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# PARTNERING WITH PARENTS: USING CAP KITS TO SUPPORT LEARNING ACTIVITIES AT HOME

DONNA SANDERSON

## ABSTRACT

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*The idea of using plastic bottle caps to enhance children's literacy and math skills was introduced in a pre-kindergarten methods and field class at West Chester University. We wanted an essentially cost-free way to create fun, hands-on, educational games for young students to learn basic skills supporting the Common Core State Standards (adopted by 45 states, [www.corestandards.org/in-the-states](http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states)). University education students began bringing plastic bottle caps, packaging them into kits, and taking them into local schools to help children learn. We have now not only formalized the Cap Kits program, but we have also conducted dozens of teacher trainings and parent workshops and have given away thousands of Cap Kits. By placing these materials into the hands of children, we are giving them manipulatives that can be used for meaningful, hands-on, engaging, and fun learning activities. Cap Kits are not just for the classroom; parents can also use them to support learning activities in the home environment.*

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As a university professor who helped start a popular, service-learning project called Cap Kits, the above quote was rewarding to read. It captures the nature of what my university teacher candidates and I set out to do. Our project goals were to 1) use basic, everyday materials and turn them into hands-on learning manipulatives, 2) bring them into local schools and child care centers in the greater Philadelphia area, and 3) teach in-service teachers, as well as parents (who are many times left out of learning opportunities), how to effectively use the Cap Kits to support children's emergent reading and math skills.

Almost five years later I can say that this project is still gaining popularity across our region. It is engaging for students, developmentally appropriate, and easy to replicate. Specifically, parents have enjoyed becoming part of the learning process. Our project has purposefully targeted parents and includes them as vital partners in their children's education. By hosting multiple parent workshop nights over the years, university teacher candidates have demonstrated to parents how to use the Cap Kits to support emergent literacy and math skills in the home environment. Our belief is that, by being inclusive and involving parents in this hands-on learning opportunity, we are empowering them to support student learning at home while simultaneously fostering strong parent-child bonding.

This article conveys the story of why and how we developed Cap Kits to assist early learning. We explain how Cap Kits are developmentally appropriate for young students

based on child development learning theory and why the use of hands-on manipulatives as a teaching tool is ideal during the early childhood years. We also share how we involved parents to be part of the process, give practical applications for how to use the learning materials with students, and share reflections from university teacher candidates and parents who have participated in the project.

## EARLY LEARNING THEORY

Young children benefit when their teachers and families engage and connect with each other in ways that help them learn and grow (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Early childhood educational professionals recognize the importance of parental involvement in a child's education and understand that "students learn more and succeed at higher levels when home, school, and community work together to support students' learning and development" (Epstein & Sanders, 2006, p. 87). It is becoming more evident that children whose families are involved in their education are more successful in school (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006).

Research has stated that the development of young children's literacy skills is tied to academic achievement (Washington, 2001) and that the process of children's literacy development is influenced by many factors involving sociocultural and ecological perspectives of learning (Hammer & Miccio, 2004; Martinez-Rodan & Malave, 2004). Furthermore, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological theory emphasize that interactions among people, as well as interactions between people and their environments, influence learning. Both theories help to explain how a child learns and develops concepts in collaboration with adults and peers in and out of the school environment (Martinez-Rodan & Malave, 2004; Ortiz & Ordonez-Jasis, 2005). Specifically, the influences of the family and home environment, namely support and engagement, contribute to young children's language and literacy acquisition. Clearly, children benefit from exposure to a variety of literacy activities (Goin, Norquist, & Twardose, 2004; Hammer & Miccio, 2004), and because so much learning takes place both in and out of school, it is critical for teachers to a) engage families in ways that develop a positive connection between home and school, and b) teach parents that children need to actively participate in the learning process through hands-on activities.

## WHY HANDS-ON LEARNING?

When researching child development, Dewey (1938), Piaget (1954), Bruner (1968), Vygotsky (1978), Kolb (1984), and others are often cited as the founders of active, hands-on learning. These theorists believed that learning is an active, highly-evolving, and complex process. Children need to experience their learning with their mind, heart, and hands simultaneously. They have to (a) become the learning, (b) use all their senses, and (c) experience first-hand learning for themselves as it is evolving. This is active, experiential learning that is hands-on in nature. It is the manner in which young children acquire their knowledge.

The use of manipulatives is highly recommended and is supported by both learning theory and educational research when it comes to young children and processing new information. Specifically, when looking at mathematical research, "manipulatives can be important tools in helping students to think and reason in more meaningful ways" (Stein & Bovalino, 2001, p.356). Manipulatives, such as bottle caps, can help students learn by permitting them to move from concrete experiences to abstract reasoning (Heddens, 1986).

It is widely known that children learn best when they are encouraged to explore, interact, create, and play (Thompkins, 1991). In fact, research confirms what most early childhood professionals already know – children learn the most when they actively participate in the learning process (Katz, 1994). Cap Kits offer a variety of learning opportunities through play and hands-on exploration. Children manipulate the game pieces, which helps them remember and retain the information that is learned. “During play, young children use hands-on exploration and sensory learning in a very important way; they confidently: (a) test new knowledge in a relaxed atmosphere, (b) relate it intuitively to existing knowledge, and (c) store that information for future use” (Blaustein, 2005, p. 4). Through the simple act of playing with the caps, either individually, in pairs, or with a group of others, students can use their sense of touch to help them acquire new information and build their basic skills.

## THE ORIGIN OF CAP KITS

In an effort to link the learning that happens both in and out of school and provide a developmentally appropriate, hands-on way to enhance youngsters’ basic literacy and math skills, a small group of dedicated university teacher candidates studying Early Grades Education at West Chester University, along with their professor, started a project called Cap Kits. In fall 2012, during a class session of my course, EGP 322: Pre-Kindergarten Methods & Field, I demonstrated how every day, basic objects such as rocks or plastic bottle caps can be used to create learning materials. After class, one teacher candidate came to talk with me and we began brainstorming ways to take ordinary bottle caps and package them into kits to support young children’s learning. The idea quickly spread through our class and the Cap Kit Project was formed. Every semester for the past five years, a core group of highly motivated teacher candidates have been working to create homemade learning manipulatives from recycled bottle caps and take them into local schools and child care centers in the greater Philadelphia area. This project has grown so that Cap Kits are now being used in Costa Rica, Peru, the Bahamas, and seven other countries. It is a thriving project with many benefits for teachers, parents, and students. It is effective and engaging for students, developmentally appropriate for young children, and easily replicated. Another asset is that, through conducting parent workshops, the teacher candidates have not only trained parents how to use the Cap Kits with their children, but each family has received a free kit to support home learning.

We teach our students about using plastic bottle caps to enhance children’s literacy skills in sections of the Pre-Kindergarten Methods & Field class at West Chester University as a way to support the Common Core Standards. Teacher candidates saw a need in our local community to increase learning manipulatives in the schools and to collaborate with parents as partners in students’ learning. Through their teacher certification program, the teacher candidates learn the value of teachers and parents working together; therefore, they wanted to be involved with a project that included this home and school connection. To date, the teacher candidates have conducted 51 teacher trainings during staff development in-service days, and faculty meetings. They have also conducted workshops for parents that take place in the evenings at local schools. The purpose of these is to share with parents the importance of home learning experiences. Research states that positive interactions between families and schools increase children’s success in school settings and support on-going family involvement in the child’s education (Colombo, 2004; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). During these family nights, youngsters are able to visit multiple learning stations conducted by the university teacher candidates. Each station has a math or literacy theme and small groups of students play learning games with the bottle caps. The games are hands-on, interactive, and above all, fun. One example includes playing the literacy game Silly Soup, where students write each letter of their name on a separate bottle cap and place them in a



small tub of water. They stir the water, and with a slotted spoon, fish out the letters in their name one-by-one and place them in the correct order. This simple, yet fun and enjoyable game, supports communicative interactions, letter identification, print recognition, phonological awareness, writing skills, and fine motor skill control. Many of these important skills have been documented as forerunners of literacy development (Horn & Jones, 2005; Snow, 2002). To date, thousands of Cap Kits have been given to parents for no cost so that they can be placed into the hands of children to create meaningful, hands-on, engaging and fun experiences that support their learning.

## WHAT EXACTLY IS IN A CAP KIT?

A Cap Kit is a bag of 124 plastic bottle caps, from either water bottles or milk containers, decorated with multiple copies of uppercase and lowercase letters and numbers and numerical symbols for children to manipulate and master. Included are an additional 20 blank caps for creating more letters and/or numbers at their discretion. Each bottle cap has been washed, affixed with a white sticker, and labeled with a marker. A detailed list explaining how to make a Cap Kit is included in this article.

Creating Cap Kits is one way to increase student interest in learning literacy and math concepts. When students explore with Cap Kits, they are not only having fun, but are reinforcing basic skills. The benefits of using these highly versatile materials are many. Cap Kits are recyclable and promote a “green awareness”; are developmentally appropriate for a variety of age groups and grades; can be used at both home and school; support the Common Core Standards; and are creative and limited only by the imagination.

When the West Chester University teacher candidates create Cap Kits, they also place into each kit an invitation for the teacher or parent to visit the specialized website. This professional website offers hundreds of different math and literacy games that increase basic knowledge and skills. The games are divided into two levels on the website; one for Prekindergarten through second grade and one for third through fifth grade. The website is [www.thecapcreations.wix.com/capcreations](http://www.thecapcreations.wix.com/capcreations).

## EFFECTIVELY USING A CAP KIT

In classrooms during the school day, teachers use Cap Kits to differentiate instruction; assist English Language Learners; provide struggling students with extra literacy and math skills; and reinforce skills to above-level students. Cap Kits are versatile and can be used in a multitude of ways. Teachers may direct the learning individually, in pairs, in small groups, as a whole class, as part of a lesson, or as a classroom learning center. At home, parents may spend quality time playing games with their children and interacting with them. Parents may also turn to the website for resource packets and a complete list of cap games.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

**LITERACY ACTIVITIES:** The Cap Kits resource packets provide activities that increase children’s awareness of the sounds of language, letter recognition, beginning spelling and word building. For example, a emergent language learner may practice word building skills by using the caps. A teacher may use the caps to display a word family ending such as *-ig*. By manipulating the cap letters, the student is challenged to add different consonant caps to the beginning of the word to build words within the family. The student learns that words (e.g. *big, pig, dig*) share common letters and sounds and belong in the same word family. Likewise, a student might engage in multiple alphabet activities since the caps promote identification of the letters of the alphabet. An

ELL student in need of help with alphabet recognition might manipulate the caps into alphabetical order, match the uppercase and lower-case letters, or play “find the missing letter in the alphabet.” By manipulating the caps and putting the alphabet back in the correct order, the student would learn the correct order of the alphabet and practice how to visually discriminate each individual letter.

**MATH ACTIVITIES:** Many math skills can be practiced using the caps such as: (a) number identification, (b) ordering, (c) shape-matching, (d) basic number sentences (addition, subtraction, multiplication), (e) sequencing, (f) sorting, (g) counting money, and much more. For example, if a younger student needs extra help in learning the concept of greater than/less than, the student can draw one cap out of a bag and write it down. Next, he or she pulls a second cap out of the bag, writes it down, and decides if it is greater than, less than, or equal to. Likewise, if a student is struggling with the concept of skip-counting, the teacher can begin a number pattern with a missing number in it and help the student figure it out. For example, the teacher creates the pattern 1, 3, 5, \_\_, 9. To make the activity easier, the teacher can give the student a few caps from which to choose the answer. To make the activity more challenging, the teacher can provide more caps. Students manipulate the caps by touching them, and they can take risks by moving them around, and changing their answers, unlike making a mistake with pencil and paper and having to erase. The learning is like a game and children have fun as they learn important skills. Cap Kits can also be used for assessing students’ learning. Students may be more engaged in the activity and less preoccupied with the fact that they are being tested on what they know.

## UNIVERSITY TEACHER CANDIDATES AND PARENT REFLECTIONS

The university teacher candidates who have been part of the Cap Kits project reflect every semester on their experiences using the Cap Kits with the youngsters and their parents. Overall, their reflections indicate they view this project as rewarding for themselves, the young students, and their parents. When the teacher candidates were specifically asked the question, “What did you learned about the parents, teachers and students you worked with this semester?” they were quite positive in their responses.

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*I learned how eager the parents were to learn! It was nice to see people of all ages wanting to learn new skills. I loved how they listened to us, even though we are so much younger. It felt nice to be the expert in a situation like that and share our expertise. I truly enjoyed working in the schools with the families.*

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*I have learned that parents and teachers, especially those who have attended our events, are always eager to find ways to help make learning more accessible and engaging for their children. Everyone that we had the chance to interact with was extremely positive about the project. Many seemed to leave inspired with new ideas for the caps that we hadn't even thought of! I also realized how busy parents/teachers are and how important it is to always show appreciation when they take time out of their busy weekday schedules to come to an event that benefits their children/students.*

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Overall, the common response themes from the university teacher candidates were that they found the parents to be sincerely interested in the Cap Kits project and appreciative of the time the teacher candidates took to bring the free materials to the families at night. There was a general sense of optimism that parents enjoyed learning about the Cap Kits and followed through with using the learning manipulatives with their children to increase literacy and math skills. Likewise, the written reflections gathered from parents have been equally positive and express a sincere appreciation for the learning materials.

*A great big thank you to you and your students! Thank you all so much for coming out to share different ideas that I can incorporate at home for my daughter. I am impressed at all the research that went into the caps program and Lillian really enjoyed doing the games - she talked about it all night, a rave review for a three-year-old. I, also, was excited to take home caps with letters and numbers already in place. What a timesaver and it will ensure that we initiate the caps program.*

*Thank you for the wonderful presentation and workshop for preschoolers yesterday evening! My son Jack and I thoroughly enjoyed learning all the various CAPS games and were excited to bring home a set of our own. As a parent of an upcoming Pre-K little boy, I am always looking for new ways to introduce academic skills in a fun manner. My son loved each station and activity and walked away wanting to play more. I'm thrilled to integrate these activities to keep the learning structure of his current preschool classes while we approach the summer off months. We look forward to working more with you all in the future and are big supporters of the university's involvement in early childhood education.*

*Way to go West Chester University! What a highly creative and innovative idea you are graciously sharing with the parents in our community. Materials that are free of charge, hands-on training, and students who seem to love these learning games. You knocked it out of the park with this idea. So thankful!*

## CONCLUSION

The Cap Kit Project has been viewed as highly successful by parents, principals, and school directors and is in demand around the greater Philadelphia area. Placing these free learning materials into the hands of families and providing sound training and demonstration on how to use them effectively are important goals of the project. University teacher candidates will continue



offering these materials to the local community because they know the importance that family involvement plays in the role of early childhood development and learning. Cap Kits provide a developmentally appropriate and unique opportunity for students to construct their own knowledge while they play. Also, the kits are easy to reproduce and their cost is minimal. With just a little time, a few materials, and a lot of creativity, teachers and parents can create learning materials that help students practice basic skills while having fun.

### Making a Cap Kit

Cap Kits offer unlimited possibilities as sustainable, hands-on, and authentic learning tools. Children will benefit from the engaging and play-based activities that can be created using plastic, recyclable bottle caps. To create a Cap Kit, gather plastic caps from milk, water, ice tea, or soda bottles. Feel free to build your collection slowly, marking the caps with letters, numbers, or number symbols and leave a few blank in case they get lost and you need to replace them.

Here is what you need to make one complete Cap Kit:

- 124 plastic bottle caps
- White stickers, one for each cap (optional)
- Permanent marker, dark in color and fine tipped
- One gallon-size bag per Cap Kit for storage

1. Wash the caps and allow to air dry.
2. Affix one sticker to each bottle cap directly in the middle.
3. Use a permanent marker to write on the stickers, as described here.

For the alphabet set, you'll need three caps for each of these frequently used letters: E, T, A, O, I, N, S, H, R, D, L, and U. Draw one capital letter, and two lowercase letters for each. For the less frequently used letters C, M, W, F, G, Y, P, B, V, K, X, J, Q and Z, draw one capital and one lowercase letter for each.

For the math set, you'll need three caps for each of these numerals: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0. Use two caps for each of these symbols: + (plus), - (minus), = (equal), < (less than), > (greater than).

4. Leave 20 bottle caps blank to make more letters or numbers as needed.
5. Place the bottle caps in the gallon-size bag.

Variations in color: You can collect only the transparent caps that come on water bottles, or only the red caps from milk bottles, for example. For preschoolers, you may consider one color for all the alphabet letters and a different color for the numbers and number symbols as a visual to help them differentiate. Collect extra caps of the same colors that will stay blank and use at your discretion.

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# READER RESPONSE IN SECONDARY SETTINGS: INCREASING COMPREHENSION THROUGH MEANINGFUL INTERACTIONS WITH LITERARY TEXTS

AMANDA H. WOODRUFF AND ROBERT A. GRIFFIN

## ABSTRACT

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*A fresh look at the reader response theory to enhance student comprehension through meaningful interactions with literature, this paper explores the instructional implications of a reader response approach in secondary classrooms and examines its role in fostering students' critical reading and thinking skills. The approach promotes transaction between readers and texts as readers are given the freedom to analyze literary pieces based on their personal experiences, diverse cultures, and unique perspectives. A selective review of recent literature on the positive effect of the reader response approach in secondary settings is included, demonstrating how this approach yields positive results with students becoming both more critical readers and thinkers. The paper also addresses best practices or strategies that help secondary students increase their reading comprehension and interactions with literary texts through a reader response approach. Implications for instruction include reader response journals, reading workshop, and literature circles, which encourage students to respond to literature as a means of interacting with various texts in meaningful ways.*

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Reading is a lifelong skill that students must master to become critical, engaged readers and thinkers in both school and life. Rosenblatt's (1938, 1978) reader response theory stresses the importance of the reader in making meaning from a text. The basic premise of reader response is that readers breathe life into texts through their prior knowledge and personal experiences (Larson, 2009). Although teachers sometimes find it easier to impart their knowledge directly about a literary piece, students benefit most from reading texts when they are provided opportunities to think critically and thoughtfully on their own terms without first being bombarded by the thoughts of others. Reader response theory supports this process for students to become engaged, thoughtful, and critical readers.

At the secondary stage of development, students have already established their opinions about reading: either they love reading, or they do not (Hendrix & Griffin, 2017). Reader response not only refreshes teachers' reading instruction but renews students' interest in reading because the emphasis is balanced between the reader and the text and not solely focused on the text as a self-contained object. Readers are challenged with the task of interpreting a text through the lens of their prior knowledge, diverse perspectives, and personal experiences. Using a reader response approach helps secondary students become critical readers and thinkers because they are not simply told how to think about a text, but must justify their multiple interpretations of a text using textual evidence and support.

The central component of reader response involves giving students opportunities to make meaningful, authentic connections with the texts they are reading. According to Graves, Juel, Graves, and Dewitz (2011), there are a variety of “instructional frameworks that center around students’ reading and personally responding to literature” (p. 359). When using the reader response approach, teachers become facilitators rather than lecturers, and students actively engage with texts as they transform the texts’ words into meaningful connections to their personal lives. Reader response helps secondary students increase their reading comprehension and interaction with texts. Although there are numerous strategies that support the underpinnings of the reader response approach, reader response journals, reading workshop, and literature circles are designed to meet the needs of different types of learners—gifted learners, struggling readers and writers, English learners, students with learning disabilities, and general education students—which suggests that this approach can positively influence literacy education in various educational settings. These methods welcome students’ varied interpretative meanings of literary pieces that are founded on their personal experiences and knowledge. Such strategies hold students accountable for their train of thought by engaging them in purposeful activities while reading. More importantly, such instructional frameworks stimulate students’ interest in reading and foster their abilities to read reflectively and deeply (Graves et al., 2011).

## PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the reader response approach to literacy instruction positively influences secondary students’ comprehension of texts as well as the meaning they create from texts. Though literature showing the positive effect of the reader response approach has been prevalent for decades, looking at the reader response approach with fresh eyes is important as it refreshes the collective conscience of literacy teachers and reintroduces them to an approach that has consistently been shown to enhance students’ interactions with texts. To this end, this paper will outline a theoretical framework for the reader response theory as well as establish reader response’s importance in secondary classrooms through a selective review of relevant literature. An explanation of how the reader response approach influences literacy education in the secondary setting will be provided along with concrete instructional implications, including journaling, reading workshops, and literature circles, which have been shown to promote interactions with texts and thus lead to improved reading performance for secondary students.

Today’s classrooms are filled with diverse students who come to school bearing unique perspectives (Griffin, Martinez, & Martin, 2014). Because of this increase in diversity, educators realize the importance of connecting students’ personal lives to the curriculum if educators wish to grab their students’ attention and make learning meaningful (Kelley, Siwatu, Tost, & Martinez, 2015). Reader response promotes student interactions with each other and the text, and in today’s diverse classrooms, incorporating reader response into the curriculum, as opposed to traditional teacher talk, will result in increased reading comprehension and engagement.

When reading literature, students are often bombarded with their teachers’ interpretations of a particular text. Teachers commonly immerse students in their personal analysis of a literary text simply because they are familiar with the piece and feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts rather than allowing students to interpret it “incorrectly.” However, teachers sharing their personal responses to a text before asking students to divulge their own reactions mistakenly teaches students that there is only one correct interpretation of a piece of literature, which could result in students creating an unfavorable opinion about reading in general (Mitchell, 1993).



Reading is an active process, one in which readers use their background knowledge, diverse perspectives, and personal experiences to make meaning of a literary text. Providing ample opportunities for students to form their own thoughts and opinions of literary texts as opposed to being taught only the teacher's interpretation paves the way for students to connect with these texts on a personal level (Mitchell, 1993).

Unlocking Louise Rosenblatt's (1938, 1978) reader response theory provides pedagogical tools for increasing student interaction with texts. The reader response theory is a top-down model in which readers gain meaning from texts through transactions between the reader and the text. This theory also acknowledges that different readers will have varied interpretations of literary works (Graves et al., 2011). Students feel valued by their teachers when they are able to say what they think about a literary piece. The reader response approach to interpreting a piece of literature is effective because students formulate their own generalizations about the text rather than passively accepting the teacher's response to it (Mitchell, 1993).

Reader response theory does not support the idea that all interpretations are correct. Mitchell (1993) explains that teachers often "wonder if using a reader response approach means that anything goes and that their classrooms will become a loosey-goosey mess" (p. 42). To support a specific response to a text, readers must justify their reactions based on evidence from the text (Graves et al., 2011). Using such evidence ensures students hone in on the important textual elements, such as the plot, theme, setting, conflicts, etc. (Mitchell, 1993). This combination of the reader's reaction as supported from the text can help give life and meaning to the words in a literary piece. Because reader response theory suggests that the role of the reader is essential to the meaning of a literary text, a further look into the process of using a reader response approach in the classroom will uncover how this particular approach to reading helps secondary students become more critical readers.

## READER RESPONSE THEORY

Rooted in the cognitive-constructivist view of learning, reader response theory emerged in the 1930s and gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s (Powell & Kalina, 2009; Roen & Karolides, 2005). The theory was first developed by Louise Rosenblatt (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978) although other theorists are credited with contributing to reader response theory, including Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser (Graves et al., 2011). Rosenblatt, an American university professor of English education, who was born in 1904 and died in 2005, asserted that the reader plays a vital role in the life of any piece of literature in her book *Literature as Exploration*, which was published in 1938 (Roen & Karolides, 2005).

Reader response theory was formed in direct response to traditional criticisms such as New Criticism. New Criticism focuses on a work of literature as a self-contained object, completely excluding the reader's reactions to the text (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Reader response theory embodies a stark contrast to such traditional criticisms because the reader is an essential part of the reading process. At its most basic level, the reader response approach focuses on the transaction between a reader and his or her response to a literary piece (Roen & Karolides, 2005).

Rosenblatt (1938, 1978) maintained there are two primary types of reading: efferent and aesthetic. Efferent reading is also called informational reading. The purpose of efferent reading is to learn new information or how to complete a procedure. As such, efferent reading does not call for a variety of interpretations. On the other hand, aesthetic reading is not concerned with what

students learn or remember about a text. The primary purpose of aesthetic reading is for readers to immerse themselves in a text and simply enjoy the reading experience (Graves et al., 2011). In addition, Rosenblatt (1938, 1978) believed that literature was written to provide an aesthetic experience for readers because literature invites readers to consider their diverse cultures, background knowledge, and personal experiences when analyzing texts. Rosenblatt explained, “A novel or a poem or a play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols” (as cited in Roen & Karolides, 2005, p. 59). In other words, the reader’s role is crucial to breathing life into a text.

The reader response approach is heavily reader-oriented. Readers use their prior knowledge and experiences to give meaning to a text, and they are required to justify their unique interpretations of a text with textual evidence. A reader response approach to literacy instruction does not promote chaos or support the creation of far-fetched interpretations without sufficient justification (Larson, 2009). Furthermore, students are encouraged to use their personal experiences and prior knowledge when interacting with a text. Also, the reader response approach embraces differences among readers and acknowledges that people view pieces of literature in different manners (Graves et al., 2011). By requiring students to look past the words on a page and search for deeper meanings, the reader response approach teaches students to think critically about a text.

A reader response approach has limitations that must be foreseen and mitigated. The author’s intended meaning may be overlooked, for example, and readers may create narrowed responses to a text because they are only considering their own perspectives rather than looking at different perspectives. Additionally, readers’ interpretations are highly subjective, sometimes making it difficult for teachers to determine which answers are acceptable and unacceptable. To mitigate these potential pitfalls, teachers should embrace their role as facilitators and help guide students toward appropriate interpretations of texts. Speaking about the teacher’s specific role when utilizing reader response, Roen and Karolides (2005) specified that the reader response approach acknowledges the teacher not as an authority representing the meaning and background of the literary work but as a catalyst of discussion, encouraging a democracy of voices expressing preliminary responses to the text and building group and individual understandings. The teacher’s voice is at once that of the shepherd and of a partner participant (p. 60). Teachers can incorporate technology into their classrooms when using reader response to reach all learners. Blogs, journals, and discussions allow learners to engage in authentic learning that increases their literacy skills (Larson, 2009).

## SELECTIVE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Much of the literature surrounding the reader response approach explores its influence on the pedagogies of middle and secondary English classrooms (Park, 2012). Several common themes emerged from a selective review of relevant literature, allowing the effects of the reader response approach to be categorized into three critical categories: connecting to texts, thinking critically about texts, and increasing comprehension of texts.

### *CONNECTING TO TEXTS*

The reader response approach is centered on the belief that a work of literature comes alive when the reader interacts and connects with it, and research explores the influence of the reader response approach to promote text-to-self connections. Conversation surrounds selecting texts that invite students to make connections.

Leung (2002) explored the interconnectedness between responses to literature and diverse perspectives about the world of three Asian American students and one student of Eastern European descent. She asserted that cross-cultural literature best suits the purpose of the reader response approach because it provides students with opportunities to examine cultural issues and historical events from their diverse perspectives. Specifically, she found that the “study of literature becomes more meaningful if the real problems and life situations experienced by students outside of school are depicted in books read in the classroom” (p. 31). Using relatable texts prevents students from feeling isolated from such texts and instead encourages them to see how they themselves fit within the story’s plot.

Louie (2005) found that culturally relevant material coupled with students’ interests has the strongest influence on students’ connections to a text. Her study consisted of 25 high school seniors, including 23 Caucasians and two Latinos; these participants read Feng Jicai’s *Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom*. Findings suggested that the utilization of multicultural literature aids the development of empathetic responses from readers because they are able to see themselves being placed in similar conflicts as the protagonists of such literary pieces and can therefore relate to these characters on a personal level. Discussing a text with other readers is crucial in constructing a more conscientious connection to a piece of literature because there is greater exposure to diverse perspectives.

Additionally, Park (2012) conducted a yearlong qualitative study of urban middle school girls’ critical and communal responses to Laurie Halse Anderson’s young adult novel *Speak* during their participation in an after-school book club. He asserted the importance of a reader connecting to a text but believed reader response is most effective when making connections becomes a communal effort between students. A communal reading of a literary text forms a community and sense of belonging between readers where they can share ideas and engage in dialogue with each other about the text. When reading alone, a student’s interpretation is limited based on his or her unique perspective, ultimately affecting how well-rounded his or her connections are to a text. Conversations about literature that include multiple perspectives keep students open minded about how other cultures and beliefs affect the reading of a text.

### *THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT TEXTS*

As students make connections to pieces of literature based on their prior knowledge and personal experiences, they inevitably begin to think critically about what they are reading. Because a reader response approach requires readers to justify their interpretations of a literary piece with textual evidence, readers are challenged to explain which aspects of a text led them to derive their personal responses.

Pope and Round (2015) measured the correlation between children’s existing knowledge about heroes and their understanding of heroism in Roald Dahl’s *Matilda*. Between the ages of seven and 11 in seven classes at three schools, 150 students were asked to draw on their prior knowledge about what makes a person a hero and then apply this understanding to their varied interpretations of the protagonist as a potential heroine. A whole group discussion, ethnographic research, and individual student questionnaires were utilized to gain insight into students’ reactions to Matilda’s actions, as well as their thoughts about Matilda’s heroic nature and the concept of heroism in general. Most students involved in the study did not initially equate a hero and a novel’s protagonist, but with further prompting, students drew on their background knowledge and personal experiences to classify Matilda as a heroine due to her powers and caring nature toward her friends.

Similarly, Leung (2002) found that a readers' age, gender, life experiences, and ethnic identity play a major role in their ability to think critically about a text because these characteristics help the reader more effectively grapple with the deeper meaning of a text and the author's purpose for writing a literary piece. Park (2012) concluded that reader response helps "students find the pleasures of reading (i.e., getting 'into' the literature), while also helping students to read these texts critically" (p. 209), such as deciphering an author's motivation for composing a work. Reading critically also means using a text to understand and question the self, others, and the world.

### *INCREASING COMPREHENSION OF TEXTS*

Reader response increases students' comprehension of literary texts due to their transactional engagement with texts. Reading comprehension is a person's ability to read a text and understand its meaning, and a student's comprehension level is directly affected by his or her ability to connect with and think critically about a text.

McCullough (2013) sought to determine what role prior knowledge and interests play in the ability of students to successfully comprehend six short stories from young adult multicultural anthologies. Based on students' completion of demographic, prior knowledge, and reading comprehension instruments, she found that the participants (117 eighth-grade African American students) heavily relied on their prior knowledge and personal experiences to answer the literal and inferential questions about the multicultural literature they read. While students' interests ultimately guided their decisions in selecting multicultural texts to read, their prior knowledge aided them in thinking both literally and figuratively about the multicultural texts.

In elementary school, students are often taught to search for answers to comprehension questions through explicit instruction. As students advance into the middle and upper grades and develop into independent thinkers, they must search for a text's meaning through a process that moves beyond directly stated answers and toward using their schema to infer the meaning of a text (Graves et al., 2011). The studies mentioned here demonstrate that a reader response approach to reading instruction provides secondary students with opportunities to make connections with the texts they read, which enhance their ability to think critically about and comprehend texts, thus promoting their overall literacy achievement.

### *INSTRUCTIONAL IMPLICATIONS*

Practical classroom applications of reader response allow all learners—English learners, gifted learners, struggling readers and writers, and students with learning disabilities—to engage in authentic experiences that increase their literacy skills and understanding of literary texts. Such instructional applications encourage students to respond to literature as a means of interacting with various texts in meaningful ways and to gain valuable insights into literary pieces.

### *READER RESPONSE JOURNALS*

Reader response journals are "informal, written communication between two or more people about something one has read" (Fulps & Young, 1991, p. 109). Reader response journals meet the needs of all learners because they do not require students to prove their understanding of what they read by answering questions or writing summaries. Instead, students are encouraged to relish the experience of reading for an authentic purpose by recording their thoughts about a text—what they like about it, what they do not like about it, how the story's elements connect with them on a personal level, if they would recommend it to a friend, etc.

Students should write regularly about their reading. Teachers could invite students to compose journal entries as they read a text. These journal entries should contain students' thoughts, predictions, reactions, and connections to the text; they can be either written or typed. As with writing portfolios, reader response journals can be stored in composition notebooks, stapled sheets of paper, or as computer documents. A suggested best practice when incorporating reader response journals into the classroom is not to grade them based on mechanics but on content because students should feel comfortable enough to write their thoughts about literary pieces without feeling pressured to write perfectly (Fulps & Young, 1991).

Meaningful, purposeful technology integration into the curriculum promotes student success (Balentyne & Varga, 2016). As such, students could turn their journals into blogs, or they could reflect on the reactions that they recorded in their journals through the creation of video blogs. A free web 2.0 tool to create student-friendly blogs is [www.kidblog.org](http://www.kidblog.org).

### *READING WORKSHOP*

Reading workshop provides an invaluable method for teachers to differentiate their reading instruction because it is both student centered and a highly engaging way to include all learners. Developed by Nancie Atwell, reading workshop encourages students to assume ownership of their reading (Graves et al., 2011). A great strength of this instructional methodology is that students have the power to select books that fit their personal interests as opposed to reading texts chosen by their teachers (Thomas, 2012).

To begin with, the teacher shares selections of texts that she finds interesting. A mini-lesson follows where the teacher provides whole group instruction. These mini-lessons may include procedural explanations about the reading workshop, introductions to literary devices, or discussion about a particular reading comprehension skill. After the mini-lessons, students move into the self-selected reading and response phase, which is the core of the reading workshop model. Students spend 30 to 40 minutes silently reading while occasionally pausing to complete activities as an outlet for interacting with their self-selected texts (Graves et al., 2011).

When responding to texts, students may use a variety of methods, such as book talks, interviews, portfolios, and Readers Theater. Web 2.0 tools would easily allow students to transform their final projects into digital presentations. Specifically, a Weebly or Wiki website could serve as a storehouse for students' artifacts. Ultimately, the purpose of reading workshop is for students to develop into independent and thoughtful readers (Thomas, 2012).

### *LITERATURE CIRCLES*

The utilization of literature circles promotes student engagement in the reading process (Graves et al., 2011). In literature circles, a group of students read and respond to the same text, generally a novel selected by the students and not the teacher. There is no "one size fits all" prescription when implementing literature circles in a reading classroom. Literature circles can take on many different forms depending on the teacher's desired objectives and students' interests and needs. Daniels (2006) believed that literature circles are effective because students, not teachers, cooperatively lead their literature circles and do not feel the pressure they would during a whole group discussion of a text.

In traditional literature circles, student participants have different roles, such as discussion director, vocabulary enricher, and bridge builder. However, roles are not a necessity when utilizing literature circles. While literature circles are fluid in their structure, their outcomes are consistent:



students learn to become passionate and critical readers (Daniels, 2006). For this strategy to be both effective and successful, students need to use it repeatedly. That is, they should not just participate in literature circles as a one-time activity.

If teachers wish to add a technological component to their literature circles, they could require students to post their responses to online message boards on a weekly basis and then thoughtfully reply to their classmates' discussion postings. Edmodo is one option for creating an online classroom for students to post their responses and reply to their peers' comments in interactive online discussion boards. Doing so creates collaborative online learning communities for students as they respond to literature (Larson, 2009).

The instructional strategies discussed here are only the beginning of a wide variety of learning activities that are informed by the reader response approach. The ideas presented in this section should prompt teachers to begin thinking about other ways to meaningfully integrate technology into their reading curriculum across the content areas to provide students with meaningful opportunities to select texts that interest them and discuss those texts verbally with peers and through writing. While important in the earlier grades, the middle and high school grades are the ideal time to provide students with opportunities to interact with texts in more meaningful ways.

## CONCLUSION

Simply stated, Rosenblatt's (1938, 1978) reader response theory is a reader-oriented approach to delivering effective reading instruction. Using the reader response approach to improve literacy education engages all learners by stressing the importance of the transaction that occurs between a reader and a text. Teachers can use this aspect of the theory to inspire students to become habitual, passionate readers. Reader response offers teachers the flexibility for reaching the needs of all students and engaging them at levels that are appropriate to their development. By allowing students to intersect their prior knowledge and diverse, personal experiences with their interpretations of literature, teachers can entice more students to enter the world of reading and to reside there for a lifetime.

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# USING DIGITAL COMICS TO DEVELOP DIGITAL LITERACY: FOSTERING FUNCTIONALLY, CRITICALLY, AND RHETORICALLY LITERATE STUDENTS

JEFF KIRCHOFF AND MIKE P. COOK

## ABSTRACT

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*Literacy scholarship has established the importance of teaching, supporting, and facilitating digital literacy education for 21<sup>st</sup> century students. Stuart Selber goes a step further, arguing that students must be functionally (using digital technology), critically (questioning digital technology), and rhetorically (producing effective digital texts) literate. In this article, we suggest that digital comics can be an effective text that supports Selber's digital literacy framework. First, we address the importance of digital literacy before providing an overview of Selber's framework. Then, we examine different kinds of digital comics available to instructors and teachers. Finally, we summarize how we have used digital comics to meet Selber's digital literacy requirements.*

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Scholarship over the last decade—coupled with common sense—has made it abundantly clear that students today are living in an increasingly digital world, where mastery of digital tools and skills is not simply a luxury, but a necessity. Some of these skills include making meaning from multimedia texts, creating multimedia texts, problem-solving digital impasses, critically thinking about digital identity, and so forth (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004). Students who are adept at utilizing digital tools are empowered, as that ability opens up the opportunity to challenge current representations of knowledge (Gainer, 2012). Given this, there has been a significant push for teachers and instructors at many levels, and in many disciplines, to teach digital literacy.

Even with this push to teach and to broaden our notions of digital literacy, it seems, anecdotally, that many instructors have struggled to find appropriate gateway texts to facilitate computer literacy instruction in an engaging, meaningful fashion. Often, instructors gravitate towards digital texts students are more than likely familiar with—Facebook, Twitter, and wikis, for example (see Buck, 2012; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008; and others)—only to find students are resistant to serious and critical reflection on how to use this technology that they use every day. This resistance is not a reason to abandon using these text types, however, in this article we offer a different digital text as a possible way to introduce students to academic analysis of digital literacy: digital comics. As an engaging, but perhaps unfamiliar text-type, digital comics have the potential to help students develop a variety of literacy skills; they also avoid the potential issue of students resisting analysis of familiar platforms. Digital comics can blend not only the two distinct modalities of image and word but also sound, motion, video, and user-participation to form a cohesive narrative, story, or

argument. Using Selber's (2004) framework of digital literacy, we will show how digital comics can be used to address students' digital literacy education. We first discuss the importance of digital literacy before offering a detailed overview of our chosen digital literacy framework, Stuart Selber's "multiliteracies." Then, we discuss different kinds of digital comics available to instructors and teachers; this is followed by an overview of how we have used digital comics to meet Selber's digital literacy requirements.

