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Call for Submissions

*A Learning Journey: Exploring New Paths to
Teaching and Learning for the 2019 Issue*



Submission deadline: May 1, 2019

AEJ is an official publication of the Arkansas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (ACTELA).

ACTELA seeks a variety of submissions based on the issue theme. Submissions must be original, previously unpublished work. The AEJ is peer-reviewed by fellow teachers, ELA educators and professionals. The AEJ will publish a variety of articles and materials on subjects of interest to English teachers.

Guidelines for Manuscript Submission:

Manuscripts should be sent by email as an attachment to ACTELA123@gmail.com. Manuscripts should be no more than ten to fifteen double-spaced pages in length.

For additional guidelines see the AEJ website:

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Thoughts from the Editor: Teaching for Tomorrow...

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...If there is anything constant in education, it is that education is constantly changing: new teachers, latest best practices and research, technology advances, policy updates, etc. So, what will teaching for tomorrow look like? In 2010, educators predicted that teachers would focus on educating and preparing students to meet post-graduation job market demands, and that teachers would focus less on testing and more on teaching skills and critical thinking. While this has come to pass and continues, a few additional educational trends to look for in 2019 include advancement of STEM/STEAM/STREAM education, advanced literacy teaching practices, and personalized learning experiences.

The discussion of STEM/STEAM/STREAM continues among proponents of STEM education (science, technology, engineering, and math), STEAM education that integrates the fine arts (music, drama, art), and STREAM education that adds literacy to STEM and STEAM elements. STEM/STEAM/STREAM education promotes augmented reality/virtual reality learning experiences that integrate virtual tours, hands-on inquiry, literacy, arts and technology that promote a highly impactful and engaging educational experience. Not everyone agrees that the arts and literacies should be integrated into the STEM curriculum goals. However, to prepare for 21st century high-tech jobs, students must be literate critical thinkers; this includes the skills of reading, writing, designing, and thinking.

Literacy remains a primary concern/interest across the nation. According to the US Department of Education, 14% of the adult population cannot read, 21% of adults read below a 5th grade level, and 19% of high school graduates are functionally illiterate (which means these graduates cannot read well enough to manage daily living and perform tasks required in many 21st century jobs). To be fully literate in 21st century society, a person must be able to read, write, do math, and use a computer. One in four US adults lack the basic literacy skills required for a typical job. To avoid future generations of illiteracy, educators must look to their current students to improve the students' literacy skills. Literacy is not just the English teachers' responsibility; literacy is the responsibility of every educator in every level and content area. According to [NAEP](#), in the 2017 Nation's Report Card, only about a third of the students entering 4th grade, 8th grade, and high school were proficient in reading on grade level. The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) introduced the [R.I.S.E.](#) (Reading Initiative for Student Excellence) initiative in 2018 to address student reading levels across the state. This initiative promotes a research and evidence-based approach to teaching reading that focuses on phonemic and phonological awareness. Creating phonological awareness and fluency is an essential element in 21st century education; a basic element that promotes reading comprehension, development of writing skills, and acquisition of disciplinary literacy. The R.I.S.E. initiative has been integrated at all grade levels and content areas to maximize the impact on Arkansas literacy.

The traditional classroom is changing. No longer are students expected to sit quietly in a desk positioned in rows with the focus on the teacher. Research suggests that personalized learning experiences support flexibility and impact student ownership of learning. Students are encouraged to socialize and collaborate with their peers in the classroom. Many teachers opt for flexible seating and/or vertical arrangements that support student selected assignments/projects that promote social and emotional learning through collaborative learning experiences. In addition to the classroom, 21st century technology has made the traditional "snow day" a thing of the past. The flexibility to use mobile snow days augments learning experiences that would otherwise be lost on a traditional "snow day." Schools across the nation are trading "snow days" for a form of remote schooling experience to minimize the loss of time towards education.

So, what does teaching for tomorrow look like? It's changing, and I will let you know tomorrow.

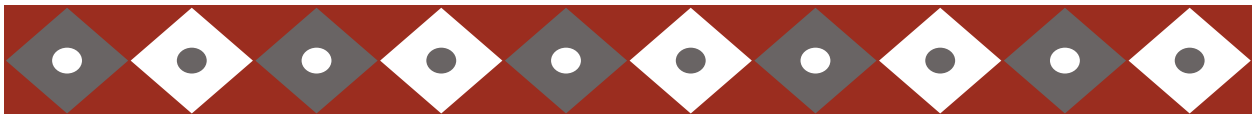


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Developing a Critical Empathetic Writing Pedagogy

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As composition instructors, we must acknowledge the struggles that our first-generation working-class students face. Along with critical compassionate pedagogy, critical empathy, meditative pedagogy, and slow professing, we propose a new concept: critical empathetic writing pedagogy (CEWP), which is also grounded in cultural studies theory, new work in literary studies on affect and emotion, and current writing pedagogy on mindfulness and other contemplative practices. The rest of the essay covers various practices that we employ that may allow others to contemplate their own forms of critical empathetic writing pedagogy.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, empathy, classroom practices, pedagogy

“Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.” —Karen Armstrong, *Charter for Compassion*

More and more, teachers and scholars are discussing the need for empathy in the composition classroom. Critical compassionate pedagogy, critical empathy, meditative pedagogy, and slow professing: all of these conceptual labels represent ways we have begun to reconceive the act of teaching in the twenty-first century. Emotion has always existed in composition classrooms, as Berg and Seeber (2016) have discussed,

Examining student evaluations demonstrates the pervasiveness of emotions in the classroom. Words such as “inspiring,” “stimulating,” “engaging and thought-provoking” all express affect...Students, it seems, make no distinction between how they felt in a course and how they thought; their emotions—whether positive or negative—were integral to how they learned. (p. 36)

Yet, many students, particularly first generation, working-class students, come to the college classroom with negative emotions already attached to the learning process, particularly in terms of writing, where many feel their work is never good enough.

Furthermore, in composition courses post the divisive 2016 election, what we would like to call a “critical empathetic writing pedagogy” has become even more crucial. Students are becoming more vocal about their political affiliations, the damages of microaggressions, and social activist movements such as Black Lives Matter, the Women’s March, and the #MeToo movement, and these issues affect the writing classroom dynamic. How do we develop classroom environments that help bring groups together, versus causing classroom segregation? Moreover, this age of partisan divisiveness comes as more and more students enter into college from diverse socioeconomic, ethnic, and gendered backgrounds. Students at regional state universities such as ours are balancing many competing needs.

This article seeks to offer educators an approachable method of empathy when working with all students, but we are also mindful that the majority of our experiences come from working with first-generation working-class students, as roughly half of our student population self identifies as first-generation. Hao (2011) argued, “Implementing critical compassionate pedagogy is important because, realistically and practically speaking, many teachers do not consider the pedagogical needs of underserved student populations that often could negatively affect the students’ likelihood to succeed in the academy” (p. 92). Although Hao (2011) utilized the term, “critical compassionate pedagogy,” we prefer the term “critical empathetic writing pedagogy” or CEWP because we feel like the word “empathetic” better addresses the blend of mindfulness and practical methodologies we employ. We also feel that describing this methodology as CEWP also emphasizes the ways that this teaching practice “...attend[s] to the needs of vulnerable people who are suffering and address[es] structural inequalities” (Zembylas, 2013, p. 505). Thus, we find that CEWP is a dynamic, multi directional, and self-reflective methodology, and as such, it flexibly can address the full range of complex and divisive issues shaping our public discourse and our students’ interests.

CEWP begins with the shift of the instructor’s view of the classroom as a learner-centered environment as opposed to a teacher-centered environment (Hubba & Freed, 1999). Learner-centered pedagogy promotes a learning environment in which the student actively engages in their learning and the instructor serves as a facilitator transferring knowledge from the instructor to the student (Anson, 2016). Such a pedagogy places a renewed emphasis on process but expands the conceptualization of

writing process to the labor of being a student. CEWP empowers instructors and students on a humane level of respect. CEWP also intermingles the notions of Freire (1970) with Hubba and Freed (1999) into a tangible classroom pedagogy by utilizing empathy in such classroom necessities as the syllabi to promote a classroom culture of respect through course policies. It is also more important than ever to employ empathy and teach students how to use language in a way that invokes a rhetoric of empathy. Leake (2016) suggested perhaps what is needed is not empathy itself, but rather better empathy. This paper posits that CEWP gives both instructors and students space to turn the classroom into a positive, transformative experience.

Origins of Critical Empathetic Writing Pedagogy

We, the contributors, all teach in the composition sequence at the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith (UAFS), and the majority of our students come to the writing classroom from a working-class background. Our campus is by far and large a commuter one, with less than a thousand of our roughly 6,500 full time students living on campus. Our student population is mostly traditional age, with 76% of students being 24 or under and 24% of students being 25 or over. Sixty-five percent of students attend full time, and the gender demographics reflect those at most universities today with 56.5% identifying as female and 43.5% identifying as male. In terms of race and ethnicity, the student population is comprised of the following race and ethnic groups: 66.5% White American, non-Hispanic or Latino; 12.4% Hispanic or Latinx; 5.3% Asian; 4.2% Black or African American; 2.2% Native American; and 8.1% two or more races. This racial makeup reflects the diversity of the Arkansas River Valley, and indeed 89% of students are from in-state, 10% out of state, and 1% are international students. As of the last census, Fort Smith is 69.3% White American, non-Hispanic or Latino; 9% Black or African American; 5.3% Asian; 1.8% Native American.¹

Based on what students shared about their parents' education levels, 49.5% of students are first-generation college students, and 52.7% of undergraduates received a Pell award in Fall 2016. In other words, this student body represents a segment of the population, predominantly working-class and the first members of their family to attend a four-year university, that has been underserved by higher education. The critical empathetic writing pedagogy discussed in this paper was developed in response to thinking through methodologies to best serve this predominantly first-generation, working-class student body, although we find these methods are useful for any student population.

¹The demographics data was obtained from the *IPEDS: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System* (<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>), and it was collected Fall 2017, except the age data, Pell Grant eligibility, and first generation data, which is from an internal database, and the data is from Fall 2015. The demographic data for Fort Smith is from the 2010 U.S. Census (<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>).

Admittedly, the idea of student-centered teaching is not novel, and we have been mindful of the traditions leading us to this point. Freire (1970) introduced and denounced the idea of the banking approach to education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. With this particular approach, the professor provides information; the students deposit it into their brains. Numerous instructors have quickly discovered that this is an ineffective way to learn. While Freire never directly dubbed it critical pedagogy, he did galvanize others to build the field of critical pedagogy to empower students to think critically about issues that affect them individually and socially.

In her examination of the academy, Shaughnessy (1977) acknowledged the struggles first-year writers in open-admission colleges and universities face which also brought to question ideas of race, language, and how to perceive student errors. Relating to Rosenberg's (2003) concept of non-violent teaching, Hao (2011) propounded this particular pedagogical approach and invites us, as educators, to examine the institutional and societal pressures placed upon our students within the classroom. Hao (2011) considered such an approach critical to first-year students' success.

