The English Record

The English Record

NYSEC
New York State English Council

Aims
The English Record publishes original peer reviewed contributions that focus on the field of English education. *The English Record* features articles on pedagogy, essays, commentaries, program descriptions, reflective narratives, book reviews, poetry, and occasional student work. Please check the website *nysecteach.org* for more information.

Submissions
Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to Lou Ventura via e-mail at **englishrecord@olean.wnyric.org.** Manuscripts should be prepared using MS Word. All parts of the manuscript should be double spaced. Please number all pages consecutively. Each manuscript should include a cover sheet with the author's name, affiliation, position, a short two or three line author bio, preferred mailing address, telephone and e-mail address.

Identifying information should not appear elsewhere in the manuscript. Please include an abstract on the cover page of no more than 100 words. Manuscripts must conform to APA standards. Manuscripts that do not utilize APA will not be considered for publication.

All images, tables, figures and additional materials should be sent as separate files with a figure heading and notation within the manuscript for preferred placement.

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Cover Art
Libby Rosa completed her BFA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2015. She will receive her MFA from Cornell University in May, 2019. Her work will be published in *New American Paintings*, No. 141, MFA Issue, 2019. She will exhibit with Cornell at Safe Gallery, Brooklyn, NY (May 2019). She has shown with *Got It For Cheap* at the Hole, NY (March, 2019), SIGNAL, Brooklyn, NY (2018), Marquee Projects, Bellport, NY (2017), Proto Gallery, Hoboken, NJ (2017), and Trestle Gallery, Brooklyn, NY (2016). She has attended residencies including ASMBLY Brooklyn, NY (2017), Trestle Studio, Brooklyn, NY (2016) and VCU SSP, Richmond, VA (2015).

ANNUAL ANNOUNCEMENT
FOR NYSEC PROGRAMS AND AWARDS

The New York State English Council understands that educators involved with professional organizations are more informed about current information on national and local programs and initiatives. The programs and awards supported by **NYSEC** provide opportunities for professional leadership, promote excellence in English education, and foster collegiality and camaraderie among ELA educators throughout New York State. These programs and awards are the heart of our mission. These programs and awards help keep **NYSEC** educators informed, enthusiastic, and unified. We encourage everyone to help us celebrate the outstanding teachers, students, mentors, and programs that we have in districts all across the state. Please visit the website where each letter and application is available in digital format: **www.nysecteach.org.**

Programs of Excellence:
Awards presented to exemplary ELA programs, which support creative instruction and learning, that have been in place for at least three years.

Educators of Excellence:
Educators nominated by colleagues who inspire excellence in students as well as teachers.

Mini-grants:
$500 grants awarded to members who are willing to create, explore, enrich or research instruction in English Language Arts at each level: elementary, middle, high school, college, and administration/supervision.

Dr. Ruth E. Everett Award:
Named after a former **NYSEC** President and Executive Board member, this award honors
one or more cooperating teachers who have mentored future English Language Arts teachers
in their student teaching or intern programs.

In celebration of the programs and awards' recipients, **NYSEC** holds an Awards Ceremony every year at the **NYSEC** Annual Conference, held in Albany. All mailing, due dates, membership forms, and application information are also available online at **ww.nysecteach.org.**

Letter from the Editor
Lou Ventura

English educators have routinely acknowledged the benefits of creative writing to help developing writers discover their voices, mostly as a result of the way creative writing can help students come to a better understanding of themselves and the world around them. As recently as the fall/winter issue of 2017 in these very pages, Ellen Kibbe, in her article "Creativity in the Classroom: An Environment for Success" pointed out that "teachers who exercise the freedom necessary to incorporate creative writing assignments could produce a classroom environment that lends itself to other exciting and innovative opportunities for their students."

With these ideas in mind, the NYSEC Executive Board decided to reinstitute the organization's student creative writing contest. The contest allows NYSEC to celebrate the work of New York's students as well as encourage ELA instructors to make creative writing an important part of their classroom routine. Featured in this issue are the 2018 winners of this year's contest: Joanna Lau for her poem "Snow From a Raincloud in a Sunny Sky," and Mia Carranza for her short story "Aranea." These students were also honored at last October's NYSEC Conference. Their writing is indicative of the fine work that teachers and students are doing in classrooms all across the state.

We can't wait to see the wonderful submissions we will receive for this year's contest, and we look forward to meeting the winners in Albany at the October conference and publishing their work in next year's spring/summer issue.

Finally, this will be the last issue of *The English Record* that Sally and I will be editing. We are grateful for the trust the board placed in us by giving us this opportunity. The work has been exciting and rewarding. We want to thank everyone who has contributed to the journal over the last two years.

Start Planning for the 69th annual NYSEC Conference

Reigniting the Spark:

Empowering Our Students, Our

Colleagues, and Ourselves through

Reflection, Hope, and Compassion

October 16-18, 2019
Albany Marriott Hotel
Albany, NY

Featured Speakers:
Laurie Halse Anderson
Brendan Kiely
Kate Roberts

What Would Dewey Tweet?: Using Students' Experience with Twitter to Foster Discussion and Understanding in the English Classroom

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University of North Texas

Abstract

Social media and popular culture enrich our students' lives. They are inundated with images, ideas, and have new ways to communicate those ideas to one another. This article strives to describe experiences students have with social media outside of school into the classroom. Furthermore, this article explores ways to navigate around some students' lack of technology by taking online ideas off line, not only for some classes, but for the general school community as well. Using social media concepts and vernacular helps students understand, interpret, and connect to everything from Shakespeare to Keats and have fun doing it.

Introduction

Social media is an ever-present entity in many of our students' social lives and is now becoming part of their educational lives as well. While students still use social media sites (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat) for keeping up with family and friends, they are also using them to organize meetings, fundraise for certain causes, and even read or watch the news of the day. According to a 2018 Pew Research Center Report:

> Some 78% of 18- to 24-year-olds use Snapchat, and a sizeable majority of these users (71%) visit the platform multiple times per day. Similarly, 71% of Americans in this age group now use Instagram and close to half (45%) are Twitter users (Smith & Anderson).

With so much time devoted to these platforms, it seems only natural for students to know not only how to consume media like Twitter, but produce it as well (Ito et al, 2010). Furthermore, popular culture, like social media is an integral part of students' home literacy practices where they learn to utilize numerous literacy skills that they can then use in an academic setting (Alvermann, Huddleston & Hagood, 2004). As Greenhow and Gleason stated in 2012:

> If knowing how to build a community on Twitter®, present yourself on Facebook, engage with public issues via YouTube®, network on Foursquare®, and share your creations on Instagram are among the literacies that some employers expect people to have to secure a job or advance their careers, educators and educational researchers ought to play a role in helping people critically evaluate and cultivate best practices (464).

The question is, are we as teachers leveraging student use of social media and popular culture, and are we in fact helping our students become informed and thoughtful producers of this kind of media?

John Dewey (1938) believed that the barriers between school life and real life should be lessened and that learning needs to be active and experiential (e.g., learning by doing, applying prior knowledge). Furthermore, Dewey argued that the teacher's role in all this is to guide students toward activities that are simultaneously interesting to students and helpful with their future needs within society. If social media, is or has already become, part of our students' everyday life, as proposed above, then why not take advantage of it and use it as not only a new way to deliver information that students will be interested in, but to give students an experience that they can use moving forward?

The Twitter Classroom

When I first thought about this topic a few years ago, I realized that this social media component was one that was missing from my classroom. Despite being at a school where every student was distributed an iPad, I had yet to instruct my students on how to become participatory digital citizens (Krutka & Carpenter, 2015). I was determined to change this and to find ways to really help my students learn how to use social media properly, while also helping them to learn the material I was asking them to read. As Boyd points out, since social media platforms are an important part of the lives of our students, we as teachers should strive to teach with those platforms rather than spurn them (2014). This is important because it is not the interest in technology itself that is the draw for students, but the relations that are afforded from the platforms themselves. So I created a Twitter account and encouraged my students and my students' parents to follow me.

I chose Twitter because most students already had accounts and, as is usually the case, their social media accounts are likely linked to their phones and their laptops in much more effective and timely ways than other education-based applications. This assumption turned out to be correct as my students were immediately connected to my tweets via their phones, iPads, or even laptops. Plus, Twitter was seen as "cool" while things like Blackboard or Schoology were not. However, this was only the beginning of the journey into the Twitterverse.

What I quickly found out was that students had way more experience with this application than I did. Not only that, but it was obvious that my students had learned to use social media on their own (probably unsupervised) and were not afforded the guidance needed to really understand their online responsibilities. Therefore, I had to address some rules and boundaries in class about using Twitter and what was and was

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not appropriate. So as a class we created "norms" for our Twitter interactions. "Norms" are shared understandings that helps to routinize behavior within a group (Ivaturi, 2018). Our norms were similar to those used in our in class discussions. Some examples: choose your words wisely, no foul language, be supportive, be creative, and allow others to have their opinions, you are allowed to disagree, but do not put anyone else's opinion down. However, with so many varying ways to interact online and no way to know inflection, it can sometimes be harder than we think to maintain these norms. I try to make clear that these norms are an expectation to be followed whether posting a new tweet, a response, a picture, or a meme. Creating these norms and expectations with student input gave students ownership of what we were doing. It also provided them with guidelines for what was and was not appropriate for a larger community, not just themselves. Did this work 100% of the time? Of course not. There had to be some conversations with some students about putting down other students' opinions of a character or story. There was a learning curve for sure. Students needed to curtail calling their friends "stupid" or saying something like, "that's dumb." Students will always test the limits of appropriateness in any forum, so as a teacher I had to be aware of that and always be able to intervene when necessary.

Modeling tweets for students was a key way to help them understand what was expected from them. I needed to make sure my tweets were well written, to the point, and had a component that would allow for classroom thought and interaction. Once the norms were set and I had modeled a few Twitter chats in class, we decided to work with tweeting outside of the classroom. Twitter chats are online discussions usually based around one concept. There is often a moderator (me in this case) who asks questions, and the participants must address these questions by typing the question number at the beginning

of each tweet (A1: for answer 1 for example). From there students can respond, not only to the question, but to answers from other students. They are also encouraged to add a specific hashtag (maybe #period1english or #MacbethChat) at the end of their tweets creating a thread others can follow or use to join in the discussion. Forming Twitter chats for my classes, we quickly engaged in some great discussions about the works we were reading. For example, the following Twitter conversations took place in response to my questions about *Frankenstein*:

> Q1: Should parents be held accountable for their child's actions?
> @TheDave: A1: It depends on their age, little kids yes of course, high school kids should be held accountable for their actions though, they should know better.
> Q3: Should cloning be legal?
> @MoeJo: A3: Of course it should't, no one should be able to create life but God…..
> @SamWise: What if I don't believe in God? Do I still have to believe cloning should be illegal?

It was fun to watch students discuss (not argue about) the topics at hand and develop into even bigger topics like the existence of God. Students' ability to use this forum to help ask questions, offer comments, and receive valuable feedback (Carpenter, 2015) was really worthwhile and for some students eye-opening. To me, this seemed to be a productive attempt at working social media into my curriculum. Plus, I used these Twitter chats as a springboard to classroom discussion. Taking ideas and concepts from the prior day's Twitter chat, I was able to lead into topics that they were going to be reading about in our novels later that day or evening.

An important part of these Twitter chat threads was the

ease of monitoring who was commenting and participating. When creating an assessment piece for this exercise, I tried to make sure that each student responded to each question and also replied to at least two other student responses. This took a little work on my part, but hashtags made it easier to follow and credit student contributions to discussions. Student tweets needed to be original, relevant, and capable of advancing the conversation. Too often at the start I had to encourage students to say more and be more precise. Tweets like, "I agree with Joel on this point," or, "Yea, what Rachel said is right," did not earn credit. Luckily, thanks to Twitter, I could discuss this in real time.

Taking Things Offline
  Despite using Twitter to do things like Twitter chats for my different periods or even using fun hashtags to help them be excited about posting their thoughts and ideas, I felt like I was missing out on the "hands on" teaching moments that can come with in-class interaction. In addition, some students were not allowed to have a Twitter account due to their parents' rules of social media, which meant they were missing out on aspects of the discussion or maybe even some revelations they might have had if they were actively involved. This parental roadblock can be one that comes up in many classes and for many reasons. Some parents do not want their children interacting with certain books, films, or music. So how do we find an alternate route around this roadblock that will help us arrive at the same destination? This was something I really thought about long and hard. What I had hoped would be, as Dewey states, an educative experience, was turning into a miseducative experience that could drive some students away from social media interaction. While an interesting hurdle, I knew it was one that I needed to overcome, because even those who could not have a Twitter account needed to learn the social

and classroom norms of social media and how to navigate virtual forums.

