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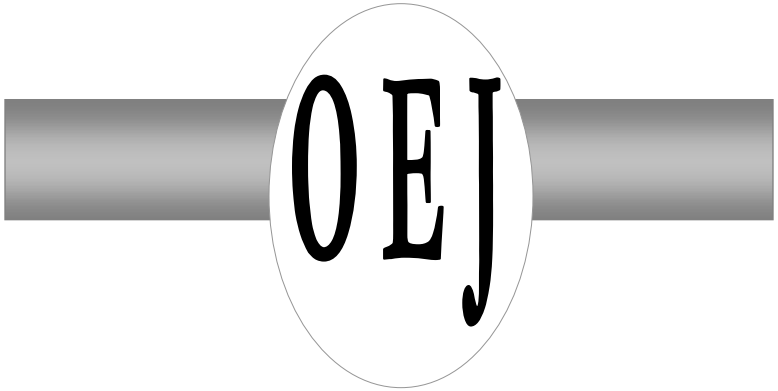

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Call for Paper

		receipt deadline
Spring 2010	***Talk to Me!***	March 1, 2010

What roles do talking and listening play in our classrooms, in our successes, and in our failures? What can we learn from each other about building and maintaining relationships—with students, colleagues, administration, local and political communities—that is unique to our field? How do we negotiate the relationships between listening and talking, reading and writing?

Fall 2010*	August 1, 2010
Spring 2011*	March 1, 2010

* These issues have no thematic links but seeks articles of value to all teachers of English from grades K-graduate school. See the guidelines below.

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). 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. Authors may mail submissions via U. S. Postal Service to:

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Sustaining Literacy in a Ubiquitous World

by Robin Murphy

The modern university system is moving faster and faster away from face to face (f2f) encounters between students and instructors, which is moving the university system closer and closer to a ubiquitous classroom environment. At the same time, our students are challenging the notion of the discourse community by placing less value on email and more value on alternative, technological communication tools like social networking sites. In a sense, they are asking instructors to connect with them academically on *their* turf. Therefore, we must consider how to enter their discourse community and use their literacy practices in order to teach them how to engage and function in ours. Due to changes like these, there is increase in the popularity and sustainability for both the university and the students of blended/hybrid courses at my university, and online social networking is at an all-time high through the popularity of sites such as Facebook and Twitter. As a result, combining these environments complicates student literacy practices and thereby the literacies needed to be a writing instructor. Because of this trend, Freire's and Macedo's work in literacy seems even more relevant now than in the 80's:

> Literacy can not be reduced to the treatment of letters and words a purely mechanical domain. We need to go beyond this rigid comprehension of literacy and begin to view it as the relationship of learners to the world, mediated by the transforming practice of this world taking place in the very general milieu in which learners travel. (ix)

These shifting transformative literacies challenge my own identity and my ability to identify with my students as an instructor, scholar, and person, and they also posit interesting questions about the sustainability of technological environments in education for students' writing progress, their retention, and their future as citizens.

In most university systems, budget depends largely on enrollment. For instance, administrators at the university level seem to be rallying to increase enrollment and retention by offering more online and hybrid courses to help facilitate choice in course offerings for students and by promising bonus pay to instructors with high enrollment numbers. This is based on the idea that making the university accessible via alternative course environments will encourage more students to enroll. Currently, my university offers 51 online courses. About six of these are in my department. There are also ITV classes and blended courses which are the equivalent of a hybrid course – part f2f, part online. The university charges an additional $15 per credit hour for an online class. To compare these fees to others, the "remedial fee" is $20 per credit hour and the "technological services fee" is $10.50 per credit hour. Resident tuition is $148.40 per credit hour (ECU Course Catalog). Bottom line? Online classes are more expensive and universities profit from them.

Along with this push to encourage online and hybrid courses comes the need to train instructors and a call for instructors to re-think what literacy is for themselves and for their students. Freire and Macedo say, "In our analysis, literacy becomes a meaningful construct to the degree that it is viewed as a set of practices that functions to either empower or disempower people" (141). And though the online initiative can empower students with choice and instructors with flexibility and electronic options, these same strengths can complicate literacy achievement. My university uses the BlackBoardCE (BbCE) platform and requires thirteen hours of Blackboard training and an additional hour of pedagogy professional development from trainers before instructors are allowed to teach a blended or an online course. On one hand, the required training is advantageous but, on the other, is a major problem. For instance, with this type of professional development, it is often wrongly assumed to directly lead to good teaching practices or that it simultaneously leads to better literacy practices for instructors. This isn't entirely true. Good teaching, like achieving literacy, is much more complicated. Bad teaching cannot be remedied by adding technology to a course. Andy Guess, of *Inside Higher Ed News*, considers this problem of bad teaching in his discussion of the 2007 ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology:

> a student's written comments on the place of technology in the college setting today: 'IT is not a good substitute for good teaching. Good teachers are good with or without IT and students learn a great deal from them. Poor teachers are poor with or without IT and students learn little from them.' […] When it comes to said they were more engaged with courses that had IT components, while a fifth disagreed and the rest didn't say either way. (Guess)

So, even if the university does offer teachers training in how to use IT in the classroom, including IT does not make a poor teacher a better teacher. Even the students recognize that. They stay in classes or in school when they are engaged – with technology or without. So, though technology can help, it's

not the presence of technology in the classroom that engages the student, it's who uses it and how well it is used. We also know that one reason students like hybrid and web classes is because they give them more flexibility in their schedule. What they often don't expect is that even though class doesn't meet in a traditional way, they have to do a lot of work autonomously, and they must have a functional techno-literacy in order to succeed. I know from experience that students are rarely prepared for the time management and self-learning responsibility it takes to participate in this type of class, much less the technological skills, though most universities explain this quite clearly in the course catalog.

