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Illinois Association of Teachers of English

IATE is a professional organization for teachers of English/language arts. IATE publishes the *Illinois English Bulletin* and the *IATE Newsletter* and hosts an annual fall conference. IATE is organized by districts throughout the state, each district having a district leader and providing local activities to members throughout the year.

IATE also maintains standing committees that address a number of professional interests and works with other professional organizations to further the interests of teachers. Composed of nearly 1,500 teachers throughout the state, IATE provides a working network for the exchange of teaching tips, current research, and professional development as well as enduring friendships.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION TO THE *ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN* 98.2 (SPRING 2011)

JANICE NEULEIB

This issue begins with a delightful poem by retired teacher and working poet, Margaret Kirk. The poem will delight those of us who understand that teaching grammar may not make better writers (researchers continue to debate this subject), but it does delight some of us who struggle with the foibles of language change. I hope everyone smiles as broadly as I did when reading this poem. The next piece in this issue is J.D. Simpson's discussion of his developing and ever-ongoing work with his Advanced Placement English Language curriculum. Simpson notes that he had moved through the breadth of an overfilled syllabus to the depth of a class that asks students to write thoughtfully and reflectively. Next, Joelle Sexton returns to the *Bulletin* with comments on

how teachers should and can respond when their choices of teaching materials are challenged. Each of us will identify with the problems discussed in this essay. Byung-In Seo presents us with the report of her IATE-sponsored research project. In this project she looks at math writing samples. The essay opens some new vistas for many readers and for IATE. Adrienne Ward looks at the conflicts between teachers and school administrators, conflicts that lead to testing and regimentation rather than student progress in writing and critical thinking. Finally, Laretta Henderson writes an in-depth study of the social and emotional development of majority and minority students. The essay helps teachers and librarians in the task of aiding students in finding reading materials appropriate to their emotional and social developmental stages.

As always, I wish to thank Sarah Haberstich for her ongoing work with the *Bulletin*. Without her careful and constant responses as well as those of the students of the Publications Unit, the *Bulletin* could not appear.

# THE RETIREMENT OF MISS CRANK

MARGARET KIRK
NORMAL COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

Dangling participles still make her shudder.
She reads the daily newspaper, red pen in hand,
confident of the mistakes she's sure to find
in the carelessly assembled copy that stumbles
into print. Her letters to the editor bypass
the world crises and local controversies
to insist that the convicted man on page seven
was not hung but hanged for his crime.
At night each dream is a languorous excursion,
clarified with commas (and a rare but precisely
placed semicolon) until it resolves itself
into a dutiful and satisfying full stop.
On a visit to her doctor, when that educated man
takes her hand and leans in to say,
"Between you and I, Miss C., I think it's time
to discuss your case objectively," she is shocked
by the impact of his pronoun usage.
But when the grim reaper finds his way
to the little stoop outside her door, she'll know
instinctively for whom the bell tolls.

*Since retirement from teaching English at Normal Community High School in 1994, Margaret (Peg) Kirk has maintained her membership in IATE. She spent some time supervising student teachers, but now contents herself with reading, writing, volunteering, and serving on boards. She tries hard to write serious poetry, but frequently lapses into light verse.*

# NAVEL-GAZERS AND DANCING BEARS

J.D. SIMPSON
HAMILTON HIGH SCHOOL

*Language is a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, while all the time we long to move the stars to pity.*

*Gustave Flaubert*

A colleague at Hamilton High School hikes to my classroom exactly once a year, packing a single question. That question never varies and the time of the visit, homecoming week, changes only with the football schedule. Usually, she appears in my doorway at the end of the day as the buses pull out and the few remaining students wander off to whichever after-school activity has claimed their attention on this day.

"Do I even know what I'm doing?" she begins, thus launching the annual discussion focusing on good intentions, better teaching, best practices.

Now, she is an exceptional teacher and loves her students like few teachers I ever have known. She plans, teaches, confers, revises, and reteaches; only those strategies that work appear in her class more than once. Still, when homecoming week rolls around, she begins the annual process of second-guessing. I should note here that homecoming week is especially stressful for her. She advises student council, plans the annual powderpuff football tournament, and helps with the homecoming dance. By mid-October, she's pretty worn out.

"What kind of a teacher would you say I am?" she asked a few years back, in the middle of one of our annual talks.

I thought for a few moments. When I gave my answer, I intended it both to buoy her spirit and to make her smile.

"You are a brilliant navel-gazer. By training and instinct you know how to teach, but you spend too much time doubting and lamenting that what you do is not perfect first time out."

Navel-gazing isn't very productive. But reflection? Revision? Ah! Every good teacher who wishes to be a better teacher reflects and revises.

When I created the course of study for AP English Language and Composition, I intended to make the class not so much difficult as different from the English classes my students had seen before. I read a variety of syllabi, attended workshops and summer institutes, pulled out my college rhetoric and writing texts, and immersed myself in the kind of reading I'd always wanted to use in class. In 2007, I attended my first AP summer institute (APSI) and came away sure that I knew how to build my syllabus. The document reflected what I had learned during that first weeklong session: classical rhetoric, Aristotle, Toulmin. In 2008, I attended my second APSI workshop, refined my syllabus to include good, practical activities, and began teaching AP Language.

My syllabus has proved itself. Students do well in class, and they do well on the test. But as I begin my third year with the class, I find myself deep in reflection, maybe even doing a bit of navel-gazing. Specifically, I find myself considering these aspects of my class:

- How much classical rhetoric is enough? Do students need to know Aristotle and Toulmin to be better writers? Do they need to understand rhetoric?
- How much writing is enough to allow students to grow as writers? Does there come a point of diminishing returns? What kinds of writing should students do?
- How do I help my students become critical thinkers?
- How do I manage the paper load?

I don't know if I will resolve all of these questions before classes resume, and I likely will be revising as long as I teach the class.

**Striking A Balance: Less Is More, More Or Less**

> *Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man.*
>
> *Sir Francis Bacon*

About ten years ago, I began teaching what we now call Pre-AP English. The students who came into the class were honors-track juniors destined for AP English Literature in their senior year. I knew that I had to prepare these kids for the rigors of that class and the demands that their senior instructor would make. I spent a summer preparing the class, selecting texts, crafting assignments, writing rationales, and I was proud of the result. Students read twelve books that year and wrote six formal papers per quarter. By the end of the year, I was completely tapped. More important than my fatigue, though: The students became writing machines,

cranking out essay after essay without any time to reflect or revise. The students who improved as writers, I believe, did so despite my class.

I no longer ask my students to write twenty-four major essays per year, and I never ask them to write an essay about theme or symbol or character in a piece of literature. Paul Graham attributes the pairing of literature and composition to historical accidents that had little to do with either literature or writing. Students might, if they even thought about it, find it pointless to argue that Arthur Dimmesdale is a tragic figure, redeemed only when he bears his sin for the community to see. After all, Mr. Simpson told them that in class. Such assignments invite formulaic writing while discouraging real thought. Instead, an essay should "try to figure something out."

> Figure out what? You don't know yet. And so you can't begin with a thesis, because you don't have one, and may never have one. An essay doesn't begin with a statement, but with a question. In a real essay, you don't take a position and defend it. You notice a door that's ajar, and you open it and walk in to see what's inside. (Graham)

Students in my class write. They write a lot; they write every day. But I have abandoned volume for value. The two dozen essays they wrote a decade back have turned into two papers per quarter, one of which we take through the entire writing process, both of which they reflect upon and revise. We still write timed essays, and we discuss their strengths and weaknesses as a class. We still write journal entries, which mimic the AP test. These teach students to write to the test. But revision and reflection teach them to write. Period.

So, this is the first major change in my class, which proves that I can learn. What follows frames the evolutionary track I hope to adopt as a result of the most recent ASPI I attended.

**Making The Grade: Rational Evaluation and Managing the Paper Load**

> *Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.*
>
> *Bruce Cameron*

Grading is the hardest thing I do. And in fifteen years it has grown little easier than it was when I collected my first set of papers from my first English class. As a former editor and reporter, when I started teaching, I went at it as a newspaper reporter would. I was objective, scientific, and precise. I left nothing to chance. In the world of newspapers, that is an excellent way to end up in court. There was a standard for everything and a way to evaluate everything. And so I began the first of half a dozen systematic plans for evaluating that devil of objectivity, the student essay. It should be simple: three points for each affront to the gods of grammar, five points for the failure to produce a clear thesis, two points for a failure to adequately support an argument—a point here, a point there. My students would soon learn that Mr. Simpson was a man of exact measurements and would thank me for making the world clear to them.

The first essay I saw that year, a little narrative in a tenth-grade English class, ended up with a 60 percent. I stopped marking the two pages of student prose after a single page. As I plowed through the paper, I felt the blood leave my face and my skin turn clammy. Is it possible that these children are this bad? Is it possible that I have this

much work to do with them? Is it possible that my standards are unfair?

I abandoned those criteria after one essay. Not after one set of papers. Not even after one class. *One paper*. And that paper I regraded. My quest for an effective and fair grading system has led me to two conclusions. First, I have grown comfortable with my own judgments. Second, I have realized that grading is just one of many things I can do with a paper that crosses my desk.

Students in my AP Language class write constantly. My syllabus calls for two major papers each quarter, up to three timed writings, and as many as three one-pagers per week. The rest of the math is easy. I have on average 45 AP students per year. In that class alone I might be faced with 360 essays per quarter. Reading has taught me that the correct response to student writing is a grade accompanied by exhaustive commentary. I planted myself firmly at one end of the paper-marking continuum: mark every error, include a running commentary in the margins of the paper, and include a summative end comment. At the other end of the continuum, best represented by the Ohio Writing Project and the National Writing Project, I discovered Tom Romano through his 1987 book, *Clearing the Way*. Romano's own model stressed no marks of any kind on the student's final draft, but a personalized typed response at the conclusion of the writing process (114–15).

I have found my third way, and a good deal of that third way has come from best practices among APSI peers:

I. **Differentiated Evaluation** (Phelan): There are three things I can do with a student essay when it crosses my desk.

- I can grade the paper: When I grade a paper, I do just that—affix a grade (A–F) or a scoring guide value to the document.

- I can mark the paper: When I mark a paper, I use a scoring guide or a rubric and the assignment itself to make limited comments on a student paper. I don't expect any given assignment to accomplish more than one or two things, and everything I expect a student to accomplish in a paper I spell out on the assignment sheet. Thus, my comments are pointed and limited. A student writer knows what to look for in my comments, and knows that comments on any given paper will be appropriate to the assignment. I may both mark and grade an essay, but not always.
- I can copyedit the paper: This I will not do. Copyediting is something I expect students to do as part of the revision process. A paper that comes to me unedited will return to the student ungraded and unmarked.

I do not claim this as my own. The essential idea comes from Bernard Phelan, an instructor at Homewood-Flossmoor High School. Phelan's emphases were on grading, reading, and correcting. I have modified his best practice to meet my particular needs and those of my students. Knowing that I do not have to spend 30 minutes per paper, and should not, because different kinds of writing require different responses, will allow me to focus on helping students improve their own writing and will place the greatest burden for writing on my students. It also will allow me to dedicate more time to the writing process (see II. below).

II. **Essay Stamping** (Struckman): Likely, this is the best idea I have come across in any workshop. I like to take one paper each quarter through the entire writing process, and this seems like a fine addition to that process.

Student writers will have to accept ownership of their own writing; oral feedback will take care of that. I've used

this strategy with timed writing, never with major pieces. AP Language students likely will be willing to accept that level of responsibility without much prompting. Also, because there is no guarantee that the instructor will comment on all problems, the student will have to be especially energetic in copyediting her/his own work.

The greatest obstacle I have had to overcome has been my conviction that essay evaluation can be reduced to an equation, a set of objective criteria that will yield up a perfect percentage, telling both teacher and student the value of the piece of writing under consideration. Romano reinforces that "[e]valuation of writing is a necessarily subjective act" and

> [o]bjectivity is impossible. Participate in one group grading session and you'll realize that. When many teachers evaluate the same paper, their judgments of its merit are diverse and astounding. So I am left with my subjectivity. (113)

Some teachers claim to know a "C" paper when it crosses their desk. After years of reading and marking, perhaps that's true. I tend to agonize over grades and so have begun to use carefully constructed rubrics tailored to specific assignments, so that I can be sure to emphasize in my grading the things I ask students to emphasize, and so that I won't become consumed with comma faults and paragraphing when that is not the focus of the writing. Like Romano, all teachers of writing are finally alone as they make that last mark on a piece of student writing.