## DIGITAL LITERACY

As a result of the rapid growth of digital tools and the digital world in which we live, the skills necessary to work within that digital world also continue to expand. Moreover, students today have the ability to compose multimodal texts and to share those texts with audiences around the world. Many of these opportunities have, however, largely been relegated to non-school spaces. There have been ongoing debates over this digital divide between in-school and out-of-school settings, and schools and colleges have largely been slow to challenge the status quo and to fully incorporate multimodal and digital literacy into curricula. Given the importance of fostering literate, 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens, it is vital for educators to rethink their instruction to align with digital literacy requirements and students' literacy practices (Lea, 2013; McKee-Waddell, 2015). One way to begin this is through the inclusion of digital tools into composition and literacy instruction, which will help foster digital literacy.

In the past decade or so, a number of scholars have put forth definitions and descriptions of digital literacy. Gainer (2012), for example, broadly defined it as "integral to the organization, support, and maintenance of democratic movements" (p. 15), and Eshet-Alkalai (2004) described it as "survival skill in the digital era" (p. 102). Providing a more focused lens, Visser (2012) defined digital literacy as "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills" (para. 2). And beginning to note the layers and complexity involved, Ng (2012) offered, "the multiplicity of literacies associated with the use of digital technologies" (p. 1006). The evolution of the definition suggests that digital literacy is more than the skill to use digital or technological tools. It is, instead, a variety of complex skills, such as cognitive, emotional, and sociological, that are requisite for interacting with digital environments. Moreover, digital literacies can take different shapes and forms, such as technical skills vs. mastery of ideas and operational vs. conceptual, requiring those responsible for literacy instruction to help students move from the skills of reading and writing to those of making meaning from and understanding information, regardless of the way in which it is presented (Goodfellow, 2011; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008; Lea, 2013).

The implementation of digital tools can engage students, inspire composition, promote critical thinking and lifelong learning, and open new avenues to structure, organize, and publish student texts (McKee-Waddell, 2015), even when the tools used are less familiar to students. That said, students need intentional, explicit instruction with specific tools and with digital literacy concepts. Over the previous decade, researchers, however, have argued that teachers have struggled to adapt their instruction to address digital natives (Prensky, 2001), that is, students who have grown up in the digital age, and to promote digital literacy (Lea, 2013). Thus, it is important to teachers to build upon established literacy frameworks in order to effectively integrate into classroom instruction

the affordances of the digital environment in which students live. It is equally important to remember that digital composition continues to evolve, and educators require new instructional ideas and approaches. Here, we ground our work in the necessity to further the discussion of classroom applications and in Selber's (2004) three-pronged literacy framework. We use Selber specifically because he accounts for layered learning and literacy practices and acknowledges multiple positions and levels of literacy skills, which he calls metaphors. In this article, we offer an overview of Selber's framework.

### STUART SELBER'S *MULTILITERACIES FOR A DIGITAL AGE*

In *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*, Selber (2004) argued that there are "three subject positions connected to the literacy landscape: students as users of technology, students as questioners of technology, and students as producers of technology" (p. 25). As such, he offered three metaphors or filters to view these subject positions: functional, critical, and rhetorical literacy. The crux of his argument is that "Students who are not adequately exposed to all three literacy categories will find it difficult to participate fully and meaningfully in technological activities" (p. 24). Functional literacy is focused with effective employment, critical literacy with informed critique, and rhetorical literacy with reflective praxis.

According to Selber, a functionally computer-literate student must be able to use computers in achieving educational goals; understand the social conventions that help determine computer use; use and understand the specialized discourse of computers; effectively manage his or her online world; and finally, solve "technological impasses" (p. 45). Selber succinctly described the functionally literate student as "[understanding] what computers are generally good at, using advanced software features that are often ignored, and customizing interfaces" (p. 46). Functional literacy, then, encompasses anything from working within Microsoft Word to customizing a desktop/laptop layout to something as "simple" as naming files. While functional literacy is often viewed in a negative light, Selber maintained that functional literacy is a necessary pre-cursor to achieve and consider critical and rhetorical literacy.

Selber begins discussing Critical Digital Literacy by citing Douglas Noble, who asserted, "The technical focus [in computer literacy] shifts attention away from social questions and portrays computers as something to learn rather than something to think about" (as cited in Selber, 2004, p. 75). Selber believed the critical lens is one way to remedy this issue; specifically, he positioned critical computer literacy as a way to "recognize and question the politics of computers" (p. 75). He went on to say:

As a rule...students are not encouraged to ask important questions when it comes to technology development and use: What is lost as well as gained? Who profits? Who is left behind and for what reasons? What is privileged in terms of literacy and learning and cultural capital? What political and cultural values and assumptions are embedded in hardware and software? (p. 81)

By posing these questions to students, Selber believed that instructors can mitigate the possibility of having droves of "indoctrinated consumers of material culture" (p. 95) and instead inspire careful social critics who are able to discern power relations in technological contexts.



Finally, Selber discussed the rhetorical lens of digital literacy. He posited that one facet of digital literacy should require students to be creators of 21<sup>st</sup> century texts, specifically one that uses digital tools. It is not enough for students to know how to use digital tools, or for students to be able to be engaged social critics of said digital tools, but they should be able to use the digital tools to create rhetorically savvy texts. He noted that it is important for teachers to frame digital creation “as a rhetorical activity, one that includes persuasion, deliberation, reflection, social action, and an ability to analyze metaphors” (p. 182). By combining all three subject positions—functional, critical, and rhetorical—he believed teachers can effectively train students to become informed, digital citizens.

## DIGITAL COMICS

As a result of a different medium of delivery, it is not surprising that digital comics often work to challenge the boundaries of how a comic can relate a narrative. Unrestricted from the constraints of the page—and the subsequent organizational and narrative grid—digital comics are free to explore the parameters of what it means to be a comic “book” (though book is used here in the loosest sense possible). Though it would be foolish to try and articulate all the different kinds of strategies for producing digital comics—as the styles and strategies are nearly endless—we offer here three different popular strategies, which also serve as categories, for delivering digital comics: remastered comics, ergodic-hypercomics, and multimedia comics.

The first category of digital comics that we discuss is remastered comics. Here, we borrow from Bolter and Grusin’s (1999) concept of remediation which suggests “new media” (such as digital comics) is actually best understood as “refashioned and improved version[s] of other media” (p. 27). This refashioning, or remediation, is a necessary step in order for the media to be acceptable and understood for whatever social and economic climate our society is in; that is, Bolter and Grusin suggested that new media needs to refashion older, perhaps more recognizable, media in order to be effectively received and understood by users. For Bolter and Grusin, remediation manifests itself in two ways: immediacy and hypermediacy. Immediacy is “a style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the medium” (p. 272). Conversely, hypermediacy is “a style of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium” (p. 272).

Simply put, we use the term *remastered comics* for digital comics that recreate (as accurately as possible) their print-based counterparts—the anatomy of the traditional print-based comics discussed are found in an identical form in the digital universe. Remastered comics can be seen in a wide-range of comics being released; it is perhaps the most prevalent form of digital comic. For example, publishers such as Marvel, DC, Image, and IDW, among others, offer copious digital catalogs of their print-based releases. Instead of going to a local comic shop, a user can download (with a username and password) the same content for their computer or mobile device. Additionally, third-party services, such as Comixology, offer these “remastered” comics for a discounted price.

Remediation is a useful concept to think of these digital comics. Clearly, these comics embody Bolter and Grusin’s (1999) idea of immediacy: by offering the same content and form as print-based comics, it seems likely these digital comics are aiming to make readers forget they are consuming

their comic narrative on a tablet instead of reading a print-based floppy. Additionally, it bears noting that part of Bolter and Grusin's remediation is the idea that "new media" (digital comics, in this case) not only refashions old media (print comics), but improves upon it. In this regard, many of the remediated digital comic platforms, such as the aforementioned third-party Comixology, strive to improve the comic reading experience by offering a "guided view." This allows readers to "view a comic on a panel-by-panel basis suitable for mobile devices in a way that mimics the natural motion of the user's eye through the comic" (Comixology, 2016). Additionally, some might consider these remediated comics as improvements over their print counterparts because they take up less physical space, can be accessed on a variety of devices at any time, and are immensely portable.

Where remediated comics look to keep the integrity of the print comic intact, *ergodic hypercomics* aim to challenge the traditional comic sequential storytelling strategies. We borrow the title for this category from both comic and new media theory. To start, hypercomics are "comics with a multicursal narrative...In hypercomics, the choices made by the reader may determine the sequence in which the events are encountered, the outcome of events, or the point of view through which events are seen" (Merlin-Goodbrey, 2010, p. 1). Hypercomics are directly informed by the tenets of ergodic literature, a theoretical framework that Aarseth (1999) proposed to better understand digital media. Aarseth defined ergodic texts as those that require "nontrivial effort...to allow the reader to traverse the text" (p. 1). Aarseth (1997) also argued that in ergodic literature, the "sequence of signs does not emerge in a fixed, predetermined order decided by the instigator of the work, but is instead one actualization among many potential routes..." (p. 33). Thus, ergodic literature demands a significant effort on the part of the reader/user to construct the narrative; moreover, it suggests that the narrative will be different for each reader/user based on the decisions they make.

The ergodic-hypercomic, then, has the following features: (a) multiple outcomes for the user/reader to experience (think of a digital *Choose Your Own Adventure*) and (b) user/readers need to engage in non-trivial effort, one which would require more participation than simply turning a page. An example of this kind of digital comic would be DC Comics' *Arkham Asylum* digital comics. Published using the Madefire platform, readers can literally choose which character's perspective through which they wish to see the story; they are also afforded the opportunity to make decisions, such as which actions to take, where to travel, and which characters to trust that will dictate the flow of the narrative. Though this comic is no longer available via the app store, other stories published by Madefire have a similar structure.

The last category of digital comics we overview here could be broadly termed as *multimedia comics*. These are comics that add additional modes of communication to the established print comic tradition of image and text; that is, these are comics that might add sound (e.g. background music, spoken dialogue/narration, sound effects, and so forth), motion, interactive puzzle games, and even background video (e.g. an image of a TV in the background is actually playing a TV show). These multimedia comics might even be hyperlinked, taking readers to dossiers of additional information related to the content of the comic or "behind the scenes" glimpses into how the comic was made, similar to extra features on a DVD.

As one can tell, this category allows for a great deal of possibility. To demonstrate the range, we briefly discuss two multimedia comics here. The first is *Nawlz*, created by Stu Campbell, more commonly known as Sutu. Campbell (2008) described his digital comic as “an interactive comic that combines text, illustration, music, animation, and interactivity to create a never-before-seen panoramic comic format” (n.p.). This, at times bizarre, story recounts the tales of Harley Chambers, a cyber-graffiti artist who has the ability to cast “reals” throughout the city—a “real” in this universe is a technological hallucination. The story is accompanied by a soundtrack of sorts, though it is mostly white-noise. Different interactions unlock different musical content, primarily in the form of sound effects. Additionally, motion is a key part of the story, and depending on how the reader interacts with the comic, the reader can access different motions. As the comic utilizes a panoramic format, the reader can still gaze upon recently read panels. Often, the motion unlocked modifies previously read panels, which forces the reader to go back and re-read that, now newly modified, panel. This creates a very surreal reading experience, one that challenges how comics are traditionally read.

Another example is Burwen and De Seve’s (2011) *Operation Ajax: How the CIA Toppled Democracy in Iran*. This text combines sound, animation, live video footage, archival research, and word balloons to recreate the true story of the CIA’s overthrow of Iran in 1953. This is a multimedia text in every sense of the word, as it utilizes alphabetic text, static visual images, dynamic visual images, sound, and animation. Much of the content is linked, so readers have the opportunity to access additional information if they want; however, they are not forced to depart from the “narrative proper” if they do not wish. This is an excellent example of how comics can make use of multiple media and the use of hyperlinks to take readers to additional content related to the story at hand.

## TEACHING MODULES

In order to fully realize Selber’s digital literacy instruction, we find it best to devote an entire unit to digital comics. In this unit, we read—and ultimately create—remediated, ergodic, and multimedia digital comics. In this section, we show how the reading and creating of these three digital comic types responsibly supports digital literacy instruction by focusing on Selber’s (2004) functional, critical, and rhetorical subject positions.

## READING DIGITAL COMICS

The importance of mentor texts in facilitating literacy instruction and fostering literacy development has been widely acknowledged. Mentor texts, as their name implies, can create a type of apprenticeship relationship between texts and readers, where the consumers learn from and with professionals and experts. Likewise, the use of mentor texts promotes an understanding of the relationship between writer (or composer or creator) and the audience. Regardless of the type of relationship forged, the use of mentor texts can help students develop the skills necessary to read closely and with a writer’s eye. Ultimately, providing students intentional and meaningful opportunities to engage with powerful mentor texts helps them to analyze exemplars and use those experiences to emulate the critical and rhetorical approaches and elements utilized by their mentors. The inclusion of non-traditional mentor texts is equally important. This includes those texts that represent and support digital literacy, including digital comics. In fact, using well-crafted

digital mentor texts can have powerful effects on students' digital literacy development and the ways in which they interact (i.e., consume, create, and share information) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a result of the noted benefits, we ground our work in the use of mentor texts, which drive students' experiences reading, analyzing, discussing, and composing digital comics (see Table 1 for a list of possible mentor texts).

Table 1

*Sample Mentor Texts and Applications for Creation of Digital Comics*

Table 1 <i>Sample Mentor Texts and Applications for Creation of Digital Comics</i>			
	Remediated Comics	Ergodic-Hyperomics	Multimedia Comics
<b>Sample Mentor Texts</b>	--Any comic from comixology.com	--Hello World	--Nawlz
		--Batman: Arkham Origins	--Operation AJAX
		--Dracula: The Interactive Comic	--Tell Me Your Secrets
		--Meanwhile	--Odyssee 2.0
<b>Application for Creation</b>	--Prezi	--Wordpress	--PowerPoint
	--emaze	--Scratch	--Electricomics,
	--Academic Presenter	--inklewriter	--Adobe Flash

Reading digital texts is one way to begin a student's path towards realizing Selber's functional, critical, and rhetorical knowledge required for achieving digital literacy. For example, a certain kind of functional computer knowledge is needed to successfully navigate and ultimately read remediated, ergodic, and multimedia comics. For many remediated comics, students will need to learn how to download files, create passwords, save files, and, in some cases, learn how to use advanced tools such as "guided view." An even greater functional digital knowledge is needed to access ergodic or multimedia comics; here, students may need to ensure that Flash is properly installed on their device (as many multimedia comics rely on Flash), adjust settings (such as pop-up blockers, sound, and screen resolution) to allow the comic to run and be read smoothly and manipulate the interface (e.g. the haptic interface that relies on touch). While many teachers may take it for granted that students may know how to do this, our experience has shown that students are most unfamiliar with adjusting existing settings and how to ensure compatibility between interface and digital comic. We recommend that instructors spend some time on accessing all three digital comic types as a class before assigning students to read digital comics independently.

Critical literacy is also a key part of reading remediated, ergodic, and multimedia digital comics. For all three text-types, the conversation revolves around similar questions and themes; we usually engage students in this discussion after students have read all three digital comic types. First, we discuss the limitations of each digital comic, paying particular attention to how the platform—for instance, guided view in remediated comics—limits the reader/text interaction. From here, we ask students to consider how the platform changes and/or challenges the reader-text interaction; these conversations are usually either an extension of discussing limitations or a new conversation examining how these platforms allow for new reading opportunities. At the heart of this discussion is answering the question, “Why this platform?” However, it is also imperative that we consider who can or can’t access these digital comics, which usually sparks an important dialogue about the digital divide.

We should also note that students begin their rhetorical digital literacy education through the reading of digital comics. Here, we invite students to conduct informal rhetorical analyses, paying particular attention to how the use of color, sound, motion, video, and so forth contributes to the construction of the narrative. Specifically, we’re interested in challenging students to analyze how digital comics use various affordances rhetorically, paying particular attention to how these affordances help create a different reader/text interaction—and a different narrative—than their print-based counterpart. In short, students analyze these comics rhetorically to discuss how digital comics are created, consumed, and engaged with differently from traditional comics, and even other digital comics.

## CREATING COMICS

Providing students opportunities to use mentor texts to better understand how authors think, write, and approach topics and audiences is just the beginning. Students must also be able to transfer that understanding to their own creation processes. In other words, being digitally literate requires more than just consumption skills; it requires the ability to create and to contribute to the digital world. Creating fosters development of communication skills, especially within the context of digital literacy. Moreover, engaging in creation is a vital part of learning, growing, and understanding oneself. And engaging in digital creation is equally as important. As a result, we provide our students multiple opportunities to do just that. Here, we share three of those instructional approaches. Before proceeding, however, it is important to note that there are a wealth of platforms and options available for creating digital comics, but we highlight only three here, focusing on those that have worked well for us and our students and that align with and support Selber’s framework for digital literacy.

*FUNCTIONAL LITERACY.* Selber (2004) discussed functional literacy as the ability to consider the affordances of computer technologies and to use that consideration to make decisions about how to use computers to solve problems and to create. It is in this spirit that we introduce three platforms for making digital comics: Prezi, to help students create remediated comics with a “guided view”; WordPress, to create ergodic hyper-comics that allow readers to shape their own narrative; and PowerPoint to create multimedia comics that make use of sound (narration and sound effects), motion (transitions from image to image), image, and text. These three platforms offer users a



variety of nuanced opportunities to develop a range of functional literacy skills (see Figure 1 for unique and overlapping functional knowledge associated with the three platforms). When using Prezi, students must first be able to create an account. They must also consider a variety of licensing options, often after a 14-day free trial, which range in price and access, such as access to image editing tools, offline access, and training from Prezi; functional knowledge of the application might help them determine which licensing option they choose. Additionally, Prezi requires users to understand not only how to include content, but also how to create paths, utilize zooming, create transitions, and interact with editing tools. Finally, students must consider publication issues, such as how and where to embed and/or link to across other platforms, and sharing options, which include privacy settings and accessibility for outside audience members.

WordPress requires students to ask additional functional questions. Students must consider the affordances of working with WordPress entirely online or installing the tool on their device; to that end, they need to decide whether they want to use the free tool or the fee-based tool, which gives them access to more affordances. Additional requisite functional knowledge for interacting with WordPress includes how to select appropriate themes, upload content, and interact with the administration and editing tools. To fully consider the platform, students must also examine and learn how to use the additional plugin options (e.g., Wordfence Security, Google Analytics, widget bundles, and MailChimp).

PowerPoint, similar to Prezi, requires students to examine the functionality of a platform designed for presentations. Unlike Prezi, however, where the path is determined entirely by the composer, students using PowerPoint need not consider path creation, as the path is pre-determined, but they must understand and be able to select from a variety of available templates and themes. To create with PowerPoint, students must also consider the process of deciding between slide types, inserting content, including color, and utilizing transitions. In addition to creation, users must also assess the navigation and editing tools. Finally, because PowerPoint is a tool used entirely offline, students must consider this constraint against their ultimate purpose. In other words, students composing with PowerPoint must also search for and evaluate compatible platforms for publishing and sharing their work.

As part of their functional evaluations, students must also consider what they have learned from reading the digital comics assigned in class, how they would like to use the technology to shape their readers' experiences, and how to compose using their understanding of the platform and their own rhetorical intent. Their rhetorical goals, in many ways, facilitate their functional literacy training. That is, students need to learn how to use effectively the tools embedded in the platforms to create a rhetorically effective document. In this way, their functional literacy education is becoming something greater than simply learning skills—for example, how to add motion or how to add sound effects using computer software. Students are realizing that certain software tools and features enable them to make powerful rhetorical digital texts. Only by understanding how to use these tools, though, will that be possible.



