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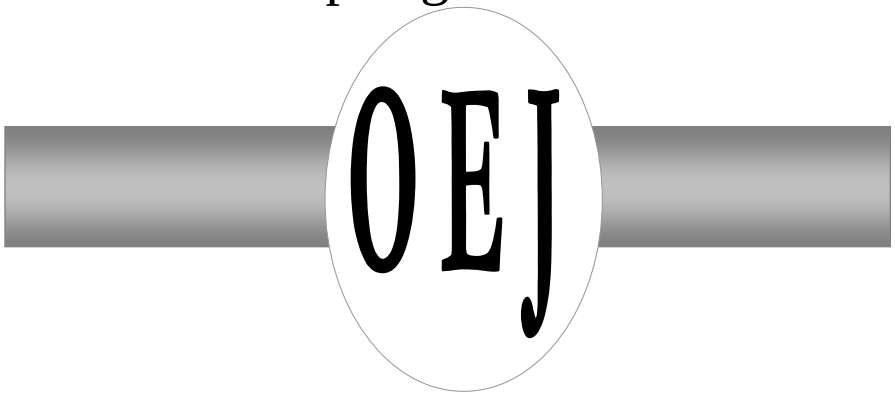

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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The *Oklahoma English Journal*, the official publication of the **Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English**, publishes articles of interest to English teachers and language arts instructors, regardless of teaching level.

- **Articles** should be theoretically based yet pedagogically applicable at a variety of levels, dealing with the teaching of writing, reading, or literature—generally or specifically—and should anticipate the needs of teachers at all classroom levels, elementary through college. Articles, including references and appendices, should be kept under 12 pages, although longer articles may be published when justified by substance and likely reader interest.
- **Book reviews** will be limited to books of likely professional interest to English teachers. Starting Fall 2008, a section dedicated to Young Adult Literature will begin.
- **Brief counterstatements** which respond directly to published articles will be considered for publication. Such counterstatements should be kept under 500 words.
- **Poetry and short essays** (e. g., *Teacher Voice*) will also be considered for special sections and should be brief and appropriate for our readership.

Submissions, not previously published, should be double-spaced with ample margins and include a brief bio of the author(s) at the end of the manuscript, along with a mailing address. They should follow current MLA format for attribution and citation and the *NCTE Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language*.

Submissions should be sent electronically to trothrock@ecok.edu, using either a .doc or .rtf format. Queries can also be sent to this email address. Though hard copies are no longer accepted, the editor can also be reached at

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Students Invite Teachers into the Third Space of the English Classroom

Mary Powell

> The unfortunate consequence of teaching talking is that we don't seem to be very good at discourse. We chat comfortably enough…but the conversations that require us to deal with difficult issues, controversies, complex chains of events…and other subtleties don't seem to go nearly as well….And so the schools, in particular the English language arts teachers, need to accept that responsibility and make the teaching of discussion a significant part of the curriculum. (Probst 45)

It is a challenge for teachers to get to know their students well enough to have meaningful conversations with them. Some students feel too intimidated to share their personal experiences and interests with their teachers unless they can trust them, and building that trust takes individualized time and effort on the part of the classroom teacher. With the average class size in urban high schools at thirty-five students, it is difficult for classroom teachers to know their students well enough to build personal, individualized relationships with them (Kozol). As a Caucasian classroom teacher for ten years in an urban school, I have often wondered, is it possible to earn the trust of ethnically diverse students through teaching the state mandated reading curriculum of "the classics?" This question has been particularly important for me because I want to have meaningful conversations with students from various ethnic backgrounds, while navigating the prescribed, Westernized canon. However, I advocate for using Socratic seminars as a bridge between students' lives and language arts content based on observations I made on my twelfth graders' Socratic seminars. In allowing students to bring in reading selections they value, we help them build confidence and appreciation for language arts.

I have taught English for ten years at an urban high school in Phoenix, Arizona in a school that is seventy-five percent Latino/a (Phoenix Union High School District). By my second year of teaching, I found that something was lacking in my classroom. Some students were engaging with my school district's prescribed readings, but

others were disconnected from them. They did not feel a connection between the British literature I was required to teach and their experiences as urban, Latino/a students. Therefore, I went to the public library and read books on Socratic seminar. Socratic seminars require students to bring in literature of their choice, create questions on that literature, and then lead their classmates in a discussion on it (Polite and Adams).

