Journal of Teaching Writing

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

2018 (33.2)
Indiana Teachers of Writing
ISSN 0735–1259

CONTENTS

Reviewing for *JTW*

Reviews

FROM THE EDITOR

This issue arrives on the heels of a busy fall season of teaching, preparations, committees, conferences, activities, and all the varied tasks we accomplish in and out of the classroom. I hope this holiday season brings rest and relaxation, as well as time to refresh and read as you prepare for your students in the new year. Happy Holidays to all our readers!

Writing teachers understand that reflecting on teaching practices goes hand-in-hand with keeping abreast of new ideas in writing and literacy. This issue is all about new ideas: it features articles on spoken reflection as a metacognitive exercise, comics production and multimodal learning, and collaborative inquiry and writing. Karen Sheriff LeVan and Marissa King in "'Can I Just Say It': A Case for Spoken Reflection in the Writing Classroom" examine the effectiveness of spoken reflection for struggling writers, arguing that it reduces their anxiety about writing, builds confidence, and provides a basis for further revision. Elizabeth L. Jaeger in "The Study Circle: A Support for Collaborative Inquiry and Writing" details the story of Javier, identified as "disruptive" and "low-achieving" by his teacher, and the author's collaborative approach that engaged Javier and revealed his special talents as a participant in a study circle. Finally, Robert Watkins in "Comic Con(nection): Envisaging Comics as a Multimodal Ensemble That Teaches Core Visual Writing" shares a qualitative classroom study on teaching comics production in the writing classroom. His findings on what students learned about multimodal writing through comics are insightful, and his classroom materials will be a jump-start for teachers interested in teaching multimodal writing.

Of particular note to our K-12 readers is a new guest-edited section titled "Teacher to Teacher," which will become a regular part of the *Journal*'s fall issue. "Teacher to Teacher" invites submissions from K-12 teachers on themes selected by the guest editor. We will announce themes in advance (see Announcements for next year's theme) with a submission deadline of August 15, and we will select three (and occasionally more) for publication in our fall issue. We planned it this way to allow K-12 teachers time in the summer to reflect on their teaching and write about their own classrooms. In this issue's inaugural "Teacher to Teacher" section, we welcome guest-editor Brandie Bohney and three K-12

teachers—Missy Springsteen-Haupt, Stacy Stosich, and Nora Rivera—who each author a perspective on the theme of failure in the writing classroom.

I am honored to welcome Professor Joe Janangelo of the Loyola University of Chicago as our new Reviews Editor. Professor Janangelo has served on the editorial board for many years, and we look forward to working with him in this new role. Professor Janangelo's essay "Evincing Criticism and Collegiality in Scholarly Reviews" in this issue will be of particular interest to those wanting to review books and digital media for *JTW*.

Speaking for all of our readers and the staff of *JTW*, I want to express my deep gratitude to Professor Kay Halasek of The University of Ohio, who served as Reviews Editor from 2013 to 2018. Professor Halasek, who will remain on our editorial board, worked diligently to keep *JTW* readers informed of new books and materials in the field. During her five-year term, Professor Halasek selected, assigned, and delivered for publication thirty-two reviews, including several review essays. She served *JTW* and the profession with honor, and we are all grateful.

Finally, I also want to extend my appreciation to Professor Michael Day of Northern Illinois University. Professor Day has served on the board for nearly eleven years, reviewing manuscripts, offering feedback, and shepherding many writers to publication in *JTW*. He was invited to the board by then-editor Barbara Cambridge, and I was fortunate—blessed, really—to keep him for ten more years! We wish Michael the best in his future pursuits and thank him for his years of dedicated service to *JTW*.

As always, we invite your responses to the contents of this issue. If you wish to respond to the authors, send your response via e-mail to jtw@iupui.edu.

–Kim Brian Lovejoy, Editor

"Can I Just Say it?": A Case for Spoken Reflection in the Writing Classroom

Karen Sheriff LeVan and Marissa King

From middle school to senior capstone courses, teachers push students to reflect on their writing: "Explain two specific ways you could narrow your thesis statement on your rough draft." "Discuss three ways you responded to naysayers." "Evaluate how you'll improve one part of your writing process this week."

Whether in written narrative reflections following essay submissions or short question responses about the writing process, teachers regularly rely on metacognitive exercises to build student efficacy in drafting and revision stages. The "extra" work is time well spent: improved metacognition has a host of benefits especially for the most at-risk writers. Metacognitive skills can help students master course content (Joseph), improve self-assessment skills (Nielsen), and focus their thinking (Hogue Smith).

For basic writers, the students assigned to remedial classes that straddle high school and college content, metacognition is particularly important. Metacognitive assignments can help basic writers adopt the writing dispositions needed to improve revision and handle the inevitable failures and rejections that writing brings (Hogue Smith). As new college students, they are fighting to see themselves as belonging in college while they tackle increasingly difficult skills. The same struggles that barely daunt the accomplished writer could nudge a struggling writer toward quitting (Blau). Cheryl Hogue Smith, whose writing instruction includes remedial writing courses on the community-college level, points out that even small failures may catapult basic writers into self-doubt about their ability or be interpreted as a sign of a "deficiency in themselves" (671). While more accomplished writers can shrug off an error and focus on overall growth, struggling

writers tend to overemphasize the product. This, Hogue Smith emphasizes, is exactly why metacognitive exercises are so essential for at-risk writers: they turn the focus "from the product to the process, from performance goals to learning goals" (672).

Metacognition bridges the gap between a student's focus on the immediate writing task and the teacher's hope that the student will transfer skills to future writing needs (Nielsen; Skeffington) including navigating transitions that may demand new and varied writing skills (Joseph). Whether from course to course or assignment to assignment, an emphasis on metacognitive reflection can bolster performance.

Multimodal Metacognition

In most classes, the majority of independent metacognitive exercises are in written form. This reflective writing, most teachers reason, slows students down enough to consider their learning process. While some students benefit, others find writing a tedious distraction. The writer who nervously approaches the page and winces at the awkward prose may find that the mode—writing—can compromise the goal of reflection. Their self-consciousness as writers compromises the reflective work they are capable of doing.

Fear of mistakes can mean students become "obsessed with fragments or run-ons or commas and focus so intently on sounding right and avoiding errors that they render themselves incapable of developing any extended idea or thinking about the shape and directions of a whole essay" (Hogue Smith 671). Multimodal reflection options open metacognitive opportunities to more students. When writing isn't the only option, fearful writers can engage rather than shrink away from complex expressions.

In an investigation into multimodal literature responses and reflections in elementary classrooms, Kathy Short, Gloria Kauffman, and Leslie Kahn make the case that a variety of response modes can help children "to think more broadly, to consider other ideas, to connect to memories, and to think through feelings" (170). In addition to the performance benefits, the move away from standard written reflections may be just what some students need. Short et al. describe

a student leaving a class read-aloud who proclaimed, "Oh, I just *need* to draw" (160).

While our college students might not yearn for colored pencils, they express similar desires to show their thinking and reflection in a variety of ways—especially in spoken word. "*Can I just tell you?*" one student in our remedial writing class repeatedly asked. In the last several years, our classroom practices and research have focused on making metacognition more accessible. In this article, we focus on our work with first-year college students in remedial composition courses at a rural, two-year college.

A Case for Audio Reflection

Most teachers assign reflective work primarily for its metacognitive benefits. Often the written mode is just a way to reach that goal. But for some students, writing may shift the cognitive load from reflection to the writing itself. After all, students may not find it helpful to reflect on writing *in writing* if writing is what has them stressed in the first place.

If the main goal is to reflect, letting students speak may serve as an alternative for the more traditional written metacognitive assignments, especially for struggling writers. Audio reflection—when students record their spoken responses to specific reflection prompts—offers students the chance to focus their cognitive energy on reflection instead of potentially tricky writing moves. The choice to use audio reflection as a supplement to writing or a replacement depends on the teacher's priorities.

This article features the audio work of three students in the same remedial writing course. Fourteen students completed weekly, independently-recorded reflections, all following the same prompts. Building off the three categories of feedback recommended in *Thanks for the Feedback*, by Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen of the Harvard Negotiation Project, we asked students to respond to the following three prompts in any order:

- Describe your successes this week.
- Describe what you did, heard, understood, or practiced this week to contribute to your success.
- Explain what you will keep doing or change in order to meet your goals next week.

As researchers we independently listened to the collective data set of 207 audio reflections recorded by fourteen students over the course of a semester. On average, each student submitted thirteen recordings, each ranging from 1:30 to 6:00 minutes long. After individually listening for trends within cases and across cases (Merriam), we sought respondent validation (Maxwell) through conversations with these same students in semi-structured interviews and focus group settings as well as classroom observations and interactions.

We selected the three students whose work we feature in this article—Jake, Genessis, and Reilly—because their audio work includes the following characteristics: (1) A metacognitive feature we repeatedly recognize within their individual recording sets and (2) A metacognitive trend we find salient across other students' audio reflections.

In this sense, even this small sampling exemplifies representative benefits of audio work as a metacognitive mode. Used as a metacognitive practice, audio reflection offers opportunities for more nuanced accounts of learning, a less intimidating place to experiment with new vocabulary and skills, and space for student voice unencumbered by textual errors.

When we use audio reflection, we try to access the same kind of thinking that we would ask for in writing. The goals are the same, but the form is different. Following metacognitive prompts, students use an electronic device (phone, iPad, or whatever is available) to record their reflection. Of course, we teach students how to record the first time, but quite quickly students can manage the process on their own. The audio file is submitted just as an electronic file would be uploaded to a course management system or emailed directly to the teacher. Like any metacognitive assignment, scheduling is up to the teacher's discretion. After the initial technological hurdles, the weekly audio reflections we've adapted take very little teacher

direction. The logistics are certainly different from a quick-write on loose-leaf paper, but twenty-first-century IT makes recording and sharing of audio files easier than ever.

Using recorded audio for metacognition purposes is still in experimental stages, but writing teachers have long relied on the spoken word to support the drafting and writing process. Research suggests that getting students to talk about their writing improves writing ability and builds metacognition (Baxa; Diltz; Harris, "Talking"; Harris, *Teaching*; McDonald; Murray, "Teaching"). Conference literature emphasizes the importance of student speech to accompany a writing text (Harris, *Teaching*; Murray, "Listening," Straub). The change in mode may also offer teachers additional information. In a study with ninth and tenth graders, Sarah Beck et al. used the Think-Aloud-Protocol (TAP) which asks students to talk about their thinking and writing choices as they draft and a teacher observes. The process, although time consuming when used fully, uses student talk as a way to focus attention to the writing process rather than just the result (Beck et al. 679).

Recorded reflection functions as a spoken version of the metacognitive practice already used in many writing classrooms, but it may offer slightly different benefits for students—especially those intimidated by writing in the first place.

Audio reflections can target the same skills, the same assignments, and even use the same prompts but in a mode that may eliminate some residual roadblocks. As basic writers like the ones in our classes approach the page, most are keenly aware that their writing is littered with errors (Hogue Smith). Even in classrooms where proofreading or grammar are never mentioned in tandem with written metacognitive assignments, concern for surface-level missteps can distract from the more important reflective work. Adding audio reflection to the toolkit is one strategy for increasing metacognitive access for students at every writing level.

More Nuanced Accounts of Learning

Just as in written metacognitive assignments, student audio reflections vary in length, depth, and detail. Some students charge

through three minutes of writing discussion with surprising agility while others linger over their thoughts and give themselves slow, careful advice. Students self-correct, restate, and congratulate themselves as they record. The result—reflection wholly in a student's own voice—is a delight to hear and an energizing alternative to the traditional written reflection.

Across a wide variety of reflection styles, we're amazed at how much students are able to do in just one recording session. Perhaps the fact that most can speak much faster than they can write simply produces more content, or perhaps they are just more comfortable when they aren't worried about written errors.

For research purposes, we've transcribed hours of student audio reflections. Students never see our transcriptions nor do we use them in class, but transcriptions make it easier to share audio reflection work in traditional print publications. While transcriptions make it easier to share research in journals, they catapult us back into the rhetorical complexities that audio reflection helps students avoid. For example, in one audio reflection, the student changes her pitch as though she is echoing her teacher's advice: "*summarize what you said*." As transcribers we must choose whether to include quotation marks or risk an outside reader missing her reference to the teacher voice. Fortunately, audio recording allows the students themselves to focus solely on their metacognitive work. Students also interrupt themselves or rely on phrases like "*I mean*" which might be distracting in the transcriptions but is generally workable in spoken form. For our students' sake, we hope you will imagine them speaking.

In this first example (Figure 1), Jake is reflecting on a personal narrative assignment with an emphasis on descriptive details, or "showing" strategies such as concrete nouns, sensory details, and active verbs. The assignment required a rough draft and peer feedback before the final submission. He moves with relative ease between discussing his final draft, his writing process, where he was struggling, and when he was "rolling." In written form, the same student often produced two to three sentences in a similar amount of time.

Like all writing teachers, we would love to see more specific evidence in this audio reflection. We, too, cringe when a student says

Well, I did really good for Week 10. When we did the—I don't know what we did—it was with the chronological order—whatever that was—I did really good I think. I did good showing everything the teacher asked for. So, I think I did really good this week. I mean, rough draft, I was a little rusty because, I mean, I didn't really know what I was doing. And then after Wednesday, after we went over our rough drafts—I just wrote whatever- but after Wednesday when we went over our rough drafts I knew exactly what to do, I knew everything. And then I was just rolling Thursday before we had to turn it in Friday before our final.

But yeah, I did a lot of good showing. I did a lot of good, uh, I actually looked over my essay. I found some mistakes. I think I corrected pretty much all of them from revising and editing. Like I said, I did really good showing. I think I killed it this week on showing.

What I gotta look forward to is getting my rough draft how I want it- like I want my rough draft to be done- and not have to do *so* much to my draft because this past week, Week 10, I did, I changed my rough draft. My final draft was totally different than my rough draft. I changed so much.

So I need to work on that—have my rough draft be almost my final draft but with a few fixes so I can make it my final. But yeah, that's it, alright, goodnight.

Figure 1: Jake's Transcribed Audio Reflection

they don't know what they're working on, but Jake's reflection on his misunderstanding does inform his reflection on process. He eventually "killed it" on the final draft but acknowledges that it took him most of the week to get "rolling" since he didn't know what to do on the rough draft. In sharp contrast to a myopic focus on mistakes in a writing product (Hogue Smith), Jake's writing goals are clearly connected to more purposeful drafting.

Audio reflection as a metacognitive practice needs more research, but the possibilities of freeing students up to talk about their writing without the distraction of the writing itself is exciting. We've seen students like Jake elaborate, expand, and give so much more detail when they can speak rather than write their reflection. "Just saying it" seems to be a good metacognitive entrance point for improving writing.

While our students independently record their audio reflections after writing, other research has focused on how "talk alouds" during the composing process offer more detail about the thoughts and

challenges writers face as they write. Beck and her colleagues' work with TAP (Think-Aloud Protocol) isn't audio recorded since teachers are present, but it offers insight into how students use talking to their advantage during the writing process. When the researchers listened to students' think alouds, they noted that students included details that didn't appear in their writing. One of the teachers Beck interviewed found that her students talked about their arguments with a "consciousness of audience" not yet apparent in their writing. Such information, once leveraged, can support decision-making about kinds of evidence to include in an essay (78). In this sense, students are able to *do* more once verbal reflection accompanies other types of metacognitive work.

In the conference setting, Muriel Harris notes a similar dynamic when students reflect on their papers. Students verbalize editorial changes and speculate on changes. Here is how Harris describes such conferences:

> As some writers read aloud, they tend to editorialize ('*That sentence was too long*,' '*That's not exactly what I meant there*,' and so on), to note grammatical errors or usage problems … and sometimes to note possibilities for revision ('*This paragraph wasn't too clear. I should add something more about why I was so unhappy*'). (*Teaching* 45)

We, too, find students simultaneously reflecting on their writing and making revision plans when they record their reflections. For example, one of our students, Genessis, described her introduction to a short informative essay that explained possible careers connected to her major. The assignment emphasizes the importance of a clear, organized introduction. Genessis starts in positive terms: "*My introduction was good: I used a stable context and disruption, thesis statement and I clearly stated the three things that I was going to talk about*." But she paired it with a specific critique of how she introduced an athletic trainer's use of MRIs: "*I would tell myself to ask questions such as, for example, my MRI: I could have used it [the definition of an MRI] as an appositive instead of a separate sentence*." Although we can imagine

that Genessis might have commented on both issues if this reflection assignment were in written form, it's a sophisticated writing skill to position oneself in an editorial role, especially with a specific example. A struggling writer, for example, might avoid quoting themselves altogether because the attributive phrase, quotation, and commentary add up to a complicated sentence structure. In audio, Genessis could talk about the things she wants to change without worrying about how to write them correctly.

Even advanced writers say they can do more in spoken form. Teachers who give audio feedback on students' papers report increased detail when they speak as compared to when they write their comments (Edgington; Bauer; Kates). If teachers find audio recording helpful, perhaps it can be a useful tool for our students as well.

A Space to Try New Language and Skills

For some students audio reflection may offer a more inviting space to experiment with new vocabulary and skills. Students who fear the teacher's red pen or cringe at feedback that seems to discount the stories beneath writing errors may find that speaking about writing offers a temporary respite where ideas can shine and grammar only matters if it impedes the audience's understanding.

Reilly, the student writer whose partial audio reflection appears in Figure 2, plots a narrative that works perfectly in spoken prose but might not even make it to the page if she shies away from the writing complexity. This audio recording took place after a research paper with multiple sources. The grading criteria included a conclusion with a call to action or an illustration of what's at stake. Verbally, she nails the metacognitive goal: to analyze her learning process.

Reilly's reasoning, which she divides into two numbered phrases, sounds natural when spoken but may have tripped her up if she worried about the correctness of writing out the number or how to punctuate it. Of course we can't claim for certain how Reilly would have responded in writing, but after years of reading written reflections that default to simplicity, the clarity and complexity offered by recorded voice is a breath of fresh air.

Perhaps some students can sound more like themselves in audio

What we did was, I was always bad at writing conclusions. And with the conclusion worksheet we had in our handout, I think that helped me to write my conclusion because in high school we were always taught to summarize: "summarize what you said." It was a little bit of a struggle for me because one, that was the easy way out and two, it was the way I was taught.

Figure 2: An Excerpt from Reilly's Transcribed Audio Reflection

reflection because the stakes are lower. After all, spoken word makes it easier to group terms in ways that are difficult to do on the written page. For example, one student used each of the following terms to describe her work on external transitions: *flowed*, *connected*, *transitioned*, *related*, *told the reader*. Maybe it doesn't seem necessary that she repeated the same idea several times, but we wonder if her language play gave her a chance to try out different understandings or somehow made her more comfortable.

Even students who can find their voice in narrative assignments can still struggle to project their personality into discussions about writing itself. The next excerpt, another audio reflection from Jake, showcases style in ways we rarely observed in his written metacognitive work (see Figure 3). The transcription doesn't capture his drawn out words, range of volume, and varied tones. He is reflecting on a newly-submitted research paper which required third-person pronoun use and at least three cited sources. The assignment and grading rubric emphasized the importance of transitions that show the reader how ideas and paragraphs connect.

As teachers, we read so many papers that the simple change in mode is already refreshing. As we toggle back and forth between Jake's recording and this transcription, we're amazed at the breadth of emotion he is able to convey in speech. Although it may seem harsh in written form, Jake changes his voice to high-pitched and silly when he says, "*Oh, no, I don't get it, but I just have to throw another comma in there and confuse everybody*!" His voice rings clear in ways we don't see when he writes about writing. Even as his writing teachers, we struggle with how he could convey the same emotion in writing. To adopt the good-humored self-criticism of a voice change is a sophisticated writing skill.

Well, um, I thought I really improved from last week's paper. I did a lot better on my mechanical errors, which I had a lot on my last paper because I didn't look over my paper last week a couple of times. And I actually looked over my paper this week. Uh, I think I did pretty well. I got a fifty-seven out of sixty. So I did pretty solid. I did a pretty solid job. But what I do need to do is get a little better on the *very* small things. Like in my citation, I had a little extra comma. Oh, no, I don't get it, but I just have to throw another comma in there and confuse everybody!

Of course third-person screws me over again. Just like last week. I don't know what it is about me but I just keep on just getting that four [points out of five] on third-person. I added *one*, I added, like, *one* "you." Mmmm, it's whatever . . . What I am going to do to get better for next week is, honestly, I need to hammer that third-person point of view thing. I need to get rid of that "you." That "you" is really driving me nuts, you know.

Ah, I do need to work on my external [transitions]. I did not ask how to do it. And I did not know how to do it. I do not know why I didn't ask. I *should* have just asked. But you know, it's whatever. So I need to get better on my external.

I need to work on my external which I'm pretty sure I'll get that done by next week. It's not that hard after [the teacher] talked to me about it.

Figure 3: Jake's Transcribed Audio Reflection

Students' ability to pause, backup, emphasize, celebrate, and vary tone in audio reflections is a delightful reminder of who our students are when they are unencumbered by written errors. Clearly our goal is that they can write with the clarity and complexity with which they speak. But for now, as they gain writing skill and confidence, audio reflection might be a helpful scaffold.

A New Classroom Practice

Like any new classroom practice, integrating recorded metacognition exercises takes some logistical consideration. From recording and submission protocols to IT capacity and teacher responses, audio reflection does include a shift from the ease of pen and paper. Still, most of the extra work is upfront. We think exploring the benefit of broader metacognitive access is worth the extra planning.

In whatever form we use, metacognition in the writing classroom shares the same goals. As Donald Murray puts it, we're "really teaching [our] students to react to their own work in such a way that they

write increasingly effective drafts" ("Listening" 16). Given its particular importance for struggling writers, multiple modes of metacognition deserve our attention. We need more research and practice that probes the edges of audio recordings' usefulness. As long as our students keep asking to "just talk about it," it's an idea worth exploring.

Works Cited

Bauer, Sara. "When I Stopped Writing on Their Papers: Accommodating the Needs of Student Writers with Audio Comments." *English Journal*, vol. 101, no. 2, Nov. 2011, pp. 64-67.

