

President's Message

For many of you, this message will arrive while you are enjoying your much-deserved summer break after a hopefully successful school year! I am sure you have put aside your thoughts about the school year by now and are focusing your attention on family time or a great book! Well, with all that said, let's think about how this school year went as summer is the perfect time for reflection!

As educators, we are hardwired to reflect. We do it effortlessly and often as part of the teaching and learning process. I cannot speak about reflection without adding a thought about **praxis**. It defines our reflective nature more specifically because it involves developing a theory, evaluating, reflecting and then re-theorizing to improve or reform our practices. It is what empowers us to be autonomous decision-making individuals in our educational settings.

I have had much to reflect on this year as the TALE President! So many exciting things have happened: from journal publishing, strategic planning, holding our annual conference, and developing new committees to better serve TALE members. I cannot overlook another important milestone that happened this year, and that was the involvement in forming a coalition with other state literacy organizations. This coalition was formed to be a resource for the State Board of Education during the revision process for the ELAR TEKS standards, and a voice for the TALE members.

We have grown in such an effortless manner that it seems we have been assisting Texas literacy educators for decades rather than just four years! In reflection, I have had such a wonderful and successful term that began three years ago as Vice-President. I must let you know that the secret to this wonderful ride has been the TALE Board and the individuals that work on our committees (Thank you for always making me look really good!). Even though I am soon to be the out-going president, I look forward to more opportunities for praxis and to offer theories from my reflection as President...well, at least to anyone who will listen!

So now it is only fitting for me to officially welcome Roberta Raymond as the 2015-16 TALE President!

TALE members, you are in excellent hands!

Patricia Durham

Patricia Durham, Ph.D. is currently an Assistant Professor at Sam Houston State University



A Message from your State Coordinator

When you made plans for the summer, I hope you included the ILA Annual Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. The conference is scheduled for Saturday, July 18 through Monday, July 20 with pre-conference institutes on Friday, July 17. With General Session speakers like Shaquille O'Neil and Octavia Spencer, the conference is a great way to rejuvenate and re-energize yourself before the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year. Also, the 120+ exhibits and 300+ sessions will offer new ideas and resources that will leave you feeling invigorated with enough ideas, information, and inspiration to guide your teaching into the new school year. If you were unable to register, you will be able to use the on-site registration available at the conference. Visit the ILA website for more information, www.reading.org.

Exciting news regarding the North Texas local chapter: This group of educators held another informational meeting in Cedar Hill on May 30 and selected officers for the group. They are now focusing their efforts on increasing the membership of the group to meet ILA membership criteria. If you live in North Texas and would be interested in joining the group, please contact me at my email below, and I will send you information about the group.

Interested in setting up a local chapter in Texas? I have an application form for groups that would like to align themselves with ILA and TALE. If you are a leader/member of an existing reading group in Texas and you would like to become affiliated with ILA and TALE, please email me at my contact information below. I will send you the application form to complete.

I hope that everyone has a wonderful summer, and I look forward to seeing you in St. Louis in July.

Thank you,

Lorene Reid, ILA State Coordinator
talemembership@gmail.com ATTN: State Coordinator



Avoiding Summer Slide

Summer break in academia signals a time for much-needed R and R (rest and relaxation) for both students and teachers across the country. No alarm clocks, assignments, or homework. Just loads and loads of free time to stay up late, sleep in, attend a camp based on their interests, and spend time with friends and family.

While this time provides many benefits for our students' social development, we cannot ignore the research about "the summer slide", especially as it relates to disadvantaged youth across the country. During the summer, the average student loses up to one month of instruction, with disadvantaged students losing up to two months (Cooper, 1996). More than half of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth is because of the unequal access to summer learning opportunities. Reversing the summer slide, however, can be as simple as reading more books. In a recent study, Professor Richard Allington of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville and his colleagues found that "giving kids 12 books to read over the summer was as effective as summer school in raising the students' reading scores" (Eames, 2013). With this in mind, what can educators do to ensure that our most vulnerable students have access to quality learning experiences during the summer months?

There are a wide variety of meaningful learning experiences that parents can provide at little or no cost while kids are home. Kids can research places that they will be visiting during their summer as a way to prepare for the trip. This research can morph into planning for the trip that could include mapping out the best route (road trip), creating a budget for planned activities along with an activity schedule, and many more. Once the trip is underway, encourage them to keep a journal of the trip either on paper or on an electronic device.

Keeping a journal is also a cost-efficient way to provide learning opportunities for students during the summer months. Students can keep a record of what they are doing during the day; whether they are at camp, grandma's house or staying with friends. The journal can provide a source of meaningful conversation when parents come home and ask, "What did you do today?" Writing about their day can occur at the beginning or end of the day or throughout the day. The journal can also contain other types of writing that a child might wish to do. Kids can create poems, songs, stories, etc. It depends on the child, but having children write every day is a great way to help them get their thoughts out, practice their writing and spelling skills, and experiment with language.

