

THE TEXAS JOURNAL OF LITERACY EDUCATION

A large, light-colored wooden star is positioned on the left side of the cover, resting on a dark blue wooden plank. The background is split diagonally, with the top-left portion being dark blue and the bottom-right portion being red, both with a wood-grain texture.

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A PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL PUBLISHED BY THE TEXAS ASSOCIATION FOR LITERACY EDUCATION
Volume 5, Issue 1 – Summer 2017

ISSN 2374-7404 texasreaders.org ©Texas Association for Literacy Education

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 1

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Page 3	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, INSTRUCTIONAL SHIFTS, AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES VICTORIA J. RISKÓ
Page 10	TEACHER INTERVENTION TO SUPPORT ORAL LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN DRAMATIC PLAY CONTEXTS SHELLEY STAGG PETERSON AND JANICE GREENBERG
Page 24	USING RESEARCH TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT THE SPELLING CURRICULUM REBECCA PUTMAN
Page 33	EARLY LITERACY IN CUBA: LESSONS FOR AMERICA CAROLYN DAVIDSON ABEL AND CHARLES FREDERICK ABEL
Page 44	LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS WRITING IN ENGLISH ANALYNN BUSTAMANTE AND MINHEE EOM
Page 57	EARLY READERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE OF LITERACY IN THEIR LIVES ZOYAH KINKEAD-CLARK
Page 71	BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR CLOSE READING WITH DEVELOPING READERS SHEILA F. BAKER AND LILLIAN MCENERY
Page 81	A MODEL FOR TEACHING LITERARY ANALYSIS USING SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR SHANNON MCCROCKLIN AND TAMMY SLATER
Page 97	CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, INSTRUCTIONAL SHIFTS, AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

VICTORIA J. RISKO

At the most recent Literacy Summit conference held in San Antonio in February 2016, Drs. Jack Cassidy, Stephanie Grote-Garcia, and Evan Ortlieb presented the results of their annual “What’s Hot” survey. Identified as “very hot” and “hot” topics for 2016 were *close reading, common core state standards, college and career readiness, digital literacies, disciplinary literacy, high-stakes assessment, informational texts, and text complexity*. And the “very cold” and “cold” topics, respectively, were *creative writing, fluency, motivation, oral language, phonics and phonemic awareness, summer reading and summer loss, and literacy coaching and reading specialists*.

And now, a year later, you may be thinking that these topics, by category, remain the same. Perhaps you would change their assignments. Then and now, I had a different perspective on the assignment of literacy coaches and reading specialists to the “cold” category. From my view, a “hot topic” would be *professional learning*. And what I envision are professional learning communities that engage literacy coaches and reading specialists to support classroom teachers within shared and collaborative learning opportunities. Such opportunities can be vital for advancing professional knowledge and effective instruction.

I found it interesting, then, to learn that professional learning was once again a “hot topic” in 2017. Building on Dr. Cassidy’s legacy of surveying literacy educators to determine “what is hot”, the International Literacy Association recently surveyed 1600 respondents from 89 countries. *Teacher professional learning* was identified on all three lists – “top hot topics”, “top

important topics”, and “what needs more attention” (Literacy Today, 2017). Additional “hot topics” for 2017 are *assessments/standards, early literacy, digital literacy, disciplinary literacy, diversity, parent engagement, and literacy in resource-limited settings*. How do these topics correspond to your life as a literacy educator? And to your community needs? Do you rate these topics as “hot”?

For me, recognizing the importance of continuous teacher learning underscores a need for reading specialists and literacy coaches as optimal leaders of literacy professional learning opportunities. There is a need for expertise guiding the changes in literacy instruction that are taking hold in our schools nationwide. Yet this potential for increased attention to expertise and knowledge building is met with a national decline in numbers of highly prepared literacy specialists employed in school districts, and among contributing factors is the decision by school leaders to hire instructional generalists to support teachers’ classroom literacy instruction. At a time with major shifts (e.g., shifts in state standards, national reports of students’ low literacy achievement, an achievement gap that continues to widen, new assessments being implemented) that are impacting literacy instruction, there is a growing need for highly prepared reading specialists and literacy coaches. The decline in their preparation and hiring, however, persists.

My goals for this paper are as follows. First, I discuss the power of professional learning that is supported by knowledgeable others and recommend a multi-talented approach that draws on the

expertise of reading specialists, literacy coaches and classroom teachers. Second, I discuss the challenges we face when implementing professional learning opportunities and identify elements that are evidence-based and most likely to support optimal professional learning. Third, I identify possible dilemmas we face when implementing our responses to current shifts in literacy instruction. These dilemmas may be best described as missed opportunities.

THE POWER OF LITERACY EXPERTISE AND TEACHER OWNERSHIP FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

New standards for K-12 literacy instruction adopted by states (e.g., state adopted standards, common core state standards) are sweeping the nation, and with these new standards are accompanying shifts in instruction (e.g., teaching with complex texts, integrating foundational skills in authentic reading and writing applications). With these shifts, a major question abounds – do teachers feel prepared for the expected changes to their instruction? In an attempt to address that question, the National Center for Literacy Education conducted a series of studies (i.e., two survey studies and one qualitative study) from 2013-2015, asking teachers if they felt prepared for instructional shifts required of them. Their goal was to identify specific conditions that support literacy capacity building (NCLE, 2015).

In response to survey questions, teachers who felt unprepared explained that their time for collaborative planning was brief and that their curricular materials were poorly aligned to new standards expectations. In contrast, when teachers reported that they felt well prepared for the new standards, they attributed this to their own involvement and ownership of changes that were implemented and that they were supported by knowledgeable school leaders. More specifically, progress for both teachers and students in strong-implementation schools was associated with (a) a multi-talented approach, that recognizes teacher expertise and supports high teacher involvement and ownership in the change-making process; (b) high expectations and time allotted for collaborative problem solving across teams of school educators; (c) strong leadership that is balanced with teacher ownership and involvement; (d) multiple formative assessments in place to provide feedback on learning and teaching, rather than compliance; and (e) teachers adapting and developing their own instructional materials to meet their goals, rather than relying on “purchased materials and focusing on fidelity of implementation” (p. 3).

With the results of this survey as a backdrop to our work, MaryEllen Vogt and I began a careful analysis of professional learning research. We had been asked to write a text that provides direction for high quality professional learning for literacy educators (Risko & Vogt, 2016). And while we have experienced and conducted many professional learning sessions during our teaching careers, our writing task took us deep into the research literature driven by our quest to identify those factors that hold power for achieving change in ways that make sense to the educators involved. We were quick to realize that top-down forms of “professional development” must be replaced with the concept of “professional learning” that more aptly represents the activity of shared learning opportunities among educators and in which teachers’ questions are at the heart of the work.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND ITS RESEARCH BASE

There are several outcomes from our literature review. First, our findings were quite consistent with the results of the NCLE studies (2015) as described above (e.g., classroom teachers' expertise is valued, time and resources are required to support collaborative efforts, strong collaborative activity is associated with high teacher involvement). Additionally, we learned that changes are more durable and respected when professional learning activities are supported by reading specialists and literacy coaches who are prepared to guide adult learners during shared activities, who demonstrate how and when to use data to inform instructional decisions, and who along with classroom teachers demonstrate that they are problem solvers – carefully identifying, analyzing, and responding to dilemmas (Risko & Vogt, 2016). Strong professional learning opportunities attend to both academic content and pedagogical knowledge, thus, identifying what K-12 students should learn and what may be problematic for them, while advancing knowledge of appropriate pedagogy (Blank, de las Alas, & Smith, 2007). There is an emphasis on collective problem identification and problem solving that invites shared visions and shared and agreed upon enactment plans. Adopting a problem-solving approach has benefits for both beginning and more experienced teachers (Windschitl, Thompson, & Braaten, 2011).

Identifying essential elements of effective professional learning, we concluded that optimal professional learning is *collaborative, situated, personal, substantive, intensive, and dynamic* (Risko & Vogt, 2017). At its heart is collaboration, learning from and with trusted peers. Also, optimal professional learning addresses problems that are familiar – those that are situated within our own teaching contexts, and thus, solutions are specific to our students, our teaching goals, the materials, and the curriculum. And with professional learning connected to teachers' classrooms and students, it is more likely to have a positive impact on students' achievement (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Yet adopted solutions require us to keep the focus personal, as the vision for professional learning is engaging educators to learn about their own practices (Leiberman & Miller, 2014) (i.e., answering the questions of what makes sense to me and my history in my classroom, and with my students and their histories). With a problem-solving approach, it is more likely that the content under study is substantive (requiring the examination of multiple perspectives) and intensive (sustained over time). Long-term and sustained professional learning opportunities are associated with greater gains for students and teachers (Banilower, 2002). The dynamic aspects of professional learning encompass high expectations for changes that are appropriate and responsive, informed by continuous assessment of the interplay of instruction and learning, and that lead to "just right goals – not too many, and not too few" (Risko & Vogt, 2016, p. 66).

TAKING RESEARCH TO *PROSPER* WITH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

PROSPER is an acronym that we used to frame a problem-solving approach to professional learning (Risko & Vogt, 2016). It references setting a *purpose*, taking on *responsibilities*, *organizing* time and space, assuring teachers that they are engaged in *safe* communities of learners, identifying *problems*, *examining* and testing possible solutions, and *reflecting* on iterative cycles of implemented changes. At the center of this framework is problem identification--noting the importance of defining explicitly the teaching dilemmas we face. Dilemmas may become evident when we ask questions, such as *Are we meeting our goals for developing students who see themselves as readers and writers? Are we developing students who read and write for authentic reasons – to advance their knowledge and the knowledge of others, to present their analysis of different perspectives and advocate for just causes, to enjoy and share their enjoyment of different text genres, and to become active users of information in their speaking and writing about texts that they read?*

INSTRUCTIONAL SHIFTS ARE VISIBLE

The above set of questions are examples of questions teachers share with me when I visit their classrooms. There is much to notice when I visit K-6 classrooms. The goal for building students' comprehension of increasingly more complex texts is at the forefront of literacy instruction. There is an increase of complex and informational texts. Interactive read aloud and shared reading instruction, in addition to guided reading instruction in small groups, are robust elements of a literacy block. Foundational skills, such as print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and other word learning skills are taught in the early grades with explicit and authentic connections to reading and writing. Writing about texts to build knowledge and within writing workshops prepare students to communicate for different purposes and for different audiences. Digital literacy communities are supporting students' research and generative capabilities as they construct meaningful and multimodal texts. Also, there is an increased use of formative assessments that provide a method for teachers to carefully track students' responses to instruction, changes that are both positive or problematic and that inform instructional decision making.

FROM POSSIBILITIES TO MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

As I reflect on instructional changes that are occurring and help teachers make sense of the data they are collecting, it is not unusual to identify new challenges and dilemmas we want to address. Often these challenges and dilemmas are the result of unintended consequences of our actions and/or missed opportunities. As Calkins (2001) noted, "One of the distressing things about teaching is that in an effort to solve one problem we so often create new problems" (p. 310). And it is these problems that we tackle during our professional learning activities.

As educators, we often talk about unintended consequences of our actions. We intend for our students to take an active role in text discussions, but the review of our informal notes tells us that far too much teacher talk occurs. An unintended consequence. Hirschman (1977) also pointed to unrealized consequences or missed opportunities that are the consequences of actions. I believe that often these missed opportunities are overlooked when we analyze our teaching and our students' learning. Missed opportunities are often nuanced outcomes of actions and not as easy to detect.

For example, if students are asked to read texts that seem to be too difficult for them, we may over-attend to students' multiple miscues during reading (and of course, we do need to consider these). During the process of thinking about how to adjust the choice of texts for future instruction, we might fail to notice the multiple strategies that students *are using* to cope (e.g., rereading, drawing on previous paragraphs to predict meaning of subsequent ones) and fail to encourage students to use these strategies when they again meet a challenging text. Thus, we may fail to realize the full potential of some actions that might be productive if actualized in constructive ways.

Drawing on my most recent classroom observations, I identify additional examples of potential missed opportunities that may be embedded in our current practices.

POTENTIAL MISSED OPPORTUNITIES WITH CHOICE OF COMPLEX TEXT. Is it possible that we are over-relying on lexile levels when choosing texts for our instruction, with less attention to the qualitative and reader-task variables? If so, we may be *missing opportunities* to extend students' prior knowledge. Students need to use what they know to build new understandings and they need tasks that carry new knowledge forward during multiple applications that will deepen knowledge development (Clay, 1998).

Increasing access to complex texts across the grades is becoming a common practice in our classrooms. The goal is to prepare high school graduates to read and comprehend the complex texts they are likely to face as college students or in the workplace. And importantly, providing access to complex texts for all students has the goal of knowledge development as students learn new concepts and about their world.

Yet it is evident that choosing the most appropriate texts for students can be challenging. We are judging texts and their appropriateness for our students using quantitative, qualitative, and reader-task variables. I worry, though, that the quantitative variables might outweigh the other two; once we have identified a lexile level or grade level equivalent score, how often do we stop to analyze the text further for its relationship to students' prior knowledge and experiences? It is much more difficult to judge complexity of a text based on the qualitative and reader-task dimensions. To do so we need to *know about our students* (e.g., their history with similar texts, their prior knowledge) and *what is expected of the students* in the work they do around the text content.

For example, when reading with our second graders about kapok trees that grow in rainforests, are we considering whether our students have prior knowledge of trees' dependence on their surroundings to survive? Are they prepared to distinguish conditions needed for plants and trees and animals and birds to survive in a rainforest vs. surviving in their own neighborhood? Are there students who have lived in countries with rainforests and if so, how will we draw on their prior knowledge? Are there students who have little knowledge of plant life and forests, and if so, what adjustments are required? When qualitative and reader variables are considered, instruction focuses on making connections to what students know already or builds knowledge that may not have been established previously. Similarly, tasks are responsive to students' knowledge and experiential history. More or less guidance may be needed to scaffold students' ability to complete tasks that extend their knowledge to consider real world problems, such as writing their own persuasive texts or identifying arguments for conservation of trees. The potential of deepening knowledge with complex texts may not be realized without adequate consideration of students' prior knowledge and experiential history. *A missed opportunity.*

POTENTIAL MISSED OPPORTUNITIES WHEN WE DIMINISH STUDENT INQUIRY. As teachers, we plan carefully for classroom routines (e.g., openings to text discussions, modeling of comprehension strategies, text-based questions for developing students' comprehension, demonstrating how to use mentor texts for writing) that are intended to engage our students' in thoughtful reading and writing activities. With our planning, however, do we also plan for our students to take the lead in their own learning? To ask and answer questions that are important to them?

Decades of research have provided strong support for students' gathering of evidence and information to address questions they generate. When rich concepts (e.g., conditions that support plant growth) are introduced and situated, perhaps when building a school garden, students are invited to ask questions about how plants grow (e.g., roots grow down into the dirt, roots need water and minerals and sunlight to grow), and as they observe changes in plant growth they are learning how to represent disciplinary-specific information (e.g., graphing growth of plants, comparing plant growth in sunny vs. dark conditions; drawing and labeling parts of plants). This process of learning is associated with students' gains in knowledge and disciplinary vocabulary (Windschitl & Thompson, 2006) and higher confidence in their problem-solving abilities (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004). If teachers are doing too much of the work providing information, students have fewer opportunities for self-directed learning that can have important benefits for acquiring new knowledge. *A missed opportunity.*

POTENTIAL MISSED OPPORTUNITIES DURING TEXT TALK ACTIVITIES. The turn-and-talk strategy is widely implemented in classrooms. The goal is to create students' ownership of new ideas, encouraging them to represent these ideas "in their own words" and from their own perspective. And as we observe this routine, we need to ask if these conversations are productive for students. Are students learning from their peers and sharing what they are learning with each other? Are they advancing knowledge as they participate in the discussions or merely repeating what they heard from their teacher and/or peers?

Too often students across the grades are unsure about what is expected of them during turn and talk routines or other structures that invite student discussion. And with this uncertainty about expectations, students may shift frequently from one idea to another or fail to make connections to each other's talk or to the text they are discussing. These conversations may fail to extend meanings as they lack "progressive discourse" (Nachowitz & Brumer, 2014), the deepening of knowledge that occurs with iterative cycles of discussion.

Additionally, we need to examine our role in text discussions. Do we listen to what students are discussing, so that we can bring their talk to the larger group discussion? Referencing students' ideas is useful to support students' learning from each other as they question and elaborate on ideas that are entered into the conversation. Additionally, are we listening for misconceptions that can be addressed immediately by taking students back to the text for clarifying and/or extending understandings? For example, when discussing earthquakes with a class of third graders, students may have difficulty understanding the function of tectonic plates and descriptions of their movement below the earth. Taking students back to the text to examine charts and seismograph photos and reread how energy is transferred and how the earth is cracked during the movement of the plates may be necessary to support students' comprehension of the text passages they are reading. When we do not listen carefully to students' interpretations, misconceptions can be overlooked. *A missed opportunity.*

TAKING ACTION ON MISSED OPPORTUNITIES WITH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

A problem-solving approach to professional learning offers many possibilities for continuous analysis of our instructional decisions and impact on students' learning. And part of our analysis should identify missed opportunities for instructional moves—missed opportunities that require changes in our actions. Each of the missed opportunities that I describe above, and many others that can be identified, can direct the work of our professional learning. Perhaps we will form a book study group to examine more carefully how to apply qualitative variables to analyze complex texts, or we may choose to participate in a lesson study that focuses on inquiry-based learning environments; and/or we may initiate a teacher research project in which we collect data on our students' talk during book discussions. These methods for engaging professional learning are research based and hold promise for sustaining the professional learning plan (Risko & Vogt, 2017). And when we analyze our teaching and our students' learning, we can advance what we know and do during our instruction and during our shared learning with our colleagues and students. A powerful opportunity for professional learning.

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TEACHER INTERVENTION TO SUPPORT ORAL LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN DRAMATIC PLAY CONTEXTS

SHELLEY STAGG PETERSON AND JANICE GREENBERG

ABSTRACT

A speech-language pathologist and former primary teacher who is now a researcher conducting action research with kindergarten teachers in northern rural Canadian classrooms collaborate in an analysis of one teacher's interactions with her students in a dramatic play center. We use three principles to show how the teacher supports children's language, literacy, and conceptual learning, and to propose additional ways to extend children's learning. The principles are observing what the children are interested in and following the children's lead, building on children's funds of knowledge to keep the conversation going, and posing a problem to invite deeper thinking about the problem and propose possible solutions. We conclude with suggestions for teachers in grades one and five to address social studies and health curriculum objectives from the Texas curriculum, while at the same time supporting and extending children's language.

In this paper we draw on a dramatic play context in Lila's kindergarten classroom in Eagle Hills, a northern Canadian community (all names are pseudonyms), to show how teachers can scaffold children's language and literacy in dramatic play and other contexts involving role-play in primary classrooms. Janice is a speech language pathologist and Shelley is a former elementary teacher who now collaborates with primary teachers on action research to support young children's oral language and writing. In this paper, we present what we have learned through working with Lila and her students, drawing on our speech language pathologist, teaching, and research experience. We believe that the fields of speech language pathology and education have many common goals and that sharing experiences and knowledge from each field is mutually beneficial. To that end, we offer the following perspectives to teachers who wish to broaden their pedagogical repertoires for scaffolding children's oral language, literacy, and conceptual knowledge.

Our paper is based on an assumption, well supported in the literature, that children's oral language provides a foundation for literacy (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Lindfors, 2008; Snow & Resnick, 2009) and for all learning (Barnes, 1992; Vygotsky, 1986). In their interactions with others, children encounter new words and new ways of using words to make sense of their world. They gain new perspectives and learn about social expectations for using language in a range of contexts. They hear sounds of language and play with sounds, developing phonological awareness that supports their reading and writing (Snow & Resnick, 2009). Additionally, children "use talk to

facilitate their own thinking and learning in all subject areas, and to jointly construct meaning and knowledge with others” (Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 49).

Teachers have an important role in creating an environment and in interacting with children in ways that support and extend children’s oral language (Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002, 2010). They have knowledge about the world, about language and possible ways to use language in a range of contexts, as well as knowledge about children’s language development and pedagogy. Yet, many teachers say that they are unsure of how to scaffold children’s oral language, seeking suggestions for encouraging children’s authentic talk in classrooms (Peterson, McIntyre & Forsyth, 2016). Additionally, the results of many studies show that traditional classroom interactions provide limited opportunities for children to talk (Alexander, 2011; Barnes, 1992; Cazden, 2001). These studies indicate a need for classroom environments that encourage:

1. sustained interactions between students and between students and their teachers;
2. children’s questions about content, rather than points of procedure;
3. the use of children’s exploratory talk as “stepping stones to understanding” (Alexander, 2011, p. 99).

In response to this research showing the need for sustained classroom interactions that deepen children’s thinking and the need for teachers to provide ample opportunity for students’ ponderings and authentic questions (Alexander, 2011; Murphy et al., 2014), we introduce a set of principles for teachers’ interactions with children in dramatic play settings. We draw on Hirsh-Pasek’s and Golinkoff’s (2011) notion of “guided play,” where teachers provide a physical environment with materials that support children’s language and learning, and where teachers interact with children in ways that enhance children’s self-discovery (p. 113), to make a case for the pedagogical possibilities of play. In guided play settings, children learn language and concepts in authentic, highly motivational contexts that involve interaction with peers, adults, and concrete objects, and that provide space for children’s creativity and for developing their interests (Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Singer, & Berk, 2011).

We begin by providing an example of a dramatic play context from Lila’s classroom involving authentic writing (Boldt, 2009). We analyze Lila’s interactions with her students and provide examples of ways in which she and other teachers might use such contexts as springboards for supporting children’s language, literacy, and conceptual understandings. We conclude with suggestions for other contexts that would be appropriate in kindergarten and beyond.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

Lila, a kindergarten teacher with two years of teaching experience, and her 22 students in Eagle Hills, a northern rural Canadian community, are participating in a six-year action research project exploring ways to support young children’s oral language and writing through play. Lila meets with

colleagues in her northern school division and university researchers five times each year to talk about initiatives that she might undertake in her classroom to foster children's language and literacy. Between these visits, she carries out a play-based initiative, records children and herself engaged in the play activity, and uploads the video recordings to the project's website. During each of the five visits to Eagle Hills per year, the university researchers meet individually with Lila for collaborative discussions about the ways in which children respond to Lila's teaching (as shown in the video recordings and Lila's observations), and then propose refinements to her teaching. These are later discussed with Lila, seven of her colleagues from other rural communities, and the researchers in after-school meetings. In this paper we discuss one video clip that recorded a teaching initiative undertaken by Lila in her first year participating in the project.

MAILBOX CENTER IN LILA'S CLASSROOM

One corner of Lila's classroom houses the dramatic play center. Each month, Lila brings materials to the center to create a new setting for children's play. In February, she created a mail center by placing paper, envelopes, and writing materials on a table, and creating mailboxes from milk cartons for each child (taping them all together so that they look like the super mailboxes in suburban neighbourhoods). Lila told us that she created the mail center to provide authentic contexts for children's writing (see Figure 1 for image of the mailbox center).