The progress that was made with students who could use Twitter was noticeable and the discussions that we were having not only online, but also in class were starting to be more in-depth and meaningful as students applied our norms to the online forum and the classroom as well. Students who had never participated in class before were now opening up and engaging in classroom discussions. When I asked some students about why they were finally participating most mentioned that they felt more confident their ideas would be appreciated and respected in class because they had already shared them in Twitter chats. Even some of the students who chose to remain quiet in class were still engaging in the online chats. Also, these outcomes did not mean that those who could not participate via Twitter were doing marginally worse or participating less. That was not the case. However, a certain amount of interaction was not taking place because of their inability to be part of the Twitter chats, therefore creating a bit of a division between those who did and did not use the application. I knew I did not want to change the overall plan, but I needed to alter it to allow students who could not use Twitter to be able to not only join the conversation, but to gain that online awareness they might otherwise have missed.

I quickly came to the conclusion that Twitter need not only be technology based. We could do this offline as well. With that in mind I created Twitter for my classroom. My students were encouraged to write on the walls of my classroom via large butcher paper that I also taped to the wall outside my classroom. This allowed students who were walking by between periods to contribute as well, even if they weren't in my class. Students were still using their new found skills of synthesizing information and using critical thinking skills to come up with new and interesting tweets. Granted,

word count was now a problem and memes or pictures could not be used to emphasize ideas, but the ideas and information they were expressing still came through. I posted hashtags for them to use that had something to do with a book or work we were reading, #BigBrother when we were reading *1984* for instance, and the students were encouraged to post something about the novel, the characters, or government surveillance and control using that hashtag on the paper. My students seemed to love it and so did a lot of students not in my class, as I had many people posting throughout the day.

Unfortunately, this new format presented a few problems. It was harder to control what was being posted as it was not confined to my class, and it was more difficult to know who was posting as I could not just follow a thread to see who posted, which in turn made assessment more difficult. I eventually made students write their real names as a hashtag at the end of each tweet so I would know who was posting, but it was still more legwork than the original online concept.

The butcher paper on the walls, while a good idea, needed to be altered a little. I eventually went to smaller handouts that students would share with one another and turn in. This allowed me the chance to see who was and was not participating in the activity more efficiently and assess it more productively. However, this new procedure threatened to leave the rest of the school out of our discussions. Therefore, I used the butcher paper to create a small feed in the hallway for the school to see. I chose the tweets to share based on their creativity, humor, thoughtfulness, or synthesis of idea. The idea behind sharing this work was not just to show what we were doing. I also hoped that by sharing their work with an audience larger than just their class would encourage students to create higher quality work (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). Once again, this assignment is all about fostering participatory citizens who are engaged in their work.

After learning their norms and using hashtags properly, it was time to advance this experiment even further. Instead of simply posting in response to a hashtag created by me, my students were asked to write tweets for parts of plays based on characters they were given. This provided them the opportunity to analyze a work and a character alike and also develop their ability to synthesize a larger work into the 240 characters of a tweet. Plus, they had to create an original hashtag which encompassed the tweet as well. It was a lot to ask, but once again my students rose to the occasion. An example from our *Macbeth* unit:

> LadyM: Anyone have some really good soap to get out a dark red stain, asking for my husband since I know he won't do it #outoutdangspot.

This post was quick, witty, and allowed the student to become a character and analyze how she would have interacted via Twitter with others. Furthermore, allowing the students to embody a character allowed them the time to have some fun while reinforcing what was happening in the play at the time. Some students struggled with this. One example was from the same scene in *Macbeth*. I asked a student to tweet as Macbeth after he killed Duncan, expressing all the pain, agony, and guilt Duncan was feeling. He tweeted:

> MacBaby: I killed the King! #hedead #coldblooded.

Not exactly the best of tweets, so I had to explain to him what I was looking for, and we needed to delve a little bit deeper into the character. Of course what is great about these being on the walls is that they lead to more classroom discussions as we dissect the tweets and talk, as a class, about whether or not they encompassed the character, the situation, or the tone of the

play. These skills of analysis, critical reading, and synthesis were beneficial in helping students prepare for their AP exams and for essays they would be writing in class. By delving into characters and being asked to break down acts and scenes in plays, students were developing cognitive skills that would also help them with future readings.

The prior activity of creating their own feeds and hashtags was also effective when it came to poetry. My students would take poems we read in class and break them down into tweets. This was really helpful for getting to the heart of what the poet was saying and allowed students to create interesting and fun hashtags as well. For example, in response to Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 one student tweeted:

> TheShake: Hey @DarkLady1, you don't really have all that much going for you, but you mine and I love you anyway #beautywithin #rarebeyondcompare.

The response:

> DarkLady1: @TheShake Maybe if you compared me to a Summer's day you would actually get some play #alltalk #YouAreNoRomeo

was a really funny comeback one of the girls in my class posted later that day and led to a great discussion on both Sonnet 130 and Sonnet 18. Once again, the better tweets (as determined by the criteria stated above) were put on my Twitter wall outside my classroom for the classes to see. Opening this exercise up to the school community allowed for some ingenious students (and I would later find out teachers) to respond on my Twitter walls with their own commentary or hashtags. It provided a wonderful arena for students to have meaningful and intelligent interaction and all offline in a safe learning environment. Hopefully providing this safe space will

make students more aware of "unsafe" social media spaces and to steer clear of them. Giving students the freedom to create online presences offline as famous authors, poets, characters, and so forth, encouraged them to think beyond the base curriculum, become more creative, and develop a greater sense of ownership. At the same time they learned the etiquette of the digital world by using something they were interested in and had experience with, allowing for quicker acceptance and more interaction.

Further Uses

Thinking more broadly about this idea, I could see it working not only at the high school level, but at the middle and elementary school levels as well (though because elementary schools restrict internet and social media use for kids under 13, the butcher paper or even the classroom whiteboard would probably be the easiest way to do this). Some may look quizzically at that statement, but why wait for our young learners to start learning about social media? Dewey (1938) would say that using something students are interested in is of paramount importance to their education and therefore to society in the future. I honestly believe that social media literacy and the ability to navigate the social media landscape is a skill that falls into those categories. Despite many online spaces having age restrictions for use (e.g., 13 years old is the most common), most research has shown younger children are not impeded by these restrictions and use the sites anyway (Livingstone & Brake, 2010). The thought that some students do not already know about social media is unlikely and the idea that most if not close to all of them do not already have some form of social media account is naive. So, why not help teach them how to develop a positive online presence which will benefit them as they become more social media savvy? Plus, most of what I did was able to be done offline, which makes it safe and allows students to be more at ease with expressing

themselves, provided teachers create that safe space to begin with.

Conclusion

John Dewey (2001) wanted teachers to focus on the interests of the students and needs of society. He understood, as we all must, that life does not happen in a science lab under controlled circumstances. In this lesson, I tried to establish some controls to maximize safety, but eliminating all risk is simply not possible. As teachers we need to be able to leverage our learners' interest in social media to help them learn. As Krutka and Carpenter (2016) pointed out, "Social media platforms can be leveraged for wise pedagogical purposes that not only can make lessons engaging, but also afford educational experiences that might not otherwise be possible" (p. 10). These lessons have the ability to engage students in learning the curriculum while at the same time teach them about being good online citizens.

It is a twofold lesson that can be used throughout the year and allows students the ability to use something they like, Twitter, rather than something they feel forced to use, like Blackboard or other educational apps. Did all of the students that I taught use this application successfully? No, of course not. However, I believe that this infusion of social media into the classroom afforded them alternative views they may not have heard or been aware of if I had just conducted a class discussion or Socratic seminar. Did some of the students who did not use Twitter (or the offline Twitter walls) do well anyway? Yes, some did. Some students are going to excel no matter the prism through which we teach. If we want to make an impact in our student's lives, if we want to prepare them for the world at large, then social media must be part of our curriculum. It must be actively and purposefully used in an engaging manner that in the end allows students freedom to express their ideas, helps them learn the material being taught in a new and interesting way, and creates positive, thoughtful,

and well informed online citizens who can use social media, in any form, properly and respectfully.

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The Impact of School Culture and Leadership in Relation to Job Satisfaction and Teacher Autonomy

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Abstract
This study demonstrates that when school leaders influence their school's culture and sense of collective autonomy among their teachers, it increases teacher motivation and job satisfaction. School culture plays a crucial role in both individual and collective autonomy, and is heavily influenced by perceptions that teachers have about their administration. Our findings show strong and significant correlations between teacher satisfaction and feeling a sense of collegiality with fellow teachers, while also feeling recognized by administrators that are open and transparent in their interactions with them.

The Relationship between Autonomy, Self-Efficacy and Job Satisfaction

The elusiveness of the term "autonomy," and more specifically that of teacher autonomy, connotes a diverse interpretation of its core meaning. Perhaps the most agreed-upon notion is that of "ideas of professional freedom and self-directed professional development" (Barfield, 2001, Introduction section, para.1). As a concept, autonomy is interpreted from a self-perceived perspective; it is incumbent upon one's reaction to outside forces and to the organizational structure. Teacher autonomy presumes connectivity with external forces. In its essence, it can be identified from an individual perspective.

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Research has significantly linked perceptions of teacher autonomy to degrees of self-efficacy as well as to levels of stress and job satisfaction. In a study by Pearson and Moomaw, the authors assert that teacher autonomy has a significant impact on "job stress, work satisfaction, empowerment, and professionalism" (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005, p.37). While efficacy is rooted in a perception of how an individual behaves in response to external factors (Bandura, 1982), autonomy denotes the control and freedom one perceives in one's environment (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). According to Deci and Ryan (as cited by Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009), both autonomy and a sense of competency are required for psychological well-being, and both are essential in order for a person to feel motivated (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009).

Maximizing teacher autonomy requires school systems which are flexible and understand the need to be receptive to the needs and interests of their teachers. Unfortunately, many American school systems are designed as rather inflexible and overly structured which decreases the sense of autonomy in teachers and can negatively impact their performance. Successful administrators would benefit from recognizing these types of structural weaknesses, finding ways to be more open with their teachers and reducing these artificial limitations, in order to get the most effective teaching performance possible.

According to Self-Determination Theory, motivation at work is based in part on autonomy, and motivation is related to job satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 1985).The contention is that teachers who express the greatest levels of job satisfaction perceive their intentions to be well received and thus, experience a greater level of motivation. If people believe they are capable, they will pursue related efforts (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Similarly, self-efficacy supposes that one would refrain from those tasks that seem to be daunting, unrecognized or constrained by organizational structures that prevent creativity or agency (Bandura, 1977). Absent of flexible structures, teachers would focus exclusively on actions that are expected

according to the demands of the organization in automatic, ritualistic forms of behavior. This suggests that there is a need to examine self-perceptions in relation to efficacy and effectiveness, both of which are affected by one's perception of autonomy within the workplace, the interaction between one's self perception and one's surroundings that affect levels of self-efficacy.

Yet, despite the overwhelming research findings about the role of autonomy and its impact upon the worker, autonomy among teachers continues to wane (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). If teachers are to be effective in the classroom and are to foster high levels of achievement among their students, then autonomy must emerge as a crucial factor within the equation.

The Effective Teacher and Teacher Autonomy

Since self-efficacy is a component of expectancy theory, it is the cognitive make-up of perception that largely determines how one views oneself within the organization (Bandura, 1977). If autonomy is predicated upon a level of self-efficacy, then levels of teacher autonomy must be addressed (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomy of teachers can be dissected into two main entities: the first is how much control the individual feels is relevant to tasks, decision-making and interpersonal relationships, while the second addresses how the community in which the organization exists affects the freedom of choice for the organization (Samuels, 1970). The implicit nature of the American public education system is that of a bureaucratic organization steeped in prescribed procedures and directives. Districts often dictate the curriculum, the resources, the schedule and the forms and protocol each teacher is to follow. Aside from the constraints of being told what to teach, how to teach, and when to teach, these mandates eliminate any sense of teacher autonomy in these areas.

In examining teacher satisfaction, researchers explored both perceptions of worth as well as the relationship between the school principal and teachers. These variables were part of

a greater exploration of school culture which were crucial determinants of teacher satisfaction in the workplace. However, one must also include other factors that lie beyond individual teachers. More specifically, workplace environments, including the quality of relationships with colleagues and administrators, are also vital and significant contributors to teacher satisfaction and performance.

The Culture of a School and its Impact on Teacher Satisfaction

The culture of a school refers to it norms, attitudes, belief systems, and values. It reflects relationships within the school setting, physical design, belief systems within it, as well as reputation in the eyes of community members. Within this culture, a message is conveyed about students, learning, family, achievement, and relationships. Some of these school cultures are positive, while others are toxic. School culture can either promote or hinder learning, and can also espouse or impede student achievement, and collaborative relationships.

School culture can best be described in terms of how it is perceived with respect to its beliefs and attitudes by those within it, and how these perceptions impact the behaviors of both students and teachers. It can be an extension of the district-wide culture, or it can deviate and be uniquely based on its own climate. Organizational Cultures maintain an identity and represent a shared philosophy (Tableman & Herron, 2004) and are formed by the interactions of "the attitudes and beliefs of persons both inside the school and in the external environment, the culture norms of the school, and the relationships between persons in the school" (Boyd-Dimock, 1992). These deep-rooted ideologies become imbedded and ensconced within the school and help to define its reputation, as well as its daily routines.

