



2021

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2021

VOLUME 10

Hodge and Zucker: Cover, Editors' Note, Front Matter

NEW JERSEY COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

NEW JERSEY ENGLISH JOURNAL



COURSE CORRECTION: THE ADAPTIVE NATURE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Editors' Note

EMILY HODGE

Montclair State University

LAUREN ZUCKER

Northern Highlands Regional High School, Drew University & Fordham University

We are pleased to welcome you to the 2021 issue of *New Jersey English Journal* (NJEJ), our second issue as co-editors. This year's theme is, "Course Correction: The Adaptive Nature of English Language Arts." We challenged writers to reflect upon the ways in which both teaching and learning have adapted in response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When we composed this call for manuscripts in early summer 2020, we could not have anticipated the extent to which the pandemic would continue to upend our personal and professional lives. This year has been an extraordinarily difficult one for many educators and families, and we pause to honor the many lives that have been lost to this pandemic. We honor the resilience and adaptability of the educators who have returned to both virtual and in-person classrooms that have changed so dramatically to support both their students and their own families during such uncertain times.

In this issue, we hoped to create an opportunity for reflection on how the pandemic has changed the course of teaching English Language Arts. In our call for submissions, we asked authors,

- How did teaching and learning change during the COVID-19 pandemic? How did teachers and students adapt, both personally and academically? What lessons will we carry with us into future teaching and learning?
- How did the shift to remote instruction raise awareness of inequities within and across our schools? In what ways can educators create more equitable learning opportunities?
- In what ways do teachers respond to curveballs—both large and small—from their students, in their own lives, at their institutions, in their communities, or on a national level?
- In what ways has the ELA classroom or the role of ELA teachers evolved during 2020, and how might it continue to change in the future? How can ELA teachers adapt their methods—for example, by considering issues such as social-emotional learning, social justice, and/or new technologies—to respond to students' evolving needs and make space for new voices, texts, and approaches?

This issue features work in three genres: poetry, reflective pieces, and research articles. In response to our call, this issue addresses a variety of topics, including how COVID-19 offered new opportunities for student engagement and teacher reflection. Our authors include current teachers, teacher educators, and literacy leaders.

One set of articles from teacher educators focused on the importance of preparing pre-service teachers to adapt to quickly changing circumstances (Emily Wender, "Training Adaptive Teachers") and to be "flexible" (Elizabeth Leer, "Learning to Teach in a Pandemic: Qualities Contributing to Success").

During a time of great turmoil and danger to our physical selves, several of these articles remind us that it is ok to “let some things go” (Sheila Benson, “Maybe Elsa’s Right: We Need to Let Some Things Go”) and instead, that it is critical to care for our own and our students’ mental health and social/emotional needs. (See, for example, Latasha Holt and Teesha Finkbeiner’s piece, “Uniting in a Reading Education Course to Support Mental Health Awareness During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” Kathleen Adler’s “Reading: The Key to Addressing Students’ Social Emotional Needs in the Time of COVID-19,” and “In Praise of Poetry: Using Poems to Promote Joy, Community, and SEL During the Pandemic” by Jordan Virgil and Katie Gallagher.)

Additionally, many of our pieces offered guidance and reflection on how to use technological tools to foster student connection and engagement during remote teaching, such as Annie Yon’s piece on Padlet, “How Padlet Encouraged Student Collaboration and Engagement in My Virtual Classroom,” and Maria Geiger’s piece on the flipped classroom, “Flip Your Way Into the Future of Learning.”

This is the second year that we have published in a completely digital format. This open-access, digital format has allowed us to reach a broader audience with the content of our eight previous issues. As of June 2021, these 212 articles have 7,418 downloads from 111 different countries representing 441 institutions. We are grateful to Montclair State University for hosting our journal on their library’s Digital Commons repository through the BePress publication system, which helps readers find our pieces through search engines, institutional databases, and keyword searches.

This year’s cover was designed by 12th grader Noreen Hosny of Northern Highlands Regional High School in Allendale, New Jersey, winner of our 2020 cover design contest, who generously agreed to design our 2021 cover. We are grateful for talent and creativity, and wish her well in her future endeavors.

We would like to thank and acknowledge those who contributed their time and expertise to this issue. Special thanks to our reviewers for their quick and attentive work to our submissions during an especially demanding year. We extend our gratitude to our Managing Editor, Samantha Brannigan, who supported our authors and this issue at every turn, and to our Copy Editors, Susan Chenelle and Katie Whitley, whose attention to detail helped us to prepare the issue for publication. Thank you as well to Stephen Tarsitano for additional copyediting support. We thank Audrey Fisch, our NJCTE President, for her leadership and guidance, and look forward to working with incoming President Valerie Mattessich.

This issue will be the last with Emily Hodge in the Co-Editor role. She has deeply appreciated the opportunity to provide a peer-reviewed writing outlet for ELA teachers in New Jersey and beyond.

New Jersey English Journal 2021 Issue, Volume 10

New Jersey English Journal is a peer-reviewed publication of New Jersey Council of Teachers of English (NJCTE). This journal is intended to serve our members through the sharing and showcasing of research, best practices, and ideas related to K–12 and college English Language Arts education, and to encourage diverse discussions and inclusion.

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NJEJ seeks educators with experience in P–12 and/or postsecondary English Language Arts to serve as reviewers. Reviewers are typically asked to read and evaluate 2–3 submissions per year.

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- The M. Jerry Weiss Early Career Teacher Award honors teachers with one to five years of teaching experience.
- Our Educator of the Year Award recognizes an exceptional English/language arts educator—a dedicated, innovative, dynamic Pre-K–12 teacher, university teacher, supervisor, or administrator—whose activities have significantly and widely impacted New Jersey ELA.

BLOG

Please consider sharing your work—a project, an anecdote, some words of inspiration, a classroom story—with our members around the state by becoming a "teacher who writes" for our NJCTE blog.

Read the blog at <https://njcte.wordpress.com>. Email njcteblog@gmail.com to share your ideas.

CONFERENCES

NJCTE typically hosts fall and spring conferences, as well as virtual events throughout the year. In Summer 2021, we will be hosting a virtual summer learning series. We hope you will join us! Learn more at <http://www.njcte.org>.

New Jersey Council of Teachers of English

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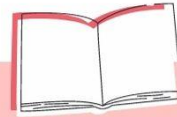
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Reading: The Key to Addressing Students' Social Emotional Needs in the Time of COVID-19

KATHLEEN A. ADLER

Morris School District

Education is known for being in a state of constant change. School curricula are established, embraced, implemented, and then oftentimes, a few years later, replaced with newer, more innovative curricula. Lesson plans change from year to year with revisions and improvements as do the current *best* teaching practices. However, no one could have anticipated the seismic shift in education that arrived as teachers are now asked to teach in-person and/or virtually and sometimes synchronously. Educators need to continue to teach curricula that address the state standards, employ rigorous lesson plans that offer differentiation for optimal student ascension, and ensure that the students' social emotional needs are being met. A new era of education has arrived, one that focuses on the academic and social/emotional success of our students. This change has shifted the role of English Language Arts (ELA) teachers in the classroom.

The experience of the pandemic has solidified for educators that now more than ever the social emotional learning and ultimately the well-being of our students and educators must be of top priority. Let's take a brief moment to discuss social emotional learning (SEL). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a leader in SEL, defines SEL as "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions"—quite a difficult but necessary feat during a

pandemic. As an ELA teacher, it is no longer enough to teach about reading, writing, speaking, and listening (English Language Arts Standards); we must pivot into becoming teachers of literacy *and* pillars of support for our students' social and emotional well-being. So, I ask, what is the best way to ensure that educators and more specifically ELA teachers are guiding students in creating healthy identities, managing emotions, and building relationships and empathy, while also sustaining academic rigor? Something we have always done—*read*.

As many schools and districts have begun integrating community circles, establishing social emotional curricula, character-building lessons, etc. into their daily routines, the simple act of reading remains a largely untapped resource. In addition to improving students' comprehension, stamina, fluency and critical thinking skills, reading can be used as a vehicle to increase students' overall happiness, build empathy, increase community, and address students' social emotional development: all areas in dire need during COVID-19. It is paramount that ELA teachers and educators alike prioritize independent reading. Educators must make a valiant effort to reawaken the sacred time of reading in every child, every day.

Creating a Culture of Reading & Community

We know there is a critical need for students of all ages to be engaged in authentic reading and writing experiences, as "Literate lives aren't a privilege, [but] a right and a cornerstone of an informed society" (Gordon, 2018, p. 28). This begins

by creating a culture of reading. When students are active participants in a culture of reading, they are able to develop their reading identity. They can answer: who am I as a reader, why do I read, do I identify as an avid reader, nonreader, or neither? Once established, this identity allows students to unearth a sense of self and “esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, mastery, independence) and the desire for reputation or respect from others (e.g., status, prestige)” (McLeod, 2020), all touching upon elements of much needed social emotional learning.

Yet, too often teachers find themselves inundated with curricular deadlines, benchmarking, and more, and as an effort to meet these demands, they sacrifice time for independent reading. When polled, the International Literacy Association (2020) reported, “82% of teachers surveyed indicate[d] that students should read independently every day for at least 20 minutes, [but] only 33% (of teachers) report[ed] that students have this daily opportunity” (p. 38), a striking disparity. To create a more robust culture of reading, teachers and students alike must hold daily reading as a core value, a non-negotiable. In ELA, this may be at the expense of a mini-lesson or read aloud. In other core content classes, there may need to be a time for independent reading, not just Science or Social Studies based readings. If schools are asking staff members to prioritize the social emotional learning of their students, via community circles, SEL curricula, daily check-ins, etc., why shouldn’t independent reading also be considered as a viable method for addressing students’ needs? It’s our job as educators to lean into this work, knowing that solidifying students’ sense of self via reading will address their social emotional needs in the current climate as well as facilitate their academic success.

As educators, we must adapt to our students’ evolving needs by giving them time to engage in authentic reading. Donalyn Miller and Jeff Anderson (2011),

stated that “the idea that they can’t read or don’t like to read is not on the table.

Providing students with the opportunity to choose their own books to read empowers them and encourages them. It strengthens their self-confidence, rewards their interests, and promotes a positive attitude towards reading by valuing the reading and giving him or her a level of control” (p. 23).

Student choice is step one in creating autonomy in our classrooms. We must foster empowerment, encouragement, and positive attitudes—vital components needed to respond to our students’ current needs. Step two would be to consciously designate daily independent reading time. Students need uninterrupted time to read. On a macro level, schools can establish the first 10–15 minutes of the day to be devoted to independent reading. In the classroom, teachers can establish a routine of devoting the first 10 minutes of class to student reading.

The final component of creating a culture of reading in the classroom is Talk. Talking about books with teachers during small groups or individual student conferences, with peers during book clubs, or with community members or authors via FlipGrid, Zoom calls, etc. presents students with opportunities to begin to form relationships with their peers, teachers, and community members. As part of this community of readers, students can begin to feel a sense of belonging, something we are all so desperately in need of during COVID-19. Peter Johnson and Gay Ivey (2015) found when students were able to talk about the books they were reading “The properties of the community itself changed with increasing trust, openness, and acceptance of difference and decreasing cliques. Indeed, students came to see difference as a tool for learning. The function of the books shifted from tools of entertainment to tools for participation in the collective practice (and mind) of the classroom (and beyond), participation that enabled personal and collective development” (p. 314). Teachers

must devote time for students to read in the classroom and then allow students to talk about their reading to adequately address students' social emotional needs and build community, virtually or in person.

Physical & Social Benefits of Reading

Not only does reading guide students in achieving their sense of self and increase their ability for empathy, core SEL characteristics, it also helps reduce the added stress students may be experiencing during this pandemic. The constant unknown coupled with the traditional stressors in students' lives are reaching insurmountable proportions. A study recently conducted on student stress levels during COVID-19 found that 71% of students "indicated increased stress and anxiety due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Multiple stressors were identified... These included fear and worry about their own health and of their loved ones [91%], difficulty in concentrating [89%], disruptions to sleeping patterns [86%], decreased social interactions due to physical distancing [86%], and increased concerns on academic performance [82%] (Son et al., 2020)."

As educators think about students' social emotional needs, they must equip them with tools to mitigate these new stressors present in their lives. The tool—to read more.

Cognitive neuropsychologist Dr. David Lewis (2009) conducted numerous studies that reported "reading for just 6 minutes can be enough to reduce stress levels by up to 68%." This occurs because "the human mind has to concentrate on reading and the distraction eases the tension in muscles and the heart." The facts are inarguable—if we want to help our students mitigate the stress of our new reality, we should start with allowing them more chances to authentically read in school.

Not only does reading have physical health benefits, but it is also shown to improve students' social skills, something that may be lacking in the time of COVID-

19. When studying the social aspects of reading, Peter Johnson and Gay Ivey (2015) found that students became "individually and collectively engaged, read more, had more positive peer relationships, had better self-regulation, and performed better on the state English Language Arts test" (p. 319). They also noted a reduction in behavior problems, an increase in students talking about books, improved maturity, compassion, and empathy towards one another, strengthening of peer and student teacher relationships, and an overall increase in happiness. In a time when COVID-19 has changed the educational landscape, an increase in positive relationships and happiness are core values that need to be fostered in schools. This can be done by providing multiple opportunities for engaged reading.

In the Time of a Pandemic, Not Just Academic but Empathetic

Psychologists David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano (2013) have proven that "reading literary fiction enhances the ability to detect and understand other people's emotions, a crucial skill in navigating complex social relationships" (p. 377). Today, educators are hyper-focused on addressing the social and emotional needs of our students; however, we may be focusing too much of our attention on installing new SEL curricula, when we may need to focus more on enhancing the already present curriculum. Tapping into independent reading with a laser focus would allow educators to instill guiding principles of how to manage emotions and feel and show empathy for others as, "Reading isn't just academic literacy—it expands our hearts and deepens our consideration of the world." (Gordon, 2018, p. 30). In schools, we often ask students to think about the characters in their reading. Experiencing moments of empathy for the character while trying to understand the character's motivations helps students understand the world around them, which is even more pertinent now during

COVID-19. As educators, we want to foster positive relationships, a sense of security, and empathy for each other within our classes both virtual and/or in person. A cornerstone of creating these relationships and building empathy can be by reading more.

Although I have asserted that what is needed in the time of COVID-19 is to read more, I would be remiss if I did not touch upon the common everyday issues that literacy educators face in regard to students and reading. Adding the additional pressure of COVID-19 and changes in responsibilities students may be facing at home, it is important to remember a few key ideas. As ELA teachers we cherish and value reading. We know from Selingo's (2017) research that if students want strong careers or futures they do not have the option of being nonreaders. Moreover, "if students are not reading in school, they are most likely not reading at home" (Atwell, 1987, p. 156). What is needed, however, is to reawaken this urgency for independent reading especially during COVID-19 when academic rigor and opportunity may be less accessible.

Additionally, during a pandemic, we must accept that some students may not read much right now, but we must continue to encourage them to see themselves as readers who can find joy in reading again when they are ready (Miller, 2020). Pernille Ripp (2017) has told us that the teaching of reading and writing is "not supposed to be quick and easy. It's supposed to be about human connection. It's one conversation at a time." These conversations today are invaluable. As we charge forward into a new era of education, we must be hyper-vigilant about allowing students the dedicated time to experience reading, to see themselves as readers, and to form their sense of self through various reading experiences. It is imperative to their social, emotional, and academic health as the future leaders of our society.

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COVID and the Death of Paper

BETH ANN BATES

William Paterson University of New Jersey

I love paper! I'm surrounded by it, at work and at home. I write notes to myself on Post-Its. I write and rewrite to-do lists on legal pads. I write grocery lists on a magnetic pad on the refrigerator. I write reminders on scraps of paper and stick them to my dashboard. I especially love paper books—cookbooks, reference books, novels, poetry, mysteries, tomes on improving my teaching. Bookcases are tucked into unlikely spaces all around my tiny condo.

I remember the moment I realized that my relationship with paper was going to change. Quarantined and working from home, I was on the phone with another professor, discussing what the upcoming fall 2020 semester would be like. She reminded me that giving and receiving paper documents would be off-limits due to COVID concerns. My morale slumped. What was I going to do? Each fall semester I teach College Writing, the required freshman composition course at William Paterson University. I carry around tote bags full of papers. Rough drafts are attached to final revisions with sheets of feedback from classmates. I normally accepted all assignments in paper, required handwritten free-writes and in-class exercises. Students brought multiple copies of their draft essays to peer-review sessions. Paper flowed like an intellectual river through the semester.