Baxa, Stephanie. "Enhancing Students' Understanding and Revision of Narrative Writing through Self-Assessment and Dialogue: A Qualitative Multi-Case Study." *The Qualitative Report*, vol. 20, no. 10, 26 Oct. 2015, pp. 1682-708.

Beck, Sarah W., Lorena Llosa, Kristin Black, and Alyssa Trzeszkowski-Giese. "Beyond the Rubric: Think Alouds for High School Writing Teachers." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, vol. 58, no. 8, March 2015, pp. 670-81.

Blau, Sheridan D. *The Literature Workshop: Teaching Texts and Their Readers*. Heinemann, 2003.

Diltz, Sr. Judith. "Words to Voice: Three Approaches for Student Self-Evaluation." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 34, no. 1, Sept. 2006, pp. 41-45.

Edgington, Anthony. "Focus on the Now: Making Time for Reflection-in-Action During Teacher Response." *Teaching English at the Two-Year College*, vol. 36, no. 4, May 2009, pp. 380-91.

Harris, Muriel. "Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors." *College English*, vol. 57, no. 1, Jan. 1995, pp. 27-42.

---. *Teaching One-on-One: The Writing Conference*. NCTE, 1986.

Hogue Smith, Cheryl. "'Diving in Deeper': Bringing Basic Writers' Thinking to the Surface." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, vol. 53, no. 8, May 2010, pp. 668-76.

Joseph, Nancy. "Metacognition Needed: Teaching Middle and High School Students to Develop Strategic Learning Skills." *Preventing School Failure*, vol. 54, no. 2, Aug. 2010, pp. 99-103.

Kates, Ronald. "Tape Recorders and the Commuter Student: Bypassing the Red Pen." *Teaching English at the Two-Year College*, vol. 25, no. 1, Feb. 1998, pp. 21-24.

Maxwell, Joseph A. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Sage, 2005.

McDonald, Betty. "Self Assessment for Understanding." *The Journal of Education*, vol. 188, no. 1, 2007, pp. 25-40.

Merriam, Sharan. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. Jossey-Bass, 2009.

Murray, Donald. "Teaching the Other Self." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 33, no. 2, May 1982, pp. 140-47.

---. "The Listening Eye: Reflections on the Writing Conference." *College English*, vol. 41, no. 1, Sept. 1979, pp. 13-18.

Nielsen, Kristen. "Self-assessment Methods in Writing Instruction: A Conceptual Framework, Successful Practices and Essential Strategies." *Journal of Research in Reading*, vol. 37, no. 1, July 2012, pp. 1-16.

Short, Kathy G., Gloria Kauffman, and Leslie H. Kahn. "'I Just *Need* to Draw': Responding to Literature Across Multiple Sign Systems." *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 54, no. 2, Oct. 2000, pp. 160-71.

Skeffington, Jillian K. "Enhancing Transfer from First-Year Composition: A Pedagogy of Shorter Essays." *Journal of Teaching Writing*, vol. 27 no. 2, 2012, pp. 27-45.

Stone, Douglas, and Sheila Heen. *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well*. Penguin Books, 2015.

Straub, Richard. "Teacher Response as Conversation: More than Casual Talk, an Exploration." *Teaching in Progress: Theories, Practices, and Scenarios*, edited by Josephine Koster Tarvers and Cynthia Moore, 3rd. ed., Longman, 2003, pp. 258-84.

COMIC CON(NECTION): ENVISAGING COMICS AS A MULTIMODAL ENSEMBLE THAT TEACHES CORE VISUAL WRITING

Robert Watkins

Having students produce their own comics in the classroom teaches a uniquely powerful form of multimodal production and analysis that I label *core visual writing*. Core visual writing combines visual and verbal paraphrasing, summarizing, and synthesizing—while incorporating the envisaging process of materiality and provenance (transferring materials from multiple modes)—into an ensemble that can be displayed in multiple media. My research project is an empirical classroom study that looks at the affordances found in teaching comics production as a way to teach students practical multimodal concepts.[1] My initial goal stemmed from helping students envisage a purely textual document into a multimodal product that combined visual, verbal, linguistic, and spatial modes through a simple production ensemble. I found comics to be a perfect fit for these goals and student responses verified this to some degree.

This paper looks at all the aspects that lead to my students' acquiring the concept of core visual writing. The literature review argues that comics function as a multimodal ensemble (as opposed to the more popular moniker *comics medium* or the problematic *comics genre*). The literature review also explains multimodal concepts that apply to comics as well as research that emphasizes production pedagogy. Then the paper discusses the study design, focusing on

the study parameters, reading list, and production schedule that informed the study. Next it covers core visual writing, which emerged from my coding of student responses. These are then analyzed to see what elements make teaching comics production unique to potentially benefit other instructors interested in teaching multimodal design in the classroom.

Literature Review

This literature review covers three major sections key to explaining why core visual writing matters. The first section introduces multimodality and how comics function as multimodal texts. The second section dives into multimodal theory that informs core visual writing and how my students envisaged their comics. The final section briefly addresses why having students produce comics instead of only using them as a literary primary text for analysis benefits students' multimodal understanding.

Comics as Multimodal Texts

Comic books have evolved since their modern inception,[2] but have been multimodal in nature since their beginning. Multimodality covers multiple concepts and the theory that informs it is expansive. For this brief discussion, I will cover only a few key concepts for my project: modes, media, and ensembles. These are the multimodal concepts that support the core visual writing (CVW) theme that my students discussed. The varied connections between comics and multimodality have been made in the *Composition Studies*' special issue on comics and could be of interest to the reader (Jacobs).

The key to understanding core visual writing lies in the namesake of multimodality: modes. What are modes? Simply put modes are "a way of communicating" (Arola et al. 3); modes are the things that enable the process of an idea transferring itself to the recipient. Modes are dependent on social and cultural norms and their meaning can vary depending on the reader. Will Gibson and Diane Mavers argue that modes depend on a combination of three Hallidayan criteria: the "subject matter," the constructed "social relations," and the textual coherence (MODE). Modes rarely exist

on their own, but are often combined, hence the term *multimodality*. The New London Group is often credited with the rise of the term *multimodality* in the 1990s, but Gene Lauer argues that the concept of multimodality can be found in composition scholarship since the 1970s under the moniker of multimedia (30). The New London Group focused on the concept of multiliteracies with its accompanying six modes (linguistic design, visual design, audio design, gestural design, spatial design, and multimodal design) of which multimodal "represents the patterns of interconnection among the other modes" (198). In 2018, when someone refers to multimodality they are likely referencing the interconnectedness of the first five multiliteracies (linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial design). Jeff Bezemer and Gunther Kress define modes as "socially and culturally shaped resources for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, speech, moving image are examples of modes, all used in learning resources" (237). Aside from moving images comics[3] incorporate all of these additional modes that Bezemer and Kress define. Because of this, multiliteracies are commonly only referred to as modes. Yet, one shouldn't confuse multimodality with new media (technology-based theory) since the five grammars (modes) can exist in both new and old technologies: "In a profound sense, all meaning-making is multimodal" (New London Group 201). While multimodality and new media often accompany each other, they aren't inseparable. Comics, for this reason, function nicely as multimodal texts that don't require new media.

Creators design modes to be consumed in a readable output, or a medium. The differences between genres, media, and modes can snag many newcomers. A genre usually indicates a mode/story/style that includes like elements that an audience recognizes as being similar (e.g., fiction, poetry, drama). This definition doesn't consider rhetorical genre, a theory that considers the "specific structure and content" of materials and synthesizes them together (Cline). In the rhetorical sense, comics can be considered a genre (in the sense that essays and tweets are "genres" due to their like structure); Dale Jacobs concedes this as well in his multimodal definition of comics (*Graphic* 5). However, in the traditional sense of the definition of

genre, calling comics a genre is problematic.[4] Instead comics seem more like a medium that houses multiple genres; however, comics aren't quite a medium either. Within multimodal communication, a medium usually refers to the material where modes are both amalgamated and consumed (such as a computer, a book, or a smartphone). Kress explains the interconnectedness among all of these terms, clarifying media in the process:

> I use the term "mode" for the culturally and socially produced resources for representation and "medium" as the term for the culturally produced means for distribution of these representations-as-meanings, that is, as messages. These technologies—those of representation, the modes, and those of dissemination, the media—are always both independent of and interdependent with each other. ("Gains" 284)

As in all things within multimodality, the interconnectedness of all objects and how social cues affect their interpretation must be considered.

If comics are multimodal, but neither the modes nor media define them, how should they be referenced? I argue for *multimodal ensemble*, or the comics ensemble. An ensemble, which like much of multimodal phraseology stems from musical concepts, refers to "representations or communications that consist of more than one mode, brought together not randomly but with a view to collective and interrelated meaning" (MODE). Readers consume comics on multiple media (e.g., in glossy magazines, in books, or on digital devices like phones, tablets, and computers), so naming the ensemble *the comics medium* is problematic. And since comics have multiple modes (namely spatial, linguistic, gestural, and visual as defined by The New London Group), they are indeed a multimodal text. Since the combinations of the modes are intentional and often done in a similar fashion despite disparate literary genres (although the format itself could be considered genre-based in nature), the most appropriate terminology would be the *comics ensemble*. However, there is room for improvement on this phrase since its initial meaning

won't be clear to outside readers who might interpret the phrase *comics ensemble* as a collection of comedians. Yet it will serve our purpose here. That said, within comics studies scholars often refer to it as the comics medium.

Turning to art vocabulary clarifies the concept a bit more: artists use different media to create their message (such as oil on canvas—both would be considered media). However, the product could rely on multiple modes (like gestural, spatial, and linguistic for example) to express any art genre. The three differ but are interrelated. Let's look at Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* as an example. The media used were oil on wood. The modes used were gestural (the smile), spatial (how Mona Lisa juxtaposes with the background, her body positioning, the horizon, etc.), and visual (the use of sfumato among other artistic techniques). The genre chosen was a portrait.

Multimodal Concepts that Inform Core Visual Writing

I coined the phrase *core visual writing* when I began to notice a trend among my students' responses referring to multimodal concepts. While core visual writing could go by other names, it is essentially learning to paraphrase, summarize, or nutshell both textually and visually while focusing on the message's layout and juxtaposition. Essentially, it was students unknowingly describing the affordances of modes, materiality, and provenance as well as the layout of their document. It also shares some elements with remediation techniques (see J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin) and recomposing (see Steve Moline); however, it's not entirely in line with remediation because remediation often indicates that the earlier mode lacked something that the newer mode fixed. As students repurposed their argument from an essay to a comic, they learned to take a larger message and shrink it into a condensed version while also converting an alphabetic literacy into a multimodal one using both new and old media.

Multimodality doesn't infuse texts with automatic exceptionality. Instead, one must evaluate whether the modes working together benefit the readability of the message. Each design mode offers different capacities, advantages, and disadvantages in their meaning-

making—these "poten-tials and constraints" are known as *affordances* (Bezemer and Kress 237). Kress labels these affordances as "distinct potentials and limitations for representation of the various modes" ("Gains" 290). Anne Wysocki simplifies this concept by saying that affordances seek to understand what modes make possible and how they shape "the actions of others" (306–07). Diane Mavers and Martin Oliver argue that the possibilities and impossibilities of using a mode for communication are always offset by the changing social norms and conventions (MODE). I was curious what affordances comics production offered my students compared to other writing/design assignments that had similar goals and how the stereotypes of comics impacted students' learning.

A large part of affordances, and multimodality in general, refers to the concept of provenance and materiality. Provenance can be defined as how a particular mode is imported from one context to another or "by what it has been repeatedly used to mean and do" (MODE). Kristian Tungol paraphrases Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen on provenance: "This concept of 'importing' one context into another allows people to signify ideas and values associated with that other context by those who do the importing." In order to use multiple modes within media, the producer (or writer) must grapple with materiality. Materiality refers to the decisions of a producer about which modes they incorporated to meet the communicative deficit they were addressing; Sara Price et al. explain: "modes are taken to be the product of the work of social agents shaping material, physical 'stuff' into meaningful stuff" (MODE). Bezemer and Kress define materiality as "the ability to 'move' the semiotic material or content of a textual entity from one mode or modal ensemble to another" (241). As instructors, we should consider what materiality best complements the rhetorical situation we assign. When students both consider these elements and synthesize the modes into an ensemble that has meaning for both them and their readers, they are invoking materiality. Provence and materiality work hand-in-hand to clarify affordances. Since the three are nouns, it becomes a bit cumbersome to explain them in writing; because of this, I use the verb *envisage* to refer to the three when I discuss them in this

essay. I chose the verb *envisage* due to its uniqueness and because it means looking forward to an imagined possibility while considering an object—or concept—with social cues applied to it. I am adding the idea that *envisage* could also mean producing the imagined possibility into an object understood by receivers.

While layout isn't considered a canonical mode by all, many scholars (including Kress) see it as one. Whether it's a traditional mode or not, having students understand layout and how juxtaposing images and words next to each other effects understanding became an important lesson in this unit. Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*[5] expertly describes gutters, panels, and how we interpret these devices. Layout was a major portion of students' decision making, and I included the following in the assignment description: "Make sure the visuals have been employed with care and in a way that shows you have given thought to how to best convey your argument."[6] Layout ended up playing a significant role in core visual writing and how students designed their comics.

In multimodal scholarship, the term *design* is often used as a synonym for composition, document creation, or writing. Lauer argues that using *design* allows the word *composition* to both become a verb and broaden its traditional, alphanumeric meaning to include all modes of writing (34). Bezemer and Kress define *design* as "principles of composition" (233). This distinction matters within multimodality because as new writing strategies appear with new technology, it's "increasingly difficult to categorize writing in terms of the old, familiar modes" (Lunsford 65–66). The New London Group assert that "All written text is also visually designed" (201). Therefore, when referring to the modes of writing as design, it's important for the reader to not confuse it with the traditional, visually centered meaning of design—but as a combination of the visual, spatial, linguistic, audio, and gestural meanings of multimodal design. When students design, they become producers.

Producing Multimodal Texts

Typically, comics studies[7] research theorizes that reading comics can aid students in understanding advanced topics (see Talon, Heer

and Worcester, McGrath, Hosler, etc.). My argument goes beyond having students read comics in the classroom (although I promote that as well) to having students produce their own comics. Comics production has also been explored (see Morrison et al.; Comer; and Burg), yet much of it covers pre-collegiate students or an instructor's analysis of students' work without input from the students. In comics studies the vast majority of research lies in analyzing specific comics according to the paradigms of each academic tradition and arguing for comics' inclusion in both the classroom and as primary texts worth studying. Writing studies often treats comics similarly: as a tool for analysis or as an additional canonical text to explore (many rely on the quasi-canon of *Maus*, *Persepolis*, *Fun Home*, *100 Demons*, a myriad of graphic memoirs, and the occasional Alan Moore or Chris Ware sprinkled on top). To clarify, when I say comics analysis, I mean making rhetorical, or other analytical, arguments using comics as the primary text. There is absolutely nothing wrong with comics analysis.[8] What I sought to do in my research was make students producers of comics. When I say comics production, I refer to students composing (i.e., drawing, creating, juxtaposing) their own comics and not just writing about comics. However, since many of my students were unfamiliar with the ensemble of comics (and multimodal composition in general), I also introduced them to comics through a specific sequence of exemplar comics (detailed in the reading section and Appendix A). Students focused on analysis and ways to transfer what they learned from the professional comics to their own production. Other scholars have focused on moving beyond analysis in comics studies and their work makes up the bulk of this section.

Having students envisage and create comics to teach similar concepts to core visual writing has been explored by other authors as well. Jerome Burg has students summarize literature readings by creating comic reports (qtd. in Burmark 12). Lynell Burmark says this concept functions because comic books "are restricted to only a very few 'cells' and to very abbreviated dialogue" which forces students to amalgamate broader elements into their "essence" (14). Timothy G. Morrison et al. write: "Constructing a comic book requires students to determine what is most important from their readings,

to re-phrase it succinctly, and then to organize it logically" (760). While not explicitly mentioning it, they are referencing materiality, provenance, and what I labeled core visual writing. While their findings, and the story-retelling strategy, are aimed at primary students—these results indicate that a similar approach may benefit post-secondary students as well. In either case, students worked on creating core visual writing through the comics ensemble.

Convincing students to produce comics may not be as difficult as encouraging unwilling instructors to experiment. Yet, having students envisage their writing through comics production can be rooted in firm theory. Diana George speaks to the reluctance of instructors to make students producers in various media. She writes that we rarely encourage students to move from visual critics to being visual producers (213). She worries that while the profession would be comfortable with students studying visuals (such as comics), producing them makes many feel uncomfortable: "As a tool for literacy instruction … visual media [is] little more than a prompt for student essays and stories, a substitute for more traditional literary forms, or a subject of scrutiny" (216). Richard Marback combines George's argument with James Berlin's work from the 80s to encourage students to engage in design and production (259–61). While using comics as a hermeneutic tool creates effective pedagogy, I wanted to follow George's production technique.

Comics can be read in print or in digital form (in a book, a magazine, a newspaper, a poster, as well as on a computer, a tablet, and a smartphone), and can be used on both expensive and inexpensive media. Comics combine text, visuals, language, and spatial placement (as well as materiality, provenance, and layout) in sophisticated ways that are still being explored. It also offers unique mode affordances—like the intuitive way it represents gestural cues through visual caricatures done in a sequence where readers seem to be able to interpret gestures and expressions with little difficulty. Comics show facial expressions and gestures in visual ways that cannot be done as effectively in pure text due to the abstract quality of alphanumeric modes. While a gesture could be represented

in a single image, portraying a wide range of gestures in single images becomes much more cumbersome. The most effective way to represent the sufficient number of gestures in single images would be to turn the images into a still-frame cinematic mode—which happens to be a synonym for comics. Jacobs solidifies this with his emphasis that comics combine "visual, gestural, and spatial elements" effortlessly and the modes cannot stand alone but must be interpreted together (*Graphic* 6–15). Comics visually display gestures while also using graphical representations of speech and facial features. They also use traditional writing with more progressive design than a traditional mode. While traditional writing can also add graphics, they're rarely more than a graphical representation of the written word. At times the graphics complement the text, but they don't often work together like they do in comics. The multimodal strength of comics contributed to my assigning them for my students to read and to produce.

The Study: Design and Methods

My project was not a traditional multimodal course, as *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects* outlines, where I taught linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, spatial, and linguistic modes as concepts to my students (Arola et al. 4). Aside from reading some McCloud, students didn't engage in these conversations about definition and theory. At the time, I didn't find it necessary for students to explicitly understand this terminology, but upon reflection I see value in teaching multimodal concepts (like the ones mentioned in the literature review). Teaching students to analyze and produce comics in order for them to understand multimodality was my goal at the time, but I wasn't clear which concepts would stick in students' minds. Once I identified core visual writing as the most significant result from students, I retroactively organized the key concepts previously mentioned. If I were to do this experiment again, I would lead with some of the multimodal vocabulary to help students have reference points to what they were creating. When I did my initial research I was concerned that the inundation of a new ensemble (comics) and vocabulary (multimodal concepts) would drown students. I'm not sure that would be the case. An argument

could be made that having students envisage their argument in multiple ensembles and modes did the work of teaching them the vocabulary in a hands-on fashion. Still, giving language to the moves they naturally stumbled on could have strengthened their understanding.

Because of this, my research isn't interested in analyzing students' final comics results for emerging themes as is sometimes done but seeks to give students a voice. An article that triangulated analysis of student work based on criteria (preferably by third-party researchers not involved in the teaching) along with coding of student responses would be useful in future studies.

Study Parameters

This section explains the parameters of the study, including the university and class details as well as the questionnaire and its distribution. Then I will look at the content taught in the course including the reading list and the production schedule. Iowa State University, a Carnegie-designated, very high research active university, rests among trees and landscaped lawns in Ames, Iowa—population around 60,000. This study was done in Spring 2011 in two composition classes with the same class schedule. It was a precursor to a similar study I performed in the technical communication classroom that would later become my dissertation. The total number of students in my study was 47, and only 33 students participated in the survey. The majority of students were primarily white, mid-western American students with an equal number of male and female participants. A few international students also populated my courses, the majority coming from China. The class met twice a week, one class in a regular classroom (with smart technology available) and one in a computer lab.

At the end of the semester, after both the analysis and design of comics had been completed, while stationed in the computer lab, students were issued an IRB-approved questionnaire that they had the option to either answer or ignore. Students were given ten open-ended questions in a Word file (see Figure 1). I left the room after administering the surveys. Students typed their responses, printed them, and turned in both a signed release form and their completed

questionnaires in different piles. A volunteer student stuffed the piles into an envelope while I was out of the room. Because of these steps, the answers remained anonymous. Before coding the questionnaires, I kept them stored in my work desk inside my office. The pages are identical and none of them have details that reveal the writers' identities.

Class Content and Schedule

My approach for teaching comics production was to have students change the materiality of their argumentative essay done earlier in the semester into an argumentative comic strip. In order for students to produce comics, I needed to introduce them to the comics ensemble and help them transfer concepts they gained reading comics and apply them toward their final production. This is evident by looking at questions one, two, seven, and eight from the questionnaire (see Figure 1). Before introducing comics, the course had covered traditional, argumentative research essays as covered in the textbook *Aims of Argument*. As part of the Department of English, ISUCOMM teaches composition courses based in a WOVE approach (meaning written, oral, visual, and electronic communication with its basis stemming from multimodality). In the program, a reasonable amount of time needed to be dedicated to all four branches of these types of communication. This assignment was experimental in nature (but covered the W-V-E- of WOVE); I didn't want it to take away from the major course assignments (which ranged from analysis and argument to evaluation and presentations) so I taught it as an additional unit. This meant spending less time on all assignments and giving students an additional assignment of comics. However, students didn't seem to mind being on a rushed schedule and doing extra work since studying comics seemed to some of them like they were getting away with something.[9] They created a traditional alphanumeric essay and received feedback from me. Then we stepped away from the alphanumeric form and students envisaged their comics. In order to do this, I used progymnasmata[10] to teach students how to read and write comics in incremental steps.