Figure 1: Functional Skills Related to the Three Platforms

**CRITICAL LITERACY.** Selber (2004) described critical literacy as the ability to recognize, critique, and react to social and power relations embedded in technology settings and contexts. We have found that responding to these issues as a class invites some engaging conversation amongst students. These conversations are started with us explaining why we have chosen to use the platforms of Prezi, WordPress, and PowerPoint for the creation of their digital comic projects. For example, we point out that Prezi offers a variety of benefits. First, we point out that users can upload a variety of content (e.g., text, images), rather than having to create within the platform only. Next we emphasize that Prezi offers myriad options for creating and creativity, while still providing a helpful frame; these tools allow students to create a pre-determined viewing path (mimicking the Guided View in Comixology), including movement, zooming, transition, size, etc. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we note that Prezi is free to anyone who takes the time to create a username and password.

From here, though, we invite students to critique and react to these choices. We first ask students to identify any limitations with the programs we've selected. For instance, students have pointed out that in the free version of Prezi, all presentations are archived as public. In other words, students

cannot choose to make their compositions private, which may or may not be a major concern, depending on the classroom level. We contrast Prezi with PowerPoint; people are often under the misconception that PowerPoint is free, but it is actually a part of the Microsoft Office Suite; by pursuing this line of questioning, we are hoping students are going to start a process that will inspire them to ask questions such as “Why is the Microsoft Office Suite on every school computer, and what impact does this have?” With WordPress, we can point out that there are two versions of the application: one is free and only requires a user-name and password to access; the other, though, requires a monthly fee. As a class, we can discuss what affordances are provided in the “free” version and the “fee-based” version of the application. Inherent in this, then, is a discussion of how people who can afford the fee-based version of the application are given more powerful tools to design websites. Thus, while the free version is still a useful tool, it does not “empower” an individual as much as the fee-based version, as the latter offers more affordances and authorial control. For instance, the fee-based version allows the user to actively and thoroughly edit the CSS code.

By actively asking students to identify limitations, we are hopefully going to have students become more conscientious users of technology, as opposed to using programs and software out of habit and/or convenience. To that end, we urge all of our students to find alternatives to the platforms we’ve selected; if they are inclined, students can use a different platform to create their digital comics, as long as they can critically demonstrate *why* they are making this choice. By using the tenets of Selber’s critical literacy to guide conversations about access and power, digital comics works a gateway to becoming a more thoughtful digital citizen.

*RHETORICAL LITERACY.* Selber (2004) argued that rhetorical literacy involves being able to compose using 21<sup>st</sup> century, digital tools and rhetorical considerations. That is, once individuals have learned how to use a specific technology (functional literacy) and learned how to question the limitations of the application, particularly as it pertains to empowering the author (critical literacy), they are then prepared to create a rhetorically powerful digital text. To foster rhetorical literacy in our students, we task them with using the concept of remediation to create a digital comic of their own using Prezi, WordPress, and PowerPoint. In order to focus on digital literacy—specifically, playing with the different affordances each tool presents—we ask students to take an existing print comic (we supply several, culled from two free comic book day events held at local comic shops in May and October respectively) and remix it into the three digital comic types explored in the unit: remediated, ergodic hyper-comic, and multimedia comics. This assignment also demands students learn a new functional digital literacy skill: scanning and cropping images. We encourage students to use their “mentor texts”—the digital comics read earlier in the unit—as models for this composition assignment. Because of file size, we ask that students work only with two- to four-page selections from their comic (usually the splash page and the two following pages).

The affordances students work with for each project are unique. For remediated comics, students pay attention to creating a “guided view”; here, they need to consider the “path” they want readers to consume their comic. For ergodic-hypercomics, we ask students to hyperlink their comic using WordPress; that is, hyperlinks are embedded within the comic that readers must click to advance the narrative. Additionally, students are asked to provide links to websites, videos, or games that

have similar/related content to the comic they are re-working; these links are to be thoughtfully included in the panel itself. Finally, students are asked to productively use narration, motion (through the transitions feature of PowerPoint), and sound effects in their multimedia comics.

We also ask that students compose a short reflection that accompanies their three digital comic creations. This reflection asks them to articulate (a) what their rhetorical goals were with each remix, (b) how they strove to meet those goals, (c) which platform best facilitated their rhetorical goals, and (d) what they learned about digital comics and digital composition through their work. Husbye and Rust (2013) noted that a written reflection articulating student's "process and the design decisions made" (p. 138) helps keep students accountable, while also emphasizing that the *rhetoric* and the *thought process* behind the composition is valuable in helping the teacher interpret the text.

## CONCLUSION

To live in and contribute to the digital world in which we live, students must first practice, develop, and effectively utilize digital literacy skills. In fact, there continues to be ongoing educational discussion to incorporate digital literacy instruction into existing curricula by designing meaningful opportunities for students to engage with digital contexts and to develop these digital skills. The goal of this article has been to offer digital comics as one way to introduce students to digital literacy and to provide them opportunities to grow as digital citizens. Coupled with Selber's framework, we offer educators instructional approaches using digital comics to foster functional, critical, and rhetorical literacy development within a digital context. As such, we discuss an instructional unit in which students read (as mentor texts) and create (as digital composers) three types of digital comics—remediated, ergodic, and multimedia—using three digital platforms with which we have experienced success: Prezi, WordPress, and PowerPoint. Within, we share how we use these texts and compositions to foster literacy development across functional, critical, and rhetorical levels; such efforts will contribute to students becoming digitally literate, 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens.

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# READING REFUGEE STORIES: FIVE COMMON THEMES AMONG PICTURE BOOKS WITH REFUGEE CHARACTERS

LOPITA NATH AND STEPHANIE GROTE-GARCIA

## ABSTRACT

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*The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program offers a quick path to permanent residency and adjustment to the United States, with the major objectives of economic success, community involvement, and local integration. The success of the program partly depends on the response of the American community towards refugees. Using the foundational idea that multicultural literature encourages learners to respect and accept people who are different from themselves, this article identifies five common themes among picture books with refugee characters. A total of 17 books were analyzed. A product of this research is a list of suggested picture books for exploring social inclusion with young readers. The list is organized to reflect the lessons or themes pulled from the analyzed texts. Suggestions for classroom discussions are also provided.*

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*Patrick invited his second-grade students to the carpet. Last week he had read aloud a picture book titled, One Green Apple (Bunting, 2006), and this morning he shared The Big Red Lollipop (Khan, 2010). The main characters of the two books were elementary-age refugee characters who were adjusting to their new American lives. Patrick invited his students to identify common themes shared across the two books. Juan raised his hand and stated, "Both books had new students." Patrick encouraged further discussion by stating, "Tell me more about that." Juan added, "At first the new students did not play with one another, but then they became friends." Patrick thanked Juan for sharing his observations and rephrased Juan's conclusions as, "The two main characters, Farah and Rubina, were new to their schools and didn't know the other students. Both Farah and Rubina made it a point to meet other children, and the other children made it a point to learn more about Farah and Rubina. This effort is why the children became friends. We can describe this as 'taking action' to be included and 'taking action' to include others."*

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This example from Patrick's classroom illustrates the use of multicultural literature as a vehicle for building richer and deeper social knowledge among young readers. Martens et al. (2015) have shared that multicultural literature "encourages learners to respect and accept people who are different [from] themselves and break attitudes that are oppressive and prejudicial" (p. 609). Patrick, the teacher in the opening vignette, is pictured using two multicultural texts as channels to discuss with his second-grade students how to take action toward social inclusion of all beings regardless of cultural backgrounds. This lesson is one that has been reported to be present in a wide variety of multicultural texts (Martens et al., 2015). Therefore, it seems natural to use multicultural texts as vehicles for communicating such lessons to young readers.

What additional lessons might be present in multicultural texts? In this article, we explore this question using picture books featuring refugee characters. We chose to set the context of our discussion around refugees because they are a rapidly growing population in the United States (UN Refugee Agency, 2017), come from different cultural backgrounds, and can often feel or experience social exclusion after resettling in America – making them an important population to recognize in the classroom. The product presented from our findings is a list of suggested picture books, featuring at least one refugee character, that can be used for exploring social inclusion with young readers. By *social inclusion*, we are referring to the act of accepting and including all individuals into one's social realm regardless of cultural backgrounds.

The presented list is organized to reflect the lessons or themes pulled from the analyzed texts. The overall idea relates back to Patrick in the opening vignette. He used two books that shared one theme, and that theme became the focus of a class discussion. His lesson required students to analyze, evaluate, and compare multiple texts– all skills that have been considered complex for nearly a decade, if not longer (Gray, 1925). We are hopeful that the list featured in this article will be a resource for elementary teachers to replicate similar conversations in their classrooms.

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

Essential to the opening vignette is the idea that children's literature provides opportunities for young readers to reflect upon their culture and to learn about the culture of others. Brinson (2012) refers to such books as *mirror books* and *window books*. Mirror books reinforce the culture of the reader, while window books offer the reader an "opportunity to learn about other cultures by providing a window into new experiences" (Brinson, 2012, p. 30). Providing such literature in the classroom reinforces "a sense of community, enhance[s] young children's understanding of and identification with diverse cultures and families, and provide[s] immense enjoyment of a mosaic of literary heritages" (Brinson, 2012, p 32). This idea is not only essential to the opening vignette but also serves as the foundation for the present article.

Also setting the tone for the current discussion is the question posed by McBrien (2005) in *Educational Needs and Barriers of Refugee Students in the United States*– "Will we teach our children to be welcoming of newcomers by accepting the diversity of international cultures that they bring with them, or will we expect new Americans to cast off their heritage and assimilate into a distinctively *American heritage*?" (p. 357). Such questions are pertinent in today's world with 65.3 million forcibly displaced people– 21.3 million being refugees, half of whom are children (UN

Refugee Agency, 2017). With a high number of refugees being children, it is imperative that schools provide environments and curricula that empower children to take action toward social inclusion of all.

Foundational to the current project is understanding who is considered a refugee and why they resettle in the United States. The second edition of the *Handbook of International Law* (Aust, 2010) provides insight into defining the term *refugee*. This source shares that essential to the definition of a *refugee* is the historical 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which was finalized on July 28<sup>th</sup> of that year and enforced on April 22, 1954. Later, the convention was amended by the 1967 Protocol “extending the convention to cover all refugees, past, present and future” (Aust, 2010, p. 117). These two instruments, collectively known as the 1951 Refugee Convention, officially defined a refugee as a person who:

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (Aust, 2010, p. 117).

The 1951 Refugee Convention also laid down the following three durable solutions to a refugee crisis: voluntary repatriation, host country integration, and third country resettlement (UN Refugee Agency, 2011b). These solutions help explain *why* refugees resettle in the United States. According to the UN Refugee Agency (2011a), in many instances, the first two solutions become impossible due to the persistence of conflict, and the inability of the host country to accommodate the large and growing refugee population in their country. As a result, third country resettlement is often the most durable solution to a refugee crisis. Still, less than 1 percent of all refugees are resettled in third countries, and almost two-thirds of those are resettled in the United States (U.S. Department of State, 2017).

The United States has welcomed over 3.3 million refugees since 1975 (U.S. Department of State, 2017). It is important to understand that half of these individuals are children. Eminent in placing refugee children into schools is the Office of Refugee Resettlement’s Division of Children’s Services, established by the Refugee Act of 1980 (Pub. L. 96-212) (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2010). Public schools admit children based on their age and irrespective of their educational background. Most refugee children arrive with basic to no education, having lived and grown up in the camps for the most part, and with little knowledge of written and spoken English.

Refugees very rarely return to their homeland (UN Refugee Agency, 2011a); therefore, it is important that refugee children be provided high quality literacy instruction, as it will greatly impact their ability to contribute back to the community and to live successful lives in the United States. In addition to welcoming new students, teachers also educate American students about the background of their refugee classmates, while deepening their understanding of social inclusion, pluralism, and leadership. This realization is why we have chosen to produce a list of suggested picture books featuring refugee characters.

## THE PICTURE BOOKS

The goal of our project was to analyze picture books that contain at least one refugee character and to identify the common inclusive themes amongst the identified texts. The product formed from this process is a list of suggested picture books for exploring social inclusion with young readers (see Table 1). In this section, we explain our process of identifying and analyzing the books.

The search for picture books was a two-step process. First, we wanted to locate books featuring at least one refugee character, so we searched our University database using the terms *refugee* and *picture books*. This search retrieved 13 relevant articles. The authors of these peer-reviewed articles examined a range of topics including themes within global literature (Martens et al., 2015), to pre-service teachers' knowledge of multicultural literature (Brinson, 2012). Among the 13 articles, we were able to collect the titles of 11 picture books featuring at least one refugee character. The second step of the process was to search directly for picture books through the local public library database. This search revealed six additional picture book titles, yielding a total of 17 books to analyze.

## ANALYZING THE BOOKS

After collecting hardcopies of the 17 identified books, each book was read by two readers. The readers read the books individually and identified the texts' overall themes. Themes, as used in this analysis, were the underlying implied messages in the stories that often stepped beyond the literal interpretation (e.g., it is better to have loved and lost, than to never have loved at all). While identifying the texts' themes, the two readers wrote anecdotal notes in their fieldnote journals. The anecdotal notes included information about the characters and character traits, main events of the story, and the setting— thereby, providing evidence of the themes. Next, the readers compared their identified themes and anecdotal notes, reaching 100% consensus – there were no variations presented. Lastly and together, the two readers crafted the phrasing of the presented themes.

## THE THEMES

The following five themes, which are also the lessons that teachers can discuss in their classrooms, emerged from the analyzed books: a) empowerment as achieved through education or a talent, b) peer relationships and how they change over time, c) perseverance through hardship, d) preservation of meaningful items and traditions, and e) sharing stories of family and culture. Table 1 features the five themes and lists the associated books.

Table 1.  
*Identified Themes*

Theme	Title, Author	Homeland
Empowerment as Achieved through Education or a Talent	<i>How I Learned Geography</i> (Shurevitz, 2008)	Poland
	<i>Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan</i> (Winter, 2009)	Afghanistan
	<i>Petar's Song</i> (Mitchell, 2003)	Europe
Peer Relationships and How They Change Over Time	<i>Four Feet, Two Sandals</i> (Williams, 2016)	Afghanistan
	<i>One Green Apple</i> (Bunting, 2006)	Middle East
	<i>The Big Red Lollipop</i> (Khan, 2010)	Middle East
	<i>My Name is Yoon</i> (Recoruits, 2003)	Korea
	<i>My Name is Sangoel</i> (Williams & Mohammed, 2009)	Sudan
Perseverance Through Hardship	<i>The Cats in Krasinski Square</i> (Hesse, 2004)	Poland
	<i>Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan</i> (Williams, 2005)	Sudan
	<i>Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan</i> (Winter, 2009)	Afghanistan
Preservation of Meaningful Items and Traditions	<i>Alfredito Flies Home</i> (Argueta, 2007)	El Salvador
	<i>The Librarian of Basra: A True Story From Iraq</i> (Winter, 2005)	Iraq
	<i>The Lotus Seed</i> (Garland, 1993)	Vietnam
Sharing Stories of Family and Culture	<i>The Color of Home</i> (Hoffman, 2012)	Somalia
	<i>The Roses in My Carpets</i> (Khan, 1998)	Afghanistan
	<i>Sitti's Secrets</i> (Nye, 1994)	Pakistan
	<i>The Memory Coat</i> (Woodruff, 1999)	Jewish living in Russia

**EMPOWERMENT AS ACHIEVED THROUGH EDUCATION OR A TALENT.** Three of the 17 picture books featured characters who found empowerment through receiving an education or practicing a talent. For example, in *How I Learned Geography*, author Uri Shulevitz (2008) tells his childhood story of

being a Polish refugee during World War II. The story revisits the hours he spent studying his father's world map as an escape from hunger and a venue to experience distant lands. Likewise, *Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan* (Winter, 2009) takes place in Afghanistan and features a young girl empowered through education, while *Petar's Song* (Mitchell, 2003) features a young boy in Europe during WWII who is empowered through the music he creates.

**PEER RELATIONSHIPS AND HOW THEY CHANGE OVER TIME.** Nearly 30 percent of the analyzed books focused on peer relationships; making it the most common theme. The analyzed books approached peer relationships in a variety of ways including the following: a) saying goodbye to friends, b) being a new student, and c) meeting peers with cultural differences such as names and traditions. Table 2 lists the different approaches of peer relationships and the associated books.

Table 2.  
*Approaches to Peer Relationships*

Approach to Peer Relationships	Title and Author
Saying Goodbye to Friends	<i>Four Feet, Two Sandals</i> (Williams & Mohammed, 2007)
Being a New Student	<i>One Green Apple</i> (Bunting, 2006)
Meeting Peers with Cultural Differences (e.g., names and traditions)	<i>The Big Red Lollipop</i> (Khan, 2010) <i>My Name is Yoon</i> (Recoruits, 2003) <i>My Name is Sangoel</i> (Williams, 2009)

Books that focus on peer relationships can deepen young readers' understanding of social inclusion. For example, in *My Name is Sangoel*, author Karen Lynn Williams (2009) tells a story of Sangoel, a young refugee from Sudan. The story begins with homesick and lonely Sangoel in the fast pace of the United States when his classmates have difficulty pronouncing his name. This changes when Sangoel designs an ingenious solution to this problem, causing him to feel more socially included. Also focused on new, unfamiliar names and making friends are *My Name is Yoon* (Recoruits, 2003) and *One Green Apple* (Bunting, 2006).

**PERSEVERANCE THROUGH HARDSHIP.** The message of persevering through hardship was found in three of the 17 books. For example, *The Cats in Krasinski Square* by Karen Hesse (2004) features a Jewish girl who has escaped the Ghetto. She is aware that families who have remained on the other side of the Ghetto wall are hungry. Although she is risking her life, she disguises herself as a simple girl playing with cats. However, she uses the disguise to sneak food through the Ghetto wall for the hungry families.

Other books that carried the theme of persevering through hardship included *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* (Williams, 2005) and *Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan* (Winter, 2009). In *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan*, Williams tells the story of Garang fleeing his village in southern Sudan and walking hundreds of miles seeking

help with thousands of other boys. Throughout the story, the band of thousands encounters numerous hardships, but through mutual support, their hope of finding a new home stays alive. Winter's (2009) *Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan* tells the story of young Nasreen, whose parents have disappeared, and her grandmother enrolls her in a secret school for girls. Throughout the story, Nasreen encounters hardship but perseveres to receive her education.

**Preservation of meaningful items and traditions.** *Alfredito Flies Home* (Argueta, 2007), *The Librarian of Basra: A True Story From Iraq* (Winter, 2005), and *The Lotus Seed* (Garland, 1993) are stories focused on preserving meaningful items and traditions. In *Alfredito Flies Home*, Alfredito and his family return to their first home in El Salvador for Christmas, creating a glimpse into his families' Christmas celebrations. The theme of preservation is also seen in *The Librarian of Basra: A True Story From Iraq* as the librarian saves the library books from being destroyed in the war, and in *The Lotus Seed* as a lotus seed travels through the generations of a family.