This problem is two-fold when it comes to techno-literacy practices. One, students rarely understand the connection between their own literacy practices and how it transfers to school and two, despite their additional training, teachers often assume that teaching online or in a hybrid environment is simply a shift in mode or classroom, not in literacy practices. This is dangerous thinking in terms of functional literacy. We must shift our literacy practices as teachers when we shift modes of instruction. Ann E. Bertoff says, "Nothing in the field of literacy is more important than looking and looking again at the role of an awareness of awareness, of thinking about thinking, of interpreting our interpretations" (Freire and Macedo xi). As instructors, we need to be more continuously aware of the literacy challenges of the electronic environment and be more active in interpreting and negotiating what those challenges mean to the content and context of our courses. To problematize these techno-literacy issues, it is also no secret to those of us who teach these kinds of courses that it is really time consuming to teach them correctly. Add to that the feeling of being some sort of a 24-hour super mart, the pressure from administration to overload the classes, being monitored by administration, and dealing with the techno-literacy deficits of the students, and I often find myself wondering how I'm teaching my composition students about *writing* at all. It's important for me to mention here that though I encounter all of these frustrations in the hybrid course, it's the students' techno-literacy deficit that I battle the most. Often students can't problem-solve when it comes to attachments, email issues, and such. In fact, instead of working through the technological obstacles to rectify a problem, many often use these technical problems as an excuse for not doing coursework.

So, the classes are often popular to students because they provide convenience, they are sustainable to students because of their ubiquitous nature [students rarely realize how much of their social networking site (SNS) literacy is already incorporated into the course platforms], and they are sustainable to the university because the long-term effort on administration is minimal. And though it seems a popular higher education train of thought within the economics of technology in the classroom that technology in the classroom is a good way of increasing enrollment and retention, I question the sustainability of enrollment or retention *because of* these types of ubiquitous environments due to the general lack of techno-literacy of both students and instructors. Additionally, a recent *Faculty Focus* "Special Report: Strategies for Increasing Online Student Retention and Satisfaction" warns

> Despite the tremendous growth of distance education, retention remains its Achilles' heel. Estimates of the failed retention rate for distance education undergraduates range from 20 to 50 percent. Distance education administrators believe the failed retention rate for online courses may be 10 to 20 percent higher than for face-to-face courses. (Hill)

But no matter the reason, if we can't keep our students in online classes either because of their lack of access to technology, their lack of techno-literacy, or the lack of transference of professional development to good teaching, there's a huge sustainability problem in an area that matters to all of us involved – retention of students. And, according to the 2008 report from EduCause, though "59.3% of students" surveyed preferred a "moderate" amount of IT in their classes, they more valued the f2f interaction to make them feel more like a part of the academic community and to increase their overall success. A notable 15.1 % said that IT in the classroom did not improve their learning while 60.9 believed it improved their learning (Salaway and Caruso 2008). In other words, students value feeling like a part of the academic community, but using IT to connect to them is a tricky endeavor; however, it's also a valuable tool of engagement if done correctly. This statistic on its own should give pause to administrators who see implementing technology as the saving grace of the sustainability of the university. IT isn't the answer to retention – good interaction between students and teachers is—but these two things don't have to be mutually exclusive. More relevantly, it should also give us instructors of writing a sense of urgency: What can we do to increase our use of technology in the classroom in order to engage our students while at the same time increase our own techno-literacy and the techno-literacy of our students in meaningful ways while not forgetting that writing instruction is our primary purpose? It seems to me one easy answer is to implement familiar writing technologies into the course.

As I mentioned, our university uses the BbCE platform. As far as BbCE being sustainable, it's true that it's slow, it's clunky, and the students

hate that it kicks them off all the time. Therefore, I wish I could question the sustainability of BbCE because it's so expensive, but it's hungry to eat other platforms (it's already consumed eCollege and WebCT), and I think it will last simply because of its economic power. That being said, as writing instructors, it seems we should embrace the inevitable sustainability of the electronic course platform and the push of the university to increase enrollment and retention through offering online courses by correlating the techno-literacy and writing opportunities of the social networking site (SNS) like Facebook with the techno-literacy requirements of the online course platforms into our teaching practices. If we can do this, we offer our students a chance to enter the writing classroom discourse community in an alternative way. James Paul Gee explains discourse in this way: "By 'discourse' I will mean: a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network'"(537). Following Gee's definition, students should be able to empower themselves within the electronic community of the classroom management software such as BbCE because they can associate their SNS literacy with the literacy requirements of the course.