I had been teaching the course this way for nearly twenty years. My department is committed to teaching revision in the “writing as process” method championed by Donald Murray and Peter Elbow (among others). While I have worked steadily to upgrade my classroom skills by attending conferences and workshops each year, the

focus on revision—and thus paper—had not changed.

For quite some time I had been considering going electronic. All those trees! We use Blackboard, a web-based course management tool, and I am adept at posting assignments, quizzes, and grades. On the other hand, I resisted electronic first drafts. I believe in the value of the mind-hand connection attained by writing sans keyboard. COVID concerns compelled me to eliminate paper, posting and receiving everything on Blackboard.

At the same time, I knew I would be altering my course to eliminate the textbook. Prior to the pandemic, the English department had decided to strongly discourage the use of textbooks for freshmen level courses. Our student population is often stressed by the cost of college texts, so the decision was understandable. I loved my textbook. Donald Murray's *Write to Learn* had been suggested to me when I first started teaching. The author, who died in 2006, was a figurehead in the writing-as-process movement. His text is filled with personal examples, including stories of his service in World War II. The chapter on internet research is painfully outdated. Yet I was loath to part with the book. One year I switched to a Peter Elbow text. It was a worthy experiment that helped me home in on which critical concepts I wanted students to get, and the next semester I returned to my beloved Murray text with renewed appreciation. After years of teaching a textbook-based course, the shift to no text has made me feel rudderless. I have to redo all my lesson plans and quizzes. The department supplied some open-source

articles to use, which I am rushing to explore.

Making all these changes simultaneously has felt arduous at times. As I scramble to comply with the new normal, the feeling I have is oddly typical. This is, after all, commonplace. So much is adaptation, and yet, so much is the same. My job is constant adjustment, constant reaction. I adapt to the personality of each class. I encourage the strengths and accommodate the weaknesses of the individuals and the group as a whole. Each year I have strived to compensate for the increased intrusion of cell phone distraction in my classroom. As my university experiments with placing freshmen into cohorts based on major, I adjust my examples to their areas of interest. This semester I have all criminal justice majors, most of whom want to go into law enforcement. I talk about the potential writing demands of police officers composing reports about accidents or crimes. Perhaps the ultimate adaptation is to the steady march of my age while my students remain perpetually 18 years old. One semester I realized that most of my students had been born in the year that I started working here. When I started teaching, I was perhaps the same age as their parents. Now I may be the age of their grandparents. I work to off-set the weird dynamic that is the ever-growing gap between our ages. Will I adapt again and return to paper in a post-COVID semester? Who knows?

The pandemic adjustments have been stressful for all of us, but our nature as teachers never changes. We always push to adapt our methods to meet the needs of our students. We serve them to the best of our ability, day after day, year after year. In that way, it's business as usual.

Maybe Elsa's Right: We Need to Let Some Things Go

SHEILA BENSON

University of Northern Iowa

Iowa winter is brutal. By mid-March, heading into spring break, everyone is ready for a change. Lucky students brag to their classmates about heading to Florida beaches. We toss around book titles we're finally going to have time to read FOR FUN!! Students are a little more relaxed, a little chattier.

Not mid-March 2020. Instead of happily anticipating a week's break from sub-zero polar vortexes, we spent that last Friday pre-break figuring out how we were going to manage a sudden shift online as the pandemic broke out. The conversation ran something like this:

"Thanks for filling out my technology survey so I know who has good Internet access. Here's my home phone number in case you can't email me. Please note this is a landline, so it does not receive texts. Yes, I still have a landline. I know things feel really weird and uncertain right now, but we've got a few minutes, so let's spend the rest of class time talking about this morning's assigned readings."

Meanwhile, the conversation inside my head ran something like this:

How in the WORLD are we going to do class discussion entirely online? I have students who don't regularly check email; what if they won't participate in our discussion board? What do I do if someone doesn't have Internet access? A lot of students said on the survey that they could just go to the public library or Panera; what if those aren't open? What if...? What if...? What if...?

I headed into that 2020 spring break, as we all did—with many worries. It didn't help matters that in my Survey of English

literature course, we were about to begin the 20th/21st Century, which has the toughest readings: Eliot, Joyce, Woolf—how were my students going to make sense of "The Wasteland" and that 8-page non-punctuated final sentence of *Ulysses* all on their own? Zoom was still an unknown factor at this point: Would it hold up under all the additional users who were about to join it?

A lot happened as the semester moved online, but for this essay I want to focus on our daily discussion posts, because they became a bit of magic. Not a perfect solution by any means. I'm not going to claim that this group of students understood "The Wasteland" better than any other semester's group, but what emerged in the discussion posts over the course of the next two months was a sense of vulnerability and a willingness to share personal feelings. That vulnerability helped us process the pandemic around us.

Because I'd struggled all semester to encourage this group of students to share thoughts in discussion, I anticipated a lot of "letter of the law" answers: Respond to the prompt, meet the requirements, end writing. Instead, I read emotionally charged writing. Students referenced one another by name in their responses to postings. They made deep personal connections to the day's readings. This was especially clear when we reached the WWI section of the syllabus. WWI poetry had traditionally been hard going discussion-wise in previous semesters. Not now. My students wrote much more than the word requirement I'd given for discussion postings. They admitted that they had no idea what it felt like to be in the trenches with shells flying overhead, but they felt like

they were in a battle. They related to Wilfred Owen's letter to his mother about not knowing what condition they would be in at the end of the day. They wrote of feeling trapped in their homes. They wrote of fear.

Discussions weren't about attendance or monitoring reading comprehension or points for a course grade. These discussions were about connection in an uncertain time. It almost didn't matter whether students responded to the specific prompt. What mattered was that they had a venue to reach out to fellow students (and me). We forged a community in a time when we were separated.

Students never built off one another's responses in our face-to-face discussions, but they willingly did it online. They addressed each other by name, and they thanked each other for being vulnerable and sharing their experiences and fears. They said things like, "I so relate to what you just shared. This pandemic is making everything uncertain." They acknowledged that this pandemic didn't require the same sorts of sacrifices as a world war, but they also drew many, many parallels. They expressed appreciation for frontline medical workers. And most of all, they wrote about their hope to eventually be on the other side of the pandemic.

The key element was vulnerability. None of us felt secure or knew what might happen next. Our class discussion board became a place to process, to vent, to project into the future. In a time when we couldn't see one another, those discussion posts were a place of connection, a place of (semi)normalcy.

What struck me about the spring 2020 semester was that, for the first time, students *cared* about the course readings and connected with them. They weren't just moving through a syllabus anymore. I think that happened partially because I got out of the way and let them relate to the material

the way *they* wanted to relate to it. Coverage was no longer an issue; we were focused on moving forward, putting one foot in front of the other.

As English teachers, we like nice, neat narrative structures. We like that plot arc with a neat resolution at the end. I can't provide that neat sense of resolution. What I *can* do, for what it's worth, is offer permission to myself and others. Permission to go off lesson plan. Permission to feel. To see what we do every day as a means of self-care if we allow it to be. Pandemic or no pandemic, we keep moving forward.

Learning From Our Limits: Lessons to Hold Tight

KARA B. DOUMA

It is a cold, sunny day, early in the morning. Students remain in a hybrid schedule to maintain social distancing guidelines. The hallways of the school are quiet. I walk into an English language arts classroom and take a seat. I can see students on the screen while a few are in-person. The screen reveals some cameras turned on, while others remain off. The chat box is already scrolling with messages about the lesson that day. Turning my head, a student looks at me. I smile then quickly realize they cannot see the smile behind my mask. I wave my hand instead. It is in these moments I am reminded of how hard this is for everyone.

Teachers and students rely on human connection, including all of the routines that foster this ideal, such as conferring with chairs next to each other, seeing each face at a glance, and the nature of teaching that involves gestures and physical expression. The loss of the typical and preferred school day and the addition of learning in this new way—masked, distanced, and in a hybrid form—are a challenge. Such challenges teach us lessons along the way that we may want to hold tight. Turbulent times, when we need the space to learn in a new and more complicated way, are an especially good occasion to take a closer look at our priorities.

Lessons we may take with us include: learning from our limits, setting priorities across the curriculum, partnering with students for content, and making assessments more meaningful. Each of these lessons respects the student-teacher relationship by making space for it. Let's turn now to these core lessons, beginning with knowing and learning from our limits.

Know and Learn From Our Limits

The experience of a pandemic creates a more pressing need to attend to our personal limits. In *Risk. Fail. Rise. A Teacher's Guide to Learning from Mistakes*, M. Colleen Cruz takes the reader through a series of studies and explanations with significant insight into the reasons teachers make mistakes along with the types of mistakes that are made. One reason a teacher, or anyone for that matter, may make a mistake is a lack of self-care: for instance, not enough sleep. In the section "Martyrs Make More Mistakes," Cruz explains why self-care is essential. Even more compelling, Cruz invites teachers to think about their "limited energy and the level and depth of energy it takes to try something new, be creative, or take a pedagogical risk. . . . When you do not prioritize your own health, rest, and happiness, you are less likely to have the energy to take the sort of risks that lead to our aha moments or stretch mistakes" (34). During this world health crisis, teachers are routinely being asked to try new things and be creative to find solutions to varying issues; more than ever before, teachers need time for self-care to maintain a higher level of energy.

In this hybrid environment, teachers talk about the extensive workload, especially surrounding preparation for virtual instruction. While stakeholders praise their work, it is still work that calls on educators to perform at a more intense level, consuming additional time and attention. In response, professional learning communities band together to systematically create and share resources. Recognizing mistakes or imperfection as typical and acceptable in

this environment is an added benefit. For instance, the prerecorded lesson will not be perfect and will only be recorded once with a degree of human error. Teachers also feel more confident that most pieces of writing or reading reflection do not have to be graded. Letting go of certain aspects of traditional instruction frees teachers from extenuating time constraints. It is okay to set emails to an away message in the evenings to get enough rest, exercise, and proper nutrition while decreasing the chance for mistakes and allowing everyone to tackle the next day with the attention and focus that all of our students deserve. By far, knowing our limits and how to have a better life/work balance benefits everyone.

Additional ways to set limits include focusing on priority standards, partnering with students for content, and reframing our needs to use assessment as learning. With these adjustments, teachers more comfortably make space for what matters most when it comes to setting limits in an effort to maintain the energy necessary for optimal teaching.

Priority Standards

Teaching is demanding. From kindergarten through high school, the English language arts standards splinter across various lifelong and necessary skills to be successful in any future endeavor. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening encompass what makes people successful across all tasks. The standards also spiral for repeated exposure in each grade with deepening complexity. Therefore, this discussion is applicable to all teachers of reading and writing across grade levels.

While English language arts teachers take responsibility for these standards, they are felt by all students and teachers across the curriculum. After a closer look, there are clear priorities in the standards that serve as the beacon for others to stream in their light.

Distilling standards down to the key elements is a way to focus instructional planning. Especially in the year of hybrid learning and pandemic struggle, students need clear, specific focus and direction. Sources, such as *Achieve the Core 2020-2021 Priority Instructional Content*, make recommendations for suggested priority standards and include the rationale as to the selection. Let us turn to an example of deciphering between such standards. In reading, citing textual evidence to support an analysis is a good illustration of a priority standard since it is necessary to advance an argument or response across text types. In comparison, analysis of different character points of view is not evident across the English language arts curriculum. Therefore, using text evidence to prove a point is arguably a priority standard since it is a thread that exists across tasks. Without reference back to the text or use of text evidence, readers will struggle with other standards such as the analysis of different character points of view.

As addressed above, there is reasonable evidence to support a move to prioritize standards by identifying the top two to three in each major area, such as reading and writing, then linking assessments to measure progress on these few standards throughout the school year. The result is focused instruction with only a few standards to continually teach in and assess. The few, selected priority standards should be studied for a continued, coordinated, and nuanced approach to instruction in the future.

Students as Partners for Content

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute conducted a recent study by Tyner and Kabourek that investigates the mastery of reading comprehension. It poses challenges to the content area of English language arts, which typically emphasizes the strengthening of student comprehension,

teaching the associated skills such as identifying themes or analyzing the author's craft. Ultimately, this early childhood longitudinal study argues that content areas, such as social studies, foster comprehension at a higher rate than literacy classes. Tyner and Kabourek explain how “a small army of cognitive psychologists, analysts, and educators has long cast doubt on the view that reading is a discrete skill that can be mastered independently from acquiring knowledge. To these contrarians, a focus on academic *content*—not generalized reading skills and strategies—will equip students with the background knowledge they need to comprehend all sorts of texts and make them truly literate” (Tyner and Kabourek). A similar argument that extends beyond early childhood education comes from Wexler who claims throughout *The Knowledge Gap: The Hidden Cause of America's Broken Education System and How to Fix It* that knowledge is what is holding students back from acquiring the skills they need to be successful. As English language arts/literacy tends to teach skills over content, the thoughtful approach of increasingly looking to students to bring the content of their reading and writing is appropriate; the core purpose of English language arts class is to teach students how to improve their reading and writing abilities.

To further support the point that teachers of English do not only teach content and tend to focus more on the skills involved, Donald M. Murray argues that “Our students should be teaching us the subject while we are teaching them to write” (96). Moving away from the traditional assignments that originate with the teacher, such as each student writing a five-paragraph essay on the symbolism of the plant in *A Raisin in the Sun* is critical. If our goal is for students to live as authentic readers and writers in the real world, they “need to know how to

collect their own information and connect it so that they can develop their own ideas out of their own material in answer to their own needs” (Murray 12). Shifting expectations, the prerequisite of a good writer is one who clearly demonstrates their developing authority on the content under study. With an authentic workshop approach, teachers use mentor texts and their own writing experience to teach the skills students need to acquire. The students select the content. Imagine the depth of student learning when the content they read and write about either extends what they are already learning in their content area classes or what they are developing as their own expertise. For example, a student may be learning about World War II in history class and decide to read informational texts in English class on the topic to deepen their comprehension of this content. The student may then decide to write about their studies in the area through an argumentative essay. The more the student knows about the content they are writing about, the greater the opportunity for the English teacher to work with the student to strengthen their writing skills.

Ideally in writing, students take the lead role of writer and work from a place of authority as to the information or content they study. To effectively write, students need to really know, and arguably care about the content they are writing about. If students are given the opportunity to write and read about the content they care most about, it gives the teacher the ability to truly focus on teaching skills. The reading and writing students do in English language arts can certainly originate from their knowledge, interests, and academic study. Students should be given frequent invitations to bring the content to class if they are to more drastically improve upon their skills in reading and writing.

Assessment as Learning

Lorna M. Earl defines assessment of, for, and as learning. According to Earl, assessment of learning is summative and meant to report out on the student's progress on the grade-level standards, assessment for learning is formative, meant to inform the design of instruction for students, and assessment as learning serves to both invite students to contribute to assessment design and position students as their own assessor. The purpose of assessment as learning is for students' "self-monitoring, self-correction or adjustment" of their learning to meet personal goals and standards (Earl 26). The traditional teacher-generated paper topics and checkpoints for homework are sidestepped. As suggested above, if students have the choice to bring the content, in other words, to decide what topics they want to read and write about, it is appropriate that assessment as learning encompasses what they do most.

To better illustrate this point, a student in third grade may engage in a year-long study of bugs. Considering the student would be the expert on the topic of bugs, since the teacher would not be able to study bugs for a year to learn all that the student did, it would empower the student to make decisions about what their next reading would be, what questions are left unanswered, and what type of writing project would help them move forward in their understanding of bugs. For instance, an infographic instead of an argumentative writing might benefit the student more if they are attempting to draw clear comparisons between different types of bugs. As students become the expert on their topic, "the instructor responds to the student's response and to the student's suggestions for improvement" (Murray 148). This reasoning values learner independence; students need to apprentice as the primary evaluator and be able to closely study their strengths with a plan to move forward. In this line of thinking, students

learn "the solutions to . . . problems. . . come from points of strength" (Murray 59). Students serve as the authority on their work by recognizing the strong parts and working to improve the rest of the piece in a similar fashion. Students grow more confident from building on their strengths, successes, and interests.

Learning From Our Limits

While education is always changing, learning from a few meaningful lessons in an effort to set limits is worth noting. To summarize, a shift to greater student independence in learning, thus a reliance on student knowledge in the English language arts classroom intertwined with a commitment to assessment as learning, embraces a responsive, student-centered model. Another lesson is to prioritize, then limit the standards, which helps to target instruction while reducing overload. Lastly, modeling self-care for students is valuable lifelong learning while also decreasing error and increasing energy in instructional practice. The need to know and learn from our limits is a lesson to hold tight.