In addition, contemplative pedagogy, meditative pedagogy, and mindfulness have been popular themes at recent composition conferences, including the annual Conference on College Composition & Communication (CCCC). Though these practices are much older than student-centered teaching approaches, they are being used to revitalize composition classrooms. According to Chick (2010), who also coordinates *The Mindful PhD* blog, contemplative pedagogy methods are "designed to quiet and shift the habitual chatter of the mind to cultivate a capacity for deepened awareness, concentration, and insight. Such methods include guided meditation, journals, silence, music, art, poetry, dialogue, and questions" (Chick, 2010). Lastly, but certainly not least, is the most recent framework, derived from the slow teaching movement. King (2018) referred to an article Cohen (2018) wrote for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. According to King, "Cohen describes her embrace of 'slow teaching,' an approach that designs a college course to 'look closely—and by extension, slowly—at one major idea or text over the course of ten weeks.'" Regarding King's review of Cohen's article, the underlying idea seems to be that Cohen is criticizing the idea of binge learning (also reminiscent of Freire). Since higher education emphasizes reflective inquiry, King highlights the fact that such binge learning is not conducive to learning in terms of memory as well as enjoyment.

Enacting Critical Empathetic Writing Pedagogy

The question of how to effectively address the needs of diverse student populations has added weight for us as UAFS begins work on a university-wide initiative to better address the needs of first-generation working-class students. According to Marinara (1997), "The basic writing class effectively becomes an introduction to academic discourse, an introduction to what a scholarly conversation is about and looks/sounds like. The university doesn't change because there is no equally valued place for

working-class experience within the public domain of the academy” (p. 4). Imposing academic discourse and structures risks alienating first-generation, working-class students, many of whom struggle to finish a four-year degree, in part because these students do not know how to navigate the structures of the university.² The humanities depend upon a model of intellectual labor that asks students to wrestle with ideas, coming to their own understandings. Moreover, many classes ask students to think and write about issues of class, race, and gender, all of which tend to elicit strong emotional responses from students, particularly in the current political and cultural moment. This type of learning model is active, anxious, and emotional, aspects of the learning process that “second chance collegians” (Rose, 2012, p. 41) find particularly daunting. CEWP can be a crucial intervention for these students. What follows is a discussion of CEWP drawn from our teaching and research experiences at UAFS. We find these methods allow for us to maintain the academic standards of the course while better attending to the many pathways students can take to academic success.

Developing Personal and Classroom Ethos

Composition instructors have an advantage when attempting to implement CEWP because they can engage with students personally, either through classroom discussion and interaction or just getting to know the students through their writing. However, composition instructors need to find ways to build an empathetic personal ethos in order to gain that sense of trust to enable students to feel they are in a safe environment to share. One way composition instructors can build a personal ethos is to share with students their own stories of how class position shaped their college experiences. While this may be a more effective strategy for instructors who were first-generation or working-class college students themselves, an attention to how background influences prior knowledge and current expectations can help students be more successful in all their courses and contribute to the sense of trust composition instructors want to develop. In one colleague’s experience, sharing the self-doubt she experienced upon entering graduate school after 13 years of teaching middle school provides a valuable opportunity for students to share their own fears and to reflect upon how their own class backgrounds affect how they should best navigate college.

Another way composition instructors can build personal ethos is to “suffer” with their students in the process of writing. For some instructors, that may mean completing the same writing assignments they ask students to complete. For others, that may mean sharing some of the challenges those instructors faced in completing other

² According to Chang (2017), “Only a quarter of first-generation students graduate after four years in college, and only half graduate after six years. In addition, only about one in 10 low-income first-generation students graduate on time.”

writing tasks. Many students, particularly first-generation, working-class college students, do not recognize that their instructors have intellectual and writing struggles of their own. Completing the same writing assignments that students complete allows instructors to articulate and explain the choices they make in their writing, an important rhetorical skill that students need to develop. Talking about the challenges faced in completing other writing tasks for college, graduate school, and/or their professional lives allows instructors to share their own struggles, disappointments, and failures, as well as successes. Students need to know that their composition instructors are not necessarily “naturally gifted” and do not produce fluent writing without effort.

Composition instructors can work toward enacting CEWP through the development of an empathetic classroom ethos, as well. In composition classrooms, where students grapple with emotional issues connected to race, class, and gender that tap into deeply held political and cultural ideas, the need for a safe environment in which to express those ideas is crucial. Instructors should make explicit in their syllabi that the classroom must be a safe space for self-expression, and this expectation should be a topic of discussion on the first day of class. Students must learn that the work of the university is to critically examine accepted knowledge and beliefs and that the intellectual labor of students requires civil discourse. To do so, composition instructors need to avoid confrontational rhetoric and explicitly teach listening rhetoric instead. According to Booth (2004), listening rhetoric is “the whole range of communicative arts for reducing misunderstanding by paying full attention to opposing views” (p. 10). Besides managing in-class discussions even-handedly, composition instructors must also try to be accessible and willing to help or listen to students, communicate with students when there are behavioral problems, and help students recognize the importance as well as the differences between equality and equity. One colleague’s syllabi all include a section on rights, responsibilities, and civil discourse, a section which outlines the requirement and rationale for the classroom as a safe environment for the civil expression of ideas.

An empathetic classroom ethos may also be developed through the formation of student support groups. Some instructors may form more complex support systems such as those comprised of bands and guilds as popularized by role playing games and online gaming; other instructors may form more simple systems of “study buddies” or “study groups.” In more simple systems, students work regularly within specific groups to increase their comfort level with one another. In addition, when one student is absent, group members are expected to let that student know what happened in class and to review whatever material was covered and/or assignments given. Groups of students with similar obligations of school, work, and family can provide the kind of classroom ethos composition instructors want to promote. While enacting support groups within CEWP does require some advanced organization on the instructor’s part, particularly at the beginning of the semester, an empathetic classroom ethos is well worth the effort.

Empathetic Classroom Policies and Procedures

Specific classroom policies and procedures may also contribute to (or undermine) the kind of personal and classroom ethos composition instructors want to develop. For example, CEWP asks instructors to consider policies regarding attendance, late work, and lack of preparation for class, which are challenges working-class students often face. While regular attendance should be expected, many working-class college students struggle with their lack of familiarity with course scheduling, as well the lack of dependable transportation, extensive family obligations, changing work schedules, etc. If an instructor has a strict “drop” or failure policy after only a few absences, such students do not have the opportunity to learn how to manage the expectations of college, and their instructors lose the opportunity to have an influence on those students. As Chang (2017) noted, “...first-generation students, who [tend] to be from lower-class backgrounds, [are] more likely to have interdependent reasons—like helping their families after college” for attending university. Moreover, these students are likely to “blame themselves for their struggles” (Chang, 2017) and not seek out resources such as the writing center, tutoring, professor office hours, or even mental health and stress care. A more empathetic approach might explore scenarios allowing some flexibility in missing class due to illness/emergency (their own or family) and where students have a pathway for making up work missed due to an absence, one that is reinforced through course policies and peer group structures.

Another policy CEWP asks instructors to consider is the acceptance of late work. While deadlines are certainly important in both college and beyond, many working-class students miss deadlines due to numerous pressures, not the least of which is a lack of familiarity with many of the kinds of reading and writing they are expected to do in their classes. An instructor enacting CEWP should critically consider the purpose of the work assigned: Is the purpose of the work to teach students to meet a deadline, or is the purpose of the work to enable students to learn and demonstrate that learning? If learning is the goal, then accepting late work, even with some kind of grade penalty, supports that learning and works to alleviate some of the alienation working-class students may experience due to the imposition of unfamiliar academic structures. Course policies that enable students to ask for extensions on assignments, assignment structures that allow students to elect to skip an assignment versus having a low grade dropped at the end of term, and opportunities to pace daily or weekly assignments around their schedules can help students become active agents in managing their workflow.

CEWP also asks instructors to consider their response to lack of preparation for class. While instructors should expect students to be prepared, that expectation is not always met, often for the same reasons that deadlines are not always met. An instructor enacting CEWP should consider how students can benefit from and contribute to class, even if they are not prepared. For example, in a peer-review session, some

students may not have a draft ready. However, giving students a zero for peer review when they do not have a draft is problematic. A student with no draft can still read another's draft and provide feedback. In this way, the student with a draft benefits from the feedback received while the student without a draft benefits from seeing how another student approached the writing task assigned. Assigning a zero simply encourages unprepared students to miss class—and as previously noted, working-class students may find regular attendance to be a challenge. A more empathetic approach would be to allow students to earn partial credit, even without a draft.

Moreover, creative use of technologies such as the G-Suite of tools, including Google Docs, can enable unprepared and underprepared students to complete the work of the class before the next class meeting. For instance, the Google Docs comment structure allows students to collaboratively work on peer review, inside and outside of class, enabling all students to engage in the discursive writing process in a manner that allows them to catch up with the class, despite some students initially not being prepared. This method accommodates students who come to class unprepared but also students with other needs. One instructor found that well-established peer review groups and the use of Google Docs for peer review allowed a student with a medical issue to be involved in the class.

Recognizing Writing as Performance

Moreover, empathetic instructors should recognize that a piece of student writing is evidence of a single performance, not necessarily a perfectly finished product. Writing is always a performance (Greenblatt, 2007), and every performance of writing responds to a specific rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 1968). In thinking of writing in this way, the composition instructor becomes a coach (Elbow, 1993). In fact, there are a number of connections between the performance of writing and the performance of a sport—practice, repetition, increasing difficulty, regular feedback, and so on. In thinking of writing as a performance, improvement is to be valued. The use of portfolios (Yancey, 1992) is one way instructors can track improvement and make that improvement visible to students. Another way to make writing performance visible to students is to provide anonymous models selected from the writing of students in the class. Instructors can use these models to show what students are doing well and what they could improve upon. Working-class students need good feedback to increase their self-confidence but may feel self-conscious about public praise. The opposite is also true. Working-class students need constructive criticism to improve their performance but may respond negatively to a public critique.

In thinking about writing as a performance, empathetic instructors should recognize that imperfect performances are to be expected. A CEWP asks instructors to be mindful of their response to such imperfection. One area of particular concern is the response to mechanical and grammatical errors. First-generation, working-class students frequently struggle with the conventions of Standard American Edited English, and

many find producing a draft of any kind to be extremely daunting because they are so concerned about making these kinds of errors (Perl, 1979; Warne, 2008). While some instructors believe it is necessary to mark every error they see in a student's draft, often assigning a point penalty for each error, empathetic instructors recognize that students frequently feel overwhelmed by all the marks on the page and may spend their time attending to the surface errors marked rather than attending to more substantive comments and needed revisions. In addition, such a response to error may increase the level of alienation working-class students feel as they enter the academy, and that feeling of alienation works against students' potential for success. In fact, it is demoralizing for any student to be faced with a draft covered in editing marks and commentary, as is the case when every single error is noted. A more empathetic approach would be to use some kind of minimal marking technique to guide students in identifying and correcting errors on their own (Haswell, 1983) and to focus students' attention on errors that most damage a writer's credibility (Beason, 2001). Empathetic instructors recognize that in terms of error—and imperfect performances of writing, in general—improvement is to be valued, even as students work toward perfection.