David Bartholomae suggests that to heighten literacy, "our students must be our students. Their initial progress will be marked by their abilities to take on the role of privilege, by their abilities to establish authority" (523). So, to enhance techno-literacy and discourse practices of our students in the online or hybrid classroom and thereby increase their authority is to use the tools or options of the university course management platform that most closely mimic SNS options. In fact, the 2008 ECAR study tells us that when students use IT in classes, "they like to learn through text based over email, IM text messaging, or through contributing to websites, blogs, wikis and the like" (Salaway and Caruso 2008). This is good news because BbCE and most other like platforms already include tools such as chat, discussion boards, and blogs that work well with the content of a writing course and mimic SNS in reasonable ways, which is probably why students seem to easily grasp those tools. Furthermore, education research agrees that informational spaces will

> change the way we relate to knowledge and information; the way we do research and evaluate credibility; the way educators and students interact with each other; and the way students learn to be professionals in their chosen disciplines. (*The 2008 Horizon Report*)

However, to complicate matters, the 2008 ECAR report claims that

> 95.1% of students 18-19 years old use a social networking site. Only 49.7% of students use a SNS for classroom talk with other students, but only 5.5% use them to talk to their professors about course related matters. (Salaway and Caruso 2008)

So how do we writing instructors get students to enter academic conversations with us and fellow students using their own SNS literacy practices in our course platforms? And, how does the information in these reports coincide with our own identification as instructors with informational space, SNS and writing practices?

To be honest, for me, my identity on Facebook is strung out and spread thin. I facebook with anyone I've known: colleagues, high school friends, current students, family, graduate school friends, former students, and church friends. But, I'll have to say that Facebook has been the best SNS mode of communicating with my students. The chat feature has been invaluable, and the wall feature lets me leave a message they'll actually read – for them, email is *so yesterday*. When they do read email, it's rare, but most of them are near-religious about checking Facebook. Facebook is a great retention tool for me because of the access it gives me to *their* discourse community. To students who want to have that relationship with me, it allows me to reach out to others, and I think it teaches them important things about modern citizenry, too. The 2007 ECAR study seems to agree:

> Classroom and lecture-based experiences are an important part of higher education, but so are the relationships students cultivate with one another and with faculty. By opening itself to virtually anyone, Facebook has become a model for how communities—of learners, of workers, of any group with a common interest—can come together, define standards for interaction, and collaboratively create an environment that suits the needs of the members. For many, a central part of the college years is "learning to be"—experimenting with different personas, engaging with a variety of groups, and developing a set of core values. By allowing users a range of tools to negotiate and inhabit online networks, Facebook and sites like it can be an important part of this developmental process. (Salaway and Caruso 2007)

Faculty Focus, too, seems to value Facebook because their research indicates that, in fact, the number one way to retain students is to

> make them feel integrated into the program and the institution. Research has shown that responsiveness to student's needs is a critical variable in terms of retention. A sense of belonging as a

> student, whether traditional or distance learner, has been shown to be an important aspect in retention, and responsiveness to student's needs is a large determinant in a student feeling like they are part of a course or an institution. Intuitively we can assume that if students are not engaged and do not perceive themselves as an integral part of their environment they will likely choose to leave that environment and seek one where their needs are met. (Hill)

If we can reach more students in valuable ways that affect their future as students by communicating with them on their own literacy turf (on SNS), perhaps we can also extend those literacy practices into their writing and retain them in our classes and universities.

It's clear that it's a tough situation to negotiate a SNS as a professional. Other issues like boundaries, personal and private space arise, but those are entirely separate-but-equal issues from literacy practices. What is important to me in this case is what the SNS can do for writing classrooms and the writing life in general. In a recent interview, Andrea Lunsford discussed her current Stanford research about student writing in a recent *Wired* magazine interview and found that students write more now than ever "because so much socializing takes place online, and it almost always involves text. Of all the writing that the Stanford students did, a stunning 38 percent of it took place out of the classroom—life writing as Lunsford calls it" (Thompson). In fact, "Lunsford's team found that the students were remarkably adept at what rhetoricians call *kairos*—assessing their audience and adapting their tone and technique to best get their point across" (Thompson). It's the same for us in our professional writing life. I negotiate kairos in everything I write. In addition to my own SNS writing life on Facebook, I Twitter with a small private circle of academic friends and I blog. I'm only a periodic blogger, and in that public space, I mix the personal with the professional. Expanding my own techno-literacy and writing life into these venues can give me an opportunity to talk to students about the literacy practices of the public and private realms of SNS and how to negotiate audience appropriately. Conventional writing instruction, then, is sustainable in a digital world. In the end, I can teach students that writing can have a life and an audience through SNS practices. So, when my students see my writing on BbCE or Blogger or Facebook, I hope they see me modeling a ubiquitous writing life and telling them, "See? I'm human.…I have all kinds of friends.…I participate in all kinds of writing projects.…I write in all kinds of ways....I'm a citizen of the university, but I'm also a citizen of all kinds of communities....and you can and should be, too."

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Check out the new OCTE web site:

http://octe.ecok.edu/

The Freedom to Read

by Jason Stephenson

"I'd love to have your job," my friends joke with me, when they learn that I teach a high school class called Reading for Fun. I admit that I am lucky to teach such a class. As it is currently structured, students can read just about anything they want—books, magazines, newspapers—three days a week, with the other two days being devoted to literacy games, projects, and other activities. This environment, which trusts students to make their own reading decisions, seems to be much more authentic than my sophomore English classes, in which I typically assign novels to my students.