After deciding to use Socratic seminars in my classroom, I gave my students a handout on Bloom's Taxonomy and explained they should use higher order thinking verbs in the questions they wrote. I encouraged students to write ten to twelve questions, including (a) one or two opening questions; (b) eight questions connected to reading strategies, writing style, and our lives; and (c) one or two closing questions that bring the text back to our hearts. During the first week of school, I introduced my students to literary terms, including diction, syntax, and poetic devices. I modeled our first Socratic seminar using chapter one of Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, although any short piece of writing will do. Both students and I created our questions using instructions from a handout I provided them (see Appendix A). Then, we moved our desks into a circle and began our first Socratic seminar collaboratively, to model our first discussion. During the seminar, I asked questions of my students though I encouraged them to also pose the questions they wrote. We established conversational norms together, including to respect our peers' opinions, to avoid raising our hands unless we deemed it necessary, and to remain focused on one conversation that involves everyone in the class. If students were shy in voicing their opinions, I asked them to turn to the person next to them and share their views in pairs first. This allowed them to *open up* with one person and made them feel more comfortable sharing with the entire group. Although Socratic seminars take thirty minutes of class time per week, they are beneficial because they are a venue in which I connect with my students on their turf or what is referred to as the *third space*.

The "third space" is where students' and teachers' interests meet. It is a way of utilizing students' cultures and experiences in the classroom and bridging them with academic content (Cook; Gutierrez; Heeger; Kirkland). Kirkland examined how hip hop could be used to help marginalized students become proficient in writing:

> texts authored by White males still dominate English language arts classrooms….urban students—many of whom are not White—rarely study or write about texts in their English language arts classrooms that reflect their interests and cultural heritage.…many urban students feel alienated within schools and worse, struggle to meet national reading and writing standards. (130)

Our school has been in "Corrective Action," an Arizona Department of Education label that indicates our test scores in reading, writing, and mathematics are low. If we do not raise our scores, the state of Arizona has threatened to take over our school, firing our current administrative team, and bringing in *curriculum experts* to improve our scores. Using student-chosen literature serves as a bridge to Language Arts standards and is a way to increase student interest in state-mandated curriculum and possibly test scores. More importantly, students use critical thinking skills rather than rote reading strategies and worksheets.

Another example of the third space is Morrell's and Duncan-Andrade's study, in which they used hip hop to teach British poetry to senior language arts students. They found their students engaged with the literature, and retained appreciation for their urban roots. Similarly, Smith and Wilhelm allowed their ethnically diverse students, who had been labeled *deficient* in reading skills, to bring in books of their choice, and read and discuss them. This led to greater student achievement in reading and writing, and students remained interested in what they were learning. In these examples of the *third space*, teachers are able to bridge these communities with the academic world. When students engage in meaningful conversations that they perpetuate, based on readings they have chosen, they are more confident and capable of leading academic conversations in college and beyond.

Most students learn best when they discuss issues they are passionate about with their peers (Vygotsky). To facilitate these conversations early in the school year, I passed around a sign-up sheet for each student to pick a week when they would lead the class in their Socratic seminar. Even the shyest of students signed up eagerly, asking me in advance if their song choice was okay to bring in. They were

concerned about their materials being good enough. This disturbed me. My students spoke from a deficit perspective, worried about their selections being meaningful enough for the class. Because the students had been in school for so long, with their teachers in charge of their learning materials, my students had little confidence in their own reading selections. This feeling of deficiency must be eradicated if students are going to become the confident, individualized thinkers we teachers want them to be. I hoped Socratic seminars would boost their confidence.

When we assume that our students have knowledge to bring to the table, we empower them in their learning. We acknowledge that what they care about is just as meaningful as what we care about.

One of our initial Socratic discussions took place early on a Thursday morning. Students yawned and stretched stiffly as we moved our desks into a circle. Janique was a shy African American girl, who loved hanging out with her girlfriends and reading stories about relationships. She played the song "Never No More" by Aliyah, explaining that "She [Aliyah] died two years ago in a plane crash." As we listened to the song, students grabbed their pencils and began circling words in the song that were meaningful to them. Some annotated the song for poetic devices while others sat and read along with the music; nonetheless there was a positive, relaxed mood in the classroom. This was different from the serious tone that permeated the class when I read aloud to them from our district-mandated textbook.