Critical Empathetic Writing Pedagogy: Discourse Communities Study

While researching narratives of instructors describing their experiences of navigating composition students between home and academic discourse communities, the collection of interviews Winterberg (2017) obtained reflected far more about the learning environments produced by the instructors than anticipated. In fact, many of the study's participants were enacting CEWP into their learning environments without the conscious effort of using a specifically named pedagogy. Instead, the instructor-participants were acting in mindful ways to enable students to succeed by showing empathy.

One particular interview question, "How is student success affected by the discourse communities?" offered the most insight to the empathy of the study's participants, which consisted of a sample population of full-time, university faculty members. Participant One described, "students can become marginalized if they are not engaged in the class. Some students self-select themselves into or out of success based on perceived differences between classroom discourse community and their own discourse community. Instructors should offer opportunities for different kinds of discourse" (Winterberg, 2017, p. 76). This instructor observed students becoming "marginalized" and/or "self-selecting" succeeding in class based on the students' perceptions of the classroom language and ethos of the learning environment. The suggestion of offering "different kinds of discourse" illustrates an application of classroom empathy as demonstrated by the instructor. Similarly, Participant Six discussed creating community in the classroom: "Bringing various communities [of students] together and discussing a common topic across these communities establishes a discourse community for the classroom itself" (Winterberg, 2017, p. 76). By offering students a commonality to explore together, this instructor created an empathetic learning environment

of inclusion and community. Like Participant Six, Participant Nine asserted the importance of classroom community. Participant Nine detailed, “They [Students] learn to trust each other, interact together, and understand everybody in the room comes from different discourse communities which fosters an actively engaged learning environment” (Winterberg, 2017, p. 76). The ethos of Participant Nine’s statement reflects similarities to the other participants mentioned; however, this statement offers a well-rounded application of CEWP with the notion of trust and understanding in the learning environment between the instructor and the students as well as the students with their class cohort.

Although the above excerpts are a sample of findings from the study, the participants’ responses show a common ethos of CEWP. In many ways, the composition instructors from the above study and from similar regional universities evolved into empathetic learning environments from a place of necessity because of the diversity of the student populations in the composition classroom. Patton (2002) explained, “There is only what they know their experience is and means” (p. 106). The creation of a learning environment that demonstrates the CEWP ethos takes mindfulness on the part of the instructor to observe the needs of the classroom population and willingness to be empathetic to those needs all while maintaining high expectations and academic standards.

In conclusion, we ask instructors to be mindful of their current practices and approaches and to identify ways in which they are already enacting elements of a CEWP. We also challenge instructors to find other ways to enact such a pedagogy, not just for the benefit of first-generation, working-class college students, but for all students. Empathy makes us better composition instructors and better human beings as well, and as members of the humanities, becoming better human beings—and demonstrating that to students—should be one of our goals.

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My Friend Thoreau: A Reflective Journey on Reading Comprehension

Dr. Ryan R. Kelly, Arkansas State University



So rarely do we have concrete examples of our own personal journey of reading comprehension transcending multiple stages of our lives. Naturally, we all have many examples of texts that we have comprehended over the years, perhaps grown by layers or depth with multiple encounters. For many of us in the field of education, our comprehension of those texts which we teach multiple times typically grows with each passing group of students with whom we share such texts. Most often, however, we seem to comprehend those texts that really resonate with us in a surge—a deeply personal connection and multiple processes of meaning-making. We then secure the text in heart and memory, the place where we park those favorites we have encountered along the way before moving on to new texts.



So rarely do we encounter a text over multiple stages of our lives where our mindset, maturity, and meaning-making skills are so different. But when a chance to take a highly reflective journey backward through this process comes along, it is extremely rewarding. The work of Henry David Thoreau has always resonated deeply with me for a multitude of reasons. I'm a naturalist; I yearn for a more simplistic approach to life (which may very well be impossible in 2018), I seek harmony with my world and environment; and I would give anything to build my own cabin by a lake. Like many, I first encountered Walden in high school. As an English major with a love of American Literature, it was only natural that I would encounter Thoreau again. Graduate school was a somewhat unexpected step in the journey, and while the most challenging, a step I have come to value among the others. While it has taken years for my desire to take this reflective journey to reach the surface, it has grown into one that I am glad to take, and equally glad to share.

What Comprehension *Is*

The current view of reading comprehension is very clear that it is a complex cognitive process. Heavy in the current view is the notion that prior knowledge is an essential component, and that readers must link new knowledge they build to existing knowledge (Guthrie, 2008). A process such as this is certainly one that requires the explicit presence of the teacher, facilitating and guiding the thinking that accompanies the experience with the text. Additionally, this process is one of choice and self-direction, where readers must maintain ownership of the process and select those tools they need to construct their new meaning (Antonio & Guthrie, 2008; Fillman & Guthrie, 2008). These tools are, of course, the palate of popular reading comprehension strategies that dominate the process in the modern classroom. They are supported by active instruction, modeling, and they guide the interpretation of the text and the attaching of new thinking to prior knowledge (Pressley 2002a, 2002b; Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 2002).

There is, however, a much deeper theoretical layer to comprehension that strikes at the very core of who the reader *is*. Rosenblatt (1978; 1995; 2005) famously called this a process of transaction, where each reader's life intersects with the text in a unique way, governed by unique life experience and perspective. Rosenblatt, essentially, made comprehension into the process that educators know and love today: one reliant upon the reader, and not the text itself. Durkin (1966; 1928; 1987) further refined this view to include the construction of meaning—a constructed form of comprehension—not only reaffirming that comprehension is active process, but also securing comprehension's place among those learning processes that are unquestionably constructivist in nature.

My Reflective Journey

High School Thoreau

Like many high school students I initially found Thoreau to be a rather odd fellow. It wasn't until I had more of a sense for the larger social and political ramifications of his actions that I began to see why he fled the city for a solitary cabin at Walden Pond. I instantly envied his deep, personal connection to nature and the fact that all he had to do was sit and present himself to the natural setting so that all of its inhabitants would reveal themselves. I yearned to experience so much that he shared in *Walden*. Having never heard a loon before that point, for example, I would wonder for nearly ten years why he found their call so intriguing until a fishing trip to northern Minnesota where I instantly realized the power in their call. As a young writer at the time, however, a quiet natural setting was also my favorite place to think and craft—perhaps the very catalyst for my connection with Thoreau. In a high school paper I said:

I have experienced some of this connection to the land and surrounding world at my grandparents' farm. Much like Thoreau at Walden Pond, I have spent a

considerable amount of time on the farm finding inspiration for my writing in places like the tall trees of the pine grove and the grassy corners of the corn field. It is when I am close to the land, exploring my eternal connection, that I find ways to express myself best. (Kelly, 1995)

I find it rather interesting that this reflective journey has clearly shown me how I have strayed from this preferred mode of writing into one dominated by an air-conditioned office (I doubt Thoreau would approve). At the time, however, I found great meaning in his passages, and the desire to “do what Thoreau did,” yet, I didn’t quite grasp the greater implications in his actions and discover a more powerful philosophical payoff.

College Thoreau

Returning to Thoreau in college was a part of my favorite academic semester as an English major. I was rather nervous at first, expecting to find a professor who would lecture at me and seek to instill in me some radically different meaning in Thoreau’s thinking—perhaps even undo four years of my growing prior knowledge. What I discovered was a professor who pushed us to think and connect, to react and respond when we discussed. And it was especially thrilling to leave the building and sit down by the river while we discussed Thoreau. He even made us sit still and gaze at the river until nature “did something” and within moments a pair of ducks swam by, calmly quacking a conversation among themselves. While I didn’t understand it at the time, studying the comprehension process years hence has made it clear to me that sitting on the bank of the Iowa River one late April day was absolutely essential to being able to say: Thoreau was right; nature will indeed reveal itself to you.

Yet, I came to see how his deep connection to nature revealed more to him than just examples of wildlife; it revealed natural law. A standard to which I know I will never measure up, Thoreau found feelings of guilt in fishing and could clearly sense a more natural instinct toward hunting when living in the woods—an instinct he felt was at odds with the enlightenment he sought. I found a greater connection with his philosophical thinking in college (as opposed to his actions, and broader views on nature), noting in a mid-term paper: “here Thoreau opens a door; one finds spiritual attainment by turning from the natural instinct” (Kelly, 1999a). He also found that it was the vigor (and even pain) of a hearty day’s work that put his mind in the proper place to think and connect with his world. I found his allusion to Ulysses irresistible when discussing the courage necessary to navigate his daily routine in my final paper:

Thoreau’s allusion to Ulysses—and his greatest of all distractions—is wonderful. A 13 ounce sirloin is a very tempting siren song after a long day of work, but the price is lethargia throughout the evening. Thoreau would rather be tied to the mast with salad and beans, thus maintaining productivity...Indeed, just because the three o’clock school bell chimes, students need not flee home, but rather continue the school day. (Kelly, 1999b)

That paragraph yielded, what is to this day, my most cherished piece of feedback:

Sirens sing until their beautiful soprano falls to a dull baritone. Thoreau's allusion to Ulysses--and his greatest of all distractions--is wonderful. A 13 ounce sirloin is a very tempting siren song after a long day of work, but the price is lethargia throughout the evening. Thoreau would rather be tied to the mast with salad and beans, thus maintaining productivity. And if "the bell rings, why should we run?" Indeed, just because the three o'clock school bell chimes, students need not flee home, but rather continue the school day.

ok, Thoreau's metaphor

Figure 1. Final paper feedback comment. A scan of my favorite feedback comment of any ever given to me, suggesting that my thinking was indeed a worthy Thoreauvian metaphor.

I ended that paper with what may also be the one of the key roots of my staunch constructivist preference for the reading process (and teaching itself):

In any transcendental journey a keen sense of smell and persistence is all it takes to find the truth, and it is no surprise that Thoreau's remarkable writing scheme takes us through this journey. With the truth buried nearby, a snout is all that is necessary to locate the best place to mine and to live out a destiny of using the mind as a tool for seeking knowledge. (Kelly, 1999b)

Graduate School Thoreau

My graduate school experience with Thoreau proved to be a much greater challenge to mine truth that I had hoped to find. Graduate study inevitably involves assimilating a great deal of thinking postulated by experts in the field. Doing so dominates one's time and poses a very serious risk in terms of turning away from one's own prior knowledge entirely. I have come to realize after more than a decade that this is where I fell short; a more effective pedagogical path in the long run would have been to reconcile the onslaught of the experts with my own existing prior knowledge. Somewhere in the comprehension process, we must reaffirm our passionate thoughts and views and find common ground between ourselves and those experts. I did, however, discover a nugget in a take-home exam where revisiting Thoreau's thinking on natural law did indeed resonate with the growing constructivist in me:

He struggles to overcome his own inner nature, the existence of which he honestly admits, and pursues a higher set of laws that govern himself (evident in his simple life, diet, and very bean field). His famous examination of the deep cut in the earth represents intrapersonal bonds cast off in that, having come to understand himself, he has come to understand the world around him...Ultimately, Thoreau teaches the reader that one must create new knowledge through

self-discovery in order to escape intrapersonal bonds that severely interfere with a quest for liberty and happiness. (Kelly, 2006a)

I tried to continue the quest to further my philosophical level of comprehension in the final paper (which, in hindsight, was far heavier on citations of experts than my own thinking):

In “Higher Laws” Thoreau cites the coexistence of the spiritual life and the savage life within himself. Thoreau likely found solace from this ambivalence of sorts in the cultivation of his beans. His higher, spiritual laws are directly connected with his relationship to the natural world. What better way to answer this challenge on a moral level, and to break the bonds of society’s accepted appetite, than with his bean crop? For Thoreau this is a useful and healthy enterprise—as intimately hands-on with nature as physically stimulating to his body as exercise—and simple enough to suit his basic needs. (Kelly, 2006b)

While it was not as profound an experience in comprehension as my college course, with time and years of reflection, it eventually reached a greater value. I have come to realize that my journey will always return to an incomplete status—regardless of how deeply I mine his philosophical thinking or cite the experts—if I give up my own love of the land and my own, personal connection to nature. These early layers in my prior knowledge have proven to be my most essential foundation for comprehending Thoreau’s work; and no further reading of his work will ever be complete if my perspective forgets that early thinking.