The traditional method of assigning a required text does not always work in the high school classroom. At the end of last school year, a freshman girl in my Reading for Fun class told me, "I love being in this class. I get to read what I want to read. But I haven't read a single book for my English class all year!" I was torn in how I should respond to such a bold statement. The student had read numerous books in my class—books of her own choosing that she recommended to anyone who would listen to her. At the same time, she had never used the silent reading time provided in my class to read any of the novels assigned in her English class. Couldn't she find a balance? Should she have to?

Still, there are students who choose not to read at all. As soon as the next classic is assigned, they go online to Spark Notes and memorize the characters, plot summary, and themes. They can pass quizzes and tests if their teachers do not make them too difficult. Then the whole cycle repeats itself until graduation. Reading is not a priority in these students' lives, but when they arrive at college, they discover how much reading they will actually have to do on their own. Wouldn't they be better prepared for college had they been reading all through high school? For more insight into how many of my current students use Spark Notes, see the poll at the end of this paper.

Giving students the freedom to choose their own reading material is difficult for high school English teachers who want to maintain control and give universal assessments. Using the same test year after year is easy, but grading seventy different projects about individual books on a monthly basis is difficult and time-consuming. Students greatly benefit from a reading program that values choice, however, and there are steps teachers can take that will ensure the success of such a program.

Why Choice is Important

Students need to have a say in what they read. Students have more motivation to read when they can choose their own texts (Anders Mazzoni and Gambrell 17). Giving students the freedom to read what they want gives them autonomy, one element needed in a successful reading program (Gaskins 163). Moreover, Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm argue that "[L]iteracy in school needs to be more like literacy in life" (Flow 155). Aside from the technological implications, their claim also raises a valid point: Will students be assigned a book to read when they walk into Barnes and Noble? Or will they browse the aisles looking for books that suit their own unique tastes? Nancie Atwell argues, "Only when children choose books do they get a full sense of what real readers do and what reading is good for" (Side 70). Students should be developing as readers in high school; their reading tastes should be nurtured and challenged under the careful guidance of a teacher.

An English class in which all the novels are assigned is far too rigid. Telling students to read Great Expectations simply because the novel is in the curriculum is not usually a high motivator for students. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi asserts that "knowledge that is seen to be controlled from the outside is acquired with reluctance and it brings no joy" (qtd. in Smith and Wilhelm, Chevys 33). If students are to "fall in love with language," then teachers can't make all the reading decisions (Atwell, Side 53). Students need to take ownership in what they read.

Teachers do not have to give up total control, though; they can easily give students the option to read one book from a small list. This strategy may seem small, but researchers found that "[e]ven limited forms of choice were greatly appreciated" in the classroom (Smith and Wilhelm, Chevys 110). When English teachers select all the required reading material, however, they send a message that they distrust their students to pick appropriate texts (Atwell, Middle 28). Basically, allowing student choice creates a more positive reading culture, which should be a goal for every English teacher.

When students are permitted to pick their own reading material, they are more likely to read it. Penny Kittle had great results with sustained silent reading in her high school English class. One student wrote, "I always used Cliff Notes and hated having to read until I got the opportunity to read what I want" (Kittle 72). Jim Burke also acknowledges that student choice plays a major role in raising appreciation for reading (47). He concedes, "Though it frustrates us, we must accept that not all our students will love the books we require them to read. Some students dismiss books just because they don't

want to be told what to read. So we must provide them room for their own reading in our classes" (Burke 49). Kittle and Burke do not expect their students to reach their reading goals by reading *only* during class. They can create an excitement for reading, though, which carries on to their students' homes. Not every single minute of reading can take place in the high school English classroom, but a percentage of reading should. Besides, reading

Upon hearing a discussion about including more reading choice, a veteran English teacher at my high school said, "I tried that. It didn't work." There are a number of ways, though, to structure and assess student reading choice that can result in a successful reading program.

First of all, students can read individually or in small groups. Students are unique individuals with different reading tastes and speeds. Teachers may want to consider allowing students to individually choose their reading texts. Nancie Atwell supports this method in her book Side by Side (43).

In this structure, students who are fast readers can blaze through multiple books and not feel constrained by the pace of slower readers. At the same time, readers who have moderate speed do not have to worry about a speed-reader ruining a book's plot. Also, students who like eccentric topics can feel free to pursue them when they are reading on their own. Another benefit to having individual reader choice is the talking that goes on between students; they can recommend books to one another since there are twenty different books being read at once in a single classroom.

Teachers who are accustomed to students reading a common text might feel more comfortable if their students read together instead of separately. This option, described in Harvey Daniels' book Literature Circles, asks students join a small group of four or five and decide on a common text to read. They meet together periodically in class to discuss the novel. One advantage to this scenario is that students can go into deeper discussion about the book with one another. The teacher moves off the stage as the possessor of all knowledge, and the students can learn from one another. Students who are used to the required-text norm may feel more comfortable in a small group rather than embarking on a novel entirely on their own. Safety is key in any reading choice program. Students need to feel safe with whom they are reading the novel—whether it be with a group or by themselves. Some students may also like the idea of small group because they know they will be held accountable for what they read.