After the song had finished, Janique spoke of the song's primary theme, abusive relationships. "Why do girls stay with guys who hit them?"

Vanna, a Latina who rarely spoke in class, raised her hand hesitantly. I encouraged her to just "speak out; there is no need to raise your hand." I wanted the students to have a time in the classroom when they didn't have to ask for permission to have a classroom discussion and to become the sole proprietors of their learning. Vanna replied, "Girls get scared to leave a guy….they don't think they can just up and leave."

Raymond, a Latino on the football team who was known for his misogynistic comments, added, "If I were a girl, I would feel sad and mad like she [the girl abused] did."

Next, Janique asked questions about literary terms. "Where do you see devices in this song and what are their purposes?"

Richard, a Latino student replied, "She used repetition with 'no more' like three times."

John, another Latino student, added, "She also has couplets with 'night and tight.'"

Richard chimed in again. "The repetition of 'never no more' emphasizes that she's never going back to her abuser. It's like a cycle."

The literary devices the students discussed were some of the most challenging to analyze. They had become more than just memorized vocabulary; students used them in a context they could relate to that had inherent meaning for them. Some teachers on my campus believe they must "teach to the test" for students to be prepared for standardized exams. Using Socratic seminars can have the same impact in preparing students for these tests, without a banking approach (Freire), in which the teacher spoon-feeds students curriculum. When we assume that our students have knowledge to bring to the table, we empower them in their learning. We acknowledge that what they care about is just as meaningful as what we care about. This forms an academic partnership between teacher and student that fosters authentic communication in the classroom.

Janique coupled academic content with her personal experiences. "I wanted to stay in a relationship that was abusive, but let it go. I had to 'cause it's a mind versus heart conflict." She had worn a shirt that day that said, "It's Over," a testament to her overcoming an abusive relationship during her junior year. She continued, "Has anyone known someone to be abused or ever been the abuser?"

Students traversed from literary terms to their own family experiences. Natalie, a quiet Latina in the classroom who usually struggled with coursework, chimed in. "My mom saw her mom go through an abusive relationship. So when my dad was abusive, my mom left him."

Josh replied, "Yeah, it happens in Mexico a lot."

Janique responded, "Yeah, [it happens in] a lot of black relationships, too."

Jessica a Latina student, jumped in. "In Mexico, since they were little, my grandma stuck by my grandpa even though he hit her."

Students who usually did not participate in class were connecting with the literature and each other. Most importantly, they learned that abuse can occur within any ethnic demographic, in any place, at any time.

As I sat and listened to the conversation for the next ten minutes, I realized that my voice was not central to the conversation. The students *knew* the literature. They were bringing me into their third space—a space which I had been ignorant about. No matter how good of a teacher I may think I am, I would never have thought to bring in a song about abuse, as this song represented a specific experience for Janique. The reading selections my students related to were so diverse that I could not meet their needs with one selected reading from our textbook.

Another way for my students to bring me into their interests is through a student book choice program I set up. Every month, students read a book of their choice, related to a particular theme which I select (see Figure 1). I required them to write a two-page reflection connecting their book to their lives. I asked them to come to class ready with three questions they could pose to their classmates, leading us in a book discussion. This was another way for my students to feel empowered in the language arts classroom.

Book Choice Genres & Themes

Month	Genre	Theme
September	Open	Young Adult Literature
October	Biography/ autobiography	Social justice
November	Open	Injustice
December	Open	*Othello*
January	Open	Career or college of choice
February	Open	Adult responsibilities (credit card debt, mortgages, interest rates, raising children, job security, etc.)
March	Open	Opposite gender's perspective
April	Open	Teach your child empathy

Figure 1

One of our reading themes was social injustice. I had never anticipated my students would connect their Socratic seminars to this theme on their own accord. Seventy-five percent of my students who lead Socratic seminars that month brought in songs or articles related to social injustice, without me asking them to. This topic resonated with them because most had lived in poverty. They had experienced the trauma that comes with friends and family who were deep into gangs or abusing drugs and alcohol.

Frankie, one of my Latino students, never completed his English homework because he found it was meaningless. He explained, "If I am going to spend time doing something, I would rather volunteer and give back to the community." He chose an article entitled, "Basketball, War and Helping Kids in America," which is about Muslim radicals who are murdering Christians in Darfur. Students conversed about how they often "take education for granted," and "[sometimes] waste a free education." There were many excellent seminars that the students led, but one seminar was paradigmatic for my students. It raised a debate about citizenship and what it means to be an American.