From a philosophical perspective, school culture may be seen through its value system as depicted by the behavior of its members and in accordance with that which is most

respected. These ideologies extend to those whom the members identify as heroes, as well to the traditions, rites and procedures that they sustain (Tableman & Herron, 2004).The culture of a school has both physical and intangible attributes. It can often be "felt" as one enters a building. Within this atmosphere, self-efficacy can be felt among the teachers. It is a school environment that is alive and positive and its members are directed and goal-oriented, commonly espousing a respectful environment among and between its faculty and students (Jerald, 2006). Similarly, schools that include stakeholders within the decision-making operations also support the learning process, as opposed to those schools in which leaders make more autocratic decisions.

School Cultures and Their Impact on School Quality
          While the definition of culture may be abstract and open to interpretation, its influence upon student behavior is less ambiguous (Boyd-Dimock, 1992). The notion that school culture can directly impact the behavior of students has been best identified in studies of turnaround schools. According to the National School of Character (NSOC), the schools that best exemplified a positive culture demonstrated a commitment to "moral character, treating others well . . . and performance character, doing things well" (Character Education Partnership). The combination of believing and behaving in an ethical manner solidified the positive culture of these schools. In identifying the traits of positive school culture, particular patterns emerged. These settings were marked by an atmosphere that included a "safe and caring environment," an "intellectual climate," a clear set of "rules and policies," and a commitment toward "shared decision making" (Character Education Partnership).
          Despite any efforts aimed at educational reform, it is crucial that the culture of a school is responsive to the needs of all of its members (Small Schools Project). Sometimes, however, leaders are blind to the culture of their schools, and

unaware of how their school suffers due to it. There are those who suggest remedies. For example, a leader could pretend to be a newcomer and walk around the school, imagining the impressions that others would make if they were to begin attending the school. During these observations, attention should be given to the physical spaces within the school, such as classrooms, offices, and hallways. This simple exercise can help leaders recognize the culture of their schools and determine if their institutions project a positive or negative aura, and to ascertain what messages are being sent to students. Once a leader identifies the culture of a school, he or she then has a responsibly to further develop the positive aspects of the school and revamp or eliminate the negative ones (Small Schools Project). The leader may then work with the faculty as active advocates for change.

This practice, however, presumes that the leader wants to engage in change and that both the leader and the faculty are responsive to a transformation of the current school culture. Fullan (2002) maintains that the attitudes of an organization affect the likelihood for change to occur. Additionally, there needs to be a consensus between the current attitudes and the desire to implement change, most notably, among the teachers and the administrators (Hinde), which is a key component in bringing about effective school change. Certain teacher characteristics can facilitate positive change, a list that includes "collegiality, experimentation, high expectations, trust and confidence, tangible support, and referring to a knowledge base" (Hinde). Likewise, school administrators who stressed the importance of professional teacher development while simultaneously exhibiting strong support for teachers were also key factors in bringing about positive change (Hinde).

Additionally, collegial teacher-administrative interactions indicative of behaviors that include "appreciation and recognition, caring and humor, [and] involvement in decision-making" (Hinde). Fullan (2002) asserts that school leaders, like those in the business world, can be instruments of

change provided that in addition to their desire for change, they embrace leadership characteristics of "moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing and coherence" (Fullan, 2002).

In sum, successful cultural change is incumbent upon improving relationships within any organization, and insists that without this occurrence, change is likely to be postponed or compromised (Fullan, 2002). The interpersonal relationships within the school affect both the culture and the culture of change. The culture of a school can be transformed, just as it can adopt a "culture of achievement" within its ideological frame. For example, when speaking about turnaround schools, Mark Conrad, regional director of Expeditionary Learning, states that " . . . cultures are not accidents. They have been intentionally designed by adults to help students and themselves stay focused on quality, character and connection" (Felton, 2011). The culture of a school impacts both student and teacher behavior, for better or for worse. Therefore, as part of any educational reform commitment, the culture of the school cannot be overlooked as a factor in our search for excellence.

Collective Autonomy: Teachers and Administrative Support

We define collective autonomy as "the shared perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have positive effects on students" (Hoy, 2005-2010, p.1). It is an extension of teacher efficacy research that supports the notion that teachers who believe in the achievement of their students will accomplish it as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Collective efficacy theory asserts that while teachers exhibit a perception of themselves, they also have a shared collectivist-based efficacy perception of the organization as a whole along with their fellow colleagues (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004).

With regard to the culture of a school, it is the collective autonomy that influences the level of autonomy for an individual teacher. These forms of efficacy are both rooted in how it is supported or thwarted by the administrative staff of the school. Current research identifies the characteristics of an effective school principal as one who "supports and develops" effective teachers (Davis, 2005, p. 8). Likewise, in studies of teacher perceptions about effective instructional leaders, data cited behaviors that "promoted reflection and professional growth" (Blase & Blase, 2000, p. 135). It was also found that effective instructional leaders communicated with teachers within open, genuine, and goal-oriented relationships, and that they supported teachers to make their own decisions. These relationships were marked by collaborative practices within a shared decision-making model. In essence, the data defined "effective instructional leadership (as one who) integrates collaboration, peer coaching, inquiry, collegial study groups, and reflective discussion, into a holistic approach to promote professional dialog among educators" (Blase, 2000, p. 8). Thus, the humanistic element emerges as a mainstay for effective leadership.

Leaders within educational organizations set the tone for collective autonomy and thus impact the individual autonomy of the teachers directly. In an interview with Rich Karlgaard (2004) of *Forbes Magazine*, Peter Drucker discussed leadership. Karlgaard stated that what sets effective leaders apart from their peers is their focus on the job and their commitment to the goals of the organization rather than on themselves when asserting that:

> Successful leaders don't start out asking, "What do I want to do?" They ask, "What needs to be done?" Then they ask, "Of those things that would make a difference, which are right for me?" They don't tackle things they aren't good at. They make sure other necessities get done, but not by them. Successful

leaders make sure that they succeed! They are not afraid of strength in others.

With the understanding that the leader is ultimately responsible for the quality of the organizational environment, it is important to examine how a leader can encourage collective autonomy within the educational setting. Seyfarth (2008) asserts that effective school-based leaders are ones who advance a learning environment, and who provide the resources, time, and inspiration for their teachers to engage in on-going learning activities. These behaviors can serve to establish and to maintain collective teacher efficacy within a school.

Educational reform advocates within the United States contend that greater teacher autonomy and decision-making input will result in more informed decisions than those made by district or state supervisors; however, they acknowledge an organization that is deeply rooted in a top-down model. "Autonomy seems to be emerging as a key variable when examining educational reform initiatives, with some arguing that granting autonomy and empowering teachers is an appropriate place to begin in solving the problems of today's school" (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005, p.38).

This discussion leads us to believe that there is a combination of important variables that are related to teacher satisfaction, efficacy, and autonomy. In this paper, we set out to identify significant relationships pertaining to how teachers felt about their own abilities, the quality of relationships with their peers, perceptions about their school's academic culture, and how much perceived support teachers felt that they had with administration. Our research aimed to identify how school cultures and administrator relationships correlate to having respected and empowered teachers who approach their work with confidence while also developing a felt sense of collective autonomy with their colleagues.

Hypotheses

The purpose of this paper is to identify what creates a sense of work satisfaction among teachers, and whether a workplace can significantly enhance a teacher's sense of self-efficacy. Using quantitative measures, the authors predict to find the following relationships:

1. Teacher work satisfaction will be positively correlated with Teacher Self-Efficacy.
2. Teacher Satisfaction will be positively correlated with Teacher Autonomy.
3. Teacher Satisfaction will be positively correlated with Perceived Administrative Support.
4. Teacher Satisfaction will be positively correlated with a sense of Collective Autonomy.
5. Teacher Self-Efficacy will be positively correlated to Perceived Administrative Support.
6. Teacher Self-Efficacy will be positively correlated to a sense of Collective Autonomy

Methodology

A self-administered survey instrument was constructed and distributed by the authors to measure the variables of interest and to identify any significant relationships among them. All of the items used to measure these concepts were drawn from existing indexes. Each of these variables had measurements that were found to be unidimensional, according to factor analysis, and with a high degree of internal reliability, which were identified using Cronbach's Alpha.

The following table displays information about the other variables being considered in this study (Teacher Self-Efficacy, Teacher Autonomy, Perceived Administration Support, and Sense of Collective Autonomy). The specific items that were asked of respondents can be seen in appendix A at the end of this paper.

Table 1: Variable Measurement Information

Variable	Number of items used	Source of the Index Items	Cronbach Alpha Score	Index Value Range	Mean Value	Standard Deviation
Teacher Satisfaction	4	(Skinner, 2008)	.750	-12 to +12	5.55	4.31
Teacher Self-Efficacy	6	(Schwarzer, Schmitz & Daytner, 1999)	.765	-18 to +18	9.59	4.41
Teacher Autonomy	6	(Skinner, 2008)	.773	0 to 60	37.16	11.78
Perceived Administration Support	5	(Skinner, 2008)	.881	0 to 50	38.80	8.56
Collective Autonomy	5	(Skinner, 2008)	.737	0 to 50	37.69	6.53

Participants

Once constructed and approved by an institutional review board, the authors engaged in a purposive non-random sample of public school teachers working in Cattaraugus County, New York during the 2015-2016 school year. This target population was selected because of its relevancy to better understanding the perceptions of public educators operating within rural Western New York. Overall, 174 responses were recorded out of 198 teachers contacted, for an overall response rate of 87.8 percent.

Results

Table 2 identifies the bivariate correlations between teacher satisfaction and all of the other variables used in this study (Teacher Self-Efficacy, Teacher Autonomy, Perceived Administration Support, and Collective Autonomy). The data indicates that teacher satisfaction has fairly strong and positive correlations with environmental factors within the school.

Table 2: Bivariate Correlations to Teacher Satisfaction

Variable	Correlation with Teacher Satisfaction
Teacher Self-Efficacy	.369**
Teacher Autonomy	.101
Perceived Administration Support	.427**
Collective Autonomy	.472**

*= Significant at a 95 percent confidence level; **= Significant at a 99 percent confidence level

The table shows support for hypotheses 1, 3, and 4. Teacher satisfaction is increased strongly by three factors: a sense of collegiality and collaboration with fellow faculty members, or collective autonomy (r=.472**), a feeling of having support from the school's administration (r= .427**), and the perception that teachers had the skills necessary to effectively teach their students (r=.369**). However, the data did not show a significant relationship between teacher satisfaction and feelings of teacher independence, or autonomy (r= .101), so hypothesis 2 was not supported by empirical data. It appears that teacher satisfaction is driven largely by camaraderie with fellow faculty and administration, a sense of collegiality within the school, confidence in being a teacher, and other contextual factors, rather than being explained by feelings of independence or personal control over a classroom.

Table 3 displays the correlations among Self-Efficacy with Teacher Autonomy, Collective Autonomy, and Perceived Administration Support. This data shows positive and significant correlations between Teacher Self-Efficacy and Collective Autonomy (r=.268**), as well as with Perceived Administration Support (r=.285**), which indicates empirical support for hypotheses 5 and 6. This data indicates that having collaboration and friendships with fellow educators, and being

in a school where the teacher feels supported by administration, can both have the effect of leading teachers to feel more confident in their abilities.

Table 3: Correlations to Teacher Self-Efficacy

Variable	Correlation with Teacher Self-Efficacy
Teacher Autonomy	.099
Collective Autonomy	.268**
Perceived Administration Support	.285**

*= Significant at a 95 percent confidence level; **= Significant at a 99 percent confidence level

   Other ad hoc analysis showed that Collective Autonomy was greatly enhanced by having the Perception of Administrative Support (r= .622**). Since Collective Autonomy plays such an important factor in Teacher Satisfaction and Teacher Self-Efficacy, it is interesting to note that the relation between teachers and school administrators seems to have a very strong (perhaps dominant) influence on these feelings. Not only does feeling supported by school leadership lead teachers to feel satisfied with their work, but it also seems to increase their confidence in their own ability to teach.

Discussion and Conclusion
   Effective teachers do not work in isolation on an island; rather, their perceived ability to do their work well is predicated upon the paramount importance of feeling that they are being led effectively by school administrators. The people in administrative positions play a vital role in enhancing a feeling of collective autonomy, or group cohesion, among the faculty, which is crucial for maintaining productive teachers.

Overall, the findings support the idea that workplace climate and relationships are crucial to teachers in the sense that they provide feelings of empowerment and satisfaction. In addition, having high levels of collective autonomy was associated with increased levels of teacher self-efficacy, which shows evidence that collaboration with colleagues creates a sense of empowerment and confidence in teachers. Taking these two points together gives a glimpse of what contextual factors drive teacher well-being and performance. Being able to have a voice in the decision-making process with administrators, along with the ability to share ideas while working alongside their fellow colleagues, are key factors that drive teacher satisfaction.

Group unity and cohesion were found to have significant impacts on teacher efficacy and overall workplace happiness, while a sense of individual autonomy did not. We find this to be compelling evidence that workplace contexts are more important than individual factors when discussing teacher efficacy and satisfaction. Environments that promote collegiality and collaboration positively impacted the perceived competency level of teachers and reinforced a sense of belonging to their school, which likely have a multitude of benefits for students.