Once teachers know if individual choice or group choice would work better in their classrooms, they then need to decide exactly how much choice students will have in selecting books. One option is to offer absolute

fluency increases when a sustained-silent reading program is used (Atwell Middle 31).

For more on the role of choice in student motivation, freedom, and pleasure, see the student poll at the end of this essay.

How Choice Can Work in the High School English Classroom

Upon hearing a discussion about including more reading choice, a veteran English teacher at my high school said, "I tried that. It didn't work." There are a number of ways, though, to structure and assess student reading choice that can result in a successful reading program.

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Once teachers know if individual choice or group choice would work better in their classrooms, they then need to decide exactly how much choice

students will have in selecting books. One option is to offer absolute freedom.. Bookworms would embrace this opportunity, but less experienced readers might feel intimidated by such liberty. Teachers and fellow students can give book talks ("trailers" for their books) during class to give less confident students some ideas for some good novels. Other English teachers might be concerned that students might choose to read books which are required in their English classes, but this issue is resolved if students know they need to wait until senior year to read Things Fall Apart.

Another issue with total choice is that students can quickly get stuck in a reading rut by choosing the same genre, author, or series over and over again. Other students might continually choose easy or trashy books unless the teacher intervenes. Problems could arise when the teacher tries to broaden readers' horizons only to be reminded by the students that they were promised they could read whatever they wanted. Teachers need to remember that although they are allowing choice, their classroom still belongs to them. They are free to encourage or even force students to try some different books and authors. A successful total-freedom-of-choice program is possible, but a teacher must remain vigilant and constantly monitor student progress and push them toward new reading goals.

Teachers can also give their students limited choice in their novels. Students may have just finished a unit on betrayal. If so, the teacher could provide a list of books with a similar theme and ask that the students read one of them as a continuation of the unit. The number of books on the list depends on teacher's preference; students could choose between two books or ten. Although this might seem too limiting, research has shown that students "embrace" the opportunity to select a novel from a list provided by a teacher (Smith and Wilhelm Chevys 197).

Limited choice eliminates some problems presented in the total freedom structure. The teacher has control over which books appear on the list, so the reading level is appropriate. Instead of reading a wide array of books, students are more focused on a common theme which they can all discuss. Anxious students no longer have to be concerned about choosing a good book because the teacher has provided choices.

There are drawbacks to limited choice, as well. Students may not like being told what to read, and their motivation could suffer. Students who are authentic readers will most likely be reading a personal book of choice during the limited choice unit. They would view their personal book as their own and the required book as the teacher's—an assignment that is obstructing or delaying their own personal reading satisfaction. Nevertheless, a limited choice reading program can work very well in a high school English classroom.

Letting Students Talk about What They Read

Providing choice in text selection is not enough. Assessment must also take place because "[l]iterary talk with a teacher and peers is crucial to kids' development as readers" (Atwell, Middle 40). This talk should take place during and after reading (Atwell, Side 43). If a teacher waits to discuss a book with a student until after completion, then the teacher has waited too long. The conversation needs to begin when the student is still reading the book.

One form of conversation is the student-teacher journal (Atwell, Side 49; Daniels 64). Students write short letters about their reading experience—not the plot—to their teacher or classmates who responds in kind. The letter that a teacher writes in response to a student should "affirm, challenge, or extend a reader's responses" (Atwell, Middle 283). This communication continues throughout the school year. Such grading may seem overwhelming, but writing letters sounds much more appealing than grading exams. Keep in mind that students will sometimes be responding to one another and not only the teacher.

Students need to be trained in how to write a letter about what they have been reading. Of course, teachers naturally have that "opinionated, engaged, comfortable chat" with fellow book lovers, but students who have written years of book reports will need some guidance (Atwell, Middle 284). When she first introduces the literary journal, Nancie Atwell gives her students a letter explaining the guidelines for the year:

> In your letters tell what you felt when you read a book and why. Tell what you noticed about how the author wrote. … Tell what you liked and didn't and why. Tell how you read a book and why. Tell what a book said and meant to you. … Tell what surprised you. Ask questions or for help. And write back about our ideas, feelings, experiences, and questions. (Middle 296)

When such guidelines are in place and students follow them, they not only learn from the teacher but also from one another. The culture in the classroom revolves around reading experiences, which feed off one another. The letter writing process may be difficult at first, but its dividends will pay off in the long run.

Students can also keep logs or journals about what they have read (Daniels 164). These open-ended responses are beneficial for students to see the reading progress they have made throughout the year. Although these journal entries are not necessarily directed to the teacher, he or she will still need to collect the responses from time to time to check on student progress.

This method might be useful for teachers who feel overwhelmed by responding to countless letters throughout the school year, but student engagement would not be as high. Students need an audience besides themselves, so having a teacher or fellow classmate respond to their entries is more desirable.

In addition to talking about what they read, students need to record the titles, authors, and genres that they read. Teachers can use these records to set goals and measure student progress. Harvey Daniels suggests that students be evaluated based on three categories: productivity, growth, and quality of reading (167). Students are being productive if they are reading a high number of books and pages. Students exhibit growth when they read a "variety of books, authors, and genres," and when their discussions with their teacher and peers become deeper (Daniels 167). Finally, quality of reading can be assessed based on textual difficulty as well as the "level of thinking" shown in student journals or other responses such as a projects or conferences (Daniels 167). Nancie Atwell proposes a similar form of assessment. She looks at the number of pages written in a student's journal, the amount of books read, and the variety of genres read (Middle 297). By using these forms of assessment, students grow as individual readers.