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Flip Your Way Into the Future of Learning

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From death, fear, and loneliness, to stifling facial masks, toilet paper shortages, and overgrown hair, a COVID-19 silver lining is hard to find. Nothing was immune from the forced changes brought upon us by the pandemic, including, and perhaps especially, education. Moving forward, we should take advantage of this unprecedented disruption and reexamine the outdated ways in which we deliver content to our students. One way to make the most of technology and engage our digital natives is by “flipping content.” Flipping content personalizes learning while making better use of classroom time, ultimately leading to important ownership of learning that will serve students throughout their lives.

For the last four years, I have taught an online “Blended and Flipped Learning” class for K-12 teachers. Since the pandemic began, teachers who previously took those online classes reached out to tell me how prepared they were when they transitioned to either fully online or hybrid teaching. It was exciting to hear that these teachers smoothly transitioned due to having already learned flipping techniques including how to access and use free video tools such as Edpuzzle and Screencastify, which offered teachers the means to engage students at home in ways never imagined. Hopefully, this disruption of the “normal classroom” will inspire others to follow suit and finally retire centuries old teaching methods that are out of sync with our 21st Century learners.

For the purposes of this essay, we will explore flipping the classroom with video. At its core, flipping is about delivering content in a way that makes the best use of

class time. What language arts teacher does not want more time for meaningful discussions, creative projects, and peer workshopping? For most flips, recorded lectures/videos are assigned as what we formerly called “homework.” When students come to class (this works either in-class or in synchronous virtual sessions), they engage in activities and discussions that spring from the content viewed/engaged with at home. In an English Language Arts classroom, flipping can be particularly effective because of how well video pairs with reading and writing.

Flipping content with video provides additional advantages because students are naturally drawn to video. The 2019 Common Sense Census of Media Usage of Teens and Tweens reports that watching videos online is second only to listening to music. If we can tap into our students’ penchant for video, we might even find ways to inspire them to read books for pleasure, which has declined drastically in the last fifteen years (Twenge, et al. 338). As writing teachers, we are in a particularly fortuitous place to flip because we can easily design reading lessons that integrate video to engage all learners.

For some students, language arts homework is not only doable, but enjoyable. However, others might lose interest while reading alone and then cherry pick for answers. Crafty older students might skip reading entirely and simply Google and/or “share” answers. In contrast, in a flipped classroom, teachers are able to build accountability check points into the at-home assignment by using a platform like Edpuzzle. Check out this [example](#) that

highlights a scene in a modernized version of *Twelfth Night* (please note that the video can be set so that viewers cannot skip ahead). For an interactive lesson like this, upon student completion, teachers have the ability to instantly view all assessment data, including how long students spent viewing and answering questions, and ultimately, who “got” what.

When the class convenes (either virtually or face-to-face), the activities revolve around the pre-viewed lecture/videos. Students can dive right into the creation of concept/mind maps, interactive vocabulary reviews, or related journal writings; activities that can be used in both traditional and virtual classrooms. As Catlin Tucker outlines in [this post](#), there is no shortage of post-video activities to engage students. Students will have more time to collaborate on projects and subsequently develop higher-level thinking and communication skills (“Collaborative Learning”). The teacher now has the freedom to serve as an informed guide rather than the proverbial sage on the stage.

Picture a teacher lecturing about *Twelfth Night* in a traditional classroom. While some students try to keep up with what is being said (or spend the time dreading their turn to read), what about the students who fully understand? Boredom. To make matters worse, students might then be assigned homework on a topic that they don’t fully understand. Flipping with video allows for natural differentiation because students are in control of their learning due to the ability to watch and rewatch videos as many times as needed for understanding. In a traditional lecture, there is no “pause” button for students who need to hear what was said again or need a moment to reflect on what was said.

When students have control over their own learning, accountability and ownership are natural outcomes. As a first-year college

writing instructor, I know firsthand that some students lack the necessary self-efficacy to succeed in college. This unpreparedness did not happen overnight, but rather, is a by-product of twelve or more years of passive content delivery that failed to encourage meaningful engagement and subsequent ownership and pride.

Despite the positives mentioned, there is an obvious flipping obstacle for some: flipping with video usually requires at least a mobile device and internet access. According to US government data, between six to seven million households with K-12 students lack internet service (McGill). Looking to the future, the pandemic will hopefully bring awareness and viable solutions to the digital divide that undeniably exists in our schools. Workarounds for students who lack access are becoming more viable; in California, one million iPads with built-in LTE internet were distributed last September (EdSource.org). For now, students who lack internet service at home should be offered online access during library and/or study hall hours as well as before and after school. For younger students, the [in-class flip](#) is also an excellent workaround that offers the benefits of flipping via station rotations for the entire class.

Teachers at every level should consider flipped learning. In our ever-changing world, it is important that students embrace life-long learning, which all begins with ownership. When we think of the world our students will navigate as adults, it is one that is connected and collaborative. With the extra classroom time gained from flipping, teachers are able to offer students additional opportunities to collaborate on projects with each other, better preparing them to thrive in college and the workforce—really, in life in general. No matter what the future holds, the flipped classroom will help us all land on our feet.

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Uniting in a Reading Education Course to Support Mental Health Awareness During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Pre-service teacher candidates need success in their reading educational preparatory courses to evolve into highly qualified English language arts teachers. Until the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional, in-person, reading classrooms were easy to describe. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, K-12 classroom instruction quickly shifted from the traditional, face-to-face, in-person setting to online virtual platforms (Bubb and Jones 2019). While ELA teachers in classroom positions faced extensive stressors related to COVID-19, many classroom teachers proved that dedication and perseverance to their students' needs would be the key to reaching success.

Higher education, including teacher education programs, were no exception to these challenging shifts. Much like the K-12 schools, many universities and colleges transformed the way they manage teaching and learning tasks during this unprecedented time when traditional, face-to-face, in-person instruction was not possible. Similar to the social distancing challenges seen in the outside world, teacher preparation programs had to somehow adapt and continue to move students forward with their degree plans despite exceptional stressors, since these programs would be preparing teachers for the K-12 classroom positions they would soon be filling. Course professors were expected to deliver the scheduled reading course content, establish field work/practicum opportunities, and

remain cognizant of the health and well-being of the students in the course. This article shares a specific adaptation made in a college reading ELA course to support the pre-service K-12 ELA educators.

Early in the semester it was observed by the professor that all the typical college-related stressors were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Regardless, it was important that the pre-service teachers enrolled in reading courses mastered the course objectives to be prepared for future teaching jobs. The challenge was figuring out how to best address fears and prepare them to be effective reading teachers. The pre-service teachers would benefit from obtaining the skills and strategies to effectively join already active ELA teacher departments attempting to balance changes to reach success during an incredibly difficult time. Since the stress seemed to be creating a barrier between the course content and the pre-service teachers' success, addressing this tension needed priority.

Supporting the K-12 ELA Teacher Community

Three key points shared in this article are important for the K-12 ELA teacher community and the teams of administrators that work to support them. First, attention should be given to supporting teachers' mental health. This should include pre-service teachers because they are training to become ELA educators. Second, research focusing on the positive possibilities of

embedding mindfulness and other similar strategies into teacher preparation courses or professional development is needed. Bringing awareness to mental health needs can possibly enhance the ELA classroom interactions with fellow educators, students, and parents. Last, making classroom connections between the task of monitoring and caring for mental health needs and reaching academic success can benefit teachers and students. Adults, including teachers and teacher candidates, and young children are facing excessive struggles, and more attention to mental health needs can promote overall classroom ELA content success. If educators and future educators have a better understanding of mental health, along with an action plan in place to meet Whole Child needs, reaching ELA content success can be a more manageable task.

Planning for Support During a Pandemic

As mentioned above, the unusual semester revealed the reading course discussed in this article needed to be adapted in more ways than just the delivery method. Before an effective start to the reading course content could be accomplished, it was important to address the copious amounts of stress the pre-service teachers were facing. After careful thought on how to approach the situation, the potential of inviting a stress expert to talk with the class was pitched to the students. The students were receptive and excited; they agreed to attend the course practicum event. The next step taken was to reach out to a therapist for possible collaboration. The therapist, who has extensive experience with helping others manage anxiety/stress, cope with trauma, and identify problem solving strategies during crises, was open to a session that would address mental health needs.

Pre-Session Details

In regard to the reading course content, the professor and therapist discussed the big ideas the class was already scheduled to cover. This meeting involved reviewing the reading course content, which included two weeks focusing on stress, managing teacher and student expectations (especially with COVID-19 and online learning/learning model uncertainties), and understanding the Whole Child model and how each of these concerns relates to developing English language skills. Together, it was decided that there was a need to support pre-service teachers by raising the importance of being aware of students' personal safety, food insecurities, personal belonging, and the overall impacts these conditions have on academic success. Additionally, it was shared with the therapist that, as a whole class, there was a curiosity about ways to manage the abrupt transition to online learning and what, if any, mindfulness strategies could help as the pre-service teachers tackle the new expectations required of teachers during this unprecedented time.

Increased Need for Mental Health Awareness

As a Licensed Certified Social Worker specializing in Clinical Social Work, the therapist and course professor identified parallels in the Whole Child approach in the education field to the Social Systems Theory in social work (Griffiths and Tabery 66). For example, the Whole Child approach maintains that students will have optimal success in the classroom if their social and emotional needs are met—not just through focusing on academics alone. The Whole Child approach focuses on ensuring that the students are healthy, safe, supported, engaged, and challenged. This approach takes into perspective the individual student's needs, such as family life, physical

health, social supports, and community resources to assist the child with optimal functioning, rather than focusing on the classroom alone. This parallels with the needs of the pre-service teachers in the course.

Systems Theory in social work seeks to understand individuals in relation to their environments—micro (individual, family, and peers/friends), mezzo (community, occupational, and local government), and macro systems (cultural, society, and national/international government policies) (Friedman and Allen). When an individual faces challenges or difficulties, the social worker evaluates possible stressors or deficits in the individual's various system levels. Also, to assist the individual, the social worker seeks to understand the strengths in the individual's social system to assist with improving functioning. This theory is often lightly covered in earlier courses in a teacher education program.

Both theories are similar in that they each view the individual or student holistically. The college students discussed awareness that the student in the ELA classroom will not be able to focus on academics if the student is hungry and without food or utilities in the home. The student whose parents are divorcing or experiencing family problems may demonstrate difficulties with concentration or appear anxious while in the classroom. Both approaches focus on awareness of emotional and social needs of the individual, providing support and a safe environment, and assisting with overall healthy functioning.

This sparked a discussion of the need for and benefits of identifying the overall essentials of the young students while they are learning from home, many of whom are without access to basic needs and resources that the schools typically provide. In addition, the therapist and professor shared

thoughts on the new challenges that educators are experiencing as they work to educate their students during the COVID-19 pandemic and the emotional and psychological needs of the educators as they work to provide distance learning. In essence, it was evident that the educators' needs and awareness of increased stressors while working to care for their students' educational needs should be identified and validated. The professor used this opportunity to remind the pre-service teachers that this was what she was doing for them. She also reminded each class member that this is important to pass on to the K-12 ELA classrooms they would soon be serving.

The parents and students are looking to the educational system for guidance during this unprecedented time of social distancing and disease prevention. It is essential that the active educators and pre-service educators are provided with the opportunity to ensure their individual psychological and emotional needs are met so they can continue their roles in providing leadership for their students and families.

Session Details

Five session goals for the pre-service teachers enrolled in the reading education course were decided upon in the meeting with the course professor and therapist:

1. Discuss mental health awareness and ways to promote self-care;
2. Consider new ways to manage personal stressors using mindfulness strategies;
3. Brainstorm ways to better lead classrooms with young students who are dealing with stress;
4. Gain knowledge about the Whole Child Model (Lewallen et. Al 730) and connect to other theories and K-12 ELA content;

5. Discuss the connection between mental health and stress as it relates to academic performance in the ELA classroom.

Session in Action

Using Zoom as the meeting platform, the session began with an introduction from the therapist who provided her professional background information as well as encouraging feedback for the students working toward their degree requirements. She used rapport-building strategies to engage the students, such as a Likert scale using video responses and chat feedback to assess the level of emotional stress and validation to encourage open expression of feelings and needs during the session. Next, the therapist used her prepared outline to guide the session, while offering flexibility for students to ask questions at any time to encourage “buy in” toward addressing the perceived needs of their future students that might impact their ELA success. This included discussing Cognitive Behavioral Theory (Beck 195) and the ways that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are connected. The students reported various levels of anxiety/stress related to the abrupt change to COVID-19 restrictions and the need to rely on video-based instruction during their training. The therapist identified how thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are interrelated. The therapist provided an example of how multiple stressors can trigger feelings of being overwhelmed, fears about uncertainties of the future, and concerns about failure in their own classes or as a future educator. The therapist encouraged feedback about various negative thoughts or beliefs that college students may experience as a result of increased stressors. The therapist discussed how negative thoughts and feelings tend to promote negative behaviors such as avoidance,

procrastination, anger/frustration, and low academic performance.

This promoted discussion of the importance of self-awareness and insight into thoughts and personal responses to changes associated with the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The therapist then discussed the Reframing technique as part of Cognitive Restructuring to promote flexibility while approaching reading instruction distance learning objectives. While these terms were not typically used in the reading course, they were connected with more common vocabulary that is used, such as scaffolding, metacognition, and building schema. The therapist discussed strategies to promote self-care, such as practicing mindfulness and meditation, identifying priorities while engaging in behaviors that honor those priorities, and calming, positive self-talk while addressing high-stress situations. She discussed the importance of setting psychological and emotional boundaries to allow educators to recover after their workday is finished. There was encouragement with the class feedback by participating in healthy, calming/soothing activities that promote relaxation, stress relief, and resilience including deep breathing, body relaxation, and chat discussion.

After discussing the interconnection among thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, the therapist discussed positive coping strategies to assist with proactively and positively managing the abrupt changes and stressors caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The therapist guided the class through a Reframing exercise. The therapist provided examples of possible anxious or negative thoughts and discussed with the students ways to identify the emotion(s) prompted by the original negative thought. She also solicited feedback from the students re: a negative thought that many of the students present reported experiencing to utilize in

rehearsing the Reframing technique. The group identified the thought, “I cannot do this today,” with regard to facing the abrupt changes in the classroom related to COVID-19 restrictions. The therapist encouraged the students to evaluate intensity of the emotion 0-100%. Several students provided examples of emotions of feeling “anxious,” “overwhelmed,” and “exhausted.” Many students reported the intensity of these emotions between 60-80%. Then, the therapist discussed the process of searching for “evidence” that validates the thought, “I cannot do this today.” The therapist shared that anxious or negative thoughts tend to “feel real,” however, generally do not provide evidence of being true. The therapist encouraged student feedback on things they have accomplished to this point that negate true evidence of not being able to get through their education requirements.

The therapist discussed ways to “reframe” or change the thought to be more realistic and positive. The therapist discussed the importance of reinforcing the positive thought. She then discussed how to check for intensity of the negative emotion after the statement has been reframed. Most students reported that the intensity of the negative emotions (“anxious,” “overwhelmed,” “exhausted”) had dropped to 20-40% during the exercise. The therapist discussed strategies to promote self-care, such as mindfulness, meditation, and calming, positive self-talk while addressing high-stress situations, such as “I can do this” and “I can reach out for support.” The therapist encouraged students to provide examples of identifying priorities while engaging in behaviors that honor those priorities, such as taking time to prepare for their reading instruction class and making sure they are getting enough rest so that they are able to address the needs of their students in the classroom. She discussed the importance of setting psychological and

emotional boundaries to allow educators to recover after their workday is finished, such as scheduling family time or exercise, or not checking work emails after 5:00 p.m. The therapist discussed deep abdominal breathing and rehearsed this calming technique with the students. The therapist discussed mindfulness techniques, such as using the five senses and focusing on breathing to assist with redirecting full awareness to the present moment. The therapist encouraged the class to provide feedback regarding healthy, calming/soothing activities that promote relaxation, stress relief, and resilience. This was considered in relation to personal situations in the role of a pre-service teacher, teacher, and student needing support in an ELA classroom.

The therapist continued with discussion around basic understandings of the Whole Child Model as it relates to students who are dealing with increased stressors and encouraged discussion of common stressors students may experience while learning during the pandemic. The therapist provided an overview of how this relates to Social Systems Theory and the ways that mental health distress and environmental stressors can manifest and negatively impact academic performance. Further, the therapist encouraged open discussion of ideas and community resources that may assist their students in reaching their full capacity of learning and thriving in this current pandemic. These resources were encouraged to be added to a required course journal for future reference. While the therapist did the majority of the facilitating, the professor helped to connect the reading course content and terminology by referencing the textbook terms and connecting to the class lecture content and literacy material.