Figure 1. Mailbox center in Lila's classroom

One day during center time, while two students were writing at the table with writing materials and two were taking up roles as kittens, Lila entered the center in role as someone who wanted to mail a package. The full transcript of Lila's interactions with children at the center can be found in the appendix. As we discuss our analysis of Lila's interactions with her students in the *Findings* section, we will provide excerpts of the transcript.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data for the action research project include videos that Lila records using an iPod set up on a tripod at the dramatic play center. After Lila uploads the video recordings to the project website, the video clips are transcribed and analyzed for various purposes (e.g., how children use language; how children use social understandings to further their intentions; and in this case, how teachers scaffold children's language). For this paper, we have selected a 10-minute video clip of Lila carrying out one of her action research initiatives. We conducted a deductive analysis of her interactions with the children, using the following framework of ways in which teachers can scaffold children's language, literacy, and conceptual learning. These principles arise from Janice's work as a speech-language pathologist. She has found the principles to be very helpful in her work with teachers and children.

The teacher:

1. observes what the children are interested in, waits to give the children an opportunity to share ideas, and follows the children's lead (Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002)
2. keeps the conversation going by building on children's funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). This involves making comments and asking questions that add ideas and vocabulary, and encouraging children to make connections with previous experience and knowledge (Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002, 2009).
3. poses a problem, adding ideas that deepen children's thinking as they talk about the problem and contribute to its resolution (Damhuis & DeBlauw, 2008; Weitzman & Greenberg, 2010).

We used these principles to identify Lila's scaffolding strategies and to suggest additional ways in which she might further extend their language and learning. Our analyses and suggestions are organized according to the three principles in the following section, though there are some scaffolding practices that address more than one principle.

FINDINGS

LILA'S SCAFFOLDING AND SUGGESTIONS FOR OTHER POSSIBILITIES

As Lila joins her students in the pretend mail center, she promotes oral language and literacy by engaging students in an extended conversation. Some of this learning is intentionally planned by

Lila, but other learning happens incidentally as the conversation continues. In the following, we identify ways in which Lila follows the framework for scaffolding children's language and literacy, as she talks with the children. We also propose further opportunities where language and literacy learning can be enhanced.

LILA ENHANCES CHILDREN'S LEARNING: POSING A PROBLEM

Lila: I need to send this box of bananas to my grandmother. She really loves bananas. But I want to make sure that it doesn't get wrecked.

Child: My sister likes bananas!

Lila: Oh does she? So I brought with me some of these to put in here (Styrofoam packing material) to pack it with.

Child: I'm gonna take some too! (children help pack the box with Styrofoam packing)

Lila: Okay, I think that's enough. Thank you! All done!

In this excerpt, Lila decides to enter the center and take on a pretend role to advance the play and the potential learning. She introduces an interesting problem to be solved (e.g., fragile bananas that need to be sent to her grandmother) and a potential solution – Styrofoam packing material.

Joining in the play with an interesting problem, Lila actively engages the children's interest as a conversation develops around how to package the bananas to prevent damage. The children are encouraged to think about what could happen to the bananas if they are not packed properly and how to solve this problem. By promoting thinking beyond the here and now, Lila is also laying the foundations for literacy success (Rowe, 2013). To comprehend written texts, children must often think beyond the information at hand. For example, they may infer why events are occurring, the motivations of the characters, and what may happen next.

As Lila successfully engages the children in an extended back and forth conversation, she is well positioned to add language to extend the children's learning. In the next section, we propose further opportunities for enhancing language and literacy learning.

POSSIBILITIES FOR EXTENDING THE LEARNING. Lila could enhance the children's learning by posing the problem to the children to solve and then encouraging children to consider possible solutions to the problem at hand. This would challenge the children to consider other perspectives, explain reasons for their opinions, and make comparisons. After hearing how the children might pack the bananas to prevent damage, she could then introduce the Styrofoam as a viable solution. Examples of possible questions and comments that could occur are:

- *Bananas are very fragile. That means they can get wrecked or damaged really easily. How can we make sure they don't get damaged?*
- *Wrapping the bananas in paper is not such a good idea because the paper is not thick enough to prevent the bananas from getting bruised.*

- *Styrofoam is a good idea because it is thick and strong and will protect the bananas from getting damaged. This is just like when you are wearing your heavy coat. When you fall down, you don't get hurt because your coat protects you.*
- *Styrofoam is also a good solution because it is very light and will not make the bananas too heavy. If the bananas are too heavy, it will cost more money to mail it to my grandmother.*

Extending the conversation in this way would also provide opportunities for Lila to model and encourage use of more complex language such as compound sentences, embedded clauses and phrases (e.g., *Styrofoam is a good idea because it is thick and strong and will protect the bananas from getting damaged*) and expose the children to more sophisticated vocabulary, such as *fragile*, *solution*, *thick*, *protect*, and *prevent*. Additionally, Lila could introduce words like *bruised* and *damaged*. Lila could also talk further about the meaning of these less familiar words to deepen the children's understanding. For example, she could use the word, "Styrofoam," when talking with the children, describing what Styrofoam is, talking about how it is the same or different from other kinds of foam, or proposing other uses of Styrofoam.

Broadening the number of words that children know also significantly contributes to the children's ability to communicate with specificity and has a positive impact on reading comprehension. In fact, the breadth and depth of children's vocabulary in the preschool years is one of the strongest predictors of later literacy success (Lee, 2011).

Lila engages the children and focuses them on her topic around mailing bananas to her grandmother. She could also follow one child's lead and extend the learning. When told that Lila's grandmother likes bananas, one of the children says, "*My sister likes bananas!*" Lila acknowledges the child by saying, "*Oh does she?*" and could also take this opportunity to follow the child's lead and extend the topic by asking questions like, "*Why does she like bananas?*" "*What about you? Do you like bananas? Why or why not?*" or making comments like, "*I love bananas too because they are very sweet and very nutritious. That means they are make you healthy and strong.*" By following the child's lead, Lila would create opportunities for explaining, offering opinions, sharing different perspectives and adding new vocabulary (e.g., *nutritious*).

LILA ENHANCES LEARNING: EXPANDING ON CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE AND FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

In the following excerpt, Lila prompts a child to generate the specific word *parcel* and then repeats *parcel* in a complete sentence, "This is a parcel for my grandma." Expanding on children's shorter productions with a longer, more grammatically complete sentence is a positive way to promote language learning. Encouraging children to use more context-specific words, (e.g., *parcel* refers to a mailed box as opposed any box), is critical to developing children's vocabulary knowledge.

Lila: Okay, I think that's enough. Thank you! All done!

Now I'm going to tape it up. What is it called when you pack up a box like this?

Child: A parcel!

Lila: A parcel. Okay. This is a parcel for my grandma.

Child: Can we make a parcel for my mom?

Lila: We have to make sure my grandma gets this. It's very important.

POSSIBILITIES FOR EXTENDING THE LEARNING. Laila could further encourage the children's thinking by asking them why it is important to tape the box or what would happen if the tape is not strong enough. Discussion of reasons and possibilities might foster the use of more complex language. Here are some possibilities:

- *We need to tape the box so the bananas don't fall out when the mail workers are taking the parcel to grandma.*
- *If the tape is not strong enough, the bananas might fall out and get damaged or even lost. How do you think Grandma would feel if she ended up getting bruised bananas?*

This kind of conversation requires children to connect their existing knowledge with the information they have at hand to think and talk about reasons and predict possibilities. The last comment would also encourage the children to imagine how Grandma would feel with a delivery of battered bananas. Having empathy and being able to take another's perspective is key to children's social emotional development as well as to comprehension of narrative texts where the reader must understand the perspective of the characters (McTigue et. al, 2015).

When a child asks, "*Can we make a parcel for my mom?*" Lila could promote further perspective taking with questions like:

- *What would you like to send you mom?*
- *Does she love bananas like my grandma?*
- *Would she want something else?*

Lila could then re-focus the conversation with a comment like, "*Well, let's finish sending this parcel to my grandma and then maybe you can get a parcel ready to send to your mom,*" to invite children to apply the knowledge they gained from their interaction with Lila.

Also adhering to the principle of building on children's funds of knowledge, in the following paragraphs we discuss this excerpt:

Lila: We have to make sure my grandma gets this. It's very important. So how are we going to know that it is going to get to her? How will I show that this is for my grandma? What can I write on it so that I know it is supposed to go to my grandma?

Child: Write her name!

Lila: Write her name? Okay, let's do it together. Her name is Violet. (She sounded out her grandma's name and the children told her the letters she should write.)

What else? Do you think if I give this to the post office, they're going to know where my grandma lives?

Child: Nope! We have to know the numbers. . .

Child: We have to find out what the numbers are so we can write it down.

Child: We usually write the number of the house.

Lila: Oh, that's a good idea. She's at 40. Forty is her house number. What else should I write down? (This continues as children provide information about the address.)

Child: Her phone number!

Lila: Okay, I'll write her phone number, too. Thank you. I've got her phone number, I've got her house number, I've got her name. What else do I need to write? Now I have to tell you, my grandma doesn't live in [name of province]. She lives all the way across the country in Ontario. Should I write that?

Child: Yep. You should write to Ontario right there.

Lila: I'll write On: ta:ri:o (she says the sounds of each syllable as she writes). Maybe we should write the street too. (she writes the street name)

In this excerpt, Lila engages the children in figuring out how to ensure that the parcel gets to her grandma and scaffolds their thinking with questions like:

So how are we going to know that it is going to get to her?

How will I show that it is for my grandma?

What can I write on it so that I know it is for my grandma?

Do you think if I give it to the post office, they're going to know where my grandma lives?

What else do I need to write?

She lives all the way across the country in Ontario. Should I write that too?

Lila also supports children's learning of concepts about print (Clay, 1972) by stretching out the sounds as she writes her grandma's name, *Violet*, and the province where her grandma lives, *Ontario*. She helps the children see the connections between the sounds in the words we say and how these sounds are represented by letters in the writing. By showing the children the value of writing for communicating important information, she is also motivating the children to attempt their own writing (Boldt, 2009; Parr, Jesson & McNaughton, 2009).

POSSIBILITIES FOR EXTENDING THE LEARNING. Lila could further promote thinking and language development by continuing the conversation with additional figuring-out questions that require the children to predict, explain, and add information such as:

- *What would happen if we send this parcel without writing where Grandma lives on it?*
- *Where would we look if we are not sure where Grandma lives?*
- *Why do we need to put Grandma's phone number on the parcel?*
- *Why do we have to add the street name? What would happen if we just put the number?*

She could also encourage the children to relate the activity to previous experiences they have had with sending or receiving mail or parcels. Continuing the conversation would also present Lila with opportunities to add vocabulary such as *address, destination, location, province, distance*.

LILA ENHANCES CHILDREN'S LEARNING: FOLLOWING CHILDREN'S LEAD

In the following excerpt, Lila follows the child's lead when she comments that "You should also put a flag on it," and adds information by telling him that the flag is a stamp. By validating the child's comments, Lila builds the child's confidence in himself as a valuable and competent communicator.

Child: You should also put the flag on.

Lila: The flag? That could be my stamp! Because I need a stamp to mail it so I'll draw our Canada flag here. That will be our stamp.

POSSIBILITIES FOR EXTENDING THE LEARNING. Lila could build further on the child's comment about the flag to discuss why it is important to put a stamp on a letter and how we know what value stamp to use. She could challenge the children's thinking with questions like

- *Why do we need to put a stamp on the parcel?*
- *What would happen if we tried to send this without a stamp?*
- *How do we know which stamp to put on our parcel?*
- *Where can we buy stamps?*
- *What other kinds of pictures can there be on stamps?*

Questions that ask the children to provide information, to explain, and to predict would extend the conversation and provide further learning opportunities. These questions could also set the stage for a new inquiry-based activity building on the children's interests in stamps to explore the different stamps used around the world.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND CONTENT AREA LEARNING: KINDERGARTEN AND BEYOND

The three principles for scaffolding children's language, literacy, and content area learning provide a useful starting point for teachers at all grade levels. Although our examples come from one dramatic play context in Lila's kindergarten classroom, we propose that teachers can implement these principles (e.g., following children's lead, making connections to children's prior experience, and posing a problem for children to solve) to support children's language, literacy, and learning across the curriculum and across grade levels. The support is particularly effective when provided while children are interacting with each other. Through their exploratory talk as students create something in small groups, solve problems together, or carry out any other small-group tasks, they provide teachers with information about their prior knowledge and experience. Teachers can listen and observe, and then build on this knowledge and experience.

In the following paragraphs, we offer possibilities for teachers in grades one and five to address social studies and health curriculum objectives from the Texas curriculum (Texas Education Agency, 2016), while at the same time supporting and extending children's language.

Setting up the Grade 1 classroom to support children in achieving the social studies objective of creating maps of the classroom or community might involve inviting small groups of children to recreate the classroom in miniature, using readily-accessible objects, such as erasers, pencil sharpeners, boxes from products such as toothpaste, etc. to represent the tables, desks, computers, book shelves, and other objects in the room. In addition to these three-dimensional maps, children might also collaboratively draw two-dimensional maps using paper and pencil or collage materials. As children talk with each other about how they will use small objects or symbols that they draw on a page to represent classroom furniture and other items in the classroom, and as they determine how far apart and where to place objects on their classroom maps, the teacher might follow children's lead and build on what children show that they know about mapping by introducing mapping concepts and vocabulary. The teacher might also introduce a problem (e.g., "How would you explain to someone new in the school how to get from the door to the classroom library? In what direction would the new person be going? Is it as far as walking from the door to the window?") that requires students to think about concepts such as direction, distance, and scale as they recreate the classroom with the various objects.

The primary grades are not the only place for creative, interactive learning activities that provide opportunities for teachers to support students' oral language using the three principles. The Grade 5 Health objective of being able to analyze food labels and menus for nutritional information provides one example. The teacher could pose a problem, such as asking students to plan a breakfast or lunch for their small group, ensuring that the meal has certain nutrients and no more than a certain percentage of the daily intake of sugar and fat. As the children plan the meal, identify what they need to purchase, and then either look up nutritional information available on the product websites or read labels from products that they or the teacher bring to class, the teacher can ask questions and provide prompts, following students' lead as they show what they know about how to read the labels, about the vocabulary used to provide nutritional information, and

about the recommended daily amounts of sugar and fat. The teacher could also invite students to seek out information to explain why certain foods are more or less nutritious, to evaluate different options and provide the reasons for their opinions, or perhaps to predict the impact of certain foods on health.

IN CONCLUSION

The three principles, which draw on research about effective teaching *and* about effective practice of speech-language pathologists, represent our collaborative learning, as we have sought out ways to support children's language, literacy, and learning. Whether the principles introduced in our paper have been long-held by teachers or whether they present something new that teachers can integrate into their practice, we believe that there is much for teachers and speech-language pathologists to learn from each other. We hope that our collaboration inspires other teachers and speech-language pathologists to find opportunities to work together to support children's language, literacy and content learning.

Additionally, as shown in our analysis of Lila's interactions with students and examples from the Texas social studies and health curricula, teachers can draw on the three principles to create environments for children to explore ideas and to explore ways of expressing those ideas using a variety of vocabulary and sentence structures, through talk (Alexander, 2011; Boyd & Galda, 2011). Teacher scaffolding is meant to extend children's thinking and vocabulary across the curriculum, and to provide new perspectives; all the while recognizing that the children are learning in all of these ways from each other in these interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). The teacher is a contributor to the students' small-group conversation, but does not take over the conversation.

As we hope to have shown in our analysis of Lila's interactions and in the proposed examples for grades one and five classrooms following the Texas curriculum, the three principles for scaffolding can readily be taken up in daily classroom activities across the curriculum. When students at any grade level are collaborating with a peer or a group of peers, whether it be to discuss a text that has been read in literature circles, to carry out a science activity, to discuss an issue in social studies, or to work through a process for solving a problem in mathematics, their language and learning can be supported using these principles. Setting up opportunities for students to talk to each other is the first step, as students' conversations are forums for constructing meaning together, as well as windows into their meaning-making. Observing and listening to children's conversations then provide information to guide teachers' input; whether it is for the purpose of helping students to make connections to their previous knowledge, introducing new information that builds on what students have been talking about, or posing a problem based on the ideas that students are discussing. In the process, teachers are addressing curriculum objectives in ways that are meaningful to students because teachers' input builds on what students show that they know through collaborative conversations.

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APPENDIX

FULL TRANSCRIPT OF LILA'S INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN AT THE MAILBOX CENTER

Lila: I need to send this box of bananas to my grandmother. She really loves bananas. But I want to make sure that it doesn't get wrecked.

Child: My sister likes bananas!

Lila: Oh does she? So I brought with me some of these to put in here (Styrofoam packing material) to pack it with.

Child: I'm gonna take some too! (children help pack the box with Styrofoam packing)

Lila: Okay, I think that's enough. Thank you! All done!

Now I'm going to tape it up. What is it called when you pack up a box like this?

Child: A parcel!

Lila: A parcel. Okay. This is a parcel for my grandma.

Child: Can we make a parcel for my mom?

Lila: We have to make sure my grandma gets this. It's very important. So how are we going to know that it is going to get to her? How will I show that this is for my grandma? What can I write on it so that I know it is supposed to go to my grandma?

Child: Write her name!

Lila: Write her name? Okay, let's do it together. Her name is Violet. (She sounded out her grandma's name and the children told her the letters she should write.)

What else? Do you think if I give this to the post office, they're going to know where my grandma lives?

Child: Nope! We have to know the numbers. . .

Child: We have to find out what the numbers are so we can write it down.

Child: We usually write the number of the house.

Lila: Oh, that's a good idea. She's at 40. Forty is her house number. What else should I write down? (This continues as children provide information about the address.)

Child: Her phone number!

Lila: Okay, I'll write her phone number, too. Thank you. I've got her phone number, I've got her house number, I've got her name. What else do I need to write? Now I have to tell you, my grandma doesn't live in [name of province]. She lives all the way across the country in Ontario. Should I write that?

Child: Yep. You should write to Ontario right there.

Lila: I'll write On: ta:ri:o (she says the sounds of each syllable as she writes). Maybe we should write the street too. (she writes the street name)

Child: You should also put the flag on.

Lila: The flag? That could be my stamp! Because I need a stamp to mail it so I'll draw our Canada flag here. That will be our stamp.

USING RESEARCH TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT THE SPELLING CURRICULUM

REBECCA PUTMAN

ABSTRACT

Learning how to spell is important. Most people would agree that the ability to spell correctly is an essential trait of literate people, and that students must be taught how to spell correctly; however, there is still debate among parents, educators, and the public as to how spelling should be taught in the schools. This paper reexamines and compares the research on the traditional spelling curriculum with the research on word study in order to help educators make an informed decision about spelling instruction.

Learning how to spell is important. Most people will agree that the ability to spell correctly is an essential trait of literate people, and that students must be taught how to spell effectively (Robinson, McKenna, & Wedman, 2000). In fact, our society, in general, values correct spelling above all other writing conventions (Turbill, 2000). Furthermore, making anything beyond a few minor spelling errors is equated with ignorance and incompetence (Moats, 2005). As a result of these beliefs, most parents view spelling as a fundamental part of their child's literacy education, and they attach great importance to weekly spelling tests (Robinson, 2005; Turbill, 2000). Most schools and teachers continue to regard spelling as an integral part of any educational curriculum. Because of these expectations, almost every elementary school in America teaches and assesses their students' spelling abilities (Fresch, 2003; Graham et al, 2008; McNeill & Kirk, 2013). The purpose of this paper is to reexamine and compare the research on the traditional spelling curriculum with the research on word study in order to help educators make an informed decision about spelling instruction.

TRADITIONAL SPELLING INSTRUCTION

Spelling research and instruction has historically been based on assumptions about the way the English spelling system is organized and how children learn (Templeton & Morris, 2000). For most of the 20th century, the spelling curriculum was determined by the beliefs that English spelling is highly irregular and students do not use prior knowledge of previously-learned words to help spell new words (Simonsen & Gunter, 2001; Templeton & Morris, 2000). The main conceptualization of spelling was as a tool for effective writing. As a result of these beliefs, spelling instruction in most classrooms was based on rote memorization of an assigned list of words selected by the teacher or a spelling textbook that emphasized visual memorization of the most common irregular sound/symbol correspondences (Robinson, 2005; Robinson et al., 2000; Schlagal, 2007; Templeton & Morris, 2000). Based on this view of an irregular spelling system and isolated learning, most teachers and researchers emphasized visual memorization of spelling words.

Around the 1960s, spelling research showed that English spelling was a predictable, logical, and rule-based language system (Hanna, Hanna, Hodges, & Rudorf, 1966). Hanna et. al. (1966) found

that the spelling of 84% of English words is mostly predictable. Because of this research, teachers began to choose lists of spelling words based on common spelling rules, but they continued to emphasize the memorization of the rules and the words because of the assumption that spelling was solely a visual memorization task. Teachers who followed this paradigm believed that until a group of words was mastered, it was ineffective to study any additional words (Robinson et al., 2000). This spelling paradigm also considered spelling a completely separate subject, and very few attempts were made at integrating spelling with any other subject areas (Robinson et al., 2000). Mastery of the words was typically measured through an isolated weekly paper-and-pencil test in a contrived context with few or no opportunities to apply this understanding to authentic and meaningful writing and language activities (Hilden & Jones, 2012; Robinson, 2005). The success of this approach was mixed because children usually learned to spell the words correctly for the tests but failed to retain or generalize this knowledge to writing or other language activities (Abbott, 2001; Beckham-Hungler & Williams, 2003; Gill & Schrarer, 1996; Kernaghan & Woloshyn, 1995; Loeffler, 2005; Robinson, 2005; Templeton & Morris, 2000). This phenomenon is often referred to as *Friday test, Monday miss*.

Despite the *Friday test, Monday miss* phenomenon, the traditional spelling curriculum has some value, which may explain why many teachers and schools still teach spelling through assigned lists and weekly tests. Several studies have shown that a traditional spelling curriculum is effective for teaching irregularly spelled words, and having a teacher-generated list of words that students memorize and then are tested on makes sense based on a traditional view of the spelling system (Brown, 1990; Dreyer, Luke, & Melican, 1995; Graham, 2000). This approach is based on the behaviorist view of spelling, in which the learner memorizes spelling words in isolation. Because the traditional spelling curriculum has been used for so many years, most teachers, parents, and students are very familiar and comfortable with the format. Also, the traditional spelling curriculum does not require the teachers to be familiar with developmental spelling stages or understand how the English language system is organized. Most importantly, the traditional whole-word approach to spelling is helpful when learning highly-irregular words, such as *does*, and *were* (Simonsen & Gunter, 2001). Words that cannot be spelled by applying general spelling patterns and conventions have to be memorized, and rote memorization works well for these words.