Because we live so close to the Arizona/Mexico border, citizenship is a heated topic at our school. It divides students on class, race, and cultural heritage. So it was of no surprise to me when Jessica brought in a poem entitled "Both of Us, Not Just I." The piece details a family from Mexico who is trying to make it across the border into the United States. In the poem, a coyote, or border patrol agent, murders a nine-year-old girl's mother. The girl must fend for herself, her dreams of living on American soil with her mother shattered. Earlier in the semester, Jessica shared that many people in her family did not have citizenry and were struggling to obtain a visa, but were on a long waiting list to do so. She often worried about her family and how she could help them gain access to the liberties she treasured in the United States. Jessica began her seminar by asking, "What are your views on immigration?" This is a challenging question that if brought up within our primarily Latino/a school usually receives a unanimous response—opening the Arizona/Mexican border. However, during this seminar, it became a debated issue because of my classroom's diversity.

But as I walk into class, I am reminded that my students also have their lessons ready, too.

Darice, an African American female student, shouted, "It's stupid! America makes it so hard to come here. It's their only choice."

Reggie, a Caucasian male student, added, "If you make it easier, a lot of people will just start coming here. We are the best country there is. We would have millions of people here!"

This statement received some protest from various students, who said, "They will come here no matter what."

Another student retorted, "The visa process takes years."

Lisa, a Latina student, exclaimed, "My grandfather came to this country [from Mexico] when he was nine. Still, to this day, he is not a citizen. He's spent thousands to come to this country!"

Benna, a girl from East Africa whose mother has waited over seven years to obtain her citizenry, was angered by the conversation. "During the walk-outs two years ago, I thought people were walking out for all of us [immigrants], but when I saw the Mexican flag at the protest, I was hurt. It should be about all of us." Many of my Latino/Latina students were sympathetic toward Benna and felt the need to reach out to her about this issue. It was clear they had never seen immigration issues from another ethnicity's perspective.

The bell was going to ring shortly, closing our conversation at its most crucial moment. I had to wrap up our seminar quickly and instructed students to "Write your views on immigration in a paragraph, and think about it from the other side. So if you are from Mexico, think about it from a governmental or other ethnic group's perspective, and if you are of another ethnicity, put yourself in a person from Mexico's shoes, who is trying to make a better life for themselves." I wanted the students to internalize this issue from many *third spaces*, not just their own.

What was happening here? I was trying to teach literary devices and literature, but the students were steering the conversation toward immigration. The classroom had transformed from "my space" to "our space." Although we were not covering caesura or kenning, some of the literary devices from our current reading selection of *Beowulf*, they were discussing meaningful issues. I would then use these issues later as a teaching tool when we discussed *Beowulf*,

connecting the British epic's monsters Grendel and his mother, who eat Anglo Saxon tribesmen in their sleep, to societal monsters like abuse, gangs, and hurtful immigration laws.

Every week, I walk into my classroom with my English binder in hand, lecture notes ready to go, handouts steaming from the Xerox machine. But as I walk into class, I am reminded that my students also have their lessons ready, too. They walk into our classrooms with their notes, their ideas, their learning strategies and content that they, too, are eager to share. I have to respect this. After all, it is our classroom. Although it is my job to teach British literature in accordance with my district's curriculum, it is also my job to help create a meaningful classroom environment with students, allowing them to incorporate their prior knowledge and experiences into it. When I only teach the classics, with conversations that I lead alone, I am telling my students that their voices do not matter, that I hold the tickets to success and they need to raise their hands in order to purchase them. When teachers allow their students to bring in their own reading selections, both students and teachers are empowered. They have meaningful conversations that forge them as colleagues in the learning process. As I continue to use Socratic seminars throughout my teaching, I hope to take our conversations a step further. Perhaps my students can write and enact a lesson plan or create our next writing assignment for me to answer and them to grade. Only time will tell as we figure out our curriculum—together.

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Appendix A

Socratic Seminar Guidelines

Choose a piece of literature that we can **discuss and interpret**. You want us to engage in a discussion on that *author's writing style*—not just the literature.

Good pieces of writing include play excerpts, poetry, short stories, music lyrics, and newspaper articles that you enjoy.