Research Discussion

Research tells us so much about pre-service teachers and the stressors they face (Paquette and Rieg 55). This stress is also found in current classroom ELA educators and the students they serve. Young students need to master literacy skills as these skills will serve as the foundation for all others. Understanding that need can increase educator stress, especially with the current challenges. Yet, with the COVID-19 pandemic, there is still so much we are learning regarding the impacts the disease is having on the mental health of the people, including pre-service teachers, teachers, and students, that make up our society.

As two experts, who each focus on different fields of study, the experience of uniting as a team impacted knowledge in the following ways. First, connections with strategies that are used in both counseling and classroom management were made. Second, the session was well-received by the participants who believed that this opportunity will benefit their future ELA classrooms. Success of the meeting was expressed and observed in a variety of ways during and after the session. Due to student privacy, these details must remain non-specific in this article.

Recommendations

It is recommended that future reading college professors and therapists consider the benefits that this type of collaboration can have on pre-service teachers and their future endeavors. It is also recommended that current ELA educators are given opportunities to attend similar sessions in professional development settings as much as possible. By doing so, the future ELA teacher departments will have stronger candidates to enhance their already active departments. This course session was not meant to take the place of one-on-one therapy sessions that may be warranted but was meant to serve as one way to better

understand mental health issues that are faced in the both K-12 and higher education classroom settings. More specific future studies and carefully planned data collection may lead to further understandings of this type of phenomenon and the outcomes observed to ultimately improve mental health in the realm of education. Also, these future studies can help collect student-specific data sharing more from their own voices. While there is a cognizance that the COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented event, research shows that similar types of stressors are faced daily with pre-service teachers, current K-12 ELA teachers, and students. Therefore, providing pre-service teachers with sessions similar to this one, helping address coping skills, mindfulness strategies, and increased awareness of mental health as it relates to the Whole Child can impact academic success for students in a variety of ways.

It is important to share this adaptation made to a reading ELA course during the COVID-19 pandemic. The attempt can be inspirational to the K-12 ELA educator community. By sharing the details of this innovative attempt to cross over typical discipline barriers, like the professor and the therapist did, a new start of promoting mental health awareness can begin. Learning ways to identify and address stressors that may be impacting pre-service teacher candidates, K-12 ELA educators, and the young students they are so dedicated to serving can be beneficial. This can become a revolution in teaching pedagogy.

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Learning to Teach in a Pandemic: Qualities Contributing to Success

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As a teacher educator at a small, liberal arts college, I wear many hats: Education department chair, chief institutional representative for accreditation, “Principles of Education” instructor, Director of Student Teaching Abroad, and student teaching supervisor, to name a few. As an English education specialist, however, my favorite role is teaching the English methods course each spring and mentoring pre-service English teachers. Sitting down with, typically, four to six bright, eager future English teachers for a semester of animated conversation about the theory and practice of teaching language arts is a joy—and makes some of the less enthralling parts of my position (e.g., preparing for accreditation visits, writing the departmental annual report) worth it.

When COVID-19 threw the world into chaos and our student body was abruptly sent home in mid-March of 2020 to finish out the semester virtually, our “Teaching Communication Arts and Literature” course remained a dependable constant when so many other aspects of life became uncertain. Despite living in different states and time zones, last spring’s students were able and willing to continue our regular Tuesday/Thursday afternoon class meetings synchronously, so we carried on as usual with only minor syllabus adjustments. Despite the virtual context, interacting with this tight group twice a week contributed a much-needed anchor to the semester and allowed us to

experience the human connection that we all craved.

At the semester’s conclusion, I felt satisfied with our work, and although students’ observation hours in local classrooms were cut short, I was confident that they were, indeed, prepared for their student teaching practica in the fall. But then fall arrived and my teacher candidates found themselves in completely virtual student teaching placements. I had not prepared them for this context in English methods. Unlike veteran teachers, they had not yet developed extensive pedagogical toolkits and couldn’t draw on previous experience to assist the transition to the virtual classroom. What would they do? How would they perform? And could this distance learning environment prepare them for the “regular” classrooms they would spend their careers in post-pandemic?

While that last question has yet to be fully answered, I need not have worried about the other two. In short, my teacher candidates rose to the challenge of distance learning remarkably well. As I reflected on their experiences, rereading my observation notes and the journals they submitted weekly throughout student teaching, three qualities stood out that seemed to contribute to their success in the distance learning context: care for students, flexibility, and passion for the profession.

1. Care for Students

“Principles of Education” introduces pre-service teachers to the nuts and bolts of the teaching profession like lesson and unit planning, instructional strategies, and classroom management. Regardless of the pedagogical topic, two predominant themes are woven throughout the curriculum: building relationships with students and creating inclusive, equitable, culturally responsive classrooms. We know that students learn optimally only after their basic needs for belonging are met (“Maslow’s Hierarchy”) and that learning is grounded in the need for social connection (Noddings, Thayer-Bacon). Students will not be motivated to learn if they do not perceive an “ethic of care” from their teachers (Noddings).

Going into his student teaching at a large urban high school, my student Nick (all names are pseudonyms) was determined to build relationships with his 11th and 12th graders, even though he knew he would only ever meet them on Zoom. He was further challenged upon discovering that he couldn’t even see most of his students’ faces as, typically, only two or three of them in each class turned their cameras on; thus, he saw most students only as “alphabet letters.” Daunted but undeterred, with help from his host teacher, he implemented a daily “Warm Welcome” to get to know students—10 minutes at the beginning of class when he chatted informally with them as they responded to a warm-up question (e.g., What’s your favorite text you’ve read for an English class?). As most students were reticent to participate in whole-class activities, the warm-up occurred primarily via Zoom’s chat feature, but Nick would respond orally to acknowledge and affirm student contributions, as well as

try to facilitate interaction among the students. He consistently included every student in his comments and questions, even when some of them consistently refused to respond publicly; he was purposely sending the message that each student was a valuable part of the group regardless of their level of participation and that he would not give up on anyone. Not surprisingly, by the end of Nick’s practicum, more students were turning on their cameras, unmuting their microphones, and turning in assignments.

Midway through student teaching, Nick also implemented small group and one-on-one meetings during “work time” (chunks of time during the virtual class periods when students were free to work on their reading or writing for class). He noted that “students were far more willing to talk if it was just me and a couple others, and I was able to have back-and-forths with students whom I had never heard speak before.” He plans to work individual student appointments into his future in-person teaching, as well, because “some of my students just really needed somebody to sit next to them and talk” with them as they worked. Further, individual meetings raise the level of accountability for students—and caring for students involves demonstrating your belief that they can achieve and holding them accountable for doing so.

At the conclusion of his virtual student teaching, Nick reflected that reading students’ writing afforded him the best way to get to know them because he still had never seen some of their faces. While shopping in the neighborhood, he mused, “I was thinking about how I could be walking past any number of my students and would never know it. Still, I was

fortunate enough to get to know so many of my students' personalities through their writing, and I'm confident that I'll still be able to name and describe quite a few of my kids...many decades from now." Despite the lack of direct, in-person contact, Nick's care for students led him to develop meaningful relationships with them—and encourage meaningful language arts learning—nonetheless.

2. Flexibility

While careful planning for instruction benefits all teachers, thorough lesson planning is essential for pre-service teachers. Crafting a detailed plan that links standards and measurable objectives with assessments, notes how instruction will be differentiated for diverse learners, considers how the content relates to students' backgrounds and experiences, and attends to teaching the academic language embedded in the lesson maximizes the chances that students will achieve the intended learning outcomes. Therefore, our teacher education program places strong emphasis on planning for instruction, and the great majority of our student teachers excel in this area. Sometimes, however, relying too heavily on plans can be detrimental because teaching also requires great flexibility (Parsons et al.). Teachers need to be able to change course in a moment both in response to students' learning needs in the classroom and in response to the shifting context outside of the classroom.

My student teacher Kirstin is a self-proclaimed Type-A personality, a highly conscientious student who thrives on planning ahead. Before her practicum started, she was concerned that so many details about her teaching placement were up in the air—what learning model

would be implemented, which classes she would be teaching, what collaboration with her host teacher would look like during the pandemic, etc. In early conversations with her host teacher, though, Kirstin realized that he was wondering about all of these questions, too. His assurances that the two of them would work through the uncertainty together helped her summon the flexibility that allowed her to flourish during student teaching.

Kirstin's learning to live with ambiguity and respond to continual change proved essential, as her practicum school district changed its learning model several times during her 12 weeks of student teaching. She started teaching completely online, then the district phased in hybrid instruction for one grade at a time (while the other grades remained online). A couple of weeks later the district pivoted back to distance learning, then later completely revised the distance learning daily schedule. While all of the changes were overwhelming and frustrating at times, Kirstin took cues from her host teacher and was able to remain focused on mitigating the effects of the changes on her students and their learning instead of focusing on her own discomfiture.

Kirstin's host teacher provided an excellent model of maintaining an open attitude of flexibility in the midst of uncertainty; however, this frame of mind may actually prove easier for some pre-service and new teachers to embody because of their novice status. Student teachers haven't known anything different; all their lessons are new, and they are not tied to particular ways of doing things. As they have not yet established and settled into comfortable routines, change may be easier for them to handle.

3. Passion for the Profession

While many factors contributed to Kirstin's and Nick's successful student teaching, an additional quality played a significant role, as well. They both demonstrated robust commitment to and passion for the teaching profession. Stepping into the teaching role confirmed that their chosen vocation "fit," and their enthusiasm for teaching was visible even in the midst of challenges. While Kirstin admitted that there were some days "when I was in the thick of lesson plans and grading and anxious about if class would go well the next day, I wondered if I really wanted to be a teacher," she explained that the satisfaction of working with students and the joy of knowing them ("Middle schoolers are hilarious!") "affirmed that despite everything that was thrown at me [in student teaching], I still do want to be a teacher. Probably even more so than I did at the beginning of this experience!"

Student teachers could be in a better position than experienced teachers to convey passion for education as teaching is new for them, and it is likely their first professional opportunity. However, student teaching is also a highly demanding experience. In addition to taking on teaching responsibilities, pre-service teachers must simultaneously juggle the requirements of their teacher preparation programs and initial licensure (e.g., submitting lesson and unit plans, attending seminars, writing weekly reflective journals, completing performance assessments). Despite the heavy workload, Kirstin, Nick, and my other teacher candidates were largely energized in their new roles. They discovered that, despite the challenges, teaching really is what they want to do,

so they were willing to put in the necessary time and effort to succeed with their students. Their passion for teaching and student learning buoyed them up and propelled them through the challenging times.

Embodying an ethic of care for students, flexibility, and passion for the profession helped my teacher candidates succeed as student teachers in the distance learning classroom, despite their novice status. But will they succeed when they secure their own positions and teach independently in traditional "in-person" classrooms? Certainly, they will need to hone various skills that they were unable to practice online (e.g., managing student behavior in the classroom, establishing and guiding in-person routines, etc.); however, I believe that the traits that served them so well in student teaching will continue to benefit them long past the novice stage. Strong connections with students and care about both their academic and general well-being, the ability to "go with the flow" and live with the ambiguity, and keeping sight of the importance of one's work and passion for it are important conditions for student teacher success, but they apply to all teachers.

While deep knowledge of English language arts content and strong pedagogical skills are essential for quality English teaching, other aspects play an important role, as well. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of soft skills and exacerbated the need for adaptation, but teachers are continually asked to adapt to changing circumstances even in "normal" times. Regardless of teaching experience, those who embody key principles like care for students, flexibility, and passion for the profession seem able to navigate shifting teaching contexts successfully.

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An Argument for Affective Inquiry

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We are living in a time of great personal and social turmoil. We endure the oppressive weight of COVID-19, feeling anguish over the loss of life and coping with stresses from social distancing. Many people abhorred murders like those of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and supported Black Lives Matter protestors turning rage into hope. The country is healing from a divisive election and the scars of an attempted insurrection. In moments both big and small (e.g., the 100th anniversary of the 20th Amendment or J. K. Rowling's transphobic statements), people felt celebratory, hopeful, and accepted or despondent, fearful, and rejected. The events of 2020 and early 2021 caused seismic shifts to worldviews and values, created a sense of disequilibrium, and prompted many educators to reflect on our philosophies of teaching. As we reflect, we may be questioning how to help our students navigate this world of chaos, pain, and opportunity.

To cope with trauma and build resilience in my personal life, I regularly engaged in a process I refer to as affective inquiry. I was sexually assaulted when I was 19. In March 2018, I experienced a domestic violence incident that required police intervention; I subsequently spent months in court seeking a restraining order. In December 2019, after four years of battle, my mother passed away from metastatic breast cancer. In 2020-2021, I have been diagnosed with epilepsy and a resurgent Lyme disease and evaluated for a yet unknown inflammatory condition. Reflecting on scholarship I read about trauma, discourse, and institutions like medicine and the justice system, I

questioned how I had been socialized to experience particular emotional reactions to these events.

During the spring 2020 semester, many of my students were facing multiple crises as a result of or exacerbated by COVID-19 (e.g., unemployment, homelessness, food insecurity, hospitalization, death of family members, closing of pre-K-12 schools). Due to these stressors, and my college's shift to online instruction, many of my students were at risk of academic disengagement. At the same time, I noticed that students' discussion board posts and journal entries about course concepts were often personal and emotional. Based on how I used affective inquiry as a tool for coping with personal traumas, I believed that the practice would encourage students to connect course concepts with their lives, keeping them engaged in coursework.

Scholarship on Affect

As I envision it, affective inquiry, a practice through which individuals question their emotional reactions as social constructs, is grounded in the scholarship of Silvan Tomkins, a psychologist who studied personality and affect. According to Tomkins, affects are socially constructed emotional reactions that are triggered when we encounter and evaluate stimuli according to value systems into which we are socialized ("Affect and the Psychology of Knowledge"). Tomkins classified nine affective states (*Affect, Imagery, Consciousness: Volumes I-III*), though some scholars have argued for an expanded taxonomy (e.g., Kelley; Ngai): positive affects (joy-enjoyment; interest-excitement);

neutral affects (surprise-startle); negative affects (distress-anguish; fear-terror; anger-rage; shame-humiliation; disgust; dissimell). While I do not directly teach Tomkins' taxonomy to my students, I employ this scholarship when creating learning tasks. For example, students in my queer theory course discuss how socialization might lead individuals to feel joy or disgust when observing camp performances.

In designing their two-volume taxonomic handbook on educational goals, Bloom et al. and Krathwohl et al. argued that instruction targeting both the cognitive and affective domains is likely more beneficial to students than instruction isolated to one domain. Scholarship on "hot cognition" supports this claim, demonstrating a link between the affective domain and cognitive processes like decision-making, problem-solving, and comprehension (e.g., Thagard). Emotional reactions are products of socialization and past experience, demonstrating they are reliant on schema (Tomkins, "Affect and the Psychology of Knowledge"); when we reconcile and integrate new emotional reactions within our schema, emotional resonance occurs—our emotional response confirms, challenges, or disconfirms previously experienced affective reactions (Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness: Volume 4: Cognition*). Affective inquiry is dependent on cognitive constructs like schema and supports the development of cognitive skills like analysis and evaluation. For example, in lessons on hygiene (Cameron) and censorship, students in my queer theory, linguistics, and gender and women's studies courses interrogate their emotional reactions to reflect on and analyze how our value systems lead us to judge practices and products as correct or incorrect; appropriate, inappropriate, or filthy; beautiful, offensive, or disgusting.

I see affective inquiry as a tool through which students explore their emotions, attitudes, interests, and values, helping them to appreciate, better remember, and more deeply learn course content. My goals for introducing affective inquiry are to encourage students to: a) recognize and share the emotional reactions that they have in response to course concepts; and b) explore how these reactions are products of socialization and are related to appreciation of, attitudes toward, interest in, and valuations of social phenomena. My initial teaching to these goals has shown the promise of affective inquiry: My students are highly participatory and communal when engaged in affective inquiry, and they are deeply analytical about social phenomena.