RESEARCH ON SPELLING

Newer research, however, has shown that spelling is not an exclusive process of rote memorization (Reed, 2012; Schlagal, 2007; Templeton & Morris, 2000). As Heald-Taylor (1998) points out, "Learning to spell is a complex, intricate cognitive and linguistic process rather than one of rote memorization" (p. 405), a belief that challenges the traditional spelling curriculum's emphasis on visual memorization. Students do not learn spelling words in isolation; instead, they use prior knowledge and understandings to help make decisions and form concepts about how to spell new words (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2012; Frith, 1980; Invernizzi, Bloodgood, & Abouzeid, 1997). Consequently, the traditional view of a semi-irregular English spelling system with rules that must be memorized and learned in isolation does not fit with what researchers have found about the English language and how students learn. The newer research supports the view of spelling as a complex cognitive process that is intrinsically and undeniably related to language, reading, and writing (Ehri, 2006; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005; Treiman, 2006). Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) note, "Spelling and reading build and rely on the same mental representation of a word. Knowing the spelling of a word makes the representation of it sturdy and accessible for fluent reading" (p. 86). The belief that spelling is a linguistic process means that "learning to spell and learning to read rely on much of the same underlying knowledge—such as the relationships between letters and sounds..." (Moats, 2006, p.12).

SPELLING DIFFICULTIES

Learning about the relationships between letters and sounds can be difficult, however. In English, there are only 26 letters to work with, but there are 40 phonemes, more than 250 graphemes, and a vast number of ways to combine these graphemes (Moats, 2006). Given this complexity, it is not surprising that many students struggle with spelling. A common but mistaken belief is that spelling problems are a result of poor visual memory—poor spellers just can't remember the sequences of letters in words. Several studies, however, have shown that a generalized kind of visual memory contributes very little to our ability to spell (IDA, 2011). This research has also shown that the kind of visual memory required for spelling is closely connected to the language processing networks in the brain (IDA, 2011). Ideally, a spelling program will not emphasize visual memory, but, instead, make the process of discovering these features of word more salient and allow students to become more efficient spellers. Unfortunately, the traditional spelling curriculum's emphasis on rote memorization does very little to help students abstract these features of language.

Combining what we know about the how children learn to spell with the current research allows educators to make informed decisions about the best way to teach children to spell. Because of the complexity of English, it is not reasonable to expect students to memorize all of the individual rules of spelling or to expect teachers to have the time to cover all of these rules. Instead, educators should help students memorize the most common irregularly spelled words and simultaneously focus on the ways in which English is regular and predictable (Moats, 2006).

SPELLING AND PATTERNS

Patterns are the most effective and efficient way to teach regular and predictable words in English. From the very beginning, our brain is hard-wired to recognize patterns. Starting at birth, the brain allows babies to pay attention to the invariant features of the faces and objects around them and begin to recognize them (Dehaene, 2009; Wolf, 2007). At the same time, the area of the brain that processes language is already perceiving linguistic contrasts and paying attention to the rhythm and sounds of the native language (Dehaene, 2009). During this first year of life, the infant brain is extracting, sorting, and classifying segments of speech (Dehaene, 2009). In other words, the brain is seeking out patterns in language. As the child grows and develops, the brain continues to search for invariant features and patterns when it tries to learn something new, including letters, words, and even spelling. (Wolf, 2007). The brain's predisposition for seeking patterns has an effect on the effectiveness of spelling instruction.

Spelling of whole words is made possible when the child understands that words are made up of speech sounds and that letters represent these sounds, an example of the way the brain seeks out invariant patterns. As knowledge of this principle becomes more sophisticated, children notice additional patterns in the way letters, syllables, word endings, prefixes, word roots, and suffixes are used during reading and spelling (IDA, 2011). Furthermore, spelling instruction that explores the patterns of English word structure, word origin, and word meaning is effective because it explicitly teaches some of the predictable patterns of English spelling, word use, and meaning. Children learn best through active involvement and practice with words, which allow them to discern and learn word and letter patterns for themselves. Research on the brain indicates that the brain is a *pattern detector*, rather than an *applier of rules* (Cunningham, 2004). Because our brains are predisposed to be pattern detectors, then effective spelling instruction should emphasize opportunities to explore, organize, and ultimately detect those patterns. How to best teach the predictable patterns in the English language is up for debate, but many people suggest that integrated word study is one of the

most effective ways (Beckham-Hungler & Williams, 2006; IDA, 2011; Invernizzi et al., 1997; Leipzig, 2000).

WORD STUDY

Word study is based on research by Henderson (1990) and Templeton and Bear (1992) shows that children acquire specific features of words in a hierarchical order. A developmental approach to spelling, word study is based on the premise that the English language is a logical and predictable system of sounds and spelling patterns. Its focus is not on memorization; instead, its focus is on the predictable patterns of letters and sounds.

As the children's knowledge of language, letters, sounds, and other phonological processes develop, so does their ability to notice patterns within words. From basic letter-to-sound correspondences, to patterns associated with long and short vowels sounds, to structures within words associated with syllables and affixes, and finally, to Greek and Latin roots and stems, the child's brain looks for invariant patterns to help it spell efficiently (Bear et al., 2012). When teachers know and encourage these developmental stages of spelling, it allows the brain to seek increasingly difficult and complex patterns in words.

Word study addresses the brain's need for patterns by grouping words into categories of similarity and difference and allowing students to explore words and seek patterns. During word study, the teacher guides students as they categorize words, typically during word sorts, according to similarities and differences in spelling, meaning, and patterns in order to "better understand how spelling represents a word's meaning and grammatical function" (Invernizzi et al., 1997). Such instruction also includes strategies for conceptualizing and exploring words from a variety of perspectives (Templeton & Morris, 2000). Combining the visual, auditory, and semantic components of spelling through word study complements the way that the human brain learns to read and takes advantage of the brain's innate tendency to look for patterns in the environment. As Invernizzi, et al. (1997) note, "Word study makes explicit how spelling patterns and word structures reflect meaning and use" (p.190) This tendency for the human brain to seek out increasingly complex patterns is one of the reasons why the traditional spelling curriculum is not the most effective way to teach students to spell. The traditional spelling curriculum that assigns words based on content vocabulary, somewhat random spelling rules, and themes does not take advantage of the brain's capacity to learn through predictable patterns.

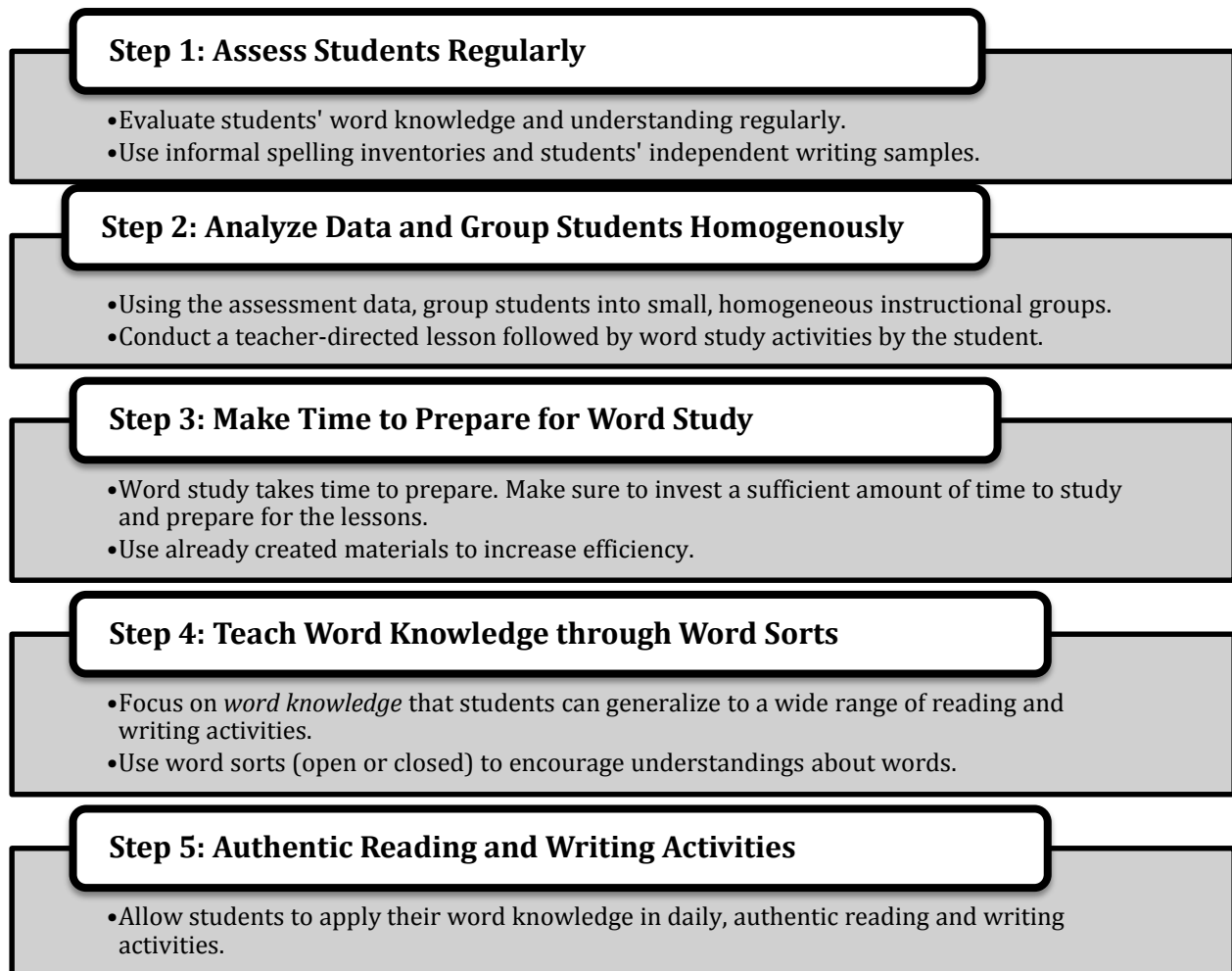
Unlike the traditional spelling curriculum, word study is flexible enough to allow the different stages of students' spelling development. At each stage of development, students will understand and use different features in their spelling, as shown in Table 1 (Leipzig, 2000). Children's progression through the different stages varies, which means that rarely would all students in a class be studying the same words.

Table 1
Stages of Spelling Development

Stage	Age Range	Spelling Behavior
Stage 1: Emergent Spelling	3- to 5-year-olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • String scribbles, letters, and letter -like forms together. • Do not associate the marks made with any specific phonemes.
Stage 2: Letter Name-Alphabetic Spelling	5- to 7-year-olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to represent phonemes in words with letters. • In the beginning, spellings are abbreviated. • Learn to use consonant blends, digraphs, and short-vowel patterns.
Stage 3: Within-Word Pattern Spelling	7- to 9-year olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn long-vowel patterns and r-controlled vowels. • May confuse spelling patterns (Ex: <i>mete</i> for <i>meet</i>) • May reverse order of letters (Ex: <i>form</i> for <i>from</i>)
Stage 4: Syllables and Affixes Spelling	9- to 11-year-olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use what has been learned about one-syllable words to spell multi-syllable words. • Learn to break words into syllables • Learn to add inflectional endings (e.g. -s, -ed, -ing) • Differentiate between homophones (Ex: <i>your</i> and <i>you're</i>)
Stage 5: Derivational Relations Spelling	11- to 14-year-olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore relationships between spelling and meaning. • Learn that words with related meanings are often related in spelling. (e.g. <i>wise-wisdom, nation-national</i>) • Learn about Latin and Greek root words and derivational affixes (e.g. <i>amphi-, pre-, -able, -tion</i>)

Note: Descriptive note. Adapted from *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* (5th ed.), 2012, Boston, MA: Pearson. Copyright 2014 by Pearson.

Word study does not ascribe a one-size-fits-all approach to spelling instruction. Instead, it allows the teacher flexibility to choose and sequence a group of words that demonstrate a particular pattern based on the students' needs. Whatever their developmental levels, word study encourages students to quickly and accurately perceive word patterns in order to read, write, understand, and spell written language (Bear et al., 2012; Hilden & Jones, 2012). Figure 1 outlines the basic steps of word study, regardless of the student's spelling stage. For teachers who want to learn more about word study, Bear and Invernizzi's book, *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Instruction* (6th edition) is a good resource.



*Figure 1 Steps of Implementing Word Study in the Classroom. Adapted from “Word Study Instruction in the K-2 Classroom” by C. Williams, C. Phillips-Birdsong, K. Jufnagel, D. Hungler, and R.P. Lundstrom, 2009, *The Reading Teacher*, 62, pp. 572-577. Copyright 2009 by the International Reading Association.*

WORD STUDY CHALLENGES

Although word study addresses the current view of developmental spelling and takes advantage of the brain’s capacity to seek out patterns, there are drawbacks to the word study approach. Word study depends on the teacher’s knowledge base to present words in a chosen pattern according to the child’s developmental level; however, teachers are often unfamiliar with the nature of the English spelling system and how to use patterns to teach this system (Gill & Scharer, 1996; Morris, Blanton, Blanton, Nowacek & Perney, 1995). Hughes and Searles’ (1997) longitudinal study on spelling and instruction showed that “Many teachers see spelling as more arbitrary than systematic...their own knowledge of the spelling system is largely implicit or relatively poorly understood” (p.133). In addition, word study requires that teachers be educated on developmental spelling levels and how to choose words and patterns based on these levels; unfortunately, many teachers are unaware of the developmental levels (Templeton & Morris, 2000). One more important issue to consider with word study is parents’ resistance to giving up the weekly spelling test. When one Houston-area school district recently replaced the weekly spelling test with word

study, parents protested saying, “I always had spelling tests...Our whole generation had spelling tests” (Mellon, 2009). Most parents don’t understand that their children are still getting tested—word study just assesses their child’s knowledge of spelling through patterns rather than their ability to memorize isolated words (Leipzig, 2000).

CONCLUSION

The research and support for using word study as part of an integrated spelling curriculum is significant and compelling, yet many classrooms are still using traditional spelling methods, emphasizing rote memorization and rule-driven instruction (Fresch, 2003, 2007; Schlagal, 2002). The traditional spelling curriculum has been around for a long time. Most parents, teachers, and schools are familiar with the assigned lists and weekly tests, and the traditional curriculum is effective for learning highly-irregular words; however, the traditional curriculum does not help children retain or generalize spelling knowledge for their writing. In addition, the traditional spelling curriculum largely ignores developmental spelling levels and does not take advantage of the brain’s remarkable capacity to abstract patterns. An alternative to the traditional spelling curriculum, word study is compatible with the current research on effective instruction because it allows students to abstract patterns, make connections between old and new, and build connections through integrated study. Word study does require teachers to be knowledgeable about the spelling system and developmental spelling, and it makes some parents uncomfortable; nevertheless, based on what we know about the English spelling system, how children learn, and the brain, word study makes sense. While learning to spell will always be valued by a literate society, many schools (and parents) need to reevaluate the emphasis they place on traditional rote memorization spelling and weekly tests and explore other options. Based on the research on spelling, integrated word study is an effective and efficient way to teach children how to spell.

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EARLY LITERACY IN CUBA: LESSONS FOR AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

How did Cuba erase illiteracy in a single year? How did they combine both a phonics approach with the constructivist meaning-based model for teaching reading that we cannot seem to manage here in the states? This paper seeks to shed light on Cuba's impressive 1961 National Literacy Campaign and reflects upon implications for early literacy development in America.

INTRODUCTION

Our interest in the 1961 mass literacy campaign began during a visit to Cuba as part of a “Cuba at a Crossroads” tour sponsored by the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME). We visited the Literacy Campaign Museum in Havana where history professor and museum director Luisa Campos Gallardo (right) told us about the thousands of volunteers as young as age 10 who were recruited, trained, and then sent into the country side to teach reading and writing. We viewed artifacts such as workbooks and student letters to Castro providing evidence of the newly acquired literacy skills (Duiguid, 2015). Ms. Gallardo had every reason to sing the praises of her country. Even our bus driver beamed with pride as his mother's name was revealed among the contributors to this amazing historical campaign. Can America learn some lessons from Cuba? The short answer is “yes.” According to Pressley and Allington (2014, p. 5), teachers would do well to integrate “skills and holistic instruction” and move beyond the reading wars. The long answer is more complex and is the topic of this paper.



DEFINING LITERACY

There are many dimensions to literacy. Defined often as decoding and understanding of text involving skills of word recognition, reading fluency, comprehension, writing, and spelling (Shanahan et al., 2008, p. vii), literacy has been related to heightened moral and intellectual categories (Graff, 2008), moral fortitude (Pattison, 1982), honor, and spiritual enlightenment, even inhabiting a *state of grace* (Scribner, 1988, p. 77). In complementary fashion, illiteracy is a “focal feature” of social injustice and deprivation (Sen, 1999, p. 103), a pervasive characteristic of poverty, and one factor in the inability “to form social relationships on a basis of equality with others and to achieve the important social good of self-respect” (Nussbaum, 2003, p.335). Literacy can promote

employment, democracy, economic growth, political stability, social harmony, and competitiveness in world markets (Levine, 1986; Graff, 1987). It is thought that as conceptions of what counts as *literacy* are adapted to context and culture, no universal model is completely justifiable. This holds true for how one may demonstrate his or her literacy levels and includes a wide range of strategies to help us teach reading. Given these dimensions, there arise questions of cultural literacy—what a certain culture expects a literate person to know in a given country in order to participate fully and thrive. There is also proof of literacy—how one demonstrates literacy achievement. Are you literate if you can read your name or a sentence, or do you need to understand what you read? And once these are defined, how do we teach others to be literate?

THE CUBAN EXPERIENCE

The context in which the Cuban literacy campaign took place is important. In 1953, six years before the Castro revolution, 76% of the Cuban population over 10 years of age were literate (Breidlid, 2007, p. 619). Corruption and discrimination, however, marginalized many. In effect, the country was divided into haves and have-nots. Wealthy Cubans sent their children to elite private schools or to study abroad while children of rural wage-earners attended vastly inferior public schools or lived too far from any school to attend at all. “Disproportionately high levels of illiteracy in rural areas of Cuba were one of the more noticeable by-products of this educational system” (Supko, 1998, p. 2). Children living in the country whose parents were agricultural laborers were five times less likely to finish primary school than were those who had parents with non-manual, salaried jobs (Supko, 1998), and illiteracy in the countryside was estimated at 41.7 percent (Jeffries, 1967).

Following the revolution, in September 1960, Fidel Castro addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations and announced a massive campaign “to combat ignorance and illiteracy on his island” (Dorn & Ghodsee, 2012, p. 386). The campaign was consistent with the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s* (UNESCO) long-standing support for global mass literacy campaigns. However, confronted by intensive U.S. lobbying to reduce their emphasis on universal literacy and to focus instead upon economic modernization, UNESCO abandoned its position and adopted a *functional literacy* approach stressing “general education, technical or vocational training” (Jones, 1990, p. 54), which helps define the literacy claim that Cuba would eventually make.

On March 17, 1960, President Eisenhower had authorized the CIA to organize, train, and equip Cuban refugees to overthrow Castro. In 1961, under the new Kennedy administration and just two days after the first training camp for the mass literacy campaign volunteers opened, the United States launched the Bay of Pigs invasion. As the U.S. attack failed, the numbers of volunteers to the reading campaign swelled (The Independent, 2010) and the campaign took on a spiritual aspect that inspired popular devotion, a sense of duty, and feelings of pride and accomplishment among participants, their families, and the public at large.

This massive campaign mobilized more than 200,000 *facilitators*, both young and old, who targeted the marginalized (economically, socially, and physically) and discriminated neither in terms of gender, nor race, nor sexual orientation (Breidlid, 2007, p. 620, 622). In under one year’s time, the Cuban government managed to reduce a national illiteracy rate to less than four percent (Dorn & Ghodsee, 2012, p. 386), and the whole country was declared a “territory free of illiteracy” by UNESCO in 1964 (Breidlid, 2007, p. 621). By 2003, Cuba’s youth literacy rate for the ages of 15 to 24 was 99.8% (Hernandez-Truyol, 2004). Additionally, and perhaps even more importantly, a culture for learning had been achieved:

Since generations of Cubans have been socialized into understanding the merits of education through general literacy and schooling up to a certain level they have internalized an attitude to schooling which to some extent bridges the potential cultural gap between home and school (Breidlid, 2007, p. 631).

During our trip to Cuba, we saw evidence of this in most everyone we met; even the woman conducting our bus tour had earned several degrees and continued her (free) education with much enthusiasm and pride. In brief, there is some justification to the claim that “Cuba’s competence ... in the field of literacy is unrivalled” (Breidlid, 2007, p. 222, 630) as this initial campaign was followed by a dramatic expansion of education at all levels.

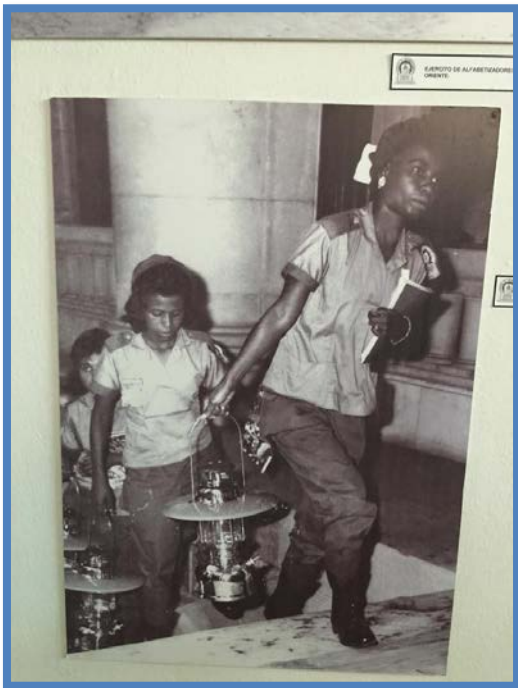
THE CUBAN APPROACH

Castro’s mass literacy campaign actually began prior to the revolution. As the rebel army gained territory, it established local literacy boards and organized schools for children and soldiers in each locality that it liberated. This provided an initial structure throughout the country upon which the newly formed government could build. Synergy between structural elements and ideological fervor evident in every aspect of the literacy campaign. The government provided simple basic teaching supplies to volunteers and workers, who traveled to rural locations. Each literacy worker was equipped with two textbooks (*We Shall Read* and *We Shall Conquer*), a pair of boots, two pairs of socks, an olive-green beret, two pairs of pants, two shirts, a blanket, a lantern (so that lessons could be given at night after work ended and which became one national symbol of the campaign), a hammock, and a shoulder patch commemorating Conrado Benítez, a young volunteer teacher killed

by anti-Castro guerrillas (Supko, 1998; The Independent, 2010). Sharing equally in the daily work of the rural home, the volunteers promoted solidarity through shared labor, and this enabled the workers to develop the motivation and trust necessary for historically marginalized students to learn to read and write what was personally relevant and important to them.