Alternatively, teachers who showed the lowest amounts of efficacy and satisfaction with their work also had the lowest amount of perceived support by their administration. This suggests that administrators play a key role in facilitating positive workplace environments in order to maintain high levels of teacher confidence and morale within their schools. We find that administrators play a key role in developing and maintaining a sense of collective autonomy in their schools. Whenever the teaching staff was able to maintain openness with school leadership, it promoted feelings of job satisfaction and confidence in their ability to teach. Likewise, there is a remarkably strong correlation ($r = .622^{**}$) between the perception of collective autonomy and feelings of

administrative support, or that the leaders of the school are able to greatly impact the morale and feelings about academic quality at their institution.

　　As a caveat, it should be mentioned that our data collection process was somewhat limited due to a combination of administrative gatekeepers and a lack of funding, which creates a need for further research. Due to these limitations, our sample contains primarily rural schools with a fair degree of homogeneity. While the current study is able to identify key relationships pertaining to teacher efficacy and satisfaction, a replication of this research on a larger scale could provide greater insight to teachers who function in a wider array of school contexts.

　　We feel that future research on this topic should focus more on the perception of administrators, which, taken in tandem with the viewpoints of teachers, would provide a broader spectrum that illustrates what is happening within schools. Additionally, new research would be useful in order to ascertain what precise policies and practices of administrators would maximize the sense of collective autonomy among teachers. Resolving such questions can provide greater insight towards improving the overall functioning of public schools across the United States.

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Appendix A – Survey items used for variable measurement

1. Collective Autonomy (Perception of work condition quality) with other teachers – (Skinner, 2008) **-** 5 items used; Cronbach's Alpha = .737. Responses based on 10-point

semantic differential categorization of the following items
(Agree – Disagree)

*Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced by
teachers in this school, even for students who are not in their
classes.*

*There is a great deal of cooperative effort among the staff
members.*

*I experience a warm feeling with the people I spend time with
at work.*

*I have the impression that people I spend time with at work like
me.*

I feel connected with the people who care for me at work.

2. Perception of Administrative Support – (Skinner, 2008) -
5 items used; Cronbach's Alpha = .881. Responses based on
10-point semantic differential categorization of the following
items (Agree – Disagree)

*The principal lets staff members know what is expected of
them.*

*The school administration's behavior toward the staff is
supportive*

*My principal enforces school rules for student conduct and
backs me up when I need it.*

*The principal knows what kind of school he/she wants and has
communicated it to the staff.*

In this school, staff members are recognized for a job well done

3. Teacher Autonomy – (Skinner, 2008) - 6 items used; Cronbach's Alpha = .773. Responses range from "I have no influence" (0), "I have some influence" (3), "I have a lot of influence" (7), and "I have full control" (10).

I have control over the Selection of textbooks and other instructional materials

I control the Selection of content, topics, and skills to be taught in class

I select the teaching techniques for my course

I have control over evaluating and grading the students

I have control over the disciplining of the students

I have control over determining the amount of homework to be assigned

4. Teacher Satisfaction (Skinner, 2008) - 4 items used; Cronbach's Alpha = .750
Response Categories range from: Strongly Agree (-3), Agree (-2), Somewhat Agree (-1), Not Sure (0), Somewhat Disagree (+1), Disagree (+2), and Strongly Disagree (+3)

I sometimes feel it is a waste of time to try to do my best as a teacher.

I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school (reverse coding used for this item)

The stress and disappointments involved in teaching at this school aren't really worth it

I don't seem to have as much enthusiasm now as when I began teaching.

5. Teacher Self-Efficacy (Schwarzer, Schmitz, & Daytner, 1999) - 6 items used; Cronbach's Alpha = .765. Response Categories range from: Strongly Agree (+3), Agree (+2), Somewhat Agree (+1), Not Sure (0), Somewhat Disagree (-1), Disagree (-2), and Strongly Disagree (-3)

I am able to successfully teach all relevant subject content to even the most difficult students.

I know that I can maintain a positive relationship with parents even when tensions arise.

I am able to reach even the most difficult students.

I am convinced that I will continue to become more and more capable of helping to address student needs.

Even if I get disrupted while teaching, I am confident that I can maintain my composure and continue to teach well.

I can develop creative ways to cope with system constraints (such as budget cuts and other administrative problems) and continue to teach well

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School Districts are asked to submit no more than six student writing entries.

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Using *Choice Words* for More Powerful Teacher Talk

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Abstract
Teachers play a powerful role in helping students shape understandings of themselves and their worlds. When teachers carefully examine their teacher talk, they can begin to notice the impacts of their words on students' identities, interactions, and development. This article provides suggestions for using Peter Johnston's (2004) book *Choice Words* as groundwork for teachers to examine their language choices in interactions with students.

Using *Choice Words* for More Powerful Teacher Talk

In our work as teacher educators, we have found Peter Johnston's (2004) book *Choice Words: How Our Language Affects Children's Learning* to be transformational in helping teachers examine their verbal interactions with students. Johnston's book takes a close look at the impact of teacher language on students' identity development, agency, ability to be flexible in their learning, and other areas of student growth and thinking. With practical phrases and ideas to implement into a teacher's practice, this book provides an opportunity for teachers to inquire about their language use in literacy classrooms.

Understanding the Impacts of Teacher Talk

Johnston argues that teachers play a role in the ways that students see themselves as learners, community members,

and citizens. The power of *Choice Words* occurs when teachers make changes to their language choices when talking with students. Throughout the book, Johnston offers snippets of language he has heard successful teachers using in their classrooms. He analyzes the effects that each of these language choices might have on students' understandings of themselves and offers a rationale for incorporating these powerful phrases into readers' own classrooms. While Johnston draws most of his ideas from upper elementary literacy teachers, his suggestions are useful for any teaching context.

In one example of the power that teachers' words can have, Johnston recalls seeing a teacher in an urban high school working with a diverse group of students. The teacher responded to the poem one student had written by saying, "You really are quite a poet" (p. 9). Johnston noticed, "the student, who until that point had met little success academically, began carrying a paperback book of poetry around in his back pocket and writing more poems." Johnston explains, "By representing him as a poet, the teacher had opened the door for this student to entertain the possibility of becoming the kind of person who reads poetry and would welcome further interactions based on the premise that he is a poet."

Using *Choice Words* in Our Classrooms

In our work with teachers at a range of experience levels (preservice to veteran) and who teach in many different contexts (various subject areas, grade levels, and school demographics), we have found that implementing Johnston's ideas can have a dramatic impact on teachers' work with students. For example, we have seen teachers develop the language necessary to have meaningful writing conferences with their students by validating students as writers and giving students control over their own writing. Teachers have become more conscious of what they say to their students and the messages they send to them. They have been excited to use the

ideas and language from *Choice Words* to see how their students' attitudes toward themselves change.

To support teachers in their implementation of the ideas from *Choice Words*, we have developed a process that uses informal discourse analysis and action research. First, we suggest that teachers record a one-on-one or small group teaching conversation. We recommend that teachers record the entirety of the conversation (a reading check-in, a guided reading session, an individual writing conference, etc.) so they capture the context of the conversation. Then we ask teachers to listen carefully to the recording of the entire conversation.

After listening to the recording (ideally more than once), we ask teachers to identify and transcribe a short excerpt. The process of reading the transcript allows the teachers to take note of places where they used some of Johnston's ideas. Teachers look for concepts like:

- "Where are you going with this piece [of writing]?" (p. 33), which demonstrates how students can build agency and become strategic in their learning
- "Are there any other ways to think about that? Any other opinions?" (p. 69), which demonstrates the process of building a democratic learning community
- "What have you learned most recently as a reader?" (p. 26), which demonstrates building identity, in this case, as a reader

We also encourage teachers to look for places where there were missed opportunities to use Johnson's ideas in the conversation. Sometimes it can be uncomfortable to identify areas of missed opportunities or places where teachers notice that they wish they "should have said X instead." The process of cultivating different language choices with students begins with acknowledging those opportunities to attend to the

development of the students' agency, identity, creativity, and sense of community.

Next, teachers create a chart with two columns (see Appendix A). In the first column, teachers list transcribed bits of the conversation. In the second column, teachers write a short analysis of how each comment works toward one of the principles of *Choice Words* (similar to the analysis chart Johnston provides at the end of his book). This close reading of teachers' own language choices helps them zero in and really listen to the impacts of their words, even in a short, five-minute conversation. We include a sample chart in this article from a teacher who has conducted this analysis in her classroom (Appendix A). In the writing conference, the teacher talks with a second grade student about an informational text the student has written about panthers. The analysis shows the teacher's comments on the left and her analysis of those comments as they illustrate concepts from Johnston's *Choice Words* on the right.

After the teachers have reflected on their transcript and analysis, we suggest that they share and discuss their charts with colleagues in a professional learning community, an action research group, or another collaborative group. This allows the teachers to get a fresh perspective and generate more ideas about their language choices from other teachers. We encourage the teachers we work with to formulate an action plan or a series of next steps to try in their conversations with students.

Teachers' Reactions

As a result of this project, the teachers we have worked with often share valuable reflections about the process. They have shared statements like, "Prior to reading *Choice Words*, I struggled with providing meaningful feedback to students. I was mainly focused on getting my teaching point across and

never stopped to think if I was building upon or diminishing my students' identity or agency." And some teachers have said that specific phrases from Johnston's book resonate with them, such as, "I love how *Choice Words* encourages teachers to use language, like 'I bet you're proud of yourself,' that gives the power back to the student." Other teachers have remarked, "I will be more conscious of the message I am sending to my students. In the past, I feel that I unintentionally sent the message that I held all of the answers." After reading *Choice Words* many teachers have expressed, "I see myself saying that" and also, "I bet I don't say that enough." One teacher even created a list of phrases from the book that she keeps on her desk that she wanted to use more regularly. Teachers have seen great value in the practice of examining how their language use shapes students' experiences and learning.

In other professional learning situations, many of the teachers we have worked with have had opportunities to try new methods and strategies in their classrooms, but few of them have analyzed their verbal interactions with students in this way. Using *Choice Words* gives teachers a chance to closely examine the lasting effects their words might have on their students. When teachers examine their language using Johnston's concepts, they leave feeling better prepared to choose phrases that encourage and sustain their students' learning.

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adolescent literacy, and teacher education. Bailey is also the Director of the Fox Valley Writing Project. Before becoming a teacher educator, Bailey taught high school English.

Jessica Gallo, PhD, is Assistant Professor of English Education at the University of Nevada, Reno. Her current research focuses on rural education, writing pedagogy, and English teacher education. Before becoming a teacher educator, Jess taught high school English in rural school districts in Wisconsin. She has been a National Writing Project Teacher Leader since 2008 and is a former co-director for the Rural Wisconsin Writing Institute, a site of the Fox Valley Writing Project. Jess has also served as president of the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English (2012-2013), assistant editor of *Wisconsin English Journal* (2009-2013), co-editor of *Global Education Review* (2013-2016), and editor of *Montana English Journal* (2016-2017). When she is not in a classroom, you can find Jess behind a sewing machine, on the hiking trails, or buried in a stack of YA lit.

Appendix A

Sample Analysis Chart (used with permission)

Teacher's Comments to a Second Grade Student in a Writing Conference	Teacher's Analysis Using Concepts from *Choice Words*
I like how you are problem solving as a writer. Instead of just writing the facts that you come across in the book, you are making it your own. I can tell that you are really challenging yourself as a writer.	By pointing out that the student is making the writing their own, I am hoping to build agency.

I like how you approached that problem. You became a researcher when you didn't know what to write. You went back to your book and researched until you found what you were looking for.	In this comment, I pointed out a strategy writers often use with an example of how the student is using it. This helps to build on the student's identity as a writer.
In your chapter about where panthers live, you list many interesting facts just like the author of *Polar Bears*.	In this comment, I connect the student to an author and build on the student's identity as a writer. I think that I should have used a specific example of a fact from the student's writing to support my praise.
The author of *Polar Bears* starts their chapter about where polar bears live with the words "Brrr!" That sentence got my attention as a reader and really made me want to keep reading. Suppose you were going to put a hook in your story. What could you write to grab your reader's attention?	With this comment, I am building agency. I am suggesting that this student think about a writing technique that they could try in their writing. Using the "Suppose…" statement keeps the writing in the student's control and promotes flexible thinking without threatening their identity as a writer.
That is a technique that good authors use to hook their readers. I'm going to challenge you to write a hook for this chapter.	By challenging the student, I am hoping to show the student that I believe they can accomplish the task. Next time, I think I should explain why I would like them to try the technique. For example, I could have said, "I'm going to challenge you to write a hook for this chapter, just like the author

	of *Polar Bears* did, to get your readers excited to keep reading."
I can't wait to see the great hook you come up with.	This comment shows that I am interested in what the student is writing and I am invested in their writing. I think this helps create a trusting relationship.

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Aranea

Mia Carranza
Herricks High School, New Hyde Park, NY

I couldn't sleep.

Before I had seen it my room was my haven. A heaven.

You know how everyone always tells you to count sheep? Well I counted about 237 before I relented, instead watching the arachnid spin its prey into an elaborate cobweb of silk. I'd have to kill it. I had an acute fear of spiders and could never kill one on my own.