Affective Inquiry in Practice

Many students who take my queer theory course regularly combat homelessness and/or cope with anxiety and depression; however, my students and I also routinely work to collectively build a safe space, with their identities and experiences affirmed by both our community and course content. In spring 2020, my queer theory students confronted a city-wide shutdown that limited their access to many of the support networks on which they rely. As we transitioned to online learning, my students expressed fears that they would also lose the community we were building. Confronting the possibility of course disengagement, I realized that I needed to address my students' fears while ensuring that they received as meaningful an education as possible. Hoping to a) affirm students' identities by building connections between course content and their lives and b) help students maintain and strengthen the community we were building pre-shutdown, I integrated affective inquiry into a module on queerness and the humanities, asking

students to analyze their emotional reactions to excerpts from queer literary narratives.

To engage students in affective inquiry, I employed a methodology, inspired by Sikora et al., that I designed to collect data for a study on affect and literary reading (Kelley). For each excerpt, students notated when, while reading, they felt emotional and, as best they could, identified the emotion they experienced. In discussion board posts, students shared self-selected emotional reactions and initial analyses of stimuli and cultural values they believed prompted such reactions. For journal entries, students evaluated their value systems as they identified and close-read emotionally salient moments in each excerpt.

When we read excerpts from *Stone Butch Blues* (*SBB*; Feinberg), many students found kinship with the protagonist, Jess, and shared how they were socialized to be ashamed of their desires or genders. For instance, one student discussed how her feelings of shame and humiliation were so ingrained that she felt pain even when experiencing joyful moments with other queer folk. Sharing her sense of anguish, this student stated, “I needed to drink or get high to let go and feel ‘happiness’ but I’d still feel that what I was doing or feeling was wrong.”

My students also connected with how the protagonist, Jess, finds enjoyment and excitement in sexual contact with a partner even though she also felt anguish, humiliation, and rage when brutally victimized and raped at the hands of homophobic police officers. A number of students shared feelings of anguish and humiliation related to traumatic experience like abuse; however, like Jess, they also found bittersweet joy and solace when being valued by another person. One student, who identified as gender defiant, shared that despite feeling ashamed of who they were after years of marginalization and familial

abuse, the touch of desire made them feel joyous, helping them feel “understood” and “safe.” Other students likewise found it cathartic to contrast moments of oppression meant to shame them with the joy they felt when experiencing being desired, loved, or accepted. This led to ongoing conversations, related to scholarship we read on queer theory and affects (e.g., Ahmed), about whether oppressive situations that cause queer folk anguish, rage, fear, or humiliation also create opportunities for a “queer joy” that is distinct from other forms of joy.

Students explored the social construction of their emotions by comparing their readings of *SBB* and *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (*ADDSU*; Sáenz). Though both *SBB* and *ADDSU* feature dark moments where queer folk are brutalized, and though both novels end with a promise of hope and joy, my students initially found hope only in *ADDSU*. One student noted that, “there was a promise that comes with youth that made the book feel less heavy than *SBB* with characters already beaten down with life. It’s like the difference between the joy of your first job and the joy of retirement.” However, a non-traditional student noted that, “This bias towards youth seems to condition us to look more positively or hopefully at teens than adults . . . While Ari and Dante are just starting out, for Jess and Ruth it’s more like finally having a chance to breathe.” For my students, the end of *SBB* reads more like the cathartic ending to a dramatic tale, with Jess and Ruth able to relax after enduring the brutal burdens of life. This contrasted with my students’ reading of *ADDSU*; they found the ending to be a hopeful beginning, with Ari and Dante entering the world together as first loves. Students analyzed their emotional reactions, critiquing how social attitudes towards age and life experience affected their reading of each novel’s ending.

In fall 2020, with courses still online due to COVID-19, I decided to integrate affective inquiry into all of my courses, particularly my gender and women's studies course. In both my spring 2020 queer theory and fall 2020 gender and women's studies courses, I assigned students to affectively read *The Cancer Journals* (Lorde). Students' discussion board postings from both courses demonstrated that they were working to reconcile their emotional reactions to social phenomena they had not previously encountered with their value systems, thinking critically about the relationship between affects and socialization.

Some students in my gender and women's studies course were discomforted by Lorde's discussion of her sexual longings for other women; however, they were also willing to unpack why they were discomforted. As one student shared, "I can't say I was disgusted that's not what I felt . . . It's not something I ever read about before . . . If she was straight and talked about sex I wouldn't be surprised. That made me question my bias." It was apparent that many of my students had never previously encountered erotic imagery depicting same-sex desire, causing them to feel startled. Students in my queer theory course were also startled by Lorde's use of erotic imagery, though their shock came from the connection Lorde makes between her sexual urges and her battle with cancer. As one student shared, "Sex is never shown related to illness . . . just because she is ill, just because she is in pain doesn't mean she doesn't want to feel the warmth and happiness that comes with feeling loved." Students explored how illness is often depicted as divorced from, rather than informing, the erotic, with ill bodies often neutered or sanitized. My students' analyses of *The Cancer Journals* reminded me of the importance of thinking consciously about decisions I make regarding which texts and

lenses, and whose experiences, are included in my curricula.

I have found that affective inquiry is most impactful when I align my courses to social justice, with themes like equality, human rights, and dignity emerging as central foci. Helping students question their emotional reactions to social phenomena that are often deeply personal to them empowers them to think more deeply about their positions in the many social worlds they inhabit. In courses where students query social constructions like gender, race, (dis-)ability, and sexuality and think about their own experiences with oppression, they are often primed to question the social construction of affective reaction. For example, by engaging in affective inquiry about concepts like linguistic profiling and discrimination, prestige, and dialect, students in my sociolinguistics course on language, race, and ethnicity critically analyzed how others may evaluate their linguistic practices and the effect that these judgments might have on their access to socioeconomic power. While I have found affective inquiry to be empowering for students who are victims of human rights violations, feel they are denied dignity, and/or are not granted full equality in our contemporary society, I do believe that affective inquiry can be an impactful learning tool for all students, especially teenagers who regularly endure social pressures.

Connections to English Language Arts Instruction

When offering their taxonomy for outcomes related to the affective domain, Krathwohl et al. argued that teaching literature to solely meet cognitive learning outcomes can depress students' appreciation of literature: "[I]t is quite possible that many literature courses at high-school and college levels instill knowledge of the history of

literature and knowledge of the details of particular works of literature, while at the same time producing aversion to, or at least a lower level of interest in, literary works” (20). Empirical research on literary reading, such as Richards’ and Holland’s seminal studies, have long shown emotional response to be a natural and integral part of the social act of literary reading (e.g., Rusch; Zepetnek and Sywenky). The methodology I designed to collect data for my research study (Kelley)—asking participants to record emotional reactions *while* reading, identifying emotionally salient moments post-reading, and close reading text—can be used to integrate affective inquiry into the English/language arts curriculum and support students’ literary reading.

Kintsch reminds us that comprehension and interpretation of textual stimuli are individualistic and formed by our positions and experiences within our social worlds. Similarly, our affective reactions to textual and social phenomena are related to our personal value systems, life experiences, and emotional schema; our emotional reactions, even if we are responding in similar ways to similar stimuli, are individualistic. Further, our emotional reactions to textual and social phenomena change as we age, experience life, or witness social change influencing our comprehension and interpretation of literary texts (Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness: Volume IV: Cognition*).

As my students and I learned, exploring the diverse ways we each attend to and experience textual and/or social phenomena can produce lively conversations that make our appreciation of literature and social theory a bit more personal and our learning a little richer. As educators, we can model affective inquiry, demonstrating to students how our social worlds affect our emotional reactions to and inform our interpretation of social and textual phenomena. Students can also be mentors of affective inquiry. In

many of my courses, students often have complex and mature reactions to stimuli to which I do not attend; when my students share their experiences, I find myself developing a deeper appreciation of the phenomena I am teaching.

Many of the events of 2020-2021 have likely influenced students’ lenses for reading and writing. As an example, teachers can encourage students to think about how COVID-19 influenced their emotional reactions and interpretative stances to novels like Shelley’s *The Last Man*, Camus’ *The Plague*, or Defoe’s *Journal of the Plague Year*. Students can write and affectively read each other’s narratives about events in 2020 (e.g., a comparison of a suffragist to a woman witnessing the election of the first female Vice President of the United States). By exploring their affective connections to spaces they occupy or that are vacant in their absence, students can think critically about the social phenomenon of space and its relationship to setting. Teachers can also help students build skills of rhetorical analysis and explore questions of social justice by helping them to affectively read news articles, opinion pieces, testimonials, memes, and infographics about Black Lives Matter protests.

As human beings, we know that moments of both personal and social strife, upheaval, and joy afford us a chance to embrace change and grow. As educators, we know that such moments ask us to be adaptive; they are opportunities for us to embrace pedagogical change and find new ways to help students navigate their way through a tumultuous world. Integrating affective inquiry into my instruction and curricula has allowed my students and me to think about who we are as human beings and reflect on our experiences with the social phenomena we encounter and experience in both our academic studies and daily lives.

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A Local Historic Village Goes Online: Transforming English and Social Studies Methods Courses for a Virtual Setting

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When teachers began to prepare for the return to school in Fall 2020, they knew this would be unlike anything they had planned for before. As pre-service teacher educators (PST educators), we were no exception—wondering how to best prepare future English Language Arts (ELA) and social studies teachers during a global pandemic. The Vermilionville Education Enrichment Partnership (VEEP) is an academic service learning collaboration between Vermilionville—a Louisiana living history museum and folklife village, one school district, and our university's College of Education. Vermilionville's mission is to increase appreciation for the history, culture, and natural resources of the Native Americans, Acadians, Creoles, and peoples of African descent in the Attakapas region through the end of the 1800s (see bayouvermiliondistrict.org/vermilionville/). Through this collaboration the museum is able to provide educational outreach opportunities and maintain collaborative partnerships. VEEP is a hallmark of the secondary English and social studies education programs at our institution. We knew, however, we needed to re-imagine this project in light of COVID-19.

What is VEEP anyway?

Prior to the pandemic, English and social studies pre-service teachers (PSTs) worked collaboratively to design cross-curricular

lessons inspired by local cultures and then implement lessons on-site with area students. Because of safety guidelines, we knew we would need to adapt the rich in-person experience to a virtual setting, which led to the first virtual iteration of VEEP. Ultimately, it was critical that changes were practical, while maintaining the high quality of the project to ensure students produced meaningful work aligned to course learning objectives.

We identified key elements, such as cross-curricular collaboration and development of engaging learning experiences, that could be implemented virtually. It was also critical for students to be familiar with Vermilionville's mission and history. To introduce the project, nearly 30 secondary education majors, the museum's education coordinator, and we, the university professors, gathered over Zoom at the start of Fall 2020. We explained that the PSTs would not deliver lessons at Vermilionville as usual, but they would still be creating engaging, authentic products for a real-world audience.

Project Adaptation and Implementation

The most significant change that occurred when VEEP shifted online was the final product. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, students created lesson plans and then implemented these lessons at Vermilionville for "VEEP Day" with area

students. In Fall 2020, the final product changed to a digital lesson that was designed to be accessed asynchronously by area eighth-grade students. To achieve this final product, we adapted the project in many ways. First, Vermilionville staff created a video providing a brief, virtual tour to familiarize our students with the site. Additionally, the museum's curator organized a Google Drive folder for the PSTs to explore artifacts within the village. Artifacts included a meat smoker, sugar cane tools, and cast iron pot (see Figure 1 for additional examples). Although students did not visit the historic village, these modifications provided them opportunities to be immersed in the time period and culture interpreted by Vermilionville.



Fig. 1. From left to right: "Loom, Button Maker, Sewing Machine," Vermilionville Education Enrichment Partnership, Vermilionville collections

Once broken into pairs or triads, our students were tasked with designing a digital, asynchronous lesson centered around their artifact. They were provided the same planning template used in past years, since we believed a familiar template would aid the PSTs as they composed rigorous learning outcomes and designed clear procedures. To further aid in lesson development, the TeachRock website (see teachrock.org/lesson-plan-collections/) was shared with students.

During whole-class workshops, the breakout room feature in Zoom was utilized so students could work in small groups while we "visited" different rooms to listen to ideas, answer questions, and offer suggestions. For instance, the museum

coordinator discussed different resources and shared various primary and secondary sources with students that they could incorporate into their lessons. As university professors, we largely provided students with pedagogical feedback, such as alignment between educational standards and instruction, and engaged in discussion regarding lesson creation and how this would "look" when implemented in an asynchronous format. Some groups had additional virtual meetings where they utilized screen-sharing features to collectively work on tasks. Others worked through Google Docs and Google Slides, and many communicated through email, text message, and other platforms, such as Group Me. These approaches to communication suggested connecting remotely was vital as students collaboratively designed instruction without being in the same physical space.

After refining lesson plans, groups turned their attention to finalizing the digital lessons. At the end of the semester, students submitted their projects and presented an overview during a synchronous Zoom class. With Vermilionville's education coordinator in attendance, the PSTs shared innovative approaches for bringing their lessons to life in engaging ways that students could connect with and learn from, all while in an asynchronous digital format. Examples included varied formats such as videos and websites, the inclusion of hands-on tasks where students created visual products as part of the lesson, and also made personal or community connections to the lesson to make it relevant and interesting for the secondary students. (Table 1 provides an overview of ways the project was modified and adapted.)

Table 1
VEEP: Now and Then Comparison

Implementation in Past Years	Fall 2020 Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-site tour of Vermilionville On-site exploration of museum artifacts for PSTs to explore and select for lesson focus Small groups (4-5) of ELA and social studies PSTs collaborated in-person PSTs created lessons that were implemented at Vermilionville for “VEEP Day” with area students as their final product, and selected lessons were posted on Vermilionville’s website PSTs had multiple opportunities to implement their lessons on VEEP Day as middle/secondary students rotated throughout the village to participate in PST-created lessons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual video tour of Vermilionville Creation of a shared Google Drive Folder with 30 pre-selected artifacts for PSTs to explore and select for lesson focus Pairs or triads of ELA and social studies students collaborated virtually PSTs created asynchronous lessons designed to be delivered virtually and presented to peers via Zoom as their final product PST lesson plans and digital asynchronous lessons were shared with Vermilionville to be made available to middle school students, but PSTs did not implement lessons with students during the semester

they recorded themselves delivering content so students could participate “with the teacher.” Some groups even chose to create websites to house their lessons. Samples from two groups are shared below.

Regina Music Box: Music, Created from Our Darkest Days of History, Connecting People

One group worked with a Regina Music Box to create the lesson, “Music, Created from our Darkest Days of History, Connecting People.” In their lesson plan, the group posed essential questions, described cross-curricular connections, and provided a lesson overview (see Table 2). In one portion of the lesson, the front page of a newspaper and accompanying article about Hurricane Katrina was shared along with lyrics to “Tie My Hands” by Lil Wayne. Students were tasked with answering guiding questions, annotating texts, and drawing connections between the newspaper and song while making personal connections. Through this lesson, the PSTs used the artifact as a focal point to examine ways music has been used as a coping method throughout history. Students who participate in this lesson are able to learn the history of the music box, analyze primary resources, reflect on their own experiences, and recognize these connections through the creation of a culminating task—a poem addressing effects of music on themselves and the world.

Authentic and Asynchronous: PST-Created Lessons

At the conclusion of this iteration of the project, 10 digital lessons were created, each centered around a primary source artifact from Vermilionville, designed to highlight connections between ELA and social studies. Some groups delivered their lesson through PowerPoint with embedded audio or video. Others created video lessons in which

Table 2

Introduction of Lesson Plan for Regina Music Box Artifact

Essential Questions	How do we deal with tragedy in our lives? How does music bring people together? How can music reflect a period of time?
Cross-Curricular Connections	This lesson requires students to analyze artifacts and primary sources from the history of the Regina Music Box, Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, and the COVID-19 pandemic to examine the effects of music born from these tragic periods. While analyzing each document, the students will annotate, answer questions, and reflect on the reading. The culminating assignment will require students to create a poem as an evaluation of their retention of the lesson.
Lesson Overview	Students will be using historical artifacts and primary sources to evaluate the importance of music as a coping method. The purpose of the lesson is for students to compare how they connect with music to how others have connected with music by analyzing songs written during specific historical periods. The students will end the lesson by creating a poem that emphasizes the importance and connection of music in our lives and throughout history.

Button maker: Social Justice Symbols Then vs. Now

A pair of PSTs whose artifact was a button maker from the early 1920s created a lesson in which students were to examine symbols of social justice over time. Their digital resources included an image of the button maker, an image of a button that read “Votes for Women,” and other resources related to the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. The university students made a connection between the Women’s Suffrage Movement and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement by describing both movements and how various symbols (including buttons) have been used to express support for said movements. The lesson began with images from BLM protests within the local community. Students were prompted to compose a journal response reflecting on what they knew about the movement, including symbols or signs they might have seen, along with their beliefs about the goals of the movement. By showing local images of the BLM movement and asking students to share their ideas, the PSTs were encouraging students to begin thinking about symbols within social justice movements before the artifact was even introduced.