You may bring in your own writing as well but nothing more than one-two pages long.

Goals:

For the class to examine and discuss powerful writing so we may

- ✓ improve our own writing techniques.
- ✓ discuss and interpret the literature.
- ✓ engage us in a conversation on that author's writing style as well as the story itself.
- ✓ connect the reading to our lives.

Develop questions on the following**:**

1-2 opening questions that guide us through the reading that

- ✓ resist a simple or single right answer.
- ✓ are thought-provoking, counterintuitive, and/or controversial.
- ✓ require students to draw upon content knowledge and personal experiences.
- ✓ can be revisited throughout the unit/course to actively engage students in what we are learning.

Opening Question Examples:

- ✓ Imagine you are the mother of a teen who committed suicide. How would you feel?
- ✓ You are living in the year 3005, how do you believe transportation will be? Will there be different type of animals? Predict life then.

3-4 writing questions that examine your author's writing style.

Writing Question Examples:

- ✓ Why does Melville use long syntax (sentences) in this passage? What is his purpose in doing this?
- ✓ Why does Steinbeck use the word "flayed" rather than cut or sliced? Why does he use this specific diction?

3-4 reading questions/personal connection questions that examine the plot of the story and connect it to literary terms and our own lives.

Reading Question Examples:

- ✓ In the article, Gandhi often fasted to help his people; what might this be a metaphor for? Explain your ideas.
- ✓ Where do you see similes in "Rapper's Delight?" Why do you think the writer uses them where he does in the song?

Personal Connection Question Examples:

- ✓ What would you do in that situation if you were the character?
- ✓ Has anything like that ever happened to you?
- ✓ How do you compare/contrast to the character in the story?

1-2 closing questions that connect the reading to our hearts.

Closing question examples:

- ✓ Do you know any teenagers who are pregnant like the girl in the poem? Why does this happen?
- ✓ Have you ever thought about dropping out of school? Why? Predict what would happen if you did.

Makers of Meaning

Janet Bassett

Writing, tediously etched on cavern walls or hastily scratched
in the sand.
Sacred texts written by scribes alone, the privileged few revered
for their skills.
Oral tradition captured on bark and stone for generations to come.
Bible, Torah, Talmud, guiding and directing through parable and
words of prophecy.
Archives with volumes of scripts, scrolls, and scrawls giving life
to the thoughts of humankind.
Words and words and words – connected spaces, configurations
of all shapes and sizes.
New worlds of meaning, changing history through written language.
Knowledge spewing over into the future from the past.
Writers -- makers of meaning, givers of thought.

Dr. Janet Bassett is currently the Curriculum and Early Childhood Director for the Diocese of Tulsa Catholic Schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma and teaches classes in Children's Literature at Northeastern State University in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma.

To Be Continued…on page 28

Speaking Up: The Why and How of Class Discussion

Karen B. Schoenberger

"It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech." -- Mark Twain (84)

Of the twelve national standards for the English Language Arts prescribed by the International Reading Association and the National Council of the Teachers of English, nine encourage learning through speaking, informally by interacting with other readers and writers and by delivering formal speeches for particular audiences. Ours is a discipline of communication, and there are myriad ways to be literate. Yet, too often, the steps for developing lively classroom discussion, an essential forum for building student knowledge and confidence, is left untaught.

A significant body of research is developing that underscores the importance of authentic class discussion to student learning. According to Applebee et al, researchers have found that class discussion as a method significantly enhances the learning of all students cutting across all ability levels; however, lower-track ability level students are less likely to receive any discussion-based instruction at all. Even more alarming is the finding that, on average, less than one minute per day is allotted to authentic discussion in any classroom (Applebee et al). Yet, when interviewed, teachers believe that they are engaging their classes in discussion much more than they actually are (Nystrand et al 49). It seems, then, that teachers are misunderstanding what authentic classroom discussion truly is.

Martin Nystrand, a professor of English and a researcher who has devoted much of his academic career to the study of classroom dialogue, distinguishes between two types of classroom discourse: "monologic" and "dialogic" (Nystrand et al 12). Monologic discourse is teacher-centered and occurs when the teacher asks a question with a right answer already in mind. The discussion that ensues from the questioning is one in which the teacher is leading the students toward a "prescripted" understanding of the topic (15). The teacher systematically ignores off-topic points, criticizes responses that are not quite what he or she had in mind, and rewards the better answers. While it may sound like discussion with many voices possibly participating, monologic discourse is recitation (Nystrand et al 12).