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

Significant research suggests that the Cuban “Yes, I Can” model, as applied both in and outside of Cuba in mass literacy campaigns, provides an inter-culturally recognizable form of literacy that does not ignore local literacy practice and is contextualized and adapted easily to local circumstances and realities. “In fact, the degree of local control exercised by facilitators and participants, which is one of the model’s strengths, makes it almost inevitable that people will *take hold* (Maddox, 2007) of literacy during the campaign in ways that accord with their own cultures and histories” (Broughton & Durnan, 2014, p. 575). Such pedagogy connected with students’ language and experience promotes an interest and



ownership for learning that utilize personally relevant contexts and materials and are reflected in the roots of whole language approaches to literacy instruction and ought to be of interest to educators in America (Goodman, 1989; Husserl, 1970).

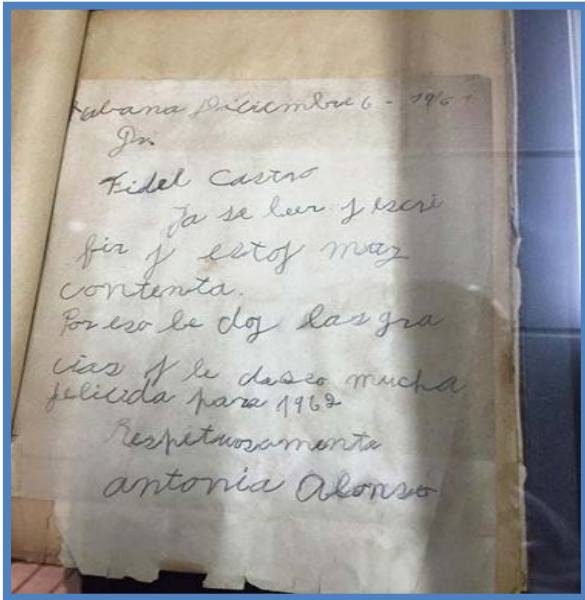
As this literature, the context of the literacy crusade, and the Cuban approach suggest, the literacy campaign's success was clearly no miracle. It was the consequence of a governmental policy that organized, managed, and led masses of people in an impressive effort requiring hard work, persistence, motivation, and a singular dedication. Literacy came to be a means not only of raising peasant and worker pride but also of enhancing the public's awareness of how politics and economics had determined who learned what and how under Castro's Cuba politics, and how economics could serve the *people* and their social goals rather than the interests and needs of economic and political elites (Griffiths & Williams, 2002, p. 37).

All of this was reinforced by a pedagogy exhibiting qualities familiar to the whole language constructivist philosophy that emphasizes making personal meaningful connections with text (Bomengen, 2010); pictures depicting everyday scenes to which people could relate were employed and students would read, write, and discuss these relevant topics. Moreover, the symbolic thank-you letters to Fidel were kept along with photographs and details of all volunteers in a museum situated in the former Batista Havana headquarters; included was a carefully constructed literacy primer that taught peasants the value and importance of the revolution as part of their literacy programming. Consequently, the Cuban people began to understand mass education as a means to personal and national emancipation and so solidified their dedication to the power of the revolutionary political resolve that undergirded the revolution (Dorn and Ghodsee, 2012, p. 386). Students understood themselves as critical participants in something bigger than themselves—as the future youthful agents required for the transformation of society. Although such a comprehensive determined promotion of ideology would not be so easily replicated in American classrooms, important motivational elements of personalizing lessons and teacher, student, and even parent investment should be considered.

AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

During the campaign, teacher and student motivation and ownership in the process were significant (Kamil et al, 2008). Perhaps such teacher buy-in was missing during much of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) movement in America, which explains a fatal flaw in our own school efforts to improve literacy (Cooper, 2015). The top-down strong-arm approach of accountability through NCLB, employing sticks over carrots with little time, money, and opportunity for teachers to shift focus and fully understand and embrace what they were being asked to do, may have reduced the effectiveness NCLB might otherwise have enjoyed.

What other variables were at work during the Cuban campaign? We asked how literacy achievement was defined and what type of instruction was used when 100% literacy that first year. We were directed to sample letters that had been placed under the glass at the museum providing



evidence of the newly acquired literacy skills. One letter addressed to Fidel Castro on December 6 says, “I can read and write and I am very happy about it. That is why I give you thanks and I wish you a lot of happiness in 1962.” These sentences written in Spanish are simple, even a word is misspelled, and yet the writer clearly can write and read a simple message; this is essentially a first grade literacy level that had been minimally achieved by all when declaring 100% literacy for the country (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1964, p.72). To provide some perspective, this basic level of literacy can also be seen in American first grade classrooms. If America gauged literacy rates using these minimum levels, the literacy rate of the US would be much higher than we are usually told. However, it is uncertain if the US could reach 100% literacy even by that definition achieved in Cuba in that single year, which is truly impressive.

When making the claim that only 35% of 4th graders in the U.S. are considered proficient in reading (Kena et al., 2015), the reference is to a much higher level of competence typically expected of 4th grade students as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in describing the national literacy level of our country. The NAEP is a moving target, however, which strives to measure literacy in the US as it changes to meet increasing (functional) demands over time—the complex level needed to participate fully in American society (“NAEP,” 2015). While UNESCO is currently working through the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) to move the original global determination of literacy from the simple answer of YES to a survey question asking, “Can you read and write,” to a more valid and reliable one that more accurately establishes literacy trends across the globe in terms of reading and comprehending more sophisticated text (“UNESCO,” 2014), we do not yet have statistics we may use reliably to determine literacy rates comparing Cuba and the US at this time (“The World Fact Book,” 2015). The ones we have must always be qualified and understood contextually.

But there is more. Children learn to read in ways that support the language they speak. For example, if they speak Chinese or Japanese, they learn to read symbols in the form of images that are quite complex; memorization plays a big role in learning to read and write these languages and memory overload becomes a problem for some. Spanish, which is spoken in Cuba, is easier to read and write than English because while both rely on an alphabetic code, Spanish has a more direct letter-sound match (McGuinness 2004, p. 39). Many of the letters in Spanish predictably link to reliable speech streams, and young readers can expect this letter-sound match when applying the alphabetic principle (sounding out words as they attempt to read the exciting personally relevant messages in front of them). These language differences can influence the ease and success with which literacy develops.

According to Emeritus Professor Diane McGuinness (2005), when we talk with each other in English, we use only about 44 sounds. If you put a letter (symbol) to each speech sound (phoneme), it becomes a simple language to read and write. These letter-sound units are referred to as “the code.” When there is a significant direct letter-sound match, we call it a “transparent” alphabetic

system—a good code. In countries that have transparent alphabetic languages (e.g., Cuba, Germany, Spain, Italy, most Scandinavian countries), children learn to read and write in only a year's time, and dyslexia (difficulty learning to read) is rare (McGuiness 2005, p. 2-3).

The Anglo-Saxons designed the first written code for English. It was considered a good code—nearly perfect with one letter for each sound spoken in the language (McGuiness 2004, p. 39). However, English has been invaded, supported, adopted, and modified so many times in so many ways by so many different cultures and languages that, as everyone knows, English has become quite complex and now rather difficult to read and write. Languages that use letters to represent sounds, yet develop over a long period of time, are considered “opaque” alphabetic languages (lacking strong consistency between letters and sounds). While we may have one of the most robust languages in the world, which can facilitate impressive levels of communication, English represents five languages with their spelling systems superimposed on one another and it is typical for a single letter such as “a” to make a different sound in each of these words—*cat, car, cage, caught, care, alter, about* (McGuiness, 2004, p. 41). This difference alone will make it more difficult to learn to read and write in English.

Regardless, such basic skill foundations in letter-phoneme connections are still critical first steps toward full literacy development in any alphabetic language, even opaque ones, and this affords students a solid rock upon which all future learning will build (“NELP,” 2008). Without this earliest concrete foundational layer, as with learning any new skill, future reading and writing skills may not flourish, and we cannot then begin the transformational force toward providing this social justice for all.

VARIATIONS IN PEDAGOGY

This brings us to the way reading is taught. Because Spanish is a transparent alphabetic language with an easy letter-sound match, there is no discussion in Cuba about whether or not to “sound out” the words; they do not have the reading wars that we have here in America (Reyhner, 2008; Strauss, 2013). Spanish lends itself easily to using the alphabetic principle (one of the five early reading skills discovered by the NRP that appear to have predictive validity for future reading success in emerging readers even in America). Children who learn to read in Spanish can experience immediate success sounding out simple words that quickly branch into multisyllable words, which extend meaning and provide practice building fluency as the larger chunks of the smaller phonics patterns are repeated over and over. During our visit, it was clear that Cuba fully understood the importance of building fluency by articulating how they taught the basic phonics elements and then encouraged students to read often to family members to build this quick automatic word recognition. The NRP and most teachers now recognize the importance of building fluency for American readers as well, but there is not always teacher agreement on how much phonics to include nor how best to teach it in the early years due to the opaque nature of the English language.

While the National Reading Panel revealed the importance of teaching the alphabetic principle to our youngest readers (looking closely at print and sounding out words), and then giving students opportunities to apply and practice it to develop the fluency (NRP Subgroups, 2000), we still have many well-meaning teachers of beginning readers who, in their attempt to help children focus on meaning, may over-promote guessing at words by reading pictures and using context clues at the expense of helping students respect and use the alphabetic principle and basic phonics patterns which can be useful even in an opaque alphabetic language such as English. Thus opportunities to learn a tricky code that needs to be taught with care and practiced early in their reading career is

reduced for these children (McGuinness, 2004, p. 41; SEDL, 2015). Teachers in America need to develop a greater respect for the full range of reading research which will help them recognize the critical (phonics) window is short and targeted to beginning reading instruction for all alphabetic languages no matter how transparent or opaque they may be (Pearson, 2004, p. 239); this is especially important for children who depend upon schools to become literate (Hiebert, 2008, p. 14). Moreover, learning the code in an explicit and systematic manner can be fun using interactive hands-on word building activities (Beck & Beck, 2013), and the engaging personally relevant whole language approach of constructing meaning and acting with purpose may be nicely woven simultaneously to improve early literacy development (Pearson, 2004, p.245; Ferguson et al., 2015, p. 1). Cuba clearly integrated both.

LESSONS FOR AMERICA

Although the Cuban campaign is, for many reasons, not applicable directly or in detail to the United States, there are some broader lessons that might be taken. The Cuban experience suggests that motivation through ownership and a culture for learning plus a determined focus on foundational skill development within a flexible context during early literacy acquisition are key in overcoming the debilitating effects on educational success of poverty, ignorance, and marginalization—a challenge faced in America, as well (Coley & Baker, 2013). To motivate and provide ownership for both teacher and student, the Cuban government offered a transcendent, inspirational, and deeply meaningful purpose; the opportunity to master a skill that could directly serve that purpose; and the flexibility necessary to adapt the means of education to the context of the student. Teachers were provided with initial basic guidance and then allowed to tackle the project in ways that met the requirements of students and exigencies of the contexts into which they were placed. Both students and teachers were presented with opportunities to become better at something that mattered to them through tasks that were neither overly difficult nor overly simple (Atherton, 2013). Skills were carefully and incrementally taught and practiced, yet always in the context of something meaningful and personally relevant to the student. Most importantly, the campaign took advantage of the natural desire to contribute to a cause greater and more enduring than one's self by ensuring that students and teachers knew and understood the social purpose, a kind of cultural literacy all would respect and acquire. Student and teacher goals were focused on the transcendent purpose as well as the personal advantages that literacy would bring. With literacy foundations in place through repetition and opportunities for fluency building through application in meaningful contexts, feelings of success and pride reinforced the continuation of a culture for learning which is enjoyed in Cuba to this day.

In the eighties, the motivational whole language philosophy caught on like wildfire across the U.S. (Kim, 2008, p. 89)—not unlike the fever that embraced the Cuban literacy campaign's mission in many respects. One problem with this contagious fervor, however, was that the foundational skills for reading were often not sufficiently appreciated and integrated to the degree the NELP and NRP recommend under the "science of reading," nor to the degree the Cuban Literacy Project employed with sincere respect and success. Despite continued confusion in the states about how best to teach reading in an opaque alphabetic language such as English (Meier, 2007), teachers in America might do well to more sincerely research and embrace a truly balanced reading approach (Hemsfeld, 1989)—not the illusion of one as Moats warns (2007)—but one that includes engaging hands-on phonics activities such as word building along with manageable leveled books and opportunities for personally relevant writing that can offer sufficient application and practice to build fluency during the critical foundational period of the emergent holistic literacy journey (Pressley & Allington, 2014). While Cuba and America still seem worlds apart and there is yet no authentic way to compare literacy levels through the grades in either country nor even define the

optimal degree with which phonics should be integrated in differing alphabetic systems, there is still something to be gained in the states by recognizing the power of motivational ownership and basic skill development and practice that Cuba enjoyed while moving their country forward to achieving 100% literacy.

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LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS WRITING IN ENGLISH

ANALYNN BUSTAMANTE AND MINHEE EOM

ABSTRACT

This study investigated attitudes of linguistically diverse students towards writing in English in four different domains: general academic writing, writing in humanities, writing in science-related subjects (STEM), and writing in electronic communication. A total of 77 Hispanic bilingual/ELL adult students at an alternative high school in Southwest Texas participated in a survey. Based on self-identified information, they were divided into an English-dominant group (n = 29) and a Spanish-dominant group (n = 48). The main part of the survey consisted of 22 attitude questions with a Cronbach's alpha of .799. Results of a Mixed ANOVA showed statistically significant findings in the main effect of writing domains; between-group differences of English-dominant and Spanish-dominant groups; and in an interaction of domain and dominant language. When all four domains were compared, participants' attitudes were significantly more positive towards writing in electronic domain than in others. As for academic writing, attitudes towards general writing were significantly more positive than subject specific writing in humanities and science subjects. Additionally, the English-dominant group showed an increase in positive attitudes towards electronic writing and caused a significant interaction effect. There was no significant language group difference found in the other domains. This study discusses implications of these statistical results and suggests the teaching of writing as a means of communication as opposed to an abstract skill set as conceptualized in the current test-driven environment.

Writing is a major determining factor of academic success. Throughout their academic careers, students are expected to engage in various writing assignments. Because of this, poor writing has a far reaching impact on students' academic and professional lives. Poor writers suffer from lower grades, particularly in courses where writing plays a significant role in assessment, and are less likely to attend college (Graham & Perin, 2007). Exploring the relationship between students' language backgrounds and their writing experiences may provide insight to academic achievements of linguistically diverse students, including bilingual speakers and English Language Learners (ELL).

Writing is often considered an especially difficult second language skill to attain, as several factors are involved in second language writing success, including cognition, language proficiency, writing proficiency, and affective variables (Graham, Berninger & Fan, 2007; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hayes, 2000; Pajares, 2003). One affective variable that is often studied by researchers is attitude toward writing. Research supports a causal relationship between attitude and motivation for both second language acquisition and writing skills development (Graham, Berninger & Fan, 2007; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995).

This study explored the writing attitudes of linguistically diverse students in various writing domains and examined attitude differences from one domain to another. The findings of this study may be a meaningful contribution to teaching writing to linguistically diverse students as well as to the research of second language writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Even though the number of linguistically diverse students in American school systems has increased over the last few decades (Kena et al., 2015; Kim, 2011), this group tends to have relatively high dropout rates across the U.S. In Texas, preparing linguistically diverse students to be successful in postsecondary education is of particular concern due to the growth of the Hispanic population (Rodríguez, 2012; Ruecker, 2013).

The State of Texas has a fast-growing rate of linguistically diverse students. However, their academic success is still a challenge for educators, as indicated by their relatively high dropout rate. As of the 2014-2015 school year, there are almost 890,000 ELLs who speak Spanish as their first language, about 17% of the total student population in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2015). Texas's ELL dropout rate was 14.9% in 2013, over twice the state average of 6.6% (Texas Education Agency, 2014).

ACADEMIC CHALLENGES FOR LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

On average, ELLs in the U.S. do not achieve basic levels of literacy proficiency across grade levels (National Assessment of Educational Progress, n.d.). Low literacy proficiency follows these students throughout their academic careers. ELLs often struggle with the reading and writing demanded at the university level (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). In addition, speaking English as a second language is often cited as a perceived barrier to educational attainment for Hispanic ELLs. Becerra (2010) examined data collected from 1,508 self-identified Hispanic adults, and found participants with lower linguistic acculturation perceive that college success is impeded by poor high school education and tuition costs. The study concluded that low linguistic acculturation limits exposure to the education system and serves as an obstacle in accessing financial aid.

Research on ELL high school dropouts shows that language issues are a major contributing factor to why these students are at such a high risk of dropping out of high school. In a study of 85 schools serving a predominantly Latino population, Zarate and Pineda (2014) found that ELLs in schools with a higher concentration of language minority students, students were less likely to graduate from high school. Zarate and Pineda speculate that this is due to fewer opportunities to communicate in English. Moreover, Watt and Roessingh (2001) found that ELLs with beginner English proficiency dropped out at a 40% higher rate than students with advanced proficiency, indicating that "language proficiency sets the tone for the challenges" (p. 219) for ELL students. English language proficiency becomes particularly relevant when considering the impact high-stakes standardized testing has had on education. In Texas, students must write an expository and a persuasive essay in order to pass the English language arts STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) exams, which are high school graduation requirements (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). Because testing is done in English, language has become an integral aspect of content knowledge. Therefore, due to the prevalence of high-stakes standardized testing, ELL students are at a disadvantage with regard to language (Menken, 2010), and tend to have lower high school test scores and greater need for college remediation (Flores & Drake, 2014). In their study, which explored 18 years of student data from both the K-12 and higher education contexts in Texas, Flores and Drake concluded that Hispanic ELLs are negatively affected by English language

deficiencies. These deficiencies may be due to lack of access to high quality ESL services, since remedial high school courses often do not provide students with rigorous curricula. Furthermore, other studies report difficulties of writing for ELLs and their awareness of shortcomings as academic writers. In the study of ELLs' perceptions of writing, Kim and Garcia (2014) reported a participant said, "I know how to speak already. Writing, I just have [a] hard time to write like grammar and everything (p. 308). Throughout their report, there is a general consensus that these students feel writing is a major factor holding them back from academic success. These students cited several aspects of writing that seemed beyond their grasp; not only grammar, but spelling and word choice as well. They also attribute their placement in less rigorous classes to their difficulties with writing. This finding again supports a negative perception of remedial courses as the courses focus solely on high school graduation requirements and may not prepare students for university writing, which contributes to their difficulty catching up to their peers. Additionally, Allison (2009) discusses the "accord, or lack thereof, between expectations in/across the two settings" (p. 76), college and high school and its impact on ELLs. She attributes much of the mismatch to high-stakes standardized testing saying, "if anything, literacy tasks are more closely determined by what will be assessed on high-stakes standardized tests" (p. 83), while college writing is relatively student-centric on form and content. The discrepancies in the high school approach may amplify how challenging university-level writing may be for incoming students.

ATTITUDE STUDIES IN SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING

In social studies, an attitude is defined as "a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioral tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols" (Hogg, & Vaughan 2005, p. 150). It is widely accepted that attitude can be measured as the components of a tripartite model. The components of attitude are affect, behavior and cognition. Affect refers to an emotional reaction toward an attitude object. Behavior encompasses overt actions and intentions related to an attitude object. Cognition is a person's value system, beliefs, and/or perceptions regarding an attitude object. These components are generally considered an accurate representation of attitude in lieu of directly measuring a subject's brain activity.

In language studies specifically, Krashen (1982) discussed how a language learner's attitude may affect his/her ability to acquire the target language. As per Krashen, research about attitudinal variables fall into three categories: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. High motivation, high self-confidence, and low anxiety not only predict that students will more actively seek out comprehensible input, but allow for the input to be more easily acquired by the learner. A high affective filter (i.e. low motivation, low self-confidence, high anxiety) serves as an obstacle to language acquisition.

In the affective realm of second language writing studies, there is research exploring affective variables such as self-efficacy, self-confidence, attitude, motivation, and anxiety, among others (Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Dornyei, 2005; Pajares, 2003; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996). Hayes (2000) posits that the relationship between cognition and affect – specifically with regard to motivation – is closely interconnected. One aspect of motivation often explored in second language studies is attitude. Attitude and motivation are generally thought to have a correlational relationship; some research supports a causal relationship in that attitudes influence motivation. In general, second language writing literature strongly supports an association between writing attitude, motivation, and achievement. Masgoret and Gardner's (2003) meta-analysis of attitude, motivation, and second language acquisition studies concludes "the evidence strongly supports that the correlations are consistently positive" (p. 200). They examined 75 studies of independent

samples which had been conducted by Gardner and his associates. Their findings conclusively support that correlations between motivation, various components of attitude, and achievement are “consistently positive” (p. 153). Furthermore, Ansarimoghaddam and Tan (2014) compared how Malaysian university students felt about writing in their L1 versus English to find a correlational relationship between positive attitudes toward English and a preference for writing in English. Participants who preferred writing in English to writing in their first language (L1) more often used English when performing writing tasks. Additionally, Merisuo-Storm (2007) found a correlative relationship between attitude, literacy development, and English proficiency. These students, who were participating in a bilingual Finnish-English program, had more positive attitudes toward language learning, had higher levels of literacy, and became more proficient in English than the control group. The researcher does not draw a strong causal relationship between these three aspects of the study; however, she does observe that positive attitudes are associated with higher levels of success in language learning. In sum, students’ attitude toward writing can be a contributing factor to a success in their education and future profession.

AIM OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate attitudes of linguistically diverse students toward writing in English in different domains (e.g., general writing, writing in humanities, writing in STEM, and electronic writing) and an interaction of students’ language backgrounds and their attitudes toward English writing in the domains. Supporting that attitudes may have a positive relationship with motivation, and, therefore, achievement in school, this research would contribute to the teaching of second language writing and the promotion of academic achievement of linguistically diverse students.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

For this study, there were 77 students in total ($N = 77$) at an adult alternative high school in south Texas. The ages ranged from 18 to 35. Seventy-five chose their ethnicity as Hispanic and two did not specify. When asked to choose a dominant language, 29 chose English and 48 choose Spanish. For the present study, language dominance is defined as the language that a bilingual speaker considers their dominant language. Based on the findings that adults are considered to be able to reliably self-report their dominant language (Bedore et al., 2012; Marian, Blumenfeld & Kaushankaya 2007), participants were directly asked to choose their primary language: English, Spanish, or other.

INSTRUMENT

This study used a paper-based survey that asked participants questions pertaining to their demographic information, language background, and attitudes toward writing in various contexts. The demographic portion of the survey asked participants for their age, gender, and ethnicity. As for the rating of statements, the survey used a six-point Likert scale.