**Sharing stories of family and culture.** The following four books feature the theme of sharing personal stories of family and culture: *The Color of Home* (Hoffman, 2012), *The Roses in My Carpets* (Khan, 1998), *Sitti's Secrets* (Nye, 1994), and *The Memory Coat* (Woodruff, 1999). In *The Color of Home*, Hassan uses paint to share the story of his previous home in war-torn Somalia, and in *Roses in My Carpets*, a young boy moves into a refugee camp where he learns to weave carpets and revisit his memories of home. Personal stories are also told in *Sitti's Secrets* as she returns to her small Middle Eastern village on the other side of the world to visit her grandmother. Although Sitti and her grandmother speak different languages, the two are able to communicate through other means.

## CONNECTIONS TO THE CLASSROOM

The 17 featured books can function as window books and mirror books, giving American students and refugee children something they can learn from or relate to within the classroom. Students can read such books and gain insight into experiences they have not undergone triggering them to build empathy, respect for others, and a growing appreciation for their own experiences. The five themes found within the featured books can provide pathways for organizing discussions addressing social inclusion. Essential to these connections is *how* the teacher shares the books and frames the discussion. Such ideas are explored further in this section.

Books focused on character empowerment, peer relationships, perseverance through hardship, preservation of traditions, and personal stories are pathways for discussions in elementary classrooms. Multicultural books that offer a *window* view into others' strengths, talents, traditions, and hardships humanize diverse characters. Likewise, such books can act as a *mirror* and empower young readers to celebrate their own talents, traditions, and personal stories. For example, books focused on peer relationships depict characters saying "goodbye" to friends and creating new friendships. Such books are a mirror to children who have left friends behind and those who have needed to make new friendships—both are experiences that refugee children have had while fleeing from their homes. Another example are the stories from Europe during World War II and also from the camps in Afghanistan, providing glimpses into perseverance through hardships. Such books provide insights into broken school experiences and the limited educational opportunities



for girls in other countries. The same texts might reinforce self-development and growth while providing encouragement and support. These texts may also influence admiration for refugee children, who persevere despite living through many hardships.

When sharing and discussing books in the elementary classroom, we suggest reflecting upon the following four statements:

- Refugees come from different countries and cultural backgrounds.
- Resettlement in the United States is not new but is rapidly growing.
- Resettlement to the United States is a lengthy process.
- Refugees have rights.

*REFUGEES COME FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS.* Books featuring refugee characters have the potential of becoming powerful teaching tools in classrooms where there are several countries and cultures represented by refugee children. The UN Refugee Agency (2015) shares that, since World War II, the United States has accepted refugees from all parts of Europe and Asia. Following the Vietnam War in the 1970s, there was a wave of Vietnamese and Indo-Chinese refugees. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, refugees arrived from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Furthermore, it is a current reality that most refugees today come from areas which are conflict afflicted, like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syrian Arab Republic, and many African countries, notably the Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, and Somalia.

**Action item.** Keeping in mind that refugees come from different countries and cultural backgrounds, it is important to select a wide range of books that represent various cultures. Sharing a narrow range of books that portray only one culture could potentially give children the impression that refugees are all alike and that they hail from one particular country or cultural background.

Also when selecting books, it is important to be mindful of the cultural differences presented in each story. The books mirror the experiences of refugee children during camp life, as in *Four Feet, Two Sandals* (Williams & Mohammed, 2007), and reflect how they face challenges in the United States, as in *One Green Apple* (Bunting, 2006). Moreover, the stories represent the countries in which the characters previously lived. A teacher might use the illustrations to discuss items of unique clothing such as a *hijab* (a head covering worn by some Muslim females) and food that American-born students may be unfamiliar with, such as Tahchin (an Iranian rice cake). By doing so, books become passports for exploring multiple cultures.

*RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES IS NOT NEW, BUT IS RAPIDLY GROWING.* Resettlement of refugees in America has continued since the end of the second World War (UN Refugee Agency, 2015). Guiding resettlement to the United States is the U.S. Refugee Law of 1980, signed into law by President Jimmy Carter. *The American Presidency Project* shares Carter's (1980) *Refugee Act of 1980 Statement on Signing S. 643 Into Law*, confirming that, although the law aligned with the

definition of the 1951 Refugee Convention, it revised previous provisions and admission policies in the United States. Outlined within Carter's statement is the affirmation that the U.S. Federal Government will take responsibility for resettling refugees and help refugees become self-sufficient and contributing members of society. These historical facts are only a few demonstrating that resettlement in the United States has a long history.

Not only is resettlement an established process with a history, but in recent years there has been an increase in the number of refugees relocating to the United States. According to the most recently published statistics from the UN Refugee Agency (2014), in 2014 there were 48,911 refugees resettled in the United States, and this number increased to 52,583 in 2015 (UN Refugee Agency, 2015). This increase is important to note because it allows educators to foresee the increasing need to share and discuss multicultural books featuring refugee characters.

**Action item.** When sharing books featuring refugee characters, a teacher can choose books from different time periods to demonstrate that refugee resettlement is a part of history. For example, the theme of persevering through hardship guides the WWII story of *The Cat's in Krasinski Square* (Hesse, 2004) and is also an important lesson in the more recent story of *Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan* (Winter, 2009). Sharing books that represent various time periods helps students understand that third country resettlement is not a remote practice of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but instead an act of compassion that has been practiced for several decades.

*RESETTLEMENT TO THE UNITED STATES IS A LENGTHY PROCESS.* Ott (2011) shares that third country resettlement can take a minimum of two years to sometimes, the greater of twenty years. Furthermore, Ott reminds us that the United States offers "a relatively quick path to permanent rights with the requirement to apply for permanent alien status after one year, with the ability to apply for citizenship after five years, and with automatic citizenship to children born on the territory" (2011, p. 4). The years spent in refugee camps are not without experiences. Many refugees are forced to pick up the threads of their lives and keep on living while they wait out the process. Many children attend the schools in the camps, which are run by the UN Refugee Agency, Caritas, and other agencies. Most of the camp schools are quite basic, as their goals are to provide the children with a rudimentary education and teach them some English. As such, when they arrive in the United States, they bring with them memories of camp life.

**Action item.** Discussing the sequence of events and the timeline of stories is important, but it has additional importance when sharing a book that portrays refugee characters and the multiple places they have called home. Discussing with students the lapse of time, multiple settings, and the change in the characters' emotions can assist American students in gaining a greater understanding of this lengthy process. A book that illustrates long periods of time moving from camp to camp is *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* (Williams, 2005), while *Four Feet, Two Sandals* (Williams & Mohammed, 2007) provides a deeper look into one camp placement.

*REFUGEES HAVE RIGHTS.* The 1951 Refugee Convention, despite its critiques over the years, has remained the cornerstone of refugee protection. As summarized in the second edition of the *Handbook of International Law* (Aust, 2010), the documents emphasize the protection of refugees

from political or other forms of persecution and are further underpinned by fundamental principles like non-discrimination, nonrefoulement, and non-penalization. Furthermore, the documents list the minimum standards for treatment without prejudice, including access to the courts, primary education, and work; as well as the provision of documentation (e.g., a refugee travel document in passport form). Such information is valuable for institutions, teachers, and students to know, as it can assist them in understanding the changing demographics in their schools.

**Action item.** It is important for teachers to be vigilant as to how other children behave toward refugee children. Framing read alouds and discussions to support these rights and not to contradict them can influence the relationships among students. The role of teachers is of paramount importance since they become the agents to help both groups learn about these rights and the rights of all individuals. Although a discussion of rights can develop from many books; it seems a natural fit for books in which the characters are in the process of relocating to the United States. One such book is *The Memory Coat* (Woodruff, 1999).

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program offers a relatively quick path to permanent residency and adjustment to the United States, with the major objectives of economic success, community involvement, and local integration. Even though the treatment of refugees is guided by the 1951 Refugee Convention (Aust, 2010) and the U.S. Refugee Law of 1980 (Carter, 1980), the success of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program partly depends on the response of the American community towards refugees. There is an average of 60,000 refugees resettled in the United States every year and about 30,000 of these are children (UN Refugee Agency, 2017). As global conflict escalates, it is likely that the number of displaced people worldwide will rise. With this increase, it is expected that the classrooms in America will become even more diverse. From administration, to teachers and students, it is everyone's responsibility to promote social inclusion of all beings within the school environment.

This article focused on using multicultural literature as a pathway for generating discussions about social inclusion in the elementary classroom. Martens and colleagues (2015) remind us that multicultural literature "encourages learners to respect and accept people who are different [from] themselves" (p. 609). Therefore, it seems natural to use these texts as mirror books and window books to communicate such lessons to young readers. By doing so, it seems likely that the classroom will not only be made of diverse populations, but will also be a socially inclusive environment.

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# DIFFERENCES OF ENGLISH AND SPANISH GRAMMARS, AND THEIR BEARING ON AMERICAN AND MEXICAN CULTURES

ARTURO ZÁRATE RUIZ

## ABSTRACT

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*In this article, I notice that English now is a dominant language and I highlight some features which actually make English language great. I also consider that these facts may lead a Spanish language user wrongly believe that applying English peculiar grammatical strengths to Spanish would make Spanish a better means of communication: he would rather lose the opportunity of using Spanish language in its best, and prevent him to enjoy a Hispanic culture invigorated by this best use of Spanish language. To avoid this problem, I identify and recommend some Spanish peculiar features that make it strong in its own way, and make it a very rich means of communication.*

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It may not be surprising that, being fair, a person acknowledges that some features of another language make it in part objectively better than his native language. Indeed, every lect or even language has features which may make it better or worse because of the features themselves, if compared the lect or language with another that is different, and if the lects or languages are assessed with specific criteria. For example, Castilians usually pronounce “z” and “s” Spanish sounds differently. Mexicans usually pronounce both as an “s” sound. Mexican Spanish is thus impoverished because of the resulting ambiguity at the time of saying, for instance, “poso” and “pozo”. Moreover, Mexicans should learn the spelling of these words, something a Castilian speaker does not need to do because it is clear for him the spelling for the differentiated sound. Also, Mexicans rarely address another person or persons using “vos” or “vosotros”. They use “usted”, or “ustedes”. Therefore, they do not use either the possessive “vuestro” or “vuestrós”. Then, they should use the possessive “su” and “sus”. To avoid ambiguity in a context of many persons, they should supply lengthy clarifications: “su de usted”, “su de ustedes”, “su de él”, “su de ella”, “su de ellos”, “su de ellas”, something that Castilian speakers do not need to do since they keep the use of “vos” and “vosotros”, and consequently the use of “vuestro” and “vuestrós”. Unless the ambiguity of these cases is aimed, we cannot speak of Mexican Spanish as a better lect than Castilian Spanish in terms of these features.



Likewise, if compared languages instead of lects, we may find that English is by no means ambiguous concerning the third person possessive (“his”, “her”, “their”), whereas Spanish keeps the ambiguity of the possessive “su”. Yet, Spanish speakers still can address a second person with an intimate “tú” or the dignified “vos” or “usted”, whereas modern English has lost the formal treatment and only keeps what is now the informal treatment, “you”. Although one may praise this loss as something favoring equality, the lack of a formal second person in English requires from speakers to use additional words to express distinct treatment, such as the words “Sir”, and “Ma’am”, something optional in Spanish because “vos” or “usted” already imply this dignified treatment.

Now, it should not be surprising that the same person who acknowledges some superior features in a foreign language nonetheless prefers his native language because of familiarity and a resultant ease in speaking, especially if he addresses people who deeply share his culture and language. Besides, a Mexican pronouncing Castilian “z” sounds would sound affected, the more so if he then loses the cultural background enriching the Mexican lect and lacks the cultural background enriching the Castilian lect.

Yet, it may be disappointing that this same person ignores the good features that make his native language great because of being dazzled with the good features of another language, or simply dazzled because the other language is a dominant one.

This may happen with some Spanish speakers on face of the dominance and success of English language in the world, the more so if Spanish is a heritage language in the speakers’ country. They may stop enjoying the virtues of Spanish because of relishing on English language accomplishments. They may even adapt Spanish to English usage, so trying to achieve the same accomplishments in their own tongue, an effort which would be lacking because Spanish is not equal to English—an effort which may rather impoverish Cervantes’s speech by, let’s forward an apparently trivial example, changing a “¡feliz año nuevo!”, for a “feliz ano nuevo!”—. At the end, these nearsighted speakers may overlook that each language differently benefits the process of communication, something that in its turn affects culture in a distinct way.

In this article, I notice that English now is a dominant language and I highlight some features which actually make English language great. I also consider that these facts may lead a Spanish language user wrongly believe that applying English peculiar grammatical strengths to Spanish would make Spanish a better means of communication: he would rather lose the opportunity of using Spanish language in its best, and prevent him to enjoy a Hispanic culture invigorated by this best use of Spanish language. To avoid this problem, I identify and recommend some Spanish peculiar features that make it strong in its own way, and make it a very rich means of communication.

## ENGLISH AS A DOMINANT LANGUAGE

Today, English language plays a most important role in the world. It is the common language on earth, the international business language, the language of sciences, the language of innovation and technology, the language of mass culture and media. Some historical reasons are advanced to explain this role. One is the rise of the British Empire. Another is the English colonization of the territories which later become the United States of America. It is also said, among other causes, that after World War II, the United States became the leading country in science, technology, economy, trade, and many other fields because its competition, Europe, then was massively destroyed (Gimeno, 2001; D'Amore, 2007; Hammond, 2014). Hana Valíková explains how English became a dominant language with additional details:

*In the case of English we speak of an indirect diffusion, that is, the language does not disseminate through the people but through developments and the innovations in several fields: scientific, technical, mass media, trade, films, etc. Also in the last decades the great development of the computer science, that has a close relation with English language, contributes to its enormous importance for the whole world (Valíková, 2007: pp. 10).*

Alex Hammond brings up another factor which makes English attractive and popular: it is “cool”, he says, to the point of being applied to another language because of the belief that doing so makes other language messages as persuasive as in full English language, and on the belief that by doing so the message’s persuasiveness is homologized in the whole world (Hammond, 2014). In this case, English language is approached as a superior tongue, leading other language peoples apply English grammar to their own languages in order to make their language better.

At any rate, Fernando A. Navarro notices that the Anglicization of Spanish actually is underway and goes beyond “bypass”, “piercing”, “test”, “airbag”, “container”, “spa”, and other loanwords and loanblends, since it also takes place in spelling, in typography, and broadly in syntax (Navarro, 2008). Moreover, other scholars notice that it is now happening in the writing of sciences in Spanish, for example, in the fields of medicine (Rubio, 2009), economy (Russo 2008), library science (Martínez, 2002), and law (Santamaría, 2008; Borja, 2000), moreover, in film and television dubbing and making (Gómez, 2001), and generally in most businesses, mass media, news media, advertising, sports, digital media, and popular culture (Hammond 2014; Gimeno, 2001; Posteguillo, 2002; Valíková, 2007).

Although, according to Francisco Gimeno Menéndez, “the analysis of English influences obviously revealed that the impact of English was greater on written Spanish in the United States than on Spanish in the monolingual Spanish-American countries of the sample”, English dominance has been described by Rosa-Triantafilian Ngini (2011) as not endangering Spanish as a heritage language in the United States, yet. The reason, she says, is immigration:

*Only if immigration is stopped, and all communication with the Hispanic countries is cut off, could we speak of the formation of a language other than Spanish and English, but that circumstance does not appear to occur in the future (Nginios, 2011).*

Be it as it may, Maryann Neilson Parada warns that Spanish speakers already living in countries with a dominant language different than Spanish would gradually abandon their heritage language in favor of the dominant one:

*It is well documented that the minority status of Spanish creates a context of reduced input and production for minority language youth who, although generally orally proficient, readily become dominant in the majority language. The acquisition of the societal language at the expense of the minority language has been shown to impede successful inter-generational language transmission and to generally result in a complete shift to the majority language by the third generation (Parada, 2016: pp. 2).*

The rise of a Spanglish as a new language and as an alternative to the dominant language is not clear, yet, according to Marta Fairclough:

*Spanglish in the United States—she says—is far from completing this process of grammaticalization. The controversial Spanglish seems to be a sporadic phenomenon, whose use is very personal and extremely difficult to quantify (Fairclough, 2003).*

Without this alternative, Hispanic culture may be lost along with the loss of Spanish language in the United States, as Rosa-Triantafilian Nginios says that some people fearfully believe (Nginios 2011, pp. 125).

Now, English, as a dominant language, not only influences bilingual communities, it also affects monolingual societies who speak other tongues in a way that is described as detrimental:

*The spread of English—says Francisco Gimeno—as a language of science, technology, and economics involves a displacement of the other European languages, and poses a risk of provoking situations of broad diglossia and linguistic conflict. The social media (and especially the print media) appear as one of the basic drivers of a globalization of culture and Anglophilia, which has boosted the use of a specific lingua franca within a global society. (Gimeno, 2001).*

This diglossia may mean not only a dominance of English language over another language, or an English linguistic colonialism which replaces another language by English itself. It may also mean an epistemic colonialism which imposes a dominating world view, through language, over the dominated linguistic communities (Mingolo, 1992). Nations closer to the United States may be more affected by this problem. Anna Maria D'Amore says:

*Although the impact of American English on Mexican Spanish is not greater than in other areas as physically close or politically linked to the United States as Puerto Rico or Panama, it is likely that the use of English language loans is more frequent in Mexico than in other parts of Latin America. (D'Amore, 2007)*

## ENGLISH “COOL” GRAMMAR AS A DOMINATING FACTOR

Now, there are very attractive features in English grammar—Hammond (2014) may call them “cool”—which may contribute to English dominance over other languages.

For example, English words often are impressively brief, at least, in their writing if compared with other languages, let’s say, Spanish:

bat.....	murciélago
friend.....	amigo
food.....	comida
man.....	hombre
knee.....	rodilla

English economy is revealed in news reports and editorials if compared their extension with other language versions. Then, English usually is briefer:

Spanish	English
<p><b>Lo que el Presidente de México debe hacer</b></p> <p>MEXICO CITY — El presidente Enrique Peña Nieto ha mostrado un liderazgo notable al lograr la aprobación de reformas claves destinadas a reanimar la economía e impulsar el desarrollo del país. Pero ahora debe actuar rápidamente para restablecer su credibilidad política y limitar el daño moral a su investidura. La crisis actual lo demanda. (Krauze 2014a).</p>	<p><b>What Mexico’s President Must Do</b></p> <p>MEXICO CITY — President Enrique Peña Nieto has shown remarkable leadership in passing key reforms to reanimate the economy and further the development of Mexico. But now he must act quickly to re-establish his political credibility and limit damage to his moral standing. The present crisis requires it. (Krauze 2014b).</p>

You may make similar findings when visiting archeological sites in Mexico. There you will find signboards with information about the specific sites, offered in several modern and ancient languages by the History and Anthropology National Institute. There, English wins

over other languages because of its concision. It surely requires the shortest space to explain the pyramids and other buildings you visit.

You may identify a reason for this brevity on the fact that most English words are made with only one syllable. In comparison, most Spanish words are made with three syllables. Thus, arithmetically, English is a more powerful instrument to compact written or spoken information. Although not a rule, a larger amount of news usually fits in an English newspaper or radio program than in a Spanish media. In a similar way, the larger amount of information compacted in a slow English movie segment requires a Spanish translator to speed up in order to offer the same amount of information in the same time.

An additional factor for economy may be that John Locke's ideal of creating one word, not roundabouts, to designate every single thing apparently is coming to its accomplishment in English language (Locke 1999, 387). The gigantic features of English language dictionaries may suggest us so.

Certainly, Locke's ideal actually is impossible because of the conceptual character of any language. Nonetheless, the more "concrete" words a language enjoys, as it seems it is the case with English, the more this language has a descriptive power. Instead of just sharing ideas or concepts, it also prompts images of what is concretely referred. Thus instead of saying "it is a plant fragrance", a skilled speaker says "it is a rosemary fragrance".