Next, lesson-creators introduced the button maker, shared information on the Women’s Suffragist movement and 19th Amendment, and explained how buttons were used as a symbol to express support for and during this movement. A connection to symbols associated with modern movements was shared, along with ways in which social justice symbols are often expressed (e.g., flags, stickers, art, and now masks). After learning about both movements, the culminating task was for students to create their own symbol to express a movement or cause important to them (see Figure 2). The PSTs took a single artifact and used this as

inspiration to address important movements in history, past and present.

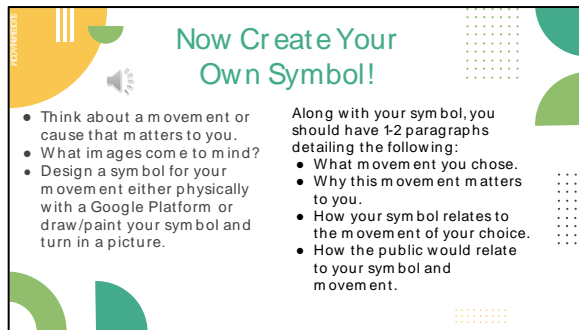


Fig. 2. Culminating Task for Lesson Influenced by Button Maker Artifact

Lessons Learned and Looking Ahead

Teachers know to be successful they need to be flexible, and the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated this in an extreme way. The biggest lesson learned from this project was that site-based learning initiatives can still take place in virtual spheres. It is also critical that PSTs are provided with experiences to design and implement authentic instruction in a virtual setting as they will likely be tasked with this as practicing professionals. One challenge of this project was not physically visiting Vermilionville; however, the guided video tour was great for helping students feel connected to the museum. When lesson planning, an initial challenge for our students was not providing sufficient details for an asynchronous audience. Verbal and written feedback was provided throughout the project to address this so they could strengthen lesson design. This provided an opportunity for PST growth since they were required to consider every detail of the lesson plan and digital lesson, since they would not be implementing this in-person. As such, they had to ensure each aspect of this assignment was clear to an audience who would access these lessons at a later date. This was essential because the PST-created lessons have the potential to reach much larger audiences than in past years

since teachers will have access to the lesson plans and the digital, asynchronous lessons. While the lessons were not implemented with students right away, they will be housed on the Vermilionville website for teachers and students to access. Previously, lesson plans were housed on the website, but now, the pre-made digital lessons will be available as well. Additionally, the PSTs were given more autonomy when creating the digital lessons compared to in-person, resulting in further opportunities for exploration, creativity, and deep critical thinking.

As we continue to work within the parameters of COVID-19 safety guidelines, we are excited for the next virtual iteration of VEEP. This semester (Spring 2021), students also created asynchronous lessons, but worked with an in-service educator so they could implement their lesson with secondary students and then reflect on their lesson. Moving forward, we plan to give students choice to work independently, and choice on designing their lesson around a specific artifact or exploring a larger topic related to Vermilionville. When given these choices, we are curious to see what students choose and to consider how these different options might influence the lesson creation and implementation, whether delivered in-person or through virtual means. Although different from previous years, the Fall 2020 re-imagining of VEEP encouraged secondary English and social studies education majors to collaborate with others, design cross-curricular lessons, and explore new approaches for delivering instruction within a virtual setting. As educators continue to adjust to teaching during a pandemic, our focus as teacher-educators is to model lessons learned for our students so they can, in turn, implement this within their own future classrooms.

Resources for Further Exploration

“Lessons.” *TeachRock*,

<https://teachrock.org/lesson-plan-collections/>. Accessed 21 December 2020.

Vermilionville. *Bayou Vermilion District*.

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There's Nothing Novel About Our Disdain for Education: Teaching in the Midst of COVID-19

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Travelers Rest High School

In June of 2020, former secretary of education Arne Duncan and Rey Saldaña, president and CEO of Communities in Schools, released an op-ed in *USA Today*. Most schools in the United States had let out for the summer, and teachers' and students' collective relief was palpable. Learning during COVID-19, with no prior warnings or timetable to return to normal or adequate resources, was demoralizing.

So when Duncan and Saldaña suggested in their op-ed that, in fact, the learning students had received over the e-learning period was inadequate, and that schools should hold summer sessions to help make up for this failure, and that, by the way, schools shouldn't even have summer breaks to begin with, they were met with the outrage of... no one. That's not because the post wasn't offensive to educators and students alike. One of Duncan and Saldaña's suggestions was that "education can be personalized," as if teachers do not already follow IEPs and 504s and shift their classrooms based on the needs of the students in front of them. But teachers hear non-teachers tell them how to do their jobs all the time. COVID-19 might be a new virus, but there's nothing new about the contempt outsiders have for education.

Duncan and Saldaña state explicitly that we should capitalize on the crisis of COVID-19 to enact "unprecedented change" in public schooling. Their bulleted suggestions to reform public education are, in order: moving to year-long academic calendars, personalizing education, moving students through grades based on

performance instead of age, and providing individual case-management to support students in poverty, specifically students in Title I schools. They also implicitly suggest that segregation is a source of some of the inequity that their suggestions intend to remedy.

Duncan's focus on moving to year-long schooling is not new. He has advocated to reform the academic calendar since his time as the secretary of education (Carr Smyth; Wade). What Duncan called "summer learning loss" in 2014 ("School summer break doesn't work for kids") he and Saldaña are now calling the "COVID slide." But talking about something for a long time doesn't make it real. Duncan and Saldaña have ignored important research about the "summer-slide;" mainly, that we aren't even sure it exists (Kuhfeld; von Hippel). The first data from "The Beginning School Study" (which started the "summer-slide" mania) were collected in 1982; no one cites studies later than "The Beginning School Study" because no one has been able to replicate their findings.

So, while making students sit in classrooms during the summer might seem like a common-sense way to make up for a learning loss that has occurred during COVID-19, the reality is we have no proof of that loss. Data on how students navigate other extended breaks is inconclusive about their effects (Kuhfeld; von Hippel), and we have absolutely no data on how COVID-19 has affected learning. Researchers will need to track the academic achievement of students for multiple years after the

pandemic to see how it has affected the population, and guessing what we think research will conclude is unethical. What we do know, however, is that learning is a lot more complicated than just sharing air and space with a teacher, and more time in school doesn't mean more learning (Baker et al.).

Too much about Duncan and Saldaña's response reflects our flawed beliefs about education, even before COVID-19; it hinges on the premise that being in school magically makes students learn, and that learning is the silver bullet to solving the deep issues of inequity in the United States (Hanauer). Duncan and Saldaña use the questionable data about learning loss during the summer to advocate for year-round schooling and exploit the COVID-19 crisis (and the once again unprovable learning loss from e-learning stints) as a justification, citing "the possibility that the coronavirus will be with us for years to come" to support their political agenda of having students sit in classrooms during summer to perform learning.

It is essential to talk about Duncan and Saldaña's push for a year-long academic calendar in the midst of COVID-19 because that push is rooted in perceiving students of color from a deficit perspective. If learning is about proximity to a teacher, and the majority of teachers in the United States are white ("Characteristics of Public School Teachers"), then the uncomfortable messaging of Duncan and Saldaña is that students of color need to be in proximity to whiteness to address the "COVID slide"; the act of existing in their Black homes, they imply, was inherently damaging. Duncan and Saldaña don't say they are targeting Black students specifically, but they do explicitly align academically struggling students as students of color, calling them "vulnerable children, including poor students and many students of color," and

they also include a link in their post to another op-ed, titled "America's segregated schools: We can't live together until we learn together," implicitly suggesting that the root issue for "vulnerable children" is their segregated home communities and therefore their lack of access to white ways of learning.

Duncan and Saldaña's other suggestions are also damaging and exploitative of students of color. What they call "Competency based teaching...advancing children when they're ready, rather than at the end of an academic year," is really repackaged retention policy, which disproportionately holds Black students back from their next grade (Adams). Because retention is causally linked to increased drop-out rates, there is every reason to believe that if schools followed the policies advocated for by Duncan and Saldaña they would be excessively harmful to students of color by *decreasing* their access to quality schooling (Mariano et al.). Graciously, Duncan and Saldaña advocate to provide one-on-one case management for the very students their other policies fail, saying that at the low cost of "\$5 billion to \$7 billion a year, we could invest in individualized case management for every child in Title 1 school [*sic*] and support their non-academic needs." They characterize \$5 to \$7 billion as "a drop in the bucket." In a fascinating but surely unrelated note, Saldaña is the CEO of Communities in Schools, an organization which provides *individualized case management for students in Title 1 schools*. In her book of the same name, Naomi Klein calls this kind of ploy "the shock doctrine"; "the brutal tactic of using the public's disorientation following a collective shock – wars, coups, terrorist attacks, market crashes or natural disasters – to push through radical pro-corporate measures, often called 'shock therapy.'" Its other name is disaster capitalism.

Duncan and Saldaña stand to benefit politically and financially from their proposed policies, but students will not. Just as importantly, we will continue our American legacy of putting teachers in untenable positions and then blaming them for systemic failures (Goldstein). In all fairness, Duncan and Saldaña mention multiple times the need for federal assistance if their suggestions, which include such costs as summer sessions and IEPs for every student, are to be implemented. But Duncan and Saldaña do not mention using any of those funds to increase teacher pay, even though the increase in worked hours would be substantial; general education teachers are legally required to be present in IEP meetings, which happen at least annually, and while not all year-long academic calendars add days so much as redistribute them, Duncan is on record saying he wants students in school for more days and more hours (“School summer break doesn’t work for kids”). And if this additional (or any) learning is occurring in-person, teachers are also risking their lives. A suggestion that would ease teaching burdens, make social-distancing possible in schools, and disproportionately help minority and at-risk students is smaller class sizes, but Duncan and Saldaña don’t mention that (“Why Class Size Matters Today”).

But I stress again, none of this misguided condescension is new. I have only been in the education field for five years, and criticism from outsiders is circulating constantly in my professional atmosphere, regardless of the types of instruction actually occurring in my (or any) classroom. I will reiterate, teachers have risked their health to provide apparently inadequate instruction. If that was not the case, then there would be no “learning loss” to fix. But providing *any* in-person instruction is above and beyond what we

should expect of teachers, who did not enter the profession with the expectation of being front-line workers during a pandemic.

Rather than making patronizing suggestions, Duncan and Saldaña would have done well to spend more time celebrating the incredible efforts of teachers and addressing how the disparities we see in education are reflective of and linked to inequities in all American systems (Rothstein). And there were laudable efforts. Teachers made videos of direct instruction, crafted entirely new activities for students that would support them even during virtual periods, and hosted tutoring sessions during evening hours. They answered countless emails from students, provided more written feedback on assignments than was ever necessary during a normal schedule, and had more targeted individual and small-group instruction. In my own classes, my students received more one-on-one writing conferencing this semester than at any other point in my career, and the writing these students have produced is the strongest I have yet seen. Teachers change their classes to fit their current situation and students, and they always have. That’s nothing new. And now, we are told that what we did was still not serving students. This too is not new.

Before COVID-19, teachers still had too much to do and too little time and too few resources with which to do it. Teachers participate in professional development, teaching us the “right way” to write learning objectives students never see, or about the newest educational tool that is actually just PowerPoint. I was required by my state to take a graduate course to confirm my “technology proficiency,” despite the fact that it is virtually impossible to have graduated from college in the last 10 years and not have at least the technology proficiency required to pass the course. Teachers have department meetings, or department chair meetings, or district

department chair meetings, or faculty meetings, or professional learning community meetings, and all of it takes time away from both our real instructional goals and from our professionalism, because we are asked to do more than is possible with our paid hours and must then donate our personal time. Nothing is more condescending than devaluing a professional's time, and we didn't wait for a pandemic to start doing that to teachers. The strains educators are facing during COVID-19 then are only different from the strains of being a teacher in the United States, but not worse.

And of course, there's also nothing new about the public's response to COVID-19 and education: letting non-educators with power posit reforms without evidence, writing policies that disenfranchise the very students we paternalistically pretend to protect, fantasizing that education can equalize the inequities our students face outside the classroom, expecting magical results in underfunded classrooms, and requiring teachers to de-professionalize themselves by consistently putting their students before their own health and family's needs (Hanauer; "TCF Study Finds U.S. Schools Underfunded by Nearly \$150 Billion Annually;" Reilly). We have always expected martyrs of teachers, and we have always expected miracles of teachers. But circumstances in education, before *and* during COVID-19, have always been untenable. The novel reality of COVID-19, the one Arne Duncan and Rey Saldaña say should cause radical change to our education system, is that there's nothing novel about it at all.

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Learning to Adapt: Redesigning ELA Instruction While Student Teaching During COVID-19

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“I am looking forward to student teaching and working with the students on a daily basis.”

This is a common sentiment I hear from preservice teachers in the months before they student teach. There is typically excitement and anticipation as the preservice teachers prepare to work and learn in the classroom. In teacher education programs, student teaching is seen as an invaluable experience because it is the time when preservice teachers get to do the day-to-day work while learning the knowledge and skills necessary to teach (Cuenca 118). Preservice teachers who began student teaching in the Spring 2020 semester were presented with new challenges to navigate when schools closed down due to COVID-19. For many student teachers, they were beginning to take on more teaching responsibilities in the classroom, just as schools closed in mid-March.

While there were many hardships, COVID-19 presented student teachers with opportunities to learn how to adapt ELA instruction, and this new knowledge will be applied to the ELA instruction they plan and implement in their future teaching careers. This article addresses perspectives from two student teachers' teaching of ELA to elementary students during COVID-19 and how the experience of moving to remote instruction shaped their knowledge, conceptions, and ideas about teaching ELA as they enter into the profession.

Opportunities to Learn

During student teaching, preservice teachers need Opportunities to Learn (OTL) to design, plan, and teach ELA lessons to students. Preservice teachers, therefore, need occasions to make instructional decisions about teaching reading, and writing to students while receiving guidance from the cooperating classroom teacher and the university supervisor (Cohen and Berlin 2–3). This article is framed by the concept of OTL, a situated perspective that is dependent on how a particular setting facilitates a preservice teacher's development and learning (Cohen and Berlin 2). Specifically, OTL can be focused on the development and growth of the preservice teacher's teaching processes, including the methods of instruction utilized, how the curriculum is implemented, and the assessment of student understanding (Floden 261). Therefore, OTL can be a specific event or moment when the preservice teacher is exposed to new content or teaching.

The outbreak of COVID-19 presented the student teachers featured in this article with many OTL. They learned the importance of addressing students' social and emotional needs, modifying an ELA curriculum intended to be taught through face-to-face instruction, and delivering material through new digital platforms for ELA instruction.

Student Teaching During COVID-19

Melissa and Jordyn are the student teachers featured in this article. They were

student teaching at different elementary schools in the same school district, and both were placed in general education second grade classrooms during the Spring 2020 semester. The district where they completed their student teaching served approximately 6,000 students in grades K–12, and about 50% of the students were White, 30% were Hispanic, 10% were Black, 5% were Asian, and 5% were two or more races. Approximately 25% of the students received free or reduced-price lunch.

Melissa and Jordyn taught ELA lessons to the students in their classrooms prior to the schools closing, so they were familiar with the ELA curriculum, as well as how to implement reading and writing instruction. Melissa taught whole group lessons focused on characters and how they may change throughout a book or series. Jordyn planned and implemented daily read-alouds, and she learned how to support students' comprehension through interactions such as think-alouds and turn-and-talks. Their teaching prior to COVID-19 involved more physical materials rather than technology. They both used physical books rather than digital books, and students completed writing in their journals rather than on Google Slides. Both commented that the elementary schools did not use much technology prior to COVID-19. When the schools closed, Melissa and Jordyn were disappointed, however, they both viewed this moment as an opportunity to learn new and different ways of teaching. Below, I describe the adaptations Melissa and Jordyn made to their ELA instruction during COVID-19.

Prioritizing Students' Needs

When planning distance ELA lessons, Melissa and Jordyn considered how they could address the students' social and emotional well-being before they planned the ELA content. Parents shared that

children were having meltdowns due to frustrations with distance learning.