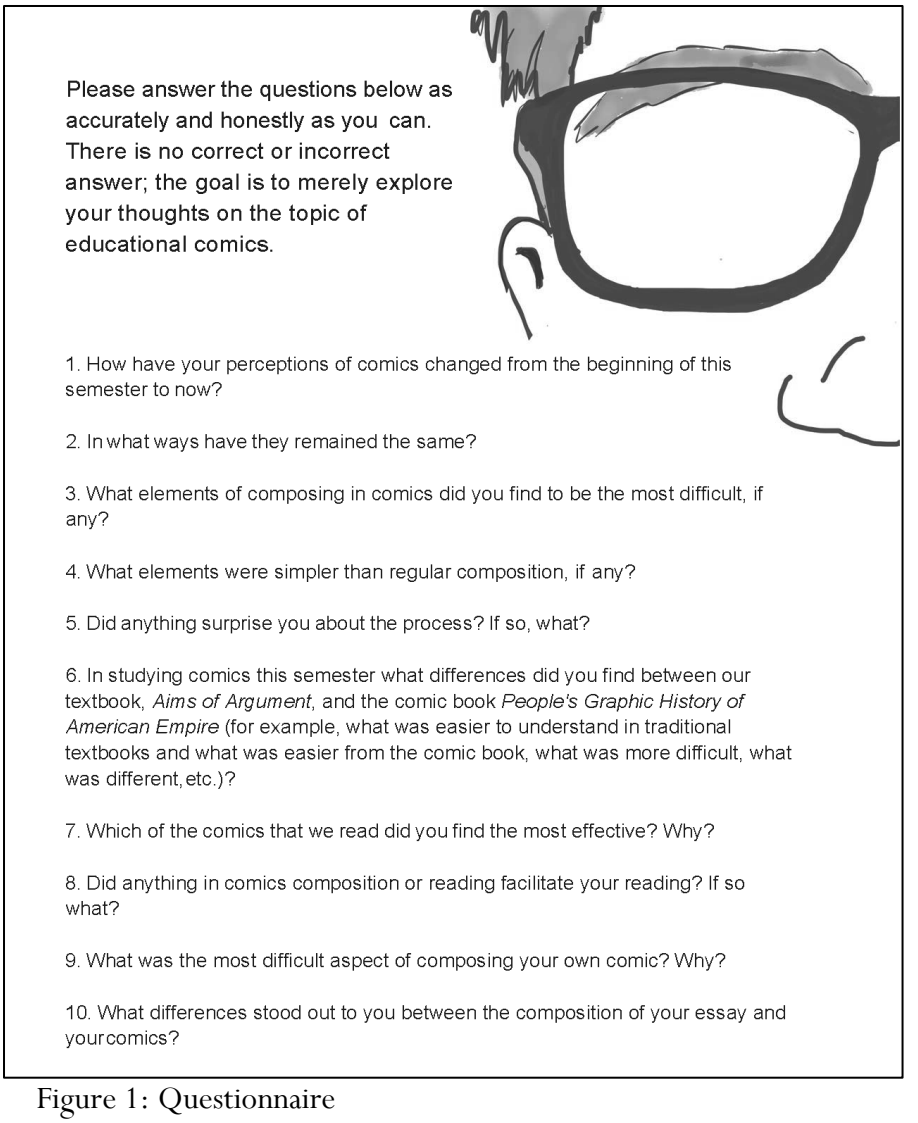

Figure 1: Questionnaire

Reading Comics in the Classroom

Students often came into the classroom with preconceived notions of what comics are. These notions were closer to prejudices than realities. But these notions matter when considering comics' affordances. While some students were familiar with comics—with a stray student or two being avid consumers—most were unfamiliar with the ensemble (aside from having read a few webcomics or

newspaper cartoons). I had them read familiar comics examples first and then we scaffolded into more complicated material from there. Engaging in production was my end goal, but in order for students to envisage a complete comic, they had to read comics and learn about the ensemble.

After justifying the pedagogical strengths of producing comics instead of just analyzing them, it may seem odd how much time I spent having students read. Part of this can be found in Jacobs' justification in his extensive comics pedagogy: "I want to advance two ideas: (1) reading comics involves a complex, multimodal literacy; and (2) by using comics in our classrooms, we can help students develop as critical and engaged readers of multimodal texts" ("More" 19). Before students can produce, they need to understand the genres, ensembles, and mediums they would be creating. Another study found something similar to mine. It had students produce multimodal texts from traditional essays; students were given pre- and post-questionnaires about what affordances were gained composing in multimodality. Their coded results share some similarities to my students' responses (the consensus was the multimodality improved some layering and appeals but weakened thesis clarity) (Kara Poe Alexander et al.). The lack of a combination of multimodal reading and production in the study partly informed my decision to rely heavily on reading even when my final results focused more on production. That said, my initial questioning still explored reading affordances, but I just didn't cover them much here because the codes mostly reaffirmed previous research that reading comics affords certain learning skills (see Talon, Heer and Worcester, McGrath, Hosler, etc.).

What follows is an abbreviated version of the assigned readings and my justification for them. For a detailed listing, the reader can turn to Appendix A. On the first day of the comics unit, I introduced students to various webcomics and traditional newspaper gag strips and comic strips. I began with comics students might have been familiar with and moved into less familiar examples. I also showed them that not all comics have to be humorous, something many students believed before our unit. For homework, students read a

longer comic at home. The next reading was a full-length graphic novel. For this assignment I used Gene Luen Yang's 2006 National Book Award nominee *American Born Chinese*. After this, students read portions of McCloud's *Understanding Comics* to introduce them to comics vocabulary and functionality. The final reading was *A People's History of American Empire*, a graphic adaptation of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of United States* by Mike Konopacki and Paul Buhle. In each step of reading, we analyzed the material through multimodal approaches (but not with specific vocabulary) and discussed how this knowledge would benefit their own creations. Students began producing their own comics while we finished the reading section.

Producing Comics in the Classroom

While learning to analyze comics as a medium, students began adapting their own alphabetic essays into comics. Their first step was to write a purely alphabetic text script, which they began while we were in the reading phase of studying comics. In order for them to do this, they had to imagine a visual representation of their argument. They weren't just presenting their argument in alphabetic text but discovering ways to add narrative and visual transitions to a nonfiction essay. Would they add a narrator like McCloud? Would they have an omniscient presence tell the story through caption boxes like Rick Geary or *Hip-Hop Family Tree*? Would they create a story that captured the essence of the argument? How were they going to cite their claims both visually and textually? How were they going to design and choose graphics that matched and juxtaposed their text? Additionally, they had to find the essence of their argument and create a much more condensed version (core visual writing). This isn't to say that comics need to be condensed. Students had seen that long-form fiction and nonfiction comics exist. However, we were limited with a finite amount of time and experience. In order to accomplish the assignment's goals, they needed to create panels for around three pages' worth of work. In the assignment description, I asked them to consider some of the following: What elements of my argument are the most essential and how will I include them in my comics? How am I going to turn this abstract argument into a more coherent story? What images should

I choose to represent my ideas and why will I choose those images? What will my audience expect? How is this different from the audience for my original essay? How will I keep visual and textual grammar on a college level? How will I have the visuals be representative of my topic and relate to the overall argument?

In order to describe the genre of script to students I focused on advice given by script writer Tim Mucci on his website *timmucci.com*. We looked at how the genre of script-writing worked, going over the conventions and expectations. However, the goal here wasn't to make them expert scriptwriters but to help them move their textual argument into another textual medium that combined their previously written work with their visual ideas. Working with the more familiar alphanumeric text of the script was a buffer to make the visuals less intimidating (see Appendix B for the assignment description).

The steps to produce the artistic side of things began with students' hand-drawing their drafts during class and at home. Next, I introduced them to various free software for approaches to design while also emphasizing that the medium they chose to present their comics didn't matter for the final assignment.[11] For the final step, they applied the analytical framework they'd learned from studying comics, the information they'd discussed about essays, and the feedback they'd gotten from me and their peers on the script and designed their own comics. It's important to note that both the design element and the reading analysis element overlapped for the script, but the focus on the production occupied the last week of the unit.

The comics I received from students ranged from professional to amateur, but I delighted in reading them all. Some students engaged heavily in new media, scanning their hand-drawn comics and digitizing them before creating a formatted comic with multiple panels. Some combined the two, often leaning heavily on older technology. Others used the avatar websites available online making their whole comic digital (albeit a bit flat in execution). Others used hand-drawn comics. The artistic ability of some students was truly impressive, while others did the best they could with lines and stick-figure drawings. Execution of narrative, argument, and juxtaposition of text and visuals also

varied in effectiveness. Some students relied mostly on photographs and created a montage of photographs to create a photo-essay comic. To students' relief, I evaluated their comics on their process and application of criteria more than on any artistic ability. I relied on Thomas Wolsey's comics pedagogical tools where he recommends grading on the process more than the finished product (127). While analyzing their comics would be fun, I was more curious about their own perception of the process. Additionally, I didn't consider that analyzing their finished products might be useful when I created the IRB approval, so I neither got permission nor access to their finished products.

Results and Analysis

Upon completing my classroom study, I had many questionnaire responses that I needed to make sense of—so I turned to coding. My research lies under the categorization of qualitative empirical research because my research question was best understood by collecting "diverse data" from human beings (Creswell 18). Since objectivity and qualitative aren't exactly synonyms, I had to rely on what Juliet Corbin and Anslem Strauss label as "subtle clues" in my results to create themes to answer my research questions (27). This concept, referred to as sensitivity, relies heavily on the researcher's previous hunches as well as careful analysis of collected data (Corbin and Strauss 41). Research is a mixture of art and science and more than one story can emerge from data (Corbin and Strauss 50). While this approach has problems, it's important to note that qualitative studies justify such an approach, which is what I'm attempting with this study (Corbin and Strauss 42). While the coding I did was heuristic (as Saldaña suggests, 8), my questions originated from a hypothesis that producing comics could help students understand multimodal concepts, not from probing students and looking for the emerging story. While many interesting themes emerged as I coded, I focused only on those that fit my initial goal of teaching core visual writing concepts. The other codes were interesting to me (and some reaffirmed previously established support for reading comics), but they neither add to the conversation on core visual writing in

multimodality nor contradict the results I present next. Additionally, I analyzed the number of responses that corresponded with core visual writing and the overall usefulness of reading and producing comics as well as the unique pedagogical affordances comics offer.

Core Visual Writing

As I defined earlier, core visual writing combines visual and verbal paraphrasing, summarizing, and synthesizing—while incorporating the envisaging process of materiality and provenance (transferring materials from multiple modes)—into an ensemble that can be displayed in multiple media. The responses that I placed into this category varied and covered differing aspects of that definition.

For five students, the idea of cutting the word count was the most difficult aspect of core visual writing. One student writes, *"It was hard to take so much text and cut it down significantly, while still incorporating my whole idea."* Another student adds a similar response: *"taking a big document like an essay and boiling it down into like maybe a couple hundred words"* was the most challenging aspect. A third student agreed, indicating the difficulty *"was in saying what you want to in such limited space."* A fourth student adds that the challenge was in *"present[ing] small amounts of information in a given box and not everything that you wanted to say."* Cutting the word count helped students envisage comics and aided their core visual writing and general writing skills.

Two students struggled with trimming their previous writings in the core visual writing process. One student writes that one of the most difficult parts of compiling the comic was "*deciding what to put in the comic and what to leave out because you have to rip apart your paper and decide what isn't as important*." This student adds that cutting isn't just about deciding what to delete, but in making sure the remaining sections make sense: "*You also have to make sure the pieces that you take make sense without the rest of the information and still flow nicely*." A second student had a similar response but was also focused on the visualizing process: "*While making my comic from my essay, I had to cut out some parts, and I had to choose which important parts to visualize*." These challenges mirror Jerome Burg's classroom activities

of having students create comics to adapt their knowledge into their "essence" (Burmark 14). But as one student warns about visuals: "*The visual part and the limitations on text content were very frustrating.*" These students grappled with affordances, materiality, and provenance to make core visual writing.

The core visual writing process wasn't a challenge for all students with at least four students appreciating the approach. One student writes, "*It was nice to just get to the point in the comics and not have to worry about all the fancy jargon that goes into writing a paper.*" A second student expressed surprise at "*just how fast and easy it was. I was able to pick out the main points of my essay and decide which ones needed to go into my comic and which ones could be left out.*" A third student writes about the difficulty in adaptation: it was difficult "*deciding what to put in the comic and what to leave out and it is somewhat time consuming to actually draw a comic but not exactly difficult.*" A fourth student seemed to appreciate the multimodal aspect of comics: "*Complex ideas that would normally require multiple sentences to explain could sometimes be expressed with a picture and a caption or text dialogue.*" While this can be taught with other formats, teaching comics production forces students to find the essence of their argument while focusing on how each academic move affects the whole article, while also infusing a visual narrative.

Analysis by the Numbers

To put some of these themes in context, it may help to have some overall numbers and comparisons. While I focused on the students' responses in the results, a numerical analysis might help the reader put them in context. I will cover the numbers involved in core visual writing and the overall numbers of students' opinions on whether comics aided reading or writing in any way.

Overall, of the 33 students that responded, at least 18 individual students raised a concern, offered praise, or discussed what could be defined as core visual writing. This meant that fifty-four percent of students who responded commented on the skillset I labeled core visual writing. This tied into my goal of teaching visual, verbal, linguistic, and spatial modes through a simple production ensemble.

The concept of core visual writing was coined after the coding so students weren't prodded to respond to this subject aside from the potential of it naturally having occurred in classroom discussions.

While I didn't explicitly ask a question that could result in quantitative data of how students perceived their learning with a positive, neutral, or negative response, I instead gathered general cues and responses from the 33 respondents to gauge whether comics production and reading aided their learning. What I primarily looked for were sentences that indicated either a positive or negative reaction to the reading of comics as well as the students envisaging their final document through the production of comics. If the responses seemed to fall somewhere in the middle or were more observational in tone I marked them as neutral. While a different researcher might observe the data and reach different conclusions, I was conservative in my assessment and I imagine the interpretations wouldn't differ by much.

Overall, the results are quite positive with only a small number reacting negatively, as shown in Figure 2. For the subject of comics helping students with writing in some fashion, 20 of the 33 responses could be considered positive (60%), 11 neutral (around 33%), and only two negative (6%). If I combine the neutral with the positive and label it as *students not having a negative reaction to writing-in-comics*, 93% of those who responded would fit into that category. For reading, 25 of 33 (75%) found the experience positive, seven were neutral (21%) and only one was negative (3%). This means that 32 (96%) could be labeled as *students not having a negative reaction to reading-in-comics*.

Conclusion

Comic production teaches multimodal concepts to students without requiring extensive technical knowledge, access to hardware/software, or excessive time in a typical semester. Judging by students' responses, they gained valuable skills from reading comics and learned multimodal skills without having to delve into theory. While these responses represent only a portion of those gathered from the questionnaires, they help illustrate how core visual writing helps students learn multimodality. Core visual writing techniques can be taught by other

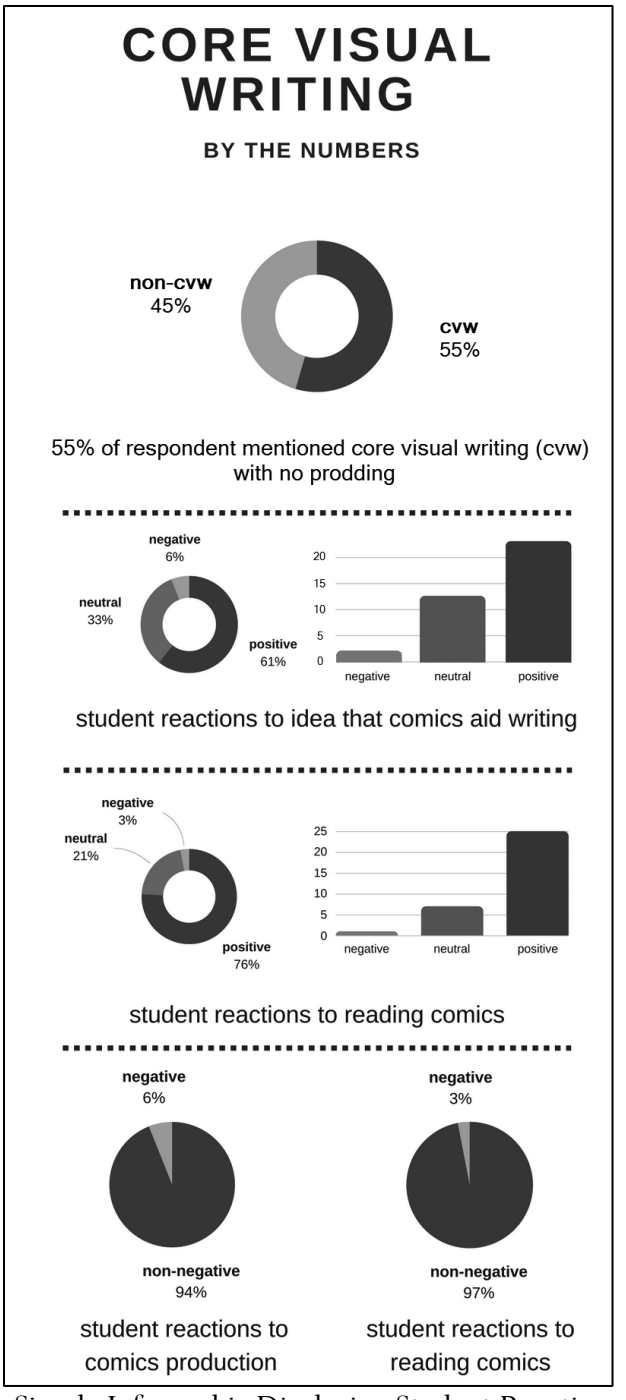

Figure 2: Simple Infographic Displaying Student Reactions

assignments, but comic production adds mandatory concise writing, multi- modal revision skills, and a process that curbs plagiarism—skills which may be unique to the medium. Panels limit the amount of text, and students have to plan at every stage to adapt their message both visually and textually. Multimodal revision skills and materiality engagement appear due to multiple adaptations of students' own work at varying stages and in multiple media. Plagiarism curbing occurs due to the rarity of composition comics available on the internet as well as the three-step process of writing (essay, script, comic), thus making it next-to-impossible for students to plagiarize this assignment.

Comics production seems to be an effective format for teaching students multimodal acquisition while they learn valuable writing skills. I hope that this research can begin to offset what Rolf T. Wigand argues about comics scholarship sometimes being "spotty," dated, primarily anecdotal, and lacking sophisticated social science research (30, 56). While this study was a qualitative classroom study and not based in social science, it is a step toward quantifying how comics production informs learning. This study demonstrates that comics production does afford at least some multimodal design lessons. Perhaps a praxis-approached application of this research would be to teach comics production and reading in the classroom while supplementing it with multimodal theory. It would be interesting to see if students' understanding of the principles would be more heightened than doing either alone. This study could expand in multiple directions: a broader student population size, a control class being taught visual rhetoric without comics, expanding the reading list (many options for this exist), and doing specific comparative readability testing on particular comics come to mind. I'm excited to see how comics production will continue to be used in the classroom and to watch what directions it will take.

Notes

[1]This study offshoots from my dissertation (available at: https://search.proquest.com/docview/1627787066?pq-origsite=gscholar) and includes some of its justification.

[2]A long debate over what comics are, when they first appeared, and what separates a comic from other art forms exists.
[3]Digital media have begun to change this, though, as many web comics have experimented with movement.

[4]Comics as a genre is particularly troublesome because some label superhero movies "comic book movies" as if the two were synonyms. While superheroes are one of the most popular genres (or subgenres) of comic books, comics actually cover many literary genres ranging from gag strips to complex nonfiction dissertations (see Matt Madden's *99 Ways to Tell a Story* for a great demonstration of genre in comics). This theme, or at least readers' surprise that comics and superheroes aren't synonyms, appeared in my students' responses as well. In many ways, this is an affordance concern of comics since people bring in their preconceived notions of what comics are whenever they discuss them. My students responded to this frequently in their questionnaires, mostly in their surprise to learn comics weren't just superheroes and jokes.

[5]*Understanding Comics* often unites the comics studies movement as a quasi ur-text. For those unfamiliar, it's a comic book that discusses how comic books work, delving into philosophy, visual literacy, and rhetoric—among other elements. Famed business author Daniel H. Pink recommends everyone read it and calls it a masterpiece (127).

[6]If the reader is interested in the entire assignment descriptions (warts and all), I've included them (the script and comics) in their entirety in Appendix B.

[7]Comics studies isn't a unified field like the name might imply. Instead, it spans disciplines and departments all with disparate approaches and goals. The only real unifying aspect is using comics as either a primary text or, as in this study, a means of production.

[8]Stephanie Vie and Brandy Dieterle published an exemplar of this approach that includes a helpful literature review of comics studies within writing studies and culminates in a multimodal, critical-analysis assignment scaffolding in "Minding the Gap: Comics as Scaffolding for Critical Literacy Skills in the Classroom."

[9]This language stems from general student comments.

[10]Progymnasmata is an ancient rhetorical practice, championed by Quintilian, that teaches rhetorical exercises in a specific order where each new activity scaffolds upon the previous. The idea is that students begin with the rhetorically familiar and graduate by mastering the rhetorically strange.

[11]The software ranged from the complex InDesign (to use this usually meant students would hand-draw their art, scan it, digitize it, and then organize it in Adobe's open-

ended design software, often relying on Adobe's month-long, free trial) and ComicLife (a software, also available in a one-month free trial, that offers comic page and panel placement templates that allow photo-comics, digitized drawings, or online drawings to be placed into pages and speech bubbles to be added) to Pixton (a webpage which allows users to draw on stock backgrounds and avatar designs that they can manipulate to perform actions from their script), and others like Pixton (such as ToonDoo).

Works Cited

Alexander, Kara Poe, Beth Powell, and Sonya C. Green. "Understanding Modal Affordances: Student Perceptions of Potentials and Limitations in Multimodal Composition." *Basic Writing eJournal*, vol. 10, no. 11.1, 2011, bwe.ccny.cuny.edu/alexandermodalaffordances.html. Accessed 25 Jul. 2017.