**Knowing How To Know: Teaching Critical Thought**

> *[T]hinking in its lower grades is comparable to paper money, and in its higher forms it is a kind of poetry.*
>
> *Havelock Ellis*

Four years ago, one of my students gave me a project she had completed in her teacher academy class. It hangs on the wall of my classroom, twine and standard 12-inch rulers and pieces of poster board bearing the following words:

- Evaluation
- Synthesis
- Analysis
- Application
- Comprehension
- Knowledge

I teach my students, AP as well as college preparatory, that we live in the top three rungs of Bloom's Taxonomy. It's a useful introduction to critical thinking for many students who have never been asked to think critically. Many students, including those who have come up through an honors track, remain locked on the lower rungs of the cognitive ladder. For some, it is a developmental problem. For some students, it is a question of using a formula that has always worked for them in the past.

Immediately, I require students to leave the lower rungs behind and ascend the ladder. During the summer break, we analyze text posted on the class discussion board. Their summer writing assignment requires them to create something new from their summer reading. Our first weeks back we give over to critically evaluating writing, and exploring what works and why.

Still, I think I like the new Overbaugh and Schultz Bloom's better. It recognizes the primacy of synthesis, which I always have seen as the most demanding kind of critical thought.

Useful as I find Bloom's, I also find it limited. If presented with the typical cue words associated with each level,

Bloom's teaches students to ask the kinds of essential questions they need to practice critical thinking. It does not always help them to make the move from critical thinking to critical discussion, and writing beyond that.

On the last day of the APSI workshop, Andrew Stuckey presented two best practices that will find their way into my writing classes, precisely because they will help students make the jump from thinking to discussion and writing. In summary:

I. **Chalk Talk**: As Stuckey presented, the activity calls for the instructor to post an essential question on the board, and allow students to approach the board and write their comments. The students would thus be able to watch a discussion as it expands, and to monitor meaningful digressions from the initial question.

This might be a useful way to introduce students to the idea of the socratic seminar. Working in teams of three or four, students start the activity with a small-group discussion, and respond directly to other postings using appropriate texts to support their arguments, introducing complementary sources, or rebutting directly the arguments of other teams. I might require students to write a reflective essay at the end of the activity. Students might also find it instructive to contrast and compare the various discussions from different classes.

II. **Three Angles of a Question**: In a sense, thinking of genre can be misleading. No piece of writing—narrative, persuasive, analytic—exists in one and only one genre. Narrative writing would be pretty boring without description, and a great argument includes both analysis and narration. In "The Age of the Essay," Graham asserts that the classic defense-of-a-position argument isn't really an essay at all. And failure

to convince a reader means "[a]t the very least I must have explained something badly. In that case, in the course of the conversation I'll be forced to come up a with a clearer explanation, which I can just incorporate in the essay." Good argument isn't just good logic. It's also good writing, good explanation, good narration—good whatever-it-takes to get an idea across to the reader.

Briefly, this activity requires students to begin by writing two separate descriptive narratives of a given scene, each descriptive narrative equally factual but from opposing viewpoints. The second "angle" requires students to analyze differences between the two descriptive narratives. The focus of this writing might be on anything the teacher wishes to emphasize. Transitions, sensory images, and figurative language seem especially useful. The final writing requires the student to reflect on both the reading and writing process from the preceding exercise. This final phase seems an especially powerful way to reinforce the central ideas.

This is a good approach to teach voice and, at the same time, help students understand how they can use various genres to approach any topic.

I spend a considerable amount of time teaching formal and classical rhetoric. I find it useful in helping students understand some very critical components of the writing process, particularly the relationship between the writer and the reader. Over the last two years, I've questioned my commitment to Toulmin and Aristotle, to the specialized vocabulary of rhetoric, and I've concluded that it is more important for students to recognize that something is happening in a text, more important to be skilled at tracking the impact a device has on the text, message, and reader, than it is to know the precise Greek or Latin name for a device. Students respond to diagrams, though, and the traditional "rhetorical triangle"

remains a useful tool for helping students visualize the relationship they will have with a reader.

The Three Angles approach fits both the pattern of the triangle, and the rationale for teaching the triangle. Just as logos, ethos, and pathos are linked by occasion or exigence—and students can see this connection—other threes match up nicely in a way that helps students visualize or map the whole writing process:

| Logos | Ethos | Pathos |
|---|---|---|
| a. Text | a. Writer | a. Reader |
| b. Speech | b. Speaker | b. Audience |
| c. Description | c. Analysis | c. Reflection |

Each triad forms a triangle around the central idea of exigence or occasion, without which no text comes into being.

* * *

For some time—certainly all of my life—astrophysicists have pointed confidently at a singularity 14.5 billion years in the past, when an infinitesimal point of matter-energy-space-time went "pop," and gave birth to everything that is anything: the big bang. Today, M-theorists contemplate eleven dimensions, with infinitely expansive membranes undulating along a seventh dimensional gap: "the seventh extra dimension of space is the gap between two parallel objects called branes. It's like the gap between two parallel mirrors. We thought, What happens if these two mirrors collide? Maybe that was the Big Bang" (Neil Turok in Keim). This new idea leads to the conclusion that the big bang really is just one of

an infinite number of, after all, rather mundane bangs, "an infinitely repeated cycle of universal expansion and contraction…(suggesting) that neither time nor the universe has a beginning or end" (Keim). If true, it undoes twentieth-century physics, utterly.

Very few things in the field of human endeavor qualify as an "exact science." Teaching certainly is not an exact science. If teaching were an exact science, we should have no reason to look for new ways to teach, no reason to look for new things to teach. Everything would be settled science.

Not even science is settled science.

I created AP Language at Hamilton High School not because of the test or the advance credit. I created the class because I value good writing and want to see students flourish and excel as writers. The test, looming out there on the horizon every year, remains the object of the class but never the reason we gather from day to day. I know teachers for whom May is the finish line of a grueling race, and everything in class is done to that end. Students may do well on the test, but too often they know nothing beyond the test.

I've always believed that young people like to write. My experiences teaching AP Language have reinforced that belief and have taught me as well that when we give students a variety of tools and a greater degree of freedom, they will flourish as writers and as scholars. Any teacher who recognizes this must allow his or her teaching to evolve.

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# WHEN THE CHALLENGERS COME KNOCKING

JOELLE SEXTON
SYCAMORE HIGH SCHOOL

Teachers take a lot of time, care, and effort in choosing appropriate age- and reading-level books for students. In the face of such care and effort, it may come as a surprise for some teachers when parents or advocacy groups challenge those choices. Although many of us are prepared to be challenged by parents regarding grades and homework, some teachers do not realize how often many texts are challenged that have been at the center of curriculum for decades. It is vital to be prepared for those challenges and to know where to turn for help when they occur.

The American Library Association (ALA) "recorded 513 challenges in 2008 but estimates that this reflects only 20–25% of actual incidents, as most challenges are never reported." (Perez). The Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF), a support group for the American Library Association, states that those

challenges "are motivated by a desire to protect children from 'inappropriate' sexual content or 'offensive' language" and include "material that was considered to be 'sexually explicit,'" was "unsuited to any age group," or "contained 'offensive language'" ("About Banned"). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) goes on to further state that "American schools have been pressured to restrict or deny students access to books or periodicals deemed objectionable by some individual or group on moral, political, religious, ethnic, racial, or philosophical grounds" ("Guideline"). In light of all of these bases for challenges, NCTE safely states, "any work is potentially open to attack by someone, somewhere, sometime, for some reason" ("Guideline"). Not only classics, but modern works of literature, young adult literature, magazines, and newspapers can and have been criticized as controversial.

Chris Crutcher, popular author of young adult literature, "is often among the most frequently challenged authors in America" ("Censorship"). He remains an outspoken advocate for free speech and feels that "the business of censorship is the business of shutting up ideas and issues. It promotes ignorance as 'help' to kids. Ignorance is not a help to kids" (CarrieK). Crutcher states that he "certainly supports any parent who, for whatever reason, wants a say in what his or her own children are exposed to…but as a therapist and teacher I never wrote a story that didn't originate from a kid's life and it mirrors their life…" (Crutcher).

From the northern suburbs of Chicago to central Illinois, young adult novels and ones from the canon have been challenged and continue to be challenged. The following books have stirred controversy in school districts across Illinois, causing many school boards to create panels and review boards in an effort to defend choices and come up

with alternative reading lists: *Beloved*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *The Things They Carried*, *The Awakening*, *Freakonomics*, *The Botany of Desire*, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, *Fallen Angels*, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *Of Mice and Men*.

Until 1990, teachers, schools, and librarians had no real resources to use in an effort to defend and rationalize their choices, but since that time "Guideline on The Students' Right to Read" established by NCTE, "Banned Books Week" founded by the ALA and funded by OIF, and initiatives like the Kids' Right to Read project and National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) Book Censorship Toolkits have helped raise awareness and lend support in defending challenges. These initiatives have helped promote the ideal that "[t]he right of any individual not just to read but to read whatever he or she wants to read is basic to a democratic society" ("Guideline"). If we cave to the pressure of the few, then we fail to prepare students to become citizens of the world and "[m]any students are consequently 'educated' in a school atmosphere hostile to free inquiry. And many teachers learn to emphasize their own safety rather than their students' needs" ("Guideline"). Simply withholding information does a great disservice to our students and denies them the right to inquire, share, and converse about important topics they will face not only in school, but in the world. What must be made imperative is that discussing controversial issues in no way condones the behavior, but rather gives students the opportunity to voice their opinions and recognize how to backup those opinions with knowledge in a safe environment.

While many of these initiatives are designed to take a defensive approach once a text has been challenged, the NCTE offers guidelines to help teachers and schools prepare

before they ever happen. At the teacher and department levels, book selections should not only be chosen carefully for readability, but statements should also be crafted "explaining why literature is taught and how books are chosen for each class" ("Guideline"). Essentially these are context and rationale statements that support the decisions made in choosing a text. NCTE offers for purchase two CD-ROMs that contain 200 rationales developed to coincide with books that have been challenged or banned in the last two decades. The disks also contain a guideline for teachers to write their own rationales and a sample presentation to a school board in defense of a challenged book. Rationales for all texts should be filed with the school administration in an effort to provide support against challenges as soon as they occur. Teachers and English departments meet regularly about curriculum development and part of those meetings should include conversations regarding current text choices and possible future ones along with potential censorship challenges. If a book is challenged, it is important to understand that NCTE cannot offer legal advice, particularly since laws can vary so much from area to area. Moreover, part of a committee's responsibility in choosing texts should be to know where the funding for book purchases comes from and particularly if it comes from a group that could legally challenge book choices.

Once a text has been challenged, it is important to listen considerately and with empathy. Most of the time challenges come from "misinformed or misguided people who, acting on emotion or rumor, simply do not understand how the books are to be used.… [or] by well-intentioned and conscientious people who fear that harm will come to some segment of the community if a particular book is read or recommended" ("Guideline"). At this point, the rationale for choosing the reading should be shared with the concerned party. If the

party is still unsatisfied, an invitation to file a written complaint should be extended. NCTE provides an example form for this purpose, titled "Citizens Request for Reconsideration of a Work." This type of standardized procedure not only allows challengers to "formalize the complaint" but it also requires them to "think through [their] objections," "evaluate the work," "establish…familiarity with the work," "consider the criticism about the work and the teacher's purpose in using the work," and provides the "opportunity to suggest alternative actions to be taken on the work" ("Guideline"). This type of formal written complaint provides an opportunity for the teacher not only to educate their students, but the challenging parties as well, and, often, unfounded challengers are discouraged from taking further action. If a formal written complaint is pursued, the proper channels must be followed and an advisory committee including the teacher, the department chair, an administrator, and, perhaps, an NCTE affiliate should meet with the complainant and reevaluate those findings. Recommendations should be "forwarded to the superintendent, who would in turn submit them to the board of education, the legally constituted authority in the school" ("Guideline"). The decision ultimately rests with the school board and even though books have been removed and teachers have lost their jobs in some cases, we should never waiver in our commitment and belief that "[f]reedom of inquiry is essential to education in a democracy" ("Guideline").