Because of the Journey

What Comprehension Seems to Feel Like and Implications for Teaching

If my initial experience with Thoreau is an indication of anything, it is that prior knowledge, primed and ready to connect with a text like *Walden*, is indeed essential to the comprehension process. I also take the flip side of my perspective on Thoreau’s text as a yellow flag to teachers, in the sense that a lack of prior knowledge on the natural world, philosophy, solitude, or even transcendentalism itself, can send comprehension into crisis. As evidenced by my college experience, being allowed to think freely, bounce ideas around, and even get out of the classroom and down to the river, can be a comprehension goldmine. The challenge for us all, as teachers, is to find ways that we can break the mold of sitting in neat rows of desks and discuss Thoreau’s thinking in context. That, and teachers must believe in the importance of placing the reader’s thinking first; this is something for which I will always be thankful to the college professor who helped me take my thinking on Thoreau to a higher level. At the graduate level I found myself in somewhat over my head. The pressure to assimilate what all the experts have said about Thoreau is great, a pressure that would seem to all but stifle a reader’s perspective. I wish I had more successfully mediated that thinking with a reaffirmed belief in my own. But this may very well be, oddly enough, when the text to

world connection comes full circle. Ultimately, what comprehension of this text has always felt like to me is a sense of belonging at Walden, and Thoreau's encouraging and reassuring presence in thinking. That, and a renewed desire to build my own cabin.

What I Actually Got from (Comprehending) Thoreau

As strange as it may be to say, I found kinship in the writings of Thoreau. I have always felt that I understood him—in a sense, “I get him.” But as I continued to read further selections of his work on my own (*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* is a prime example), I felt like selection after selection continued to deliver the same kinship—almost as if “he got me” and continued to deliver what he knew I would find engaging. This is of course not the case, given the incongruity of our lifetimes. But the most satisfying of comprehension experiences are those where we find ourselves in an author's work, and continue to find new depth to our own thoughts as we engage with new depth penned by that author. Henry David Thoreau is one of a very select few authors that I feel justified (again, as strange as it may be to say) in calling a friend.

In the final examination in my graduate course, I said that “ultimately, Thoreau teaches the reader that one must create new knowledge through self-discovery in order to escape the intrapersonal bonds that severely interfere with a quest for liberty and happiness” (Kelly, 2006b). When penning those thoughts I did not realize how deeply I would come to believe that statement. Indeed, the most important new knowledge I built in and around my life and thoughts, thanks to Thoreau, was very much grounded in self-discovery. But *what I actually got* from studying Thoreau over the years, in as much as this journey has revealed to me, is how much I actually value, appreciate, and love the constructive nature of the reading comprehension process.

Coda

One of the most treasured books on my office shelf (beside a very, very annotated paperback from my college course) is a copy of Thoreau's work given to me at graduation by one of my high school teachers. I had it with me the summer after high school graduation on a family trip to the Grand Canyon, to read in the car. One of the highlights of the trip was a very brief stop in Thoreau, New Mexico, and the local post office to have my book autographed.



Figure 2. Thoreau, New Mexico postmark. This is the autograph stamped in my favorite copy of Thoreau's work by their local post office.

I can't wait to take the book with me to Walden, Colorado, and even to my friend Thoreau's own Walden Pond.

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You only need sit still long enough in some attractive spot in the woods that all its inhabitants may exhibit themselves to you by turns.

—Thoreau

1 Photograph collage: Lon Sanders Canyon, Piedmont, MO. Photographer: Janine Chitty (ca. 2008).

Teacher's Guide to Working with Students Affected by Parental Incarceration

**Nichole Dapson, HS English Teacher
Alma High School, Alma, Arkansas**

In the United States, it is estimated that one out of every fourteen children has a parent who is currently or has previously served time in the prison system, according to a study done by the research firm Child Trends. Their research showed that roughly seven percent of children in the United States, approximately five million children, have a parent who has been incarcerated (Zoukis, 2017). Parental incarceration is a growing issue in the United States; an issue with consequences that affects more people than simply those who are incarcerated. The lasting effects of parental incarceration is an issue many American educators are likely to face. While there have been numerous studies done on the consequences and effects of parental incarceration on children and young adults, little scholarship is readily available for teachers, especially teachers of junior high and high school students, on how to best help and work with students affected by this issue in the classroom.

Because parental incarceration is a growing problem in the United States, teachers need to be well equipped for working with affected children. As with other types of trauma, children with an incarcerated parent or parents are going to be greatly affected in several ways. The affected students will show signs of the emotional, social, and economic effects the incarceration has had on their families. These children will have needs that differ from their peers. Teachers should be prepared to meet the specific needs of these students, just as they would any other student's special needs. While conducting research, I will be building a guide for classroom teachers, focusing on how to best work in the classroom with junior high to high school students affected by parental incarceration. The field of education is constantly evolving to fit the ever-changing needs of students. A guide such as this will be a useful tool for teachers in meeting the needs of these specific students. This guide will focus on three major areas: pedagogical methods, support methods for the student, and methods of communication with/support for the student's caregiver.

Parental incarceration has profound effects on children and young adults. These children are affected on a social, emotional, and economic level, and because of these effects, the way they learn and behave in the classroom will likely differ from their peers in some ways. According to Joyce A. Arditti in *Parental Incarceration and the Family*, children of incarcerated parents are at a higher risk for mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. These children are also more likely to have issues in school. Children of incarcerated parents have a higher rate of dropout, absences, school failure, and disciplinary infractions (Arditti, 2014). In multiple studies, parental incarceration has always had a negative effect on children's behavior and success in school. Because these children are dealing with a form of trauma, they may not realize or know how to effectively cope with the trauma. According to the Council on Crime and Justice (2006), "Children of Incarcerated Parents," these children's underdeveloped coping mechanisms are likely to result in "reactive behaviors such as physical and verbal aggression, withdrawal, hyper vigilance, or sexualized behavior" (p. 6). Because school is where children spend a majority of their time, this divergent behavior often manifests itself within the school's walls. The type of behavior presented by these children typically results in disciplinary infractions. There is a known correlation between the number of student office referrals and student dropout rates. If classroom teachers knew how to best handle these students' behavior and meet their needs within the classroom, there should be a decrease in the dropout rate for these students, which, in turn, would increase the students' educational success rate.

While my research includes an in-depth look at the social, emotional, and economic effects of parental incarceration, it mainly examines these effects from the standpoint of an educator. It is important for educators to understand the profound effects of parental incarceration on children in order to know how to most effectively teach and meet the needs of these students. Research for this teacher's guide also looks at the pedagogical methods that would work best for these students. There is

little existing scholarship on the exact pedagogical methods that would be the most effective in this situation; therefore, I have researched existing pedagogies, used theories from educational psychology, and utilized the research from studies on the effects of parental incarceration to best inform my decision on which pedagogical methods to include in the final guide. Finally, my research delves into the most effective communication methods between teachers and the current caregivers of children with a parent or parents in prison. The child's caregiver might be the only strong role model in his/her life at that moment, and effective communication and support for the caregiver from the teacher is likely essential to the success of the student.

Research Methods

In conducting research for this guide, I looked at current scholarship on the subject of parental incarceration, focusing on the effects of parental incarceration on children and young adults. I also looked at current effective pedagogical methods, as well as the best ways to communicate with and support the student's caregiver. Additionally, I examined and analyzed current young adult and children's literature on the subject. Finally, I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers, administrators, and others who come in contact with children of incarcerated parents on a daily basis in order to examine different perspectives on the issue.

Literature Review

Parental incarceration is a growing problem in the United States as the mass incarceration rate keeps increasing. Incarceration affects everyone involved, especially the children and families of the inmate. Children are affected on a social, emotional, and economic level. Because of this, the way they learn and behave in the classroom will likely differ from their peers in some ways. In order to best meet the needs of these students, teachers need to know the effects of parental incarceration and how to support children who are affected. Additionally, the communication between teachers and the student's caregiver and, when possible, the incarcerated parents, can greatly affect the student's success in school. There is a wealth of literature examining and describing the social, emotional, and economic effects of parental incarceration. Literature is also available focusing on communication methods between teachers, caregivers, and the incarcerated parents as well as strategies for support for these students while in the classroom. While specific literature is not readily available on the best pedagogical methods and strategies for students with incarcerated parents, there is literature on the best practices for at-risk students. Many students with a parent or parents in prison can be considered at-risk; therefore, this review will examine the literature describing the best pedagogical strategies for working with at risk students.

Emotional Effects

Having a parent in prison can have profound effects on students' emotional,

economic, and social states. These effects will likely vary from student to student, but many students will have at least some of these effects in common. Emotionally, the initial arrest of the parent is going to be a terrifying and traumatizing experience, according to Rita Manning (2011). Many arrests are made in the middle of the night because people will most likely be home and asleep. From the child's perspective, police officers pound on the door, or break it down if need be, in the middle of the night while they are sleeping and then take their parent(s) away from them. The children, depending on the state and their policies, are either taken in a police car to await another family member or an available foster family (Manning, 2011). An experience like this can definitely be considered traumatic for children of any age, and can take an emotional toll on the child.

Joyce A. Arditti (2014) claims that children of incarcerated parents are at a higher risk for mental health problems such as anxiety and depression because of the trauma experienced. In support of Arditti's claims, Manning (2011) states these children may experience the following:

Trauma- related stress: depression and difficulty forming attachments; difficulty sleeping and concentrating; emotional withdrawal; cognitive delays; and difficulty developing trust, autonomy, initiative, productivity, and achieving identity...As a result of the psychological trauma they experience, they are also much more likely to engage in disruptive behavior: truancy, pregnancy, drug abuse, diminished academic performance, gang participation, and delinquent behavior.
(p. 271)

Further supporting these claims, Dallaire (2010) conducted a qualitative study where she interviewed several teachers about their experiences and expectations regarding children of incarcerated parents. In her study, the results of which are published in the article, "Teachers' Experiences with and Expectations of Children with Incarcerated Parents," she found that many teachers had at least one experience with a child whose parent was in prison and that these children had some kind of strong emotional response to the experience. Many teachers agreed that the children whose parents were incarcerated tended to have a "a low threshold for frustration" and would easily "fall apart or fall to pieces" (Dallaire, 2010, p. 284).