Most high school principals, parents, and students will ultimately demand some sort of grade for all of this reading. Assigning a grade for individual readers can be tricky business, but it can be done. First of all, grades should be based on "students' level of participation in the [reading] workshop and the degree of progress they made toward the goals" set at the beginning of the grading period (Atwell, Middle 322). The "level of participation" hearkens back to the productivity, growth, and quality of reading previously discussed. The individual goals can be very basic. Perhaps the student needs to try a different genre. Maybe the student has read a low number of pages and needs to increase their book consumption. When the time comes for goal setting, the teacher should already have one or two goals in mind for each student. Students might also want to contribute a goal for themselves. When the grading period is at its close, teachers and students can review the goals and progress made toward them. This method includes a "strong authentic component of student self-evaluation," which is highly beneficial for all (Daniels 166).

A Balanced English Class

Allowing student choice in reading material is pertinent in a successful, happy high school English classroom. Balance is also important. Students do not have to choose their texts for the entire school year. The teacher may want to require one novel to be read as an entire class once a nine weeks, and there is nothing wrong with that. Next year, I plan to require four novels for the entire year of my English class, and allow for choice the rest of the time. Teachers do not have to give up their right to choose texts in their high school English classroom, but they should share that right with their students.

Poll

I conducted an informal poll of my 106 high school students, grades 9-12. My classes include Reading for Fun (grades 9-12), Pre-AP English II (grade 10), and Student Council (grades 9-12). Students were told they could remain anonymous on the survey, but two students wrote down their names anyway. Students took the poll on a sheet of paper.

Students were asked the question, "During the school year, have you used SparkNotes or another online summary website as a substitute for reading an assigned novel for your English class?" The results were

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Never	32	30%
Once in a while	47	44%
Most of the time	10	9%
All the time	17	16%

This means that at some point in the school year, approximately 70% of these students used Spark Notes at least once to read a required novel in their English class.

Students were also given a series of statements, with which they were asked to agree or disagree. Students marked "A" for agree and "D" for disagree. A few students used "S" for sometimes and "M" for maybe. One statement was "I usually enjoy reading assigned novels in my English class." The results were

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage of Reponses
Agree	25	24%
Disagree	70	66%
Other (Reponses included "S," "C-," "D/A," and "M.")	11	10%

Another statement was "I would rather write a letter to my English teacher about a book I read instead of taking a test over the book." The results were

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage of Reponses
Agree	58	55%
Disagree	44	42%
Other (Reponses included "M," "SA," and "?".)	4	3%

More than half of the surveyed students agreed that they would prefer the teacher-student journal approach over the traditional test. One of the students who supported this option added a "Duh" to the end of the statement while another wrote "omg A."

Another statement was, "I would rather read a book I choose than a book my English teacher assigns." The results were

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage of Reponses
Agree	90	85%
Disagree	12	11%
Other (Reponses included "SA," "D,A" and "S.")	4	4%

When asked why they would rather have choice or not, students have a variety of responses. Many students were very dissatisfied with the required novels in their English classes. They felt they could make better text choices than their teachers. They wrote:

- "I'd rather pick my own novel because I'd be more likely to actually read it. Most of the books assigned are really boring and no one reads them anyway."
- "One for yourself! I want to read something that interests me than something someone else considers a 'classic'!"
- "Choose one for myself cause the school books are DUMB."

Other students explained that choosing a book helps their motivation to read:

- "Choose one. I feel more in control and more motivated to read it."
- "I'd much rather choose one for myself. Assigned reading actually makes me want to read less."
- "I think it is important to let the student have some say in order to keep them interested. The whole read out of fear doesn't work for all students as well as it works for me."

Some students even explained that they enjoyed the freedom that choice would provide:

- "Choose one. Because it gives me more Freedom [sic] to Figure [sic] out what I like to read."
- "Chosen so i [sic] can express myself through reading."
- "I would rather choose one for myself because then I get the freedom of reading what I would like to even if it is an assigned genre."

Students who preferred an assigned novel liked the equality that an assigned text provided. They also liked required texts because it made things easier for them. They wrote:

- "assigned novel. I can't pick a good book on my own."
- I would rather read an assigned novel. An entire class reading the same book levels the playing grounds…"
- "I would rather read an assigned novel because I have a hard time making decisions and I would be afraid that I wouldn't pick a book that was relative."

These results prove that students need more choice in their text selection in their high school English classes. Students' pleasure, freedom, and motivation are at stake. These results also indicate that some students will need guidance in choosing texts they will enjoy.

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Maria & Me: The Transition from Linear to Simultaneous Instruction in Literacy

by Della Hutcheson

Maria in this piece is a fictional name to represent a real student I had the privilege of working with my first year in a SEI (Structured English Immersion) classroom. What a blessing and an inspiration she has been! She truly changed not only my philosophy and practices, but my heart as well.

"Mrs. Hutcheson, Maria can't latch the bathroom door!" a young voice boomed down the short hall and around the corner to where I stood centered in the hallway to monitor my new third graders as they took one of their first restroom breaks of the new year.