Censorship and challenges occur not only at the classroom level, but in libraries as well, and school personnel need to be prepared to respond to the challenges: "Free Access to Libraries for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights" (ALA's basic policy concerning access to information) states that, "Librarians and governing bodies should maintain that parents—and only parents—have the right and the

responsibility to restrict access of their children—and only their children—to library resources." In an effort to uphold and defend the First Amendment, celebrate the freedom to read, and underscore the dangers of censorship, the ALA established Banned Books Week in 1982. The ALA also provides a toolkit to help librarians advertise and promote this event. The OIF has tracked the top 100 most frequently challenged books from each of the past two decades. They also track the reasons for those challenges as well as the outcomes and provide confidential support to teachers and librarians. It is important to note that while both school and public libraries are covered by the Library Bill of Rights, funding for school libraries can be jeopardized by advocacy groups trying to challenge or ban books and the board of education is the legally constituted authority over school libraries while local and state government oversee public libraries. The ALA also provides an online challenge reporting form that follows the same format as NCTE's written complaint form.

The NCTE and ALA are both members of the NCAC, which has created the Kids' Right to Read project. Their Book Censorship Toolkit provides advice, assistance, educational materials, and support for local activism as well as sample letters to school boards in an effort to denounce challenges. In response to a challenge made against *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* regarding racial slurs, Joan E. Bertin, executive director of NCAC, quoted Susan Anderson, a school board member from Huntsville, Alabama, stating school is "precisely where children need to learn about these things [racial slurs] so they don't carry misconceptions or myths" ("Bertin"). In cases such as these the NCAC recommends writing letters to the school board or local newspapers in support of books and provides educational materials and talking points to local activists.

Censorship is an everyday problem and is more prolific than most can imagine. Teachers and librarians must be prepared not only to choose wisely for the betterment and enrichment of students' lives, but to defend those choices and be aware of the resources available and the procedures to follow when challenges do arise.

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# WORKING IN TANDEM: UNDERSTANDING MATHEMATICAL WRITING IN 7TH GRADE ELA CLASSES

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## Introduction

When the term "content-area writing" is used, many educators associate the humanities or social sciences to English/language arts (ELA). Seldom do images of mathematics come to mind. Both mathematics and ELA require writing to understand the content in their respective areas. Writing is a production of text. At its very essence, text consists of symbols that convey meaning, and this meaning is not arbitrary (Harris 19, Pimm 2, Rotman 8). For example, "go," contains two symbols (g, o), and this combination of symbols forms a word that means "to move." The same is true in mathematics: "2x" is a combination of two symbols (2, x), and in mathematics, it means "twice the value of an

unknown number, that is designated by "x." As seen in these examples, both languages use a combination of symbols, in these cases letters and numbers, to convey meaning through writing (Harris 27–28, Rotman 39).

Mathematical writing is like other texts. It is multidimensional, taking on more than one form, and has different genres (Morgan 9–11). Such texts range from symbolic code to multimodal texts, and are usually used to present learning tasks to the student (Ernest 6). Meaning of such writing is dependent on the context of the text. For example, "5" by itself designates a number or an amount of something. When written as "5x," it takes on a different meaning, designating a property or function of the unknown value "x." As context changes, the meaning of the symbols can also change (Ernest 42–43).

For many teachers, writing is designated as scripted words. At the secondary level, mathematical writing is often taught by the mathematics teacher, while other writing genres, such as poetry or essays, are taught by ELA teachers. Teachers know that regular writing activities can help students develop fluency in the skill of writing itself and in the specific content area (Roe, Stoodt-Hill, and Burns 266). In ELA, students write and revise multiple drafts of texts, while in mathematics, the same students compose and calculate multiple equations. Both activities require students to write combinations of symbols in order to convey meaning, and meaning in both activities is dependent on the context in which the text is written.

Based on personal experiences, students will try to adapt their writing to the expectations of the teacher, because they equate conformity with a positive grade (Ede and Lunsford 166). Mathematics and ELA teachers want students to be clear on what they are writing to insure clarity and coherent

meaning. Ede and Lunsford conducted their studies in collegiate ELA classrooms. Do junior high school students have the same phenomenon? This research study focused on the following questions:

- What affect does a mathematical topic have on students' in-class writing?
- How does a mathematical subject influence writing style and format?
- How do students feel about mathematical writing in ELA class?
- How do students feel about scripted writing assignments in math class?
- What are the teaching implications of incorporating both content areas into a single writing assignment?

**Methodology**

This study was conducted at a junior high school in the suburbs of an urban center: 81.4% of the students are considered low income, 81.2% of the student body is African American, 7.8% is Latino, 8.8% is Caucasian, and 2.2% of the student body is Asian or Native American. All of the ELA and mathematics teachers were asked to participate in this study, but only two ELA and two mathematics teachers took part. In these four teachers' classes, all of their students were asked to be a part of the study.

***Student Participants***

Of the 7th grade students, 26 chose to be a part of this study. This number comprised of 17% of all 7th graders at the school. Fifteen students had the ELA teachers only, seven students had the mathematics teacher only, and five students had both the ELA and mathematics teachers. Of the

26 students, there were 17 girls and nine boys. In addition, 21 students were African American (80.76%), two students were Latino (7.69%), and four students were Caucasian (11.55%). No Asian or Native American students participated in this study. The percentages are identified to show that the students who participated in the study reflect the student body of the school, as a whole.

### *Procedure*

#### Writing Prompts

This study took place over 12 weeks during spring 2010. During the first week of the study, I obtained consent from the teachers and students. Once consent was given, I observed teachers and recorded the kinds of writing the students saw in their routine instruction. During the observations, I took photographs of the board during routine instruction, and of the classroom walls. In addition, I received copies of textbooks and other printed materials. I wanted to know the kinds of texts the students were exposed to on a daily basis. By understanding these texts, I could get a better idea of the writing expectations of the teacher. If the teachers wrote symbolic language only or scripted words only, then that exposure could influence the way their students wrote for their teachers.

During the second week, the teachers were given writing prompt 1. This prompt was written in consultation with the teachers, so it looked like a typical in-class assignment. The mathematics problem was one that all students could complete, and each teacher was given the same mathematics problem, only the values changed. During this week, the teachers gave the writing prompts and incorporated this assignment within their routine classroom instruction. Before grading the in-class writing assignments, the teachers made copies of the students' writing and gave them to me. Upon

discussion, the teachers agreed to grade this assignment, because they stated that the students were likely to take the assignment more seriously if a point value was associated with the work. I gave the teachers one week to administer, collect, and make copies of writing prompt 1.

During the fifth week of the study, I gave the teachers writing prompt 2. These prompts were tailored specifically to the teachers' needs. The ELA teachers were given a narrative prompt. For the mathematics teachers, the prompts were written in the style of the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) extended response. Similar to the first writing prompt, these writing prompts contained the same mathematics problem with different values. During this week, the teachers gave the writing prompts and made copies of the students' writing before grading the assignment. As with the first prompt, I collected the writing samples after one week.

During the eighth week, I gave the teachers writing prompt 3. These prompts were standardized for all four teachers. This prompt was a combination of the ELA and mathematics writing prompts. The mathematical problem asks the student to calculate, explain, and give rationales for two sets of calculations in the format of the ELA prompt. It was necessary to construct this kind of prompt because I wanted to learn if students changed their writing according to the format of the prompt or to their teachers' expectations. By standardizing the format of the prompt, one of the variables was eliminated. As in writing prompts 1 and 2, the teachers were given one week to administer the writing assignment, make copies of the writing, and give the copies to me before grading it.

## Student Interviews

Twenty-three students agreed to be interviewed about their in-class writing. These interviews were conducted after

all of the writing samples had been collected. Each student was asked the following questions:

- Do you remember writing this (point to copies) in Ms. _____ class?
- Do you remember what you were thinking when you wrote this for Ms. _____?
- Why do you think your writing is this way for Ms. _____?
- Did you think it was weird to do this kind of assignment in _____ class? Why/Why not?
- Did you like doing this kind of assignment? Why/Why not?
- Did doing these kinds of assignments help you on the ISAT? Why/Why not?
- Do you think you should do these kinds of writing assignment more often? Why/Why not? (If the student said "yes") How often do you think you should do these assignments?

## Data Analysis

Writing samples were coded according to length, explanation of the mathematical process, use of mathematical symbols and/or scripted words, and identification of a rationale. All interviews were transcribed, and the transcriptions were examined to identify specific responses to the interview questions. Finally, writing samples were rated by the researcher and two outside raters. One rater's specialty is mathematics education and the other's is ELA education. These samples were rated according to the ISAT Extended Response rubric for 7th grade. The Extended Response rubric has three categories: mathematical knowledge, strategic knowledge, and explanation. Because these writing prompts are mathematical, students are expected to emulate these kinds of writing on the

ISAT Extended Response questions. Students are taught that mathematics teachers rate the actual ISAT responses. For this study, students wrote to the ELA and mathematics teachers, so I wanted to learn if this change in audience would affect the rating of the responses.

Two outside raters are necessary for inter-rater reliability. Inter-rater reliability is when two or more people are consistent in their rating of data. These raters were trained using the ISAT Extended Response rubric and guidelines set on the Illinois State Board of Education website. To show that the researcher's ratings were reliable, there needed to be a means of rating the student writing samples with outside readers.

**Data**

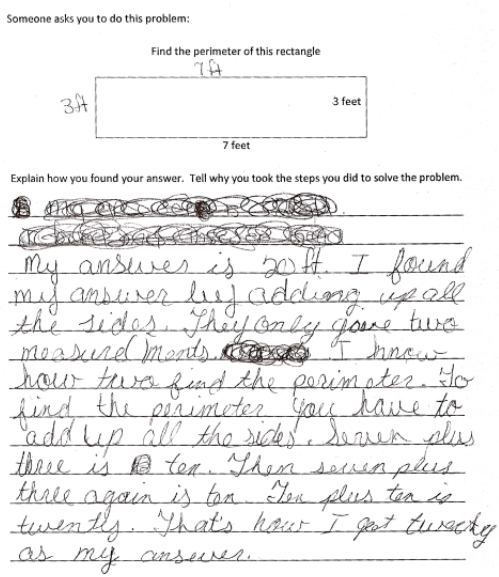
There are four sets of data in this study: writing samples from students in ELA classes only, writing samples from students in mathematics class only, writing samples from students who wrote in both classes, and interview transcripts.

***Writing Samples from Students in ELA Classes Only***

Fifteen students wrote mathematically in only ELA classes. These students produced 42 writing samples. Upon examining these writing samples, salient characteristics were identified. Overall, ELA writing samples had almost twice as many words as in the mathematics class writing samples. Figure 1 is an example of a writing sample from a students in ELA class only.

In figure 1, mathematical functions are explained in scripted words. For example, this student wrote, "Seven plus three is ten," as opposed to writing "7+3=10." There were attempts at providing a rationale to the explanation of the mathematical process. Also, there was some evidence

of paragraph structure. In figure 1, the student wrote, "My answer is 20ft," and then proceeded to explain the process of arriving at this answer; this first sentence can be seen as a topic sentence, since it alerts the reader of the possible meaning of the paragraph. At the end, the student wrote, "That's how I got twenty as my answer," concluding the paragraph. With regards to mathematical computations, there were minimal, if any, computations shown outside of the text. Students did not "show their work."


Someone asks you to do this problem:

Find the perimeter of this rectangle

3 feet

7 feet

Explain how you found your answer. Tell why you took the steps you did to solve the problem.

My answer is 20 ft. I found my answer by adding up all the sides. They only gave two measurements. I know how to find the perimeter. To find the perimeter you have to add up all the sides. Seven plus three is ten. Then seven plus three again is ten. Ten plus ten is twenty. That's how I got twenty as my answer.