Melissa shifted her teaching and began “checking-in on the students emotionally during each session before beginning any ELA instruction.” One strategy was to begin class sessions with a Morning Meeting. Examples of questions that generated discussion and put the students at ease were: *What did you do yesterday after school? Who played with a brother or sister yesterday and what did you do? What would you like to share with us today? What do you want to do after school today?*

Melissa also left time after lessons for the students to share a favorite toy. This was a key moment for Melissa because she included a new strategy into her teaching practices—she focused more on student talk and sharing in her online teaching than she had in her physical classroom teaching. In addition, Melissa allowed the students to briefly introduce their siblings and pets during online sessions, which benefited many of the students and made them feel more comfortable. By including these moments into her ELA teaching, Melissa learned more about the students and helped them feel more comfortable in the new remote classroom. She also learned that students who were reluctant to speak in the physical classroom were not nearly as shy online; they actively participated, shared what they knew, and learned about the books they were reading. There was one student in particular who Melissa described as painfully quiet in the classroom, but when learning over Google Meet, “she would raise her hand constantly to be called on, and she would talk at length about the books we were reading.” Melissa learned some of the students thrived in the online learning setting. Teaching remotely taught Melissa the importance of taking the time to hear from students and facilitate conversations between them.

COVID-19 highlighted the connection between ELA instruction and the social-emotional well-being of the students. Melissa learned students could not focus on the content if they were frustrated, scared, or nervous about the pandemic and the new classroom format. Building in time for the students to talk about all of the changes and focusing on student talk was a new teaching strategy; this helped the elementary students feel cared for and supported, and enabled Melissa to continue teaching the ELA content. This was an opportunity for Melissa to address the needs of the students while also meeting the expectations of the curriculum.

Shifting the Focus and Reimagining ELA Instruction

COVID-19 allowed Melissa and Jordyn to critically examine the ELA instruction that they were teaching. Melissa explained:

Teaching during COVID-19 definitely made me think about different sides of teaching reading and writing and how to best support students. If I had just been in the classroom, I would not have questioned the curriculum nearly as much. I would have continued following what I was told to do [by the curriculum]. But in this situation, I really had to make my own rules and figure out the best type of instruction for my students. I tried out so many different ways of teaching. I never would have done that in the classroom.

Therefore, COVID-19 allowed Melissa to examine the content and how it was delivered to students rather than blindly follow the curriculum guides.

There was a shift in the reading curriculum after the schools closed, and from Jordyn's perspective, "This whole experience brought more enjoyment to

reading." Jordyn conducted daily read-alouds with the second graders prior to the schools closing, and she included turn-and-talks to support comprehension and build the students' vocabulary. From her face-to-face lessons, Jordyn learned how important routine is to the students and how they depend on a consistent schedule. Jordyn wanted to keep some consistency for the second graders, so she created pre-recorded read-alouds every day for the children to watch at a time that worked for them. For the digital read-alouds, Jordyn shifted her focus from planning read-alouds to support the skills targeted in the reading curriculum to planning read-alouds allowing the second graders to "enjoy the story and enjoy the read-aloud." Rather than plan turn-and-talks the students would not be able to do with a partner, she spent time planning and practicing how she would deliver the book to the students. For example, she read the books in fun voices and made facial expressions at particular points in the book. She wanted the students to "have a moment in the day that they could look forward to." Jordyn received positive feedback from the students and their parents; she noted the majority of the class watched the read-alouds each day to keep the routine.

COVID-19 gave Jordyn the opportunity to look at read-alouds from a different angle, and rather than focus solely on skills or strategies, she decided to use read-alouds to engage the students with stories and build positive relationships with reading. Her goal was for the read-alouds to be a positive and happy time for the second graders during the pandemic.

Melissa learned how small group instruction benefited students. After teaching a few whole class reading lessons, Melissa revised her teaching and planned small group book clubs as the format for reading instruction. Working with her cooperating teacher, Melissa developed a

non-fiction reading curriculum using books on PebbleGo and Epic for students to access and read. Using Google Slides, the students completed targeted assignments, and used that work for the discussion with their group. In order to manage the book clubs, Melissa gave the students edit access to Google Slides, and each day there was a task to complete. For example, on Mondays, the students identified the main idea and found three details to support the main idea. On Tuesdays, students shared three amazing words they found in the book and had to explain the meanings of the words to the group. Students enjoyed Thursdays because it was Flipgrid day and they had the opportunity to teach the rest of the group something they learned from the book. Using Google Slides in this focused manner supported the students' reading, and Melissa found assigning one slide with a targeted task benefited the students' comprehension of the book more than in the physical classroom. In addition, Melissa realized due to the Google Slides activities, the students read the books multiple times and learned how to go back into particular parts of the book to find information to discuss.

Melissa and Jordyn were able to experiment with the format of the ELA instruction they planned and implemented, and they learned the redesigned content kept the students engaged with the ELA curriculum. Remote teaching provided them with the opportunity to truly support the second graders' reading comprehension; the students made strides and benefited in a way they do not believe would have happened the same way in the physical classroom.

New Perspectives on Teaching ELA

COVID-19 provided Melissa and Jordyn with opportunities to teach through new online formats. They learned to deliver ELA instruction through different modes while reflecting on how the students learned through these formats. Reimagining ELA instruction and experimenting with a variety of digital platforms taught Melissa and Jordyn how technology can be used to maximize the ELA instruction taught in the physical classroom. As Melissa shared, "Remote teaching taught me that there are new ways to reach all students and engage them in reading and writing. In today's world, it's important to have an understanding of digital teaching and physical classroom teaching." The experience of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic provided Melissa and Jordyn with the confidence as well as the opportunity to learn how to include technology into ELA teaching in a way that supports reading and writing.

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Slow Conversations: Facilitating Empathy and Nuance in Communication

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The earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic were a time of separation. We were sequestered within our individual homes, to our individual laptop screens, buried in our individual, hurried adaptation of our own lessons. March 2020 was a scramble; lesson plans changed with the wind, and I desperately missed the energy and laughter of my classroom. I missed the easy conversation of my eleventh graders: their brilliant insights, their thoughtful comments. I mourned lost opportunities for my twelfth graders: yearbook signatures, the joy of tossing caps. The physical markers of our time together had disappeared. Instead, I had fleeting moments of scheduled meetings when my students felt scattered and inaccessible; days flew by in constructing some semblance of a classroom, in ensuring that my students were simply well.

For many of us, it has continued to feel so. Venturing outside safely is no small feat; interactions are reduced to boxes within boxes. This isolation is amplified within our communities, the news, and our political climate. There is an atmosphere of frenetic fracturing and contention as we move forward after new elections. As we scramble to ensure that we are providing safety for teachers and students, it seems that direct conflict and apathy are modeled instead in the political dialogues we witness. We see a refusal to recognize the lived experiences of those marginalized in our society or even our own roles in perpetuating systemic inequities laid bare by this pandemic. There is a slow leeching of agency and a refusal to

recognize nuance and complexity of identity.

However, we cannot normalize this behavior for our students. Refusing to engage in the world's crises perpetuates voicelessness and silence. This is fastness, a refusal to pause and think, and the very opposite of the function of a classroom. Instead, the construction and content of classrooms must model community and communication, the antithesis of the fractures witnessed outside. They must be a place to slow down and process our place within the outside world as well as our contributions to a culture in which we are interdependent. Now more than ever, our texts and writing are necessary because they establish binding experiences and allow us to read and comprehend the world.

Here, the role of the English classroom is thrown into stark relief. While we weather the frenzy of the world outside, we have the opportunity to create a sense of community within the classroom. It has the unique power to reduce the isolation we feel elsewhere. More so than anything else, the pandemic has shifted the focus of our English classroom; our academic pursuits serve as a way to prepare students to engage empathetically in dialogue rather than languish in protected spheres that never intersect. Our study of texts, while bringing us an hour of solace in the study of unfamiliar words and worlds, also uncovers our ultimate purpose: to facilitate exchanges of ideas and perspectives that we hope our students will carry into their futures.

Thus, as English educators, the greatest adaptation of our work this year may not rest in just the adoption of new technologies. Instead, our greatest labor over the next years will be to adapt our lessons so that they consistently facilitate conversation, interaction, and nuance in thought. Our role as English teachers is amplified since we now face an even more urgent need to facilitate critical thinking and conversation that invites and recognizes a multiplicity of perspectives.

This perspective has shifted my construction of my curriculum. Instead of pursuing a relentless path toward “checking off” multiple texts, our focus has shifted to maintaining the key elements of communication and exchange from previous years. Rather than rushing immediately into the day’s business, I’ve learned to open my virtual classroom early, to converse about everything other than academics: my newly adopted cat (usually lurking on my desk); birthday celebrations; book recommendations; college applications; interviews. These simple exchanges allow the personal and the public to intersect beautifully. The students’ energy, as they talk about the “normal” and quotidian, flows into relaxation as they begin considering the day’s tasks. They process their reading and personal experiences through their journals. Previously, these were used less frequently; now, this reflection is routine, if simply as a moment to step back from the whirlwind of virtual schedules. As they write their way through those ten minutes, they demonstrate independent understanding of the concepts we study. They pause, recollect, reflect, feel confident.

My students then become teachers; lessons become conversations. They study Hamlet’s loss and bewilderment at his place

in the world, the intrusion of Facebook’s algorithms in their personal choices, the optimization of snacks they consume. This spectrum of subjects is purposefully chosen to break apart the complexities and issues of the society they will inherit. It also allows them to contemplate their own role and agency in these issues, knowing that it is not only acceptable, but necessary to feel confused, so that they can work through these reeds. They record reflections, teaching me about issues meaningful to them. They close-read excerpts to classmates, guiding them through meditations upon themes, language, structure. Independent insights form the core of their experience. They determine and refine Socratic seminar questions, then meet groupmates to practice listening to and inviting their contributions, independently learning how to value and accept varied communication styles and perspectives. This has been painstaking but priceless: they collaboratively untangle the complexities of language and critical social problems, unveiling shifts in their own behavior and approach to the world, emerging with purpose and energy.

I hope that curriculum and construction will reflect respectful discussion and the act of truly listening: the deliberate absorption of alternate perspectives. It is from pausing and concentrating that our students grow. It is from slowness that we can learn to listen and think critically about the connections we share with others. It is by emphasizing attentiveness, choice, and collaboration that we can teach them to value nuance, acknowledge others’ and their own humanity, and encourage them to examine their contributions to an interconnected culture.

K–12 Teacher Reflective Practice in (Pandemic) Context

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Introduction

Elena and Paul are elementary school literacy coaches who support literacy curriculum and instruction in multiple school buildings within a large New Jersey school district. When COVID-19 broke, they worked together and with other educators to analyze their unique school and community context, identified potential learning gaps, and constructed a revised plan for remote instruction while mindful of these unique contexts. For example, Elena and Paul thought about their district's recent strides to support more phonics and word study as part of the district reading block, especially since ample district time and money had been dedicated to building teacher capacity to deliver a systematic and multisensory approach to phonics and word study. As a result of the pandemic, teachers and students found themselves home, without their resources such as blending boards, sand trays, and word sorts. This was clearly a problem, and Elena and Paul persevered to revise the district approach.

Elena discussed the issue with a cohort of Orton-Gillingham specialists, and Paul was in touch with an online regional literacy coaching group. Next came professional conversations between Elena, Paul, district teachers, and the district supervisor. Soon after all of this collaboration, Elena developed K–2 Zoom phonics videos that presented virtual lessons that prompted students to practice at home using computer-based book widgets. Paul developed a student-friendly digital interactive notebook to spur students to practice their study of district-driven spelling and vocabulary lists—integrating ideas from a word study

book club that he facilitated earlier in the school year.

Elena and Paul are exemplars for teacher reflective practice—a practice all the more important when a pandemic upended daily life and teaching practices—however, teacher reflective practice does not come naturally to everyone.

So, what is reflective practice, and how can teachers be supported in their practice of reflection effectively in today's ever-changing classroom contexts? A clear definition of teacher reflective practice could contribute to supporting teachers' capacity for learning and development as reflective practitioners in order to help prepare them to grapple in self-directed and informed ways with the multitude of challenges and complexities likely to lie ahead for them within their own teaching contexts. Moreover, I suggest that a contemporary definition of teacher reflective practice that promotes working with others, rather than solitary reflection, is essential in a pandemic context that oftentimes creates isolation.

To address the complexity and diversity of classrooms today, I have combined multiple theoretical perspectives into the following definition of teacher reflective practice: “a teacher's *social* action to analyze multiple contexts, identify a problem, and reapproach the situation with context in mind” (Blommaert; Dewey; Pankiewicz; Semin and Smith; Schön). This definition, although seemingly basic at first glance, explains the chunks of activity that comprise a robust benchmark for teacher reflective practice. This definition emphasizes that reflection is not a solitary

activity, but that teacher reflective practice must also include a collaborative platform or format for teachers to analyze and revise contextual circumstances with others. All in all, the purpose of this article is to outline how social interaction is an essential element in productive teacher reflective practice—especially in the face of a pandemic.

Context's Role in Teacher Reflection and Teacher Reflective Practice

Through my own work with a research-writing study group, professional conversations with a university mentor, and my interaction with educators throughout a K–12 learning community combating COVID-19, I set out to consider what teacher reflective practice during a pandemic might look like.

Broadening What “Counts” as Context and Building on Prior Work

In the past, those who thought deeply about teacher reflective practice considered context to be a physical space or setting in which people interact with each other (Blommaert 3; Brameld; Dewey; Schön). However, the current “hybrid” approach to educating students includes a mix of students both in-person and at-home, complicating the idea of reflective practice coming from in-person interactions with students. In the interest of safety, these hybrid-style educators find themselves teaching in a static position in the front of their classroom with a small cohort of socially distanced and masked students, while simultaneously facilitating the instruction to the rest of the class remotely via a computer-based platform. As complex as this set of circumstances is due to one's location, there is yet another complication to the element to context.

This other component of context in teacher reflective practice is “the social occasion” (Blommaert), where context is

dependent on social interaction involved in the social event. An example of a social occasion during the COVID-19 pandemic could be identified in the arrangement of teachers during a building or department meeting. Nowadays, most of these meetings are conducted remotely (again, in the interest of safety). Different social occasions transpire when a district leader broadcasts their messages widely to one whole group of educators versus the organization of Zoom and Google Hangout Breakout Rooms constructed for smaller group discussion. In summary, while they look different during COVID, the context involved in teacher reflective practice has both locational and social elements that can be translated to teaching during a pandemic.

Embracing a Situated Cognition Perspective in Teacher Reflective Practice

However, location and social interaction are not the only important elements of teacher reflective practice. Another important element is situated cognition, in which knowledge and understanding is acquired through a “network” of meaning that emerges through the dynamic of social interaction rather than through an individual's thinking alone (Gee; Darwin; Smith and Semin; Semin and Smith). This contemporized theorization contributes to a newer conception of teacher reflective practice.

A practice, according to Donald Schön, who initially conceptualized reflective practice, is “made up of chunks of activity, divisible into more or less familiar types, each of which is seen as calling for the exercise of a certain kind of knowledge” (Schön 32). Practices are “socially and institutionally patterned so as to present repetitive occurrences of particular kinds of situations” (Schön 32). Simply put, according to Schön, reflective practice, is the act of approaching a situation differently based on one's learned knowledge and

experience—to change the situation rather than letting it repeat itself. Thus, these foundational positions of teacher reflective practice contributed a fundamental expectation to revise an approach to a situation as part of reflective practice.

To reiterate, this is where a situated cognition perspective created an additional layer to this definition of reflective practice. My situated cognition lens differs from Schön's respective take on "action" that is less concerned with a teacher's deliberate social interaction. To this end, I identified the following concise definition of teacher reflective practice: Teacher reflective practice is a teacher's social action to analyze multiple contexts, identify a problem, and reapproach the situation with context in mind (Pankiewicz). This definition of (or description of the chunks of activity involved in) teacher reflective practice could serve as an effective benchmark for teacher reflective practice with an enhanced focus on complex teacher social action with easy-to-replicate simple direction. This definition implies that teacher educators must support teacher reflective practice in their analysis of the physical setting and concerns surrounding a situation in addition to facilitating an opportunity to discuss these contextual circumstances with others. Whereas it may be possible for teachers to reflect as individuals, I suggest that teacher reflective practice cannot take place in isolation. Teacher reflective practice must include a social occasion (e.g., an online discussion group, a professional learning community, or a structured feedback loop in a teacher observation process), where teachers share their reflections with others.