It was too late to call someone into the room to help me, the alarm clock on the white bedside table read 1:13 AM in bright, blue light.

So, instead of unwrapping myself from my heavy blue comforter, I lay on my back and continued to watch the spider. It seemed to realize it had no competition because it decided to add to its tiny design. I watched as the liquid protein from within the creature solidified into a deadly, but beautiful, trap.

Yes, a trap. Like the one I'd been caught in this morning, I remembered. I dove back into memories of how he had dutifully put me in my place. The purpling bruise on my face and my split lip throbbed as I remembered the cold fury, like hell, in his cobalt eyes.

"What did you say?" he growled, inches from my crimson flushed face as he gripped my throat with one hand. Those lips of his spinning its own silk, he was catching his prey.

"I-I," I tried to speak but my throat failed me. I was losing oxygen. My brain begged to be wrapped in his lies, that godforsaken cocoon. I tried to reach for something— the gossamer drapes fluttering against my window. Please, I thought, please tell me you love me. That would be the end.

"Can't speak now?" He released my throat from his fingers and backed me further into the web. Spun the silk tighter around me. "How dare you try and speak back to me? You are useless."

I felt brave and tried to break free. "How dare you? I have the righ-," My bravery ricocheted off the alarm clock. The sound of the back of his hand breaking the skin of my lip came before the pain. I submit. "You have the right to what?" He crouched down to my level, sat with me and played pretend. Pretended we were equals. I only wanted to retreat, surrender. The security of this room was no longer mine. He had made this his web.

He caressed my face and I flinched, trying to hide it but he didn't react. I was surprised as he cupped my face in both his hands and made me look at him. Eye to eye I saw my predator.

"I love you."

He wrapped me in his web of lies.

I stared at the arachnid some more, didn't kill it. I let it build its lattice and instead burrowed into my comforter, blue as his eyes. I closed my own.

I fell asleep.

Mia Carranza is a junior at Herricks High School. Inspired by authors such as Sarah J. Maas and poets such as Neil Hilborn, she writes poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction. Mia writes for her school's newspaper and literary journal, and is in Herricks' Jazz and Mixed choirs. She also runs for her school's Cross Country team in the fall season. Mia has a unique fondness for 80's movies; *The Breakfast Club* and *Ferris Bueller's Day off* are among some of her favorites. She also loves to read, with fantasy being her favorite genre. Despite her many interests, her true love is writing; she one day hopes to write her own novels and change the world through her words.

The English Record
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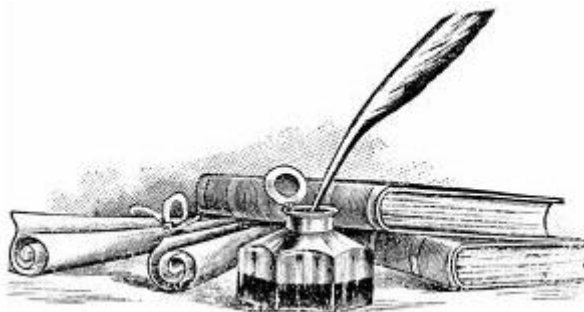
This award is given to one author that was published during the current volume year. Nominations will be sent by members of the blind review panel and executive board to the editor for selection. The award will be presented at the awards luncheon at the conference.

Snow from a Raincloud in a Sunny Sky

Joanna Lau
Herricks High School, New Hyde Park, NY

my grandparents' English // is snow falling
from a raincloud in // a sunny sky
the words topple like two // puzzle pieces that don't // fit
from different puzzles // entirely // the square piece that
found itself in a box // of curves

I // am more curved // than square
the rain from a // raincloud can will
itself to turn back // into a snowflake but // is a snowflake still
a snowflake once // it melts

my edges // are a lost child I // flail for in the clouds
a flash of dark eyes // hair // laugh at me for the
corners // I have neglected

my Chinese hides // within the mist // I will ask it
to peek out as light // show its edges // in sunrays // even if I can't
touch them // but my dimming // rays will cower
in the sunlight // amid leaves of // trees laughing
at the sky // I will rain
and my grandparents // will snow // the sky basking
in its sunny shards

A member of Herricks High School's English Scholars (Creative Writing) Program, **Joanna Lau** is a senior who enjoys writing poetry and creative nonfiction. Her work has received a National Gold Medal, four Gold Keys, and two Honorable Mentions in the 2019 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, as well as 3rd place in the 2019 Ringling College international "Storytellers of Tomorrow" Creative Writing Contest nonfiction category. Joanna also received the highest level of recognition in the 2018 National Council for Teachers of English Achievement Awards for Writing. She is on the staff of the Herricks OPUS Literary Journal. Aside from her love of writing, Joanna is also an aspiring flutist, having appeared as a soloist with multiple orchestras. She has been principal flutist of the Honor Orchestra of America and Manhattan School of Music PreCollege Philharmonic Orchestra. Her playing has been featured on WQXR's Young Artists Showcase multiple times and has been recognized nationally by the Anthony Quinn Foundation Scholarship and YoungArts. Joanna is planning on attending Harvard University in the fall.

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Shhh…It Isn't in the Module: Creative Problem Solving
through Makerspace and Odyssey of the Mind

Dr. Kjersti VanSlyke-Briggs
SUNY Oneonta
Marisa Orezzoli
Elaina van der Sommen
Tiffany Sullivan

Abstract

This team of four Odyssey of the Mind volunteer coaches discuss the implementation of a NYSEC funded mini-grant that supported the development of a makerspace for use in the elementary/middle school. This space was developed for use by teachers, but also for use by the Odyssey of the Mind.

The Cast

Kjersti: A past coach for four years. She began coaching when her daughter was in 1st grade. Coauthor of the mini-grant through NYSEC to support the development of the makerspace and to support the Odyssey program.

Marisa: A coach for five years. She has been involved in Odyssey for six years and she coordinated the entire school program the past four years. She is a coauthor of the NYSEC mini-grant.

Elaina: Coach three years. Her two children have been involved for several years.

Tiffany: Coach for three years. One child has participated in Odyssey for several years.

The Sets
Funding from The New York State English Council Mini-grant was used to develop an empty classroom as a makerspace. This space was also supported by the school district with the addition of furniture, an LCD and a SmartBoard. The space was identified as the makerspace due to the large size, stage cabinets, closet, and sinks. As a former lab room, it was well suited for the experiential work and applied learning associated with Odyssey of the Mind.

The Show
Odyssey of the Mind (OM) is an international program that highlights problem solving and team work through creative exploration. This program began in 1978 and continues to develop strong interdisciplinary experiences as many of the long term problems have a STEAM approach in that students must develop a technical or mechanical solution to a problem through the use of the visual arts and theatre. The membership fee and site coordinator stipend were both funded through the site school district.

      Guided by a site coordinator, the volunteer coaches were comprised mostly of parents broken up into teams organized by age group. After school, teams rotated to meet in the makerspace room to develop the long-term problems and to practice with spontaneous problems. After several months of development, the teams showcased their work for families at theatre night held in the high school auditorium. This provided time for last minute changes before heading to the regional competition.

The Script
Kjersti: Let's start off by talking about what got you started in Odyssey. What brought your children into Odyssey? Why did they want to start? Marisa, let's start with you as a site coordinator, so you can tell us a little bit about what Odyssey is as well.

Marisa: At the beginning, I got asked a lot what Odyssey was and that was hard for me to explain because people think it's like math problems and academic decathlon, but it's not any of that. The way I explain it is that it is like sports for the creative mind. It is being able to think outside the box, put a skit together, make all the props, and do everything on your own. I like to think of it as a competition for the creative mind.

I got involved six years ago because my middle son was interested. My husband also always wanted to do it when he was in school, but back then members were hand-picked, and if you did not get an invitation, you didn't get to participate. He never got picked. He said it was always the wealthier kids and the kids that behaved, and he wasn't one of those. He explained to me what it was and I was like alright, I'll try it out.

My two sons were on the team together for primary. One was in second grade and one was in kindergarten, and a kindergarten teacher was the coach. It's so funny because I was letting them go to practices, and then my son came home and complained how he didn't feel like he was being heard. He was complaining about something so I was like, oh, I'll just go and see if I can help out. She [the coach] asked if I wanted to stay and see what was going on and my husband and I ended up helping out the rest of the year with her team. They had a rowdy bunch, but we stayed and it was fun.

The next year we thought about doing it again and just going to sign ups. We got there and they already had a team for us! We ended up coaching that year and our team ended up going to States. It was pretty fun. It was interesting and a learning experience because that year I didn't know of the whole other side of the problem form. There is also style judging and other details you have to know. No one explained that you have to really thoroughly look through the problem and every detail.

Tiffany: To be honest my daughter actually didn't know about Odyssey. I did Odyssey as a kid. Knowing what Odyssey was, I thought it was something she would enjoy. I brought it up to her and once I discussed the different aspects with her she seemed interested. The biggest benefit is that she can think out of the box and there is no right and wrong. Sometimes in school they don't have this ambiguity, and students are consistently directed that this is what they are doing. She really likes the self-directed part of it. She is in fourth grade now.

Elaina: My oldest started first because a friend was going to sign her son up and sent us because she couldn't be there. We ended up signing up, and her son couldn't be there. That's how we got him into it and got started, and he really enjoyed it and has stuck with it for a couple of years now. Because he was doing it, then his sister had an interest in it and we started her up on the team as well. My daughter just finished first grade and my son is in fourth grade.

Kjersti: Marisa, you mentioned style earlier. There are two different kinds of problems really. There's the spontaneous and then the long term. Let's talk about those a little bit. How would you define spontaneous? What is that like to someone who is not part of OM?

Marisa: I would say spontaneous is going into a room and not knowing what to expect. You are faced with having the possibility of a verbal problem or a hands-on problem where it's something you cannot prepare for, more of an impromptu. The team just has to go in and use a lot of teamwork on the spot. They are on a time restraint as well, working to complete this unprepared problem that is thrown at them and to the best of their ability, to gain the most points that they can.

Elaina: I think that's where you really see where your team personalities come out and how they mix and work together. How they handle being put through being handed a problem on the spot. You really start to see the different personalities come out in the spontaneous, being in primary (the youngest level of competition), you get to sit in while they compete and see how they work that through. As the kids get older you can't go in. You just rely on their reports when they come back out.

Kjersti: Yeah, I know that was hard for us; the first year I couldn't go in and I panicked, wondering what's going to happen when I'm not there to supervise. They were fine, of course, and didn't need me.

Elaina: But it's a good thing to see when you can go in, which person steps up and if they are going to get along. If they are able to work through that. If they don't, if one person takes over the whole problem, you get to see the team dynamic a little bit differently.

Tiffany: Spontaneous really is just "here's a problem. Let's see how really good you guys work well as a team." It can be elaborate, and you don't know if you are going to have verbal or hands on. There is also a lot of variety. It gets the kids to think on their toes about being prompted by an adult. Here you guys go, let's see how good you guys work together, and it shows the team unity. If they work together they do it without hurting each other's feelings.

Marisa: They have to decide the players as a team before going in. Only five students from the team are allowed in, so if you have more on your team you have to go through that process, which can be painful. Seven get to go in, but only five get to actually do the problem.

Kjersti: So how is long term different? What is that like?

Marisa: You get to prepare for that. You get the breakdown of what they want you to do, and you are able to explain it to the kids, so that way they have to think about how they are going to solve this problem with each other. They have to base it on eight minutes in a skit. Basically, it's a skit that they have to create everything for and solve this elaborate problem that breaks down to so many steps.

With my team, I always tell them in the beginning, we are going to be straight up honest with each other and they always look at me funny. I make everybody tell each other what their strengths are and what they think what makes them valuable to the team. That way anytime there is some sort of conflict, we can remember back to team member strengths. As a team, they have to work well together.

Tiffany: The teams start out with a problem, and they start out really well, and there is always that craziness of doing long term when they get stuck at a certain point and you have to pull them back together and regroup them and refocus them. It seems like a creative chaos. If you have done it before you know this is the natural curve now we are in. Their flow will come back and they will pull it together by the end.

Kjersti: Usually theater night when they present to the parents before the completion—

Marisa: It's like they like to drive you crazy until that night, then they are like, "oh, we got it."

Elaina: The long-term problem allows them to critique their own abilities, how they are doing with it. The team this year, for example, they came up with a skit. We started with one whole concept of Shaketown and three practices later they are talking about a completely different concept, and I don't even

55

know how it shifted, but that's their minds moving from one idea to another.

Even once you have your skit down, they have to fine tune it to see what they can improve. They analyze the breakdown of the scoring, so if you are forgetting a portion that is going to be scored you can go back and edit that part of the skit. It is a reading problem where they go through and have to critique it and annotate it. This allows them to focus and complete the multi-layered task. A couple of times they'll veer from the task, and I have to redirect them. It draws them back in to what the main problem is and what are we really supposed to be focusing on. Even in school, sometimes students get off the path and need to refocus and this helps them practice this skill.

Tiffany: Mainly, with the long-term problems, the tricky part is that sometimes it's so open to how they are interpreting the task and what information they are given. They might read it one day and think they are on the right track, and then the next day they decide they didn't interpret it the right way and can ask more experienced students for clarification.