Moreover, the simplicity of English language morphology makes amazingly easy to create new terms or to import them from other languages. English language incorporates words from other languages as easy as they come and as they sound. English has imported the word "goulash" as it came from Hungarian. Such a novelty would be difficult to accomplish in Spanish because its morphology is not as friendly as English's. What would be the Spanish version of "goulash"? "Gulá"? Let's look at other imported terms:

English		Spanish	
Goulash	Goulash	Goulash	¿gulá?
			¿guisado?
carnet	carnet	carnet	carné
ratatouille	ratatouille	ratatouille	¿ratatuil?
			¿menestra?
yihad	yihad	yihad	¿yijad?
tsunami	tsunami	tsunami	¿sunami?
			¿maremoto?

Spanish is not as receptive as English is. English language is a sponge for importing foreign terms. Moreover, thanks to its world leadership in economy, science, technology, and mass culture, English language diligently produces new words every day. Its dictionaries are up-to-date, easy to check, and, most importantly, amazingly rich, perhaps the richest dictionaries on earth. They are a good substitute for heavy weights in the gym.

Some friends of mine who are poets have assured me that it is even easier to versify and to write songs in English than in Spanish. If you versify in English language, you achieve stress by accentuating long vowels or one syllable terms. If you versify in Spanish language, you usually work with three syllable terms and achieve stress by the more complicated system of accentuating tonic vowels.

English	Spanish
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One vowel words, very common.</li> <li>Stress on long vowels or on one vowel words</li> </ul> <p>It's <b>raining</b>, it's <b>boring</b>, The <b>old</b> man is <b>snoring</b>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three vowel words, very common.</li> <li>Tonic accent</li> </ul> <p>Recuerde el <b>alma</b> dormida, <b>avive</b> el <b>seso</b> y despierte contemplando...</p>

### WHEN ENGLISH GRAMMAR PRAISE IS EXAGGERATED

In any case, the most common praise to English language refers to its power of speaking right to the point, without roundabouts. And even though I usually do not have any problem with believing it, I nonetheless start doubting it when professors, like Robert G. Bander (1978, 3), explain this power not with English words but with graphics. Alas!, to prove their point, they dare to speak of inexistent language families, such as the "Oriental" one, as if Japanese and Mandarin Chinese languages could be placed together in a same category:

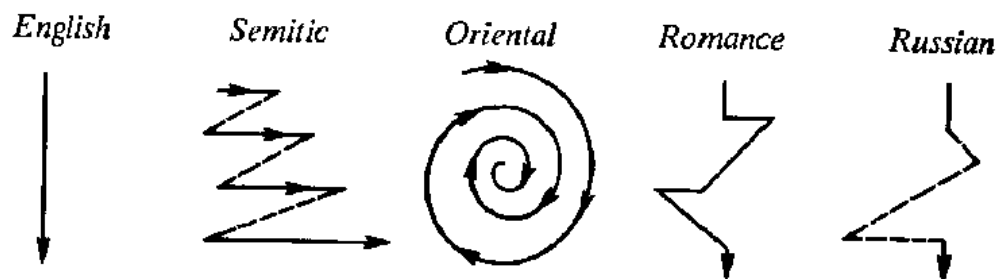


Diagram from Robert B. Kaplan, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education," *Language Learning*, 16, nos. 1 and 2: 15.



And my doubts increase when friends of mine try to prove English directness by saying that English language does not require as many gestures from a speaker as other language do. The fact is that each language enjoys its own repertoire of gestures. But the unknown language always seems to suffer excessive gesticulation because, while the listener does not understand what is said, he still watches the speaker's gestures and thinks that they are exaggerated or meaningless.

Nonetheless, according to my own appreciation, English language at least requires a wider range of gestures than Spanish in order to follow the pitch of each pronounced syllable:

### English

Hello! Are you feeling OK?  
E, F, C. D, E, F, F, E, F, G.

### Spanish

¡Hola! ¿Te sientes bien?  
E, C. D, E, D, E, E.

Yet, my point here is not to prove that English language requires more gestures. In fact, although a foreigner may say that an American movie is overwhelmed by gesticulation, an American viewer may fairly disagree and say that such gesticulation is appropriate in his language. My point rather is to notice that a foreigner who is used to watch mostly American movies because of American mass media global dominion may end imitating American gestures in his own language in spite that these gestures do not correspond to his own native language. Such gesticulation would turn meaningless and pollute the native language power of communication.<sup>1</sup> Unwittingly applying the rules of gesticulation or any other rule of a dominant language to another language may impoverish the other language, instead of enriching it, be such rule the English easy importing of new words, its "direct" sentence structure, its brevity because of its short words, just to mention some few (Navarro, 2008; Valíková, 2007).

### SPANISH LANGUAGE

But let's come back to the issue of language's directness. As said, English language is often described as superior in its capability of going right to the point. Honestly, I prefer not to question this power. Yet, there is something I would rather question: that other languages, for example Spanish, are not as capable as English in going right to the point.

In fact, not only English, but also Spanish and other languages can be direct in addressing an issue. What makes at least Spanish different is that directness is a choice, not something necessary. We can appreciate this by examining Spanish syntax. Spanish syntax is superbly rich. In English language, sentence structure requires an inevitable order: subject-verb-

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning the influence of English on movie dubbing and making, see Gómez (2001).

complement. The only possibility is “The cat eats mice”. In Spanish language, we surely can accomplish such an order: “El gato come ratones”. Nonetheless, there are many other options for structuring that sentence: “El gato ratones come”, “Come ratones el gato”, “Come el gato ratones”, “Ratones el gato come”, and “Ratones come el gato”. Spanish can even offer contextual statements, impossible in English language, such as “Come ratones” or simply say “Los come”, or “Se los come”.

English	Spanish
<b>The cat eats mice.</b>	<b>El gato come ratones.</b>
(He eats mice).	<b>El gato ratones come.</b>
(She eats mice).	<b>Ratones come el gato.</b>
(It eats mice).	<b>Ratones el gato come.</b>
(He eats them).	<b>Come el gato ratones.</b>
(She eats them).	<b>Come ratones el gato.</b>
(It eats them).	(Él come ratones).
	(Ella come ratones).
	(Él los come).
	(Ella los come).
	(Come ratones).
	(Los come).
	(Se los come).
	(Cómeselos).
	(Cómelos). <sup>2</sup>

It is true that Spanish multiple possibilities of sentence structure may lead to ambiguity. For example, “Se come un gato un ratón” can be translated as “A cat eats a mouse”, and also as “A mouse eats a cat”. Yet, this ambiguity helps Spanish speakers acquire the healthy habit of

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<sup>2</sup> Spanish sentence structure spans from very analytic statements to very synthetic ones.

checking a sentence meaning with its context and even with reality. Then, Spanish listeners should be more active than English listeners in discerning not only what is said but also what is referred by a statement. That helps them more often keep an eye on reality, as I will discuss later.

In any case, you also have less possibilities of phrasing in English language than in phrasing Spanish, too. If you use English language, you can only say “a great man”. If you use Spanish language, you can say “un gran hombre” and “un hombre grande”. Then, you will notice that the difference affects not only order, it also affects meaning.

Therefore, Spanish syntax many choices are not inconsequential. In fact, they allow you to express different meanings, even if they are only a nuance. A first glance may make us think that the following sentences are equal in meaning: “La paz es el respeto al derecho ajeno entre los individuos como entre las naciones” and “Entre los individuos como entre las naciones, el respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz” (Juárez, 1867). However, their different sentence structure, which is possible in Spanish, makes the first statement present “peace” to the listener as something whose clear definition will follow, whereas the second statement present “peace” as a conclusion, as something discovered after comparing equity among individuals with equity among nations. Thus, the force found in Benito Juárez’s apothegm does not spring only from its sonorousness, but also from not ignoring the shades in meaning.

Neither is inconsequential Spanish language refusal of any easy introduction of new terms from innovation or from other languages. Spanish morphology is at stake, and any innovation should respect this morphology in order to make the new word, once introduced, reach its full potentiality by means of derivation. Thanks to Spanish morphology capability for derivation, the single term introduced becomes many. “Clon” was introduced in Spanish language by importing the English term “clone”. Previously, English language had imported this term from the Greek “κλων”, “a twig”, in order to mean, at least, “a plant or animal that is grown from one cell of its parent and that has exactly the same genes as its parent” (Merriam-Webster). By adapting “clone” to Spanish morphology and making the word become “clon”, we keep the new term open to many derivations, for example, “clonar”, “clonesco”, “clonez”, “clonado”, “clonante”, “clonoso”, “clonadamente”, “reclonar”, “clonillo”, “clonote”, etc. Let’s consider another example. Latin language lends “curriculum” and “curricula” to English language, one term being the singular, and the other, the plural. English language takes these terms exactly as they come from Latin. Often Spanish speakers are asked to import these terms in the same way as English speakers do. I do not agree. I think that the borrowed term should be adapted to Spanish morphology. Then, multiple derivations will follow: “currículo”, “currículos”, “extracurricular”, “curriculito”, “curriculote”, “se extracurriculeó”, etc. Spanish language multiple possibilities of derivation because of its morphology are alien to English language, in spite that, today, English language usually is the lender and Spanish language the borrower of terms. English language is not as rich in word derivation as Spanish because English morphology is poorer than Spanish one. And although English language may claim a larger amount of words than Spanish, by displaying its bulky dictionaries, such a display may be misleading: Spanish dictionaries do not include on its pages the multiple derivations from the

root terms. In fact, by just consulting a root term in a Spanish thin dictionary, Spanish speakers can create multiple derivations by adding or replacing particles. If these derivations were included in Spanish dictionaries, these dictionaries would reach no end.

Therefore, if a Spanish speaker thinks necessary to import new terms from science or from other languages, he should be careful of doing so in the correct way. So was achieved when Spanish borrowed the term “carnet” from French to refer a special identity card: it became “carné”. “Carné” plural was adequately adapted to Spanish noun structure: “carnés”. Such adequate adaptation has not happened, yet, with other new terms, for example “cassette”, a word referring a special tool for audio recording. This word ideal Spanish spelling should be “casé”, and a well-adapted plural should be “casés”, not “cassettes” or “cassettts”.

Spanish also is outstanding because of its phonetic and orthographic simplicity. A wrong pronunciation does not necessarily lead to a misunderstanding because the listener only is required to distinguish five vowels, no the many of English language. Moreover, it is easier to learn writing in Spanish than in English language. Spanish writing rules are clear and reasonable. Indeed, they are codified in what is called “orthography”. English language hardly has orthographic rules. You learn to write not by reasoning the rules but by memorizing the spelling of words.

Spanish	English
Few vowel sounds	Many vowel sounds
A.....a	A pat, pay, care, father, about.
E.....e	E pet, be
I.....i	I pit, pie, pier
O.....o	O pot, toe, paw, out, took, boot
U.....u	U cut, urge
Consonants' sounds almost always correspond to consonants' writing. Orthographic rules are reasonable.	Other sounds: feu, schön, tu, über There are 21 consonant letters for 24 consonant sounds. Correct writing relies on memory and spelling.

So, if new words are introduced in Spanish, let's introduce them properly so that Spanish writing rules continue being clear and reasonable. For example, “shampoo” should be introduced into Spanish as “champú”.

In any case, let's acknowledge that English language is the richest language in word number. Samson may find huge English dictionaries very useful in the gym. Even so, Spanish language is superior than English in combining its so-said few words to render many meanings. Jorge de Montemayor (*Diana* 1561), who was someone close to a Don Juan, illustrates this power when speaking about lovesickness: "¿Qué más honra puede ser/ que morir del mal que muero?" In this expression, "morir" is certainly much more than saying "I love you!" to a girlfriend. Saint Teresa of Avila would mean something very different, her thirst of God, with almost the same phrase: "muero porque no muero". With only one phrase, Baltasar Gracián, a concision master, intentionally says both: that he was chained and that he was accused of erring: "cargándome de hierros" (*El Criticón* I, 8). He does so because, if read aloud, the word "hierros" sounds as "yerros", too. Also, Gracián illustrates how plain and well written Spanish language can be briefer than English language in reporting:

When Cicero arrived at Pompey's military camp, Pompey asked him where he had left his son-in-law Piso, the husband of Tullia. Cicero replied instantly: "He is staying in the camp of your father-in-law Caesar". Cicero found a parallel between Pompey's behavior and Pompey's very imputation to him. Cicero squeezed it as a reply.

Preguntándole Pompeyo a Cicerón, cuando llegó a su campo, que dónde dejaba a su yerno Pisón, marido de Tulia, respondió pronto: "Queda en el campo de su suegro César". Halló la paridad de lo mismo que le oponía y exprimióla por respues

To some degree, Gracián's success in concision springs from Spanish language power to suppress needless words because the few ones used imply what is the relevant information. English should rather be explicit. For example, in the cited Spanish text, Gracián suppresses the nouns because they are implied by verb conjugation. The listener is in charge of discovering what seemingly is hidden in the expression.

Now, to praise one language because of its directness and explicitness—because of this language going right to the point—may only mean to praise a language too much restricted to declarative statements.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, underrating another language because of its roundabouts may only mean ignoring this language capability of inviting the listener to be in charge of reaching the meaning of what is said.

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<sup>3</sup> Dwight Longenecker bewails American English usage because of its common avoidance of subtlety. Longenecker thus speaks of "America the Literal" (Longenecker 2011).

One language assumes that the challenge is to transmit preexisting information to a passive listener, and ideally works as a syringe does. The other language assumes that the orator's challenge is to share with his listener the responsibility of producing meaning. Then, the orator offers words that the listener should decipher by himself in order to reach understanding.

By using one language, the speaker makes it clear that his role is separate and different to the listener's. In a patronizing fashion, he deigns to supply information and wisdom to who seems to be ignorant people listening below. By using the other language, the speaker walks together with his listeners as brothers do in the quest of enlightenment.

One language supposedly possesses one different word for each different thing. The other language combines its supposedly few words not only to unveil the universe but also to reach a friend. For a Mexican world play, not rarely profane, is not only about using filthy terms that some people South of the Border often like, it is also about exploiting Spanish rich morphology and syntax to its limits in their spicy conversation. "It is not the same thing 'El chango de Tapachula' than 'Chula, tápate el chango'", a person from Tepito notices. A driver bluffs about something different than his old truck when he posts on it "Pujando, pero llegando".

I will never deny English speakers the ability of telling gags, but it is when listening Spanish speakers that it seems that their speech is an unending jest. And it is not that Spanish speech necessarily is humorous, it is that their language often is cryptic and demands from the listener to decipher what is said as it were a joke.

So strong is this demand that we may consider Spanish language rude, not because of Mexican filthy raillery, but because the listener is to some degree forced to undress his thoughts without even pronouncing a word. By simply taking notice of sage dicta, the listener makes clear that he himself reaches a specific understanding of what has been said to him in a cryptic way. "El tiempo y yo, a otros dos", Emperor Charles V spoke defiantly, and the listener got, by himself, that victory is achieved by patience (Gracián, *Discreto* 3). "No hay cosa más fácil que el conocimiento ajeno", Baltasar Gracián pondered (*Discreto* 8), and his interlocutor guessed that achieving self-knowledge is the most difficult task. Neither the Emperor nor the writer made manifest their ideas to the listeners. Therefore, their listeners were in charge of unveiling what was said. They were the ones supplying the specific understanding, too. Thus, in doing so they silently disclosed their mind to the speakers.

Many other Spanish conversations take place in a similar way. By letting listeners grasp of what was not explicitly said, we make our listeners, even unwillingly, reveal to us their thoughts once they reach understanding. If we rather declare every bit of information, as a right to the point English speech does, we can never be sure if the listener himself reaches the same understanding of what is said. But, by wittingly using ordinary Spanish language, we can know so. For the only way that listeners can reach awareness of something not explicit is by guessing it themselves. What is more, your listener also discovers what ideas you have in your mind without having you made them overt. And he discovers that he and you share an understanding. So, both of you look at each other



eyes and smile, without needing to speak a word, as if promising not to reveal other people your little secret. Each one become an accomplice of the other, moreover, you become great friends.

Such capability is, I think, the greatest virtue of Spanish language. Well spoken, Spanish language, one with rich sentence and word structure, builds up brotherhood. Do not cripple Spanish language with restrictions imported from other languages, such as reducing its functions to declarative statements and right to the point sentences. Do not tie it with a straight jacket just because another language use is currently fashionable. For a good Spanish language use builds up political communities, and even nations. Such is the Hispanic American nation, the largest and most lively nation in the world.

Let's notice an additional virtue of Spanish language, related to its so-called roundabouts. Whereas declarative languages foster relativism, cryptic ones are the antidote. For the first let a speaker only express overtly his thoughts, and the second challenges the listener to unveil the saying by contrasting it with an alluded and objective reality, a reality that the speaker must acknowledge if he truly intends to reach communication. Jorge Negrete, a very manly Mexican actor, sang a song: "Dicen que soy hombre malo... porque me comí un durazno de corazón colorado". If this statement is deciphered literally, following only what it overtly expresses, Jorge Negrete's sin was gluttony: he ate a peach. However, if this statement is contrasted with the real context of Jorge Negrete's reputation as a Don Juan, something that can be objectively checked, then Jorge Negrete's sin was lust. Thus, when we allow our listener to check a statement's meaning with reality, our communication bet is for realism, not relativism, which would happen if we only share our thoughts.

To finish, let me refer something shared to me by an American scholar who is a fan of German language. He thinks that Spanish language has a greater virtue than building up brotherhood or being an antidote to relativism. He said that its greatest virtue is its distinction between the verb "ser" and the verb "estar". Not even Latin language has such distinction. Some languages enjoy only the verb "to be", which helps people in the task of philosophy. Some languages even lack the verb "to be". Only Spanish language, my friend said, let people do philosophy with "ser" and distinguish what is just circumstantial with "estar". For it is not the same "es dulce" than "está dulce". In English language you can only say "It's sweet", and in German "Es ist süß." "The word *is* implies eternal sameness", regret Ronald B. Adler and Neil Town (1987: pp. 169), as they prescribe English speakers to add plenty of qualifiers in order not to shock a child with a "you are a bad boy". This would never happen in Spanish thanks to the distinction between "ser" and "estar". For that reason, this German language fan said, he would give up half of German words (German language richness rest on its very abundant and precise terms) if German language imported the distinction of what is circumstantial from Spanish language, which is only possible with the verb "estar".

### SOME FINAL REMARKS

Saying all this does not imply that every change in a language and every contact of languages is undesirable. In fact, because of this contact, languages often are enriched with new words and expressions (D'Amore, 2009). The United States is today the leading country in scientific and technological developments, and obstructing the importing of new words and new expressions into

Spanish because they come from English language may result into an obstruction of the new developments themselves.

Yet, this change and these loans should come without causing diglossia and without reducing the potentials of Spanish grammar itself. If Spanish grammar is crippled, English dominance will not only take place by imposing a world view to Spanish speakers, it will also take place in a more disastrous way: by replacing the wonderful lens and the lively social interaction through which a world view is acquired by Spanish speakers, Spanish language itself.