Children of incarcerated parents are also more likely to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) because of their experience, according to Kate Luther. Luther (2015) also states that these children may also act more aggressively than their peers. The aggression may stem from the student's underdeveloped coping mechanisms. According to the Council on Crime and Justice (2006), children of incarcerated parents have underdeveloped coping mechanisms that are likely to lead the child to experiencing traumatic stress. This stress adversely disrupts a child's development manifesting itself in reactive behaviors that may include fighting, substance abuse, gang activity,

and other antisocial behaviors (p. 6). Students may exhibit these behaviors because they are confused about how they are supposed to feel about the situation (Dallaire, 2010; Luther, 2015).

Many children may go through a range of emotions about their parent's incarceration, depending on the situation. In a case of abuse, the child might be relieved and happy his/her parent is no longer involved in his/her life. In other cases, the child may feel anger or hurt at the absence of his/her parent. In Dallaire's study, one teacher remarked that one of her student's father was being released from prison, but the student was confused about how he should feel. The student said that he "should be happy," but there were still lingering feelings of anger and resentment (Dallaire, 2010, p. 284). Some of the emotions, such as anxiety, can be caused by the economic effects of having a parent in prison.

Economic Effects

In addition to the profound emotional effects parental incarceration has on the children affected by it, parental incarceration has vast economic effects. If only one parent has been incarcerated, the children will typically stay with the parent still left in the home. If a two-income household suddenly has to run on only one source of income, this can take a drastic toll on the financial state of the family. In an interview Katy Reckdahl conducted with Khary Dumas, Dumas gave some insight into the financial strain his father's arrest put on his family. Because his father was absent, his mother had to do everything to support the family. Although his mother tried to be a devoted parent and "woke them up for school every morning and cheered at his football games when she could, she had to work two jobs as the family's sole breadwinner" (Reckdahl, 2015, p. 14).

Sometimes the working parent still might not be able to support the whole family and kids get tossed around from place to place and family member to family member (Dallaire, 2010). When this occurs, children may be greatly concerned with where their next meal is coming from, who is going to take care of them next, and how long they will be able to remain in a certain place. Drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, physiological needs, such as food, water, and shelter need to be met first before a person can worry about anything else (Maslow, 1943). If a student is focused on where his/her basic needs are coming from, it is understandable that he/she may not be able to control his/her emotions in the same way his/her peers do. Unfortunately, several children either have both parents in prison, or the parent not in prison is otherwise unavailable. In these cases, the children usually begin to live with their grandparents or are placed into foster care. Many times the grandparents are not financially ready to raise children a second time, and/or they are on a fixed income (Dallaire, 2010). Children without a close relative available are typically placed in foster care.

Social Effects

Closely linked with the emotional and economic effects of parental incarceration, children whose parents are incarcerated often deal with the social effects of their parents' status as well. Likely one of the largest social effects of parental incarceration is the stigmatization attached to it. Children of incarcerated parents are often stigmatized by their peers, other adults, and even teachers (Luther, 2015). The children's peers may bully, make fun of, or shame them for their parents being in prison. Other adults may stigmatize the child by thinking the old cliché, "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree." They may think the child will eventually end up like their parents or expect them to act out simply because their parents committed a crime. Teachers are not immune to this kind of thinking either. Too often, teachers tell these students they are likely to grow up and go to prison themselves (Reckdahl, 2015). Some teachers have much lower expectations for students whose parents are incarcerated because they think that the incarceration is going to cause the students to act out or perform more poorly than other students.

Susan Phillips and Trevor discuss the harmful effects of this stigmatization. According to Phillips and Gates (2011), "there is speculation that children's concerns about being stigmatized at school may contribute to school phobias and non-attendance, particularly in the first few weeks following a parent's arrest" (p. 288). After hearing so many negative stigmatizations from peers, other adults, and teachers, often, some children will tend to self-stigmatize. Students who self-stigmatize will start believing the negative stigmatizations said about them and see themselves as different or abnormal (Phillips & Gates, 2011). The stigmatization coupled with the child's emotional response to the incarceration can also be linked to other negative social effects. Children with incarcerated parents may have trouble interacting with their peers, either from shame, fear of stigmatization, or problems with trust or abandonment (Dallaire, 2010). In school, they may feel isolated or have negative feelings toward school because they may have had to move to several different schools, and they may have had negative experiences in previous schools. Because of the possibly negative social interactions and feelings of isolation, these students may be more inclined to drop out of school.

Communication

In order to ensure that these students have a better life as well as academic success, teachers need to know how to best help their students whose parents are incarcerated. One crucial way to help these children succeed academically is through communication with the children's caregivers and, if possible, with their parent or parents in prison. The reason communication with those closest to the affected children is crucial stems from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory. His theory explains how a child's interactions within a microsystem and the connections between

their microsystems, which comprises the mesosystem, affect his or her life. A child's microsystem is comprised of the complex relations between the developing person and the environment, such as family, home, school, neighborhood, religious organization, etc. (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For a child, the mesosystem is typically the interactions between family, school, and peer group. If the interactions between the mesosystems are positive and effective, this will likely positively impact the child. Positive and helpful communication between the microsystems of school and home for these children can greatly help their academic success. According to Dallaire's (2010) study,

Connecting children's microsystems via increased communication between caring teachers and concerned caregivers could help improve children's outcomes, as children may have access to more caring individuals who are committed to helping them deal with their parent's incarceration. (p. 289)

Dallaire's study further stresses the importance of positive and effective communication between the teacher and the student's caregiver. Since many students are living with a person other than a parent when their parent(s) go to prison, it is recommended that when communicating with the caregiver, the teacher use inclusive language such as guardian or caregiver instead of only "mom" or "dad."

In some cases, communication between the student and the incarcerated parent can have quite positive effects on the student. In these cases, it is important that these students still have sufficient contact with their parents. Unfortunately, according to Manning, "the majority of children with incarcerated parents will have a parent incarcerated in a distant prison since over 50% of state and 40% of federal prisoners live 100 to 400 miles from their children, as prisons are increasingly built in poor rural communities" (Manning, 2011, p. 270). Because of this, students may need to miss school in order to complete visits. It is important to keep an open communication with the caregiver about when these absences will take place, and, if possible, discuss a plan with the administration to excuse these absences (Morgan, 2013). Additionally, if possible, teachers can conduct virtual conferences, either by phone or use of other technology with the incarcerated parent. Teachers can also send work and/or newsletters to the parents so that they can still be involved in their child's education (Chute, 2017). Although parents and caregivers may not be able to be as involved in their child's education as they might like to be, it is important to offer support to the parents and caregivers through communication in order for the student to thrive.

Classroom Supports and Teaching Strategies

While communication between children's microsystems is important to ensuring academic and personal success, support in the classroom as well as teaching methods and strategies are also a crucial part of a student's success. Social support can be a great part of a student's success. According to Luther (2015), "for children of

incarcerated parents, social support could act as a buffer from the negative effects of parental incarceration" (p. 507). Effective social-emotional support promotes resilience, which is crucial part of student's personal and academic success. This kind of social-emotional support promotes resilience in three ways in particular: "(a) providing access to conventional activities, (b) supporting a vision of a better life, and (c) encouraging turning points" (Luther, 2015, p. 505). There are a few ways teachers can provide access to conventional activities. Conventional activities are activities such as athletics, social clubs, youth groups, and groups such as Upward Bound and the Boys and Girls Club. Teachers can have resources and information about these activities readily available to students in the classroom. According to Luther (2015), teachers that supported a vision of a better life,

Supported participants to envision and work toward life trajectories different than their incarcerated parents. Almost 90% of participants reported that their social support systems helped them see not a life that consisted of crime and incarceration but instead one in which they could achieve normative success. (p. 511)

Finally, teachers can encourage turning points in students' lives and help redirect their paths towards a more prosocial path. Teachers can do this by reaching out to students, letting them know they are in a safe, non-judgmental space, and telling them about the better opportunities out there. Some students may need help finding ways to apply to college and financial aid, therefore, teachers can help these students in that area (Reckdahl, 2015). Teachers can also help these students reflect on their own lives and actions (Luther, 2015).

According to Tori D'Angelis, teachers should try to keep at-risk students in the classroom as much as possible. It is important for these students not to miss crucial class time and time in class with their peers. Because of this, support should exist within the classroom as well as outside of the classroom. In the classroom, teachers should try to meet students where they are, while keeping in mind the students might have had to move around frequently, and they might have had prior negative experiences. Inside the classroom, teachers can also have resources, such as books on incarceration, readily available to students (Chute, 2017). These students may need extra support that cannot be provided only by books, so teachers can help these students find support groups or help the school partner with groups such as the Seedling Foundation or Project WHAT (We're Here and Talking), groups focused on helping teens and young adults affected by parental incarceration (Chute, 2017). Support groups can help these students know they are not alone, which can combat the feelings of isolation many of these students face. Most importantly, when making any decisions concerning a student, focus on the child's needs. In addition to providing appropriate support in the classroom, there are a few teaching methods and strategies proven to be effective with at-risk students. First and foremost, teachers should set

high expectations for all students, not just the high achieving students. Teachers need to make sure to not stigmatize students and lower teacher expectations based on these stigmatizations (Reckdahl, 2015). In addition to having high expectations, the teacher's expectations should be clear and achievable. Giving students some control over their own education has also proven effective, especially since students with incarcerated parents may not have much control over other areas of their lives. Allowing choices in assignments and topics is one way of achieving this. Problem based learning and thematic units covering issues important to the students are also effective teaching methods when working with at-risk students (Morgan, 2013).

Research

To support primary research of this topic, I, the author of this article, gathered input from people regularly working with children affected by parental incarceration, classroom teachers, student teachers, administrators, and other members of the community who are or have been actively involved in children's lives. These participants completed a semi-structured interview which was conducted electronically or over the phone. Each person interviewed was asked a series of general questions, beginning with his or her occupation, what level of students (elementary, middle, or high) he or she came in contact with most, and whether his or her school was defined as a rural school or a city school. The participants were then asked how many students affected by incarceration were in his or her classrooms. The questions that followed facilitated a discussion surrounding the behavior of the students affected, the supports and accommodations currently provided to these students, the communication methods used with the students' caregivers, and any other advice he or she would give to people working with students affected by parental incarceration. Some participants provided additional information during the interview regarding the topic of students with incarcerated parents.

Results

Out of all participants interviewed, 18.2% of respondents did not have any students with known incarcerated parents, and 81.8%, had at least a few students with incarcerated parents in their classes. After all interviews were completed, an open coding of the data was conducted. From this process, five main themes emerged: behavior, counseling, communication, relationships, and accommodations. The concepts associated with each of these major themes can be found in Table 1.