Marisa: You can also ask the OM organizers for clarification, and there is a discussion online. Sometimes you might not even think to ask the question, so it is important to read the discussions. Last year, my team got dinged at States because they used the tune of an Elton John song. They made the song that way because in the description it stated, "anyway you wish" and that came down to an interpretation difference.

Tiffany: That's the hardest part as a coach. You are guiding the kids, but you can't help them and you can't say anything directly. They need open spaces, makerspaces, to play and develop ideas. That's why this maker-classroom was so helpful.

Kjersti: Even in the long-term there are different kinds of problems, so there are the ones that I like that are all theater based then there's the more mechanical.

Tiffany: The five problems: it's the transportation problem and that has a vehicle in it. Then, the technical problem. They have the classic which is more like the art problem and then there is balsa wood. They also have problem five, which is the cliffhanger skit and more theater.

Marisa: My husband's team last year did the balsa wood problem, and it is very unique. They have certain dimensions they can use and a certain height, and they must build a structure. Last year was the first time we did this one. Basically, you have to build this structure that fits around this metal pole and a crusher board. It's however strong this structure is without being crushed because they provide weights and you keep putting weights and weights and weights on until it breaks. You have to provide a skit with it to incorporate whatever theme that they use as well.

Last year, they made it too tall, so it started to twist and because of that a piece of the balsa wood was touching the pole. The judge had them take it back off and do it again because the wood can't touch the pole. It has to just stay away from it. But because they had to redo it the team got flustered. Of course, the other team was watching so they knew how much weight they had to beat and that was it. It's an interesting problem. It was a tough year, with the problems; I feel like they keep getting harder.

Marisa: This year we had 33 students participate in grades one through seven. They were split across five teams. One team had three coaches and then there were three teams with one coach and one team with two coaches. There was also a floater coach.

Kjersti: The great thing about that is the coaches are all voluntary. It's not that they're getting stipends. The NYSEC grant was to create a Makerspace. I think we got pretty lucky. I don't know what happens in other school districts, but the fact that we had our own classroom that was devoted this year with a closet and science tables made a big difference. Marisa, what did we use the money from the grant to purchase?

Marisa: All the supplies I can think of, duct tape, hot glue, spray paint, markers, crayons, pens, tissue paper, scissors, and glitter. Anything the teams really needed. Anything that I could provide that was universal. There was a sale one day at the hardware store on duct tape. I bought so much duct tape! There was a stack of all these different colors of duct tape, and there is never such a good sale.

I always find items on sale, the awkward colors even. Price is important because they are included with the problems and there is a limit. You have to figure out your pricing sheet, so that they don't go over their budget.

Kjersti: And of course, not included in the grant, but the random massive piles of used cardboard that are put into use. So much cardboard.

Marisa: One of the coaches has a friend that works for a furniture company. He said he was going to bring in some cardboard during his practice which is the team Elaina helps coach. I said okay that's fine. They brought all that cardboard up in one night. For an *hour* after practice. It was a lot of cardboard. The janitors are still not happy with me. It's all free, so what can you do with cardboard? We had carpet tubes too, and I know a lot of teams used those. Those were helpful.

Kjersti: Between cardboard, duct tape, and hot glue! I think every kid took a shot at the hot glue gun.
　　　　I am sure we are the worst nightmare for the maintenance staff between paint, glitter and the recyclables we save to use.
　　　　So, Marisa, what is the secret to getting to States?

Marisa: I don't know, letting them know when the plan is not going to work. Helping them know what the judges want. Being able to have layers. I always ask, "what is going to be your wow factor?" What is going to set you apart?"
　　　　They have really grown. I mean, you know everything has to be original. I really push the team to be original. Don't use props that are purchased. You have to think what will set you apart creatively. What's going to have someone said "wow, they took a lot of time to do that." I have them on

Pinterest to look for ideas. I encourage them to create as many details as they can out of recycled items. The more recycled stuff students can use to make things look unique the further they will go. It is going to set you apart from someone who wears regular clothes or a regular shirt.

One of my teams this year made a tree out of cardboard. Then they cut water bottles in a spiral, so it looks like the top of a tree. They spray painted them green. I have a funny group. They are hilarious. I have a bunch of hams on both teams.

Kjersti: What do you think the kids are learning by doing this? For my daughter, I can tell her language skills have improved. She is learning to state a problem and develop evidence-based skills to solve that problem. What else do you think the kids are learning?

Elaina: The public speaking skill is big. Being comfortable in front of a crowd, which is why we wanted our son to do it. I reference him because he is the oldest and started first. We wanted him to do something outside his comfort zone. I think that's a huge component they learn.

Tiffany: I, obviously, related it back to myself. Working in the environment I work (nursing), you have to think quick on your feet, which goes into the spontaneous part. You are thrown a problem and solve it. "Here ya go—you only have a few minutes to think and a few minutes to solve it. Let's see what you can do."

The critical thinking piece is not a natural process for some people. They are learning a lifelong skill that is going to help them in the future. They are learning team work, public speaking skills, literacy skills and the ability to decode the text of the problem. And they can be kids; they can have fun and be silly with it.

Marisa: It helps that they have fun, and I feel like innovation comes from people thinking outside the box. Having those thoughts in a comfortable environment is important. You never know what it will lead to in the future. There are some kids on my teams that have gone through big life changes in their families during OM. The kids help each other out. OM is a place that is loving.

Elaina: There are times when I am like, can we do this another night? It is work. I get tried. I know the kids feel that sometimes. It is great and fun, but it is hard. It teaches commitment.

Marisa: Yea, towards the end, on one of my teams there was some tension. I know it means so much for the kids. To see their faces be excited when they won. I struggled with my first team the most, but the work pays off.

Anyone is welcome to come and support our school. I tell them this is their opportunity, look around, look at what you can be up against. This is where the kids remember ideas and they incorporate those ideas later. Two years ago, at States there was team, I think it was a high school team, they made a xylophone out of a glass mirror. It was this whole huge glass xylophone incorporated in the skit of glass. It's so creative.

Elaina: How do you prepare for States? Are you allowed to change anything?

Marisa: You can revamp and change anything you scored low on at regionals.

Tiffany: And the kids are funny and silly! They get to be themselves. You're not allowed to be that way in school. It's not like you can crack jokes and be silly in school all the time. These kids are good kids and you know they forget they can do that—be silly and be kids.

Then when we get to performance they have their game face. That's something you learn by doing this. Overcoming those fears of public speaking or fear of performing. That is something else I have noticed is the kids that I have had multiple years on the team get more comfortable with each year. They aren't as scared.

I had one who never performed until this year, and you could see when she got to spontaneous; you could see it in her face. She was fine and then all of a sudden right before she went out her eyes got big. It was such that fear of the unknown

and fear of performing. I looked at the rest of the group and that was them three years ago. Now the rest of them have done it a few times and settled in their shoes. They have learned not to stress as much. I think that is what Odyssey brings to the table.

Kjersti: And I like that for my daughter too. Not that she opens up in Odyssey very much either. She is so restrained all the time. I like that this challenges her a little bit. She is such a rule follower. I know that is a good thing most of the time, but it is sad too because she forgets to be a kid and is always looking for the "right" answer.

Elaina: It does stretch them. I do see the difference between the kids over the years. It is amazing.

Tiffany: It teaches them too that you can't always win. My daughter is always used to being top of her class, doing well in every sport. It is good for her to do something that she is not automatically first.

You have to really apply yourself. Work hard. Then come back again, keep going with a persistent attitude not to give up. A lot of the kids in my group are very used to winning and being on top. It is not bad to be second, to learn to come back and keep fighting.

Elaina: I was hesitant to coach my first year. I'm not creative. It is out of my comfort zone. No way, no way. I can see why it is hard to get coaches. It is imitating. I am a concrete, sequential type person. It is very challenging for me. I have to step back and let the kids be creative. And it is very uncomfortable for me. It is not as organized as I want it to be.

Tiffany: I see creative ideas emerging from the students and I am like, "ooo, guys it is right there." But obviously, their brains are not thinking what my brain is thinking.

Marisa: I started using slideshow and media to help prompt them and show them without telling them. Let them draw their own conclusions. I try to help bring the research to them with tools like Pinterest. Sometimes I will send it to the parents and ask them to look it over with the kids. It helps them with sets and costume ideas.

Tiffany: You do bond with the kiddos. I have a good crew. It makes it hard to think about not coaching again.

Elaina: They are comfortable with each other. They feel safe. They have to feel that to share their ideas.

Marisa: That's a good thing too because it makes them think outside of their circle of friends, make different bonds and accept different people.

I had a brother and sister come and their mom said she didn't care if they were on the same team. When they both won, she was emotional because both of her kids were going on to States. The sister is really creative. She is quiet and quirky, and really creative. The stuff she does is really good. She made her whole dress. She weaved it from recycled plastic bags. Then she braided it with straw to make her Snow-White dress. She did it at home all on her own.

The team had her dress be in the stylist, free choice item for judging. Give credit to the students. They worked hard; I just guided them. I just do it for the kids. I create those bonds with the kids, and I bond with the coaches. If I see them in the hall, I say "hi." They say "it's the Odyssey lady."

Epilogue
For more information on Odyssey of the Mind and starting your own school program head to https://www.odysseyofthemind.com/

Dr. Kjersti VanSlyke-Briggs is a Professor of Secondary Education and the Director of The Faculty Center at SUNY Oneonta. She is a former member of the Executive Board for NYSEC and is a Past President of NYSEC.

Marisa Orezzoli is a member of the Sidney School District Board of Education and is currently serving as the vice president.

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Tiffany Sullivan is an RN at UHS Wilson Medical Center in Johnson City.

A Newer World

Paul J. O'Brien

"A Newer World" was originally published in V*oices From Room 6: A Teacher Remembers,* The Troy Book Makers (2015).

In the early 1960's Robert Kennedy had come into my life and grew dramatically for me in the next few years. As I began to teach in 1967, he was one of the principal forces shaping the way I saw the world.

On June 4, 1968, I stayed up late watching the reports on the returns from the California Presidential Primary. After a tumultuous and exhausting campaign, Robert Kennedy appeared to be the winner. Having to teach the next day, I went to bed with the feeling that there was hope for America in this charismatic, contradictory, inspirational figure. By morning, my world and the world of all those who saw hope in Robert Kennedy had been tragically diminished.

I knew very little about Robert Kennedy in my formative years. I knew that he was part of a bright and influential family. Of course, Irish households in general saw his brother John as an heroic figure and a game changer. I remember being called in by my parents from the woodshed – our game center – to watch the presidential debates of 1959: John Kennedy vs. Richard Nixon. I remember clearly with all the bias built into an Irish household how handsome and articulate Kennedy seemed against the darker, tortured figure of Nixon – a beacon of hope versus a flickering lantern. In our eyes, Kennedy was the clear-cut winter in the debates, and we would have disputed totally the analysis of political pundits that the debates were actually very, very close. Theodore White's *The Making of the President 1960*, a book I later

devoured, made me see much more clearly how close the debates and the Presidential race had been.

Not being a political person by nature, I did not engage in late night college tavern discussions about how the Kennedys were doing as leaders, although I was aware that Robert had been a crucial figure in the Cuban Missile Crisis and a strong voice to the President on domestic issues.

Robert Kennedy's life and the world's took a dramatic turn on Nov. 22. 1963. I was walking up North Avenue in New Rochelle heading to my American Literature class with Dr. Peter Chetta, when cars starting pulling over. One man who pulled up near me had his window open, and I could see that he was listening intently to his radio. I asked, "Did something major happen?" Looking directly at his radio, he said, "The President's been shot." In class, Dr. Chetta moved slowly to the front of the room, turned and said, "Gentlemen, given what has just happened, there is no way I can conduct class. Go do what you need to do." I am still amazed to this day that about twenty minutes later about 100 young men gathered in the quad near the ginkgo tree and prayed the rosary. It was a prayer I knew well.

The images of the Kennedy funeral are forever locked in the minds of those who were alive at the time: the stoic face of his wife, Jacqueline, the salute of his son, John, as his father's body passed by, the riderless horse, Blackjack, who carried a saddle with boots turned backwards in the stirrups, and the one constant image, the presence of Robert Kennedy at Jacqueline's side, both consumed by grief, both plumbing depths of strength to carry on.

At the 1964 Democratic Convention, filled with political maneuvering, Kennedy stood before the delegates on the fourth day of the Convention and received a twenty-two minute round of applause. Lyndon Johnson, the Democratic choice for President, had told the convention organizers that

the ceremony planned for day one would not take place until day four of the Convention. Johnson, according to many political pundits, feared a groundswell of support for Kennedy that would move him into the position as his running mate; and LBJ, whose relationship with the Kennedys was rocky to say the least, feared and disliked Robert Kennedy most of all. On day four one could see why the fear was legitimate. The outpouring of emotion was overwhelming on the floor, as Robert Kennedy stood at the podium waiting to give his tribute to his brother. Tears rolled down my eyes.