Figure 1
Writing Sample from a Student in ELA Class Only

### *Writing Samples from Students in Mathematics Classes Only*

Seven students wrote mathematically for only their mathematics teacher. These students produced 20 writing

samples. These writing samples were significantly shorter that the writing samples from the ELA classes. Some students used little or no scripted words in their explanations. They only used mathematical symbols. For example, in Figure 2, the student drew a diagram to help organize the mathematical knowledge, and he used "ft." as his scripted words.

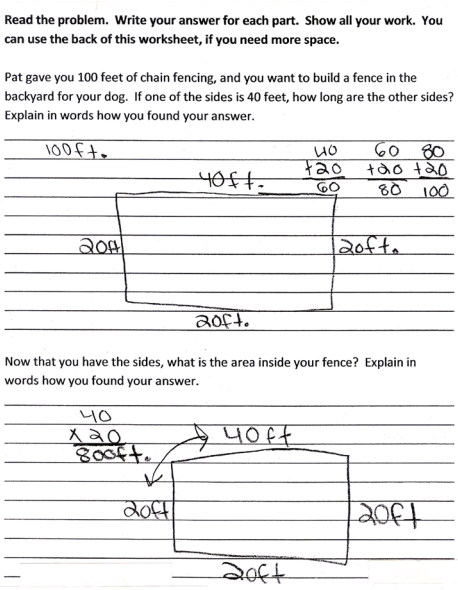



Figure 2
Writing Sample with No Scripted Words

Most students used a combination of mathematical symbols and scripted words in their explanations. For example, in figure 3, the student wrote equations to calculate the answer and then used scripted words to verbally explain the mathematical process. As in the other writing samples of this group, this example gave no rationale on why the mathematical

process was that way, and the explanations were linear, with a clear beginning and ending.

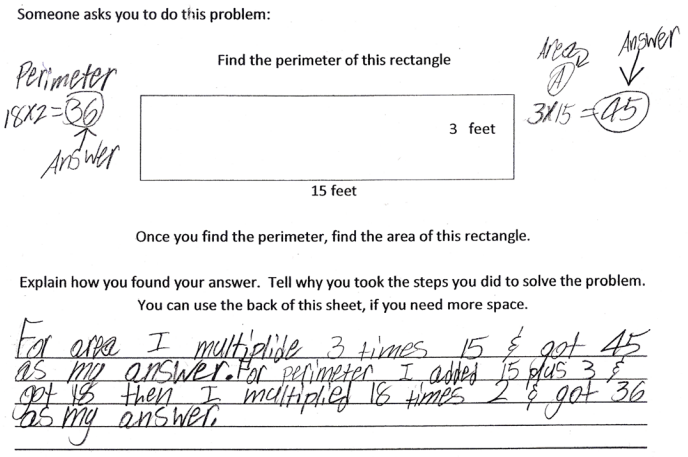
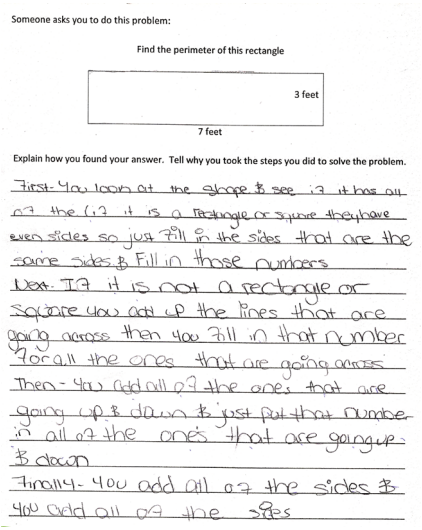



Figure 3
Writing Sample with a Combination of Mathematical Symbols and Scripted Words

### *Writing Samples from Students in Both ELA and Mathematics Classes*

Five students wrote mathematically in both ELA and mathematics class. These students produced 25 writing samples. All five students changed their writing styles according to the expectations of their teachers. In ELA class, their writing exhibited characteristics of their ELA classmates. For example, ELA writing showed attempts to construct a rationale while the mathematics class showed none. The same phenomenon happened in their mathematics classes. These students' writing had similar characteristics of their mathematics classmates. Writing samples from the mathematics class showed computations while the ELA samples showed none.

When comparing figures 4 and 5, the different characteristics are evident. In the ELA example, this student used writing conventions (first, next, finally) to designate each step of the process. There are no mathematical computations or other mathematical symbols. With the mathematics example, there are computations and the use of mathematical symbols. Also, the mathematics example is shorter and more concise than the ELA example. When compared to other ELA and mathematics writing samples, they have similar characteristics.



Someone asks you to do this problem:

Find the perimeter of this rectangle

3 feet

7 feet

Explain how you found your answer. Tell why you took the steps you did to solve the problem.

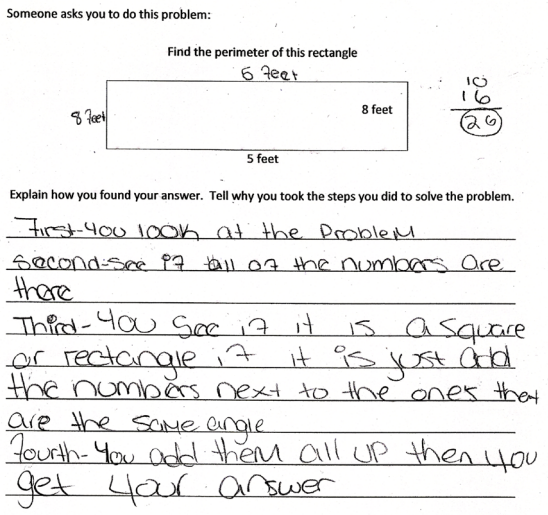
First- You look at the shape & see if it has all of the (,) if it is a Rectangle or square they have even sides so just Fill in the sides that are the same sides & Fill in those numbers

Next- If it is not a rectangle or Square you add up the lines that are going across then you Fill in that number for all the ones that are going across

Then- You add all of the ones that are going up & down & just put that number in all of the ones that are going up & down

Finally- You add all of the sides & you add all of the sides

Figure 4
Writing Sample from a Student
in Both ELA and Mathematics Classes—ELA Class


Someone asks you to do this problem:

Find the perimeter of this rectangle

5 feet

8 feet

8 feet

5 feet

10
16
(26)

Explain how you found your answer. Tell why you took the steps you did to solve the problem.

First-You look at the Problem
Second-See if all of the numbers are there
Third-You See if it is a Square or rectangle if it is just add the numbers next to the ones that are the same angle
Fourth-You add them all up then you get your answer

Figure 5
Writing Sample from a Student
in Both ELA and Mathematics Classes—Mathematics Class

### *Student Interviews*

Twenty-three students were interviewed: 12 students wrote in ELA classes only, seven students wrote in mathematics classes only, and four students wrote in both ELA and mathematics classes. Of these 23 students, 18 were African American (78.26%), two were Latino (8.69%), and three were Caucasian (13.05%). There were 15 girls and 8 boys. These percentages are given to show that the students who agreed to be interviewed have similar ethnic backgrounds as the rest of the school.

These students were asked a series of questions. With each question, the students' responses and comments are below it.

**Do you remember what you were thinking when you wrote this for Ms. _____?**

Yes: 17

No: 6

**Why do you think your writing is this way for Ms. _____?**

"I don't know."

"Because that's what she wanted."

"If I didn't, I wouldn't get a good grade."

"'Cause that the way we always do it."

**Did you think it was weird to do this kind of assignment in _____ class? Why/why not?**

Yes: 15 (All ELA classes)

"Math should only be in math class."

"I don't like math.

"It's just weird."

No: 7 (2 from ELA classes, 5 from math classes)

"Ms. _____ has us do this stuff once in awhile."

"I like to write. I don't care if it's about math."

"Because it all fits together. I don't know why, but it all fits together."

**Did you like doing this kind of assignment? Why/Why not?**

Yes: 3 (math students only)

"I'm a math guy."

"I'm kind-of used to it"

No: 20 (ELA and math students)

"'Cause it's just weird."

"It's hard."

"I don't know. I just don't like doing it."

**Did doing these kinds of assignments help you on the ISAT? Why/Why not?**

Yes: 17 (ELA and math students)

"I wasn't surprised."

"It made me used to what was on the test."

"The problem didn't scare me."

No: 4 (ELA students only)

"It had nothing to do with English."

No Answer: 2 (math students only)

**Do you think you should do these kinds of writing assignment more often?**

Yes: 14 (ELA and math students)

No answer/I don't care: 9 (7 from ELA classes only, 1 from math classes only, and 1 from both ELA/math classes)

**How often do you think you should do these assignments?**

1/week: 6 (2 from ELA classes, 4 from math classes)

2/week: 3 (1 from math classes, 2 from both ELA/math classes)

1/month: 2 (1 from math classes, 1 from both ELA/ math classes)

1 every 2 months: 1 (from math classes)

1 every chapter: 2 (from math classes)

### *ISAT Math Extended Response Scores*

On the ISAT Extended Response question, students can earn up to 4 points in three categories: Mathematical knowledge, strategic knowledge, and explanation. Therefore, students can earn up to 12 points.

**12 Writing Samples Scored—Single Teachers**

9 points (1 math, 1ELA)

8 points (2 math, 3 ELA)

7 points (1 math)

6 points (1 math)

5 points (2 math)

4 points (1 ELA)

**8 Writing Samples Scored—Both Teachers**
Student 1: 8 points (math), 7 points (ELA)
Student 2: 7 points (math), 7 points (ELA)
Student 3: 6 points (math), 6 points (ELA)
Student 4: 5 points (math), 6 points (ELA)

**Discussion**

Through informal conversations, what is clear is that secondary level ELA teachers are uncomfortable using mathematics problems as writing topics. These teachers see mathematics as a topic that is disparate from ELA and do not see a relationship between the two content areas. Also, there are ELA teachers who say they are "bad at math" and shy away from the topic. The students in this study showed that the mathematical topic had little bearing on the quality of writing the student produced. ELA students made attempts to use paragraph structure, including topic and concluding sentences. Instead of the topic being the biggest influence, it was the audience, the teachers. Their teachers set the tone and the guidelines for the writing activities. Whether it is the length of the in-class writing assignment or the inclusion/exclusion of mathematical symbols, students adapted their writing to the expectations of the teachers. Students take into account audience when completing these in-class writing assignments. They acknowledged, in the interviews, that if they did not write in a certain way, they felt they would earn a negative grade.

Another issue ELA teachers were concerned about was that the students would not be interested in mathematical writing assignments and not put their best effort into the activity. After interviewing the students, it is clear that this issue is false. The majority of the students, in both the mathematics and ELA classes, stated that writing about mathematics was

odd for them, and they did not care for the activity. However, these same students who did not care for the activity saw benefits of completing mathematical writing assignments more often and with regularity. Interestingly, the majority of the students stated that they should have assignments like these once a week. Two students who completed the mathematical writing in both ELA and mathematics classes stated that these assignments should be given twice a week, once in each content area. Interdisciplinary lessons are beneficial to secondary level students. Such lessons teach students that content areas are not individual entities, that there are connections between each course. One student identified this connection when she said, "Because it all fits together. I don't know why, but it all fits together." This connection is easier to identify in the humanities and the social sciences. Even in science, because of the reading and writing of science reports, students learn that literacy skills are essential. However, with mathematics, it is different. Mathematical language is so different from English, that some teachers and students see it as a foreign language, like Spanish or French. With regularity of these assignments, students will become more familiar with the idea that mathematics is a viable writing topic in ELA classes.

As explained in "Mathematical Writing and Audience Among High School Students," high school students who mathematically wrote in ELA class were more complete in their computations and explanations. Students in ELA class used both mathematical notations and scripted words to explain the mathematical processes. However, this study's results were different. With regards to the ISAT scores, on the surface, it showed that it did not matter whether the student completed the mathematical writing assignment in ELA or mathematics classes, because the scores were similar. However, upon further analysis, writing samples from the ELA

classes had higher "explanation" scores, while the writing samples from the mathematics classes had higher "mathematical knowledge" scores. With both groups, the "strategic knowledge" scores stayed the same. This data shows that students not only have the mathematical knowledge, but they also know how to explain this knowledge. Several students stated that they wrote more for the ELA teachers because the ELA teacher expected them to do it, and they felt that the ELA teacher did not know much about mathematics. Therefore, they had to "use more words" and "explain it more."