The survey also included the questions about how they felt about writing, how they behaved in regard to writing and if they recognized particular qualities related to writing anxiety. The two attitude aspects addressed in the survey were related to ‘affect’ and ‘behavior’ dimensions of the tripartite model of attitude in Gardner’s work (2004). In addition, it included items about anxiety as it is widely studied area of second language acquisition.

The four domains of writing included in the survey were general writing, writing in humanities classes, writing in STEM classes, and writing in electronic communication. Many academic disciplines can be broadly generalized under the umbrella terms “humanities” and “STEM.” Writing standards for these two groupings of disciplines emphasize different composition and cognitive skills. (North, 2005). In addition to academic writing, the survey included a domain of electronic communication, as today’s technology has allowed for an explosion of electronic written communication. Young people send countless text messages per day and consider strong writing skills to be “important to success in life” (Lenhart, Arafeh & Smith, 2008).

In sum, the survey was designed to ask participants about their perceptions of the three attitudinal aspects (i.e., enjoyableness, writing behaviors, and writing anxiety) in four domains of writing (i.e., general writing, writing in humanities, STEM writing, and electronic communication writing). Two items were used to address each attitudinal attribute in each domain, thus there were six questions per domain in a total of 24 items.

However, a reliability coefficient of items in each domain showed a concern about the items in the domain of electronic communication. The two items related to anxiety produced negative correlations with other items in the domain, so they were removed. With the elimination of two electronic communication items, the total number of the survey items included in this study was twenty-two, and the Cronbach’s alpha of all the items was .799. The reliability coefficient of items in each domain ranged from .659 to .525.

The survey questions included in assessing general writing attitude were as follows, with Cronbach’s alpha = .659.

- *I like school work that involves writing.*
- *I try to avoid writing for school work whenever possible.*
- *Writing for school stresses me out.*
- *I generally find writing to be a relaxing activity.*
- *I try to do my best on writing assignments.*
- *The writing I do in school is not enjoyable.*

The survey questions included in assessing humanities writing attitudes were as follows, with Cronbach’s alpha = .601.

- *I hate writing about topics in English and social studies.*
- *Writing in English and social studies is not at all stressful.*
- *I like putting my ideas on paper in English and social studies.*
- *I try to practice my writing skills as much as possible in English and social studies.*
- *If we have a writing assignment in English or social studies, I try to write as little as possible.*
- *My mind goes blank when I try to do a writing assignment in English and social studies.*

The survey questions included in assessing STEM writing attitudes were as follows, with Cronbach’s alpha = .657

- *Writing in math and science classes is enjoyable.*
- *I try to write in math and science as much as I can.*
- *I never stress out when we have to write in math and science.*
- *Trying to write about what I’ve learned in math and science causes me anxiety.*
- *I don’t like to write in math and science.*
- *If we have writing assignments in math and science, I try not to do them.*

The survey questions included in assessing electronic communication writing attitudes were as follows, with Cronbach's $\alpha = .535$.

- *I prefer to use English when I send texts, instant messages, and emails.*
- *I try to avoid sending texts, instant messages, and emails in English.*
- *I want to use English when I text, instant message, or email.*
- *I dislike communicating through English texts, instant messages, and emails.*

DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

First, in order to examine a language effect, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to compare two language groups in each domain of general writing, writing in humanities, writing in STEM, and writing in electronic communication. A post hoc analysis would reveal a domain that would have a difference between the two language groups. In addition, to understand each language group, paired *t*-tests were conducted for each language group separately to examine if there was a domain difference per language group.

RESULTS

A mixed ANOVA was used to examine the effects of both between-groups factors and within-groups factors. This study started with a mixed ANOVA to examine the effects of within-writing domain factors and between-language group factors on writing attitude ratings. It also allowed us to investigate interactions between factors. Checking assumptions for the use of mixed ANOVA, the test of sphericity indicated a violation of sphericity along with $\epsilon > .75$, and, therefore, the Huynh-Feldt correction was used to correct degree of freedoms (*dfs*) (as described by Leech, Barrett & Morgan, 2008). A set of follow-up analyses was conducted and is presented alongside relevant findings to provide a thorough examination of writing attitudes of different language groups in the writing domains.

WRITING DOMAIN EFFECT

The results of within-group analysis indicated a significant main effect of writing domain, $F(2.52, 189.33) = 21.70, p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .224$. This indicated a significant main effect of writing domains with an effect size much larger than typically found. According to Cohen's general interpretation of the strength of a relationship, $\eta^2 = .45$ indicates an effect size much larger than typical (Leech et al., 2008, p 81).

In order to locate the significant main effect, this study conducted additional paired-*t* tests of writing domains. As shown in Table 1, a statistically significant difference was found between general writing and writing in the humanities, $t(76) = 2.99, p = .004$, and between general writing attitudes and writing in STEM courses, $t(76) = 2.79, p = .007$, with general writing attitudes being higher than both humanities writing and STEM writing. Additionally, there is a significant difference in the attitude scores of STEM writing and writing in electronic communication, $t(76) = -5.72, p = .000$, and in the comparison of humanities writing and electronic communication, $t(76) = -4.96, p = .000$. In both cases, electronic communication attitude scored higher.

Table 1
Results for Paired T-Tests Comparing Attitudes of the Total Population Toward Writing Domains

Writing Domains Compared	<i>t</i> -value	df	<i>p</i>
General Writing, Humanities Writing	2.99	76	.004**
General Writing, STEM Writing	2.79	76	.007**
General Writing, Electronic Communication	-3.66	76	.000**
Humanities Writing, STEM Writing	.727	76	.469
Humanities Writing, Electronic Comm.	-4.96	76	.000**
STEM Writing, Electronic Communication	-5.72	76	.000**

** Significant at $p < .01$; * Significant at $p < .05$

However, there was no significant difference found in the pair of humanities writing and STEM writing.

WRITING DOMAIN AND LANGUAGE GROUP INTERACTION

The results of mixed ANOVA found a significant interaction between domain and language group, $F(2.52, 189.33) = 4.55, p = .007$, partial $\eta^2 = .057$. It suggested that with a typical effect size, the rating pattern of one language group across domains was significantly different than that of the other group.

When the mean ratings of domains for each language group were examined (see Table 2), the two groups had an identical order of the highest to the lowest: STEM writing << humanities writing << general writing << electronic writing. However, the difference between the two highest ratings, general and electronic writing, was drastic in English-dominant speakers causing an interaction between domain and language group. The interaction was noticeable in Figure 1. It also confirmed a significant difference in the comparison of general and electronic writing for the English group, $t(28) = -4.20, p = .000$, while no significance found for the Spanish group, $t(47) = -1.36, p = .181$.

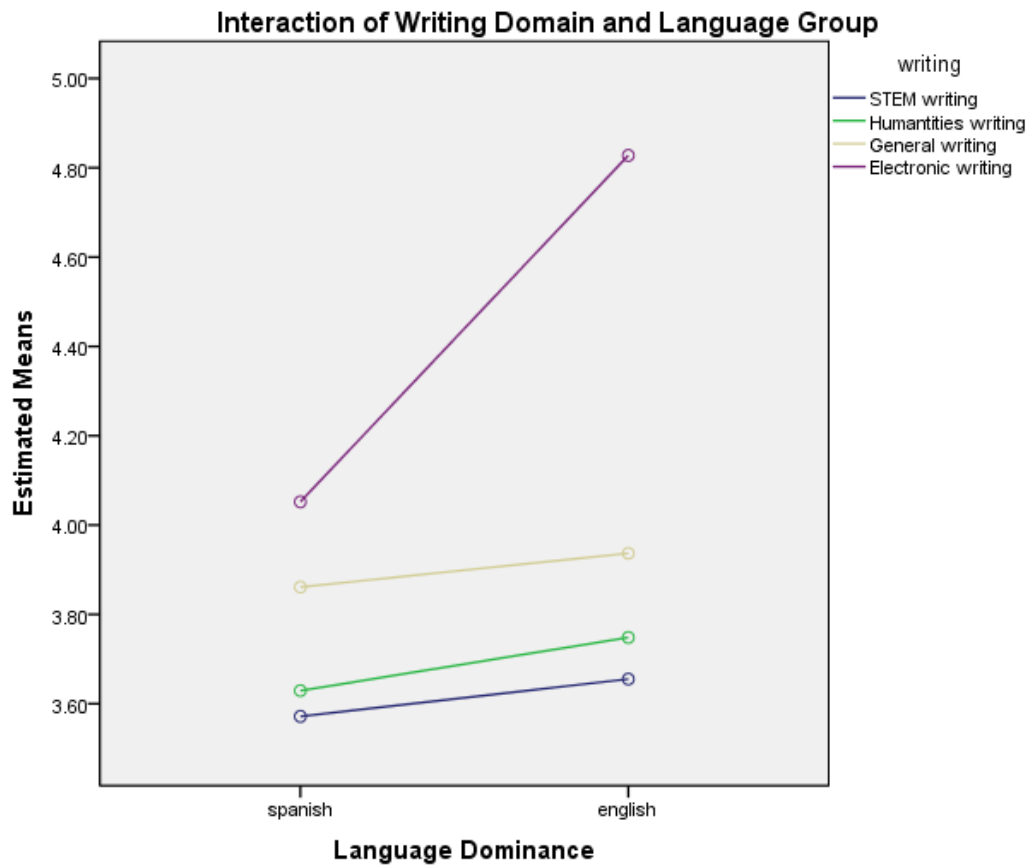


Figure 1. *Interaction of attitudes towards writing domains and language groups*

LANGUAGE GROUP DIFFERENCE

Also, there were significant differences found between language groups, $F(1, 75) = 3.95, p = .050$, partial $\eta^2 = .050$. Although the effect size is rather small, it indicated that one language group rated writing domains significantly higher or lower than the other group. One-way ANOVA results showed that two language groups had a statistically significant difference in their ratings of writing attitude only in the domain of electronic communications, $F(1, 15.91), p = .000$. As shown in Table 1, all the other domains had no significant difference between English-dominant speakers and Spanish-dominant speakers.

Table 2
Results for One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) between Language group

	Dominant Language		<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
	English	Spanish				
General Writing	3.94 (1.00)	3.86 (.660)	1	.161	.002	.689
Humanities Writing	3.75 (3.63)	3.62 (.700)	1	.402	.005	.528
STEM writing	3.66 (.907)	3.57 (.788)	1	.182	.002	.671
Electronic Writing	4.83 (.894)	4.05 (.784)	1	15.91	.182	.000***

Note. *** Significant at $p < .01$; * Significant at $p < .05$. The sample size of language group is $n = 29$ and $n = 48$ for English-dominant and Spanish-dominant group, respectively.

This finding of group difference in electronic writing had a larger than typical effect size even closer to much larger than typical, $\eta = .418$ (the square root value of $\eta^2 = .182$). The mean scores of the English group were higher than those of the Spanish group in every domain, but the analysis finding suggested that the higher mean values of the English group were not significant except for electronic writing. This result indicated no language effect on attitudes toward academic writing. However, electronic writing such as texting and emailing could be considered as a different domain to academic writing, and their dominant language has a significant effect on how much they enjoy writing or how they like writing in English in the context.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate writing attitudes of linguistically diverse students; specifically, the relationship between students' language background and their attitudes toward writing in English. The results regarding attitudes toward writing domains show that participants' attitudes toward general academic writing are statistically more positive than writing in specific academic subjects. One factor that may contribute to the present study's participants' less positive attitudes toward academic writing in specific classes is a possible impact of the standardized testing associated with those classes. In general, standardized testing has had a largely negative impact on the schooling of minority communities (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008), especially students whose second language is English (Ruecker, 2013). For the sample population of this study, a major focus is preparation for the exit tests because it is a graduation requirement that many of them lack (Pharr-Alamo-San Juan ISD, n.d.). The emphasis on writing for standardized testing may be related to their less positive attitudes toward writing in humanities and STEM. The finding of more favorable attitudes toward electronic writing than toward writing in all the other domains is in agreement with other research findings. Lenhart, Arafeh, & Smith (2008) found that high school students tend to enjoy writing in low-stakes situations, for personal reasons, or to communicate. It also shows that students have a preference for self-selecting topics, something that is often discouraged in a test-centric environment. Moreover, it has been argued that language learners in particular struggle with timed writing prompts considering that they not only elicit students' knowledge of unfamiliar information, but expect students to use grammar and mechanics on a level similar to native English speakers (Song & August, 2002). While linguistic accuracy may come naturally to a native English speaking student, it may not come naturally to an ELL. As for the language group difference, this study found a statistically significant difference between English-dominant participants and Spanish-dominant counterparts when it comes to using English

for electronic communication: the former group felt more positively toward electronic communication in English than did the latter. There was no statistically significant difference between these groups in the school-related writing domains. The less positive attitudes of Spanish dominant participants toward electronic communication in English could reflect an affective response or could be a matter of convenience. Because texting is a way to maintain relationships, people may feel more comfortable expressing themselves in their dominant language due to associations with their identities and language communities. It supports the research finding that texting in one's dominant language is more efficient than trying to use a second language (Carrier & Benitez, 2010). The result may support the notion that a dichotomy exists between "communication" and "*real* writing" (Lenhart, Arafeh, & Smith, 2008, p. *i*). Writing in texts, emails and instant messaging "carries the same weight to teens as phone calls and between-class hallway greetings" (p. *i*). In their study, the participants indicated that while they felt that writing is important, they do not think of texting as "writing," but simply as a form a communication.

In sum, as mentioned in the literature review of this study, attitude plays a key role in promoting writing motivation and achievement, thus developing positive attitudes toward writing may help students become more motivated to lead to an academic success. As for adolescent and adult learners, the results of this study support the inclusion of more low-stakes writing assignments in traditional educational settings, as opposed to test-driven writing activities. Teaching writing through low-stakes and informal writing activities may promote positive writing attitudes to improve students' ability to produce the target language. It may be desirable to promote a sense of real communication and to give students real-world topics for which they have motivation to express themselves.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study adds to the knowledge base regarding language and writing attitudes and adult English language education. Having a positive attitude toward writing is an essential factor in writing achievement, which may affect one's academic success. Students should also be encouraged to think of writing as a means of communication, as opposed to the abstract skill set conceptualized in the current high-stakes, test-driven environment. Such a shift in perspective could aid ELLs in developing positive attitudes toward writing, thereby increasing their intrinsic motivation to write and improving their writing achievement.

There are some limitations of this study. The current study did not include open-ended questions on the survey in order not to put linguistic pressure on the participants, as most of them were Spanish dominant speakers. To further explore student population's attitudes toward writing, interviews or open-ended questionnaires could be administered.

Also, the generalization of the findings seems somewhat constrained due to the participation population of non-traditional postulation. Future research can explore writing attitudes of students at a traditional high school or university setting or students of various language backgrounds to represent a more generalizable student population.

As for future research, it may be meaningful to investigate the English academic writing development of students with similar needs as this student population, such as long-term ELLs, bilingual adult students in the U.S., non-traditional or GED students, at-risk students, students who live in a language minority area, etc. Exploring the writing attitudes of these particular populations could give researchers more insight to their struggles with academic writing.

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EARLY READERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE OF LITERACY IN THEIR LIVES

ZOYAH KINKEAD-CLARK

ABSTRACT

The following article aims to present, from children's perspectives, the value of literacy and how they use it in their everyday lives. Through the use of ethnographic methodology, including observations, interviews and collection of artifacts, it seeks to examine how children rely on their literacy skills authentically, as they play and move between spaces and respond to stimuli in their environment. I followed six children as telling cases and used Strauss and Corbin's (1990) Grounded Theory to illuminate the findings. Two dominant themes emerged: connecting and participating in significant moments. These findings provide much guidance on how teachers and parents can more readily support young children in their literacy development. It also supports the notion that children's perceptions of the value of literacy are inextricably linked to how they use it within their personal contexts: at home, school, and the wider community. This also supports children's use literacy as a means of bonding with and participating in social experiences.

INTRODUCTION

While research is replete with the factors affecting children's literacy development, very few have sought to understand how children feel or value literacy in their everyday lives. For instance, within the Caribbean context, literacy research has been predominantly aimed at assessing the success of various literacy strategies with the goal of determining how they impact student achievement and, by extension, student performance on standardized tests.

The following study emerges out of a larger study, which followed the progress of a group of kindergarten children's literacy development over the course of year. This article takes a look at six children from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and highlights how they perceive literacy and how they value its use in their everyday lives.

CONCEPTUALIZING LITERACY

Literacy acquisition is influenced and shaped by multiple factors, such as socio-economic status, parent education levels, teachers practices, family experiences and, in some instances, ethnic practices in supporting young children's literacy development (Aram & Levin, 2001; Bauman & Wasserman, 2010; Huss-Keeler, 1997). Though literacy acquisition is frequently conceptualized as children's "linear progress" in the development of conventional literacy skills, other studies have also sought to "add color" to this perspective by broadening our understanding of the term literacy beyond a mere black and white continuum (Dyson, 2001). Through greater insight into the richness

and diversity of home, family, and community literacy practices, we have greater awareness that literacy moves beyond paper and pencil and now includes multimodal and artifactual representations (Flewitt, 2008; Pahl, 2001; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005).

BROADENING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF LITERACY; LOOKING AT HOME AND SCHOOL

Over the years, researchers have struggled to fully and clearly articulate what literacy is. The problematic issue in this regard often relates to who seeks to define it and the spaces we seek to confine it; whether school-focused or home-focused. Historically, the dominant mode of thought was to view literacy as solely the application of alphabetic principle and use of comprehension skills. While very important, there has emerged within the past few decades researchers who have sought to explore the concept of the purposes of literacy, the socio-cultural aspect of literacy, and more importantly to describe families' use of literacy in their everyday lives (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Pahl & Kelly, 2005; Souto-Manning, 2010).

Denny (1983), in her groundbreaking research on literacy within homes, refers to these unique familial experiences as family literacy practices. Interestingly, similar to Ladson-Billings (2005), Pahl and Kelly (2005), Snow (2006), and Souto-Manning (2010), Denny believed these experiences are rich, valid, and powerful and provide children with tremendous opportunities to learn about their world.

As stated by Snow (2006),

For some, literacy tasks engaged in at school constitute the prototype for literacy, whereas others argue that most literacy activities and much literacy learning occur outside school, in the home, in the context of religious observance, daily life tasks, and community involvement (p. 4).

Within the past forty years, research pertaining to emergent literacy indicates that emergent readers are significantly shaped by the home, community, culture, and other childhood environments because these provide the lens through which they view, interpret and respond to literacy experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Souto-Manning, 2010). It is these diverse contexts that provide children with prior experiences to draw on, interpret, and use as they seek to interact with literacy and engage in its range of forms (Ladson-Billings, 2005; McLachlan, 2007; Moll et al, 2005; Snow, 2006; Souto-Manning, 2010;).

Pahl and Rowsell (2012) and Souto-Manning (2010) concur that most literacy exposure for emergent readers occurs in the home and wider community. They explain that while literacy is experienced in many contexts for young children, the home environment provides more opportunities for literacy than even school (2012). It is for this reason that schools ought to build on the richness of the home literacy experiences of children in order to ensure children see the value of literacy across spaces.

As suggested by Anderson and Morrison (2007) and Ladson-Billings (2005), the significance of the family literacy practices and the tremendous impact they have on the literacy development of young children must be fully embraced in the classroom context when they assert “across socio-cultural groups, families can be rich contexts for children’s early literacy development” (p.3). Pahl and Kelly (2005) also explore family literacy moments as a third dimension that bridges home and school literacy practices. Their findings suggest that family literacy facilitates greater understanding of the rich, intimate experiences that occur between older and younger members of families and essentially minimizes the dissonance that may exist between home and school literacy practices.

This is particularly significant because, not only do children learn attitudes, positive or negative, towards literacy in the home, but they also acquire some of the requisite concepts to begin formal reading and writing. This affects how they relate to literacy when they enter the classroom. No doubt, children from homes with a wealth of literacy practices relate to literacy experiences differently from children who come from homes that do not have traditional forms of literacy (books, newspapers, etc.) readily available. This dynamic has an impact on future academic success, as children from homes which support literacy acquisition have a greater chance of doing well academically as compared to those from homes where positive literacy experiences are not promoted (Bauman & Wasserman, 2010). In reference to this, Hannon (1995) explains:

The family’s literacy values and practices will shape the course of the child’s literacy development in terms of the opportunities, recognition, interaction and models available to them” (p. 104).

MULTIMODAL EXPRESSIONS OF LITERACY

In this era of hashtags and dot-coms, it has become even more evident the complex use, look, and feel of literacy within the home. This shift, as outlined by many researchers, requires us to look beyond the more traditional concept of the term, and think “outside the box” as we explore new, alternate, and multimodal literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2009; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Walsh, 2009).

According to Flewitt (2008),

Multimodal literacies is a concept that takes into account the whole range of modes that young children encounter in a variety of texts (words, images, and sounds in printed and electronic media and in face to face interaction) and the range and combinations of modes they use to make and express meaning (gesture, gaze, facial expression, movement, image, music, sound effects, and language” (p.123).

Multimodal literacy does not dismiss the value of literacy as defined in its more traditional sense of encoding and decoding text; rather, it builds on and extends the concept. As Hobbs and Frost (2003) explain, multimodal literacy further supports the need for traditional literacy. According to the authors, in order to be able to function in our rapidly changing society, one needs to be able to use alphabetic principles as a point of reference to understand other forms of representations.

Whitehurst and Lonigan (2001) acknowledge that most of the research focused on literacy has often been limited in that it would focus on English speakers as they learned the “alphabetic writing principle” and formal representations of reading and writing (p.12). Despite this, perhaps one of the greatest transformations in the teaching of literacy in the 21st century is that our concept of the term has evolved and ultimately challenged the traditional understanding of literacy. No longer is it seen as being solely about language. As it stands, the term has come to encompass the barrage of technological and digital innovations of our time.

Kress (2003) reiterates this stance. Agreeing with Whitehurst and Lonigan (2001), Kress maintains that it is impossible to define literacy without considering new technologies and the implications they have on literacy practices. Following this argument, Pianfetti (2001) points out that our society requires us to reconceptualize our ideas of literacy by shifting our focus from solely traditional texts to digital, visual, and other forms of technologies. As Flewitt (2008) explains, children engage in multimodal forms of literacy in their daily lives. It is not bound by time or space. Whether driving on the road, watching a play at the theater, painting pictures in art class, making a sandwich at home, composing a song, or choreographing a dance at dance class, children are surrounded by and engage in literacy in different forms very frequently. So ubiquitous are multimodal forms of literacy that Ward & Wason-Ellam (2005) explain that even in traditional literate environments multimodal literacies are evident. In libraries, there are several opportunities to engage in multimodal forms of literacy. Toddlers singing songs, dancing, and viewing puppet shows and older children role playing, drawing and crafting demonstrate that libraries are also quite rich in alternate forms of literacies.