The speech was relatively short, citing some of the accomplishments of his brother, but two moments especially stood out for me: "I realize that as individuals we can't just look back, that we must look forward. When I think of President Kennedy, I think of what Shakespeare said in *Romeo and Juliet*: 'When he shall die, take him and cut him out into stars, and he shall make the face of heaven so fine that all the world will be in love with night and pay no worship to the garish sun" (R. Kennedy, 1964). And then at the very end of the speech, Robert mentioned that his brother often quoted Robert Frost and that the following lines applied to the President himself: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep."

Robert Kennedy had become foregrounded in my life, not as a maneuvering politician, which he was, but as a character as rich as those created by Shakespeare: someone who had experienced tragedy and someone who was growing into an understanding of tragedy's full potential.

As Kennedy's campaign for President was beginning to gather steam, the world was rocked with another assassination. On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King was shot and killed while standing on the balcony outside his room in Memphis, Tennessee. The night before, King had uttered prophetic words in his sermon at the Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee.

Like anyone, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And so I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord! (King, 1968).

Profoundly prophetic.

For many, the people whom King had spoken for and represented, the poor and downtrodden, the assassination was the tipping point. Violence exploded in many cities, especially in the slums of Baltimore, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Detroit. Kennedy was in a plane heading for Indianapolis when he heard that King had been assassinated. Against the advice of a number of his supporters and the city police, he, upon arrival in the city, went immediately to the rally site that had been arranged for him in a poor section of the city. On the back of a flatbed truck, he began, "I have bad news for you, for all of our fellow citizens, and people who love justice all over the world, and that is that Martin Luther King was shot and killed tonight." Gasps, screams, and cries poured forth from the crowd, and the Kennedy continued. He spoke about King's dedication to peace and justice. He spoke about the temptation for bitterness and the desire for revenge on the part of black people. He said that we could move in the direction of "greater polarization or we could make an effort as King did – to choose, instead of violence, understanding, compassion, and love." He spoke of his own loss and spoke of his struggle to understand, to get beyond the dark times. And then he quoted one of his favorite poets, Aeschylus: "'Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until in

our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God'" (R. Kennedy, 1968).

His closing words were "And let's dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world. Let us dedicate ourselves to that, and say a prayer for our country and for our world" (R. Kennedy, 1968).

Two months later, Robert Kennedy was assassinated.

In many ways, the funeral for Robert was more painful. I had felt an identification with him that I had never felt with his brother John. For me President Kennedy had remained a hero who had opened news worlds – romantically captured in the word Camelot. Robert, perhaps because of my own growth in maturity and insight, was someone I could identify with, someone with obvious flaws, someone who clearly bit his pencils, but also someone who had seemed to find a connection with the common man, the downtrodden, the poor, the minorities. Ted Kennedy, in the close of his eulogy, touched the heart of what Robert Kennedy was to so many:

> My brother need not be idealized, or enlarged in death beyond what he was in life; to be remembered as a good and decent man, who saw wrong and tried to right it, saw suffering and tried to heal it, saw war and tried to stop it. Those of us who love him and who take him to his rest today pray that what he was to us and what he wished for others will someday come to pass for all the world. As he said many times, in many parts of this nation, to those he touched and who sought to touch him: "Some men see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say why not. (T. Kennedy, 1968)

I had often read Jack Newfield's column in the *Village Voice*, a paper I had started to read in fits and starts in college. Newfield was a strong liberal and someone who had come to

see in Kennedy a beacon for the future. His book, *RFK: A Memoir* was published in 1969. The jacket shows Kennedy's face, tousled hair, serious expression, a finger crossing his lips, eyes looking at both the reader and slightly to the reader's left, but the eyes – to me edged with sadness – reflecting most of all, pensiveness. The book ends on an ominous note with the author speaking of this recent period of history:

> We are the first generation that learned from experience, in our innocent twenties, that things were not really getting better, that we shall not overcome. We felt, by the time we reached thirty, that we had already glimpsed the most compassionate leaders our nation could produce, and they had all been assassinated. And from this time forward, things would get worse: our best political leaders were part of memory now, not hope. The stone was the bottom of the hill and we were alone. (Newfield, p. 304)

Newfield's book became a permanent part of my classroom, whether in one of my bookcases or resting against the chalkboard with Bobbie looking out at the classroom. A postcard commemorating him and including the passage from Aeschylus was taped under the clock near the entranceway to the classroom. The book disappeared from my room sometime in 2009-10. Someone had borrowed it, but it never came back to me.

One poem discussed in class usually following the reading of Homer's *Odyssey* was Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses." Part of the reason for my desire to do this poem was its link to RFK, in addition to the fact that the text showed how rich the evolution of the figure of Odysseus over the ages has been. Tennyson presents a figure of the old King as someone who still seeks to explore and know more – to set out on the sea in search of new ventures and new discoveries.

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho
we are not now that strength which in old days
moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. (1997, p. 560)

Inspirational words that close Tennyson's poem, but the line that Robert Kennedy spoke more than any other line in his campaign was one that appears a few lines before the closing of the poem: "Come, my friends, / 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world." I cannot think of any more inspiring words for Robert himself, almost shattered by the loss of his brother, than those words from Tennyson.

A student from the graduating class of 2010 gave me a large framed poster promoting Robert Kennedy for President, 1968. The poster was issued by Students for Kennedy, Princeton University. In the sketch Kennedy looks to his left, dress shirt open, tie loose, and at the bottom of the picture, the words, "Seek a Newer World."

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Student Voice and Narrative Writing as Key Factors for Planning Lessons in the English Language Arts Classroom

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Abstract
Teacher created lessons have historically and exclusively been an adult professional responsibility. The outcomes of our lessons are determined by student learning and achievement, including feedback about lesson delivery with hopes of having positive results for both students and the overall school program. As teachers design lessons within a silo-mentality, while ignoring student voice and input in the initial process of creating lessons, post-lesson feedback from students may or may not even be sought as a formative measurement for gauging the success of a lesson. I contend that student engagement and learning increases when student voice is activated through narrative responses as part of the lesson planning process *before* instruction is ever delivered. Using a grounded theory research methodology including 25 student participants in an urban Grade 9 English Language Arts classroom, an authentic lesson planning partnership between teacher and students existed and led to highly engaged learners.

Establishing a Need for Student Voice
        The importance of student voice has been emphasized by scholars for years including the important work of Quaglia (2014), Fletcher (2017), and even dating back to Dewey's (1916) intentions for conceiving democratic schools and society for supporting learning in its most purest social form

which can certainly be extrapolated into student voice input. The argument for activating student voice is complex because there are levels of student voice implementation—some of which are misunderstood as a way to justify school change and reform. Student voice is often distorted because it can still be controlled by adults unless a true partnership breaks down the barriers of slotting adults and students into different respective duties and tasks versus the multi-functional processes that govern the planning, instruction, and assessment of student learning. Instead of planning *for* students, we should be planning *with* students and, therefore, we should not view student voice input as a form of "treason." Instead, it should be considered "healthy treason" which is a first step towards perceiving the adult/student partnership in any area of schooling (Coda & Jetter, 2018, p. 26).

Passive instructional planning approaches, charging that student voice was activated, are sometimes utilized by adults in order to appease students or the community at large into thinking that student voice was gathered for positive input and impact when, in the end, no such attempts to carry out the utilization of student interests ever existed. I argue that student voice should be part of a teacher's full educational program including lesson planning, preparation, and construction because of the benefits that are incurred for increasing student buy-in, engagement, and the growth or conception of democratic partnerships between adults and students.

Narratives as Meaningful Artifacts

If we agree that student voice is important, our next step is to validate the significance of gathering narrative artifacts as part of the student voice activation process. Narratives act as a vehicle for social contexts to come alive in the classroom, and, in this case, to better understand lesson

planning, which Bruner (1990) would identify as social activities that intertwine "thinking [and writing] . . . that which are experience-based" (p. 153). Experiences are highlighted through narratives because they lay the bricks for better understanding that can be captured by text and later utilized by social communities for greater analysis of our experiences.

In this study, students wrote down their responses to simple prompted questions so that they may engage in authentic writing for a purpose. These questions are outlined in the next section. According to Perl (2007), we need to apply a new kind of criteria for analyzing narratives: "Good stories strive to use relational language and narrative styles to create a purposeful dialogue between readers and the author. It teaches through its manner of expression as well as through its claims about the world" (Perl, 2007, pp. 307-308). As a result, the use of narratives in this study is twofold: 1.) Students use narratives to *report* something and 2.) Students use narratives to *express* something. Both are useful in considering ways in which criteria lend themselves to the deep analysis of planning tasks and lesson activities.

The written narratives gathered in this study also provided artifacts which can be shared with other members of the school community. Moving from oral responses to written responses and with a series of 50 narratives that were collected just for this study alone (25 written responses per lesson), the narratives provided an archive that can be used for other venues, such as school board presentations, teacher in-service training and professional development in the area of student voice, continued research, and further implementation. Narratives become "zones for agentive possibilities" (Wortham, 2001, p. 9) because they are filled with "languages, codes, theories, ideologies, and methodologies for others to learn about and understand (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2007, p. 277). In this regard, this study considers some powerful passages excerpted from the 50 longer narratives so that the analysis for

our discussion can be more succinct, but highly relevant and impactful.

       There is a greater good that narratives instill within us and within our communities according to Clandinin (2006): "School landscapes shape, more or less, educative possibilities for building relational places out of which new stories mindful of families, children, teachers, and principals can be negotiated and lived out" (p. 111). This research study supports Clandinin's work by illustrating how cooperative planning is the key negotiated place that will either bring together or sever the student/teacher relationship in the classroom whether it is explicit or implicit.

The Study

       I selected two random lessons in January 2019 and February 2019 as a result of low student interest and explored two key issues: 1.) The relevance of a lesson to students' lives and 2.) The ability for students to tackle controversial issues. I constructed lesson #1 and then randomly selected a group of students to participate in a discussion about how to make each lesson better. Lesson #2 was constructed by me and my students, only. I utilized their narrative responses to further prove that after-the-fact feedback should have taken place before the lesson was constructed so student feedback was interwoven throughout the planning stages, discussion stages, and formative collection stages of each lesson and at the end of each lesson.

       Lesson #1 involved a freewrite regarding a quotation taken from Dr. Wayne Norton and Lesson #2 involved analyzing the "N-word" in Steinbeck's classic American novel, *Of Mice and Men*. Students analyzed each lesson using the following simple set of questions (prompts) by writing responses rather than having a discussion that may or may not have been accurately captured fully and completely without the

transcription of their narrative collection methods. The simple questions provided to students include

1. What did you *connect with* the most regarding this lesson?

2. What *problems* did you have with this lesson?

3. How might you make this lesson *better*?

While a discussion about these key points took place, the narratives were collected, first, in order to be used as a reference for more concrete thinking, writing, and participation as we analyzed the lesson outcomes together in order to better craft a new set of lessons that certainly improved student engagement and participation based on their feedback.

Lesson #1: Uncovering Freewriting Relevance through a Quote

I presented a picture of a mask submerged in water with a quote by Dr. Wayne Norton: "In a world where masks are worn, it is a privilege to see a soul" and then asked students to write down what this quote meant to them. Students were given two minutes to freewrite in order to flush out their conscious minds of anything related to this quote. Please note that students were trained in the freewriting process since the start of the school year and knew the tenets of freewriting guidelines including no rules, write anything that comes to mind, keep the pen or pencil moving even if it leads to a place where you think is "nowhere," and write until "time" is called.

After the freewrite was completed, student responses included the following questions (tabulated by the number of students who responded in a similar fashion to this exercise):

1. Who is Dr. Wayne Norton? (17 out of 25 students)

2. Why was the mask submerged in water? What does water have to do with this quote? (15 out of 25 students)

3. What is "soul"? Does "soul" refer to music or the state of being? (14 out of 25 students)

4. What does the word "privilege" mean? (14 out of 25 students)

As the task advised students to write about what this quote meant to them, you can see that a large number of students had contextualized vocabulary questions or misunderstandings. Many were also hyper-focused on the *name* of the author of the text (which was unfamiliar to them and created a barrier for learning). Next, a focus on the background artistic rendering of the quote with a mask submerged in water was a cause for concern. All of these responses detracted from true student engagement in so many ways and could have been planned for if student voice was activated prior to this lesson being carried out—which I will outline in the next section.

Student Voice & Narrativized Recommendations.
A group of nine random students from my class shared their feelings about the lesson and provided insights into making the lesson more effective. Below, you will find a list of the top insights according to my students' narrative responses:

1. Why didn't you tell us the meaning of words before we saw them just in case some of us didn't know them?

2. Why didn't you place the quote on a plain slide so images did not interfere with the textual task at hand?

3. Why didn't you share a little bit about the author before we saw a name that we did not identify with so it did not detract us from analyzing the text?

I utilized students' recommendations through the use of student voice and narrative collections to conceive a new lesson given days later with a Kanye West quote that students enjoyed much more. The quote was placed on a plain brown background with the following quote by Kanye West accompanied by his picture: "My greatest pain in life is that I will never be able to see myself perform live."