**Implications for Teachers**

The implications for ELA teachers are numerous. Despite the students' dislike for the activity, they saw the benefits of completing mathematical writing assignments in ELA classes. A majority of the students stated that they should complete mathematical writing assignments with regularity, once per week, in ELA classes. In most cases, the students understood that completing mathematical writing assignments was important, even though they could not verbalize why. These students understood that there were benefits of such assignments. For example, these students felt that completing these assignments helped them on the ISAT mathematics extended response section, because they were not afraid nor surprised by the question. In many cases, overcoming fear is half the battle to being successful in a subject. One student, who completed mathematical writing assignments in both ELA and mathematics classes stated, "'Cause I saw it all the time, I wasn't scared of it. I kind-of knew what to do."

Also, even though they were given mathematical topics, the students were able to apply writing conventions in ELA class, even though they did not apply these conventions in mathematics class. This application of conventions showed

that the students are aware of the paragraph structure and content; however, they are not able to transfer this knowledge from ELA to mathematics. Similar to other skills, with increased opportunities to write mathematically, students will learn that their writing skills in ELA class can also be used in mathematics classes.

ELA teachers should use mathematical topics as writing prompts. The mathematical topics need to be current, so it would be wise to talk to the mathematics teachers and learn what they are teaching. If the mathematics class has a vocabulary lesson, in ELA class the students can write a narrative, incorporating those words. Students can write process essays, explaining the computation of a problem. By incorporating mathematical topics, students will need to recall the mathematical knowledge, analyze and evaluate its salient points, and synthesize a piece of writing that identifies and explains these points. Also, it would not seem odd for students to provide rationales to their written processes, because they see content area teachers as exclusive to their subjects.

Eventually, students will understand that these two content areas are not exclusive from one another. When writing process papers, common topics include a recipe or an explanation of directions from one location to another location. Students have prior knowledge of recipes and directions. As a result, they have an idea of how the processes need to be organized and written. At the same time, students have prior knowledge of mathematics. The ELA teacher can utilize this prior mathematical knowledge when having the students explain a mathematical process. For example, with the writing prompts in this study, the mathematical problems were written so that all students would be able to solve them. In order to complete the assignment, the students needed to use

their prior knowledge of area and perimeter of solving these problems before they could explicate the processes.

A common assumption amongst students is that ELA teachers do not know much about mathematics. Four students admitted to having this assumption. ELA teachers can use this assumption to their advantage. Students may be more willing to be clear and explicit in their procedures and rationales. If the reader is unaware of the topic, then students need clarity and details in their writing. Otherwise, the reader will be confused, and meaning will be lost. The goal for all ELA teachers is to have their students be effective communicators, in oral and written forms. Therefore, the objectives and activities that flow from this goal might involve a juxtaposition of students' perceptions and the actual knowledge of their instructors.

**Conclusion**

Content-area literacy requires students to work in tandem. Students need to be literate and able to manipulate language that is appropriate for the content area. This study showed that 7th grade students were able to manipulate mathematical language that they deemed as appropriate to the class. Writing in ELA classes contained elements of paragraph structure, and writing in mathematics class contained equations and other computational text. At the same time, students saw the benefits of writing mathematically in ELA classes. Clearly, they did not enjoy the activity, but they saw the benefits of the activity by stating that there should be more mathematical writing assignments, on a regular basis.

ELA teachers need to take note of these students' feedback. Incorporating more mathematical writing assignments would strengthen students' perception of content areas. Instead of content areas being independent entities requiring unique skills, over time, students may be able to see that, as

one student stated, "it all fits together." Using mathematics as a vehicle for writing provides opportunities for students to work, in tandem, two seemingly disparate topics.

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# WHY CAN'T JOHNNY WRITE

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"Why can't Johnny read?" It's a question that has been circulated through television news programs, editorials, letters to the editor, and discussions among parents, school boards, and legislative bodies. It is the subject largely responsible for the controversial No Child Left Behind Act with its often-criticized drill-and-fill strategies designed to create better test scores but not necessarily better learning outcomes. As a teacher of first-year college composition, the question that I hear most from colleagues isn't "Why can't Johnny read?" but rather "Why can't Johnny write?" It is often followed by the accusatory questions of "What are 'they' teaching kids in high school about writing?" and, in particular, "How are teachers preparing students (or often not preparing students) to perform the types of writing that they will need to produce in a university setting?"

Mike Rose notes that many young people come to the university with skills in summarization but lacking the ability to frame an argument or analyze someone else's argument and this is something that I see quite often with my own students (Nagin 2). In many ways I consider this to be a confidence issue based in fear. Because many students are accustomed to standardized testing and objective examinations, they are unprepared to make arguments that do not have a definitive answer. When they do begin to make such assertions, the fear remains for many of them that the instructor will punish them for having a viewpoint that the instructor does not share. Nagin notes, "in today's increasingly diverse society, writing is a gateway for success in academia, the new workplace, and the global economy, as well as our collective success as a participatory democracy" (2). Yet, approximately 40 percent of traditional undergraduates take at least one remedial education course and this number increases among the non-traditional student population (Woodham in Attewell, et al. 886), 18 percent of which were in writing and language arts (898). And, while the media traditionally portrays this group of students as being the victims of underfunded urban or rural schools, Paul Attewell, et al.'s findings indicate that while 40 percent of students from rural schools took remediation in college so did 38 percent of students from suburban high schools and 52 percent from urban high schools. They further indicate that while students from the lowest quarter in terms of socioeconomic status represented the largest percentage of those enrolled in remediation, at 52 percent, 24 percent of the students from the highest quarter of socioeconomic status also enrolled in some form of remedial coursework (899).

Merilee Griffin, Amy Falberg, and Gigi Krygier note that this need for remedial coursework results in "an annual expenditure of roughly one billion dollars, for remediation

in reading, writing, and mathematics at the college level" (8) and, perhaps worse, puts many college students at risk of dropping out of college altogether (7). And they further note that in its report, *A Test of Leadership*, the Spelling Commission noted that it "believes higher education must assume responsibility for working with the K–12 system to ensure that teachers are adequately trained, curricula are aligned, and entrance standards are clear" (16) (295).

Writing courses, even at the college level, are a relatively new phenomenon. The first postsecondary writing course arose as a result of Harvard's written entrance exam in 1974. Up until that time the teaching of writing in elementary and secondary schools focused primarily on penmanship and focused on the belief that students had to first learn to read (Nagin 1). In 1975 when *Newsweek* published the article "Why Johnny Can't Write?" American public schools were accused of having neglected the basics and this led to the inception of the National Writing Project (Nagin 2).

For more than three decades the National Writing Project has worked to improve both writing and learning through efforts to improve the teaching of writing in schools. Its strategy is a simple one: to create teacher development models by providing instructors with examples of successful teaching strategies used by successful teachers in all disciplines and levels (Nagin ix). The program, which began at the University of California–Berkeley in 1973, is now comprised of 189 network sites in 50 states, Washington DC, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands, serving more than one hundred thousand teachers annually in grades K–16 in all disciplines (Nagin xi). According to Jeffrey Kaplan, the program has a threefold emphasis:

> To develop a leadership cadre of local teachers to participate in invitational summer institutes to become NWP

> teacher consultants on the teaching of writing,
>
> To deliver customized in-service programs on the teaching of writing for schools, and
>
> To provide continuing education and research opportunities for teachers. (337)

While legislators continue to seek ways in which to improve academic outcomes in elementary and secondary schools, efforts such as the ever controversial No Child Left Behind legislation have short-changed students' opportunities to develop the writing skills necessary to succeed. Sarah McCarthey's research indicates that this is particularly true in low-income schools where teachers have routinely lessened writing instruction in favor of reading comprehension and mathematics because these are two of the most prevalent benchmarks used to measure a schools efficacy through government-mandated testing. She notes that low-income schools are affected the most because the teachers in these districts are most likely to be forced to use district-mandated, prepackaged teaching materials.

McCarthey states that "to receive federal funding under No Child Left Behind, states are required to comply in the following ways:

- have academic content standards
- administer standards-based assessments in reading-language arts and mathematics in grades 3–8,
- employ a statewide accountability system that measures and reports adequate yearly progress of all schools
- identify schools for improvement or corrective action, and require teachers to be highly qualified in their subject area. (www.ed.gov.nclb/methods.html qtd. in McCarthey 465)

But No Child Left Behind has many critics, most notably the teachers who are affected by the legislation. Many elementary and secondary school teachers I have met seemed to agree that there was room for improvement in our nation's school systems, but few supported the kinds of methodology advocated for in No Child Left Behind. McCarthey notes that:

> Surveys and polls by several professional organizations have found that teachers support the basic premises of the law; however, criticisms of the law include the following: a) results from a statewide high stakes test are poor measures of school performance, b) teaching to the test is widespread and detrimental c) growth models that track students over the course of a year are better indicators than percentages of students who passed mandatory tests, d) emphasis on reading and math to judge school performance has led to less emphasis on other subject matters, e) reporting disaggregate test scores does not help improve schools, and f) No Child Left Behind has resulted in lowering teacher retention and motivation. (Mixed Reactions to NCLB qtd in McCarthey 465)

By all accounts those of us who deal with writing and writing instruction must acknowledge that the process of writing is a difficult and complex one that simply cannot be mastered in one course provided at the college level. Nagin reminds us that writers do not "always know beforehand where to begin, much less how to proceed. Writing doesn't take shape all at once in fluent sentences and organized paragraphs. The more complex the subject or task, the more disorderly and unpredictable the journey can be (9).

I can attest to this assessment from firsthand experience, as can most writers. As a doctoral student with an

emphasis in composition and rhetoric, I have found that many people have assumed that my own writing comes effortlessly, with words flowing smoothly and efficiently from my brain to my computer keyboard. Yet, after many years of writing papers and enjoying moderate academic success, there are times that the writing process continued to be an arduous one. How much harder the task must be for novice writers? And if writing is a difficult skill to acquire, how much more difficult is the job of teaching it? Writing specialist James Moffit explains that "composing is staged across various phases of rumination, investigation, consultation with others, drafting, feedback, revision and perfecting" (qtd. in Nagin 10).

What becomes a challenge for instructors is to create ways in which this type of writing can occur across curriculums and throughout a student's academic career, beginning in grade school by teachers who also practice their own writing skills and stay abreast of current developments in the field. Susan Fanetti, Kathy M. Bushrow, and David L. DeWeese assert that all students should be thought of as being college bound. They call for the reconfiguration of secondary education as a middle point rather than an end point in terms of learning, stating that "we must begin to think of postsecondary education occurring on the same continuum, with high school learning intended specifically to prepare students for the next level of study" (77). While they acknowledge that there is a general assumption that high school learning is already a building block for college, they also note one critical difference in that high school work is designed to be standardized and quantifiable while college is designed to be theoretical (78).

Research from the National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading Report Card indicates that writing

performance improves when students write frequently in various content areas. Yet the standardized testing practices of No Child Left Behind would seem to discourage the kind of in-depth thinking and writing opportunities most needed by developing writers and they do little to address the strengths and weaknesses that are unique to every writer. As Donald Murray explains, some "are excellent spellers and understand the mechanics of grammar and don't say a thing. Others have voices. Some are very organized. Some are totally disorganized. I've taught first grade through graduate school. There's just an enormous range at every level" (13). I would add to Murray's assertion that these strengths and weaknesses vary by writing assignment. For these reasons it is important that schools encourage their students to not only write more but to provide a variety of writing opportunities as well. While current composition theory strongly discourages the use of drill-and-fill exercises that center around grammar and punctuation, there are still instructors who insist that these exercises are necessary. As Nagin notes and theory maintains "emphasis on mechanical errors overshadowed the deep rhetorical, social, and cognitive possibilities of writing for communication and critical thinking" (20). This is a concern shared by Fanetti, Bushrow, and DeWeese who exlain that "focus on process writing and portfolio assessment, on student-centered and student-driven writing acts and assessments, that gained footing a decade ago (Goldburg, Roswell, and Michaels; Hansen) has shifted to a focus on 'power' and modal writing, the kind of writing that shows well on the essay portions of standardized tests. Standardized testing, then, has 'caused' more writing in high school, but at the expense of actual writing instruction and experience (Fisher and Frey). Students are learning longhand test-taking, not real writing" (78).