Much of what passes for authentic discussion in classrooms actually conforms to what Mehan identifies as IRE whereby a teacher *initiates* what he or she believes to be discussion by asking a question for which he or she already knows the answer. The student then *responds* to the question, and the teacher proceeds to *evaluate* the quality of the response (qtd. in Nystrand et al. 12) The students recite what they believe the teacher wants to hear and the teacher hones the responses until the subject is properly uncovered. While there may be an array of voices and ideas spoken, this is hardly a discussion. Knowledge is not built in this exchange; it is transmitted.

The teacher who relies on authentic discussion over recitation sends the message to the students that their voices are critical to an understanding of any text.

Dialogic discussion, in contrast, begins with an authentic inquiry – a question to which no prescribed answer exists in the teacher's mind. This question is open-ended and allows for student-centered participation that does not conform to a tightly controlled teacher agenda. Dialogic discourse locates the teacher in the position of non-evaluative facilitator, helping the students navigate their own meaning construction. Higher thought processes are involved in this type of discussion than recitation and recall. Critical thinking is required. Knowledge is not transmitted in this exchange; it is built.

Discussion based upon the dialogic mode conforms to the constructivist Vygotskian perspective of sociocognitive meaning-making (Miller 311). With an authentic question as an entry point into the text, the teacher can create a Zone of Proximal Development (Miller 292, 312) for learning whereby, with the assistance of the teacher and skilled peers, students can create new meanings of the text. Knowledge in this learning environment does not disseminate as a static commodity from an authority, but is instead created collaboratively (Miller 311). Students can draw on a variety of sources to collaborate, including personal experiences, cultural awareness, the text as it relates to them, and the meaning they have of it, to experience the subject in a connected way (Smagorinsky 10).

They operate at a much higher cognitive level of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation in dialogic mode than the factual recall of monologism. Students build their own understanding, are more engaged, and are likely to remember better what they have learned.

The teacher who relies on authentic discussion over recitation sends the message to the students that their voices are critical to an understanding of any text. The students are more likely to have some ownership of or a real stake in classroom content. Student engagement, the Holy Grail for all teachers, is much more likely in an environment where students' voices are crucial.

What, then, can a teacher do to get out of the way and move a class towards more dialogic discourse? First of all, an overall environment of support for all learners must be established from the first day of school. Students need to know that they are in a safe place to express themselves. Nancy Steineke, in *Reading and Writing Together: Collaborative Literacy in Action*, offers a host of great suggestions for community-building in the classroom. Her students know that their classroom is "home court," a place where all are safe and respected, and students can even invoke the occasional "this is home court" to remind fellow students that they may be trespassing on others' rights (19). Steineke believes that classroom norms and rules should be negotiated with students and teachers together for each class period, and then students record these rules and norms in the front page of their notebooks. She uses a "T" chart to elicit from her students the protocol for quiet attentive listening, and again, they negotiate together what true listening "looks like" and "sounds like" (19). They can also agree to disagree with respect for one another. By collaborating on their own classroom culture, students have helped build and are co-owners of this learning environment. The message Steineke sends to her students is powerful.

Once the supportive environment is established for discussion, there is obviously no guarantee that, upon delivery of a well-constructed, thought-provoking, open-ended question to a class, a teacher will not be met with the dreaded dazed looks, averted eyes, uncomfortable squirming, and silence. In *Talking in Class: Using Discussion to Enhance Teaching and Learning*, Thomas McCann et al suggest that the teacher can adopt some simple strategies to spur discussion. For instance, if teachers wait longer than six seconds for a response, they are much more likely to have a student speak (12). In fact, the average response wait time by teachers is only half of a second (Johannessen 78). Miller tells of an effective teacher who uses a wait time closer to twenty seconds to remind students that their "thinking time" is important (293).