For students cooped up at home, audiobooks are great. Imagine kids huddled around the stereo listening to *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, or series like *Harry Potter* or the *Dork Diaries*. Listening to a book is much better than watching television because it requires students to visualize what is taking place in the text. It encourages students to use their imagination and fosters a love of reading. During the summer months, kids can listen to an audiobook and create pictures of their favorite part of the text that they heard that day. By the end of the book, they will have graphic representations of their

favorite parts of the story. Also, if that book has been made into a movie, watching the movie is an awesome culminating activity.

The final suggestion is going to the local public library. The Texas Summer Reading Program offers a statewide membership for public libraries to join a Collaborative Summer Library Program. The program “consists of a grassroots consortium of all 50 states working together to provide high-quality summer reading materials for all ages including early literacy and children, teen, and adult programs” (Texas State Library and Archives Commission, 2015). Every year a theme is selected, and participating libraries can purchase posters, reading logs, bookmarks, certificates and a wide variety of reading incentives at the lowest possible cost to the public libraries. To participate all that is needed is a library card.

Several companies have sponsored summer reading programs that provide students with the opportunity to earn free books, money, gift cards, movies and more. The link below provides more information on programs sponsored by Barnes and Noble, Scholastic, Chuck E. Cheese, Half Price Books and more:

<http://freebies.about.com/od/familyfreestuff/tp/summer-reading.htm>

References:

Cooper, H. M., Nye, B. A., & Charlton, K. (1996). The effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores: a narrative and meta-analytic review. *Review Of Educational Research*, 66227-268. doi:10.2307/1170523

Eames, A. (2013, June 4). Summer Reading and the Rich/Poor Achievement Gap: An Educator Responds to Questions. *Curriculum Connections*. Retrieved from <http://www.slj.com/>

Texas State Library and Archives Commission (2015). *Texas Summer Reading Program*. Retrieved from <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/>

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Book Review

While dystopian novels are all the rage, there are some with underlying themes that have the reader question events and messages in their world. The *UnWind dystology* series by Neil Shusterman does exactly that. In *UnDivided*, readers continue to follow characters first introduced in the book, *UnWind*, written in 2009. The series presents the idea that many teens have become incorrigible due to a breakdown in the education system and are *unwound* with the permission of their parents. Other families choose to have a 10th child dedicated as a *tithe* in a religious ceremony similar to a Bar Mitzvah. Still others are wards of the state in an overcrowded system. These teenagers are not "dead" but rather "divided" and their parts used for transplants or, for those who can afford it, upgrades to their appearance. The *unwound* parts retain many personal attributes from the original owners. The novel presents both sides of many arguments and lets the reader struggle to determine which argument to support, even when a clear decision is impossible. Issues included are:

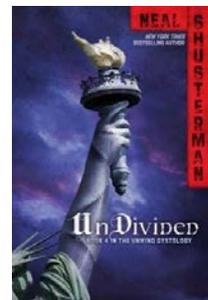
- when the age of reason begins
- when life ends, if the person is not truly dead
- how parents deal with teenage issues
- the rights of the state
- the autonomy of religious beliefs
- the morality of the "creation" of a military prototype entirely constructed from unwound parts.

Propaganda interspersed throughout the series allows the reader to see the government's portrayal of events. The characters are believable and their decisions relevant while the action is fast-paced. This series can spark discussions on many levels and offers an alternative or addition to *1984* and *Fahrenheit 451*. Books in order in the series are, *UnWind*, *UnWholly*, *UnSouled*, and *UnDivided*.

Goodreads, 4.51/5 stars

Barnes and Noble, 5/5 stars

- *UnDivided*, Book #4 in the *UnWind dystology* series by Neil Shusterman
- ISBN-13: 9781481409759
- Publisher: Simon & Schuster Books For Young Readers
- Publication date: 10/14/2014
- Age range: 12 - 17 Years



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Featured Technology Tool: Vocaroo

Many educators use QR codes as a way to engage students in school work. A “Quick Response Code” is a digital image that can be scanned using QR reader apps on smartphones and tablets. Scanned codes take users directly to a website. Teachers use QR codes for announcements, homework instructions, and to share student work during events such as Open House. Vocaroo, an online technology tool, enables users to record audio messages and share the recordings via email, websites, or QR codes. The QR code generator feature, found at vocaroo.com, is an excellent tool for both students and teachers to communicate school-related information.

The Vocaroo website is simple and easy to navigate. Use the following instructions to create and use QR codes:

1. Visit vocaroo.com
2. Click on the red button to start recording.
3. After a satisfactory message has been recorded, save the recording. Several options for saving the recording are available.
4. Select the QR code option to acquire a code that can be copied and pasted into any document.
5. Listen to the Vocaroo message using any mobile or tablet device containing a QR Reader app.