As Nagin further notes and I have directly observed, product-centered pedagogy is still being used. I first observed it when I was teaching composition at Southern Illinois University–Edwardsville, a university whose English department employs several adjunct faculty, some of whom have taught there for several years. The department was aware that some of their faculty were still using current traditional methodology, and eyes rolled when the subject was discussed, but for the sake of teacher autonomy and, I suspect, for the sake of filling of teaching positions as cheaply as possible, the department did little to change the situation. Later my niece came to me for help in the composition course she was taking at a local community college. Her instructor's complaint with her writing was that it lacked organization. In working with her I learned that what she was really doing had organization but did not follow the five-paragraph essay format. I had attributed these accounts to the use of aging adjunct faculty, who had little time or inclination to keep up with current theory, but after coming to Illinois State University I find that this is not necessarily the case. As a member of the writing program leadership team one of my duties was to observe the first-year writing instructors. I was again surprised to see drill-and-fill exercises being used there as well and my graduate students whom I would assume had been taught otherwise.

Instructor emphasis on grammar, usage, and punctuation have long been questioned by researchers and this issue was directly addressed in the 1985 National Institute of Education report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers,* which explains that "no communicative message is served when children are asked to identify on a worksheet the parts of speech or the proper use of *shall* and *will*" (qtd. in Nagin 21–22).

What we do know is that the act of writing occurs in phases and these phases vary from writer to writer. In a

seminar course I attended as a graduate student, one of my instructors asked 12 students to discuss their own writing processes. We were surprised to learn that no two of us wrote in the same way, although several of us used similar parts of processes to create a written work. Graves explains, "the writing process is anything a writer does from the time the idea came until the piece is completed or abandoned. There is no particular order. So it's not effective to teach writing process in a lock-step, rigid manner. What a good writing teacher does is help students see where writing comes from" (Graves qtd. in Nagin 22).

We are also coming to realize that students who practice writing do more than just develop one set of skills for a specific task. Research has found that writing also may help to develop higher-order thinking skills, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and interpreting because it requires students to question and reflect on various viewpoints, rather than to simply memorize and regurgitate facts for a standardized test (22). We are also learning that reading and writing are "intertwined and inseparable language tools" throughout a student's learning. Nagin notes that:

- Better writers tend to be better readers (of their own writing as well as of other reading material).
- Better writers tend to read more than poorer writers.
- Better readers tend to produce more syntactically mature writing than poorer readers. (31)

And Gail Tompkins argues that writing aids in reading development in the following ways:

- Readers and writers use the same intellectual strategies. These include organizing, monitoring, questioning, and revising meaning. Children grow their ability to use these strategies through both reading

> and writing activity. The biggest difference between good and poor readers and good and poor writers is their strategy use, not their skill use.
> - The reading and writing processes are similar. The first step in both processes, for example involves activating prior knowledge and setting a purpose. Because the two processes are so similar, the student learns literacy concepts and procedures through both reading and writing.
> - Children use many of the same skills in both reading and writing. Phonics is a good example of this transfer. Children use phonics skills to decode words in becoming fluent readers, and they also use phonics knowledge to "sound out" the spelling of words and apply spelling rules. (qtd. in Nagin 32–33)

College instructors of first-year composition courses surveyed by Fanetti, Bushrow, and DeWeese indicated that their expectations for students entering into their courses have dropped over the years as they have come to believe that one of their first tasks is to help students unlearn rules that they had been taught in high school and up until that point had served them well. One instructor surveyed stated "I end up feeling like I am arguing with the students in some way for the first part of the semester and [have to] make them feel that I am not trying to pull one over on them by saying that this is not how we do things here" (80). I share this frustration at times with my own students, but at the same time I have had several utter audible sighs of relief when I tell them that many of the rules that they have found restrictive have been lifted in my class. One of my greatest challenges has been to find ways to create a level playing field for students coming from a variety of high schools with an equally wide variety of instruction. Along with this is the ever present struggle

to convince first year students that there is no ONE right answer or argument, a belief that I believe also originates and is perpetuated with standardized testing. When Fanetti, Bushrow, and DeWeese asked "What do you wish students were—or weren't—learning in high school to prepare them for first-year composition?" they received responses such as:

> "I wish that maybe things weren't so goal oriented and rigid."
>
> "I would like to see more emphasis on writing and getting students feedback about their writing rather than just having them write a paper, turn it in and get a grade on it."
>
> "It's like a double edged sword: the more that you write in certain conditions it can be very problematic for students, because it's just one more way for you to tell me that I don't know what I'm doing or it's just one more hoop that I have to get through."
>
> "Many students get the impression that writing is something foreign to them or something which occurs only at "school." As a result, the first half of the semester requires me to get the student involved in his writing toward ownership." (81)

One thing that does appear to be consistent between high school and college level instructors is a general dissatisfaction with the No Child Left Behind legislation. Merilee Griffin, Amy Falberg, and Gigi Krygier note that the 2006 Spellings Commission report, A Test of Leadership, found that "[s]ubstandard high school preparation is compounded by poor alignment between high schools and colleges, which often creates an 'expectation gap between what colleges require and what high schools produce" (7) (295). Ironically,

my master's program, with an emphasis on the teaching of writing, was somewhat unique in that it intermingled students interested in teaching at the post-secondary level with instructors of elementary and secondary schools. I appreciated this dialog because it afforded me a broader understanding of the challenges that those instructors faced in balancing the needs of their students with the demands of legislation. But I also acknowledge that many post-secondary instructors do not have the opportunity to interact with instructors in the lower grades. In fact, time restraints often make interactions with one's own departmental colleagues a challenge. It is for this reason that I find the National Writing Project particularly appealing. In addition to the abovementioned goals, the program also encourages teachers to examine their own practices, model best practices, and inspire others while establishing a community of learners (Kaplan 337). Kaplan further notes that for many of the teachers participating in the project, this is the first time outside of formal teacher preparation training that many of them have had to learn more about their discipline. Research shows that teachers learn best when they are taught by other successful practicing teachers (Cox, Huber) and when they are allowed to examine their own practices elementary and secondary teachers are more likely to inspire others by modeling best practices. Further, they are more likely to establish and maintain communities of learners to continue their passion for learning and teaching and to continue reevaluating their own teaching practices (Pritchard and Honeycutt, Putnam and Borko, Zhao and Kuh).

Professional development plays an essential role in both school reform and in building a culture that supports a high level of learning. Milbrey McLaughlin and John Talbert's research indicates that "teachers' groups, professional communities variously defined, offer the most effective unit

of intervention and powerful reform" because they provide a "context for sustained learning and developing the profession" further noting that "the path to change in the classroom core lies within and through teachers' professional communities; learning communities which generate knowledge, craft new norms of practice, and sustain participants in their efforts to reflect, examine, experiment, and change" (Nagin 57). One of the most successful examples of school reform comes from a strategy implemented by New York City's Community District 2, which is based on seven organizing principles:

> It's about instruction…and only about instruction.
>
> Instructional change is a long, multistage process.
>
> Shared expertise is the driver of instructional change.
>
> Focus on systemwide improvement.
>
> Good ideas come from talented people working together.
>
> Set clear expectations, then decentralize.
>
> Collegiality, caring, and respect.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future indicates that teacher expertise is the most significant factor in student success, citing studies showing that teacher qualifications play a larger role than socioeconomic background in student learning. Shirley Harwayne notes that when teachers make their own professional discoveries, students directly benefit, asking "Would you go to a doctor who doesn't keep up with the latest findings and techniques?" (59). But we also know that writing is not something that can be taught in the course of a semester or even a decade, because the tasks that students are asked to do change and expand as the student advances (60). For this reason even

No Child Left Behind recognizes the value of professional development and requires that it be extended beyond short-term workshops or conferences. Rather, it defines high-quality professional development as being "sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher's performance in the classroom" (60). Some activities which are advocated for by Harwayne include:

- Reading and responding to related professional material.
- Watching videotapes of fellow teachers at work.
- Bringing students to a staff meeting and conferring with them publicly.
- Presenting the results of colleagues' visits to one another's rooms or combining classes to co-teach a writing workshop.
- Telling the story of a writer and his or her work and teasing out the implications for students.
- Brainstorming new teaching techniques, volunteering to try them out, and sharing the results.
- Looking at one piece of student work prepared on an overhead projector and imagining how a conference with the student would go.
- Reading aloud children's literature and discussing how best to share it with students.
- Crafting a mini-lesson and rehearsing its presentation with colleagues.
- Visiting other schools, attending conferences or workshops, and sharing observations and notes.
- Inviting guest speakers with expertise in a selected area of study.
- Inviting adults to work on their own writing in order to closely understand techniques to be taught to children.

- Collaborating on teaching plans for a new course of study.
- Presenting a new course of study, workshop tool, or classroom ritual to get feedback from colleagues. (62–63)

Part of what is being learned about student writing is based on assessments. One assessment that has been cited by the National Writing Project is the 2002 National Assessment of Education Progress, which indicated that there were modest writing gains from 1998 to 2004 for the fourth and eighth graders they researched. But curriculum leaders are more interested in the study's linkage between student performance in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades and their home and classroom practices (Nagin 43). Among that students who outperformed their peers include the following:

> Planning. "Those students [at grades 8 and 12] who were asked to plan their writing at least once a week or once or twice a month outperformed their peers who were never or hardly ever asked to do so."
>
> Multiple drafts. "While there were no relationships with student scores at grade 4, students at grades 8 and 12 who reported being asked to write more than one draft… hard higher average scores than their peers who were not asked to do so."

And two teacher practices which also had positive impacts on student writing include:

> Teacher-student discussion. "A positive relationship was evident between teachers talking with students about what students were writing and students' writing scores. This was more evident at grades 8 and 12 than at grade 4; at grades 8 and 12, students whose teachers always

> spoke with them about their writing outperformed their peers whose teachers sometimes spoke with them about their writing."
>
> Portfolios. "There was a positive relationship at all three grades between student writing scores and students saving or having their work saved in folders or portfolios." (44)

What this research seems to indicate is that writing students have been most successful when their teachers teach them the basic techniques associated with process based writing practices (45) and that writing practices are a good indicator of student performance (46). The National Writing Project further contends that writing teachers must write and that effective writing programs are built by those teachers who write themselves (65). This is a belief that most compositionists share, but it is not always practiced by teachers in the field. Kaplan maintains that it is essential that teachers who attend the summer institute also commit to teaching writing to others, and this group includes administrators, colleagues, and other interested teachers. Participants are further encouraged to engage in self-reflective practices which help them to examine their own assumptions about the teaching of writing (340).

Nagin reiterates that current research in composition studies indicates that writing development is not a linear process involving a specific set of skills and that the teaching of writing should involve a developmental awareness: "An effective writing program evolves a coherent, localized sense of students' developing needs as writers…it is based on careful observation of individual student needs and passed on through grade levels" (95).

Another important strategy advocated for by the National Writing Project is writing across the curriculum. And, as

Timothy Shanahan notes, "Most teens are surprised to find out that writing is more than a social performance. It is more than just getting the words in the right order in sentences, or putting the punctuation in the right places so others can make sense of what we have to say…We write for the same reasons that we read" (Nagin 51). This is commonly done through what Robert Tierney has termed "expressive writing" which he defines as a means of thinking through a problem. Using this technique in biology, Tierney believes that it allows students to have the experience of free inquiry, which he considers essential to scientific method. He further notes that students who had the opportunity to use this type not only retained more of what they learned but that they had a more thorough understanding of the material (54–55). George Hillocks further argues that teachers must also provide students with the skills of "examining assumptions and prior knowledge, posing questions, making inferences and interpreting, establishing working hypotheses and testing interpretations, and, finally, imagining—which is perhaps the most powerful gateway of all, the foundations for original discovery and insight" (54).

As we learn more about the ways that writers write and the most effective ways of helping students to develop and hone their writing skills, efforts such as the National Writing Project provide excellent forums for instructors of all levels to bring this knowledge into classrooms across the country. As a university level educator, I would like to see more done to provide a bridge between high school and college level writing instruction and find that this particular project seems to easily lend itself to creating such a bridge.