Arola, Kristin L., Jennifer Sheppard, and Cheryl E. Ball. *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014.

Berlin, James. "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." *College English*, vol. 50, no. 5, Sep 1988, pp. 477–94.

Bezemer, Jeff, and Gunther Kruss. "Writing in Multimodal Texts: A Social Semiotic Account of Designs for Learning." *Multimodal Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*, edited by Claire Lutkewitte, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014, pp. 233–57.

Bolter, Jay D., and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. The MIT Press, 1999.

Burmark, Lynell. "Visual Literacy: What You Get Is What You See." *Teaching Visual Literacy: Using Comic Books, Graphic Novels, Anime, Cartoons, and More to Develop Comprehension and Thinking Skill*, edited by Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher, Corwin Press, 2008, pp. 5–25.

Cline, Andrew R. "Genre." *Rhetorica*. The Rhetorica Network, rhetorica.net/genre. Accessed 9 Aug. 2017.

Comer, Kathryn. "Illustrating Praxis: Comic Composition, Narrative Rhetoric, And Critical Multiliteracies." *Composition Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2015, pp. 75–104. Academic Search Complete. Accessed 23 Nov. 2015.

Corbin, Juliet, and Anselm Strauss. *Basics of Qualitative Research*. Sage Publishing, 2007.

Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage Publishing, 2008.

George, Diana. "From Analysis to Design: Visual Communication in the Teaching of Writing." *Multimodal Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*, edited by Claire Lutkewitte, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014, pp. 211–32.

Jacobs, Dale. *Graphic Encounters: Comics and the Sponsorship of Multimodal Literacy*. Bloomsbury Publishing Pic, 2013.

---. "More than Words: Comics as a Means of Teaching Multiple Literacies." *The English Journal*, vol. 96, no. 3, January 2007, pp. 19–25.
---. Editor. Special Issue on Comics, Multimodality, and Composition. *Composition Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1, Spring 2015.
Kress, Gunther. "Gains and Losses: New Forms of Texts, Knowledge, and Learning." *Computers and Composition*, vol. 22, 2005, pp. 5–22.
---. *Literacy in the New Media Age*. Routledge, 2003.
Lauer, Gene. "Contending with Terms: 'Multimodal' and 'Multimedia' in the Academic and Public Spheres." *Multimodal Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*, edited by Claire Lutkewitte, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014, pp. 22–41.
Lunsford, Andrea A. *Writing Matters: Rhetoric in Public and Private Lives*. University of Georgia Press, 2004.
Madden, Matt. *99 Ways to Tell A Story: Exercises In Style*. Chamberlin Bros., 2005.
Marback, Richard. "Embracing Wicked Problems: The Turn to Design in Composition Studies." *Multimodal Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*, edited by Claire Lutkewitte, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014, pp. 211–32.
MODE. *Glossary of Multimodal Terms*, 2012, multimodalityglossary.wordrpress.com. Accessed 12 July 2017.
Morrison, Timothy G., Gregory Bryan, and George W. Chilcoat. "Using Student-generated Comic Books in the Classroom." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 45, no. 8, 2002, pp. 758–74.
Mucci, Tim. "How to Write an Awesome Comic Book Script." Ehow.com, 2011. Accessed 5 Apr. 2011.
New London Group. "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures." *Multimodal Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*, edited by Claire Lutkewitte, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014, pp. 193–210.
Pink, Daniel H. *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-brainers Will Rule the Future*. Riverhead Books, 2006.
Saldaña, Johnny. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. SAGE, 2009.
Tungol, Kristian. "Provenance." *Key Terms: New and Old Media*. Depaul University, Fall 2011, depaul.digication.com/key_terms_new_media_old_media/provenance. Accessed 3 Aug. 2017.
Vie, Stephanie, and Brandy Dieterle. "Minding the Gap: Comics as Scaffolding for Critical Literacy Skills in the Classroom." *Composition Forum*, vol. 33, 2016. Accessed 8 Apr. 2016.
Wigand, Rolf T. "Toward a More Visual Culture Through Comics." *Comics and Visual Culture: Research Studies from Ten Countries*, edited by Alphons Silbermann and Hans-Dieter Dyroff, München, 1986, pp. 28–61.
Wolsey, Thomas DeVere. "That's Funny: Political Cartoons in the Classroom." *Teaching Visual Literacy: Using Comic Books, Graphic Novels, Anime, Cartoons, and More to Develop Comprehension and Thinking Skills*, edited by Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher, Corwin Press, 2008, pp. 113– 29.

APPENDIX A
DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF READINGS WITH LINKS

A detailed list of the reading assignments makes up Appendix A. On day one of the reading section of comics, I shared a mixture of funny webcomics and newspaper strips. I used *The Far Side* as one of the early examples due to its ubiquitous presence in U.S. society and because after thirty years it still packs a punch. I also relied on webcomics like *xkcd*—a stick-figure based, multi-panel comic strip that covers pop culture on a more sophisticated angle, including engineering and mathematical takes. *Xkcd* (https://xkcd.com) appears on social media and some students recognized the comic by look if not by name. (Additionally, the author Randall Munroe recently released a comic-art, how-to book *Thing Explainer* that I currently use in my technical communication classroom to teach document design and technical descriptions.) I supplemented this with the equally popular *Cyanide and Happiness* (http://explosm.net), which also has a simple style, but carries a more sarcastic, sardonic take on life. While less prescient on popular culture and rooted in more base humor, it is also a webcomic many students had seen, even if they didn't know the name. Then I left the familiar webcomics into the unfamiliar by introducing *Chainsawsuit* (http://chainsawsuit.com/comic/), which has more complex art than *xkcd* or *Cyanide and Happiness* but relies on the classic three-panel gag setup, *Amazing Super Powers* (http://www.amazingsuperpowers.com), similar to *Chainsawsuit* but more silly, and *The Perry Bible Fellowship* (http://pbfcomics.com), the title shouldn't fool the reader—this irreverent comic is religious only in the sense that it could be considered Gary Larson's spiritual successor. Many other smart webcomics exist that could be interchanged with these (e.g., *Hark*, *A Vagrant*: http://www.harkavagrant.com, *Poorly Drawn Lines*: http://www.poorlydrawnlines.com, and *Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal*: https://www. smbc-comics.com).

Day one's next step was to show students that not all comics have to be humorous. I started by showing traditional comics like *Calvin and Hobbes*, which weaves humor and seriousness while also being culturally familiar to students. I expanded on this with comics like *Lunarbaboon* (http://www.lunarbaboon.com), a comic that mixes heartbreak, nostalgia, and humor while discussing childhood and parenthood. Others in this vein are *Deep Dark Fears* (http://deep-dark-fears.tumblr.com), now an Eisner-nominated book that I used with success in a recent composition class, which chronicles submitted fears by readers that are both humorous and terrifying, and *Romantically Apocalyptic* (http://romanticallyapocalyptic.com), a breathtakingly beautiful but disorienting comic where art comes before storytelling. All of these are covered in one class period. While discussing each comic, I also taught medium elements such as panels, speech balloons, etc.

Their first homework was to read a slightly longer and more experimental comic strip called "Some People" by Luke Pearson. A complex comic strip, this long-form online comic features different characters in varying timelines that intersect. The goal is for them to draw on their webcomic knowledge from class and grapple with unfamiliar elements. In class the next day we discuss this comic and look for connections.

After this, their next assigned homework was to read a full-length fictional graphic novel, *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang. *American Born Chinese*, the first graphic novel nominated for a National Book Award, covers themes of race, identity, American culture, and religion. With a deceptively simple design (large margins with usually

fewer than five panels per page), the complex message manifests itself in beautiful simplicity. We discussed these elements in class the following day.

Up to this point, students had been introduced to primarily fictional comics, but in order for the students to produce an academic, research-driven comic they needed to read non-fiction comics. While some students had read fictional comics before and most were at least familiar with them, the move into nonfiction was unfamiliar for most all of them. Even in conversations with comics fans, the knowledge that complex, nonfiction graphic novels exist isn't always widespread information (aside from semi-autobiographical memoirs).

Their first nonfiction comics were selections from McCloud's *Understanding Comics* —chapters one and two specifically—that cover the definition of comics and the vocabulary of comics. McCloud's work is often touted in academic circles inside and outside of comics studies with these two chapters often being exemplars. The complex definition of comics used by McCloud in chapter one led to philosophical questions in the classroom about medium and the meaning of words in the classroom. It also led to conversations about using avatars in nonfiction comics, since McCloud's self-aware narrator is an avatar of himself and he guides the reader. McCloud's approach is often imitated, similarly with Larry Gonick, in other nonfiction comics. However, nonfiction comics with no avatar have begun to gain traction (see *Hip-Hop Family Tree* or any of Rick Geary's work).

Students had now experienced nonfiction comics, so the final step was a full-length, nonfiction, argumentative comic book: *A People's History of American Empire*. Mike Konopacki and Paul Buhle rooted Howard Zinn's agenda-fueled history into a graphic textbook of sorts based on Zinn's popular alterna-history *A People's History of the United States* as well as biographical elements from Zinn's personal life. *American Empire* is fascinating to analyze due to its caricature choices of famous real people and the cartoon emotions it often depicts. It often—either intentionally or unintentionally—whittles complex historical stories into very basic good vs. bad narrative (e.g., Teddy Roosevelt's face is scrunched up like a super villain's when behaving contrary to Zinn's thesis). We discussed how visuals shape argument and tone just as much as words do. We also talked about how students would represent their topics. During the reading process and as we finished the reading, students began comics production.

APPENDIX B
ORIGINAL ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION

What follows are two assignment descriptions that I gave students. The first is for writing a script where they did the first envisaging of their comic. The second is for the comics production assignment, where they completed the production side of envisaging. I don't advocate the descriptions as being particularly well done on any level. Instead, I'm including them so the reader can understand what the students were working from.

Script Assignment Description

It's time to begin your comic. The first step towards creating visual comics is purely writing. This stage is the script. Like an outline to a paper or an annotated bibliography

to a research project, the script is the drafting stage of your finished product. Most of you have probably never created a document like this. Further on there are some great tips (provided by [i.e., stolen from] Tim Mucci). Though this assignment will stand on its own, it's really the first half of your final comics assignment.

Essentially, you're summarizing your documented essay (including revisions) into a three to five page comics presentation (how many panels you end up using will be up to you). Now is the time to begin planning how you can take seven pages of written research and turning that into only a few pages of graphical representation. Will you follow McCloud and *American Empire*'s approach of having a drawn narrator? Though this isn't necessary, it probably will make things easiest (what will this narrator be?). Will you create a straightforward comics or will you rely more on an abstract representation? These will be the things you need to justify and think about.

Following Mucci's example, format your script to look like this:

Page 1
Panel 1
Here is where you write what is happening in this panel.
Character dialog
"This is a character speaking."
Panel 2
Something else is happening now.

Mucci also points out that, "you're in control page by page and panel to panel. Each page of comic script allows for about one to nine panels; often less but rarely ever more. Do not try to pack too much into a page unless it serves your story to do so" (Mucci). Have fun with this and use the examples in class (or look for some on the internet) to base your argument on.

Aside from following the above format, this assignment won't have many specific requirements, so long as it covers your argument. Having said that, your target length of the script should be around two to three pages.

Comics Production Assignment Description

The purpose of this assignment is to take your documented essay and adapt it into a comics format. You have already created a script/summary of your argument, so now it's time to take the next step by creating the actual visual representation.

Purpose

Obviously a seven-page argument being shifted into a three-page comics essay means a lot of your information will have to be shifted and adapted to fit this new format. Aside from that, your audience may be broader now, so you'll also have to consider what this new audience expects. You'll have to engage critically and put yourself in their shoes to aid this. Think of your audience like this: they are either a group, like you, who are engaging academically with texts and are experimenting with a comics format—or—they are comics fans who expect to be entertained by the medium. Think of ways to address both of these audiences.

Planning

The first step to this is adapting any needed revisions from your essay to fix your overall argument. The next step is creating the script. The third step is adapting that

script into comics. You'll probably find that your script and your finished product will not be exactly the same. Be willing and prepared to change your plans as you go if you find something isn't working. Some questions to consider as you do this are as follows:

- What elements of my argument are the most essential? How will I include them in my comics?
- How will I cite information? (Look at some of the examples we've used for advice.)
- How am I going to turn this abstract argument into a more coherent story? (Will I follow the McCloud/Zinn method of having a narrator? Will I use a more abstract format?)
- What images should I choose to represent my ideas? Why will I choose those images?
- What will my audience expect? What will they be expecting from my argument? How is this different from the audience for my original essay? How will I adapt my arguments to meet this new audience and fit this new medium?

Drafting

How you create this is up to you, but here are some easy methods to try out:

1. You can draw (either digitally or by hand and then scan) your images and organize them in a program like InDesign.
2. You can use one of the following programs (or a combination of them):
   - Comic Life 2 (you can download a free month trial for Mac or Windows at plasq.com)
   - Toon Doo (it's free but costs to export images, so you can just use a screenshot and put them into a different program)
   - Pixton (this one has some capabilities but seems weaker than the others)

Requirements

The comics should:

1. be between three to five pages
2. have between three to nine panels per page (you can justify more or less if needed)
3. have a combination of box texts and dialog texts
4. be either printed or created in a pdf format (it does *not* have to be in color)
5. have a works cited page at the end (not in the comics format, just the traditional MLA)

Evaluation

- Have a focused topic with either an implicit or explicit thesis statement
- Have a general awareness of your audience and creating a balance between the two expected audiences
- Make sure your introduction/conclusion engages audience
- Allow the structure of the comics to flow in a logical format with good transitions
- Keep grammar (both visual and textual) on a college-level

- Be sure that outside information is cited in a way that works for the comics and that your works cited page is in proper MLA
- Have the visuals be representative of your topic and relate to the overall argument
- Make sure the visuals have been employed with care and in a way that shows you have given thought to how to best convey your argument

THE STUDY CIRCLE: A SUPPORT FOR COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY AND WRITING

Elizabeth L. Jaeger

> Teacher: One of our group's rules is *Be kind*. If someone entered this space and students were following the *be kind* rule, what would that person see and hear?
> Javier: They would hear us saying polite words.

This interaction occurred during the first meeting of our Study Circle group. In attendance were four Grade 4 vulnerable readers—that is, students who are particularly sensitive to disruptions in their literacy ecology: too-difficult texts, inauthentic tasks, insensitive peers, caring but stressed teachers, as well as oppressive class-, race-, and gender-based power structures (Jaeger, 2015). These students received one-on-one tutoring designed to meet their individual literacy needs, but, in my mind, this was not enough to fully engage them as literate human beings. Too often difficulties with literacy are associated with lack of interest and engagement (Guthrie and Davis; Melekoglu). I wanted to place these children in a collaborative environment in which their natural curiosity could surface.

Study Circle was just such a place. In this context, students conducted research on a topic of interest, relied on their peers for support, and published books on their findings. It is my purpose here to describe the structures that facilitated this process and to track the participation of one student, Javier, whose teacher considered him low-achieving and disruptive. The study described here is important in that it highlights the strengths of students who were otherwise considered unsuccessful, as well as their positive and productive interactions.

Literature Review

Research on inquiry-based instruction for children of this age group is scant. Mariam Dreher studied sixth-grade students as they wrote social studies reports. She found that they had little trouble generating research questions, but had considerable difficulty finding answers to those questions in reference materials. Over half of the students directly copied sections of text that were one paragraph or more in length. Some students effectively followed the report structure provided by their teacher, but others struggled to do so. Overall, there was a great disparity between the strongest and weakest of the reports. Dreher and her colleagues taught a research protocol to fourth graders. This protocol included lessons in gathering and organizing information, drafting, editing, developing visual aids, presenting, and self-evaluating. These lessons were presented in response to student requests and observations of their research process. Students' inquiry skills improved over time.

Additional information is available in practitioner-oriented books and journals whose authors argue for the need to revise traditional and ubiquitous research practices such as assigning topics and placing undue emphasis on the product of the research experience (Lindfors; Harada and Yoshina). These authors envision an environment of inquiry as one in which students employ discussion and writing as tools for sense-making (Barnes). Specific recommendations include:

- Foreground student choice about topic selection and question generation (Lamb, et al.; Lindfors; Harada and Yoshina; Parker)
- Teach helpful research strategies such as how to select appropriate and accurate information and how to record that information (Lamb, et al.; Stripling; Parker)
- Provide ongoing scaffolding during research activity (Stripling; Harada and Yoshina)
- Encourage student-student as well as teacher-student interaction (Lindfors; Stripling; Harada and Yoshina; Leu et al.)

- Facilitate sharing of information among students and with families (Lamb et al.; Stripling; Parker)

A significant gap in the literature is the lack of recommendations for providing enrichment experiences, like those described in this article, for students who struggle. Within the Common Core State Standards research, for example, little attention is paid to the needs of those readers who demonstrated difficulty in activities that targeted the less rigorous standards. On the flip side, there is little within the intervention literature about offering challenging experiences for students who experience difficulties in school (Jaeger, 2016). For example, Lamb et al., referenced above, seem to presume that research projects are suited only for gifted elementary students.

In response to these gaps in the literature, this article investigates inquiry practices employed with students who struggle in school. In conducting this research, I wanted to better understand the ways in which the inquiry practices described above played out in the Study Circle setting in general and how they influenced the engagement of one focal student.

The Study Circle Project: Research Methods

This qualitative case study was conducted at Education without Boundaries (pseudonym), an elementary school in a large urban district in a western state that served approximately 350 students. Of these children, 52% were Latino, 20% African American, 12% Asian, and 16% other ethnicities/no response given; 92.7% of students received free or reduced-price lunch and 59.8% were English learners. I selected this site because the school had a diverse population, a setting that would maximize the variety of readers I might find. In addition to the one-on-one tutoring I provided for the research participants, I met with the students as a group for one hour each week over the course of a school semester, totaling 15 hours.

Ideally, Study Circles would take place within the classroom context, including students who struggle, as well as the higher-achieving children who are more likely to engage in enrichment activities like this. Because teachers at the school site were unfamiliar with this

practice, it was my intent to implement and explore the possibilities with a smaller group in a pull-out setting. If the practice proved successful in a more tightly-controlled environment, I would feel comfortable recommending it for use in the classroom.

The student participants were diverse. Javier was Latino and native English-speaking. Bella and Sam were English learners whose native languages were Spanish and Cantonese, respectively. Timmy was a native English-speaking African-American. The students selected for the study struggled with literacy, but they also exhibited clear strengths as well as challenges. The stereotypical view of vulnerable readers positions them as students who struggle with all aspects of literacy from decoding to vocabulary to high-level comprehension. I chose to work with this population because I was intrigued by students who did not fit this stereotype—who had strengths to fall back on as we worked together and who could serve as mentors providing assistance to peers in their areas of expertise. I desired to conduct research that positioned them as whole and active vulnerable readers who are "overresearched but underseen" (Tuck, 411).

Within the Study Circle project, each student took up the inquiry process in unique ways. For purposes of this study, however, I focus on Javier. Javier found decoding of even simple words frustrating. He reacted to this frustration by acting out in class and his teacher seemed to view him as just one more distraction. However, Javier had a far different side, as well—a side I was fortunate to witness in both the tutoring and small group aspects of our work together. Javier was a History and Nature channel buff and displayed remarkable mastery of both topics. He knew more about the Revolutionary War than I did (or ever will), easily distinguishing among the characteristics and tactics of a range of the colonies' various insurgent groups. A child who, having struggled to write the word *quart*, remarked, "*This is my arch-enemy—I don't know how to spell*," yet he remained vitally interested in the world around him. Javier was also naturally social, making friends easily and collaborating effectively. Over time, Javier formed connections with the process of our work together. This combination of curiosity, friendliness, and engagement with process, made Javier an ideal candidate for Study Circle.

To represent the work that occurred during Study Circle time, I collected a range of data. I photographed or photo-copied the notes students took, the drafts they wrote, and the books they constructed. I audio-recorded each session to capture in detail the conversations we had and also audio-recorded two interviews with each student, which allowed me insight into their feelings about Study Circle. All recordings were transcribed and then analyzed using data-driven coding (Gibbs); that is, the transcripts were read and re-read, noting patterns in the enacted curriculum and in the comments made by Javier, the focal student. Classroom observations and the resulting field notes helped me understand who these children were in an environment distinctly different from that of Study Circle. Within these classrooms, the students had virtually no control of the tasks in which they engaged. Their teachers failed to offer them choices about what they did or how they did it, and, as a result, their innate curiosity was, more often than not, stifled. Finally, I developed detailed lesson plans and maintained a journal in which I examined the way those plans were enacted.

The Study Circle as a Collaborative Inquiry Space: Research Findings

The Study Circle project involved three major periods of time: preparation for research, note-taking and drafting, and editing and sharing the final products. I describe each of these in turn.

Getting Prepared

In planning for our first session together—and for all sessions to come—I attended to Barbara Stripling's comment: "Environments that support inquiry must be centered on building the community itself as much as they focus on the learner [and the] knowledge" (32). The goal of Study Circle was, in fact, to develop a culture of inquiry. This was not to be about individual students working on individual projects; even if each child selected a different topic, as they ultimately did, it was important that we build and maintain a research community with members who supported each other in

the process. I also wanted the students to understand that this was to be a productive environment, a place where they were expected to apply themselves to the work at hand, but where they could take risks without fear of ridicule (Lamb et al.). So, we began our work together by establishing two key norms: work hard and be kind. We discussed what it would look and sound like if a stranger entered a space where researchers were hard-working and kind. As noted in the initial quote, Javier participated actively in the ensuing discussion. Although this sentiment was not always evident in his interactions outside our space, he was almost uniformly hard-working and considerate during Study Circle.

I wanted the students to understand what it meant to *study* a topic but felt it might be easier if they talked about something more tangible first. So, during our first session, I asked them to describe what it meant to *swim*. Other students struggled to explain their thinking or focused on concrete aspects like moving arms and legs. Javier, however, explained, "*It includes skill ... You have to know what you have to wear*." When we shifted gears and talked about what it meant to study, Javier noted that it involved hard work.