Despite the great changes in literacy and forms of literacy representation, there is evidence that school pedagogies do not reflect this. Marsh (2007) discusses this position and draws on evidence, which speaks to the fact that school curricula and syllabi typically do not reflect the changing nature of literacy and the varying representations of text. According to Marsh (2007), the predominant thought is that technologies take on a supporting role and are seen as an “in addition to” aspect rather than being the foci of lessons. She acknowledges that while some teachers have expanded their perspective on what literacy is and perhaps would like to draw on multimodal literacies in their lessons; they are challenged and “boxed in” by the school curricula.

Hobbs and Frost (2003), in reference to this argument, affirm Marsh’s (2007) position when they too explain the great reluctance on the part of educators to acknowledge the richness and worth of “new” forms of literacy. They claim “...literacy educators have long elevated one form of literacy over others” (p.333). According to Flood, Lapp, Squire et al. (2003), this occurs because teachers have an “irrational loyalty to reading and writing” (p. xvi).

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH SETTING

The study was conducted in a kindergarten classroom in one of the largest primary schools in the Cayman Islands. The Cayman Islands, a dependency of Britain, is a small island in the Caribbean that boasts one of the highest per capita incomes globally. Highly dependent on tourism and banking, this group of islands recruits and attracts a high number of expatriates each year which results in a culturally diverse and increasingly multilingual population.

Similar to the diversity reflected in the society, so too is it that schools are quite cosmopolitan. In the classroom where I conducted this study, several nationalities were represented. Many of the children were from Cuba, Jamaica, Honduras, the Cayman Islands, and Canada. There were also many bi-cultural children whose parents came from different islands and countries.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

My role in this research was that of participant-observer. As suggested by Bryman (2008), in this role I was a “fully functioning member of the social setting” because I was both researcher and the classroom teacher. The other research participants in this study were six students who were purposefully selected as case studies to illuminate the findings of the research. My selection of participants was purposive in that I wanted to have an equal number of boys and girls represented; however, I had no other criteria for the students I selected.

Having been given consent from 17 parents, and assent from 15 children, the names of the 15 students were sorted according to gender. Three names were randomly selected from the list of girls and three names from the list of boys. All children were between the ages of four and five years.

DATA COLLECTION

To gather the data for this study various qualitative methods were used. These include observations, artifacts, field notes, and interviews with parents and children. Data was collected over the course of ten months, both in children’s homes and at school. Artifacts collected include visual images, samples of children’s writings, instruments used during literacy moments, and audio recordings.

Throughout the period of data collection, field notes captured my observations of significant moments of the children’s literacy experiences. The home visits allowed me to get some sense of the literacy practices of the family and to understand the unique ways families used literacy. The final means of data collection were interviews with parents, children, and other significant members of home environment. These interviews resulted with a sense of how family members used literacy (both conventional and multimodal) and how they supported children in developing both conventional and unconventional literacy skills.

DATA ANALYSIS

To analyze the data, Strauss and Corbin's (1990) Grounded Theory Method was used. This method allowed me to extricate dominant themes which helped me to determine how children used literacy and how they valued literacy as they moved about their everyday lives. In order to extricate the themes, audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, images captured were labeled, and field notes were sorted and coded.

As suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the process of data analysis was quite lengthy, tedious, and painstaking. To do this, three overarching steps were followed. These include open coding, where the data collected was perused and placed in categories according to similarities or differences in meaning, concept, or idea; and axial coding, where the relationship between the codes generated in the open coding step were accessed. This step required that words and concepts similar in meaning be categorized. In the final step, selective coding, the core concepts emerging from the data were identified. These core concepts were then highlighted as the dominant themes.

FINDINGS

Two themes emerged from the findings; connect and participate and engage in significant moments. In presenting these findings, I draw on writing samples as well as use of a table to contents to show the ways students used and valued literacy in both the home and school contexts.

CONNECT AND PARTICIPATE

It was overwhelmingly evident that for my co-constructors the value of literacy in their lives meant that they had an opportunity to connect and participate in events they would previously have been disconnected from (See Table 1). Though they struggled to articulate how they viewed literacy in my interviews with them, it was quite interesting how they were able to outline the benefits it afforded them.

Literacy as a means of connecting with people, spaces, and practices also emerged when my co-constructors demonstrated how they "built bridges" and began to transfer their literacy skills between home and school. They discussed how, when at school they would write about the experiences they had at home, and when at home they would make reference to the experiences that had at school. In a writing sample from one of my students, (See Figure 1), he was able to explain that for him, literacy meant being able to play in learning centers. This was particularly important because in the early weeks of kindergarten, he expressed his dislike for school because it was not fun like his home.



I like school because we get to do activities and my teachers lets us do centers.

Figure 1. Why I like school.

During my observations I also recognized that for the children, literacy provided them with the opportunity to participate in peer, family, and community events. For Natasha and Keith, this now meant they had the opportunity to participate in family devotions and church worship. For Jose, literacy was valuable as it gave him more independence to use the computer; while for Shanna, it meant she had the opportunity to read to her younger brother and participate in the unique speech pattern of home. These moments were significant and essentially empowered them.

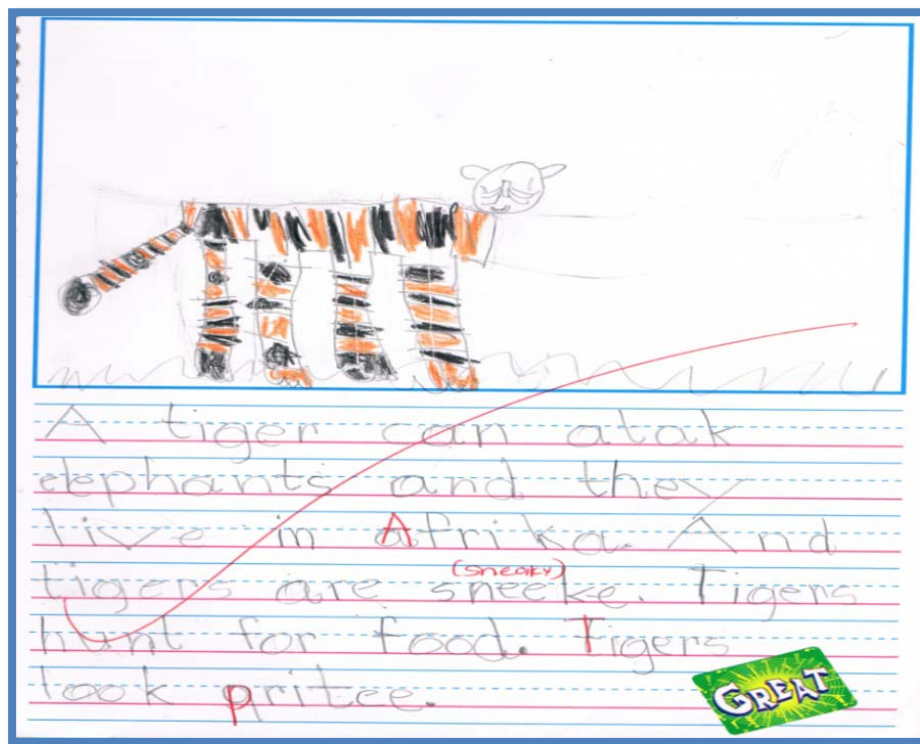
It was quite clear that the children more readily understood how valuable literacy was, because they understood how it provided them with the key to unlock doors previously closed to them. For instance, at home, Shanna's mother, Betty, would spell out words rather than say them if she did not want Shanna or her brother to know what her conversation was about. This occurred during one of my visits to the home when Betty was making the point that Shanna's father did not read much and she worried how it might impact on her son. In Betty's bid to not disclose who was being discussed, she spelled the word *daddy*. Shanna heard this and explained to her mother "I know what you spelled you know mummy, that word *daddy*. It's on the word wall at school." Though seemingly trivial, for Shanna, developing literacy skills was of value to her because it allowed her the opportunity to participate and understand the unique way adults spoke in her home.

SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS

Literacy, in its many forms, provided my co-constructors with the tools to create tangible and visual representations of their world, their lives at home, and how they interacted with others in their communities (see Table 1). Throughout the period of observation, I recognized that children's literacy reflected familiar experiences, or what I refer to as significant moments. Through their writings, drawings, songs, and art, they drew on personal experiences and outlined what these

moments meant to them. Whether they wrote about toys they had, favorite television shows, family trips, or even in one instance, my visits to their home, children enjoy sharing or expressing moments of significance. Figures 2 and 3 show Natasha's and Keith's journal entries where they did just this. In Natasha's entry, she referred to a story she had heard about animals in the jungle. She was particularly struck by what she learned about tigers and how similar their behavior was to her dog. In Keith's entry (see Figure 3), he referred to an event that took place two days prior where he had the opportunity to ride in a police car.

The experiential aspect of learning was also evident as the students drew on many personal experiences as they discussed stories and interpreted texts during story time. This was something I highly encouraged, because as a kindergarten teacher, I felt it fostered children's love for books by allowing them to see their lives reflected in texts. To do this, during Story Time, I read stories that were relevant to the children's interests. In Natasha's case, because I recognized her interest in animals, I chose to read a story about African jungle animals. Natasha was particularly interested in prey and predators because she often talked about how her dog, Pepsi, tried to catch stray cats in her neighborhood. This event spurred Natasha to write about tigers preying on elephants because she was very intrigued by the story of tigers acting in a way similar to her dog. Natasha's journal entry (Figure 2) highlights her connections between her life and text.



A tiger can attach elephants and they live in Africa and tigers are sneaky. Tigers hunt for food. Tigers look pretty.

Figure 2. Natasha's journal entry.

Keith's experience also highlights how children use literacy to share significant moments with others. Slightly shy, Keith would often have to be encouraged to participate in class activities. In his journal entry (Figure 3), he writes about having the opportunity to sit in a police car during "Police Day". It was obviously an extremely enjoyable experience for Keith because he chose to write in his journal about his experience sitting in the police car during free activity time.

While my co-constructors used literacy as a means to encode their thoughts, my findings also suggest that they valued the opportunities to participate in significant family and community events. Whether during devotions with the family, writing a song for a new baby niece (as Bianca did), or listening to stories, literacy provided the children with the chance to write about and encode significant moments with others. This was the case with Jose, who would often sit with his father on the veranda in the evenings and read books borrowed from the library. In my visits to Jose's home, it was clear that he looked forward to these special moments with his father, where they shared about interesting events that took place at school, pictures Jose drew, or songs he learned during music class at school.

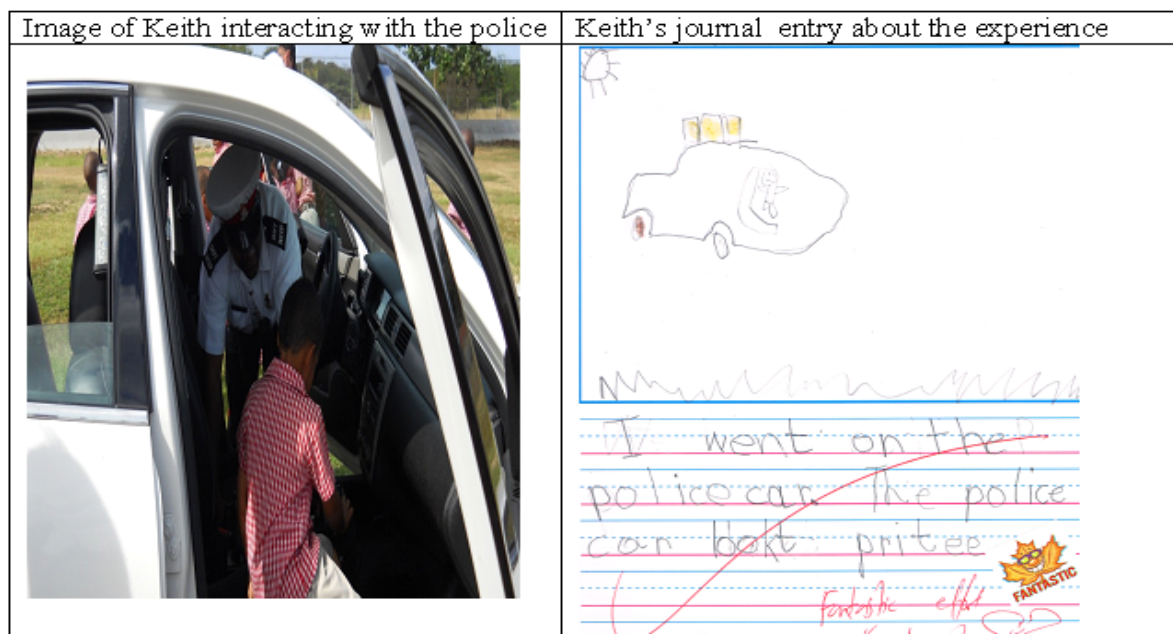


Figure 3. Keith's journal entry.

Table 1
Students' Perceptions of Literacy

	Perceptions of learning literacy skills and engaging in literacy instruction	Perceptions of the value of literacy in the home and school
Bianca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to read is easy when your teacher helps you. • Some aspects of learning to read are more fun than others ("The teacher center not fun like the computer and the home centers." • "Reading makes you smart". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful to find favorite TV shows at home. • She can read her favorite storybook. • Able to read storybooks and write songs for her parents. . • Can write notes for mummy and for teacher. • Transcribes favorite TV songs.
Shanna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Mom or Dad] is proud of you when you read". • You learn all your sight words to move on to "harder books". • Does not like going to the writing center for guided writing "because it's too hard". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets to teach little brother how to read at home. • "When you know all the words you get [a chance] to be the assistant". • "When you are finished with your word work you can get extra center time."
Natasha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not like learning sight words. • Likes to go to different centers. • Dislikes going to the writing center with friends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can write songs to dance to. • Knows how to spell words and send text messages. • "When you do well you get to sing on stage in music class and at church." • "Mummy likes to listen and is proud of you when you read well. Daddy buys you stuff."
David	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I'm getting better and better at reading everyday". • Enjoys learning sight words. • "I like when you [teacher] read story books". • Favorite center is the computer center and the listening center. • "I don't like to write sentences or to draw". • My mummy helps me at home. • "My favorite book is <i>Come In</i>. It's easy to read." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets to use the computer without anyone helping him. • Reads his favorite book without help. • "When you finish your work you get a chance to go to centers." • "When I read, my mummy is proud of me and she takes me to the beach".
Keith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I know a lot of the sight words already." • Reading is easy. • "Sometimes I like to write but sometimes I don't." • Games are fun. • Loves to listen to stories read aloud. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We get to the movies and see some of the books read in class." • Has the chance to read like daddy. • Has a chance to read his children's Bible during family devotions. • "When you know how to read, it makes you smart so you can do your work by yourself". • "If you read a lot of books you get a chance to do fun things".
Jose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I don't know some words." • "Reading is hard...and I can't read." • Enjoys read alouds, particularly stories where his name is substituted for the character's name. • Enjoys literacy centers. His favorite ones are the computer center and the home center. Does not like the teacher center because "it's too hard". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets to use the computer. • Goes to the library. • When it's reading time "we sometimes go to centers". • "You [teacher] read books for us". • Chances to bond with his father.

DISCUSSION

Children's understandings of the purposes and value of literacy is directly related to their experiences with how and what they are taught (Wang, 2000). As Heath (1983) explains, children use their daily experiences with their families to conceptualize what literacy means and use these to validate its importance in their everyday lives. This is true in the obvious sense that family literacy practices influence children's literacy development as previously discussed, but also in terms of how children understand how stories, traditions and cultures are constructed and how they can use literacy skills as a part of their everyday lives.

As I aimed to focus on children's perceptions of the value of literacy, I recognized that, for each of my co-constructors, its value differed and these differences were often shaped by what took place in the home. These findings align with Chu & Wu (2010) and Sawyer (2010), who suggest that parental beliefs shape family literacy practices because parents influence what, when, and how often literacy is practiced within the home. Each child had a different perception of what literacy meant, the purposes of literacy in their lives, and the factors that had an impact on their literacy practices. I was also intrigued by the notion that my students' perceptions of literacy instruction were influenced by how successful they were at learning skills at school and by my instructional practices. This supports the findings of Chu & Wu (2010) and Sawyer (2010), who assert how the practices of home shape the skills children take with them into the classroom setting. It must be noted that families are rich repositories of literacy. In the case of my co-constructors, this was reflected in how they engaged in literacy practices, comments they made when communicating with each other, how they responded to instruction, and how they used multimodal and artifactual forms of literacy (See Table 1).

As Wang (2000) explains, children's perceptions of the value of literacy in their lives is crucial, as, in addition to the implications it has for their success in learning to read and write, it also has an impact on their confidence. With all six students, I recognized that the more "successful" they were with learning literacy skills and the more positive perceptions they had of literacy instruction, the more they sought to use it in both conventional and multimodal forms and the more they seemed to value it in their lives. Interestingly, the converse also holds true. I identified that those who had difficulty with learning literacy skills placed little value on it and struggled to talk about how they used it in their daily lives. I also recognized that the aspects of literacy that proved difficult or challenging for them to learn were often viewed negatively "and not much fun". For instance, Shanna, who read quite well, spoke "positively" about how she benefitted from learning to read and how she used reading both at home and at school. Her perception of writing was different, as learning to write (both in forming letters and constructing sentences) was challenging for her. Through my observations and in speaking with her, I noticed that she had a dislike for writing, and as such, during writing instruction, she was apprehensive and unsure of what was expected of her.

For the other children, when asked about what learning to read meant for them, most of them spoke of the opportunity to gain tangible rewards that came with learning to read and the opportunities they had to "do things with family". This essentially supports the role of literacy as a socio-cultural activity that provides children with opportunities to participate in social and family

experiences. This relates to the findings of Ladson-Billings (2005), Moll, Amanti, Neff et al. (2006), Pahl and Rowsell (2012) and Souto-Manning (2010), who outline that literacy as a practice is socio-culturally grounded.

The children who served as my co-constructors appreciated the opportunity that their burgeoning conventional literacy skills provided with experiences. For Shanna, the chance to finally understand and be a part of adult conversations showed her the value of literacy. For Bianca, Natasha, and Keith, I recognized that the value of learning to read and write allowed them to take part in unique family literacy practices. In Bianca's case, she was able to write the lyrics to her favorite television theme songs as she had seen her teenaged sister doing at home. Natasha also took inspiration from her father, who was a budding musician, by writing songs that she could dance to. Additionally, Keith, by his improved ability to read, was given opportunities to have a more active role in the family devotions. For Keith, this was particularly pleasing as he had an equal opportunity, like his sister, to show his parents just how "good" he could read. This highlights that young children value literacy in both its conventional and multimodal forms and are able to use the two with ease. This supports the findings of Cope and Kalantzis (2000), Flewitt (2008), Kress, (2009), Pahl and Rowsell (2005), and Walsh (2009), who explain that children use literacy in diverse ways, and that as literacy skills are acquired, they are able to move between both forms of literacy. For Jose, this was particularly true because it was his preference for multimodal forms of literacy that was the impetus behind his efforts to acquire conventional forms of literacy. For instance, Jose enjoyed playing on the computer but was often frustrated by the fact that he had to ask for help to log on. With encouragement, he figured out how to blend sounds to spell the password, which then allowed him to access the computer independently. As suggested by Au (1998), literacy serves a means of interaction, participation, and cultural communication. Long before children understand the value of literacy, they understand its purposes in helping them take part in experiences they consider to be valuable.

CONCLUSION

My research highlights that literacy played a powerful role in the lives of my co-constructors by allowing them to make meaning of their world and connecting with those around them. Interestingly, they initially conceptualized literacy as learning how to read and write. I recognized that, in the authentic moments of play and talking with their classmates or at home, literacy also involved making meaning of visual, audio, and kinesthetic representations. It essentially is a way of life and served as a way to participate in cultural experiences, participate with family members, and interact with others (Moll et al., 2006; Pahl 2002).

For children, the value of literacy in their lives is pure. It serves as a means to take part in family religious practices (as in the case of Keith and Natasha), as a way to pass on indigenous cultural practices (as with Jose and his father), and it provides opportunities for parents to have meaningful family moments (David and Biannca).

Though these findings cannot be generalized, they do provide much guidance on how classroom teachers can more readily support young children in their literacy development and help in the

planning of children's literacy instruction. Recognizing that literacy moves beyond the borders of the classroom and into family and community practices is important. This understanding has an impact on how and why teachers of young children should consider children's perceptions of literacy. Giving credence to children's feelings empowers them. As suggested by Ladson-Billings (2005), Pahl and Rowsell (2012) and Souto-Manning (2010), understanding the cultural influences surrounding the literacy of the home and community from which children come provides us with insight into the lives of our students and how we should approach our pedagogy. Certainly, as teachers and advocates, this is certainly something we would want to support.

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BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR CLOSE READING WITH DEVELOPING READERS

SHEILA F. BAKER AND LILLIAN McENERY

ABSTRACT

Close Reading utilizes several strategies to help readers think more critically about a text. Close reading can be performed within the context of shared readings, read-alouds by the teacher, literature discussion groups, and guided reading groups. Students attempting to more closely read difficult texts may benefit from technologies and platforms that support their diverse reading levels, abilities, and special needs during close reading activities. The authors identify technologies which enable teachers to embed multimedia, interactive activities, and questions and activities that promote critical thinking and which guide readers to take a closer look at the content of their texts.

Close reading is a term that has been with us for some time. As early as 1838, Horace Mann wrote,

I have devoted especial pains to learn, with some degree of numerical accuracy, how far the reading, in our schools, is an exercise of the mind in thinking and feeling and how far it is a barren action of the organs of speech upon the atmosphere (p, 531).....The result is, that more than eleven-twelfths of all the children in the reading classes, in our schools, do not understand the meaning of the words they read; that they do not master the sense of the reading-lessons, and that the ideas and feelings intended by the author to be conveyed to, and excited in, the reader's mind, still rest in the author's intention, never having yet reached the place of their destination (p. 532).

For decades, close reading has been promoted in classrooms where teachers challenge students to delve into text to think on higher levels. Adler and Van Doren (1972) suggest that students become the detectives in dealing with the text as they explore the layered structures of a text.

Boyles (December, 2012/January, 2013) agrees that close reading involves reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deeper comprehension.

Lapp, Grant, Moss, and Johnson (2013) characterize close reading as “one type of classroom reading in which a small or large group of students ‘have a go’ at a text” (p. 110). Delving deeper to take a more critical look at text proves fruitful for students. While there has been some controversy over the idea of close reading and its use with developing readers, several researchers point out that, at the very least, we can take on practices that lay the foundation for this very important skill (Beers & Probst, 2012). Developing learners’ ability to read more closely at an early age helps to build a

strong foundation in reading. This foundation of strong reading skills is built upon throughout their school years and helps to prepare them for college and careers. “A significant body of research links the close reading of complex text - whether the student is a struggling reader or advanced - to significant gains in reading proficiency and finds close reading to be a key component of college and career readiness” (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 2011, p. 7). Much of the literature in the education field regarding close reading centers on the secondary school group. The authors contend that readers of all ages can participate in this type of reading. Developing readers can begin to navigate the use of various strategies such as making connections, drawing on prior knowledge, identifying what is not being addressed in a text, and analyzing what the author might have meant. Included here is a basic rationale for introducing close reading in early elementary grades, suggested activities, and possible question stems. Also discussed are technology applications that help students navigate digital texts, providing critical skills and strategies for comprehending and embracing today’s digital world.