Much can be done to preserve what is good of Spanish language and to welcome true novelties. Alberto Gómez Font says:

*Spanish is the most lively and dynamic of the great languages of communication... Media are increasingly adapted to globalization and becoming less local and more international. That makes the media feel necessary an international Spanish which is good for all. My proposal is to establish regulatory agreements on Spanish, in a coordinated work of institutions, style books authors, and researchers on the lexicon of the cultured norm in the different Hispanic capitals (Avendaño 2005).*

Fernando Lázaro also says:

*The ideal would be the development of language agreements common to all media, which would not have to hinder the differences of style between different media. With a single deck it is possible to play very different games, including the solitaire. To this end, it would be of the utmost importance the collaboration of journalists, who today have the power of language, and the Academy, which perhaps enjoys authority (and does not advocate the "academic style" to which, as a disqualifying topic, is attributed) (Lázaro, 1993).*

Since 1997, the Association of Spanish Language Academies has held meetings with representatives of every Hispanic nation to reach collective agreements on a common renewal and safeguarding of Spanish language. News agencies, newspapers, and generally mass media now establish rules for properly adapting new words and expressions into Spanish (Gómez, n. d.) Some successful efforts have been accomplished on the field of sports, particularly soccer (Rojas, 2012). This effort should also be achieved by scholarly media, especially in introducing new scientific terms and expressions in Spanish (Rubio, 2009; Russo 2008; Martínez, 2002; Santamaría, 2008; Borja, 2000).

In doing this, I recommend paying special attention to Spanish language structure. Focusing on it rather than on particular words or expressions may prevent too much zeal for a common language which may endanger the diversity of Spanish lects. As I have argued, it is Spanish rich syntax and morphology which makes this language great. And this syntax and morphology can properly empower every Spanish lect without threatening their variance.

This focus on Spanish language structure should be enforced in any educational environment, either one teaching languages separately, or another doing it by translanguaging, as proposed by Ofelia García (2012). Any good educational method for languages should aim at finally mastering the language strengths.

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# SHOW, DON'T TELL: READING WORKSHOP FOSTERS ENGAGEMENT AND SUCCESS

SHERYL LAIN

## ABSTRACT

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*This article details the secondary English teacher's application of a reader's workshop to teach literature.*

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I wish I'd learned to teach reading early in my career as an English teacher. Granted, I intuitively adjusted my instructional support for my students, such as reading aloud the complex text *Romeo and Juliet*, but I didn't consciously know much about the science of teaching reading.

Earlier, I assigned reading as homework and then got frustrated that students didn't read at home. I resorted to summarizing the text, lecturing, or building study guides—worksheets with blanks to fill in as students “read.” I didn't know how to set up my lessons with the clear intention of teaching students how to read literature. The reading workshop (see Table 1), coupled with more knowledge about reading strategies and processes, gave me a structure to teach literature *and* teach reading.

The workshop approach is not new. Before Donald Graves wrote *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (1983), my dad used the workshop approach in his shop class. He'd gather his students and demonstrate how to weld a trailer hitch before sending them forth to work on their own projects. Though the workshop model was prevalent in product-oriented classes, until recently, I did not use the reading workshop in my English class.

I believe that the workshop grows readers, crucial in today's schools where more than eight million secondary students read below grade level. Moreover, three thousand students—most with limited reading skills—drop out every day (NCTE, 2006). These drop-outs find reading troublesome and boring; their lockers are full of books they cannot read. Yet research shows that all adolescents can read (Allington, 2009) when teachers model strategies, offer diverse texts, hold discussions, and provide students the opportunities to process their thinking by writing, acting, and pursuing their own inquiries (NCTE, 2006). Reading workshop provides the structure for students to enhance their reading confidence, competence, and enjoyment.

But first a disclaimer: the workshop will not, all by itself, solve our students' reading issues. To make a difference, schools need to increase the amount of in-house reading time. According to John Goodlad (2004), high school students read about seven minutes a day. Students practice other



skills for hours, skills like driving, playing video games, and shooting baskets. This practice results in competence and enjoyment, without which students cannot be successful. So the classroom workshop isn't enough. If schools want competent, engrossed readers, they should provide an additional forty-five to sixty minutes of reading time during the day (Allington, 2009). However, because increasing school-wide reading is beyond my control, I want to teach reading while teaching my content in my own classroom.

Table 1  
*Basic Reading Workshop Template*

Segment	Activity
Connect	Remind students of what we learned prior and connect with today's lesson...
Mini lesson	Text to Model: _____  Tools: _____ (poster, journal, highlighter, post it notes, visual representation, discussion guide, etc.)
Guided Activity	Students turn to one another and take turn reading a paragraph apiece from the text and talking about the application of the strategy.
Link	Now, have students read on. Tell think about the strategy as they go.
Workshop Time/ Conferring	Confer with students about strategy and what they are thinking; keep some anecdotal notes
Content writing	Might have students do some quick writing in their academic journals, either what they noticed as they read or better yet how they connect the text with their own personal experiences.
Reminder	As they pack up to go at the end of the period, recap one or two key ideas to hold onto.

## A BIT OF READING KNOWLEDGE

Knowing some basic principles of reading instruction helps me grow readers. These principles include scaffolding, teaching reading strategies, balancing instruction from literal comprehension to inferential reasoning, and using a reading process.

Being mindful of scaffolding, I adjust my instructional support. For example, my homework reading assignments are near my students' independent reading levels, meaning they can read the text unassisted at about 95 percent accuracy. Challenging texts, on the other hand, require more classroom support. Armed with basic knowledge about text difficulty, I match my instructional support with my students' ability to read texts (Beers, 2001).

Besides knowing more about scaffolding my reading instruction, I understand reading strategies—what readers do in order to decode and comprehend. Research claims that strategy instruction

helps students grasp the full meaning of texts (Tovani, 2000). These strategies are actions such as visualizing, questioning, annotating, and interpreting, which I demonstrate, showing students how I think my way through text.

### **Six Traits and Bloom-like Strategies**

#### **Building Context**

*Knowing the author*  
*Noting the text features*  
*Recognizing the genre*  
*Seeing the structure/mode*  
*Realizing the historical time, cultural overtones, social issues*

#### **Decoding Words**

*Gaining fluency*  
*(Pause, articulation, varied pace, pitch, volume)*  
*Growing vocabulary*  
*Decoding punctuation*

#### **Comprehending Literally—Reading the lines**

*Retelling, Summarizing, Paraphrasing*  
*Questioning*  
*Visualizing*  
*Marking facts*  
*Predicting*

#### **Interpreting Inferences—Reading between the lines**

*Inferring/Wondering*  
*Analyzing*  
*Finding the universal themes/symbols*

#### **Synthesizing—Reading beyond the lines**

*Making something new—writing, discussing*  
*Making connections: text, self and world*

#### **Evaluating**

*Being metacognitive and monitoring oneself*  
*Figuring out the author's values and comparing to one's own*

*Figure 1. Six Traits of Reading mirroring Bloom's Taxonomy.*

Another tool to balance my reading instruction is Dwyer and Thompson's Six Traits of Reading (1999), heavily influenced by Bloom's taxonomy. This Bloom-like model balances literal and higher order thinking while mirroring the reading process (see Figure 1). Building context, the first rung on the Six Traits ladder, means that before students begin to read, I guide them to be conscious

about the context of the book. Is it a novel or a poem? Is it historical or current? Is it short or long? I show students that before readers read, they bring their background knowledge about the genre, author and subject to the text, so that, like Velcro, the text's message "sticks." Also, good readers know why they're reading. They have a purpose. Am I reading to learn how to adjust the wallpaper on my phone, or am I reading to learn the meaning of life? When students understand their purpose in reading, they are more able readers. The reading process exemplified in the Six Traits model begins before reading, when readers develop background knowledge and set a purpose.

Decoding is the second step in the process, according to the Six Traits model. Decoding-type lessons include reading pace: skimming or slowing down, re-reading, or relishing text. When I read poetry, for example, I read quickly and then go back to soak up more meaning, listening with my brain's inner ear. When reading a biology text, I annotate, using a highlighter or notes, and slow down to grasp unfamiliar words and syntax. I model what I do when I run into unfamiliar vocabulary, how I visualize scenes, how I recognize foreshadowing or comic relief. During reading, readers monitor their comprehension, gathering key ideas and supporting details.

After-reading activities are interpretation, synthesis and evaluation. Working at the interpreting level, students figure out the themes and claims; they stand back and get the big picture and consider the author's world view including bias, point of view, and veracity. When students synthesize, they connect their own experiences to the text, they check the text against other texts, and they apply what they've learned or experienced to create their own products, be it a poem or a Lego's robot. Evaluation means students compare and contrast the author's view with other thinkers, judging the usefulness of the text to oneself, and wondering about the author's values.

Clearly, reading process and reading strategies weave into Bloom's taxonomy. Also, this taxonomy echoes the national reading standards (2010), which ask students first to read closely, noting key ideas and details, and then to interpret themes, synthesize and evaluate.

## HOW THE WORKSHOP WORKS

To teach my students all the lessons I've learned about reading process and strategies, I use the workshop model that includes a mini-lesson, student reading time, and teacher conferencing (Bennett, 2007).

The mini-lesson is the first component of a workshop. My dad called this a demonstration. During the mini-lesson, students receive direct instruction, learning how to decode and comprehend text at increasingly sophisticated levels. Davey's (1983) think-aloud, a way to reveal what the teacher is thinking as he or she reads and makes sense of text, is an essential tool to *show, not tell*. Following the demonstration, I might guide pairs of students to practice together before launching into independent work. When students start to read silently, I walk among them, conferring: redirecting, asking questions, taking a few notes, or seeking teachable moments. Finally, I end the class period with a reminder of the day's lesson.

## SAMPLE LESSON

Because eighth graders struggle with bullying and its flipside, victimhood, I want to build a sense of community in my classroom early in the year through reading, writing, and discussing, activities that Jeff Wilhelm says have the potential to transform students' thinking and behaving (2010). I want my classroom to be a place where everyone belongs, where students can walk in and breathe more easily, where all students feel connected with something or someone: the teacher, other students and the literature.

Therefore, I select an engaging novel for the whole class to read, a novel that is not too difficult, reveals the story of a bully transformed, and creates the feeling of common experience in our room. I hope together we can build my students' capacity to feel empathy toward others. The book I select is the novel *Touching Spirit Bear* (Mikaelsen, 2001). In it, the main character, Cole, is a bully who beats up a weaker boy and almost kills him. Cole is taken to court and given the option of juvenile detention or Circle Justice—rehabilitation on an island where he has to learn to survive. Circle Justice is based on Native American practice. The Native American who takes him to the island gives him advice about how to survive and warns him of a massive bear that roams the island. In a spine-tingling scene, Cole is attacked by the bear and eventually learns to tame his anger and hatred.

I decide to use a companion text, the picture book, *Thank You Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco (1998) to begin the unit. The main character is the author as a school girl, who is bullied on the playground because she cannot learn to read. I like to use this picture book for my mini-lesson because it has a touching message, it is set in school where my students experience put-downs and attacks, and it is viewed by my students as nonthreatening. I see no sense in intimidating my readers at the start of the year. This unit uses a whole class novel and a picture book, but these are not the only text combinations possible during workshop. Other texts include self-selected novels, textbook snippets, classics, newspaper clippings, poems, and speeches.

During the first workshop lesson, I plan to introduce the theme of bullying and victimhood, read the picture book, and help students connect with literature by writing a quick anecdote about a time when they were bullied. To introduce the theme of bullying, I post a T-chart on the wall. I label the left side *Characteristics of Bullies* and ask students to list some. I record their words on the chart--*angry, impulsive, lacking empathy, aggressive, domineering, power-seeking*. After reading the book aloud, I ask students to return to the chart, adding words on the left column and putting checkmarks in the right column if these traits are exhibited by the bullies in the text.

When I finish reading the book aloud, I ask, "Isn't it astonishing what some people do with their lives in spite of obstacles? I am amazed by the stalwart human spirit." Then I ask students to jot a quick write in their journals. I offer some ideas. "I remember a time when I was bullied, and it changed my life. I bet you have similar memories. Let's write about a time when a teacher saved you or a time you bullied someone or an incident when you were bullied."

My goals with writing are to have students connect with the theme of the text and bring their own life experiences to our classroom (Daniels, 2007). I tell students the drill: we write like our hair is

on fire and we don't cross out or worry about correctness yet. We race along trying to capture this butterfly of memory before it flits away. I set a timer for five minutes, and I write, too, modeling on the white board. I read my quick write aloud and ask students to share with one another, perhaps in a pair share, to honor the words and experiences (Romano, 1987). This mini-lesson stretches into a maxi-lesson, but there is always another day when the lesson is short and the reading time is longer.

A subsequent lesson might be to hold a discussion. I might ask, "What makes kids bully and laugh at the victim? Are kids monsters, cruel and mean, born to be bad?" Serious questions like this deserve serious discussion involving all class members. My version of a Socratic Circle requires all students to speak and build on the speaker(s) who went before. The discussion rolls around the circle of desks with students keeping score that they contribute and that they tag onto the speaker who spoke before them.

*Anna: Well, I sure don't think all kids are monsters. I never bullied anyone in my life.*

*Sammy: Remember in third grade, Anna, when Jeremy fell on the playground and split his pants? I bet you laughed then. It's pretty hard to be perfect your whole life.*

*Taquisha: Well, I sorta agree with Anna cuz I'm pretty good about other people. I know what it's like to get teased. I was like that kid in the book and didn't learn to read until fourth grade and Mrs. Leshner took time to tutor me, just her and me. She saved me.*

*Grady: I think it's easier for girls to be good like Taquisha because boys hafta be, like, cool.*

Another mini-lesson might be to help students understand the structure of text. This is an important concept built into the Common Core reading standards. In this case the text structure is the narrative represented with a plotline, the familiar pattern of organizing narrative. I draw the plotline and explain how the text begins with exposition when Polacco gives background, introduces characters including the grandparents who love literacy, and presents the problem: when Trisha goes to school she doesn't immediately learn to read. As the plotline ascends, other events happen--the grandparents die, the mother moves her family to California, and Trisha continues to have trouble in school. The turning point is when a teacher finally notices Trisha's suffering and begins to help her. I show students that the story resolves at the tail end of the plotline when Trisha learns to read and in the epilogue, when Trisha, an adult now and an author, meets the teacher who turns her life around. "Thank you, Mr. Falker," Patricia Polacco writes. "Thank you."

I create these lessons to demonstrate the use of strategies, reading process, and Bloom's hierarchy of thinking. The goals of the lesson also include having students write and discuss in response to texts. After the mini-lessons, students have time to read the central text, the novel *Touching Spirit Bear*, and apply the strategy they've learned.

## CONCLUSION

Students learn how to read during reading workshop. I watch, I notice, I lean toward them to observe and fine tune my instruction. As an English teacher, I teach literature that ranges from nonfiction to fiction, from prose to poetry, and I teach students to respond to that literature by helping them be conscious about their thinking. In the end my goal is for students to know about the human journey revealed through literature and to love what reading can do for them all the rest of their lives as they deepen their comprehension and transform their hearts.

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# THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN READER'S THEATER INSTRUCTION

TIMOTHY RASINSKI, FAIDA STOKES, AND CHASE YOUNG

## ABSTRACT

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*Reader's Theater is a transformative and influential instructional tool for reading with far-reaching benefits for all students. Teachers are critical players in the use of Readers Theater in classroom; the effects of Reader's Theater are a direct result of a teacher's involvement. These effects include an increase in word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension development. This article outlines the facilitative role of a teacher as they incorporate Reader's Theater into their literacy rotation.*

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Children love performing for classmates and others. Reader's Theater is an ideal approach for capitalizing on this desire to perform and simultaneously improve students' reading outcomes. Moreover, the easy-to-implement nature of Reader's Theater make it an easily accessible activity for any classroom. In Reader's Theater students read and perform a script. However, Reader's Theater entails no memorization of lines, costumes, acting, props or scenery. The performing students simply stand in front of their audience with scripts in hand and read. Because of its minimalist nature, Reader's Theater requires readers to read with expression and fluency in order to convey meaning to an audience.

Reader's Theater is perhaps the most imaginative, instructional, literature technique available for students (Ratliff, 2006). Further, Reader's Theater is a diverse tool that benefits students across content areas. In 2007, Kinniburgh and Shaw proposed a strategic plan for using Reader's Theater using geology and other science-based content. Concurrent with this idea, Plankis, Ramsey, Ociepka and Martin (2016) demonstrated how this literacy-based activity could be used with students in grades 3-8, as a way to promote science themes such as sustainability and awareness of environmental problems. Vasinda and McLeod (2011) discovered the benefits of pairing podcasting with Reader's Theater, while maintaining the elements of this proven literacy strategy. Reader's Theater has, also, been used to promote fluency and enhance social development in children with learning disabilities at the elementary level (Garrett & O'Connor, 2010).

Ideally, Reader's Theater is structured around a weekly schedule, which can be easily adapted and modified to any literacy block. Throughout the week, Reader's Theater students are expected to rehearse (an authentic form of repeated readings) their assigned script to develop automaticity and prosody (expression in their oral reading). This rehearsal and the concurrent monitoring and feedback from the teacher is important, as it ensures the performance is meaningful and satisfying for the student and audience members. A key element in the success of this approach is the teacher, who has the role of facilitating and promoting reading fluency, comprehension, and engagement

throughout this process. In previous articles we have documented the value of Reader's Theater in promoting the abovementioned benefits in reading for students (Young & Rasinski, 2009; Young & Rasinski, in press). We have, also, considered how teachers and students can find and create scripts on their own (Young & Rasinski, 2011; Young & Rasinski, 2016). Additionally, we have highlighted, the inherent value of this writing and reading experience, as a stand-alone activity (Young & Rasinski, 2011; Young, Stokes, & Rasinski, 2017). Our aim in this article is to add clarification to the teacher's role in Reader's Theater.

We have heard well-meaning teachers express their opinion that Reader's Theater is great because the role of the teacher is minimal – assign the script, allow for rehearsal, and listen to students perform. However, we think there is much more teachers need to do in order to make Reader's Theater a regular and productive part of the reading curriculum. In this article we explore, from our own experiences, the 'characters' that teachers play to make Reader's Theater work in their classrooms.

### SET UP A REGULAR INSTRUCTIONAL ROUTINE

The first role of the teacher is to make a commitment to make Reader's Theater a regular and ongoing part of the reading curriculum. In order for Reader's Theater to improve reading it needs to be done on a regular basis, not just for special events. With that commitment, teachers need to develop a weekly routine or cycle for making Reader's Theater work. In a previous paper, we suggested a weekly routine that included opportunities for students to focus on comprehension and word study as well as fluency (Table 1). This is just one way that Reader's Theater can become integral to the classroom English/Language Arts (ELA) agenda. However, there are other ways that teachers can organize their Reader's Theater curriculum. The critical feature is to give students a daily opportunity to engage in some aspect of Reader's Theater – hearing, rehearsing, and performing authentic and engaging scripts.