It was important to me that topic selection allowed for both freedom and collaboration (Lindfors; Harada and Yoshina). For this reason, I asked the students to brainstorm overarching topics within which they could select their individual sub-topics. The children suggested everything from *sports* to *space*, with Javier adding *how things work* and *the history of their school or state*. They voted for as many topics as they wished, and we considered only those topics which all the students expressed an interest in, thereby assuring that no one would be excluded from the group's enthusiasm.

Ultimately, the students selected *animals*. This was unsurprising. Jo Worthy et al. noted that books about animals were rated seventh in a list of sixth graders' choices, and I suspect that, had they surveyed fourth graders, this topic would have been further up the list. Part of the appeal may have been that, within the parameters of this topic, there were so many choices available to them. Each child listed between 20 and 30 animals, including such exotic species as warthogs and sea urchins. I told the children that they could choose to work with a partner

to research an animal, but, knowing they could help each other as much as they desired, each chose to work on a topic of her/his own choosing, and selected that animal during the second session.

At this point, I asked the following question: "What are we going to have to do and what resources do we need to obtain to study an animal?" Initially, talk turned to a visit to the local zoo—a terrific idea that would prioritize first-hand experience, but it was unaffordable for us; we then discussed the possibility of emailing the zoo for information. Use of books and web sources came up soon thereafter.

Although I had failed to consider this during the process of topic selection, the large number of child-friendly books about animals proved a great boon. For example, the *True Book About* ... series included books about nearly every animal chosen. I required that they consult at least two books and one website in their research, and the *True Book* series, and other similar books, served as fertile ground on which to begin. A fully digital project was precluded by the severely limited technology resources available at the school. We made do with a single laptop.

Once books were collected, I modeled the process of selecting questions to guide their research (Lamb et al.) during the Week 3 meeting. To do this, I read aloud a book on the blue iguana, an animal no child had selected. Students were to attend to the various types of information the book provided. Sam noted that the book described where the iguana lives and Timmy mentioned he had learned what the iguana eats. Javier explained how the iguana grows and I expanded upon this to include other facts about its body. Then the students seemed stuck, so I re-read a section about the iguana's babies and Bella noted that this provided another possible question to research. At this point, I introduced the term *miscellaneous* and explained they might also collect interesting information that did not fit under any of the other headings, information that would be of interest to their readers.

To help students avoid simply copying from sources, common practice in student research (Dreher; Harada and Yoshina), I modeled the note-taking process using sentences from the blue iguana book:

> This is a sentence I read you a few minutes ago. If you were studying the blue iguana and you wanted to write this information down in your notebook, you would not have to copy the whole sentence because … all we're doing now is collecting information.

In other words, "as few words as possible" was the mantra for this process. I asked the children if the sentence was about food or the animal's body or babies. They replied in the negative and we decided the information belonged on the *where they live* page. We looked again at the sentence and agreed that the words *found*, *one*, *just*, *the*, *is*, *on*, and *iguana* could be eliminated, with only *islands in Caribbean* remaining.

Note-Taking and Drafting

Later in that session, after I had taught these preliminary lessons and students had selected their animals, children received notebooks and they headed separate pages with the sub-topics we had discussed. Then the students generated what they already knew about their animal and recorded these facts on the appropriate page. Most offered at least four or five facts. They then had the opportunity to ask their classmates for any additional information to add to their lists. This information served as the foundation for the knowledge they would gain in the research process (Stripling). In the meantime, I visited many of the local libraries searching for books about the animals they had chosen. Ideally, students would have joined me in the hunt for resources (Parker), but our time together was short and there was much to do. Javier, who had great difficulty finding books he liked in the school library, wanted to know where I got the books for him to use in his research.

By this point in time, I knew the students quite well and had a sense of their individual strengths and challenges. Based on that knowledge, I designated Class Experts. Sam, the most fluent reader in the group, was the expert for pronouncing words; students were to ask him if they were having difficulty with the pronunciation of a word. If they could pronounce the word but did not know what it meant, they were to ask Timmy, the vocabulary expert. Bella was the sentence expert,

because she was great at understanding the meaning of individual sentences, and Javier, with his ability to grasp the overarching meaning of larger segments of text, assumed the role of meaning-making expert. The "expert" construct established each child as an authority to whom other children could turn as needed. It also released me to circulate freely and handle pressing problems ranging from missing books to difficulty understanding steps in the process.

Then the note-taking work began in earnest and continued for the next three to four weeks. Although we had talked about the contents and index pages in the iguana book and how they might use those pages to find information more quickly, most students chose to read the books from the beginning, jotting notes as they went along. This approach came as no surprise; Dreher found that even children who understand how to use text layout tools rarely do so. I suspect this was the preferred choice because one area of focus was on finding miscellaneous information that was, by definition, unrelated to any of the specific sub-topics and would likely be distributed throughout the book.

Javier was skilled at the note-taking process; he ably selected bits of information from the sources he consulted and recorded them on the correct pages in his notebook. From the first day of his independent project, he got to work immediately and continued diligently for the rest of the hour. The students talked a lot as they worked, sharing interesting tidbits with each other. Relishing the opportunity to add more facts to his repertoire of interests, Javier regularly responded enthusiastically to what he learned. By and large, these conversations were brief and spontaneous and did not seem to distract anyone. There were exceptions. After witnessing Timmy's and Bella's lengthier conversation, I noted, somewhat playfully, that I thought she would end up knowing more about Timmy's research topic (lions) than her own (sea urchins). I engaged in these little talks and reacted with surprise to new information as I facilitated note-taking.

Over time, students employed the range of strategies they had been taught. They turned to their designated peer experts, asking, for example, about word pronunciations. Javier grasped the concept of *miscellaneous* and enjoyed finding interesting items to place on that

page in his notebook. After two days of note-taking, we re-grouped to hear each other's most interesting information. Javier could barely contain himself: "*Can I do mine now? Sharks they eat fish and people . . . Sharks eat [other] sharks. Sharks eat stingrays. Sharks eat sea urchins and cans . . . Like if someone throws in [the water] a tin can [makes a gulping noise]*." He was equally interested in facts provided by others about their animals.

I was unable to find videos on any of the other animals, but I did discover one about sharks and brought it in for Javier—to which he responded, "*Awesome! Free movie!*" Other students were interested in watching as well, and we agreed that students should assess how far they had gotten in their note-taking (Hanada and Yoshina) and then decide whether they could spare the time. Because I believed watching the video and taking notes at the same time would be too arduous for Javier, I proposed that he should be responsible for noticing information in the shark video and tell me what he heard; I would assume the task of recording the information in his notebook. He agreed and stopped regularly to tell me what he had learned.

At this point, Javier mentioned a problem with his notes. He had utilized three different sources—two books and a video—and discovered they were not in agreement as to when the first sharks lived. The first book said they came into being one million years before the dinosaurs, the video said 200 million, and the second book agreed with the video. We brought this concern to the attention of the class, leading to a discussion of conflicting information. I suggested that if two sources agreed, they were probably right, and also suggested they look at the copyright date. Anticipating where I was headed, Javier said, "*Oh, now I get it!*" We agreed that newer sources might have more accurate and up-to-date information.

Javier also reminded me that it was his turn to access the Internet that day. Were I to repeat this project, I would have attended more carefully to strategies for online reading because, as Jill Castek et al. note, this type of reading requires skills in addition to those required for print text (e.g., dealing with the nonlinear format of Internet sources). Nevertheless, students gained some information from these sources. I also asked students to tell me one piece of information

about their animal that they were eager to know but had been unsuccessful in finding. We made calls and sent emails (e.g., to the biology department of the local university) in a last attempt to determine answers to their questions.

It was my policy to introduce new strategies when one child needed them. By our seventh week, Sam was ready to begin drafting—that is, taking his skeletal notes and crafting sentences and paragraphs from them. I suggested that they compose drafts on loose-leaf paper, skipping lines to leave room for any small additions or corrections, and writing on only one side of the page in case they wanted to cut up their work and re-arrange it. As a practice, students used notes I had generated from a book about pandas and proposed sentences drawn from those notes. Javier, for example, took the note "bamboo forests" on the *where they live* page and suggested, "They live in bamboo forests." At this point, I went through the students' notebooks, indicated which pages were ready to go into their drafts and which required more information; for the latter, I suggested a source for the additional information.

Reconstituting their notes as sentences proved more difficult than I had expected. Some students had trouble remembering what their skeletal notes meant. Bella erroneously employed the first/next/then/finally structure she had been taught for procedural writing, and Sam occasionally used words that, when pressed, he could not explain the meaning of. Yet as the drafting process got underway, Javier's enthusiasm continued to grow. The physical act of writing did not come easily to him and spelling was a source of great frustration. Yet he was committed to what he wanted to say and stuck with it, proceeding step-by-step through his notes.

We met for updates on each other's work. I asked the students to think about something they would like to know about the animals their friends were studying. Javier was delighted and responded easily and accurately to all questions posed to him. When asked which oceans sharks live in, he pointed to the answer in his notes and said, "*Look here. It says all over the ocean*." When asked what sharks' bodies are like, he asked, "*What do you want to learn about their body?*" and then went on, "*They have gills to help them breathe and they are [reading from*

his notes] in the fish family … They have 3000 razor-sharp teeth. They have a good sense of smell."

Javier was equally interested in others' work. Some of the students seemed to simply go through the motions, just repeating questions that were part of the organizing structure of their note-taking (e.g., What does X eat? Where does X live?). In contrast, Javier's questions were clearly genuine. He wanted to know what animals were predators of coyotes and which were prey of warthogs. He was impressed with Sam's information on the coyote's eating habits: "*Dang! Lots of stuff*." Javier was also known for his tough questions; "*I always give the hard questions to answer*," he noted.

I introduced a variety of different "special" pages for the authors to choose from: About the Author, Contents, Index, and Glossary. Students looked through a range of books that included these pages, coming to understand the roles they played via immersion. The children each selected at least two of these pages to include in their books. Early on, I read aloud a book my own son had written when in elementary school, including his About the Author page. Javier was especially excited about writing his own version of this page, listing his many interests as my son had done. As a child completed one of these pages, s/he served as "consultant" for the others. Javier, for example, helped Sam to select important words for his glossary.

Editing and Publishing

Students supported each other throughout the drafting process; they demonstrated interest in their peers' topics, helped each other find information, and assisted in crafting sentences from notes. When we began the revision process during Week 9, however, they were of little help in listening to each other's drafts and noting parts that did not make sense to them. For example, I caught Javier reading a library book while his partner read her draft to him. Only Sam noted a place of confusion in a friend's piece. I came to believe that this practice was developmentally inappropriate for this age group, so I met with each student and we went through sentence-by-sentence, adjusting as we went. Javier was open to this process. He worked with

me to clarify confusing sentences, and when I noted a fact I believed to be inaccurate, he readily returned to his sources to double-check it.

Students were more capable of proofreading, a process which began for some children during our tenth session. I provided a conventions checklist that included looking for errors in punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and fragments/run-ons. They were expected to go through their drafts multiple times, focusing on one issue each time to achieve greater accuracy. They also circled words they believed might be misspelled, fixing those they could. At this point, I went through the drafts, marking their papers with symbols that showed which lines of text still exhibited problems; for example, if a period was missing, a P was written in the margin. They then completed their editing. In preparation for publishing, we met one final time to decide where page breaks would go and which pages would include an illustration.

Next came publishing which lasted about four weeks. I took the completed drafts home, typed the text, sewed pages together, and bought tagboard to serve as covers. Students illustrated many of their pages, we glued the text and pictures into the pages, and we used colored tape to bind the book. Javier demonstrated a remarkable knack for drawing pictures that allowed the reader to view the various underwater scenes from different angles. In one such picture, we see only a person's legs hanging down into the water, with a shark circling below. In another, the shark's egg case was drawn to resemble a suitcase, complete with handle. Initially, Javier had intended to place an illustration on every page, but his enthusiasm diminished partway through, leaving a somewhat lopsided monograph. All in all, however, he delighted in researching, writing, and book-making, and he formed closer connections with his peers through this process.

We celebrated the completion of the books during our last meeting (see Figure 1 for the cover of Javier's book on sharks and Appendix A for his complete text). The students read them to the rest of the group. Everyone applauded and offered specific compliments about the content: expressing encouragement for action-filled pictures, enjoying information on the About the Author pages, and noting unusual facts. We also played a version of *Jeopardy!* using questions based on information provided in their books. I could never convince Sam or

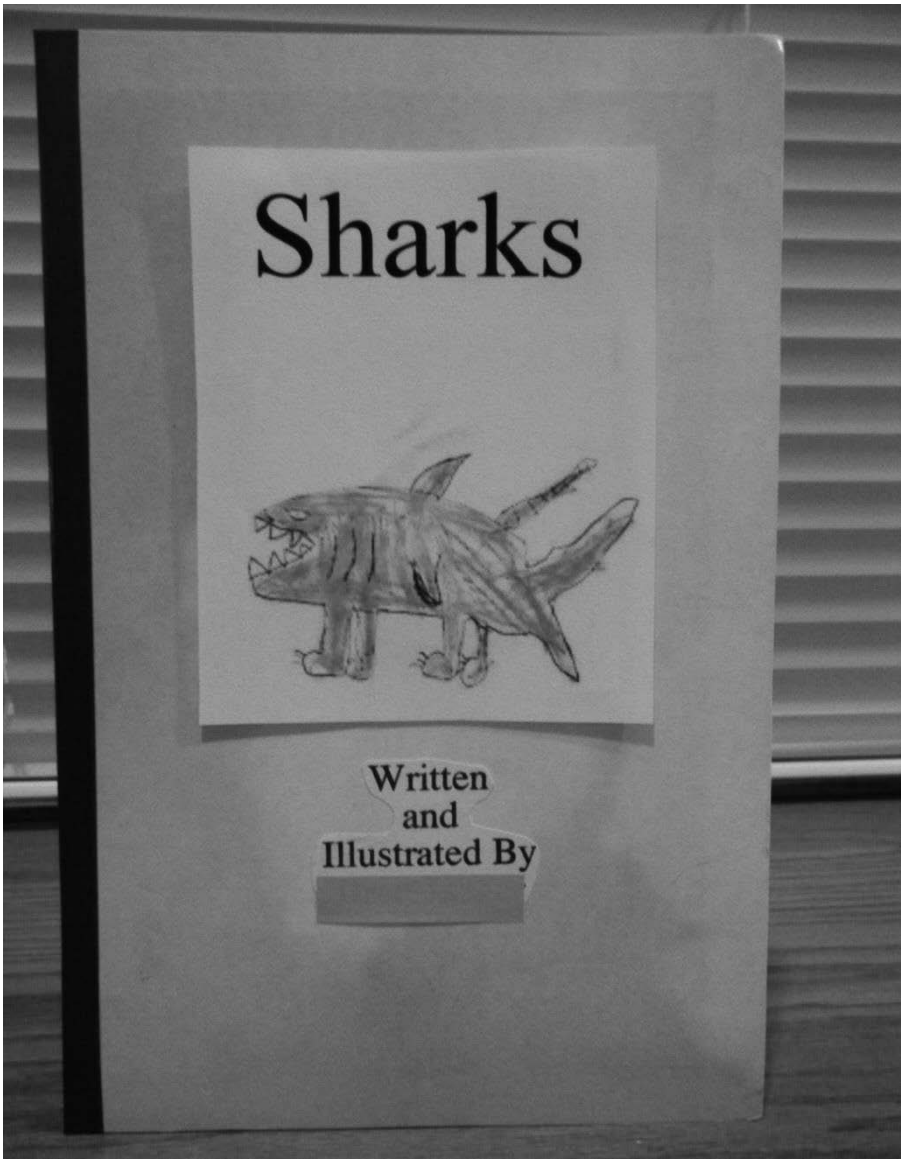

Figure 1: Javier's Shark Book

Timmy to read their books to their classmates, nor allow me or their teachers to do so, but Bella shared hers energetically and to great approval. Sadly, Javier moved away that week and never had an opportunity to read his book to others. All the other students took their books home and read them to their families. This inquiry

project had gone a long way in building a sense of camaraderie in our little group and positioned these students—rarely acknowledged within their classrooms—as knowledgeable and committed scholars.

Reflection

I return here to the questions that guided my inquiry: In what ways did carefully-designed student research practices play out in the Study Circle setting? and, How did these practices enhance the engagement of a student dealing with considerable academic challenges?

Supportive Research Practices

From the beginning, student choice was critical to our endeavor. The children made a variety of decisions from the substantive (what they would research) to the mundane (whom they would sit with as they worked). Although I set up the framework for the project, I depended on them to know best what engaged them, what materials they needed, and who was likely to provide strategic advice along the way. I guided the questions they were to investigate, but the miscellaneous page allowed for them to include whatever struck their fancy. It's unsurprising, then, that each finished product was unique, expressing the interests and personality of its author.

Student choice was balanced with explicit strategy lessons and ongoing follow-up. Because I expected that this project was the first of its kind for these students, it was important to provide the kind of structure that would facilitate success. As a result, I took nothing for granted. Mini-lessons addressed the following strategies:

- What does it mean to study something? Viewing research as a process that required ingenuity and hard work was important.
- What resources serve my research process? Books, videos, and the Internet were obvious choices, but I also wanted them to understand that it was best to begin with the knowledge they already possessed—as well as that of their peers. This knowledge provided a frame on which to "hang" new information.

- How does reading for research purposes differ from reading for pleasure or to obtain the gist of expository texts? It might mean employing the contents or index to skip around through the text to find the answers to specific questions rather than starting at the beginning and reading all the way through. When reading online, it might mean following a series of links.
- How do I record information from resource materials to avoid simply copying large chunks of text? Beginning with a sentence including the necessary information and cutting it down to its bare bones before writing it on a notebook page with appropriate heading was the process they learned and employed.
- How do I reconstitute notes to draft a text that foregrounds my voice? Taking information from several sources and organizing it to best support the reader was the lesson to be learned here.
- What processes assist me in refining my draft? Students participated in revision pairs and teacher-student conferences. They employed editing checklists and codes on drafts to polish their work.
- What can I do to make my book engaging for my readers? A cover illustration, placement of text on the page, and within-text pictures contributed to this goal.

These mini-lessons occurred as students began a specific part of the process, but reinforcement was ongoing.

Student-to-student interaction was another key aspect of this project. The children discussed topic choices and offered bits of information unknown to the author. They eagerly shared facts collected in their research and responded to questions asked by their peers. They served as "experts" for everything from word pronunciation to text meaning and offered less formal support to each other as needed. They traded ideas about illustrations and supplied some of the drawing for their friends, if asked. Finally, they came together to celebrate the work they had accomplished, offering compliment after compliment.

Although process was privileged over product, the children knew they would have something material to show for their hard work, and this was also key. They regularly asked me, "Are we *really* making books? Are we *really* taking them home when we are done?" as if they could not quite believe it to be true. So rarely does work in school result in a product that demonstrates the outcome of task after challenging task. This was not a worksheet or a quick sketch or a page of multiplication problems. The children were proud of what they had accomplished, and the book symbolized their accomplishment.

Adjustments for a Full-Class Project

This unit occurred in a small-group pull-out setting. Were this to be taught in a full classroom, the teacher's challenges would be greater due to the sheer number of students involved. Additional sessions might be needed, although working on the project for some time each day would compress the length of the unit as a whole. It would take longer to collect the necessary print research materials, although this would be mitigated if students had access to digital resources. Students to whom the research process comes most easily might partner in a more extensive way with children who struggled a bit, and the teacher might meet with small groups of students who needed extra support as the research and writing work proceeded. Older students could serve as effective peer editors; children who worked more quickly might collaborate with their peers in the publishing process or begin a second research project.

Javier's Journey

Whereas I came to know Javier as the curious, intelligent, and tenacious child he truly was, in no way was he anyone's traditional model of the "good student." When I first met him, he struggled to read and write even simple sight words. He dug in his desk when his teacher talked and loudly regaled his classmates with irresistible jokes during work time. Javier was frequently ill and family circumstances precluded necessary medical visits. Ultimately, his mother lost her job and was forced to move in with family in another town, so we lost Javier in December.

This was not, however, the child who entered Study Circle in early October. On our first day together, he asked whether he would get some kind of reward if he behaved, trying, I think, to determine exactly what sort of universe he had entered. I responded that I suspected that would not be necessary because I had not found it necessary to establish such a system for other groups of students with whom I had worked. Javier set about to prove me right. His thinking was highly conceptual, he quickly grasped strategies for learning, he worked for long periods of time without interruption, and he was a helpful and sought-after partner. Javier was an active and enthusiastic participant at every step of the inquiry process: a process that emphasized student choice, strategy instruction with ongoing support, and student-to-student interaction.

Works Cited

Barnes, Douglas R. *Language in the Classroom*. Open University, 1973.

Castek, Jill, Lisa Zawilinki, J. Greg McVerry, J., W. Ian O'Byrne, and Donald J. Leu. "The New Literacies of Online Reading Comprehension: New Opportunities and Challenges for Students with Learning Difficulties." *Multiple Perspectives in Difficulties in Learning Literacy and Numeracy*, edited by Claire Wyatt-Smith, John Elkins, and Stephanie Gunn, Dordrecht: Springer, 2011, pp. 91-110.

Dreher, Mariam J. *Sixth-grade Researchers: Posing Questions, Finding Information, and Writing a Report*. National Research Center, 1995.

Dreher, Mariam J., Kathryn A. Davis, Priscilla Wagnant, and Suzanne F. Clewell. "Fourth-grade Researchers: Helping Children Develop Strategies for Finding and Using Information." *Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference*. Scottsdale, AZ, December 1997. Unpublished Conference Paper. 2016.

Gibbs, Graham. *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. Sage, 2007.

Guthrie, John T., and Marcia H. Davis. "Motivating Struggling Readers in Middle School Through an Engagement Model of Classroom Practice." *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, vol. 19, no.1, 2003, pp. 59-85.

Harada, Violet H., and Joan M. Yoshina, "Moving from Rote to Inquiry: Creating Learning that Counts." *Library Media Connection*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2004, pp. 22-25.