Every participant noted a difference in behavior between students with incarcerated parents and their peers. Although 75% of participants observed that these students tended to struggle academically, act out or disrupt during class, and were more antisocial than their peers, 25% stated that it completely depended on the student. These 25% stated that some students facing this issue were obedient and resilient,

Table 1. Major Themes of Working with Students with Incarcerated Parent

Major Themes	Associated Concepts
Behavior	Behavior issues, acting out, social, unique to student, struggling academically
Counseling	Emotional support, guidance counselor referral, listening
Communication	Phone call, email, letter, face to face
Relationships	Teacher/student, caring, positive, supportive, encouraging
Accommodation	Extensions, food, peer mentoring, tutoring

while others in the same class were defiant and rebellious. Another major category referenced by every participant was the importance of relationships. Seventy-five percent of participants stated that it was crucial for students to know they are loved and cared for by their teachers. These participants also noted that these students needed and responded positively to plenty of encouragement. “Giving grace” and being patient with these students is also critical, according to 25% of participants.

Regarding classroom supports, 54% of participants mentioned counseling and 36% referred to specific accommodations. Several of these participants stated that they provide emotional support to these students, as well as a listening ear. Some of the participants stated that their students had been referred to a guidance counselor and were receiving counseling through the school. As far as accommodations, homework help and extensions on assignments appeared to be the most effective. Some teachers also stated that they needed to provide snacks and other necessities to these students. Approximately 12.5% of participants noticed that peer mentoring greatly helped their students because students with incarcerated parents tended to respond more positively to assistance from a peer than help from the teacher. When asked about the most effective communication methods, each participant’s answer differed

slightly. Letters home worked best for 37.5% of participants; however, they noted that it was sometimes a challenge to ensure that the letter made it home. Phone calls and emails also worked well for 37.5% of participants. Finally, home visits, when necessary, were most effective for 25% of participants.

Overall, many of the participants had similar answers to the questions given. Each participant noticed similar behavior in the students affected by parental incarceration, although some noted that no students are exactly the same. While they may exhibit similar behavior, each student may respond uniquely to the situation. Most agreed that the students likely need some kind of emotional support within the classroom, and that students need structure as well. All participants agreed that communication between school and home is important, even though the methods of communication varied. It mostly comes down to what works best for the individual teacher and the student.

Discussion

Teachers can be some of the most crucial people in the lives of students affected by parental incarceration. These students, and all students, need an adult they can trust, confide in, and who will advocate for them. Because of the social, emotional, and economic strain parental incarceration puts on the students affected by it, support within and outside of the classroom is important. Teachers can provide emotional support for these students and can act as a positive role model and advocate for these students when they may not have any other adult filling that role. In addition to providing support, teachers still need to be able to help these students learn, achieve the standards, and reach their potential. Certain teaching methods, strategies, and pedagogy may work better with these students than what may work with their peers. Finally, as previously stated, communication is imperative between the teacher and student, as well as with the parents and/or caregivers. In the classroom, there are several ways each of these needs can be met. Based on the research provided above, interviews with those in the field of education and others who work with children, and information from young adult literature, this article may serve as a guide providing information, examples, and methods to effectively meet the needs of students with incarcerated parents.

Building Positive Relationships

First, and probably most importantly, a teacher should get to know the students in his or her class. When registering for school, it is not required for family members to reveal if the student's parent or parents are incarcerated. Teachers may only discover that a student's parent is in prison if a family member discloses this information to the school or teacher, or if the student informs the teacher him/herself. While the teacher may not want to directly ask if any of their students have a parent in prison, there are a

number of ways teachers may collect data from students and their family. One way teachers may collect student information is at the beginning of the year pass out a questionnaire at the school's open house or the first day of school. The teacher can add a simple open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire along the lines of "Is there anything else you wish I knew about you?" If the teacher sends the questionnaire home for the parent or guardian to answer, the question could be changed to, "Is there anything else I should know about your student in order to help me best meet his or her needs in the classroom?" While students and/or their family member may still not choose to reveal the situation of a parental incarceration, this may still be a useful tool. Along these same lines, one Denver, Colorado teacher, Kyle Schwartz, passes out post-it notes at the beginning of every year and asks her students to complete the phrase, "I wish my teacher knew" (Gumbrecht, 2015). Another way to get to know students is by simply talking with them. Simple strategies such as these can reveal important information about students and their lives outside of school.

Likely one of the most stressed characteristics of effective teaching is forming a relationship with students. A good relationship with a teacher is especially important for students with incarcerated parents. In many young adult and children's literature on the topic of parental incarceration, a relationship with a teacher played an important role in the student's life. In the novel, *The Same Stuff As Stars* by Katherine Patterson (2016), Angel Morgan's father has been in prison for most of her childhood. She lives with her mother, who is struggling to keep supporting her family, and her younger brother. While the novel never explicitly states that Angel had a good relationship with her teacher, or that her teacher helped her during a hard time, Angel referenced one teacher several times throughout the novel and would always try to follow what her teacher had taught in class. Because Angel referenced her teacher and the lessons she learned from her teacher so many times throughout the story, it shows how much Angel respected that teacher and how important she was in Angel's life. In Higgins' (2011) children's book, *The Night Dad Went to Jail*, Sketch's father is taken to prison, and Sketch is really confused and angry about the whole situation. When a classmate says something insensitive, Sketch lashes out by pushing his books off his desk. He gets sent to the principal's office, where he tells Mrs. Sanchez, the principal, that everything is all messed up. Mrs. Sanchez assures Sketch that it is okay to feel angry, worried, or scared. She helps him process his emotions, and eventually Sketch feels better again. Sketch's positive relationship with Mrs. Sanchez, and her kind words and reassurance helped Sketch work through this tough time constructively, instead of letting the anger and negative feelings turn him to lashing and acting out even more.

Using young adult literature such as those discussed above can be incredibly beneficial in the classroom. Issues such as parental incarceration can be difficult to discuss in a classroom setting. Young adult literature on the topic can open a doorway for discussion without alienating or putting students affected by it on the spot. Young adult literature can help bring awareness to the issue and help break down the stigma

surrounding parental incarceration and those affected by it. According to Jaqueline N. Glasgow, “young adult literature provides a context for students to become conscious of their operating worldview and to examine critically alternative ways of understanding the world and social relations” (2001, p. 54). Students can discuss these issues in a safe, non-judgmental environment. The students who may currently be dealing with the issues presented, such as parental incarceration, should be made welcome to share their insight on the topic but should never feel pressured to reveal anything they are not comfortable with sharing. While using young adult literature to teach about and discuss parental incarceration can be beneficial to teachers, there are only a handful of good young adult novels on the topic.

Regarding forming positive and open relationships with students, unfortunately, some of these students may not be the most open to forming a relationship. These students may feel uneasy or scared of people in authority because of the traumatic experience of their parent or parents being arrested. These students may also be afraid of being stigmatized by adults and their peers. Problems with trust may also arise in these students because they may be afraid of losing another person they care about or worried that a person they care about will leave them. Because of this, a good, stable relationship with a teacher is so important for these students. There are a number of ways teachers can form relationships with students, even students who might be more difficult to have a relationship with than others. By first getting to know the student, teachers should choose a method that works best for them. Children are not all the same; a method that works with one child may not prove successful with another. It is important for teachers to remember to never give up on a child, even when it seems like nothing is working, and to remember that building relationships takes time.

Building relationships with students first requires a strong foundation. Teachers need to begin building relationships at the beginning of the year and establish a safe, welcoming climate for students within the classroom. The next few strategies described can be used with all students, but can be especially helpful for establishing a relationship with at-risk students. One strategy teachers can use every day is simply greeting students at the door. Some teachers offer a simple “hello” or “good morning” as their students walk in the classroom door, while others use a bit more structured approach, such as the “3 H” strategy. The three H’s in the strategy stand for “hello,” “handshake,” or “high five.” When students enter the classroom, they tell the teacher which one of the three they want that day. Grace Dearborn, a former middle school teacher and full time educational speaker, discusses this strategy in her speech “When Consequences Don’t Work” at the 2017 Association of Middle Level Educators Conference. Dearborn shares the story of one student with whom she was having a hard time connecting with and how this simple strategy made an impact with the student. When the student came to her fifth period class, she offered the usual “hello, handshake, or high five.” She could tell this student was having a rough day when, at first, he refused any of the “3 H’s.” She gave him a minute to calm down, and then asked what was going on with

him. After a moment he revealed that this was the first nice thing anyone had said to him all day. While their relationship still had problems for the duration of that year, years later, this student revealed that she was the main reason he made it to high school and wanted to attend college (Dearborn, 2017). Another strategy for building relationships with students is the “2X10” strategy. In this strategy, a teacher needs to talk to a student about anything the student wishes to discuss for at least two minutes a day for 10 consecutive days. The teacher should not make it obvious that they are using a strategy, but allow the conversation to develop naturally. If the student seems reluctant to talk, the teacher may try to start a lateral conversation, where the teacher places the student in a group and begins talking to the student’s group members, while still trying to pull the student into the conversation (Dearborn, 2017)

Constructing a Safe, Structured Classroom

In addition to having a mentor or adult advocate, many students of incarcerated parents need a well-structured school and classroom. Because of their situation, students with incarcerated parents likely do not have a great amount of structure in their lives. Many times, their lives can be a bit chaotic leading up to and/or after the arrest of their parent. Some students continue living with the non-incarcerated parent, who may have to take on another job in order to support the family. Other students may be forced to live with a grandparent or other family members who might not be ready to raise a child again. Still other students are uprooted and forced to live in foster care. With so much uncertainty in their lives during the time of their parent’s incarceration, these children crave structure and stability, even if they do not outwardly show it. Having high, clear expectations and procedures in the classroom can greatly help put order in the students’ world of chaos. Teachers should have high expectations for all students; a student’s ability level, behavior, home situation, etc. should not change the teacher’s expectations for that student. Students tend to perform close to the expectation of others. If a teacher’s expectations for a student are low, the student will likely match that low expectation because they know they do not have to try very hard to meet that teacher’s expectation. If a teacher’s expectations are high, however, and the student has a good relationship with that teacher, the student is much more likely to work hard to reach those high expectations. According to a study conducted by Christine M. Rubie-Davies (2010), there is a correlation between student achievement and teacher expectations. In high expectation teachers, those who have high expectations for all students, the correlations were positive and significant. In addition to simply having high expectations for all students, these expectations should also be made clear to students and should be attainable. Students always need to know what is expected of them, and that they are able to meet these expectations.

Additionally, procedures should be made clear and specific. Procedures lay the groundwork for a smoothly running classroom, and they help provide structure and stability to all students. Procedures should be in place for everything that goes on in

the classroom, from entering and exiting the room to passing back papers. In her lecture, "When Consequences Don't Work," Dearborn (2017) discusses the importance and benefits of using visuals when it comes to procedures. The visuals for the procedures should be placed in context,. For example, if the teacher wants a student's binder to look a certain way, the teacher can have students keep a picture inside the front of their binders for reference. Dearborn also discusses having numbers for certain procedures such as entering and exiting the classroom. If the procedures are numbered, and still on display for students somewhere in the classroom, the teacher can simply tell a student or students what number they are currently on and what number they should be on. The teacher saves his or her voice by simply saying a number instead of a whole sentence, and the student or students are not loaded down with too many words being spoken at them (Dearborn, 2017).