Table 1  
*Reader's Theater + Comprehension and Word Study Format*

Day	Building Fluency with Gradual Release	Comprehension	Word Study
Monday	Teacher models texts to be performed on Friday. Students follow along and discuss the quality of the teacher's reading.	As a whole group, generate questions while reading the script.	Choose, discuss, and analyze unknown words. Then, add these to the word wall.
Tuesday	Choral reading of script.	Students choose their scripts, and the teacher helps students generate a summary of their respective scripts.	Choose, discuss, and analyze interesting words. Then, add these to the word wall.
Wednesday	Small group rehearsal. Teacher "coaches" students, as they practice.	Students are assigned parts and rehearse in their assigned groups. Teacher circulates among groups providing encouragement and talking about meaning of the script.	Choose, discuss and analyze root words and/or affixes in words (if any). Then, add these to the word wall.
Thursday	Practice – Dress Rehearsal	Class does a run through of the scripts and texts to be performed. Afterwards, students retell the script in their own words to a partner.	Choose, discuss and analyze content vocabulary (if any). Then, add these to the word wall.
Friday	Grand Performance. Students perform for an authentic and supportive audience of classmates, parents, and other visitors.	After the performance, students discuss what they liked most about their script and what could have been done to make the script even better.	Read and discuss word wall chorally

(see Young, Stokes, & Rasinski, 2017)

## FIND AND CREATE MATERIALS FOR PERFORMING

Indeed, it does take time to locate and prepare scripts for the weekly implementation of Reader's Theater. The process, though sometimes cumbersome, is quite fun. To begin teachers, scour the usual locations for scripts, including libraries, basal readers, or old files. A favorite place to search is on the Internet. There are hundreds of scripts and would-be scripts available (see Authors, 2017 for more information on locating scripts). Your school or local branch librarian would be a great resource to utilize in your search for scripts. Fredericks (2011) insists that "when teachers and librarians join together to promote literature collaboratively, they are opening incredible windows that expand the influence of that literature and extend learning opportunities for youngsters as never before" (p. 5). For Reader's Theater to be a successful and dynamic feature of an ELA curriculum, Fredericks (2011) suggests that a substantial level of cooperation between the teacher and the librarian is essential.

If you are exploring a thematic unit, use Reader's Theater scripts to support your instruction. For example, there are several winter/snow themed scripts available on [www.thebestclass.org](http://www.thebestclass.org). Other times we might choose all nonfiction related to a single topic, such as Texas History (Rasinski, Murphy, & Young, 2014). Additionally, poems are versatile and flexible pieces of text, which can be adapted into a Reader's Theater script (see below for an example of Baa, Baa Black Sheep). Some weeks, you might script poetry for their performances, mixing in modern, humorous, or classical children's poetry. However, a teacher chooses to search, it is important to remember that the perfect script does not exist for students. Therefore, if you are unable to find a script, then create one with your students. The overall purpose is to practice reading, using a variety of materials.

Reader 1: Baa, baa, black sheep,

Reader 1: Have you any wool?

Reader 2: Yes, sir, yes, sir,

Reader 2: Three bags full;

Reader 1: One for the master,

Reader 2: And one for the dame,

Reader 1-2s: And one for the little boy

Readers 1-2: Who lives down the lane.

One can probably surmise that searching for and creating scripts requires time and effort. Once found, many of your scripts may be recycled throughout the school year. In the end, we make sure the number of parts from each script add up to the total number of students in our class, print them,

and get ready for a new week of Reader's Theater. As a tip, we recommend printing a few extra copies of each scripts, because students, no matter how amazing and responsible, might misplace their scripts from time to time.

### MODELING FLUENT READING OF SCRIPTS

One of the great advantages of using Reader's Theater in the classroom is that it requires students to read with expression or prosody in order to communicate meaning to an audience. Before students can read with prosody it is usually a good idea to demonstrate to them what expressive or experienced reading sounds like, i.e. cadence, voice inflection, and pace. When introducing scripts to students, teachers can; in addition to providing background to the content of the script; read portions of the script to students. Here is where the teacher director can offer a prototype for the voice of the character. This will add to the background, but also give students a sense for the type of expression that is appropriate for the script. Following the modeling of a script with a brief discussion of how the teacher used her or his voice to communicate meaning and emotion will draw students' attention even more to the role and need for expressive reading in Reader's Theater and beyond.

### COACHING STUDENTS DURING REHEARSAL

Once scripts are assigned to groups of students, teachers might think that their job is largely done. Students can rehearse (engage in repeated reading) on their own. The truth of the matter is that to make Reader's Theater work in the classroom the teacher is always engaged. True, students can work independently in groups; however, teachers should be constantly observing and coaching the various groups. As the teacher visits different groups, he or she will find that Reader's Theater offers many opportunities for teachable moments and mini-lessons. For example, teachers may create mini-lessons that focus on interesting words in the scripts, emphasis on particular words and phrases, adjusting pace, appropriate posture while performing, the need to read with volume as well as expression, etc. Teachers should remind students of the rules they need to follow when rehearsing in groups. Most importantly, teachers can listen in as students rehearse their scripts and provide positive and formative feedback. Nothing is more motivating for students than to hear the teacher tell them how good they are doing as they develop their assigned script for eventual performance.

### PREPARING FOR THE GRAND PERFORMANCE

The reason students will actively engage in a week of rehearsal is the actual performance of their scripts at the end of each week. This means that the teacher needs to consider and plan for various aspects of the grand performance. Relevant questions include:

- Where should we have our grand performance?
- How should we prepare the stage? Are there props or other items required?
- Will we use a master of ceremonies? If so, who should it be?
- Who should we invite? How should we invite them?



- How will we seat all the people we invite?
- What is proper audience behavior that is expected during the grand performance?
- Should we provide audience members with copies of the scripts that will be read?
- Will the grand performance be video recorded for posting on the classroom website?

### ALLOWING FOR AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK

Reader's Theater is a shared reading experience. We often think of it unidirectionally – performers to audience. However, there should also be opportunities for the audience to provide feedback to the performers. This is usually in the form of applause that is provided after each performance. But more specific feedback can be quite effective in helping students improve their proficiency in Reader's Theater. After each performance, the master of ceremonies might ask audience members to provide positive comments on the performance. Additionally, a rating sheet provided to each audience member could allow for more specific feedback on targeted aspects of the performance (e.g. Were the performers sufficiently loud? Did they read with expression? Was their pacing appropriate?). Indeed, the feedback sheets could actually be used as a way to turn the grand performance into a bit of competition where each performance is rated and the highest scoring performance receives an award. Another consideration is whether or not the performance is recorded for future reference or, even, as an evaluative tool. Students may choose to evaluate their own performance, thereby increasing their motivation for their next performance opportunity. Additionally, if the performances are recorded for the classroom website, parents and others who may not be able to attend the grand performance in person, may be allowed the opportunity to comment on recordings of the performances. In such a case, it may be necessary for the teacher to moderate the comments in order to ensure that only appropriate ones are posted.

### MONITORING PROGRESS

The qualitative and quantitative feedback provided in each performance can be summarized regularly to document and demonstrate progress made by students doing Reader's Theater. This information may easily lend itself to goal-setting opportunities for students, as well. Reader's Theater is more than an opportunity for students to engage in an enjoyable and engaging reading activity. The rehearsal and the focus on expressive reading involved in Reader's Theater make it a powerful, instructional activity for building reading fluency, often called the neglected element of the school reading curriculum. With that in mind, the teacher may choose to assess students' fluency development on a regular (e.g. every 6 to 8 weeks). This would involve simply having individual students read a grade appropriate passage for one minute. From that minute of reading the teacher can check word recognition accuracy/automaticity by calculating the number of words read correctly in the minute. Expression or prosody can also be assessed using a fluency rubric such as the multi-dimensional fluency rubric found at [www.timrasinski.com](http://www.timrasinski.com). Over the course of time, the teacher will have referential evidence of students' growth in both word recognition accuracy/automaticity and prosodic reading.

On the surface, Reader's Theater may be thought of as a fun reading activity, which it is. However, when used as a regular part of the classroom curriculum, it can, also, be a very influential instrument for improving a variety of components of reading and social development. Fredericks (2011) describes Reader's Theater as an opportunity for children to share and interpret stories with their peers. This teamwork and social exchange involved in Reader's Theater are among its many positive consequences. In order for Reader's Theater to take on this more academic role the classroom teacher must take a proactive role in helping Reader's Theater achieve its full benefit for all students.

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# MATHEMATICS PRESERVICE TEACHERS ARE LITERACY EDUCATORS TOO: LEARNING HOW TO ADMINISTER AND USE DATA FROM THE TEXAS MIDDLE SCHOOL FLUENCY ASSESSMENT TO PLAN INSTRUCTION

BENITA R. BROOKS

## ABSTRACT

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*House Bill (HB) 2237 (80<sup>th</sup> Legislature), Section 6: Adolescent Reading Assessment requires districts and public charter schools to administer the Texas Middle School Fluency Assessment (TMSFA) or some other state approved alternative assessment to students in grade seven who do not demonstrate reading proficiency on the grade six state reading assessment. This requirement began in the fall 2008. Many school districts provided training for teachers to learn how to administer the TMSFA. Yet, there are many middle school administrators and teachers who do not know about HB 2237 Section 6 or the TMSFA. This article explains HB 2237 Section 6 requirements. In addition, it provides information about the TMSFA and a free online training offered through the Texas Adolescent Literacy Academies (TALA) website. This article also includes the beliefs of mathematics preservice teachers enrolled in a grades 4-8 literacy methods course about the TMSFA form.*

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Beginning in fall 2008, House Bill (HB) 2237 (80<sup>th</sup> Legislature), Section 6: Adolescent Reading Assessment, required districts and public charter schools to administer the Texas Middle School Fluency Assessment (TMSFA) or some other state approved alternative assessment to students in grade 7 who did not demonstrate reading proficiency on the grade 6 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reading test, and now, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). As the instructor of record for an undergraduate grades 4-8 literacy methods course, I did not know TMSFA existed until searching the Internet one summer night in 2017 for a reliable and valid measurement for middle grade level content area teachers to use to determine students' reading fluency and comprehension. During the past two years, I noticed an increase in preservice teachers pursuing certification to teach mathematics and a decrease in those seeking one in English/language arts and social studies. With the increase in enrollment of mathematics preservice teachers, many began to ask about the connection between literacy and their content

area. I spent a considerable amount of time demonstrating how all content area educators were literacy teachers.

As part of the course, I trained students to use Rasinski and Padak's (2005) *Three minute reading assessments: Word recognition, fluency & comprehension for grades 5-8*. I used this particular assessment because it provided teachers with a roadmap indicating "where their children were academically, and where they needed to go" (Rasinski & Padak, p. 5). I explained to the preservice teachers that assessment is a vital component of successful instruction because it enables teachers "to identify a focus for their instruction" (Rasinski and Padak, 2005, p. 5). Yet, I felt compelled to locate another measurement to provide them with options. I wanted them to know how to use a variety of reading fluency and comprehension instruments. I stumbled upon the TMSFA, and realized it had been in existence for several years. I asked several school administrators and teachers about HB 2237 Section 6 and the TMSFA, and none knew about the House Bill or the assessment. As such, the purpose of this article is to inform sixth, seventh, and eighth grade teachers in Texas about HB 2237 Section 6 and TMSFA.. This article will also shed some light on the beliefs about TMSFA from my 2017 literacy methods course students after they completed the training modules.

### WHAT DOES HB 2237 SECTION 6 REQUIRE DISTRICTS TO DO?

As stated previously, HB 2237 Section 6 requires districts to administer a state approved or alternate assessment to students in grade seven who did not demonstrate reading proficiency on the state reading test. The TMSFA and three alternative assessments are listed in the 2014-2018 Commissioner's report as reliable and valid reading instruments for seventh grade students. The alternative assessments are listed below:

- Istation's Indicators of Progress, Advanced Reading (ISIP-AR)
- Reading Analysis and Prescription System (RAPS 360)
- Woodcock Johnson III Diagnostic Reading Battery (WJ III DRB)

The required domains for grade seven are Phonics/Word Analysis (PH/WA), Text Comprehension-Reading (TC-R), and Fluency (FL). Seventh grade teachers are required to assess students in these domains. As such, the TMSFA and alternative assessments listed above included the required domains.

The TMSFA is used to determine areas of reading difficulty. It consists of two subtests: Passage Reading Fluency and Word Reading Fluency. The Passage Reading Fluency subtest is used to determine students' accuracy and fluency with connected narrative and expository texts (TEA, 2011). The Word Reading Fluency subtest is used to determine students' word-level abilities in the absence of context (TEA, 2011). The TMSFA is administered three times during an academic year to monitor students' performance: the beginning of school year (BOY) from August to November, the middle of year (MOY) from December to February, and the end of year (EOY) from March to May. HB 2237 pertains to only the BOY administration of the TMSFA, which occurs within the first six weeks of the academic year. Although HB 2237 Section 6 applies to grade seven students, TMSFA can also be administered to students with a low passing score on the state mandated

reading test or those at-risk of failing it. It is imperative that teachers remember that the TMSFA serves as a diagnostic instrument to assess grade seven students who failed the state reading test in grade six. It is also a progress-monitoring tool used to assist in planning a strategic intervention to help students meet grade-level standards in reading (TEA, 2011).

### WHERE CAN EDUCATORS FIND THE TMSFA?

The TMSFA is offered free of charge through the Texas Adolescent Literacy Academies (TALA) website. Part of Texas Gateway, an online learning initiative of the University of Texas System/Texas Education Agency (TEA), TALA consists of three separate academies—the English Language Arts Academy (for English language arts/reading teachers), the Content Area Academy (for mathematics, science, and social studies teachers), and the Professional Development to Support Academic Writing Academy (for English language arts/reading teachers). TALA is designed to help teachers develop appropriate instruction for students in grades six through eight, including those who struggle with reading due to English language proficiency, learning disabilities and dyslexia. The English Language Arts (ELA) Academy of TALA provides free training modules on administering and using the TMSFA. The self-paced stand alone course is located in unit four of TALA. It is titled, “Texas middle school fluency assessment: Administering and interpreting results. In one report, TEA (2011) noted that TALA is based on the concept that “students who can read effortlessly with comprehension are better equipped to understand literature, science, social studies, and mathematical word problems” (p. 14). Undergirding TEA’s concept is the belief that “developing students’ basic reading skills will assist in their overall understanding of what is being read in the content areas” (p. 14). I reference this quote in my literacy methods course to help preservice teachers pursuing mathematics certification understand that they are literacy educators too.

### WHAT DID PRESERVICE TEACHERS SAY ABOUT THE TMSFA?

All preservice teachers enrolled in my literacy methods course for teachers pursuing certification in grades four through eight printed a copy of their certificate of completion to confirm they had been trained to administer the assessment. After collecting the certificates, I asked the preservice teachers to retrieve the TMSFA reflection log (TEA, 2011). The reflection log consists of four questions. One question asks them to identify how they can use the results to identify students’ needs and plan instruction. Another question asks if they have concerns about interpreting and implementing the assessment. One preservice teacher wrote, “The overall ending equated scores and retell scores are very useful for future instruction planning, for it shows you what they are struggling with.” She also wrote, “How could teachers, after giving this assessment, implement what they found into a lesson plan for math specifically?” I developed in-class projects to show them how to transfer the results from the TMSFA into planning instruction. One assignment required them to analyze textbooks and nonfiction works using a readability formula. We also discussed creating formative and summative assessments based on the results from the TMSFA. I introduced the preservice teachers to the Kling and Bay-Williams (2014) article about ways in which mathematics teachers use observations, interviews, performance tasks, and journaling as formative assessments to learn about students’ reading fluency and comprehension.

According to Kling and Bay-Williams, interviews provided “the extraordinary opportunity to hear children explain what they know about a topic in a discussion format, during which teachers can ask follow-up and clarify questions” (p. 491). After reading the article and completing in-class projects, students began to see how to use results from the TMSFA and data from other assessment tools to plan instruction. The capstone project for the literacy methods course requires them to assess four students in their field experience placement using the TMSFA and Rasinki and Padak’s (2005) *Three Minute Reading Assessments*. The preservice teachers are required to complete a reflection log on the TMSFA (see Appendix I) and the Rasinski and Padak assessments (see Appendix II). The purpose of this capstone project is for the preservice teachers to experience conducting the assessments and to collect data based on their findings. In addition, it enables them to use the data to assist their mentor teacher in instructional planning.

## CONCLUSION

Mathematics preservice teachers are literacy educators, too. As we reach the midterm of the semester, I have witnessed more of my preservice teachers using data from the TMSFA and Three Minute Reading Assessments to develop their lesson plans. Several incorporated journaling as a formative assessment because they wanted to learn more about the students in their mathematics classrooms. Most used Fry’s Readability (Schrock, 2016) to evaluate nonfiction text and determine reading levels. Kling and Bay-Williams (2014) recognize the importance of meaningful assessment in a mathematics classroom. In this case, the TMSFA and the Three Minute Reading Assessments serve as diagnostic instruments for preservice teachers in grades six through eight to use to develop lesson plans and to assist their mentor teachers. However, there are still many middle school administrators and classroom teachers who do not know about HB 2237 Section 6 or the TMSFA. If they are expected to use data to drive instruction, then it is imperative that they are equipped with the proper assessment tools to help students learn how to read effortlessly with comprehension in science, social studies, and mathematics.

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## APPENDIX I

**To earn full credit, make sure you include a completed copy of the TMSFA Record Sheet: Passage Reading Fluency and the Teacher Page of the Three-Minute Assessment that includes results for each student. You will upload all documents to Blackboard by October 25 by 5pm.**

Preservice Teacher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Semester: \_\_\_\_\_

Content Area: \_\_\_\_\_

### Texas Middle School Fluency Assessment

#### Preservice-Teachers' Perception of TMSFA

**Directions: Place an X in the box that best matches your opinion.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I have a good understanding of the TMSFA.				

Explain.				
2. I believe it is beneficial to know how to administer the assessment in my content area.				
<p>Explain. Make sure you discuss what you learned about the students after administering the assessment.</p> <p>Student #1</p> <p>Student #2</p> <p>Student #3</p> <p>Student #4</p>				
3. I believe the results from the assessment help with preparing lesson plans.				
Explain. Make sure you discuss the impact the results had on your mentor teacher's lesson planning. Were you able to share results with the mentor teacher?				

4. I learned about myself as a future teacher.				
Explain.				

### Student Demographics Information

**Please use a pseudonym.**

Student #1\_\_\_\_\_

Gender\_\_\_\_\_

Grade\_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity\_\_\_\_\_

Previous Grade in language arts\_\_\_\_\_

STAAR results (if applicable)\_\_\_\_\_

Student #2\_\_\_\_\_

Gender\_\_\_\_\_

Grade\_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity\_\_\_\_\_

Previous Grade in language arts\_\_\_\_\_

STAAR results (if applicable)\_\_\_\_\_

Student #3 \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Previous Grade in language arts \_\_\_\_\_

STAAR results (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Student #4 \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Previous Grade in language arts \_\_\_\_\_

STAAR results (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

**School's SES Population (Is it a Title I school? What's the percentage?)** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX II

Preservice Teacher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Semester: \_\_\_\_\_

Content Area: \_\_\_\_\_

### Three Minute Reading Assessment for Grades 5-8

#### Preservice-Teachers' Perception of the Three Minute Reading Assessment

**Directions: Place an X in the box that best matches your opinion.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I have a good understanding of the Three Minute Reading Assessment.				
Explain.				
2. I believe it is beneficial to know how to administer the assessment in my content area.				
Explain. Make sure you discuss what you learned about the students after administering the assessment.  Student #1  Student #2				

Student #3				
Student #4				
3. I believe the results from the assessment help with preparing lesson plans.				
Explain. Make sure you discuss the impact the results had on your mentor teacher's lesson planning. Were you able to share results with the mentor teacher?				
4. I learned about myself as a future teacher.				
Explain.				



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The editorial team of the *Texas Journal of Literacy Education* invites you to submit your literacy research and/or effective and innovative teaching strategies to the next issue. We welcome all voices from literacy researchers, classroom teachers, and graduate students. The latest issue's acceptance rate was approximately 26%. The blind review and editorial decision process typically take about 8-12 weeks. Submit your manuscripts [online here](#).

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- include the title of the work;
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