Jaeger, Elizabeth L. "Literacy and Vulnerability: Shame or Growth for Readers Who Struggle." *Talking Points*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2015, pp. 17-25.

---. "Intensity of Focus, Richness of Content: Tier 2 Response to Intervention in an Era of the Common Core." *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 70, no. 2, 2016, pp. 179-88.

Lamb, Pose, Dorothy Kennedy, Janice Chezem, Sharon Hopf, and Vicki Vaughn. "Research Skills for Gifted Elementary School Pupils." *Gifted Child Today*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1993, pp. 3-7.

Leu, Kuan-Hui, Tran Templeton, and Haeny Yoon. "Co-inquiry, Co-construction, Collaboration: The Emergence of Curriculum." *Language Arts*, vol. 94, no. 1, 2016, pp. 54-7.

Lindfors, Judith.W. *Children's Inquiry: Using Language to Make Sense of the World*. Teachers College Press, 1999.

Melekoglu, Macid A. "Impact of Motivation to Read on Reading Gains for Struggling Readers with and without Learning Disabilities." *Learning Disability Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2011, pp. 248-61.

Parker, Dianne. *Planning for Inquiry: It's Not an Oxymoron!*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2007.

Stripling, Barbara K. "Inquiry-based Learning." *Curriculum Connections through the Library*, edited by Barbara K. Stripling and Sandra Hughes-Hassell, Libraries Unlimited, 2003, pp. 3-39.

Tuck, Eve. "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities." *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 79, no. 3, 2012, pp. 409-27.

Worthy, Jo, Megan Moorman, and Margo Turner. "What Johnny Likes to Read is Hard to Find in School." *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1999, pp.12-27.

APPENDIX A

Sharks

Sharks have gills to help them breathe. Sharks have sharp teeth. They have 3000 razor teeth. Sharks are in the fish family. They do not have smooth skin. There are 30 different sharks. Sharks have a good sense of smell. They can smell a little drop of blood from a mile away.

Sharks eat people, other sharks, sting rays, sea urchins, cans, birds, turtles, and shrimp. They are good hunters.

Sharks live in every ocean.

Some sharks lay eggs and some give birth. They lay eggs in cases. The mom doesn't care for their babies born in eggs. Mom does care for babies born alive.

Be calm if you see a shark. People eat shark fins. Sharks are the most ancient animals. Sharks were in the dinosaur age. Some people put shark scarecrows on the shore to scare animals. Rays are related to sharks. Sharks are eaten by other sharks, killer whales, and people. Sharks usually live 20-30 years but some live up to 100 years.

About the Author

Javier is 9 years old. He likes sports like football, basketball, soccer, baseball, and 4-square. He loves history and math.

Index

FAIL FORWARD!

Brandie Bohney
Guest Editor,
Bowling Green State University

In their brief segment of *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, Collin Brooke and Allison Carr note that "the capacity for failure (and thus success) is one of the most valuable abilities a writer can possess" (63). And yet in our own classrooms—where pressures to teach to the test and produce as much measurable learning as quickly as possible often stand in direct opposition to known best practices—it is challenging to help students feel comfortable with failure. Elizabeth Wardle notes that "the steady movement toward standardized testing and tight control of educational activities by legislators is producing and reproducing answer-getting dispositions in educational systems and individuals." As educators, we know how important student dispositions are to their learning, and Wardle's research indicates that students who are consistently in systems that require them merely to find the one right answer rather than encourage them to solve problems through trial and error then develop answer-getting dispositions. Such dispositions discourage students from trying to work through difficulties or apply what they know from one situation to another. For students with answer-getting dispositions, the writing process screams of failure because revision means their work wasn't "right" the first time.

In this inaugural Teacher-to-Teacher column, three classroom teachers discuss how they approach failure to normalize it and help students work toward problem solving rather than answer getting in their own classrooms. Missy Springsteen-Haupt explains how sharing her own authentic writing failures helps students see the natural emotional connection to their writing as normal and also to prove to them, as Shirley Rose notes, that "all writers always have more to learn about writing" (59). Framing student writing in

terms of growth mindsets, Stacy Stosich discusses a practical strategy for allowing for ugly drafts and redefining success and failure. Finally, Nora K. Rivera delineates a system of peer review and weekly sentence work designed to allow for experimentation without penalty; her methods not only pushed students to carefully evaluate their own and others' work, but also resulted in a reduced grading load and student success in district testing.

Works Cited

Brooke, Collin, and Allison Carr. "Failure Can Be an Important Part of Writing Development." *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth A. Wardle, Utah State University Press, 2016, pp. 62–64.

Rose, Shirley. "All Writers Have More to Learn." *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth A. Wardle, Utah State University Press, 2016, pp. 59–61.

Wardle, Elizabeth. "Creative Repurposing for Expansive Learning: Considering 'Problem-Exploring' and 'Answer-Getting' Dispositions in Individuals and Fields." *Composition Forum*, vol. 26, 2012, http://compositionforum.com/issue/26/creative-repurposing.php.

PERSPECTIVES ON FAILURE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

From Missy Springsteen-Haupt:

The Call for Submissions was near-perfect, encouraging all teacher-writers to share their experiences of writing with students. I dove into the work in class, during our designated writing time. Throughout the process, I talked through my goal of being published. My eighth graders lived through the process with me.

The first revision suggestions gave me hope. It wasn't the outright rejection my mind had spent the previous weeks prematurely building defenses against. I shared the comments with my students as we revised together, commiserating in the pain of feedback that proves our writing isn't perfect even when we think it is. Wrestling with the feedback in front of my students showed them my personal attempts to overcome the failure of a draft not being good enough.

And then, finally, the news: My manuscript was rejected. The outcome I had originally planned for hit hard after months of revisions. The wound of rejection settled itself into my brain. My students rallied around me with sympathy and support, astonished that something I had worked so hard on could ultimately be rejected. They couldn't understand how my dedication didn't pay off because so much of their education has reinforced the idea that a goal plus hard work equals success.

We talk about failure being a path to learning all the time; "Growth Mindset" buzzwords plaster the walls of schools around the country, but motivational reminders to work past failure are meaningless in the moment of hurt. Nothing bruises our minds quite the way failure does. Defeat worms its way into our heads and takes up extended residence. *This paper wasn't good enough* easily spirals into *I'm not good enough*. Nowhere is this quite as personal as the act of writing.

Even the simplest writing assignment requires personal investment and bravery. Many student writers experience excessive error-

correction from well-meaning writing teachers, and the stakes for failure build over time. We encourage failure as a path to growth: crummy first drafts, multiple revisions to strengthen writing, and utilizing feedback to make adjustments. Final drafts eventually receive a grade, though, and the fear of that opportunity for high-stakes failure is difficult for students to ignore. Student writers have invested so much to improve, but what happens when a piece of writing is still not good enough? We shouldn't kid ourselves that the mark of failure is an "F." For many students, simply not earning an "A" translates into the feeling of failure. Revisions feel like failure for students who want writing to be "perfect" on the first try. Minutes of staring at a blank sheet of paper or a flashing cursor can make any writer feel like a failure before they even begin. Any writing experience that doesn't lead to personal satisfaction or audience approval can feel like failure. Writing provides us with ample opportunities to feel inadequate.

With the fear of failure looming in many students' minds, we as teachers need to work them past that fear by having them confront it when the stakes are low, before that final paper. Too often, our compassion and desire to see all students succeed translates into teachers attempting to rescue students from the pain of failure. We see them struggle with the empty page, and after a few minutes, we swoop in to provide support. This leads to failure on both sides. Students fail to realize their own agency and don't learn the resiliency necessary to work their way out of a challenging situation. Teachers fail to provide their students with a safe space to struggle, and often prevent ourselves from viewing their full capabilities. One class period of staring at an empty page has never harmed any of my student writers beyond repair, but I have seen plenty of writers grow dependent on teachers because they are afraid to face the task of writing without being told exactly what to do. Fearful writers will never grow into confident writers if we don't allow them the space in our classrooms to fail. If teachers don't model and practice the safety of life beyond failure, then failure becomes fatal in our students' minds.

Embracing small failures on a regular basis allows students to experience the benefit of working beyond defeat. Frequency matters. The more students write, the more they have opportunities to struggle

on smaller pieces instead of investing too much in one major piece of writing. Writer's notebooks are the place where failure always reigns. I stop my students from erasing anything, and urge them to look to their worst writing for opportunities to reflect and grow. Attempts to try (and fail) at new techniques or genres receive encouragement and in-process feedback to support revision.

We can successfully model how to overcome deficiencies by building self-reflection around potential failures during early drafts. A simple five-minute quick write on *What is your biggest obstacle to success at this point in the writing process?* can help our students think about how to get to the root of the problem. At the bottom of a rough draft, I have students write for a few minutes about what the hardest part of writing the piece has been so far. This normalizes the feeling of failure during the writing process. Many student writers are suffering alone with their fear, but if we build the space for frustration into the process itself, we show that confronting the fear of failure is as much a part of writing as drafting or revising. This head-on confrontation with perceived failure can help them work out these feelings before revision. Confronting fear was something lacking in my classroom until I experienced rejection for myself and felt the fear that came with it. The more I talked in class about my feelings of rejection and failure as a writer, the more comfortable my students felt admitting their own. Naming our fear helped to take away its power and gave us freedom to move forward.

As we model our own writing in class, teacher-writers can pay special attention to highlighting our initial failures. We invite students to notice where our word choice is lacking and syntactical choices are awkward. Verbalizing our frustrations and struggles can help create a writing environment where students feel comfortable facing their own roadblocks. We reinforce revision as the key to overcoming rough draft failures, playing with changes until we find ways to turn inadequacies into strengths. Instead of looking at revision as another thing to fail at, the way we model revision can be the key to fostering a growth mindset for our student writers. If we remember how strong the fear of failure is in our own writing lives, we can better empathize and model resiliency.

I licked my rejection wounds for longer than I would like to admit, and it reminded me that our students need time to heal from failure, too. If a piece isn't working, they should have freedom to set it aside and try something else. Rewrites should always be an option on graded work, after a one-on-one conference over the major issues in the final draft. Teacher comments should guide students forward instead of dwelling on mistakes. Through this, we show them that lack of success on one piece doesn't mean they are destined to fail at all writing.

Students eventually have to confront their fears on their own, and our most effective action is to share in the frustration of failure. By naming and making space in our classrooms for the fear of failure, we show that successful writers are not the people who are never scared to fail, they are the ones who continue to write even in the face of fear.

From Stacy Stosich:

Teaching is an exercise in failure. There is always something we could have done differently, done better, or done more of. Yet in my education classes in college I was told to "fake it 'til you make it" and to present an image of authority. But as a reflective practitioner I believe what students need is a way to see failure as part of professional life. In my eleventh grade English classroom, the biggest issue of student "failure" I deal with is simply students who won't write, who won't even make an attempt to turn something in, and students who continuously turn in plagiarized writing instead of writing something themselves. Here is what I do to show students that it's okay to try even if sometimes they don't succeed.

I like to start the year talking to students about some success stories that emphasize the soft skills that contribute to academic success such as the stories of Dawn Loggins and Ben Carson. Loggins lived in a shack with no running water or electricity, and her parents abandoned her before her senior year, yet she was accepted to Harvard. Carson was the "dumb" kid with a single mother who only had a third grade education, but he became a world famous neurosurgeon. Most of academic success is not about how "smart" you are, but rather about being an advocate for yourself, asking for help, working hard,

capitalizing on your strengths, and being able to remediate your weaknesses. And of course, the most important soft skill of all is having a growth mindset. I have my students write a reflection on what areas and in what ways they have a growth or fixed mindset. It's important to model to students, so I explain to them my own areas of growth or fixed mindset. For example, in the area of athletics I mostly have a growth mindset—I know that as I practice and train, I get better. In the area of writing I also have a growth mindset; I am eager to receive feedback, largely because I'm confident enough in my own skills that I'm not worried about criticism or others seeing me as a failure. I know that the eye can't see itself and that all writers need feedback. However, in the area of math, I am not as confident due to a long history of negative experiences. So if a math problem comes up in a social conversation, I usually just laugh it off and say, "I'm an English teacher; don't ask me," hence effectively avoiding the challenge altogether—the very thing that I get so frustrated about when my students do it in my classroom. This year I told my students that I plan to have a growth mindset toward math, and I expect them to have a growth mindset toward English.

As I've learned over the years to share my own areas of weakness, I've seen the humanizing effect it has on the way students see me. This year after I pitched my "why reading matters" presentation, a student came up to me and told me that what I said really "hit" her and that she wanted to focus more on reading. We talked about her experiences as a non-native speaker of English, and I told her I was impressed with anyone learning a new language. Then she told me that she heard me speaking in Spanish to an ELL student who was new to the country, and she was impressed! I laughed and told her some of my insecurities about speaking Spanish, but she was very encouraging. Now whenever I attempt to use my broken Spanish to help students, I see her smiling at me. I've also noticed she's been more emboldened to raise her hand and share in class.

Another way I allow my students to try without fear of failure is making the first draft of an essay a separate assignment, for which they get full points as long as they turn in a complete draft. Even in schools doing proficiency or mastery grading, this works because

the common core actually has a standard on the writing process and simply writing a first draft makes you proficient in that aspect of the process. This is my way of showing students that they are rewarded if they will just try. I don't care if they make mistakes—the whole point of a first draft is to figure out how it could be better. I've told my students a mistake is a success as long as you learn from it, and the way they show that learning is by correcting those mistakes for a final draft.

Of course, there's a time to let a student fail, too. Even with a proficiency-based grading system that allows for re-writes and retakes, often enough students turn in too little too late, and can fail not just a writing assignment, but a quarter. This is a good time to have a one-on-one with a student about what went wrong and what goals to set for next quarter. Everything needs to be tied to the growth mindset and the opportunity to learn from an experience. This can be done through one-on-one conversations with students, through sharing with the class your "favorite mistakes" from a set of assignments you graded, as well as through assigning students to write reflections and goals after completing a piece of writing. There is never a time for sarcasm or shame about mistakes made in the classroom—only an opportunity to encourage growth.

As a professional educator, I've had to re-define my own ideas of success and failure. After turning in plagiarized work for every major writing assignment for the year, one student finally turned in his real writing for the fourth quarter narrative essay. Now, this essay wasn't exactly pretty. In fact, the writing was so poor that I couldn't even understand what happened in the story. But I spoke to him about some of my confusion points, and he actually turned in a revised final draft. The final draft was still quite poor, but I considered it a huge success because he embraced the effort and the risk of turning in his own writing and even continued with the process to take constructive feedback and embark on the journey that all professional writers go through when turning something from an idea to a finished product. He caught the vision that success doesn't mean getting an A you didn't deserve—success means learning something.

Winston Churchill said, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." As a teacher, I am the authority in my classroom, but my position of expertise and power didn't come from one defining moment of success; rather it came from a collection of successes and failures that I've used to continuously improve my practice. Educators need to help students reframe their vision of success to include facing failure. Case in point, I almost didn't submit this very article due to my own fear of failure, but I did, and my risk was rewarded when I was conditionally accepted pending revisions. And because of that risk, I've gained experience that is making me a better teacher and a more seasoned professional as I've been able to share with my students how I'm going through a revision process just like I expect them to. Students must see red marks on a first draft not as failure, but as part of the pathway to success. Let teachers and students, professionals and amateurs alike never forget the work, the effort, and the insecurities of the craft. Here's to facing failure!

From Nora K. Rivera:

Failure has been misunderstood. Rather than understanding it as a training phase, an opportunity for revision, or a rehearsal towards achievement, failure has become a word that implies defeat. As an English teacher, I have been pondering over my own reactions to failure in my teaching practices, prompting me to speculate about the importance of deliberately devoting time to writing in class and creating an editing system that can be adjusted to the needs of students. Consider my case last year when preparing to teach English I for the first time to a group of talented eighth-grade girls who were being taught high school English. Thinking of ideas like "practice makes perfect," "process over outcome," "plan with the end in mind," and "praise effort over grade," I created a practical system to give students sufficient time to practice writing and editing skills without exhausting myself grading essays after school. My method primarily consisted of peer-review workshops and weekly sentence exercises with SAT vocabulary use.

As part of our school's initiative to encourage students to take ownership of their learning, we implemented peer feedback practices

throughout the core subject classes, and teachers were able to modify this practice to their needs. Writing, I knew right away, was the place for peer feedback in my class. Knowing that writing requires thinking, editing our thinking, and making mistakes, I had numerous conversations with my academically competitive students about the value of failure and the benefits of giving and receiving meaningful feedback. To free class minutes to dedicate to writing, the girls read novels at home as this task is usually less daunting than writing and requires less guidance—although my students do often read and analyze short pieces of fiction and nonfiction in class. Then, I devised a rubric—adapted from the Expository Writing Rubric designed by the Texas Education Agency—specific enough to combine my expectations with the state test expectations but simple enough for my students to follow and provide peer feedback (Figure 1). Students participated in writing workshops nearly twice a month, starting with the composition of paragraphs and gradually moving into writing full essays (adjusting the rubric when working on paragraphs). Although always writing either an academic paragraph or a full essay, each workshop focused on a specific area (e.g., thesis, introduction, topic sentence, concrete detail), and each session culminated with written and oral peer feedback.

Grading was surprisingly effortless. Instead of fixating on the final draft, I concentrated on guiding the process. And because we had recently adopted and adapted the Jane Schaffer© color-coded system, which associates each element of an academic paragraph with a color, it was easy to walk around the room and redirect students on the spot. Paragraphs and essays produced during this time received an A for effort, and were scored by peers. Students practiced writing and made mistakes without the fear of receiving a failing grade. To receive the A, however, the work had to be completed, and the rubric with at least two comments—one for reinforcement and one for refinement—had to be attached to the writing piece. As a result, students proactively sought out the opinion of other students, and peer feedback quickly became part of the routine. A drawback of my method was that, due to time constrains, the girls were not able to revise and resubmit their work. Instead, they collected their writings and reviewed their

Feedback by: _____

Expository Writing Feedback

Organization & Progression (Thesis, Smooth Flow, and Transitions)	
The introduction and conclusion **strongly** establish the controlling idea (thesis), and **every part** of the paper supports that controlling idea. The progression of ideas is logical and well-control. **Meaningful** transitions and **strong** sentence-to-sentence connections enhance the flow of the essay.	4
The introduction and conclusion **clearly** establish the controlling idea (thesis), and **most parts** of the paper support that controlling idea. The essay is coherent, but **not always** unified due to minor lapses in focus. **For the most part**, transitions are meaningful, and sentence-to-sentence connections are **sufficient** to support the flow of the essay.	3
The thesis (controlling idea) is **weak** or somewhat **unclear**. **Lack of** an effective thesis or presence of irrelevant information interferes with the focus of the essay. The progression is **not always** controlled or logical. Repetition of wordiness causes **minor disruptions** in the flow of the assay. Transitions and sentence-to-sentence connections are **too weak** to support the flow of the essay.	2
The thesis statement is **missing**, even though most ideas are related to the prompt's topic. **Lack of** focus, unnecessary information, and abrupt shifts from idea to idea occur. The progression of ideas is **weak**. Repetition of wordiness causes **serious disruptions** in the flow of the essay. Transitions and sentence-to-sentence connections are **random or illogical**, making the paper **unclear** and **difficult to follow**.	1
Development of Ideas (Concrete Details and Elaboration)	
Concrete details **clearly** and **consistently** support the controlling idea of the paper. Essay is **thoughtful** and **engaging**. The writer uses **unique** examples or experiences to connect ideas in **interesting** ways.	4
Concrete details **sufficiently** to support the controlling idea, adding **some substance** to the essay. Essay reflects **some thoughtfulness**. The writer's response is **original**.	3
Concrete details are **present**, but they **don't really support** the controlling idea. Concrete details are **too brief**. Essay reflects **little or no thoughtfulness**. The writer's response is **limited**.	2
Concrete details are **weak**, **inappropriate**, **vague**, or **insufficient**. Response to the prompt is **vague or confused**. Essay is **weakly linked** to the prompt, demonstrating a **lack of** understanding of the task.	1
Use of Language (Diction, Syntax, Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling)	
Writer's word choice and language is **clear**, **precise**, and **appropriate** to the expository writing task. Sentences are **purposeful**, **varied**, and **well-controlled**, enhancing the effectiveness of the essay. Writer shows **consistent** command of grammar with only **minor** punctuation or spelling mistakes that don't distract from the fluency of the essay.	4
Writer's word choice and language is **mostly clear** and unambiguous, and the tone of the paper is **appropriate**. Sentences are **mostly varied** and well-controlled. Writer shows moderate command of grammar with **occasional** spelling and grammar mistakes that create few disruptions in the fluency of the essay.	3
Word choice is **not precise**, does not contribute to the clarity of the essay, and does little to establish a tone appropriate for the task. Sentences are awkward or **somewhat controlled**, weakening the effectiveness of the essay. Partial command of sentences, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. **Distracting errors** create minor disruptions in the fluency or meaning of the writing.	2
Word choice is **vague** or **limited** and does not establish an appropriate tone. Sentences are simple, awkward, or uncontrolled, significantly limiting the effectiveness of the essay. Little or no command of sentences, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. **Serious errors** create disruptions in the fluency of the essay.	1

Reinforce	**Refine**
What do you see in this essay that you find to be impressive, innovative, or strong? (I like how you… / I was impressed with…)	Are there parts of this essay that you thought were not clear? Was the concrete detail and commentary consistent? (I respectfully disagree with… / I think focusing on _____would really help you improve…)

Figure 1: Rubric for Expository Writing with Feedback

feedback before starting a new piece to avoid previous mistakes. The system not only gave students practice time but also saved me from the exhaustion of grading essays twice a month. As part of the nine-week exams, I meticulously graded two full essays per semester. It was during these assessments that the improvement from one writing piece to the next became evident.