Effective Teaching Strategies

Once teachers have laid the foundation with positive relationships and clear procedures, effective teaching can begin. Certain teaching strategies tend to work better with students of incarcerated parents and other at risk students. At-risk students and students with incarcerated parents likely do not have a lot of control in most areas of their lives. Giving these students some control in the classroom and over their education can go a long way. These students tend to respond well to being given choices, such as learning menus or problem-based learning. Problem-based learning has also been seen to work well with at risk students (Morgan, 2013). Problem-based learning is where the teacher and/or students come up with a problem and try to find solutions to the problem throughout their learning. Problem-based learning can be carried out over a single unit, an entire semester, or a full school year. Problem-based learning works best if students are able to have a choice in the problem they choose. Students are much more likely to be engaged and involved in the learning if they are interested in the problem. It is also not an issue if students are left with more questions at the end of their problem-based learning unit/assignment, as many aspects of life often leave people with more questions than answers. Teachers should act as facilitators in the process and try to help students as much as possible with the questions they may have. Similar to problem-based learning; thematic units also tend to work well with at-risk students. Thematic units tend to be created around a problem or essential question. Thematic units can also cover topics important to students. Young adult literature also works well inside of thematic units. Additionally, these students may need teachers to help scaffold their learning, depending on where they are at academically. Peer tutors and mentors have also been known to work well for these students. At risk students may respond better to peers than teachers and other adults.

Conclusion

While the strategies and supports listed in this guide are research based and

have been known to work with some students, it is important to remember that every student is unique and may not respond the same to certain strategies as another student. Teachers and students need to work together to find the strategy that is the best fit for both. Even though incarceration is a rapidly growing problem in the United States, few educators are discussing the issue. Additionally, while many children's books exist on the topic of parental incarceration, there is a great lack of representation for these students within young adult literature. These students need to see themselves represented in literature created for their age group. If there were more young adult books surrounding this topic, and if educators were more well-versed concerning this problem, the social stigma these students face every day could begin to break down. Educators need to be knowledgeable about parental incarceration, especially since it has become such a large issue. Students dealing with parental incarceration are some of the most at risk students; if educators are not well-equipped to help these students, they will be the students who are lost.

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“Just” Teaching: (Re) Imagining our Students’ Right to Their own Language Through Digital Literacies


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Acclaimed author, Toni Morrison (1993), once said, “We die. That may be the meaning of life. But, we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.” Language is integral to our lives, to our identities, and to our classroom spaces. Every time we walk into our classrooms, we see language in action, wrapped up in the personal, cultural, social, and political worlds we live within. As English language arts teachers, sometimes it is easy to forget that our subject area is called *language arts*, as the day-to-day grind and the ever-increasing pressures to conform to standardized teaching practices and test-preparation bog us down. Remembering that our content area is an *art*, and not just a testable fact, is important, particularly in terms of language use and practice.



As current and former language arts teachers, we witnessed daily the creative use of language by our students whether through their use of dialect or through their digital literacies they bring from their social media worlds into the classroom. Thus, we argue that in order to meet the 21st century literacy needs of our diverse students, educators need to more clearly see English language arts education as an art form—one in which teachers reaffirm students’ rights to their own language, and also celebrate their students as language designers and producers who reimagine their rights to their own language in new, creative, performative, and digital ways.

Revisiting the Past

Over the years, many English language arts teachers and teacher educators have worked to create justice-oriented pedagogical practices and classrooms. In 1974, members of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), a group within NCTE, passed a resolution on “Students’ Right to Their Own Language.” The resolution stated:

We affirm the student's right to their own patterns and varieties of language – the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.

This resolution, and document as a whole, was controversial and progressive for its time, and was in direct response to the sociocultural and political climate of the Civil Rights Movement and the increase of diverse students within the educational system. The resolution and language policy had three main objectives: 1) to raise awareness of the attitudes surrounding language, 2) to advance examples of language diversity, and 3) to provide educators with information about language and language variation to help their students (Smitherman, 1995).

Since the inception of this resolution, language policy and practices within schools and society have been continuously debated and attacked. As author Rita Mae Brown (1988) posits, “language exerts hidden power, like a moon on the tides” (p. 73). Although there are many examples of the ebb and flow of power and privilege over language policy, several are worth noting over the past five decades. For example, in 1986, California passed the first of many state-level anti-immigration policies related to language use, which people have called the English-Only Movement. The proposition made English *the* official language in California, therefore making it difficult for the multitude of Hispanic citizens’ home-languages to be seen as valid. A decade later, in 1996, California was once again at the forefront of the language debate. This time, however, there was an attempt to acknowledge language diversity. The Oakland School District school board passed a controversial resolution recognizing “Ebonics” or African American Vernacular English as a legitimate language, and not just a dialect. The resolution began a fury of media criticism, and ultimately, due to national opposition, the school board backed down and revised their resolution to a conservative goal of teaching students Standardized English.

In 2003, both NCTE and CCCC reaffirmed the resolution on “Students Right to Their Own Language” because of growing and continuing concerns about this disallowal of language variation within schools. Despite this reaffirmation, in 2010 language policy was yet again in debate; this time, however, in Arizona. House Bill 2281 was passed, stating that “public school pupils should be taught to treat and value each other as individuals and not be taught to resent or hate other races or classes of people.” On the surface, this appeared to be a positive move; yet, upon closer analysis, it prohibited educators to teach courses or have course material that “advocates ethnic solidarity.” Implied within this bill was the idea that certain knowledges, certain languages, and certain groups of people within the United States were not valid, nor should they be celebrated. Almost forty-five years later, The CCCC resolution is still very relevant to our language arts classrooms and the lives of our ever-growing population of linguistically and culturally diverse students especially as they are faced with new challenges in today’s world.

Reconstructed Realities

Despite the amount of research on the presence of language diversity in our classrooms, the research that becomes educational policy at the state and district level is still imbued with norms that make it difficult for our students. Teachers are still inundated with, and reinforce, concepts and terms such as “language gap,” “non-standard English,” and “struggling readers” to describe those students who can’t replicate standards upheld by dominant ideals surrounding race, social-class, and singular notions of culture and language. As teachers and teacher educators, we decided to revisit the CCCC resolution as a way to purposely remember and continue a conversation that has been repeatedly silenced and overlooked. Relatedly, we also acknowledge an equally important conversation about what counts as literacy and/or who is labeled as literate. It is important that these conversations take place together because not only are students not afforded the right to their own language, but often claims of illiteracy are not too far behind.

More than thirty years ago, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) described a literacy event as “occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies” (p. 50). Using this definition to frame what counts as literacy suggests that the reality of who is considered “literate” or “proficient” needs to be expanded even today. All of our students, regardless of the deficit language used to categorize them, are participating in and learning through numerous literacy events outside of the classroom—events that are not just in the written form. Yet rarely do those practices get taken up in the classroom as knowledge.

For example, at the beginning of a student’s experience with formalized education, students are assessed on how many words they use in their vocabulary. Described by Paris and Alim (2014) as a form of linguistic hegemony, students are

unfairly categorized as deficient and underprepared—while simultaneously and erroneously connecting those judgments to socio-economic status. From there, our classrooms are muddled in this discourse of “college ready” and “lacking.” Each day in classrooms across the United States, students are required to write and speak, however, the ways in which we require students to communicate still perpetuate a singular, correct way of doing so.

Yet, regardless of our continued efforts to deny students the right to their own language, students are still creating and co-constructing words and images that speak directly to their needs—in essence creating their own forms of literacies. Students recognize the contradiction in that they witness the successful careers of social media influencers, bloggers, and other artists who are transcending the boundaries of what counts as “proper” or “correct” language.

Our aim in rethinking this resolution is to grapple with the effects of “linguistic supremacy” (Alim, 2006, p. 13) in a world where there are multiple ways of being literate. As we share with our students that language can be interpreted as a structure with rules for gaining and accessing power (Delpit, 1995), students become agents in dismantling this hierarchy. Then we can reimagine a pluralistic education where all languages and literacies are acknowledged especially within the digital realm.

Reimagining & Revisiting

In a time when standards are shifting and being critically examined (Washington, 2014), it is easy for educators to feel overwhelmed. Our hope is that after exploring the social and political contexts surrounding literacy events (Heath, 1983), teachers and teacher educators might see how the CCCC resolution “dialogues” with the standards and could positively affect our classrooms by making them more justice oriented for all learners. Yet, many questions still linger for teachers and teacher educators to consider: how can educators find supplemental classroom resources that value their students’ languages and literacy experiences? How can teachers tell their students that they are already readers and writers even though assessments do not take all of their language and literacy skills into consideration? How do teachers explain to students that their voices may not “fit” into state standards? What affordances do digital spaces provide teachers and students to participate and create justice-oriented spaces of learning?

As we considered these questions, we began to think about what James Gee (2012) calls “Big D Discourses” or the “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities” (p. 3). Here, Gee suggests that while linguists have traditionally viewed “discourses” as verbal interactions between speakers and listeners, “Discourses” (with a capital “D”) examines interrelationships between social identities,

contexts, and situations. Language, then, is socially constructed and creates rich identities that people embody. Thus, we cannot deny that our students' identities are inherently tied to their language uses.

For this reason, we believe that educators can use the resolution to find success in valuing their students' identities and language(s) through the use of digital literacies within the ELA classroom to combat injustices that far extend beyond the classroom walls. After all, "The power of technology to jump across borders and time zones, to join the once disparate, and to foster social connectedness, has provided the means for the children and young people of today to participate in a global society in ways previously not possible" (Third, et al., 2014, p. 6). Digital literacies, then, allow for students to become active, critical producers of language rather than simply passive consumers of language within the classroom. Therefore, in this section we discuss specific strategies that focus on digital literacies, including non-traditional texts, writing portfolios, public service announcements, and book trailers/music videos, to help us apply what the CCCC resolution encourages teachers to do in their classrooms.

Through digital resources, such as nontraditional, print-only texts, students can begin to see how their language is connected both in and out of the classroom. If students have ownership of the texts they create, then they can see how language is produced in a variety of spaces, such as through Goodreads, Novelry, Medium, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, blogs, or news outlets. In other words, when we turn our focus not just to student consumption of texts but also authentic production through their own choice of media and dissemination, then students have an opportunity to participate in local, national, and global conversations through their "own patterns and varieties of language" (CCCC, 1974). Even in the elementary classroom, Twitter has been used as a literacy learning tool (Marich, 2016). For example, "hashtag activism" has been coined as a way for people to create awareness and advocate for change regarding social justice issues (Jaramillo, 2017). If students are charged with finding a current social justice issue that they feel strongly about personally, then they can create awareness and change through social media and shared hashtags for their cause among their peers. These unique opportunities allow students to use their own language(s) to interact in spaces they are typically already members of outside of class, such as Twitter or Instagram. Yet, students also research information about the issue in which they are focusing upon and that they identify with personally in order to create change.