REVISITING THE TEXT

Close reading of text involves an investigation of a short piece of text, with multiple readings completed over multiple instructional lessons. “Through text-based questions and discussion, students are guided to deeply analyze and appreciate various aspects of the text, such as key vocabulary, and how its meaning is shaped by context; attention to form, tone, imagery, and/or rhetorical devices; the significance of word choice or syntax; and the discovery of different levels of meaning as passages are read multiple times” (Brown & Kappes, 2012, p. 2).

Fisher and Frey (2012) describe close reading as “students examining the deep structures of a text and this includes the way the text is organized, the precision of its vocabulary to advance concepts, and its key details, arguments, and inferential meaning” (p. 179). Close reading stresses engaging with a text of sufficient complexity directly to examine and analyze meaning thoroughly and methodically, encouraging students to read and reread deliberately (Beers & Probst, 2012; Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2011; Pearson & Johnson, 1978).

Choosing an appropriately challenging text is critical for maximizing this approach. Directing student attention to the text, concepts covered, and issues uncovered empowers students to understand the central ideas and key supporting details. It also enables students to reflect on the meanings of individual words as well as overriding author messages. As teachers, our practices help to model for students what it means to be a dynamic and transactional reader (Beers & Probst, 2012).

Lapp, Grant, Moss, and Johnson (2013) make the connection between close reading and revisiting the text. They cite Cummins’ statement of readers, “They return to the text at the word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph levels to fully comprehend how the ‘important details fit together to support the author’s central idea(s)’” (2012, p. 8). Frequently, teachers have not emphasized the importance of rereading and its potential for helping to give students a deeper meaning. Students, then, may view rereading as a weakness or something only delayed or struggling readers engage in. Changing this perception is an important piece of espousing close reading.

HOW TO LEAD DEVELOPING READERS THROUGH A CLOSE READING

Building the foundation for close reading involves instructional strategies and a process with which students can improve their critical reading skills. An instructional framework for multiple readings might look like the following:

Phase One: The first phase involves preparing students for close reading. Guide students to think about what they are reading by using strong questioning techniques. Elicit student background knowledge about the topic. Help students extend their thinking about related topics and evolutions of thought. This might easily be done through the use of post-its or notecards on which students write down or illustrate their initial thoughts. This process of making simple annotations begins to build the foundation for students to interact with the text on various levels. Some of these levels help readers better understand the decisions made by the author, such as why the author chose a particular word to describe or convey a point, chose a particular theme, or chose a specific sentence structure.

Students might make annotations about what they are reading according to guiding questions put forth by the teacher. Discussion might follow and students could be charged with coming away from the discussion with one new piece of information. Making sure that questions are of the higher level (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, creating new understandings) is imperative in this part of the process.

Powerful questions lay the foundation for guiding students to additional realms of understanding. Even young readers have the capacity to ask questions of the author, to determine different purposes for reading, and to locate phrases that might signal to the reader that further exploration should be conducted. Questions for consideration include:

- Why did the author write this piece?
- What question might you ask the author?
- Who do you think would really enjoy this particular selection?
 - The author plays with words like ____ and _____. How do these words make you feel? What do they make you think of?
 - What might the author tell you about this story if he or she were right here beside you?
 - Direct students to identify who is telling the story. Is it a narrator or one of the characters in the story?
 - Who is the person telling the story? Can you think of some words to describe or characterize the character telling the story? Do these words help you to understand the main character's point of view?
 - What emotions do you feel as you are reading the story?
 - Can you tell what the story was about? What are the key points, details, and events that happened in the story?
 - Identify the tone of the reading. Is it negative or positive? Is it happy or sad? Is there a change in tone to be found from the beginning to the end of the story?

Some of these supports can be removed as students become more proficient at the skill of close reading.

Phase Two: The second phase involves similar activities, but the activities require students to think more critically about the text. For example, the teacher might prompt students to look for words that may take on a different meaning or symbolize something else. For example, an “odd duck” may refer to a person who has a unique personality or characteristics.

said, a well done wordless text that elicits strong emotions can be just as powerful or have as much potential for use in a close reading activity as a piece that touches upon strong topics such as justice, freedom, slavery, or diversity in a non-fiction format. Fisher and Frey write, “At its heart, close reading is about showing our students that some texts are worth that level of attention, and moreover, teaching them how to become fully immersed in texts to analyze ‘both the openness and the constraint offered by the text’ (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. x).” (2012, p. 180).

TECHNOLOGY CONNECTIONS

The evolving learners of today are digitally connected. Schools and classrooms have acquired many digital learning tools such as laptops, tablets, and e-readers. Students use digital resources and now, more than ever before, much of their learning may take place online. Technology is engaging and motivates students in the learning process, but its use does not come without some concerns. Some research indicates readers struggle with comprehension and the recall of information when reading digital content (Mangen, Walgermo, & Brennick, 2013). Some readers may discard learned reading strategies in favor of skimming text, and often digital content can be distracting to students, particularly for those students considered developing or struggling readers. Still, other researchers suggest that the type of text (digital, print) has no effect on reading comprehension (Margolin, Driscoll, Toland, & Kegler, 2013). Because the impact of print versus digital text is still under study, the authors suggest that teachers identify technologies that can be integrated into their curriculum that enable teachers to incorporate strategies and activities that specifically support readers’ efforts to read closely. Effective technologies provide readers with learning opportunities that help them read text more critically and think more deeply about their reading. These technologies enable teachers to embed multimedia, interactive activities, and questions and activities that promote higher order thinking and guide readers to take a closer look when reading the content of their texts.

TOOLS AND PLATFORMS

In a review of studies involving student use of technologies to support reading comprehension, findings suggested that multimedia elements may be useful in supporting and motivating literacy development (Biancarosa & Griffiths, 2012; Guernsey, 2011; Roskos & Brueck, 2009; Sherman, Kleiman, & Peterson, 2004; Verhallen, Bus, & de Jong, 2006; Zucker, Moody, & McKenna, 2009). Multimodal learning opportunities address students’ learning styles and provide accommodations for equity of access. Students who are attempting to read difficult texts more closely may benefit from technologies and platforms that support their diverse reading levels, abilities, and special needs during their close reading activities. There are many websites and applications that can support readers’ comprehension of text by helping them to make connections, extract key concepts, understand the main idea of a passage, draw on their own prior knowledge, and analyze the author’s meaning. Despite concerns of using technology during reading, there are several platforms that may support teachers in developing close reading activities and help students to better comprehend, recall, and analyze information. The following technologies can be used effectively in teaching and learning for the purpose of curating resources and developing questions and activities that help teachers promote close reading.

CREATING DIGITAL CONTENT

Glogster is an interactive tool that enables teachers to design close reading activities across the curriculum. Within this application, teachers can post short passages from readings with embedded images, graphics, audio, and videos relative to the subject that will engage students and help them comprehend the text by reading more closely. These added resources can help to build background

for understanding texts, provide additional on or below grade level readings for differentiated instruction, and provide visuals such as graphic charts, infographics, visual definitions or explanations, and virtual tours. Students using a *Glogster* designed for close reading will answer questions and respond to prompts from the teacher, and show their analysis of a reading with resources to support their arguments. This application enables students to experience multimedia and improve their digital literacy as they share their knowledge and understanding after performing close reading activities (See Figure 2).

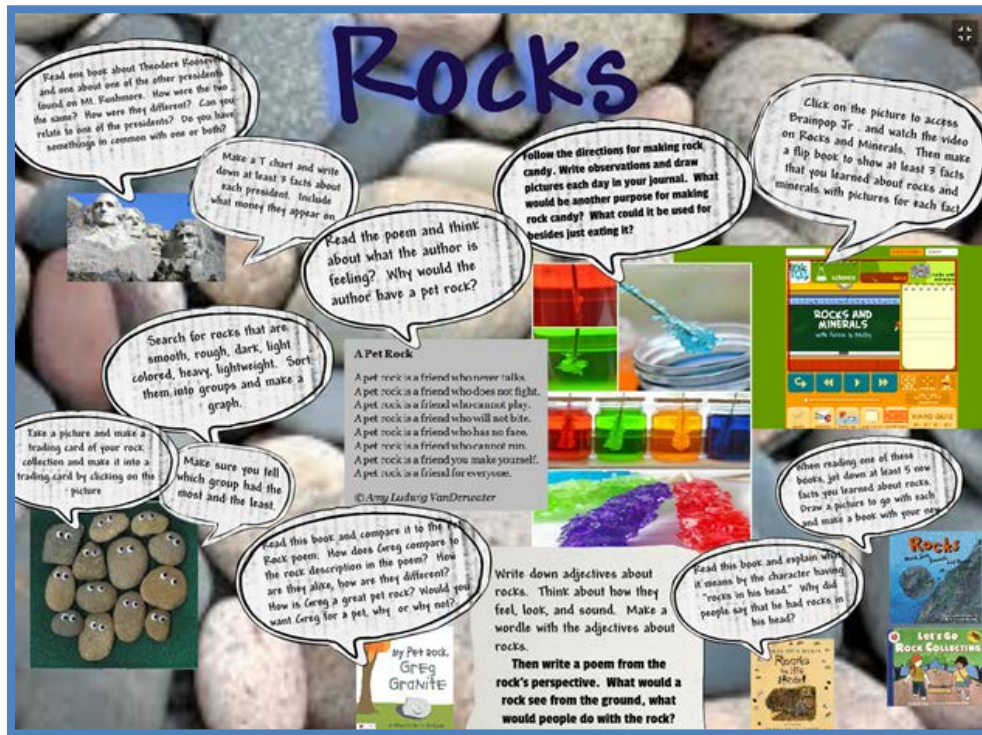


Figure 2: Glogster. This figure is an example of close reading activities using Glogster.

VoiceThread is a platform that promotes collaborative and focused discussions of a particular topic. Teachers can post images, videos, and/or documents for students to view and analyze. Teachers can then solicit close reading responses of the images, videos, and documents they have posted. Communication is via video, voice, or text, based on student preferences. Images and documents can be drawn on to help support explanations or instructions with an authentic audience. Using a simple PDF or Word document enables teachers to save poems, paragraphs, or short passages to which they can add comments or questions to guide students in close reading activities where they think critically about and analyze what they have read. This is an effective way of teaching students to take notes about their readings so they may then summarize what they have read.

READING IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS

Several studies conducted by the Pew Research Center show that reading e-books continues to grow (Rainie, Zickuhr, Purcell, Madden, & Brenner, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2013; Zickuhr & Rainie, 2014). The number of people reading e-books quadrupled in less than two years (Rainie, Zickuhr, Purcell, Madden, & Brenner, 2012); forty-three percent of teens 16 and older own an

eReader or a tablet (Rainie & Smith, 2013); more teens are reading (Pew Research Center, 2013), and device owners read more often. Print books remain the dominant choice, but the number of teens who read e-books has nearly doubled in the past three years (Zickuhr, & Rainie, 2014), particularly for readers in their late teens and early twenties. These statistics have implications for developing readers as more digital learning permeates classrooms. The findings from School Library Journal's (SLJ) School Technology Survey (Kenney, 2011) indicate elementary school librarians' *will* (28 percent) or *may* (43 percent) purchase eBooks within the next two years. SLJR's School Technology Survey conducted in 2013 shows 68% of schools offer eBooks, up from 47% in 2012 and 36% in 2011.

Research shows students comprehend better when reading print versus digital text (Schugar, Smith, & Schugar, 2013). Many students enjoy and even prefer to read using electronic devices, not to mention that student reading of digital text will continue to increase parallel to the increase of technologies in schools. According to Burnett (2010), "Current educational practices are becoming increasingly anachronistic within a world in which knowledge, learning, and relationships are being re-defined in digital environments" (p. 13). Because of the anticipated continued growth of students reading digital text it is important not only to build a strong foundation of close reading strategies at an early age but also to teach children how to transfer those strategies so that they may read both print and digital text proficiently.

Reading text on electronic devices enables readers to take advantage of a variety of tools that can support students in close reading. Readers have access to an embedded glossary to help them define unfamiliar words. Many devices provide tracking of text to highlight words as students are reading. Readers can highlight individual words, phrases, or larger parts of the text they want to discuss with the teacher. They can also post virtual sticky notes with annotations, questions, or comments about what they read. Teachers can use highlighting and note-taking features to embed thought-provoking comments and questions throughout any text used for shared readings. Small groups or the entire class of students can access the same teacher notes. These questions and comments enable teachers to set a purpose for reading and rereading, provide examples of modeling and thinking-aloud, or help to clarify parts of the text that may be confusing and need further clarification. Findings from the teaching of a literature unit showed students used more text evidence in their arguments, and they doubled the average amount of quotes from the literature being analyzed, due to the ease of bookmarking (Haveman, 2014).

Newer digital platforms, such as *Curriculet*, enable teachers to add questions, offer support, embed media at critical points in the text, and assess understanding through quizzes (Herold, 2014). All these features can heighten student engagement, foster critical thinking, and lead to rich discussion about the text with others, which is important in close readings (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Care should be taken to ensure activities are focused and supportive of deeper reading, and not a distraction from it (Herold, 2014).

Using *Actively Learn*, teachers can select content from various grade levels and across the content areas or from the library by grade levels and genre. Teachers can create assignments using supplemental material that can be added by teachers and shared both school- and district-wide. Online text can be added via the URL from the Internet, a pdf, or a Google document. Teachers can set a purpose for reading and rereading, embed stop-and-think questions, write notes, embed links and definitions, and design close reading activities for whole class participation, small groups, or individualized differentiated instruction. Students can highlight, take notes, listen to the text, access

definitions, or alert teachers they need clarification. This platform supports collaborative discussions while obtaining perspectives from the entire group.

Learning A-Z provides resources for students in PreK through 6th grade. Students can access leveled eBooks with short leveled readings that contain close reading activities. Students can view words and phrases being highlighted while listening to books being read to them. Students can record their own reading and listen to their recordings to build their reading fluency. Tools enable students to draw, highlight, type text, and use stamps such as questions marks, stars and checkmarks. Teachers can assess learning via assessment data and running records of student reading. Resources are aligned to state and Common Core standards.

PROGRESS MONITORING SOFTWARE

Programs designed specifically for monitoring students' reading progress, such as Renaissance Learning's Accelerated Reader 360 and Scholastic's READ 180, engage students with personalized practice activities in self-selected books specific to each student's interests, reading level, and academic needs. Within these types of programs, students are able to build background knowledge, highlight text, view high-interest videos that support the text, and respond to writing prompts to show their learning (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Cossett, 2012). All of these are strategies that support students in reading text more closely. Data collection informs teachers and helps them in strategic planning for advancing students to higher reading levels.

COLLABORATION WITH AUTHENTIC AUDIENCES

Skype and *Zoom* are two platforms that could be used to build global connections with authentic audiences. Students could hold discussions with their peers within their classroom, their school, and other schools worldwide. This would enable students to hear others' perspectives about a topic on which they are reading, build support and reasoning for their arguments, or share what they have learned from their close reading activities. Students can also connect with authors and illustrators of their favorite children's books. Award-winning author, Kate Messner (2009), published a list of authors and illustrators who will provide free Skype sessions. A few of the award-winning authors and illustrators who do virtual presentations include Leslie Boulion, Jill Esbaum, Kirby Larson, Debbie Ridpath Ohi, Amy Sklansky, Melissa Stewart, and Suzanne Williams. Students connecting with authors can get answers to questions that help them gain more insight into and better understand the books they've read.

CONCLUSION

Close reading has the potential to issue an invitation to students to more carefully partake of a text, to, in the words of Adler and Van Doren (1972), "x-ray the book...(for) the skeleton hidden between the covers" (p. 75). It holds the promise of helping us to convey to students the message that there are certain habits of mind that take place when reading deeply and closely. It also has the potential to build stamina and persistence, even when confronted with texts that aren't easily consumed (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

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A MODEL FOR TEACHING LITERARY ANALYSIS USING SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR

SHANNON MCCROCKLIN AND TAMMY SLATER

ABSTRACT

This article introduces an approach that middle-school teachers can follow to help their students carry out linguistic-based literary analyses. As an example, it draws on Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) to show how J.K. Rowling used language to characterize Hermione as an intelligent female in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Using a simplified SFG analysis, the authors show how teachers can help students find and use language data that can support their intuition about characters or can uncover other patterns in the text. This type of SFG analysis approach can be particularly useful for English language learners and struggling readers as it provides students with useful tools for text analysis.

INTRODUCTION

As students advance through the grade levels, they are expected to move from simply summarizing works of literature to studying texts critically. Critical analysis of text requires an application of sophisticated literary knowledge along with well-developed literacy skills.

Learning to uncover what is important in a literary text and then to argue one's opinions using explicit evidence can be difficult tasks no matter what level of English proficiency a student is at. However, learning to do this type of text analysis is important, particularly as students prepare to move to high school and beyond. This move from *enjoying* to *studying* literature as well as the written genres students must learn about so they can reflect it can be daunting for many students. This move is even more complicated for English language learners (ELLs), who due to incomplete knowledge of the English language (Dutro, Levy, & Moore, 2012) as well as limited cultural knowledge (Carter, 2014), may struggle to draw appropriate conclusions about literature.

Teachers of middle-school students are charged with both helping students determine what is important in a text and developing their ability to argue and support ideas. Students must learn that "a text is a complex of patterns, and each pattern carries meaning" (Cummings & Simmons, 1983, p. 87). Cummings and Simmons argued that when introducing students to literature, teachers must foster students' "intuitive sense for what is important," while also teaching them to locate and explain the causes of their "intuition in the text" (p. xv). Teachers may pose questions to assist students with identifying important aspects of the literature being read. For example, a teacher might ask students questions to prompt them with identifying and articulating their intuitions. However, these types of questions may be too challenging for students who are in the early stages of learning to study literature; they may not know how to find evidence of these aspects once the questions are asked. For example, in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, many students are likely to be able to pick up intuitively, even from a leisurely reading, that Hermione is a

knowledgeable and intelligent character. The most obvious clues are comments made by other characters about her, such as Ron and Harry's comments:

"You're a genius," Ron repeated, looking awed.

"Yeah, you are, Hermione," agreed Harry fervently. "I don't know what we'd do without you." (p. 425)

However, some students may struggle to find adequate evidence from Hermione's own behavior and language use. Thus, these students require a systematic approach to engage with literary analysis effectively (McGee, 2002).

Truong (2009) explored the usefulness of several approaches to literary analysis for ELL students and found that certain approaches to literature such as New Criticism and Structuralism are likely to be overwhelming for ELLs. Instead, Truong recommends Language-Based approaches, in which students' experiences with literature are enhanced through activities to prepare them for the language of literature, and Reader-Response approaches, in which readers are encouraged to draw from previous experiences and opinions in the interpretation of a text. While these methods may be less overwhelming for ELLs they avoid the analytical and research-based methods that students could benefit from as they move across the curriculum. Instead, Guo (2008) recommended that language teachers consider Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG).

Systemic Functional Grammar, first introduced by Halliday (1961; 1985), works to connect a text's grammar and meaning. SFG can be used as part of a research-based approach to literature by showing students how to systematically analyze literary texts. Students learn to use the language patterns in the text that were discovered through a SFG analysis as evidence of their intuitions. This approach may be particularly useful for ELLs, who have often been trained to look at language learning as the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary (Hinkel & Fotos, 2001). Moreover, teaching the idea that language is a meaning-making tool and helping students acquire the metalanguage to talk about how meaning is constructed can make students more sensitive to the power and subtleties of language (Guo, 2008; Unsworth, 1999).

Returning to the example of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, this article will illustrate how an SFG analysis can lend evidence to a student's argument that Hermione is an intelligent female by showing that she uses more technical terms than Harry and uses modals that reflect her certainty about her information. Hermione also gives more information and requests less. Further, an SFG analysis can highlight unexpected findings, such as Hermione's use of language to display, reinforce, and foster relationships, evidenced by the use of tag questions, vocatives, and "we." Using SFG for a systematic analysis enables students to recognize that in addition to what other characters say or feel about her, Hermione's character is constructed to a great extent through her own language.

PREVIOUS ANALYSES USING SFG

Basic SFG analyses have been used to successfully analyze several literary texts. Cunanan (2011) used a simple SFG analysis on Woolf's *Old Mrs. Grey*, arguing that the analysis helped to clarify the

connection between Woolf's choice of words and the reader's intuitions and impressions. McDonald (2006) used an analysis in addition to lexical chains to show how the Australian author Libby Gleeson built the character of Susie in her novel *I am Susannah*. Gallardo (2006) explored gender roles in *Pygmalion* by examining various linguistic resources that the two main characters and the narrator used.

Studies on the use of SFG in the classroom have shown that it can be a useful approach with students of all ages. Williams (2000) described a study in which the teacher worked with a class of late elementary, early middle school children to analyze Anthony Browne's *Piggybook*, using an SFG approach which she had introduced to them and had them use regularly with literature. The students were able to identify through a basic analysis how the author of *Piggybook* built the characters through language, and how the use of specific patterns supported the overall intuition of the reader about those characters. The same teacher in Williams's report, Ruth French, later published an article on developing young students' critical literacy skills. French (2009) examined the grammar used in the picture book *Pumpkin Soup* by Helen Cooper. The article shows how the teacher worked with primary students to help them understand the patterns and choices in the wordings of the book, as well as how those patterns worked to shape the story.

Several of these resources have aimed to make SFG available to teachers as a literature analysis approach to try in their own classrooms. For example, McDonald's (2006) analysis of *I am Susannah* was presented in a teacher-friendly way that included resources to assist with implementation, such as a table for teachers to reference and sample guiding questions to use during an analysis with students. Similarly, Lukin (2008) offered several examples of ways that SFG could be used with students in the middle and secondary grades to analyze poems, such as by examining graphology, sound, experiential, and textual patterns.

However, previous literary analyses conducted within the SFG framework have often required an in-depth knowledge of the terminology and analytical framework. SFG has therefore posed difficulties to teachers and students who have had limited training in this approach (e.g., Butt, 1987; Kies, 1992). Although literature teachers are responsible for guiding students to connect the language of the text to their personal interpretation, not all teachers are confident about using a research-based approach to analysis (Lukin, 2008). Many teachers have reported needing significant training (i.e., weeks or months of training) with SFG to feel comfortable with the method due to the attention to detail often required (Achugar, Shlepppegrell, & Orteíza, 2007).