In addition to the peer-review workshops, students practiced sentence structure by completing at home a simple vocabulary log every week (Figure 2). The log consisted of defining five SAT words, identifying parts of speech, synonyms, antonyms, and drawing images of each term. The caveat to this seemingly easy exercise was that students had to write one sentence using any two of the five words, and this one sentence needed to start with a different structure rule every week. We concentrated on five different rules to vary sentences throughout the year: beginning a sentence with an adverb, with a gerund, an adverbial clause, an adjective, or an infinitive. Every Monday, I wrote on the board the five new SAT words to develop in the log and the rule to use to start the sentence. At times, the rule also required a sentence to be compound, complex, or compound-complex. This sentence practice provided students with more non-intimidating writing experience, and gave me a chance to peek into their writing progress on a weekly basis.

This log was simple, and grading it typically took no more than ten minutes of checking by the students' desks while they worked on independent assignments. And each time I saw a faulty pattern emerging, I addressed it directly with the student. While some students failed to compose the sentence every now and then, most enjoyed the challenge of creating an interesting sentence with two new "fancy" words. And to persuade the reluctant students to write it every week, I weighed the sentence grade more than any other part of the log. Interestingly, many girls took this assignment as an outlet to express their humorous side or political views, and very often I found myself drawing happy faces, exclamation marks, or just chatting about the content. As in the writing workshops, we did not have enough time to revise and resubmit. Nonetheless, students reviewed prior mistakes and tried to avoid them the following week. With time, the skills

Vocabulary Log

Word:	Part of Speech:
Definition:	
Synonym: Antonym:	Image/Symbol:
Word:	Part of Speech:
Definition:	
Synonym: Antonym:	Image/Symbol:

[Note: Students complete a form for each of five SAT words.]

Write **one sentence** combining any **two vocabulary words**. Use the sentence variation rule by your teacher.

_____

_____

Figure 2: Vocabulary Log with Sentence [partial]

learned by practicing these sentences transferred into their essays. Both the vocabulary log and the peer feedback assisted my students during the state exam not only to write an effective essay, but to answer the multiple-choice questions in its editing section. The students gained confidence in writing while making low-stakes mistakes and learned to recognize these mistakes as opportunities to grow into better writers.

In the end, the girls accomplished a task that at the beginning of the school year seemed impossible. These eighth graders received the highest scores in the English I End of Course exam—a high school test—in the district. Succeeding at an exam that equally weighs reading and writing required my classroom to do the same. My system was neither the best nor the most unique. It was a trial-and-error method

that, like writing, was—still is—in constant state of revision. It was technique that allowed my young students to acquire something they lacked because of their age: experience.

To put it simply, we cannot expect students to get it perfect the first time, or the second, or the third time. Allowing and encouraging tolerance towards making mistakes in writing is indispensable to produce experienced writers. Allocating purposeful time to practice editing skills with a well-planned system, tailored to the needs of our own students, has to be a priority in the English secondary classroom if we want our students to succeed in college. Last year I learned to give writing a fair chance and stopped expecting perfect sentences, perfect paragraphs, perfect essays by accepting that making mistakes, and sometimes failing, is essential to writing.

REVIEWING FOR *JTW*

EVINCING CRITICISM AND COLLEGIALITY IN SCHOLARLY REVIEWS

Joseph Janangelo
Reviews Editor
Loyola University Chicago

I am writing to invite you to consider writing a review for the *Journal of Teaching Writing* and to introduce myself as the incoming Reviews Editor. I wish to begin by thanking our editor, Professor Kim Brian Lovejoy, for his generous invitation and this opportunity. Also, I thank my immediate predecessors, Professors Janis Haswell and Kay Halasek, for their fine work as well as the review authors and the *JTW* editorial staff for their important contributions to the journal. These colleagues, especially the review authors, do vital work for our profession. My work here, according to Professor Lovejoy, is to explain my vision and offer advice for potential, and perhaps returning, review authors. I am tasked with offering some ideas and strategies for writing your review—"a piece … that gives readers an overview of [my] plans as the new Reviews Editor."

In preparation, I have done some research on the Internet and within the pages of the *Journal of Teaching Writing*. I am taken by The University of North Carolina's capacious definition that "[a] review is a critical evaluation of a text, event, object, or phenomenon." They argue that "[a]bove all, a review makes an argument," and that "[t]he

most important element of a review is that it is a commentary, not merely a summary." The major takeaway is that a well-written review "allows you to enter into dialogue and discussion with the work's creator and with other audiences." Certainly, dialogue and discussion are worthy goals. Of course, with published reviews, that discussion takes place in public view, and can be become influential, even impactful. People will be reading your review and will be deciding what to believe about the work under discussion based, in part, by what you write. Since the spotlight will be on and focused, journal readers will need to contemplate and trust your reading and review of the work. That inspires me to share some ideas for formulating and composing your review.

For one thing, *I hope that you will consider the work's pertinence to teaching writing*. As you formulate your review, think about the readers' end(s). Ask yourself, why should they read the work and how might it help them become more effective, more intentional tutors, teachers, or administrators? Let's think about utility, something that is too often undervalued or disparaged. As a reviewer, you might ask yourself these questions:

- How might readers be able to use your review for their teaching, scholarship, and conversations with colleagues, parents, stewards of scholarly organizations, or the general public?
- What would you like readers to learn, critique, see, or see anew in the work?
- How might *JTW* readers use the work and mine its data, evidence, findings, or argument for their own pedagogical purposes?
- How might readers use the text in their own research projects? What new pedagogical/scholarly work might it inspire?
- What would you like readers to do, think about, consider or re-consider as they read your review and the work?
- How might the work relate to teacher and tutor preparation and renewal?

- What is the work's relevance to graduate student pedagogical and professional development and scholarship?
- How does the work help us explain our work to the general public and policy makers?

As a reviewer, you can't know exactly when readers will encounter your review—before or after reading the work—or what they know or have heard about the text and its author(s). However, we can consider our readers' students, stakes, and goals. If you think about your readers' colleagues and leadership teams, you might be inspired to consider passionately "interested parties" such as parents, administrators, and campus/policy decision-makers. That would be a good time to *consider what diversity does and could mean in the context of the work's argument, its methodological approach, its data sample and findings*. Here are some possible approaches:

- You might glean the data, argument, and assumptions critically, re-mining them for oversights and slights as well as for inflations and myopia.
- You might suggest ways that the data could be redeployed and reassessed with an eye toward inclusion. That could mean drawing attention to "minor" passages or ideas that could be amplified and explored in further studies.
- You might scrutinize the Works Cited and notes for areas that warrant more inclusive discussion. This could include LGBTI students, different learning styles, race and ethnicity, gender, class, and student athletes, competing notions of ability as well as other things.
- Think of diverse learners, their strengths, learning styles, and needs. Tell us what the work you are reviewing could mean for, and how it could apply to, working class, elite learners, as well as English Language Learners who could encompass both of those categories (Leki).
- Ask yourself if there are other readers just like you or not like you? Tell us why, and perhaps how, you think

> they should read the work in whichever ways you think they should scrutinize, interrogate, or interpret it.

You might also *consider the diversity of the texts you choose to review*. In "Reviews at a Crossroads," former Reviews Editor Janis Haswell offers us advice on where to look. She recommends "that we expand our horizons" and argues that "scholarship has taken an important turn with the advent of Open Access Publishing—original research provided free (and immediately upon publication) to all on the internet" (120). Haswell also notes that "[i]t is incumbent upon print journals to acknowledge this shift as well as upon English teachers to be familiar with the potential and promise of OA materials …" (120). Haswell states that "[t]eachers of writing can learn a great deal from other disciplines in their use of this important opportunity" and that "[a] few Open Access initiatives in other fields may be of interest to researchers as well as teachers seeking access to a wider range of resources …" (121). She specifically mentions The WAC Clearinghouse and invites us to review "books from presses that have been 'underrepresented' in composition journals … publications from outside the U.S., despite active research (particularly in K-12) published in English by European university presses" (123-24). I support that perspective. It would be valuable to bring to public attention underrepresented ideas and works that some readers may be less liable to encounter elsewhere.

Imagining the specific somewhere in which writing instruction occurs could lead reviewers to *consider the work's pertinence to the institutional contexts and working conditions in which students, staff, and teachers labor and learn*. In her "Writing a Review for *JTW*: Reflecting on Scholarship in the Field," Kay Halasek argues for recognizing institutional variety and reviewing works that discuss literacy development "in and out of the classroom with students of all ages" (102). She explains that she "can make a small contribution to this P-20 collaboration by soliciting from colleagues reviews of books, webtexts, websites, and educational software that represent the needs and interests of all *JTW* readers, facilitating a greater understanding of theory and practice across these contexts" (102). I

think we would do well to pursue the provocations and possibilities Halasek outlines by examining how the work's ideas can become dialogic with the institutional contexts K-12 and beyond.

Along with diversity, you might discuss *how the work resonates with important topics in millennial education and academe*. Some topics may include: classroom instruction, online learning, writing centers as well as relevance to professional best practices and policy statements or educational and learning theory. Along with discussing the opportune moment, you might consider such perennial topics as undergraduate research, assessment, digital humanities, student persistence and retention, writing curricula, writing program and/or writing center administration, as well as writing across the curriculum initiatives. In discussing the work's relationship to these issues, you might offer ideas and caveats for colleagues, teachers, graduate students, librarians, advisors, staff, and administrators across units and departments. Some discussion points could include how well the work responds to the cultural moment or to longstanding, and perhaps understudied or unseen, issues related to teaching writing and literacy acquisition. For instance, does the work point to a current or emerging need? Does it amplify something previously ignored?

Whatever you do, recognize that you have influence as a reviewer and exercise due diligence. Kay Halasek discusses "the immense value of public review of scholarship—for individual readers and the profession as a whole" (101). She notes that "[t]hrough our collective assessments of one another's work in book reviews and review essays, we engage one another in conversation about and collaborative assessment of the research that defines our field—determining the merits and contributions of our colleagues' work." Halasek illuminates the stakes by arguing that "[r]eviews … create a space for the community to reflect on the field and its research" and that "[a]lthough certainly not equal to the driving force of publishers' editorial boards that determine *what* gets published, book reviewers nonetheless provide a valuable descriptive and evaluative function about what *has* been published" (101).

To Halasek's comments, I would add that well-written and well-argued reviews may be catalytic of what might or should be published

as reviewers inspire readers to begin their own research to build work they have read. Halasek explains the array of benefits reviews afford readers: "Composing reviews certainly provides reviewers themselves a means of keeping up with current thinking—but *reading* these reviews keeps all of us aware of theoretical and pedagogical innovations across that span of nearly twenty years when students sit in our classrooms" (102). According to her, "We all become better stewards of our students and their educations through greater understanding of the work that we all do—whether it's in a reading readiness program, primary language arts classroom, first-year writing class, or an advanced writing seminar" (102). While I would be remiss not to mention that reviews are sometimes imbricated in vexed, complicated, and even shady aspects of academia, I would add that, as reviewers, we are poised to become better stewards of our colleagues as well.[1]

As an influencer, you might *use your review to teach us*. If you remember our journal's title and emphasis, you might see your review as a site of questioning and conversation and, most of all, of teaching. I invite you to take seriously your pedagogical role and to see yourself as a guide, instructor, and even an advisor for your readers. That means writing a review that is fair (e.g., quoting accurately and in context), judicious, and sensitive by attending to textual nuance.[2] That involves *evincing intellectual hospitality when you find something to praise and critique*. Our colleagues at UNC pose a set of questions for giving credit where it is due:

- How is the work's argument set up?
- What support does the author give for her/his findings?
- What is the main idea of the work?
- What makes it good, different, or groundbreaking?

One of *The University of Southern California Research Guides* offers this important refinement for when a work appears groundbreaking. It states that "[t]he question of whether the book breaks new ground does not necessarily refer to some radical or overarching notion of originality in the author's argument … contemporary scholarship

in the arts or humanities is not about completely reorienting the discipline, nor is it usually about arguing a thesis that has never been argued before…." The message is that "[i]t is more likely that the author of a scholarly book will look at the existing evidence with a finer eye for detail, and use that detail to amplify and add to existing scholarship. The author may present new evidence or a new 'reading' of the existing evidence, in order to refine scholarship and to contribute to current debate. Or the author may approach existing scholarship, events, and prevailing ideas from a more nuanced perspective, thus reframing the debate within the discipline." That nuanced discussion of value will, I hope, prove useful to your review.

How about offering criticism and in public view? We know they put effort into their work, yet there is no need to shy away from offering criticism when it is there to share. Some say offering criticism is a central "Law of Genre" (Derrida and Ronell) and the hallmark of a scholarly review. The Writing Center UNC offers this perspective: "You can offer agreement or disagreement and identify where you find the work exemplary or deficient in its knowledge, judgments, or organization." They add that you can and should "… challenge an assumption, approach, or argument." They advise us to "[be] sure, however, to cite specific examples to back up your assertions carefully." The goal is always to "… present a balanced argument about the value of the book for its audience." To me, that means being neither deliberately picayune (e.g., employing an "it's all good" approach), nor blue sky in order to help readers.

Think of your review as evincing collegiality and criticism. While this may seem like antithetical advice, to be both generous and critical, I think we can do that by offering *JTW* readers our most thoughtful counsel about why a work is meritorious and where it falls short. I recommend that we see any criticism we advance as a service to our colleagues: peer, junior, senior, and future. We might also see that criticism as an act of feedback to authors, publishers, and schools who chose this book or digital source over others and who invested time, intellect, energy and other resources (e.g., paid leaves of absence and project subvention) to bring the work to public fruition. In short, I trust you to be both critical and conscientious, to critique

the work without necessarily castigating the project or author(s). As we offer criticism, let's strive for a tone and approach that is open, collegial, and receptive. Don't shy away from offering criticism. Just offer it with example and integrity. Speaking of collegiality, our colleagues at The Writing Center UNC offer us this important advice: "Review the book in front of you, not the book you wish the author had written. You can and should point out shortcomings or failures, but don't criticize the book for not being something it was never intended to be." Whatever criticism you advance, write as though you would read your review to the author(s)' faces and not magnify perceived flaws just for the satisfaction and dubious status of being critical in public.

As you review, ask yourself if there might be *something about appreciation within the criticism you offer*. Even if you disagree with the author, perhaps especially if you disagree with the author, try to see what reviewers and publishers saw in the project, if not the "finished" manuscript. If the work is not a complete success, perhaps there is discernible value in the attempt, if not the realization. Another way would be to explain the missed opportunities and leave bread crumbs for future studies and scholarship. You might enact a collegial turn by pointing out potential work that lies ahead for *JTW* readers to do.

One way to consider writing your review is *to engage in self-reflection*. I hope you will consider your situated reading and reader response to the work you are reviewing. Perhaps you have only read this text by that author? Maybe you know their scholarly contributions or have worked with them in professional contexts? Each has its own strengths and limitations and potential influence on your review. Eschew the idea of reviewer neutrality. You can be a reliable reviewer without being a dispassionate one. If you do that, be transparent. I hope you will consider putting something of yourself into your review by examining and revealing your investments. I am thinking of Michael Polyani's argument about the "personal coefficient" in *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. Here I invite you to consider your own preferences and biases and to disclose a bit so *JTW* readers can better understand your perspective. As you

reflect on your aversions and, perhaps more importantly, your alliances, you might consider these questions:

- What inspired you to write your review? What interested and still interests you?
- Think about your involvement with the argument and data: what attracted or distracted you?
- What were you looking to find in the work?
- If you were disappointed in the work, how did you feel when you did not find what you were looking for?
- Following that train of thought, what inspired you to look for that in the work anyway?
- How do your beliefs about what the author(s) should have done hold up under scrutiny and multiple or counter readings?

Personalizing your review is one way to "own" what you say publicly. Finally, if you could write the author(s) a note about revising or expanding their work, what would you say? You might consider concluding your review by asking questions of the author[s], readers, and publishers. You might offer suggestions and ideas for further work or projects.

You are welcome to contact me at jjanang@luc.edu. If you are interested in writing a review, please list your areas of interest and send me your CV. Thank you. I hope these ideas are helpful to you. While I cannot pledge to recommend every review for publication, I welcome the chance to hear from you.

Notes

[1]Haswell elaborates on the professional stakes and politics of book reviews, stating, "Few of us who write or edit academic books will be recognized in *The New York Times Review of Books*, but we all hope to be reviewed in a scholarly journal" (119). She explains that "… a journal's review policy can enhance and solidify its reputation as being dedicated to a particular emphasis" and contribute to its branding (119). Haswell also points out that reviews may be imbricated in professional politics and author status: "We also know that books published by 'big names' in the field will always be reviewed,

sometimes by several journals, occasionally even twice by the same journal, whereas other books of equal merit by lesser-known scholars may never be reviewed….Note on Ominous Practice: And the decision not to review certain books is one of the ways our profession censures ideas and writers" (120).

[2]The UNC and USC web sites offer valuable ideas for formulating your review.

Works Cited

Derrida, Jacques, and Avital Ronell. "The Law of Genre." *Critical Inquiry*, vol.7, no.1, Autumn, 1980, pp. 55-81

"General Guide Information." *USC Libraries Research Guides*. University of Southern California, Updated: 6 Feb. 2017, libguides.usc.edu/ah_writing. Accessed 21 Feb. 2018.

Halasek, Kay. "Writing a Review for *JTW*: Reflecting on Scholarship in the Field." *Journal of Teaching Writing*, vol. 29, no.1, pp. 101-06.

Haswell, Janis. "Reviews at a Crossroads." *Journal of Teaching Writing*, vol. 22, no.2, pp. 119-25.

Leki, Ilona. *Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers*. Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1992.

Lovejoy, Kim Brian. "An Invitation." Received by Joseph Janangelo, 9 June 2017.

Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. U. of Chicago P., 1958.

"Writing Academic Book Reviews." *USC Libraries Research Guides*. University of Southern California, Updated: 6 Feb. 2017, libguides.usc.edu/c.php?g=235208&p=1560694. Accessed 21 Feb. 2018.

The Writing Center UNC: Book Reviews. 2018, writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/book-reviews. Accessed 22 Feb. 2018.

Kinkead, Joyce. *Researching Writing: An Introduction to Research Methods*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2016. 338 pages. $34.95. 978-1-60732-478-2. Print

Reviewed by Nathalie Singh-Corcoran

Undergraduate research has become a mainstay on college and university campuses, and while there may be several arguments for including undergraduate research in the overall college experience, George D. Kuh's is perhaps the most persuasive to multiple stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, faculty, and administrators). In his 2008 analysis of the *National Survey of Student Engagement*, he defines undergraduate research as a high-impact educational practice (HIP) or a teaching and learning approach that benefits students from a variety of backgrounds. Much evidence suggests that HIPs such as undergraduate research positively impact student retention and engagement (Brownwell and Swaner, Kilgo et al., Stanford et al.). Consequently, such data have led a number of institutions to devote significant resources to the undergraduate research experience. For example, at my home institution, a relatively new Office of Undergraduate Research provides students with opportunities to design their own research projects, connect with faculty mentors, and present and publish their research. In addition to the institutional support devoted to undergraduate research, a number of journals publish undergraduate research exclusively (*International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities*, the *Journal of Student Research*, and *Young Scholars in Writing*).

Chief among writing studies scholars on the cutting edge of undergraduate research is Joyce Kinkead. Her new book, *Researching Writing: An Introduction to Research Methods*, is a natural complement to the body of her scholarly and administrative work. Kinkead is both a longtime WPA and university administrator. For over twenty years, she served in writing program and writing center director roles. She is a founding member of the National Writing Center's Association (now the International Writing Centers Association), and at Utah State University, Kinkead served as a dean of humanities and the

Associate Vice President of Research and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Research Studies. She has been publishing on the value of undergraduate research for well over a decade.

Kinkead classifies *Researching Writing* as a textbook for students, particularly those who are majoring in English literature, writing studies, or creative writing. She also sees the book as applicable to any student in any major who is, in her words, "investigating writing in the disciplines" (xvii). The textbook is divided into two parts. Part 1 outlines the process of research, and part 2 discusses research methods. Student activities are woven throughout each chapter. Key words are italicized and glossed at the end of the book. Many of the chapters include references for future reading, and each chapter has its own works cited.

Kinkead spends her first chapter, "The Research Process," explaining the importance of research to her student audience. Embedded in the chapter's first two headings "Why do Research?" and "Why do Research in Writing?" are reasonable, clear, and well-researched responses to anticipated audience questions such as: How will this book (and course attached to the book) help me reach my end goal (career, graduate school, etc.)? In those first few pages, she helps her target audience see that through research, we identify solutions to the problems of our time. In addition, she explains that when students engage in research projects, they become more critical and independent thinkers; they further strengthen their reading, writing, and speaking skills; they become better prepared for graduate or professional school; and they become more appealing candidates on the job market.

"The Research Process" is the longest chapter in the book, totaling 65 pages. It is also the one that reads most like a textbook. In keeping with the genre, instruction is scaffolded. Kinkead helps students identify a research area, formulate a research question, find resources, conduct primary research, and then write everything up. As a teacher of a junior-level course where this book would best fit, I found this chapter to be the most immediately applicable. Students often have little experience with research beyond their first-year composition courses, and those courses don't require them to do disciplinary research. Students don't quite have the sense of what it means to ask and investigate a focused

research question, and many of us teachers don't quite know how to articulate and instruct students in the research process because we weren't taught how to research. We were left to *figure it out on our own*.

In many ways, *Researching Writing*—but especially this first chapter—is an extension of Kinkead and Grobman's work. In "Expanding Opportunities for Undergraduate Research in English Studies," they lobby for genuine undergraduate research opportunities for students in the English major. They argue that English Studies, particularly Literature, has been "slow to embrace the undergraduate research movement" (218) in part because assignments in literature classes lean toward close reading. In addition, it bears repeating that research has been excluded because many teachers of English are not quite sure how to teach the research process. Chapter 1 not only gives students a guide, it gives teachers one as well.

Chapters 3 and 4 seem an extension of Chapter 1 in that they both speak to significant components of research. Chapter 3, "Considering the Ethics and Responsible Conduct of Research," outlines how researchers are accountable for upholding a code of conduct. The chapter also explains IRB approval. Having worked with undergraduate researchers, I can say that the process of IRB approval is often a mystery to students. Chapter 3 will prove helpful for readers because it clearly explains why a college's or university's Institutional Review Board is necessary and important and how students can navigate the IRB process.