Students of all ages can use QR codes to share or present material. For example, classmates and teachers could scan the code on a student's poster presentation for additional information. Below is a QR code included on a fifth grader's poster project about Franklin D. Roosevelt.



Teachers of all disciplines and grade levels could use Vocaroo for instructional purposes. QR codes containing various types of information can be posted around the classroom or used in flyers, assignments, or handouts. This technology tool also provides a way for teachers to support struggling readers or English Language Learners. For example, when a student needs materials read aloud, a QR code could be placed next to instructions or questions (McQueeney & Vasinda, 2015). Students with technology devices (including earphones) could scan the code to hear the recorded information as needed.

Other uses for this technology tool include the following:

- Teachers could record messages for absent students who need information about make-up work (<http://www.teachersfirst.com/single.cfm?id=9921>).
- Teachers traditionally label classrooms with written text for ELLs. With Vocaroo, teachers could label both the written words and the oral pronunciations on QR codes.
- Librarians could post QR codes containing summaries of books.
- Teachers or students could read short stories aloud on Vocaroo for others to hear.
- Students could record messages for special events using Vocaroo (First day of school, Open House, Valentine's Day, or Mother's Day)

Reference:

McQueeney, L., & Vasinda, S. (2015, February). *Transforming struggling students into inspired thrivers*. Presented at the meeting of the Texas Association of Literacy Educators, The Woodlands, TX.

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Featured Technology Tool: ZooBurst Books

Writing has the distinctive advantage over other content areas to manifest its final product, or publications through a myriad of outlets. Unarguably the process of writing is as important, if not more, than the end product itself. With traditional publishing options like books, papers, posters, to more artistic choices such as shaped foldables, integrated artwork, or interactive flapbooks, the options are practically endless. Add in the digital facet of blogs, webpages, digital newspapers, animated presentations and the possibilities grow exponentially.

Like journaling with colored pens, I love to offer my students a variety of creative outlets when it comes to publishing. Often times we discover the ins-and-outs of a website or app together to both alleviate the overwhelming pressure for me to be the expert in the room, but to also give students ownership in the learning process. Recently, some of my students and I explored another Internet-based publishing tool together, ZooBurst books. ZooBurst books is a digital storytelling platform available both online and as an app on iPad. Unique to ZooBurst books is that the story is created in a 3D/ pop-up format. It's a small novelty that the children enjoyed because it offered a different perspective to the online storybooks that we have used in the past. Even more intriguing was the "live" augmented reality experience that, using a webcam, not only enabled the readers to project the book around them, but also permitted the reader to be a part of the story and interact with it through simple gestures.

Admittedly, the program took some practice to navigate and was not as easy for students as other sites we previously have experienced. Help buttons and a support manual were available free-of-charge on the website, but I speculate some overzealous students did not want to take the time to read the provided directions. Classified as upper elementary and intermediate grade levels, my students sometimes familiarize themselves with a new technology tool without being modeled in great depth by me. However, I do carefully screen and acquaint myself with the technology tools before allowing students to do so on their own. For younger students, I would suggest walking them through creating a book. Speaking of age-ranges, because ZooBurst books is a publishing medium, it can overlay a broad assortment of assignments as well as diversity for differentiation.

Sharing published works is easy via hyperlinks that can be emailed or embedding. Additionally, students have the ability to virtually interact with readers through comments in a moderated discussion forum. The site, <http://www.zooburst.com>, boasted many other features exclusive to iPad users, but I have yet to try them.

An individual account is free to sign-up, but does feature ads and has limits compared to the paid versions. Advantages for educators to subscribe to the paid version include classroom management tools, expanded illustration selections, and the capability to integrate audio and speech. With writing lending itself to countless publication products, ZooBurst books it one not to be missed.

Dr. Monika Anderson has experience working with students of all ages from early childhood to higher education. In addition to the many hats she wears, she currently teaches for the homeschool community.



Maximizing TALE's Web Presence

Can you imagine asking a TALE member to promote the organization 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, and without a single day off? Fortunately, there is no need to search for such a human who requires zero sleep and lives only to promote our state literacy organization. Instead, we have a website. Although I am sure many of you would sacrifice a lot for TALE, having a website seems a bit more practical. Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays this website from its appointed duty.

However, we could always use your help to promote the TALE website. If you have a personal website, consider adding a link to texasreaders.org. Backlinks increase our search results ranking which consequently increases traffic. Sharing pages from texasreaders.org on social media also drives traffic our way, which can attract new members. We already have an impressive number of monthly visitors, but with each additional visit, our trusty and hardworking website continuously shares the wonderful work of TALE and recruits more members to support the organization's mission.

Of course, we also want returning visitors, and best way to get them coming back is to constantly offer a plethora of new information. We invite you to send updates, announcements, state and local event information, legislative briefs, advocacy efforts, and other content the state of Texas needs to know about literacy. Send your information to chase.young@tamucc.edu, and I will post it within 72 hours.



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