A student response of "I dunno" or "pass," according to McCann et al, is unacceptable because it sends the message that avoidance is possible (13). The teacher can reframe the question until a response is given, then build off that by asking for agreement or disagreement from other students and move on from voice to voice. McCann et al caution that it is very tempting for teachers to praise even with a slight "good" in a situation where a student is reluctant to speak (14). However, any praise or criticism should be avoided. If students recognize that they are being evaluated, they will offer a response that they think the teacher is looking for or expect teacher commentary. Even more important to note is that "validation of the correct answer tends to discourage other participants in the discussion" as students who feel they do not have the "correct" answer will not speak (14). Evaluation slides the discussion towards a monologic mode. The teacher should not remain silent, but should use "uptake" (Nystrand et al 39).

With *uptake*, the teacher takes a student's response and paraphrases it or asks another question building off that student's response. The student's response is the springboard for further elaboration. Uptake is non-evaluative, and, as such, this technique is in direct opposition to the IRE pattern. It follows that teachers who concentrate on using uptake will likely break free of the IRE pattern and encourage more critical inquiry and more authentic discussion from their students.

It is important for teachers to note that, just as in writing, speaking has its different audiences and purposes. In *Teaching English by Design,* Peter Smagorinsky cites work by Douglas Barnes, delineating two views of speech and writing: final draft and exploratory (10). Barnes found that much of the type of speech in class that teachers reward is "final draft" or polished student responses "in which all of the kinks have been worked out, all of the bad ideas rejected, all of the language smoothed over" (10). These types of rewarded responses often intimidate the students who are still thinking.

According to Smagorinsky, "classrooms ought to encourage more exploratory talk in which students work through their ideas. Such talk is tentative, spontaneous, provisional, half-baked, and constructive as students discover what they have to say by voicing their emerging thoughts" (11). Students should be encouraged to explore unformed ideas verbally—to hear what they think.

McCann et al offers a literature discussion continuum model whereby the monologic, teacher-controlled, knowledge transmission mode would be at one pole while a more "freewheeling jam session" (such as current adult book clubs with snacks, wine, and friendly conversation) would be at the other (4). Ideally, exploratory classroom discussion would be somewhere in the middle. Teachers should carefully plan discussions and have instructional objectives to be met, but the construction of knowledge within the discussion should be done by the students.

Just as there is a difference between exploratory and final draft speech, dialogue is not debate. The early twentieth century English writer G.K. Chesterton writes, "The thing I hate about an argument is that it always interrupts a good discussion." In fact, less competitive or confrontational students may be silenced by a conversation in class that turns toward debate. Matt Copeland, in his book *Socratic Circles*, recommends directly teaching the difference between dialogue and debate, offering a thorough comparison chart that teachers would be wise to share with their students (41). Along with established class norms and etiquette for discussion, establishing the definitive characteristics of a good dialogue can create a more inclusive environment for all students to speak. Planned debates can be incorporated in other class settings.

In addition to using wait time effectively, Larry R. Johannessen suggests several other important strategies for teachers to use to initiate authentic discussion. First, teachers should take care to "create controversy" when they are designing their questions (77). Multiple perspectives arise from controversial topics which hold no simple answer. He recommends that teachers use small group collaboration to allow students to speak more comfortably, listen to other ideas, and refine their own thinking (Johannessen 77). Small groups can help quieter students share before speaking in a whole-class discussion. Johannessen suggests that it is critically important for questions, or entry points into the topic, to connect to the students' lives in some way (77). If students do not see a reason to care, they are unlikely to become engaged. Also, as in reading comprehension strategy, questions should be designed so that they tap into students' prior knowledge and build upon it. Last, teachers should devise questions at the higher cognitive taxonomic levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Johannessen 78).

There are many useful discussion activities that practicing teachers have written about at length which are worth trying. Socratic circles and fishbowls are two such activities using two concentric circles of students. The inner circle discusses a piece of text while the outer circle evaluates the discussion based upon criteria set forth in a rubric. The circles then switch roles. These activities can be powerful instruction in the art of discussion itself (Daniels). Literature Circles are also popular for small-group work where students can discuss the books they are reading or even expository texts (Daniels). To ensure all students participate in a discussion and no one speaker dominates, talking chips can be used. Several chips are given to each student prior to the discussion and each person must stay within the allotment (Daniels). This may be a good activity in the early stages of class discussion. Many of the graphic organizers teachers use for reading comprehension and writing can also be used as a precursor to class discussion, like exit passes (slips of paper the students fill out anonymously and deposit in a jar before leaving), which may help the teacher gauge what questions should be raised next (Daniels). There are many possibilities. The key is to provide forums for class discussion practice and to know the students.