Chapter 4, "Sharing Research Through Oral Presentation, Poster Presentation, and Publication" offers a guide for the presentation of original research. Kinkead explains the poster, an old genre for researchers in the sciences and social sciences but a relatively new feature at professional conferences in writing studies. She also offers advice on how to deliver a conference presentation. This chapter implicitly nods to the value of undergraduate scholarship and the students' potential contributions to the field. It signals to teachers and students that undergraduates are makers of knowledge whose research projects do not have to end once the semester is over.

There are a few chapters whose placement disrupted my reading experience. Chapter 2, "Writing Studies," was one of those chapters.

As I stated above, Chapters 3 and 4 seemed natural extensions of Chapter 1. But Chapter 2 is not a directive chapter in the same way as the others in Part 1. Chapter 2 provides a brief explanation of Writing Studies: what it is and its history. The content itself is useful, especially for students who have not been exposed to the field before. Students will gain a general sense of the importance of writing throughout time and the role of writing at the college level. The chapter also has several student activities designed to get students reflecting on their writing experiences in college, exploring Writing Studies degree programs, and learning some of the key terms in the field. Because this chapter addresses a different kind of content than the preceding and following chapters, I initially questioned its placement. However, upon my second reading of *Researching Writing*, I concluded that the audience of this chapter is narrower than the others in Part 1. This chapter, while introductory, seems to be one that's mostly for students who are writing studies majors and minors (or who want to learn more about Writing Studies as a field) while the other chapters in Part 1 speak to a broader audience.

Part 2, "Approaches to Research," is largely devoted to research methods in writing studies. It is divided into four chapters and covers text and discourse analysis (chapter 5), case study (chapter 6), ethnography (chapter 7), historical (chapter 8), and mix-methods research (chapter 9). Each of these individual chapters provides a brief description of the method and an example of a professional scholar and a student scholar employing each method in their individual research. At the end of each chapter, Kinkead also provides article-length, published examples of student work. For example, chapter 6, "Conducting a Case Study," begins with a student-friendly definition of a case study: "The case study is a qualitative approach used to look at a single case; a small group of participants, a class, or a program. It involves description and analysis and is often used to make recommendations" (172). Kinkead then goes on to show readers how Janet Emig employed case study research in "The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders." Once she has provided additional professional-scholar examples, she turns to a student-scholar example. She describes how one student used the case study method to investigate how

users interacted with a website belonging to Global Village Gifts, an all-volunteer fair trade store. The student's aim was to make the site work better for the organization and expand the website's reach (181). In the last section of the chapter, Kinkead offers an exemplary student essay originally published in the journal *Young Scholars in Writing*: Sara Mulcahy's "I Realize Writing Is a Part of My Daily Life Now: A Case Study of Writing Knowledge Transfer in One Section of ESL Writing."

Of recently published textbooks, *Researching Writing* reminds me most of Melissa Ianetta and Lauren Fitzgerald's *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors*. Ianetta and Fitzgerald also encourage students to undertake research. They describe research methods at length, and they offer published student examples (note: both books also use Brown et al., "Taking on Turnitin: Tutors Advocating Change" as exemplary student research essays). However, Ianetta and Fitzgerald's audience (the peer tutor) and the site of research (the writing center) are more targeted whereas *Researching Writing* is meant for a wider range of students. There is much productive overlap between the books, and I could see using *Researching Writing* as a companion to the *Oxford Guide* in any writing center practicum or in other staff development efforts.

Researching Writing could also easily be employed in a writing about writing course. Pieces could be used in first-year writing classes. The book is also appropriate for graduate students who are new to writing studies research, and because the first section of the book is especially versatile, it could be adapted in undergraduate courses outside of English or writing studies.

In the next iteration of *Researching Writing*, I can imagine Kinkead expanding on existing sections. For example, early on in the book, she suggests that students seek a faculty mentor who can help serve as a steward of the discipline, someone who, "teaches by example and can model how to read scholarly literature, critique it, write and revise it" (99). The need for a mentor might be especially acute for underrepresented students, and there may be other, additional factors a student considers in her search to find one. Is the faculty mentor a person of color or the first to go to college? Can the faculty

member help the student navigate her concerns or answer her questions related to identity and the acquisition of a new discourse?

Second additions aside, Kinkead makes several important points in *Researching Writing*. First, we should engage students in research early and often. Research, as we teach it, is often bookended in a student's college career: experienced in first-year writing and then again in a senior capstone. If other undergraduate research opportunities exist, they are often only available to honors students. Kinkead shows us how to engage students in meaningful research beyond current models. As Kinkead states at the start of her book, when students participate in meaningful research, they become more engaged in their learning. More engagement translates to better outcomes for students. They see the value in what they are learning. They become better critical thinkers, stronger communicators in writing and speaking, and more confident independent learners. They are more likely to be retained, and they are more likely to graduate in four years.

Secondly, undergraduates have the capacity to contribute significantly to scholarship, particularly in writing studies. For far too long, undergraduate writers have been the subject of our research. But, as Lori Grobman argues, through participation in writing studies research, undergraduates have the opportunity to "write themselves into disciplinary conversations and challenge faculty/scholar-constructed representations of them" (177). Our students deserve a voice in the conversations about them, and they, like all scholars, have the potential to make significant contributions to the field. Through *Researching Writing*, Kinkead gives students and us the tools to ensure their voices are heard.

Works Cited

Brownell, Jayne E., and Lynne El. Swaner. *Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion, and Quality*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2010.

Grobman, Laurie. "The Student Scholar: (Re)Negotiating Authorship and Authority." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2009, pp. 175-96.

Kuh, George D. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008. ERIC.

Kilgo, Cindy A., Jessica K. Ezell Sheets, and Ernest T. Pascarella. "The Link Between High-Impact Practices and Student Learning: Some Longitudinal Evidence." *Higher Education*, vol. 69, no. 4, 2015, pp. 509-25. ERIC.

Kinkead, Joyce, and Laurie Grobman. "Expanding Opportunities for Undergraduate Research in English Studies." *Profession*, 2011, pp. 218-30.

Stanford, Jennifer S., Suzanne E. Rocheleau, Kevin P.W. Smith, and Jaya Mohan. "Early Undergraduate Research Experiences Lead to Similar Gains for STEM and Non-STEM Undergraduates." *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2017, pp. 115-29. ERIC.

Ball, Cheryl E., and Drew M. Loewe, editors. *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, 2017. 370 pages. Free and open-access at https://textbooks.lib.wvu.edu/badideas/badideasaboutwriting-book.pdf. ISBN: 978-0-9988820-0-0.

Reviewed by Mark Blaauw-Hara

Writing Studies has a fake news problem. When I say this, I'm not using the term as many politicians do—i.e., to discount real facts that make me uncomfortable. I mean there really is a collection of incorrect ideas about writing and writers that persists in the public mind: for example, that Standard English is inherently correct and easily understandable, that America is in the midst of a literacy crisis, that good writers are born and not made, that writing well in one context means you can write well in all contexts, and more. These ideas cause real problems for us in the classroom and in our schools, and unfortunately, we writing teachers have done a poor job dispelling them.

One reason is that we tend only to talk about how writing and writers work with our students and each other—i.e., in classrooms, journals, academic books, and conferences—rather than with the public at large. As a result, the public is behind the curve of current writing-studies scholarship, which has repercussions for us in the classroom and in the larger university context. Consider if our students already came to us understanding that writing is recursive and individual, that audience and purpose are vital considerations, or that good research begins with a genuinely thorny question. How much time might we gain in the classroom? If our administrators and legislators understood that writing is a difficult, idiosyncratic process, and that writers could benefit from working with experts in the field, how might funding and staffing situations change in English departments?

Bad Ideas About Writing is an effort to widen the conversation about writing studies. In their introduction, Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe write that the book was conceived as a vehicle for Writing Studies scholars "to name particularly unhelpful or backward ideas

[about writing] and argue directly to the public about them" (1). The result is a series of short essays that consciously eschew the syntax and style of journal articles, attempting rather to "summarize the available research and present it in a way similar to how a newspaper, introductory textbook, or podcast might deliver such research" (2).

The book is organized around eight categories of "bad ideas": what good writing is; who good writers are; style, usage, and grammar; writing techniques; genres; assessing writing; digital technology; and writing teachers. Most sections include five to ten essays, each of which summarizes a bad idea, points out its flaws, and provides a nuanced, expansive, and research-based alternative view. The book contains more than sixty such essays, usually around five pages each. The bad ideas are well chosen and some are, at least to me, darkly funny. For example:

- "Writers are Mythical, Magical, and Damaged"
- "Texting Ruins Literacy Skills"
- "Popular Culture is Killing Writing"

The titles of these essays have a similar effect as does reading a post about how presumably liberal climate scientists are faking global temperature data in an attempt to sabotage American energy production: an initial disbelieving chuckle, followed by a sense of disquiet shading into slow-building alarm. Do people really believe this? If so, how can we get them not to?

Recently, Nick Behm, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Duane Roen published an excellent piece in *Academe* arguing that a functional democracy should have access to current knowledge and conversations of the type faculty produce and engage with on a daily basis. Yet as Jill Lepore memorably opines in a piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, academic writing tends to be "a great, heaping mountain of exquisite knowledge surrounded by a vast moat of dreadful prose." Of course, Lepore's critique is not true in every case, and some academic prose is difficult to read not because of its inherent quality but because it engages with difficult ideas. Yet if we put our minds

to it, I'm sure we could figure out how to present those difficult ideas in more accessible prose.

Essentially, that's what *Bad Ideas* attempts to do: identify erroneous understandings, show how they lead to negative repercussions, and correct them, all through relatively simple writing. For example, Jacob Babb's rebuttal of America's perceived "literacy crisis" touches on institutional racism, technology, socioeconomics, and public discourse. Anjali Pattanayak, Jennifer M. Cunningham, and Steven Alvarez each have entries that further explore how the idea of a standardized, privileged form of English impacts marginalized populations and serves to ossify socioeconomic stratification. Seth Kahn's entry on writing teachers describes how the bad idea that "anyone can teach writing" has resulted in the mass exploitation of a part-time workforce. Alison C. White's entry on how research should proceed from intriguing questions (rather than already-held assumptions) supports genuine public dialogue as we engage with the challenges of our current time.

Language-wise, the essays do a good job of adopting a more accessible prose style. For example, here is a section of Elizabeth Wardle's entry that pushes back against the concept of "writing in general":

> There is no such thing as writing in general. Do you doubt this claim? Test it out. Go to your desk right now and attempt to write something in general.... You can't do it, because it can't be done. (30)

Contrast this segment with a few sentences from Wardle's 2009 article "Mutt Genres":

> Genres arise when particular exigencies are encountered repeatedly; yet each time an exigence arises, people must be attuned to the specifics of the current situation in order to employ the institutionalized features of the genre effectively—or, in some cases, throw them out. (768)

Both segments argue that writing is done for specific purposes in particular situations, yet the prose is markedly different. The first segment addresses the reader directly, contains contractions, and makes its argument in five short, straightforward sentences. The second is a single, syntactically complicated sentence that relies on discipline-specific terms. Just for fun, I ran each through several online readability assessments: the first segment has a Flesch Kincaid grade-level score of around 3.0, whereas the second scores around 24. Of course, one is not "better" than the other, but the first will likely be easier for a wider audience to understand.

I do question whether that wider audience will ever read the book in the first place. Housed on an academic server, composed in a single .pdf, *Bad Ideas* is a digital version of an academic text, and is likely to be read by the same audience that reads most academic texts: us. If our goals are to "argue directly with the public" (1), as Ball and Loewe state, those goals might be better reached through other modes of delivery. For example, many colleges have annual speaker series, open to the public, that feature faculty discussing interesting facets of their fields. These might be better ways to get the word out, as it were. Writing in more public outlets—websites, local newspapers, etc.—might also be effective. Behm, Rankins-Robertson, and Roen argue for this sort of public engagement in their *Academe* article.

Where this book shines is in conjunction with writing curricula that focus on helping composition students develop a "theory of writing," as Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak advocate in their book *Teaching for Transfer*. *Bad Ideas* would also serve as an excellent component of a curriculum based in Writing Studies of the sort outlined in Downs and Wardle's pivotal article "Teaching About Writing, Righting Misconceptions." The approachable prose would make the book's essays much more accessible to students than most of the writing in our field. They could be used on their own or in conjunction with more "academic," in-depth articles on similar subjects. My own department recently adopted a writing-about-writing curriculum, and I forwarded the link to *Bad Ideas* to the rest of the faculty. I plan to use it in my own sections of first-year writing, not only because the

essays engage key ideas that would help my students understand writing, but because the style of the book demonstrates that difficult ideas can be discussed in a stylistically direct way.

My hope as well is that the book will help me push back against some of the false narratives—the fake news—in my classroom. In the public sphere, fake news often persists because in some way it meshes with a worldview already held by the reader. Believing a contradictory truth is often uncomfortable because it calls that worldview into question. In the classroom, writing's version of fake news can operate in much the same way. Believing that "some people are just born good writers," as Jill Parrot's essay is titled, counter-intuitively serves as a salve to struggling writers: If they struggle with writing, it's because of immutable genetics. It's not their fault; they are off the hook. In contrast, if writing is viewed—as Parrot argues—similarly to sports, wherein genetic predisposition plays a role but training and sustained hard work can help *anyone* improve, that means that our students can no longer shrug their shoulders when they confront their own writing. Improving at writing becomes largely a matter of choice: Do they *want* to improve? If so, how hard are they willing to work to do so? What are the best strategies to support their growth?

These are challenging questions, and we should forgive our students and the public for buying into narratives of writing and writers that relieve them of the responsibility of asking them. However, we should challenge those narratives when they contradict what our scholarship has shown to be the case. Doing so will help our students grow as more informed, confident, and proficient writers.

Similarly, the field has a responsibility to engage with the wider public and share what we know. I admire and agree with the editors' and authors' goals, and writing the book and posting it for free represent a genuine attempt to share what we know. *Bad Ideas About Writing* is well worth reading. I see its application being primarily in the classroom, but the charge of the book—to engage a wider audience—is one we should heed.

Works Cited

Behm, Nicholas, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Duane Roen. "The Case for Academics as Public Intellectuals." *Academe*, vol. 100, no. 1, 2014, www.aaup.org/article/case-academics-public-intellectuals#.Wz4_MNhKg6V. Accessed 18 June 2018.

Downs, Douglas, and Elizabeth Wardle. "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning 'First-Year Composition' as 'Introduction to Witing Studies.'" *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 58, no. 4, 2007, pp. 552-84.

Lepore, Jill. "The New Economy of Letters." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 3 September 2013, www.chronicle.com/article/The-New-Economy-of-Letters/141291. Accessed 22 June 2018.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak. *Writing across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing*. Utah State UP, 2014.

Wardle, Elizabeth. "'Mutt Genres' and the Goal of FYC: Can We Help Students Write the Genres of the University?" *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 60, no. 4, 2009, pp. 765-89.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Brandie Bohney was a high school English teacher for nearly a decade before she decided to pursue her Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Writing. Her research focuses on secondary English teacher education in writing instruction, and she is also interested in devalued Englishes in the composition classroom. She is currently in her second year of doctoral studies at Bowling Green State University.

Elizabeth L. Jaeger is an associate professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Sociocultural Studies at the University of Arizona in Tucson, AZ. Her primary research interests are in writing instruction for students of all ages, and members of marginalized groups who choose to write for their own personal fulfillment. She can be reached at elizabethjaeger56@email.arizona.edu.

Joseph Janangelo is an associate professor of English at Loyola University Chicago and a past president of the Council of Writing Program Administrators. His most recent book is *A Critical Look at Institutional Mission: A Guide for Writing Program Administrators* (2016, Parlor Press).

Marissa King is a former 5th grade teacher in Tulsa Public Schools and a former Hesston College Education professor. She currently works for the Teaching & Leading Initiative of Oklahoma. Her research on developmental writing strategies has appeared in *Language Arts*, *Teaching English at the Two-Year College*, and *Oklahoma English*. She is a regular contributor to Education World and Edutopia.

Nora K. Rivera is a seasoned secondary teacher who holds an M.A. in Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing, an M.A. in Spanish Literature, and is now working on her Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Texas at El Paso. She has taught a variety of subjects at different levels, ranging from

Marketing at the graduate and undergraduate level to English, Journalism, Spanish, Business, and Digital Interactive Media at the high school level. She currently teaches English at the Young Women's Leadership Academy in El Paso, TX.

Karen Sheriff LeVan teaches writing and literature courses at Hesston College, where she also directs the Writing Fellows Program. With a zeal for writing identity across the lifespan, she focuses her research on the struggle for words in the 5th grade classroom, first-year college writing courses, and older adult creative writing groups. Her scholarship appears in *Teaching English at the Two-Year College*, *Language Arts*, *Oklahoma English*, and *AgeBlog*.

Missy Springsteen-Haupt is in her thirteenth year of teaching 7th and 8th grade language arts at Clarion-Goldfield-Dows Middle School in Clarion, Iowa. She blogs about teaching and writer's workshop at themrshauptsteen.weebly.com.

Stacy Stosich has taught high school English for eleven years. She teaches junior English, both honors and core with ELL students. She is National Board Certified and a Fellow of the National Writing Project.

Robert Watkins is an assistant professor of English at Idaho State University, where he teaches undergraduate and graduate students rhetoric, composition, and professional writing. His research focuses on the pedagogical intersections of multimodality, visual rhetoric, and comics. His writing has appeared in *Kairos*, *Digital Humanities Quarterly* (where the issue was awarded Best Online Comics Studies Scholarship of 2016), *InVisible Culture*, and in an upcoming issue of *Programmatic Perspectives*.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

JTW is Now Accepting Submissions for the Fall 2019 Guest-Edited "Teacher to Teacher" Section

Theme: Real Revision

The *JTW* is happy to announce the continuation of its newest section Teacher to Teacher. This guest-edited section is devoted to K-12 reflections written by and for K-12 teachers. The fall 2019 issue of *JTW* will welcome back Brandie Bohney as guest editor for "Teacher to Teacher." Bohney is a former Carmel High School teacher (Carmel, IN) who is now completing her Ph.D. at Bowling Green State University. The theme for the fall 2019 issue is Real Revision: Encouraging Students to Resee, Rethink, Rework.

Writing teachers almost universally agree that helping students understand that revising is more than proofreading and spell-checking is an uphill battle. And with increasing demands on teachers to do "more writing" in their classroom, time for integrating strong revision practices often gets lost. That said, as writing instructors, we know that revision—the ability to resee, rethink, and rework our writing—is one of the most important skills students can learn. How, then, do you approach revision in your classroom? What practical strategies do you use to help students see revision not as punishment for doing something wrong but as part of a larger process? In what ways do you help students get past merely checking for conventions in peer review to focus on content and meaning? How do you encourage students to "kill [their] darlings" and rewrite elements that are not working? Do you assess for process and revision?

Brief submissions (roughly 750-1200 words) that reflect on practical application and on classroom practices that apply to this theme should be sent as a Word document to jtw@iupui.edu with the subject heading "K-12 Reflection." The deadline for submissions for our fall 2019 issue is August 1, 2019. All submissions will be reviewed by the Guest Editor in consultation with the *JTW* Editor. Contributors will be notified of the Editors' decisions by September 30, 2019.

The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

The *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning* (*JAEPL*) is a refereed journal open to all those interested in extending the frontiers of teaching and learning beyond traditional disciplines and methodologies. It provides a forum to encourage research, theory, and classroom practice involving expanded concepts of language. It contributes to a sense of community in which scholars and educators from pre-school through the university exchange points of view and cutting-edge approaches to teaching and learning. *JAEPL* is especially interested in helping those teachers who experiment with new strategies of learning to share their practices and confirm their validity through publication in professional journals. Topics of interest include, but are not limited to: intuition, insight, emotion, silence, spirituality, meditation, multimodality, environmentalism, ecoliteracy, social justice, (meta)cognition, body wisdom, and felt sense.

Journal of Research Administration

The *Journal* is the premier academic, peer-reviewed publication in the field of research administration and management. Published twice a year SRAI* Journal articles are dedicated to the education and the professional development of research administrators. The *Journal* publishes articles covering the changing research environment worldwide, focusing on quality and innovation in research administration. The *JRA* is a critically important resource for your growth, for the enrichment of the body of knowledge of research administration, and for the advancement of the art and science of the profession and its allied disciplines. For more information on how to submit, please visit the *JRA* Become a Journal Author page or if you don't know where to start, watch the free webinar "How to Write for the Journal," all at www.journalra.org.

*Society of Research Administrators International

The Journal of Writing Analytics

The Journal of Writing Analytics (*Analytics*) is a peer-reviewed, open access journal published by Colorado State University Open Press. Additional support for the journal is provided by the University of South Florida.

Conceptualized as a multidisciplinary field, Writing Analytics is defined as the study of communication processes and genres as they occur in digital educational environments. The journal operates at the intersection of educational measurement, massive data analysis, digital learning ecologies, and ethical philosophy. Intended to give voice to an emerging community, the journal is devoted to programs of research providing evidence of fair, reliable, and valid analytics. Dedicated to application, such multidisciplinary research will demonstrate its usefulness to educational stakeholders as they expand opportunities for diverse learners.

Publication of *Analytics* is annual and coincides with the conference of Writing Analytics, Data Mining, and Student Success hosted by the University of South Florida. When the conference is announced each year, solicitations will be open for both the conference and the journal. Researchers may submit a manuscript without attending the conference.

Submissions for Volume 3 of *Analytics* will begin on April 1, 2019. The submission period will close on July 1, 2019. For more on the journal, please visit our website:
https://journals.colostate.edu/analytics/index

IUPUI SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

M.A. in English @ IUPUI

- Flexible curriculum
- Evening and weekend classes
- 20-Hour Certificates in Teaching Writing, Teaching Literature, or TESOL
- Thesis or non-thesis option
- Connections to the Hoosier Writing Project and the *Journal of Teaching Writing*

If you would like information about our program, please visit our website: http://liberalarts.iupui.edu/english/ or contact Karen Kovacik: kkovacik@iupui.edu.