In response to this dilemma, our work in Slater and McCrocklin (2016) sought to minimize the strain on teachers and make SFG analysis more approachable. We examined the effectiveness of a two-hour training session that provided a brief overview of SFG, teacher training in analysis, along with example analyses to show the potential of SFG. We found that teachers can become comfortable with many of the aspects of SFG relatively quickly and can perform analyses with sufficient confidence. After the two-hour workshop, teachers expressed interest in trying SFG analyses themselves with other literary texts. In this paper, we aim to introduce the basic concepts of SFG and make our systematic approach to analyzing long texts available to teachers. Further, we aim to show in this paper that even a simple, relatively shallow examination from the SFG perspective can be sufficient to bring out many of the features needed to explore students' intuitions and produce a response to literature that is supported through a systematic investigation of language use.

THE BASICS OF SFG

SFG is a theory of language that emphasizes how people use language to construe their realities (the experiential or ideational), establish relationships (the interpersonal), and reflect the particular mode of communication being used (the textual). We will describe the relevant aspects of each of these metafunctions below.

THE IDEATIONAL OR EXPERIENTIAL METAFUNCTION

Downing and Locke (1992) pointed out that the ideational metafunction “permits us to encode, both semantically and syntactically, our mental picture of the physical world and the worlds of our imagination” (p. 110). We can perform an analysis from this perspective by looking at processes (verb phrases), participants (noun phrases and adjectives), and circumstances (adverbials). In different genres, these pattern out in various ways (Derewianka, 1990). For example, typically a scientific report has verbs that relate one thing to another. In literature, the processes can vary depending on what the author is doing in a specific part of the text: Is the part describing or recounting? Describing will likely use *be* and *have*, whereas recounting will use actions. Differences may appear between different characters in the types of processes they accomplish. For example, characters can be active agents of change or they may merely sense the world around them. Participants (which could be the characters but may also include other elements present in the story) can also be analyzed in terms of types, including technical versus commonsense things, or concrete versus abstract things (for a simple overview of thing types, see Christie and Martin, 1997). Finally, we can examine patterns of circumstances (adverbials) in a text. For example, whereas recipes require circumstances of manner to ensure that the instructions are being carefully followed, a setting in a novel would make good use of place and time. Introducing these ideas can help students look for evidence in the text that supports their intuitions.

THE INTERPERSONAL METAFUNCTION

Resources in the interpersonal metafunction work to negotiate social relationships which allow language users to interact, show power, and establish solidarity (Thompson, 2014). We establish relationships using several interpersonal resources. One is through the mood of the text. Are there questions being asked? Are there statements being made? Commands? Are there tag questions, to bring the interlocutor into the speaker’s reality or to seek confirmation? Another resource is modality, which Thompson (2014) explains as follows:

If the commodity being exchanged is information, we can refer to the utterance as a proposition. In such cases, the modality relates to how valid the information is being presented as in terms of **probability** (how likely it is to be true) or **usuality** (how frequently it is true)... If, on the other hand, the commodity is goods-&-services, we can call the utterance a proposal; and then the modality relates to how confident the speaker can appear to be in the eventual success of the exchange. In commands, this concerns the degree of **obligation** on the other person to carry out the command (the scale for the demanded goods-&-services includes:

permissible/advisable/obligatory), while in offers it concerns the degree of **willingness** or inclination of the speaker to fulfil the offer (the speaker may signal: ability/willingness/determination). (p. 70-71).

Thus, by having students look through a text and identify instances where speakers are giving or receiving information or services, we can direct them towards ways of supporting their intuitions about whether a character is coming across as determined, unsure, powerful, or weak. Other interpersonal resources include appraisal language and vocatives, or “device[s] for nominating or appealing to someone” (Collerson, 1994, p. 37). For example, what names are characters in a literary text calling each other? How often are they using them? Using somebody’s name establishes familiarity; using pet names creates further intimacy. Evidence of this patterning helps provide evidence regarding relationships between characters in a novel.

THE TEXTUAL METAFUNCTION

Resources within the textual metafunction offer ways to examine *cohesion* in text (Collerson, 1994). In turn, these can be used to show the importance of repeated references to a single theme or item, which can then reflect back to the ideational metafunction. This type of analysis is done by creating lexical chains (i.e. semantically related words in a text), such as (a) repetitions of a word or phrase, (b) its pronouns, (c) the use of synonyms, hyponyms, meronyms, and (d) collocations throughout the text.

Putting these three metafunctions together, a functional model of language “is interested in what language choices are available within any particular situation, and in which choices are more likely to result in an **effective** text which achieves its purpose” (Derewianka, 1990, p. 17, emphasis in original). An analysis based on SFG can focus on one metafunction or it can draw from more than one. By examining a literary text from an SFG perspective, we can explore how an author has used language to construct a particular reality. Teaching students—not only our English language learners but all students—to be able to identify how language is used to construct particular meanings in text means helping them develop critical literacy skills. Students learn not only *what* meanings are conveyed but also *how* they are conveyed (Unsworth, 1999).

USE OF SFG FOR A CHARACTER ANALYSIS

To simplify the process of doing an SFG literary analysis, particularly for long texts, we present four major steps:

1. Choose a book and a feature for your students to analyze.
2. Collect a representative sample of text.
3. Have your students systematically analyze the sample of text using basic SFG.
4. Have your students discuss their findings, look for information that helps elaborate on their findings, and (potentially) write up their findings as an argument or research paper.

The following sections will provide further detail about each of the steps and how to enact each with a class. We use language data from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* to illustrate the approach for each step, as well as the wide array of interesting findings such an analysis may reveal.

Step 1

Step 1 involves choosing a book and a feature to examine. A simple option is to choose characters who are opposite in a way that targets the questions you want answered, such as good versus evil, powerful versus weak, and teacher versus student. In our analysis, we examined two main characters who were opposite in gender. We chose *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* because of the popularity of the series, and we focused on gender because these books have been criticized for

female roles that have perpetuated gender stereotyping (Mayes-Elma, 2006). To carry out this analysis, we considered the following two questions about the text:

1. How does the language used by Harry and Hermione differ?
2. How do these differences help create a female gendered identity for Hermione?

Step 2

It can be overwhelming to analyze an entire book. Therefore, Step 2 requires students to select a representative sample of text. There are two primary ways to do this. The first is to focus on the narrator's comments about the characters. The second is to focus on the character's own speech. However, analyzing the entire text in a long novel is likely to be overwhelming. Instead, students can focus on one major interaction between characters in which both fully participate in the conversation, or students can collect small chunks of text spread out throughout the book, perhaps skipping several pages between chunks. In order to make the data collection systematic, students can develop guidelines for how many pages to skip between collections and how to decide what to take from a particular page.

In our illustration, we used the latter approach to gain a general sense of language used throughout. Quotes were selected by going through every fifth page of the book. If the character had a quote on that page that contained a full clause, it was added to the database. We examined 50 quotes from each character. Harry's quotes started on page 35 and ended on page 475. Hermione's quotes started on page 50 and ended on page 640. We listed these in preparation for our analysis (see sample in Appendix A).

Step 3

Step 3 focuses on using basic SFG to analyze the sampled text systematically. It is useful to mark or color code the text based on SFG categories and then to list those examples in charts, which can then be easily compared and discussed. For students struggling with some of the SFG concepts, it may be useful to introduce one aspect of the analysis at a time and guide students to find examples. For example, a teacher could facilitate a lesson to help students identify and label functions of modality. After students gain an understanding of and comfort with the topic they could work to work on identifying these in their own data set before moving on to the next concept.

IDEATIONAL ANALYSIS

As we were concerned with the nature of two characters, we focused our analysis on the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions. We began by doing a simplified analysis within the ideational framework to examine the way that Harry and Hermione expressed their experiences and views. The basic analysis focused on the processes, which we categorized into verbs of *being* (underlined), verbs of *doing* (bold), and verbs of *sensing* (italics) (see a sample analysis of five of Harry's lines in Table 1). Students could layer further analyses onto such a chart by also using symbols, highlighting, or circling other features. However, it is often helpful to create follow-up charts with findings to fully explore character differences (Tables 2 and 3 provide examples of subsequent charts made based on analysis).

Table 1
Example SFG Analysis of Sample of Harry's Quotes

P #	Harry's Quote
215	Parents shouldn't leave their kids unless-- unless they've got to
220	You've done really well Kreacher
230	I don't <i>think</i> we're going to be much better prepared than we are now even if we skulk around the Ministry entrance for another month
275	So, <u>have</u> you <u>got</u> it?
280	I didn't <i>mean</i> it to happen !

Our initial analysis revealed that while both Harry and Hermione talked about people doing things in much the same way, Hermione used marginally more *being* and *doing* verbs, and Harry used more *sensing* verbs. What becomes more noticeable was that Harry's use of *sensing* verbs occurred mostly when he had himself as the subject of the sentence. Moreover, Harry used these sensing verbs often in the negative, as in "I can't *believe*" or "I still don't really *understand*." Harry used *sensing* verbs with himself typically to agree, state opinions, or to confirm information, and at times to provide emphasis to the following clause. Hermione, on the other hand, used *sensing* verbs to confirm or state opinions, but also to show empathy with others, as in "I can *see* that's *upset* you, Harry."

By looking then at the participants (nouns) as subjects of the clauses, it became clear that Harry referred to himself ("I") much more than he referred to the group ("we") or others. In fact, Hermione used twice as many instances of "we" in our randomly selected data, as can be seen in the following examples:

Harry: "I couldn't...make one"

Hermione: "We wondered whether Harry could still have the trace on him"

Hermione: "All the same, we should get to bed."

We marked these findings as possible paths to further discuss how gender differences appear in language and how the author has constructed a particular identity for Hermione that is different than Harry's. Without a systematic examination of the language, the reader may only respond intuitively to these differences. Quantifying differences can help students provide evidence to support their intuitions.

We then searched for differences in the types of things that Hermione and Harry were talking about to classify them as technical or everyday commonsense nouns. Teachers could provide students with a blank chart for students to complete while they examine and categorize their selected quotes from the book (see Table 2).

Table 2
Example Abridged Data for Types of Things Talked About

	Hermione	Harry
Technical Terms	Tongue-tying curse Dissaperated Spattergoit Invisibility cloak Trace Hallows Fiendfyre	Horcruxes Death Eaters Invisibility cloak
Commonsense terms		Dragon-fire thing Stuff
Nominalizations	Precaution Obsession	

As shown in Table 2, both characters used technical terms (technical in the *Harry Potter* sense), but our analysis showed that Hermione used more of these than Harry did, as illustrated in the following examples (underscored):

Hermione: "That m-must have b-been the T-Tongue-Tying-Curse Mad-Eye set for Snape!"

Hermione: "We've been Dissaperating."

Hermione: "You're supposed to be in bed with spattergoit."

Furthermore, Hermione uses nominalized terms such as "precaution" and "obsession" as well as marginally longer participants (noun phrases), such as "the most wanted person in the country." Hermione also has longer participants in the position of actor (or subject), such as "the bit of soul inside it can flit in and out of someone if they get too close to the object." Our analysis determined that Harry's speech does not show these trends as noticeably. In fact, not only does Harry use fewer technical terms, he is shown to avoid them at times in favor of more commonsense language (italics).

Harry: "Hagrid, do the dragon-fire thing again..."

Harry: "Muriel said stuff about Dumbledore at the wedding."

Our simple analysis enabled us to see further differences that unfolded between Harry and Hermione. Hermione, who seemed to come across intuitively as an intelligent character (and is treated in the book this way by other characters), exhibited this explicitly through her use of more technically specific language and her use of longer and more nominalized participants.

INTERPERSONAL ANALYSIS

Following the basic analysis within the ideational framework, we transitioned to analyzing language data for interpersonal features. Our next analysis examined the mood system. We identified sentences as giving information (typically done using declarative sentences), requesting information (using questions), giving services (also declarative, but there is an offer being made), or requesting services (typically imperative). These results can be charted in a table such as the following.

Table 3: Example Abridged Data for Mood System (Giving or Receiving Info or Services)		
	Hermione	Harry
Giving information	Ooh you look much tastier than Crabbe and Goyle, Harry. While the magical container is still intact, the bit of soul inside it can flit in and out of someone if they get too close. Yes, I took out all of my Building Society savings before I came to the Burrow. It must have been Fiendfyre!	None of the order would have told Voldemort we were moving tonight. Well I probably look better than Olivander. If we knew where any of the Horcruxes were, I'd agree with you.
Requesting information	Ron, where are you? You aren't serious, Harry? Harry, are you saying what I think you're saying? Are you saying that there is a Horcrux in the Lestranges' vault?" But he didn't get the job, did he?"	So...er...where is Gregorovitch these days? What do you mean, locked in the cellar? So where are these jinxes they put up against Snape? So have you got it? What did you do that for? How did he get hurt? I know...but how did you escape the Inferi?
Giving services	I'll pack these for you.	
Requesting services	Harry, come back in the house. Shut up, Ron Harry, stop.	Hagrid, do the dragon-fire thing again. Don't look at me like that.

Our full results showed that Hermione gave information more often than Harry did and demonstrated a small edge in the number of times she requested services in the form of commands. She requested information (as true questions) less frequently than Harry did. In fact, while Harry more often requested information that would help him on his quest to defeat Lord Voldemort, Hermione asked more questions to confirm her own understanding of the situation. This is shown in the examples below:

Harry: "So...er...where is Gregorovitch these days?"

Harry: "What is wrong?"

Hermione: "Harry, are you saying what I think you're saying? Are you saying that there is a Horcrux in the Lestranges' vault?"

Hermione: "But he didn't get the job, did he?"

Notice Hermione's use of a tag question in the last example. It is interesting to note that in our data sample, Hermione used tag questions three times more often than Harry did.

Throughout our data sample, both Harry and Hermione used modal verbs such as *can*, *would*, and *should*, which can be listed and quantified by the students in table format. Harry was shown to use a wider range of modals that primarily suggested probability and willingness, including *might have*, and modal adjuncts such as *definitely*, *probably*, *surely*, *likely*, and *really*. Hermione used no modal adjuncts in our data selection, but she used modal verbs such as *can*, *should*, *could*, *would*, and *must have* to show probability, willingness, and obligation. Through the use of modals, Hermione was shown to be much more sure of herself and the information she gave.

Harry: "I can't believe"

Harry: "I couldn't...make one"

Harry: "Well, I probably look better than Olivander"

Hermione: "---and he must have realized they wouldn't let you have it if they put it in his will."

The final part of our analysis concerned one of the most striking features of Harry and Hermione's speech: vocatives. While both Harry and Hermione used vocatives, Hermione used over four times as many as Harry, suggesting perhaps a strong connection with other characters. In fact, over a third of Hermione's utterances included vocatives, and mostly other characters' names. Some examples include:

Hermione: "Ooh you look much tastier than Crabbe and Goyle, Harry."

Hermione: "Harry, do you want your toothbrush?"

Hermione: "Shut up, Ron"

Hermione: "But it keeps appearing, Harry!"

These can be quantified by the students and compared with other findings in the class. These data can then lead to a discussion of Hermione's use of language and how it helped create her character's identity.

Step 4

Step 4 brings the students' results into a discussion in preparation for writing. These are guided by the following questions: What patterns did we find? What might our findings mean? What claims are being made? What conclusions can be reached? As students share their individual findings with the class, they should also engage in a discussion that uncovers patterns among their findings. As agreement emerges in the case studies that groups of students are uncovering, the overall argument that such findings exist and are not the result of one individual's sampling is strengthened. Further, once students engage in a whole-class discussion in which primary findings are addressed, the class may realize that further information should be sought out before writing begins. This recursive pattern, in which the students move back and forth between the evidence they have found and possible explanations for that evidence, is an important part of a literary analysis and in fact critical for any well-supported, data-based argument.

From our simple analysis, we made two claims about Hermione's gendered identity that can be supported by the data we presented in our description of Step 3. First, Hermione is shown to be more knowledgeable than Harry. This is supported by the fact that Hermione uses more technical terms, gives more information and requests less, and uses modals that reflect her certainty about her information. While many students are likely to be able to pick up intuitively that Hermione is a knowledgeable and intelligent character, now they can point to several pieces of data to support their claim. What is useful about using SFG is that students, by approaching the analysis systemically, are drawn to noticing that her character is constructed through her language and not just from what other characters say or feel about her.

A second conclusion from our simple analysis is that Hermione is more concerned with showing familiarity and friendliness, a finding that may be less noticeable when doing a leisurely read. This was supported through Hermione's use of tag questions, vocatives, and "we." According to Collerson (1994), tag questions are used to seek confirmation from others and to help a dialogue run more smoothly. He stated that:

[Tags are] very common in friendly, informal conversation amongst people who are close to each other. In these circumstances, people often seek confirmation rather than information because they can to some degree anticipate what will pass between them—it's an indication of how closely in touch with each other they are. (p. 31).

The use of tag questions was different between Harry and Hermione. This finding can be used to encourage reading about and discussing tag questions and their use, and our new understandings of these can be used to support our intuition about Hermione's character.

Similarly, by discovering what has been written about vocatives, we can argue that Hermione's use of these may also be an attempt to show the friendly, inclusive aspect of her character. Although some of her vocative use may be targeting a person in the conversation for the next turn or even serve as direction for the reader as to who will be speaking next, it can be argued that the sheer number of vocatives in Hermione's speech may suggest that something else is happening. As Eggins and Slade (1997) pointed out, "the use of redundant vocatives would tend to indicate an attempt by the addresser to establish a closer relationship with the addressee...the form of the vocative will indicate the affective and status dimensions of the relationship" (p. 145). Finally, Hermione's use of "we" may be seen as an attempt to show her view of herself, Harry, and Ron as a group and friends.

Taking the use of tag questions, vocatives, and “we” together, we could argue that Hermione is more focused than Harry on establishing and maintaining relationships.

Notice that our discussion of results models the recursive, back-and-forth movement between the students’ explanations/arguments and the linguistic data they have extracted from the text. Once the discussion has been carried out, students can then work on writing up their literary research projects. The write-up may take the form of an argumentative essay, but teachers could also use an SFG project to encourage students to explore other genres of academic writing. Given that the analysis project included formulation of a research question, systematic collection of data, and interpretation of results that are statistical/numerical in nature, the project write-up could take the form of a research report utilizing tables and graphs.

CONCLUSION

As suggested by the example character analysis above, SFG has the potential for assisting students with literary text analysis. Studying the language of the literary text is in fact studying the text: “Texts, after all, are linguistic objects, and a literature text is no exception” (Hasan, 1985, p. 91). The use of SFG even at a simple level can make the task of literary analysis less overwhelming; it can reduce the burden on students and help them provide evidence for intuitions that the teacher has guided them to. We provided a single example to highlight SFG’s potential for character analysis; however, the potential for SFG in literary analysis is endless. For example, SFG could be used to examine power relations with *The Hunger Games* (e.g., exploring which characters use *doing* verbs in clauses with agents and objects versus which characters do not include objects in their spoken discourse), investigate good versus evil using *Eragon* (e.g., which characters are associated with positive versus negative entities), or study the teacher/student relationship presented in *The Giver*. It can be challenging for all teachers to connect the enjoyment of literature, whether classic or contemporary, to the need to teach genres (e.g., argumentation), while also developing students’ critical literacy skills. It can be even more challenging to develop and hone these skills among students who are, as Halliday (2004) states, learning language, learning through language, and learning about language simultaneously, as ELL students must do. Modeling how to use simple SFG analysis techniques has the potential to develop students’ understanding of how writers use language to achieve specific purposes, which in turn can raise students’ understanding of how language works to make meaning to a more centralized position within an ELL curriculum. Learning activities that involve SFG literary analyses also provides students with useful writing skills that hone their ability to argue and support their intuitions both in literatures classes and across curricular areas.

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APPENDIX

ABRIDGED DATA/QUOTES FOR HARRY AND HERMIONE (25 EACH)

Q#	P#	Harry
1.	60	Hagrid, do the dragon-fire thing again, let's get out of here!
2.	70	None of the order would have told Voldemort we were moving tonight
3.	80	No, I mean... if somebody made a mistake and let something slip, I know they didn't mean to do it.
4.	85	Well, I probably look better than Olivander...
5.	90	But surely Snape will have told the Death Eaters the address by now?
6.	100	If we knew where any of the Horcruxes were, I'd agree with you.
7.	105	I wonder how Dumbledore destroyed the ring?
8.	120	Vaguely, didn't you smash down the front door, give Dudley a pig's tail, and tell me I was a wizard?
9.	150	So...er...where is Gregorovitch these days?
10.	155	What d'you mean, locked in the cellar?
11.	185	It's not just that
12.	195	I know—but how did you escape the Inferi
13.	205	No, only after we ran into a couple of death eaters in a café in Tottenham Court
14.	215	Don't look at me like that!
15.	220	You've done really well Kreacher.
16.	230	I am.
17.	270	How did he get hurt?
18.	275	So, have you got it?
19.	285	I couldn't...make one.
20.	305	And Dumbledore didn't give it to me because he still needed it, he wanted to use it on the locket --
21.	320	What? What did you do that for?
22.	330	What's wrong?
23.	405	I'm sorry
24.	425	Yeah, you are, Hermione.
25.	455	You're going to kill me?

Q#	P#	Hermione
1.	50	Ooh, you look much tastier than Crabbe and Goyle, Harry.
2.	105	While the magical container is still intact, the bit of soul inside it can flit in and out of someone if they get too close to the object.
3.	115	I'll pack these for you.
4.	135	No, I'm not!
5.	160	Ron! Ron, where are you?
6.	165	Yes, I took out all of my Building Society savings before I came to the Burrow.
7.	170	That m-must have b-been the T-Tongue-Tying Curse Mad-Eye set for Snape!
8.	175	Harry, do you want your toothbrush?
9.	185	Of course, I can see why that's upset you, Harry--
10.	195	Well, then, you did what you were told, didn't you?
11.	205	We wondered whether Harry could still have the Trace on him?
12.	210	Thank you, Ron, but I couldn't let you.
13.	230	You aren't serious, Harry?
14.	235	Harry, you keep talking about what your wand did, but you made it happen!
15.	275	Well, we were running for our lives from the Death Eaters, weren't we?
16.	285	Shut up, Ron.
17.	290	But he didn't get the job, did he?
18.	305	--and he must have realized they wouldn't let you have it if they put in in his will.
19.	330	Harry, stop.
20.	385	No, actually, we've been dissaparating under the invisibility cloak as an extra precaution.
21.	425	You're supposed to be in bed with spattergoit, Ron.
22.	435	Obsession? We're not the ones with an obsession, Harry!
23.	490	Harry, are you saying what I think you're saying?
24.	555	Let's just leave!
25.	635	It must have been Fiendfyre!

THE TEXAS JOURNAL OF LITERACY EDUCATION



A PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL PUBLISHED BY THE TEXAS ASSOCIATION FOR LITERACY EDUCATION
Volume 5, Issue 1 - Summer 2017

ISSN 2374-7404 texasreaders.org ©Texas Association for Literacy Education

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