As eight random students were brought into the planning of this lesson, students recommended reviewing who Kanye West was in case someone did not know who he was. They also recommended a quick review about the difference between literal and figurative language that they learned back in September but felt the need for a refresher even if we have talked about figurative language on many occasions throughout the school year. Finally, my students felt that it was necessary for me to show them how to freewrite on the document camera using a different task so that they could visibly see how I flushed out my own mind about anything ranging from an object to a quote to a different textual passage. One of my students suggested that I take off my shoe, place it on a table, and then model freewriting on the document camera for 2 minutes highlighting the question, "What does this shoe mean to me?"

These student recommendations are actually highly intelligent, creative, and they capture the art and science of teaching, AND these insights were gathered from my students because I provided an opportunity for my students and me to

talk about lesson creation, lesson planning, and how to help them become better learners and more powerful thinkers. My students gave me some things to think about in order to get them more engaged in the lesson and make my teaching better than it would have been if I had planned it alone in my own teacher silo.

This partnership led to the following outcomes which were tabulated from the narratives written by students when I asked for their feedback about the lesson in addition to their freewrites about the content and literary text-to-self task:

1. I liked how Kanye West was quoted. (23 out of 25 students)

2. I'm glad we reviewed figurative language. I get it mixed up sometimes. (18 out of 25 students)

3. The image was bold and not complicated. (12 out of 25 students)

4. I was able to think about my life because I knew something about Kanye West, already. (8 out of 25 students)

5. I liked the way Dr. Jetter did a freewrite about his shoe because I saw how he related it to his life. (21 out of 25 students)

While these responses represent only a sample of the total arsenal of narrative responses collected, having my students assist in the planning of the lesson clearly increased their engagement levels. Because my students' voices were accessed and utilized on issues that we think are only adult issues (i.e. lesson planning), a better lesson was delivered the second time around because my students were part of the planning process.

Lesson #2: Establishing the Historical Context for the "N-word" in *Of Mice and Men*

This lesson was pre-planned with a random group of eight students before the delivery of instruction took place. The task focused on Chapter 2 of *Of Mice and Men* where Steinbeck begins to characterize Candy (who was nameless at the onset of the novel) and the Boss (who would be later introduced in the chapter). Crooks would soon enter the chapter and be the locus of the discussion referring to the "N-word."

To help students understand characterization and to encourage their own visualization of character development, I used chapter two in *Of Mice and Men*. This chapter is where the "N-word" first appears in *Of Mice and Men*, so I asked students how to approach this textual reality.

Pre-planning brainstorms invited narrative responses which surveyed these two key questions:

1. How will we tackle the discovery of the "N-word" in the book?

2. What can we do to help students learn about the usage of the "N-word" in the book?

3. How do we make students more comfortable with seeing the "N-word"?

Students vigorously wrote down their ideas with the exception of two students who did not know what to do and had no advice about what to do—which is actually a fine result for this study because it demonstrates that the activation of student voice does not always mean that there are "right" answers out there for the picking. What educators can do by learning about this experience is to simply open up the discussion about our planning which could help us arrive at different creative plans or capacities of building more meaning

for our students even if some of our students do not feel that they have immediate solutions. Student voice is not a "wrong" or "right" outcome; it is a means to a better outcome.

What my students did recommend was a brief consideration of historical context, especially the Great Depression and the history of lynchings. They also recommended that we ask for volunteer readers rather than me reading the chapter out loud to the class (as a white male).

My students and I also collectively tried out a Boggle word scramble activity during one particular class using the letters (g-r-i-n-e-g) which would most likely reveal the "N-word" after many attempts to create 2-3-or-4 letter words, first. This game eventually became a discussion platform for how the word was used offensively in the past and continues to be used offensively today. This exercise also led to the observation that although Steinbeck created racist characters who reflected society's views on race during that period, we could not conclude Steinbeck had racist views himself based on his use of the "N-word" in this novel. These activities better prepared students for their encounter with the "N-word" than if I simply had addressed the issue myself without their input.

Student Voice & Narrativized Outcomes.
Take a look at the variety of powerful student responses gathered through narrativized (and archived) writing in order to better understand the power behind planning *with* students instead of *for* students:

1. I liked the word jumble. It revealed the "N-word" before we entered into the book. (17 out of 25 students)

2. I liked the reference to the Civil Rights Movement which came decades later. It helped me to understand history better and how the "N-word" was used. (18 out of 25 students)

3. I liked how Raphael and Darby (pseudonyms) read out loud. It made it easier for me because they are black and I am white and if I read the "N-word," I would have died. (13 out of 25 students, 7 of which were white students)

4. I liked how Dr. Jetter talked about using an abbreviated term, "the N-word" versus reading the entire word, verbatim, if students did not feel comfortable. It was a choice not a mandate. (19 out of 25 students)

5. It was good that we talked about the "N-word" before we saw it on the pages of the book. It wasn't a big deal when we saw it as a reference to a character, named Crooks. (22 out of 25 students)

These narrative responses are the result of a partnered planned lesson between me and my students. I sought student voice and feedback, and collected their narrative ideas about planning the lesson. Therefore, the narrative responses of the class afterwards became the type of living and breathing texts that illustrate their voices and identities as they lived with and through the instructional process.

Findings

Relevance to Students.

Most importantly, if students are to think about their own lives through the context of a quote, meme, or image, including textual analysis, we cannot always expect them to know everything about such story crafting or textual work. Students will go through their entire lives not knowing everything about a task, historical concept, or context-based

learning heuristic. And, we should not walk away from this study thinking that students must always know such contexts (and if they don't, it is our job to always create text-to-self contexts). But we can actually plan to have a discussion about the author of any text before it is revealed to the students.

Therefore, this study revealed something extremely interesting about its construct: Students were more engaged by a modern-day link to their lives which was revealed through an incredibly invigorating discussion about the difference between their knowledge of Dr. Wayne Norton and Kanye West. I did not anticipate that the name of the author would be a significant barrier to student engagement. Therefore, I did not preemptively create a plan for student voice activation. Instead, it was through student voice and narrative response collections that students entered into a task and came out with different points about their arrival of understanding—all of which were useful to the discussion that ensued for the entire class. The name of the author created confusion, but this became a learning point where students prepared me to use this new knowledge for future reference if similar activities were planned alongside students in the English Language Arts classroom.

While all academic activities that students experience, such as written examinations and college papers, will not create relevance to a student's life, skill-building in my classroom, by using student voice and collecting narrative responses, most certainly created a larger learning context that I did not identify with, exclusively and solely, as the teacher's. It wasn't until student voice was activated that I learned to improve my lessons by co-planning with my students, giving them a "taste-test" of learning before learning was finally executed.

As student engagement in the Kanye West quote increased, so did the engagement about the discussion of either unknown or anonymous authors and this new teacher knowledge provided by the students in order to teach *for* my

students, was arrived at through a true planning partnership *with* my students.

Confronting Controversial Topics.

Some of my colleagues delicately dance around the use of the "N-word" in *Of Mice and Men* and worry about how students will work through such a difficult topic. My students were different, however. As I hesitated to massage this topic and was worried about how my diverse classroom would handle this lesson, they actually executed an incredibly high level of student engagement, so much so that they volunteered to read passages from the text out loud for the class and to learn more about the historical context.

It was through the activation of student voices that I learned how to massage this lesson into a highly impactful platform of historical contexts and an amazingly rich discussion about the use of the "N-word" across history, the use of the word today, and the conversational forms of the "N-word" that my students use with one another, bringing about a highly informative discussion with participation from all students joining together for deeper cultural awareness.

If students picked up a copy of *Of Mice and Men* and read it on their own, they would obviously encounter the "N-word" individually, perhaps privately, perhaps unknowingly, and perhaps, without the context of history and its usage of the word during such a time period and, of course, outside of this time period. What I learned through co-planning with my students was that my apprehensions of tackling the "N-word" and subsequent plan to address it had far greater effects on student learning and engagement because my students told me that it would be OK. They told me that if I ignored the word or tried to gloss over it, they would have wondered why, especially without receiving any framework to aid their understanding. They preferred bringing forth the issues at hand within what is considered to be a classic piece of literature.

Seeking student voice activation for guidance and input about how to move forward and analyze such an important piece of literature was incredibly powerful for both me and my students.

I am not asserting that I would have ignored the use of the "N-word" during my own planning. That would be professionally and culturally irresponsible on my part. What I am asserting is that my students guided me to look at the lesson differently and not to boldly ignore the word or recklessly use it without proper pre-planning that would be relevant to them and not only relevant to me as the teacher. The Boggle game-like unscrambling of the word led students to a greater appreciation of the word's historical context and therefore to a deeper understanding of the text.

The activation of student voice during the planning stages of this lesson was vital to my own learning and professional reflection as a current practitioner. I understand that next year's class might be at a different spot than this year's class, so I will assume that getting *their* feedback before this lesson is possibly repeated will be essential—as the use of *Of Mice and Men* will most likely be part of my 9th grade curriculum once again.

Conclusions

Through my own research and work with student voice, narrative theory, and notions of identity for both students and educators, one thing that stands out is the social and collective nature of ideas generated by students and adults, creating a marketplace where teaching and learning becomes more powerful and engaging for all.

If we consider lesson planning to be strictly an adult responsibility, we will then miss so many important lesson features and proactive tactics or strategies for increasing learning and student engagement. If we instead create a partnership between students and adults, we might not always find what we are looking for, but we will increase the potential for success because our students know more than we often give

them credit for—including in areas we strive to exclusively own ourselves.

Pluses.

There were many victories that took place because of this study—both personally and professionally. First, student input was incredibly helpful and constructive for greater lesson success, producing a level of engagement greater than I could have imagined. A learner-centered environment was established, trust between students and teacher increased, and voices were heard. Students were co-planners, co-pilots on the aircraft of their own learning. Students felt a deeper appreciation regarding their role in the classroom which turned out to be a powerful ingredient to the continued transformation of our relationship.

Secondly, students had opportunities to write about how they felt about the lessons, what they thought could be improved, and how they might have approached things differently. While it would be incredibly laborious to include all fifty narratives for both lessons, the greatest findings were shared in a transcribed and tabulated fashion. These tabulations show incredible growth outcomes from both Lesson #1 and Lesson #2 and in two different areas of focus: relevance to students and confronting controversial topics. I am especially proud to report, within this study, that student voice and the narrative collection of student voices *did* have a variety of positive outcomes in so many ways. It validates the body of work regarding student voice and narrative collection of student voices.

Potentials.

Last year, while co-writing and publishing *Let Them Speak! How Student Voice Can Transform Your School*, there was an immense collection of student narratives which were

included in our book and assisted in the validity of our work. What I found most invigorating was the new practical knowledge I gained by returning to the English 9, ELA classroom, in an urban setting, to compile and collect new research to supplement my theoretical platform. Such an experience has provided me with a greater hyper-focused understanding of the day-to-day demands placed on teachers and the importance of planning and delivering instruction while having a keen eye on the importance of creating incredibly positive relationships with students at all times.

This study has the potential to spread into English Language Arts classrooms across the nation AND in the classrooms of other disciplines, as well. While the mini-research nature of this study might seem minute to some, it has the incredible potential to add innovation to teaching due to the complex structure of our craft and the complex methods by which we include students in the planning of lessons. Teaching and learning should be a collective craft between students and educators, not OUR craft, alone. If we can get past our own egos as educators, we will include students in the process of creating instruction *with* them, and not *for* them.

Limitations.

The limitations of this study to both the researcher and practitioner are varied and need to be acknowledged for greater transparency regarding the efficacy of this work. While I will continue to be an advocate for including student voice and using narratives to act as a megaphone for student interests that can become artifacts for other educators to use and learn from, I did not include the vast collection of narratives, nor did I use individualized student names (in pseudonyms) when gathering student responses for your review. For the sake of being concise, I transcribed common issues and responses for review.

This might appear to be a limitation to some. However, the exact nature of this study is so important that the best way to bring forth a calling for further research is to grab

and hold on to anything that we can and send it out for consideration and review. All of the daily parts of education that we engage in should collectively assist the whole.

Next, I did not report on the racial statistics that could have contributed to a deeper discussion about Lesson #2. I believe that could be saved for larger studies regarding race, discourse, and literature studies. I also reported on a study consisting of 25 students out of the larger 109 students that I currently teach. Such a microstudy might be considered unreliable or invalid. Yet, the narratives in this study are *real,* and the lesson outcomes from my students' voices are *real* and *important*. They were incredibly essential to this discussion.

Finally, this study consists of only two lessons in *one* English Language Arts classroom in *one* urban school, in *one* city, and in *one* state. Yet, the results are highly interesting and compel me where to go from here.

Next Steps.
There is a greater calling for all educators to bring students into the lesson planning process, to ask simple questions about what could work better, and to value students as *partners* in the lessons that we typically think are only adult-laden responsibilities. Such a study can be replicated in *any* classroom at *any* grade level, and in *any* subject area. Until we value the role of students as partners, we will continue to miss so many things that might seem small to us, but can emerge as huge life-changing issues for our students. If we create a scaffolded system of grade level inclusion of student voice and narrative collection, we will have a comprehensive PK-12 system that values student voice and leads to greater engagement for tasks which have historically been set up, protected by, and carried out by the adults, exclusively and alone.

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