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# IDENTITY MATTERS: A CALL FOR BIBLIOTHERAPY TO SUPPORT RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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Race and its associated issues are thoroughly engrained in the socioeconomic and political fiber of the US. Children are immersed in a racial discourse via overt and covert messages from multiple sources: family, media, and school being the most prominent. Many adults believe that children do not "see" race, that either they do not notice physical differences such as skin color and hair texture associated with racial groups or that they attach no value to such differences. Further many adults believe that if children do mention race that "they don't understand what they are saying," or "they don't mean it." These ideas are more aligned with adult discomfort about discussing race and research differs. Children, even preschoolers, are quite aware of race. For example, in a

study of roughly 200 African American and white children ages six months to six years old, researchers discovered that infants categorize people by race and gender. They found that "infants looked significantly longer at an unfamiliar face of a different race than they did at an unfamiliar face of their same race.… [B]ecause this finding is very consistent in six-months-olds, 'initial awareness [of race] probably begins even earlier'" (Winkler 1). All the children in the study "expressed an in-group bias at the age of 30 months" as demonstrated by their selection of potential playmates from amongst photographs of both African American and white children (3). At 36 months all the children selected white playmates but this pattern decreased at 60 months. Winkler states that racialized kindergarteners show evidence of being aware of, and negatively impacted by, stereotypes about their racial group. Of course, children's concepts of race develop alongside their cognitive development and are greatly influenced by their environment. This is not to say that children only mimic adults, but rather that they notice the stimulus around them and come to age-appropriate conclusions about various racial groups.

Thus, racially sensitive children bring racial identity development issues to school. Race-related psychological stages may impact children's abilities to perform in school by making it impossible for them to relate to texts with unfamiliar content. Such children may say that the book "ain't got nothing to do with me," and such a position might translate to poorer grades if the children do not engage the texts and subsequent assignments. The manner in which such children negotiate their racial identity may also affect their self-esteem and influence their interpersonal interactions. Children who rarely see members of their racial group positively reflected in the media may, depending upon other factors in their lives, develop a negative opinion of themselves. The assumption

here is that children's self-images and self-esteem may be informed by the manner in which their group is perceived by the mainstream. The combination of poor academic performance and low self-esteem makes it imperative that teachers and librarians be aware of racialized children's identity development. These influential adults need to know how to address children's needs by recommending appropriate books and other reading materials.

Racial identity "is a schema or mental representation of the racial aspect of the self, including perceived attributes and the feelings association with them (e.g., I am Black, Black people do X, I like X)" (Murray & Mandara 74). One who is "racialized" has had to interact with and be informed by a social matrix that views them through a lens colored by various definitions of race, thereby impacting their social identity development. The term "racialize" denotes the social and evolving nature of such categorization and moves away from a purely biological construct. Nevertheless, those who are racialized in the US are marked by unequal treatment, involuntary membership in a subordinate group, and an awareness of their subordination. Group members usually share a genetically inherited difference, belief system, language, and history.

Certain racial groups may produce literature that is distinctive in content and style from that of the mainstream. The literature may include group history, real or imagined, group values, and group racial socialization. To socialize children means teaching them, overtly or covertly, the behavior patterns, norms, values, and expectations of adult society. Mainstream US values include "upward mobility, acquisitive individualism, and the importance of material well-being" (Boykin and Ellison 95). For racialized children, these values may conflict with those associated with their ethnic group. For

example, Afrocentric values include, but are not limited to,

> communalism, which denotes a paramount commitment to the fundamental interdependence of people and to social bonds and relationships; and orality, which connotes the centrality of oral/aural modes of communication for conveying true meaning and to cultivating speaking as performance. (Boykin and Ellison 100)

Nevertheless, to be successful in both their racialized community and the mainstream, children must embody both sets of mores and be able to apply them appropriately in various contexts. One of the duties of ethnic literature is to socialize a group's children into the community. For example, writers such as Richard Wright and scholars such as Larry Neal have delineated the purpose(s) of African American literature as educating the African American community about its collective and differing histories by reflecting the community and its culture and concerns and by addressing the social, spiritual, and physical needs of community members. Thus this literature embodies the behavior patterns, norms, values, and expectations, as well as the racialized and class-based challenges, of African American adult society. Thus when reading such literature, African American children encounter the social values of their community and learn ways to address life's race-based challenges. These children learn positive ways of coping with their racial identity development.

Bibliotherapy—recommending texts that reflect the psychological needs of the reader by showing characters successfully navigating life's challenges—may be used to assist children's development. For issues related to race, teachers may recommend literature produced by children's ethnic groups, literature that reflects these children's concerns. Bibliotherapy can be proactive when a teacher suggests books

that will address forthcoming issues in children's lives or anticipated developmental growth. To use bibliotherapy as a tool to affirm racialized children's racial identity development, teachers need to understand the stages of racial identity development and must become acquainted with appropriate children's literature that reflects these stages.

In bibliotherapy, teachers use texts to encourage children think about, understand, and work through social and emotional concerns. In so doing, children can be supported as they "come to grips with issues that create emotional turmoil for them" (Miller 261). Bibliotherapy may also be used developmentally by the teacher's providing "guided reading," especially for "elementary classrooms" (Bohning 166). Literature can provide information about, insight into, and possible solutions to issues of concern; stimulate discussion; relay social values; and assure the reader that others have dealt successfully with the same concerns. Characters and events in a story may serve as a mirror through which readers see themselves and their issues and model ways to address their concerns. Subsequent discussions with informed adults may help readers gain insight and valuable tools for coping with situations in real life that are similar to those in literature. Developmental bibliotherapy is most appropriate for teachers, counselors, and librarians since they are already addressing children's cognitive, physical, and emotional development. Bibliotherapeutic actions do not have to wait until the child manifests a difficulty, these appropriate actions can be taken in anticipation of pending stages of development and/or associated challenges. Knowing what to expect and addressing potential problems before they arise may increase children's self-esteem and produce positive self-concepts.

A reader's connection with a character in a therapeutic manner occurs in three stages: identification, catharsis, and

insight. During the identification stage, readers see a character, setting, or situation as being authentic and relevant. This is particularly germane to racialized children reading literature written for the white mainstream or literature with a racialized protagonist that is culturally inauthentic. In the second case, readers may dismiss books as irrelevant to their concerns saying that the characters are either "acting white" or are "lame." If readers do not have access to stories with characters they deem authentic, the bibliotherapeutic process may be derailed. If the connection has been made appropriately, readers may move into catharsis by recognizing that others have problems or questions similar to their own. Finally, insight may be reached where readers realize that something can be done and one or more solutions are possible (Baruth & Phillips in Bohning). By reading about a character with similar characteristics, child readers may be able to recognize elements of themselves in the character and his/her dilemma, thus gaining insight into how they themselves might address similar issues in their lives. On the other hand, the character may serve as a negative example and show readers how not to respond to a negative situation. Either way, readers leave the text with an understanding that may benefit their lives.

**White Racial Identity Development**

> *Approximately 90 percent of K–12 teachers in the US are white, while 36 percent of the national school population are students of color. This contrast underscores the critical role of white teachers [and librarians] in challenging racial bias in the curriculum and in school culture. A prerequisite for effectiveness in this effort is a willingness to confront one's own attitudes and privileges.*
>
> *Joyce E. King*

Awareness of race can help literacy professionals in their work with children of color, improving relationships they form with these children. Teachers need to be aware of the power relationships associated with race and how they as instructors may affect their students of color. If teachers are oblivious to the ways that race functions in the US, then the power relations between race and social institutions remains invisible and facilitates a racist curriculum and library collections.

White professionals need to acknowledge white privilege and understand that they may not be aware of the burden to which racialized groups are subject, nor to the professionals' unearned privilege as members of the dominate group. When white professionals realize their own racial identity development, they can be more emotionally available to the children they serve.

Multiple models of white racial identity development exist (see Hardiman, Ponterotto, and Helms), all of which share some underlying assumptions. First, unlike the racial identity theory for racialized groups, the white racial identity model, "focuse[s] on the 'oppressors'—individuals who [are] in the numerical majority; who ha[ve] power, resources, and countless unearned life privileges; and who [are] responsible for racism in the United States" (Ponterotto 88). If white professionals are not aware of their role and do not "take stock in, and responsibility for, their legacy of oppression and their ongoing participation in an oppressive society either directly or through passive acceptance of the racist status quo," they will not be able to understand the impact race plays in their relationship with racialized ethic children (Sue et al. in Ponterotto 88).

Whether white literacy professionals are aware of these forces or not, the forces will nevertheless impact children's literacy development and the general environment of the

classroom and library. Adults who are unaware of their racial power may be less likely to notice when racialized children are having difficulty negotiating their racial identity development. Teachers may not be self-reflective about how their subjectivity impacts the children in their care.

The assumptions upon which white racial identity development model are as follows:

- Racism is integral to US life and permeates all aspects of our institutions and culture.
- Whites are socialized into society and therefore inherit the biases, stereotypes, and racist attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the larger society.
- How whites perceive themselves and process their reactions as racial beings follows an identifiable sequence that can occur in progressive (linear) or nonprogressive (nonlinear) fashion.
- White racial identity status will affect an individual's interracial interactions and relationships.
- The desirable outcome of the white racial identity development process is that individuals accept their status as white persons in a racist society and define their identity in a nonracist manner. (Sue et al. cited in Ponterotto 89)

These assumptions do not deny the individual's free will, but they do confirm that race is a social construct that impacts people's lives in tangible ways. They also highlight whiteness, an often invisible concept that goes unspoken and unexplored, thereby retaining power and perpetuating a stance of "blaming the victim" instead of investigating the invisible privilege associated with being white.

While there are multiple models of white identity development, Ponterotto's mode, unlike Rita Hardiman's and

Janet E. Helms's models, includes all interactions whites may have with racialized groups. Ponterotto's model includes four stages: pre-exposure, exposure, zealot-defensive, and integration. In the pre-exposure stage, individuals have little thought of race-related issues and / or white privilege. They often think that either racism no longer exists, or, if it does, it happens on an individual not an institutional level. They tend to think of racism as overt and obvious and are not cognizant of the subtle forms of racism. The next stage, exposure, is denoted by individuals being awakened to racialized issues. They begin to become cognizant of the institutional racism faced by racialized groups. With continued exposure individuals evolve into the zealot-defensive phase which is twofold: they may immerse themselves in race-based debates and become an advocates for racialized issues, or they may become angry, guilty, and defensive. The latter may shut down and refuse to engage race-related issues. If individuals can resolve this phase, their next challenge is the integration stage which is characterized by individuals who are able to process and openly discuss their feelings. These individuals acknowledge the realities of racism and white privilege. Finally, they retain positive responses to being white while being interested in and concerned about other ethnic and racial groups. They may also become allies of the oppressed. Individual development through the stages is far from linear; rather, change is more cyclical with stages being revisited and relived.

Teachers' stages of racial identity development will impact their comfort levels as they address racialized children and race-based issues. Teachers who are aware of their own assumptions will address pedagogy, curriculum, library collections, and programming with an eye to helping their students. They will understand children's identity development and not leave needs unaddressed and literacy undeveloped.

**Minority Racial Identity Development**

Racialized children develop identity through patterns that differ markedly from white identity development. These theories:

> [focus] on the 'oppressed'—individuals who [are] in a numerical minority; who [have] less power, fewer resources, and diminished life-quality access; and who [have] been the subject of violent physical and psychological torture for centuries. (Ponterotto 88)

In addition, the theories assume that positive self-esteem about one's racial identity has value to everyone since those who are comfortable with themselves interact with others in more positive and productive ways. Those with a positive sense of racial identity have self-respect and clear self-definition.

As noted, even young children are aware of race although they view it as purely physical and mutable. They may, for example, think African American skin is brown because of sun exposure or drinking chocolate milk. By the age of six, many children understand that race and ethnicity are associated with ancestry and influences of culture, lifestyles, and language. Around ten, some children correlate race with socioeconomic status; they begin to notice the connections between race, class, and the quantity and quality of the public resources available to various communities. They may realize that white, affluent neighborhoods have schools with more resources than do those in poor communities (Quintana).