McCann et al states that teachers need to move away from the "sage on the stage" metaphor to that of "the guide on the side" (127). "Disciplined improvisation" is the metaphor Sawyer would use. These metaphors suggest that teachers move away from scripted performances. Yet, improvisation is risky. In our current, high-stakes test environment, it is difficult to relinquish any control in the classroom because we have so much to cover. It is tempting to revert more to direct instruction and knowledge transmission. But the research is solid: our students learn better across all ability levels with discussion-based instruction (Applebee et al., Nystrand et al.). Teacher education programs need to include discussion pedagogy.

Current teachers need to reflect on their class discourse patterns and change them as needed. To help our students emerge as critical thinkers who have the skills to participate in a complex democracy, this is one risk we have to take.

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For I Am Not a Tyrant

Samantha J. Manuel

Half-eaten spinach frittata, smooth ricotta cheese,
Smartwater with a missing cap—
I pick the gum from the sole of my shoe.
Maybe I should organize all of these papers.

They bustle in from gym.
Thank God Caribbean Salsa drifts from the oil burner,
Dances around the paper lanterns and bamboo plants—
I huff it like an addict.

Disaster awaits my nostrils just beyond my desk—
Shakespeare turns green in his tacked home.
The ponytail palm gasps for fresh air.

I step outside my box
Into a dangerous world of sweat, drinking tales, and intrusive
cell phones.
Funny how five years and thousands of dollars has landed me here—
Small town, Oklahoma.
But wait.

They seem so eager.
Smiling eyes and gleaming teeth—
What are we gonna do today, Miss Sam?
I glance through the window to the warm autumn day that beckons
us to join it.
Maybe a lesson surrounded by nature,
That beauty seeps through the pages that they flip with jagged-nailed
fingers—
Soothes a hungry soul.

Too bad that one couldn't keep his pen to himself.
The other flinches and rubs his cheek.
Choice words fly from his mouth, luckily not directed at the antagonist—
At the pain.

I could be raising my voice,
Could be storming down the hall with a muscular arm clenched in
my tiny fingers, but…
This is a democracy!

A motion for the pen-chunker to stand—
What do you think we should do to punish him?
Burn him!
A roar of laughter and sharp smacks on table tops
Not a bad idea but…
As tempting as that may be, I would suggest a consequence that
actually fits the crime—

One raises his hand—
Maybe he should have to throw the pen at the wall for the rest of class.
A bit childish, but so is tossing objects at others,
And a vote settles his case.
This jury of peers sends the aggressor to the corner—

Open your minds now.
This is my favorite quote—tell me how you feel.
In your journal now.
This is Upton Sinclair.
This is our jungle.
Make it interesting.

I remember why I love this.
You boys are seventeen
And I a portal to the outside.

This classroom is open for discussion, creativity, and responsibility—
I can teach you how to read, write, and analyze.
I can teach you amazing facts about these American authors.
I *want* to show you how life happens,
How words live.

Learning cannot end with a book.

I scan over the mess of unruly hair to the desk from which I will
never teach,
And the pen strikes the wall again.

Stephanie Manuel is a preservice English Education teacher at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma.

Book Talk

Dear OEJ Editor:

I am a dedicated classroom teacher who loves to read but just does not have time to keep up with all the titles I might want to suggest to my students. Can you help?

Signed,
Frustrated BookWorm

* * * * * * * * * * * *

Dear Frustrated:

I hear from many teachers like you, and I, too, am frustrated. If only we had time for a book club during the school year! But, I offer hope.

The *OEJ* wants book reviews from just you teachers who love to read or who have active reading classrooms. Young adult novels or any book of interest to teachers or young readers is precisely what we need.

If you don't have time to write a full book review, then send us short blurbs* like what you might mention at the water cooler. Or, better yet, co-author with your students a collection of short reviews of books that have brightened your lives and your classrooms.

Send us what you can, and we'll share it with our readers, like you.

Signed,
***OEJ* Editor**

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* Short blurbs should give the title in MLA format, a 3-5 sentence summary, and a short commentary on its appeal to certain readers or possible classroom usage.

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Saturday, June 5, 2010	Summer Board Meeting @ Full Circle Bookstore
Saturday, Sept. 25, 2010	**OCTE Fall Conference/Board Meeting with Jim Burke at OCU in OKC**
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