In addition, digital writing portfolios allow opportunities to affirm students' variety of languages through a multigenre/multimodal approach to standards with tools such as Google Sites, Weebly, LiveBinders, or iBooks Author. For example, when tasked with the prompt to show how one has grown over the course of their high school career, a student performed a remixed version of one of their cultural dances to show how they had become the reader, writer, and thinker they currently were. This

example is just one of many that supports how language forms other than words on a paper, such as dance, still allow students to create rich narratives that hit all standards while beautifully combining oral and kinesthetic modes of communication. And most importantly, it affirms student's individual cultural values and forms of communications, which supports the CCCC resolution by being a classroom that is "proud of its diverse heritage."

Furthermore, students can take academic language and make it their own or gear it toward a specific audience by creating public service announcements (PSAs) by using Garage Band, Audacity, Podomatic, Youtube, and even more recently, SoundCloud. Here, students' language is valued because they not only are able to pick the social justice issues that matter most to them, but they also are able to find the platform best suited to disseminate their work. Though teachers might be hesitant with more multimodal and social forms of media, it is important to remember that students still work through the basic writing process and have opportunities to revise; thus, once again, standards are hit through this option. However, students are using their own "patterns and varieties of language" (CCCC, 1974) to hit the standards through digital compositions that address social issues. In addition, this might mean that some students are translating words into their home language or using images to provide a powerful connection to what they are saying. After all, we know that "Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity" (CCCC, 1974). Therefore, because students have to show an awareness for their audience, they have the freedom to use the language(s) they need to get their information across.

Finally, book trailers or music videos, created through iMovie, Animoto, MixBit, Windows Movie Maker, or any other video creation app that is now out there for students to use, offer a more multimodal approach to using language as well. Once again, this product allows students to use language in ways that fit their own identity and style, just as the CCCC resolution affirms. Not only are students analyzing the overall book, but they have to think critically about all of the choices they are making from every transition to the font selection to the lyrical rap they have constructed; each decision is ultimately a part of their analysis and meaning making experiences—experiences that allow students and teachers to avoid limiting creativity to a "proper" or "right" standardized language. Digital media, then, provides a foundation for students to use their language and experience others' languages through a variety of modes that tie into standards and still honor their right to their own language(s).

At the end of the day, we need to make sure that our schools take into consideration our students' Discourses, too, in order to create English language arts classrooms that are more justice-oriented. Our "schools ought to allow all students to acquire, not just learn about, Discourses that lead to effectiveness in their society, should they wish to do so. Schools ought to allow students to transform and vary their

Discourses, based on larger cultural and historical understandings, to create new Discourses, and to imagine better and more socially just ways of being in the world” (Gee, 2012, p. 215). We want our students to be able to perform well on their school writing tests and also be critical thinkers, readers, and writers in the world around them, which includes digital spaces. For this reason, both teachers *and* students need to create a classroom, together, that values all voices and learning spaces, so they can say, “Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done - together” (Morrison, 1993).

Reaffirming Our Roots

In order for teachers and teacher educators to consider the aforementioned learning and literacy events, we need to reimagine our roles as educators and what those roles mean when we include digital literacies in our classrooms. We acknowledge that Heath’s (1983) notion of literacy events far extends beyond the written word today when we consider students’ multimodal, digital work; however, most ELA classrooms do not take into account that work when testing perpetuates the power of the written word. In addition to being “cultivators of learning”—providers of literacy learning opportunities for our students that value all of their rich cultural, historical, and socio-political experiences in our classrooms in ways that create different language experiences—we also need to value our students’ expertise, particularly as they use and work within digital spaces that complement the work we do in our face-to-face classrooms. If we are to affirm and value students’ diverse language uses in the 21st century, “Any discussion focused on better understanding how the ubiquity of digital tools impacts on children’s rights, must be informed by children and young people themselves” (Third, et al., 2014, p. 7).

Instead of professional development focused solely on learning from other professionals, we must take the time to listen to our students in order to better understand how we can reach them as 21st century language learners, consumers, and producers today. ELA teachers “must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language” (CCCC, 1974). Additionally, as English language arts teachers, it is important to rethink the binary of offline and online communication when considering students’ language uses because “digital spaces are just another setting in which they carry out their lives” (Third et al., 2014, p. 8). After all, 92% of students go online daily while 71% of them use more than one social network (Lenhart, 2015). We can no longer afford to deny the fact that our students are engaging in these digital spaces. We must start to see the ways in which these new learning spaces still connect to our classrooms and standards of learning—so that we respect our students’ language diversity and support their right to their own language. Ultimately, when we reimagine our English language arts classrooms today as one that is inclusive of the diversity of language use in digital and face-to-face spaces, we are reminded not just of the resolution, but also of the fact

that we know that there is no apolitical classroom. As NCTE's Committee Against Racism and Bias (2017) wrote: "We know that racism exists in our classrooms and in our communities. We feel that silence on these issues is complicity in the systemic racism that has marred our educational system." After all, we cannot sit back silently as youth today are still told to "speak American" (Benavides, 2017). We must all take a look at the biases that are influencing our decisions within our English language arts classrooms and remember that in order to fight systemic issues of injustices, we cannot accept that one language use is the only use as it creates "an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another" (CCCC, 1974).

Conclusion

Through examining ways in which digital literacies influence student and teacher participation in justice-oriented endeavors, it is important to remember that as educators, we have room to learn from our students, too, especially when it comes to their language(s). As Toni Morrison (1993) beautifully and vividly said, "tongue-suicide is not only the choice of children. It is common among the infantile heads of state and power merchants whose evacuated language leaves them with no access to what is left of their human instincts for they speak only to those who obey, or in order to force obedience." Our hope is that by remembering our past through CCCC's resolution, by considering the social justice issues that matter to our students today, and by providing them with opportunities to create with their own language(s) in our 21st century English language arts classrooms that we are helping our students grow as readers, writers, and thinkers in the diverse world around them. Therefore, we must remember that our job is never "just" teaching, but *just* teaching to ensure that all students' voices are heard and valued through justice-oriented literacy learning that remembers the past, acknowledges the present, and believes in the future.

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Being Named is Being Loved

Sheryl Lain, Laramie County School District #1

Today, my granddaughter, Natalie, is boarding a plane for New Jersey in the arms of my 36-year old son. Her father sings her name to her every time he turns around. It's sort of an insurance policy against the day when he won't be a daily feature in her life. He sings as he changes her diaper. He sings as he spoons rice cereal into her tiny mouth, the same spoonful poked in two or three times while she tries to figure out how to swallow solids. He sings as he leans his six-foot, two-inch body over the bathtub washing her neck where the creases hide traces of cereal he didn't spoon-catch in time.

He sings, *Natalie Bo dad-a-lee. You are cute and you are cuddly. And you are the sweetest baby in the world.* Her name is love, imprinted a hundred times a day by the sound of her father's voice.

I know in *Abstracts* Carl Jung says, to be named is to be loved; Madeleine L'Engle says in *A Wind in the Door*, to heal simultaneously her brother and the diseased world, Meg needs to name her hated principal, Mr. Jenkins; and Cynthia Rylant says in her picture book, *The Old Lady Who Named Things*, that the old lady, who only names inanimate objects like her frig, her car and her bed, needs to name a newfound, tail-wagging dog, Lucky, because she is lucky to learn to love the living again.

I knew the power of naming, but now I know in my bones that Natalie's name on her father's tongue will sustain her forever.

So I promise I will try to learn my students' names the very next day after I lay eyes on them. That way, the disenfranchised will be named, the ones who are poised to drop out of school, the ones Jeffrey Wilhelm and Michael Smith interview in their book *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*, the ones who quit in part because nobody calls them by name, fulfilling the social contract that should be inherent in school. They might stand a chance of staying in this huge, impersonal building where all they learn is their incompetence. I hope when they look in my eyes they'll see less judgment and more understanding. When I write them a little reflection poem, like this one about Cade, maybe one will say, "Hey, Mrs. Lain, you know us better than we know ourselves."

Cade, at school,

You are the dam I forget to move when I irrigate the beets.

The water has nowhere to go, and

I get stuck in the mud of your sighs.

But inside,

You are Laramie River high up at the head waters,

Racing and leaping, sprinkling droplets of joy in the air,

Raising a happy ruckus that rekindles your dead eyes alive.



Sheryl Lain has taught thousands of kids in her English classroom. She was director of the Wyoming Writing Project and international speaker on reading, writing and special education. She is the author of the book, *A Poem for Every Student*, and numerous articles, memoirs and poems.



Epistle from *Felis catus*

Lynette Thrower, University of Arkansas at Fort Smith

I see you. Gorging
on pork medallions atop
your cushioned perches.
"Let them eat slop," you laugh –
brown broth dripping from your
lips and fingertips.

Bless us, oh Lord, and these thy gifts...

Bon appetit, Human.

I see you. Sweet
repose beneath the canopy
of the down of my brother. Indeed,
your cheek rests easy against
the soft supple support
of his feathers.

Now I lay me down to sleep...

Bon nuit, Human.

I see you. Haughty
strut in boots of hallowed hide,
and the sacrifice of my sister
warming your shoulders. What!

The accompanying garment
even stained the color of her essence!

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death...

Bonne chance, Human.

Eat well.

Rest easy.

Revel in your warmth -
For tomorrow, we attack.

Testament

Lynette Thrower, University of Arkansas at Fort Smith

All-seeing eye
probing for signs of life.
What of the living endure
with the dead?

Hover above, heavenly drone.
Peer deep into the rubble of this
existence of that place, that day,
that time.

Hone in there, heavenly drone.
Yes, there.
Your lens reveals a brilliant day,
or is that fire reflected in your eye?

All was well.
The fiery hearths of Mondanaro's Bakery—
perfume of yeast married with the spice of chai, travels
through time even now.

Then a bright night fell in that place.
You captured the aftermath.
Walls to foundation to an
ashy testament to what stood once.

Great Eye, you gave the guardians command.
Death, what of your sting?
Grave, what of your victory?
Hone in there, heavenly drone.



Exploring Resources in Education

Sources reviewed by Dr. Janine Chitty

Follow the links to view and use the resources

[Arkansas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts \(ACTELA\)](#)

[National Council of Teachers of English \(NCTE\)](#)

[The Arkansas Anthology \(ACTELA\)](#)

[Arkansas English Journal \(ACTELA\)](#)

[The English Pub \(ACTELA newsletter\)](#)

[Commonlit](#)—fiction literature sources

[Cult of Pedagogy](#)—educational blog

[Discovery Education](#)—nonfiction videos and materials

[EngageNY](#)—materials and resources from the New York State Education Dept.

[Edutopia](#)—educational online journal

[Free Rice](#)—practice questions in a variety of subjects

[Newsela](#)—nonfiction literacy and current events

[Planbook.com](#)—lesson planning organizer

[Remind](#)—a safe way to text messages to students and parents

[Symbaloo](#)—visual resource management tool

[TED Ed](#)—education initiative from TED to help teachers, educators, students to access and create interactive video lessons

[Teaching Channel](#)—teacher education videos

[Web 2.0 tools](#)—blog of the best Web 2.0 tools for education

Arkansas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

The **Arkansas Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts (ACTELA)** is a nonprofit organization whose aim is the improvement of the teaching and learning of English and language arts in the state of Arkansas. We provide a variety of services to teachers in our state, including participating in **local events and conferences**, offering **mini-grants** for teacher-led projects, recognizing outstanding language arts **teachers** throughout the state.