The impact of racial stratification on children has been investigated by Jana Noel in *Developing Multicultural Educators*. While Noel's work depends upon that of Helms and William Cross, Noel's model is written for, and depends more firmly upon, scholars aligned with the tenets of multicultural

education than counseling as is the case with Helms (Banks, Tatum). Nevertheless, while there are subtle differences and each theorist labels the stages differently, the order and content of the stages are congruent.

In Noel's first stage, unexamined identity, children express little to no interest or concern about their racial identity. There may be multiple rationales for this stage:

> For some, there will be a lack of interest in the whole field of identity studies and identity constructions. For others, there may be recognition that other people have concerns about their identity, but they themselves do not share that interest. (Noel 147–48)

Children in this stage construct a sense of self that is not informed by their race. James Banks says that racialized children in this category may have surveyed the negative stereotypes about their racial group and may be ashamed thus distancing themselves from a race-based identity. Children in this stage do not want attention paid to their race and would rather perceive themselves as, if not members of the mainstream, at least not differentiated from it. Oftentimes racialized people in this stage are accused of either "acting white" or, in the case of African Americans, "not knowing they're black." While this may not pose a problem in schools, it may ostracize the person from racialized community-based groups.

Books that may appeal to these children are defined by Rudine Sims Bishop as socially conscious books, generically American or culturally neutral in that the universalities of humanity are emphasized in these books instead of the specificity of the racialized experience (Cai). Books such as Keats's *Snowy Day* fall into this category because the protagonist's race is irrelevant to the story. He could be any child playing in the snow. One of the values of books such as this is that

although children reading the book may not be interested in their racialized identity, the book nevertheless offers them a positive reflection of themselves in the protagonist. Other books in this category include Jean Marzollo's Shanna series. Written for beginning readers, the series features an African American girl who has a variety of adventures including identifying animals in *Shanna's Animal Riddles* or enjoying accolades for performances in *Shanna's Ballerina Show*.

Eventually children will be faced with events that force them to realize that they cannot blend into the mainstream or deny their race. They may hear racial epithets or experience blatant acts of discrimination. The child may experience "anger, confusion, surprise, sadness, [and/or] embarrassment" (Tatum 32). Other children may simply ask children of color about their experiences. While the teacher may think this is an opportunity to see these children as cultural experts, the children will feel racialized. This sparks the search for identity stage, which is characterized by "active questioning and seeking to understand one's cultural or ethnic identity" (Noel 148). This stage is exemplified in Sandy Holman's picture book, *Grandpa, Is Everything Black Bad?*, in which the protagonist, Montsho, an African American boy, questions why "black" is often associated with bad things (e.g., black cats are bad luck and the bad characters on television wear black). Clearly Montsho is searching for his identity at this point. He is cognizant that he is black/African American, and because he is three, he thinks in purely physical terms. He is interested in race but does not want to be associated with things that are considered bad.

With more information about their racial group, children may move toward the construction of identity based on devaluation of others stage. They embrace their ethnic identity to the detriment of other groups. Children may either ignore

other groups or devalue them and move into an "us versus them" mentality. Children in this stage may actively seek out racialized literature, a necessary part of this stage. The teacher or librarian can easily find such books from racialized children's book awards and reference sources such as the Americas Award, the Coretta Scott King Book Award, Oyate.org, or the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, among others.

Eventually children may move into what Noel calls clarified identity in which they create a "clear sense of and acceptance of [one's] own cultural or ethnic identity, with all its positives and negatives" (148). In Holman's picture book, Montsho's grandfather assures him that everything black is not bad by exposing him to the richness of his African ancestry through cultural elements such as drumming and oration. The grandfather, who is comfortable discussing issues of race with a child, gives Montsho positive information about his ethnic background. The grandfather also encourages a positive sense of self in Montsho when he says, "the dark color of your skin and your African heritage is a good thing, a very good thing indeed." Surely this one episode is not the extent of Montsho's concerns, but it does exemplify how one might address a child's concern about the negative images of their racial group.

Eventually Montsho will evolve toward Noel's expanded sense of identity, which is "recognition of an identity…based on multiple factors and that includes multiple characteristics of multiple groups" (148). As he develops cognitively he will move away from viewing race purely in a concrete manner, and, as he clarifies his identity by understanding his heritage and resisting the negation of his racialized group by the mainstream, he will define himself not just as one of African heritage but, as an American and, specifically,

an African American, possibly with multiracial and or multi-ethnic ancestry.

A person who has reached this stage is better able to help create societal change. According to Banks (in Noel), this person would have "internalized the ethical values and principles of humankind" so that, with the necessary skills and commitment, this person can move toward social action on a global scale (161). While children may or may not have evolved through the stages, most elementary school-aged children have a clear sense of justice, and, if led by a skillful teacher or librarian, can move to create social change in an age-appropriate manner.

Bob Peterson is such a teacher as we see from his article, "Planting Seeds of Solidarity," in which he discusses how he uses stories, oral and written, to teach his fifth grade class about the impact of globalization. By weaving world justice into his curriculum in meaningful ways, he is able to make the issues relevant to his students as citizens of the world and to discuss how these same issues may appear in their communities. Writes Peterson: "students are more likely to begin to understand that working for global justice also involves changing 'our' world as well and that when we help to change conditions for 'others' we are helping to change them for ourselves" (21). Peterson uses songs like Tracy Chapman's "Why?" when he teaches about "justice in an unjust world." The song asks "Why do babies starve when there's enough food to feed the world?" and further prompts questions like "Why does chance allow for some to live a life of relative luxury while others don't know where their next meal is coming from? And what might we do about such things?" He also uses videos such as *When Children Do the Work*, which focuses on child labor and sweatshops and songs like Bernice Johnson Reagons's "Are My Hands Clean," in which she tells

the story of laborers who make clothes and rich people who wear them. Peterson includes additional resources for this unit in the resource section of the *Rethinking Schools* website. Knowledgeable librarians can help teachers by adding these resources to library materials. Children can independently use their clarified identity to achieve societal change with the assistance of an informed adult.

The stages of minority identity development are not linear but take a complicated journey, one of stagnation, regression, and repetition. Multiple factors may impact a person's racial identity development and, since children spend such a significant amount of time in school, teachers and librarians poised to help them along their journey. How can we as educators support children's racial identity development through the books we recommend?

**Using Bibliotherapy to Support Racial Identity Development**

It is the search for racial identity, the first stage, that may present challenges in school. Specifically for Asian American children, books such as Choi's *The Name Jar* and Recorvits's *My Name is Yoon* may help serve as models for these children as they construct their racial identity in predominately white spaces. While Unhei, the protagonist in *The Name Jar*, is initially ashamed and vacillates about changing her name to a mainstream American one, Yoon, from *My Name is Yoon*, clings to her Korean name and resists writing it in English. Naming serves as a metaphor for both protagonists' adjustments to mainstream US culture. These books transcend issues of being the new kid in school to a struggle to define oneself in regards to race and national origin and might be useful with children coping with the same or similar issues.

Some books for older readers (9–12), such as Laurence Yep's *Thief of Hearts*, cover almost all the stages. In this story the protagonist, a biracial Asian American girl named Stacey initially has an unexamined racial identity and all white friends. When forced by her parents to befriend a Chinese immigrant, Hong Ch'un, Stacey is confronted with her Chinese identity as mirrored by Hong Ch'un. Because Stacey is unaware and uninterested in her Chinese heritage, she and Hong Ch'un do not become immediate friends. When Hong Ch'un is accused of stealing, Stacey defends her and is called a half-breed by one of her white friends which thrusts her into the construction of identity based on devaluation of others stage. Ashamed, lonely, and confused, Hong Ch'un runs away to Chinatown and Stacey, her mother, and her grandmother search for her. In so doing, they visit many places and people from the mother's childhood and immerse Stacey in her Chinese American heritage. This assists her move into a stage in which her racial identity is clarified. Of course, they find Hong Ch'un and clear her of the false charges. The book ends with Stacey having a renewed interest in her grandmother (the symbol of her Chinese heritage) and her identity.

It is quite feasible, according to bibliotherapy theory, that the reader of the above books would identify with the characters, their plight, and their navigation of the issues of their racial identity. Thus the reader might experience his or her own development as well. Educators should consider racial identity development and listen for clues in children's behavior and reactions, as well as their requests for books. Some literacy professionals may need to recognize their own racial identity and address their privilege and ability to ignore issues of race. Yet the racialized child does not have that luxury because by definition racialized children live their lives through a lens of race. Such an experience will definitely

impact their behavior in school. Suggesting books that reflect the developmental stage and race of the reader may assist these children in navigating these developmental stages in a healthy and productive manner.

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## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS TO THE *ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN*

As the written forum in which Illinois English teachers share their ideas, the *Illinois English Bulletin* welcomes all kinds of materials related to the teaching of English.

We seek articles dealing with literature, writing, language, media, speech, drama, film, culture, technology, standards, assessment, professional development, and other aspects of our profession. Any combination of research, theory, and practice is appropriate. Some articles take a formal and conclusive approach, while others are informal and exploratory.

Book reviews, poetry, black-and-white photographs, and line drawings are also welcome.

When you are ready to share your work with your colleagues across the state, please consult the submission guidelines on page 90. We look forward to hearing from you. If you have questions or suggestions for the editor, please

don't hesitate to get in touch (contact information on page 92).

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(See page 92 for the editor's contact information.)

- Via U.S. mail, send one clean, paper copy of the manuscript to the editor. See below for manuscript formatting guidelines and information to include in your cover letter.
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- Manuscript formatting guidelines: follow the current *MLA Handbook* guidelines for parenthetical in-text citations, the works cited section, and other technical elements; follow NCTE's "Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language"; place page numbers at the top right corner of every page; type and double-space throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and works cited), with one-inch margins all around.

- With both your paper and electronic manuscript submissions, please also include a biographical blurb of 50 words or fewer. (Blurbs for manuscripts with multiple authors should total 50 words or fewer.) Blurbs usually mention institutional and professional affiliations as well as teaching and research interests.
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To be considered for inclusion in the spring issue, materials must be received by the editors by the previous November 1.

To be considered for inclusion in the summer issue, materials must be received by the editors by the previous January 15.

To be considered for inclusion in the fall issue ("Best Illinois Student Poetry and Prose"), materials must be mailed to the special editor for that issue and postmarked by the previous January 31. Please see page 93 for the two-page special submission guidelines and contact information for fall issues and page 95 for the required enclosure. Please note that as of 2005, the poet laureate of Illinois will designate several of the poems selected for publication in the *Bulletin* as "Poems of

Exceptional Merit." These poems will be identified in a message written by the poet laureate and published in this issue of the *Bulletin*. The poets will receive a certificate from the poet laureate in the U.S. mail.

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## CALL FOR STUDENT WRITING FROM ALL LEVELS FOR IATE'S BEST ILLINOIS POETRY AND PROSE CONTEST

DEADLINE: Postmarked no later than January 31, 2011.

FORMAT: Typed copy is preferred. $8^{1/2}$ x 11 paper is mandatory (one side only). Copy must be clear, legible, and carefully proofread, and must not include drawings or illustrations.

LABELING: Each entry must be accompanied by its own cover sheet stapled to the entry, which states:

- Full name of student
- Student's grade level at time piece was written
- Full name of school
- School's complete mailing address
- Full name of teacher (indicate if IATE member)
- Email address of instructor

IMPORTANT: The student's name, the school's name, and the teacher's name must not appear anywhere else.

LIMITS:
1) Five prose and ten poetry entries per teacher.
2) One thousand words of prose per entry; forty lines of poetry per entry.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FROM THE JUDGES:
1) Please see that students abide by the line and word limits. Have them revise and shorten pieces that exceed these limits.
2) Please emphasize to students that prose and fiction are not synonymous. Encourage them to explore the possibilities of expository essays, arguments, and personal narratives.

REQUIRED ENCLOSURE FOR STUDENT
POETRY AND PROSE ENTRIES

When submitting manuscripts, include a signed statement to read:

To the best of my knowledge, the enclosed manuscripts were written by the students whose names they bear. I have submitted work by the following students (give complete list of students represented):

_____ _____ _____

(Name) (Title) (Grade)

_____ _____

(School) (Instructor's Email)

_____

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