"You've got to be kidding me," I mumbled under my breath. "I thought they were supposed to be fixing those over the summer." I proceeded into the girls' restroom, quite a bit frustrated only to find a perplexed, sweet face staring at me. As I rattled the latch I soon discovered it wasn't a malfunction in equipment at all. The lock worked perfectly. It was Maria who, having recently moved from Mexico, encountered a completely new experience in her life. She had no idea how to navigate through the process of this lock. I smiled to myself and quickly took her small hand in mine, showing her how it worked. She smiled with gratitude and as I walked back into the hall, my mind began racing with all of the content and pedagogy I had studied in preparation for my class of Marias. The countless readings, lectures, and investigations I had done brought me to this point—a point where a student didn't even have the background knowledge to lock a bathroom door. What was I going to do with her? How could I effectively instruct her, knowing all the while that my role in the classroom required me to teach all of my students, Maria included?

Teachers across America that have ever worked with English Language Learners have probably felt the exact same way at one point or another, feeling that overwhelming "What do I do now?" feeling. If not, with the increasing number of second language learners in our public school system, there is a strong chance it will affect all educators sometime in the near future.

My journey that year with Maria and all of the "Marias" in years to come have been just that—a journey. I regret to inform you that I do not feel I enabled the gains she was capable of making. I attribute that confession to a

potential “paradigm shift” of my own professional philosophy based on current research and trends in second language teaching.

As a novice teacher my beginning language instruction had many critical elements of language acquisition, understanding the regular versus academic language and the time element involved in learning both, spanning three to eleven years. There were so many powerful methods and useful tools presented to help enhance classroom instruction. However, early research claimed that language acquisition was linear. Students would acquire listening in a new language, followed by speaking, then reading, and finally writing. This made complete sense to me at the time. The progression seemed logical enough. One would get comfortable understanding a language, and venture to speak it. Reading would eventually follow, noting patterns of speech and language in text, culminating in the final step of the language acquisition process, expressing oneself through writing.

The ideas sounded logical—until the human element, the “Maria factor”—was brought into the equation. I utilized this linear model in teaching my first Maria, providing many hands-on, picture-supported lessons for her to glean from. I introduced her to picture books, significantly below the level of my other students, giving her assignments to draw a picture detailing what she read. There was also the constant listening to a story on tape, working with a buddy, or giving her headphones and putting her in front of a simplistic computer program in hopes of strengthening listening and speaking in order to progress to reading and writing development. During this time, the fact of life—state testing and end-of-year district assessments—were looming with little to no chance for Maria to reach proficiency as a third grader. Over the course of the year, she learned to listen, to speak some, and her reading began to take shape, allowing her the ability to read those below grade level stories and identify words. The last notch on the linear spectrum, writing, did not even begin—unless you consider formulating simple sentences as writing. So, I sent her on to fourth grade with the label of beginning language learner-Level 1, satisfied that I had fulfilled my obligation to her throughout the school year. Sounds ludicrous, right? Well it happened to me, and I would dare say that it continues to happen to thousands of teachers and students all across our nation.

In light of this experience, I began to test other ways of instruction. The years that followed brought with them many more Marias and varied levels of language acquisition. I began to discover that waiting for Maria to understand language and speak efficiently before providing adequate reading and writing, as well as content area instruction, was not proving effective.

Maria was starving for knowledge. She was watching everything I or the other students did. She wanted to read and write. She wanted to succeed. I needed to provide more authentic learning opportunities for her. She needed concrete examples through which to explore and scaffolded approaches to discover content in a new language. This trial and error period brought success for me as a teacher, as well as for my Marias who so desperately wanted to succeed. The simplistic readers were replaced with grade level, supported text, mixed with appropriately leveled books. The buddy work was no longer a babysitter. There was a purpose for Maria as well as her partners to set a goal and objective for their tasks. The computer time was replaced with small group time with me or other support staff in my building. Maria was being taught, held accountable, and loving it. Still, I had no basis for what I was doing in my classroom, except for the fact that I was beginning to see results. The Marias in my room had moved from students unable to lock bathroom doors to students hungry for knowledge, ready to handle any task I gave them, especially when that task was clearly defined, instructionally appropriate, and student-centered.

I was delighted when I began the Invitational Summer Institute of National Writing Project site and encountered research that completely refuted my initial learning that language acquisition was linear. It was a breath of fresh air—a sigh of relief and a salvation for all of my future Marias. In Carl Nagin's *Because Writing Matters*, he explained that "a child develops simultaneously as listener, speaker, reader, and writer" (33). He also added that "In light of ELLs we should not shy away from challenges but rather teach to them, making teaching authentic and challenging" (40). These ideas were further evidenced in the Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth which stated that "more complex, innovative programs typically taught several of these components of literacy simultaneously—and these efforts were usually successful in improving literacy for language-minority students" (August and Shanahan 3). I was ecstatic to learn this information. It was my desire to be one of the more complex and innovative teachers. I wanted to see Maria excel, not hindered by a language that was beyond her control. Many of these ideas had rung true in my classroom since my initial "Maria" encounter, but I wasn't aware of the research literature that supported it or the fact that other educators were also seeing that linear progression of language development was not working effectively in public school classrooms.

Increasing accountability for individual student achievement meant making changes, looking deep into my practices, and identifying the weaknesses. My weakness was that through waiting for linear language

acquisition to take place, I wasn't reaching Maria. The slow progression of listening and speaking, without providing reading and writing instruction was limiting the chance for success and creating a boring learning atmosphere. Too much time was being wasted. Since, there have been many changes in my classroom instruction and those changes are far from complete. All students are expected to succeed, rising to the expectation, gaining proficient or advanced status on the state Benchmark exam in both literacy and content areas. No one is excluded or allowed to get by, citing beginning language as an excuse for not teaching them the content that all students deserve to know and need to obtain. The following practices are ones that have worked successfully, fostered improvement, and left me, as well as my students, with a sense of success. No longer do end-of-year assessments simply label students Level 1 Language Learners and get passed into the fourth grade stack. There is listening, speaking, reading, and writing evidenced-growth—isn't that what we all seek so diligently?

The following four guiding principles have been the driving change in my successful instructional practices for second language learners. They are common practices, too often overlooked, that carry substantial weight in promoting literacy development.

1. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing develop simultaneously in children.

   Taken directly from Mr. Nagin's text, this has become my *motto*. Everyday, in all subjects, students are expected to use the four avenues of language acquisition, listening, speaking, reading, and writing to promote learning.

2. Never throw away current best practices.

   Constantly being bombarded with so many new ideas and theories, we need to realize it is okay to hold on to the ones that work. Many of the resources gained in ELL instruction are very useful, research-based, and effective for promoting student achievement and may very well work for many individual students. Don't get rid of them just because something new comes along. Make sure there is daily classroom proof that they are effective and continue to seek out new practices which might promote greater student achievement.

3. Have high expectations.

   No matter what type of students you are working with, it is obvious if you believe in them or not. Set standards high, yet provide support and encouragement so that students can be successful. Believe in yourself and in them.

4. Scaffold, Model, Differentiate

   These have become the top three words in my lesson planning vocabulary. Every student is at a different place and can have success with different levels of instruction. Provide support in listening for those who need it. Give all students the opportunity to speak daily across the curriculum. If reading is difficult, intervene using other resources to allow success for students. In writing, look for ways to provide assistance instead of doing the work for the student. Most of all, don't shy away from the task, simply provide scaffolded, comprehensive literacy plans, extending learning into the content areas, realizing that this is indeed how students' develop.

"Mrs. Hutcheson, Maria can't latch the bathroom door!" represented a reality I won't soon forget. This sparked a new beginning for me—a beginning that would stretch me personally and professionally to look deep into my practices, into my beliefs and find what worked the best, constantly searching and refining to assure Maria the best possible education. Each day, I am joyfully greeted by Maria. She takes many faces in the halls of my school, as well as many schools throughout our nation. She sits ready to learn, eager to achieve, and desiring to become. She needs her teachers, to define what it takes to reach her, and not to stop until that task is complete.

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by Randy Baker

Gallagher, Kelly. *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It.* Portland: Stenhouse, 2007.

Warning: Do not read this book. Do not add it to your professional library. Do not read it unless you are willing to question some of your current practices of reading instruction in your classroom. Do not read it if you, too, have focused your attention on the "development of test takers" over the "development of lifelong readers." Do not read it unless you are willing to provoke serious discussions in your language arts department, school, and district. For Kelly Gallagher proposes that *readicide* is practiced widely not only throughout your school district but throughout our country. What is *readicide?* It is "the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in school" (vii). This book challenges current practices but offers practical strategies to save this generation of students from this deadly disease.

Initially, Gallagher identifies the contributing factors to this "reading killer": that schools value test-taking skills more than they do the development of readers, schools are limiting "authentic reading experiences," and teachers are both "overteaching" and "underteaching" books. To support his theories, he provides ample data to force conscientious teachers to reconsider their classroom practices. He insists that teachers find their "sweet spot" in teaching—that balance between overteaching ("chopping books to death") and underteaching ("handing books to students without any level or support") (87). However, unlike many educational theorists who can only find the fault but offer no solutions or unrealistic strategies to solve the problems, Gallagher challenges classroom teachers across the nation to take a stand and administer the anecdotal reform now. Teachers must address the "dearth of interesting reading materials in our schools" (45). Language arts teachers, in addition, must be "discussion directors" on their campuses (51). They must address "summer reading loss" (55). And they must create their own teacher action studies to determine how much actual reading is done in their schools. Gallagher suggests that it is surprising just how little reading is actually done each day and throughout the school year.

Finally, and most importantly to Gallagher, if *readicide* is to be prevented, then students must be given "access to great books and large doses of uninterrupted time to read them" (73). To Gallagher, it is fundamental that we create lifelong readers, and this can only be done if they have interesting books, time to read those books within the school day, and a place for students to read outside the home.

If you ignore my warning and read Kelly Gallagher's *Readicide*, I think you will find it equally as difficult to ignore his concluding challenge: "if we are to find our way again—if students are to become avid readers again—we, as language arts teachers, must find our courage to recognize the difference between the political worlds and the authentic worlds in which we teach, to swim against those current educational practices, that are killing young readers, and to step up and do what is right for our students" (118).

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