Gina, a high school English teacher, exemplified teacher reflective practice in the following example. When Gina was recently placed in a Zoom Breakout Room to discuss Grade 11 instructional planning with other

Grade 11 English teachers during an English department meeting, she debriefed with colleagues who shared distinct challenges in engaging students and in encouraging meaningful skills-based discussion during English classes in remote and hybrid modalities. With these contexts and problems in mind, Gina shared her recent review of "Hexagonal Thinking: A Colorful Discussion Tool" (Gonzalez), an episode of a Cult of Pedagogy podcast that interviewed teacher-author Betsy Potash, on a web site dedicated to the professional development of teachers. As such, Gina explained the idea of giving students hexagons with different lesson-based ideas written on them as a prompt for students to arrange and connect their hexagons to discuss and explain why they joined particular hexagon topics together. Through her collaboration with colleagues, Gina fleshed out an idea to use a version of hexagonal discussion to support argument writing with her Advanced Placement Language and Composition students. Since Gina was also a member of a regional AP English Teacher Summit, as well as part of an AP group on social media, she anticipated that this hexagonal approach would also support newer AP testing expectations in synthesizing different ideas and providing a progressive line of reasoning. Gina pursued additional professional conversations with her department supervisor and presented her ongoing lesson ideas with the larger high school department, where links to the hexagonal thinking podcast were posted on the department's Google Classroom thread. Gina clearly used social action with her colleagues and professional affiliations in her analysis of contexts and the identification of particular problems. Then, she reapproached these issues of student engagement and supporting newer writing expectations by creating new hybrid and remote lessons with context in mind. As a

result of Gina's reflective practice, her students seemed to appear more engaged in annotation and follow-up discussion, negotiating text-based relationships and synthesizing information more naturally, even in the face of the pandemic.

This article was initially written to support teachers with key issues in education today such as newer student performance standards, standardized testing, more intricate and demanding teacher evaluation systems, and the navigation of an abundance of education research and evidence-based best practices. Then, the pandemic hit, reminding educators that we may never be prepared for the issues that could come our way. Many educators, like Elena, Paul, and Gina have an innate ability to demonstrate teacher reflective practice, routinely setting out to analyze their locational setting and seeking social interaction in their reflective practices. However, some educators may need more support—especially during a pandemic.

Since each issue comprises a set of complex contexts that are further complicated by the unique context of each classroom, this support of teacher reflective practice should provide a structure or platform for teachers to work with others as they analyze multiple contexts, identify a problem, and reapproach the situation with context in mind. This insistence on social interaction as a central component could contribute to supporting teachers' capacity for teacher development as reflective practitioners in order to help prepare them to grapple in collaborative and informed ways with the multitude of challenges and complexities likely to lie ahead for them within their own teaching settings.

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Refuge for Teachers (and Learners) in a Turbulent Public Education Landscape

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We've all been there.

For some of us it was last semester; for others of us, it's been awhile: the newness of a teaching career. The giddiness of a new teaching idea. The spark of an inspiring lesson plan. Knowing that we can engage even the most reluctant readers and writers.

As teacher educators, we see this sureness and enthusiasm on the faces of the preservice teachers with whom we work every semester. All too often, though, as student teaching begins, that enthusiasm gives way to something else – not only a healthy dose of reality, but that initial glimmer seems to fade a bit. This phenomenon is not our imagination at work. The numbers show that fewer teachers are entering and more are leaving the profession, and this trend has only worsened during the COVID-19 crisis. Why?

A 2015 *Washington Post* article focuses on the reasons behind the U.S. teacher shortage, noting “polls show that public school teachers today are more disillusioned about their jobs than they have been in many years” (Straus 1). While this disillusionment likely contributes to teacher attrition across academic disciplines, English teachers are especially vulnerable to attrition. In fact, dating back to 2000, Darling-Hammond noted that the rate of attrition among English teachers in their first two years is more than two times that of other teachers (3). More recently, the call has become more urgent to reject the term “teacher shortage” for language and discussion that acknowledge

the inability of school districts to attract and maintain the number of teachers needed (Greenel; McCoy 1). The word *shortage* suggests that there are not enough interested individuals to satisfy the unfilled teaching positions in this country; however, the argument against terming this problem a *shortage* posits that the real problem isn't that there aren't enough individuals wanting to become teachers, but rather there isn't enough support being given to those willing to teach (Akhtar 1). This article responds to the increasing teacher crisis in the United States, and to the decades of early-career teacher attrition preceding it (Ingersoll; McCann; Straus 1).

Individual states are making concerted efforts to examine teacher attrition and what causes it, as teacher attrition may contribute to teacher shortages (Robinson and Lloyd 3). In other words, in addressing teacher shortages, examining how to recruit new teachers accounts for the “supply” side of the equation, while focusing on how to retain the teachers already in the workforce, speaks to the “demand” side of the teacher shortage problem.

Literature reveals that states are motivated to address attrition, in large part, because attrition is expensive. The State of Michigan, for instance, cites that The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future estimated that in 2005, each teacher lost to attrition can cost \$9,501” (Barnes, Crowe, and Schaefer in Robinson and Lloyd 14). This cost accounts

for the recruiting, hiring, processing, and training of new teachers. In the 2016-2017 school year alone, the Michigan Department of Education notes 7,251 teachers were “leavers,” meaning they left the profession all together (or, in some cases, crossed state lines for employment) (Robinson and Lloyd 6). This means the State of Michigan lost over \$68 million due to the attrition of these 7,251 teachers. The Michigan Department of Education notes, based on the United States’ Department of Education’s Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS), that 259,400 teachers were leavers in 2012-2013, resulting in an estimated, jaw-dropping loss of nearly \$2.5 billion to our nation’s public school systems (Robinson and Lloyd 5).

But what about the costs beyond the fiscal in addressing attrition? What about the human costs affecting students, teachers, families, and communities? In addition to the financial losses associated with attrition, there are certainly costs in stability for schools, affecting students, faculty, staff, administration, and the broader community, as well. Ingersoll, in 2001, notes that high turnover rates may signal systemic problems in school culture and climate: “high levels of employee turnover are both cause and effect of ineffectiveness and low performance in organizations” (505). Particularly troubling is that national studies show such costs as disproportionately affecting schools serving minority and economically disadvantaged students, suggesting cultural inequities plague our profession (Haynes 6).

Furthermore, the added trepidation and stress many teachers have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic puts our profession at a tipping point. A recent RAND Corporation Survey of 1,000 ex-public school teachers found “about three-quarters of former teachers — including those who quit in the two years leading up to the pandemic and those who quit after March of 2020 — indicated that their jobs

were ‘always’ or ‘often’ stressful during their most recent year of teaching” (Jagannathan 1). Moreover, this survey revealed that teachers under 40 who left the profession due to the pandemic attributed “the move to their pay not justifying the stress and the risks” (1). Interestingly, the survey results show no change in the profiles of teachers who left in the two years before the pandemic and the teachers who left during the pandemic. Respondents noted that structural problems such as lack of flexibility in workday schedules, low pay, poor work environments, and long hours won’t fade and will likely continue to worsen— even should pandemic-related problems fade (Jagannathan, 1).

In a similar vein, Michigan teacher Paul Ruth notes in his 2021 op-ed: “The pandemic exposed many inequalities in society that have been ever present. Sadly, for Michigan this includes schools” (1). He continues to observe that the “current teacher shortage is of no surprise to those in the field,” as its roots go back decades (1). Ruth cites systemic issues and poor policy, such as the outsourcing of support staff positions and the expansion of charter schools as contributing factors to an unstable retirement system, as well as issues that negatively impact teacher effectiveness and student learning. These include a lack of quality teaching materials, a lack in supportive rather than punitive professional development, and evaluation systems focused more on “how the principal looks than supporting good teachers” (1). Moreover, average Michigan teacher salaries in 2009-2010 were higher than in 2017-18 not counting inflation, and Ruth argues that while higher pay and an increase in classroom funding may seem like obvious solutions to addressing the shortage problem, such solutions are only partial. In addition to the pandemic pushing teachers to take earlier retirements, he notes that teacher

education programs that were once robust in Michigan have waned and even ceased to exist; go-to teacher residency programs are “filling holes to buy time for people to earn certification” (1).

Such realities contribute to an arguably dire professional reality facing preservice teachers. And so, with each graduating class of preservice teachers, a handful decide after student teaching that they do not want to pursue a teaching career. For the majority who do move forward with their choice to teach, the attrition rate within the first few years of teaching is an unfortunate reality. This “perfect storm” of factors adds to an increasingly desperate situation, and one that must have intentional policy attention paid to it (Garcia 1). And so we consider here: What can help sustain our teachers as we weather these circumstances?

What Can Keep Our Teachers in the Classroom?

Keeping current teachers in the field and positioning education as a competitive option for our nation’s top undergraduate students likely means addressing workplace necessities: this includes lower numbers of students in classrooms, more competitive pay for teachers, supportive professional climates, and a strengthened prestige of the profession (Garcia 1). Arguably, these factors are largely at the mercy of our political leaders and policy-makers; however, what factors *can* we help our teacher candidates prepare for as they enter their classrooms? How can we help early-career teachers gain agency and confidence in their skills as educators? What factors can we, as teacher educators, help teacher candidates feel some agency or control over as they enter a profession that is tenable? Those are the questions we aim to deconstruct. And, while our work here is focused primarily on preparing and supporting teachers, it should also be

mentioned that, at the heart of our work, is a desire to make all classrooms a place of equitable education for students. We want to ensure that the graduates from our teaching programs are ready for diverse student needs, and we want to spread the stability and security that teachers bring to a district when they stay, flourish, and grow along with their students. What we suggest here are sustaining and beneficial strategies for both teachers and students.

Conversations about keeping our teachers in the profession are becoming increasingly popular. At NCTE in 2018, Kelly Burns, Cindy O’Donnell-Allen, Jennifer Putnam, and Molly Robbins presented a session on sustainable teaching in which there was standing room only. Energized by the popularity of this session, the group then conducted a workshop titled, “Body and Soul: Mindfulness Practices to Sustain Your Teaching (and Your Life)” at the 2019 NCTE. The inclusion of and demand for sessions that focus on the self-care, emotional support, and self-compassion of educators is increasing—and this is a good thing. This approach acknowledges that those in charge of the social-emotional well-being of young learners need also to have their own personal social-emotional well-being considered (Kaplan, 2019). In the *English Journal* article they published on this topic, Burns et al. write: “In this article, we contend that the prerequisite for teaching courageously is developing staying power. As fewer enter the profession and attrition rises, a teacher shortage looms. Yet we feel it’s still possible to share our passion for learning with students” (45). While Burns et al. focus their efforts on reimagining and redesigning professional development to include regeneration, personal restoration, and profession renewal time for teachers, our focus here is on what can be done *within* the confines of the classroom to position the

career of teaching as a sustainable, fulfilling option.

Why Classroom Environment Matters

In our work over our combined 30+ years in education, both as classroom teachers and as teacher educators, the notion that *classroom environment* plays an important role in establishing a positive rapport with students, a positive outlook on teaching, and an increased likelihood that teachers will stay in the game, has become increasingly apparent. If teachers are able to build structure in their classrooms that foster student relationships, positive participation in reading and writing activities, and a mutual respect for the sanctity of reading and writing, then the potential to keep these teachers motivated to stay in the classroom increases. If students want to be there, teachers will want to be there.

But how do we create this structure and make it sustainable? How, as teacher educators, do we instruct our preservice teachers to create this type of classroom—one that inspires creativity and gives (rather than depletes) energy (mental and physical)? What strategies for creating a classroom culture of community, openness and democracy are tangible, reproducible, and therefore teachable? How can we support preservice and early-career teachers in building these skills and not allow the term “classroom environment” to become a vague expression without concrete, identifiable actions or teaching moves?

Many of our preservice teachers, in their enthusiasm to become English teachers, report a deep love of literature and writing. They reflect on the assignments, class structures, and projects that their former English teachers employed—activities that made a lasting impression on their literacy histories. Central to many of these activities are the agency, student choice, and routine that we describe in the following sections.

By remembering what draws us to this discipline in the first place—our love of books and notepads (or blank Word screens, waiting for our words to occupy it)—and by prioritizing time in class for routines that provide regular opportunities to read and write, teachers can help their students (and themselves) find refuge in their own classroom environments.

What Is Teachable in Building a “Classroom Environment?”

At the heart of this issue are a multitude of factors that combine to create a classroom environment, including the topic that few want to directly tackle: classroom management. Even in one of the best-selling (few other educational books have sold over 3 million copies), formative books on the topic of classroom management, authors Harry K. and Rosemary Tripi Wong assert that their book can *help* teachers with classroom management, but should not be considered a foolproof plan or model. “The book will only help. There is no teacherproof method of education. There is no one way to teach. There are no pat answer, quick fixes, or foolproof plans for teaching. There is no way to reduce teaching to a simple and predictable formula. To do so would ‘de-skill’ and deprofessionalize education” (Wong and Wong xii). There are millions of combinations of situation-specific factors that could result in millions of situation-specific remedies. And this is perhaps why, even though student teachers perennially cite fears about their classroom management, teacher educators are reluctant to slay the discipline dragon. We recognize the enormity and complexity of classroom management issues, and how they affect the overall classroom environment, and we likewise recognize the enormity and complexity of the solutions.

But we can do better—and we should, especially for the sake of preservice teachers

who feel unprepared and who are therefore more vulnerable to leaving the profession within the first few years, and for the students they serve. What are the content-specific strategies that help English teachers keep their ELA classrooms running smoothly? How do teachers create a positive, democratic classroom culture? How *do* teachers build strong relationships with their students? A more recent effort to make these practices tangible and teachable is TeachingWorks, an organization which grew out of the teacher education program at the University of Michigan. Their mantra, that “great teachers aren’t born, they’re taught,” contradicts traditional rhetoric about teachers and the act of teaching (i.e., that a teacher is “born to teach”). While there are perhaps inherent personality characteristics, such as extrovertedness, that may aid in the ease of classroom presence, there are also definite methods that can be learned and practiced in order to establish an efficient, effective, positive classroom environment—and these strategies are not burdensome, but rather simplify many of the otherwise chaotic moments of class time (such as transitions). Of the nineteen high-leverage teaching practices that TeachingWorks has identified, three relate directly to our work here:

#5 Implementing norms and routines for classroom discourse and work;

#8 Implementing organizational routines;

#10 Building respectful relationships with students.

Like our colleagues at TeachingWorks, we recognized and felt called to act upon the notion that we can do a better job of preparing our preservice teachers in these areas. While the term “classroom environment” has traditionally been a slippery term that was difficult to define/capture, there are strategies/practices that we can teach, model, and provide

opportunities for our preservice teachers to enact. While simplistic in theory, we realized a key to building a positive classroom environment that sustains students and teachers alike was something we inherently knew all along: routines.

Routines. A mundane word? Perhaps. But a word that suggests structure, safety, and simplicity in the ordering of a day that allows for a safe space. As Linda Shalaway writes in *Learning to Teach...not just for beginners*, “Routines are the backbone of daily classroom life. They facilitate teaching and learning.... Routines don’t just make your life easier, they save valuable classroom time. And what’s most important, efficient routines make it easier for students to learn and achieve more” (26). Adherence to routines is also a celebration of the shared experiences of a classroom, honoring the ceremonial opening, closing, and functioning of a classroom ebb and flow. Routines have the potential to lessen the emotional burden for teachers by defining expectations for students. Upon further reflection, we realized that we were really talking about three categories of routines: Routines for beginning and end of class, routines for writing and reading, and routines that build student relationships. While the following lists are written with face-to-face instruction in mind (at the time we are writing this, heading back into the classroom is where most secondary instruction seems to be heading), we want to mention that most of these routines can be modified for a virtual classroom as well. In fact, incorporating routines into virtual learning may be even more important than in face-to-face settings because they allow students to feel connected to their teacher, fellow classmates, and the purpose of class time more so than they otherwise might (while logging into class from their bedrooms, dining rooms, or even from their cars).

Routines to Begin Class

Students shuffle in (if you are lucky enough to see them face-to-face). Most of them take their seats; some wait to be told to do so. What happens next is often very telling about what the teacher prioritizes. Is there some downtime to chat with a neighbor? Is there a writing task posted somewhere? Maybe students know they will have something to read before class “really” gets started. Whatever the routine of those opening moments of class, students quickly become accustomed to the “rhythm” of a teacher’s expectations for the beginning of class. And while transitions in the classroom can be difficult to navigate in general, the transitions between classes, and those opening minutes of a new class, can be where students decide to tune in/out, start a fight, or do homework for another class.

In an effort to provide a snapshot of what this looks like to our teaching methods students, we routinely begin our university methods course with one of the following:

The One-Minute Sentence Starter:

Students craft a one-sentence summary or response to an excerpt we’ve chosen that relates to that day’s upcoming lesson/discussion (adapted from Kelly Gallagher)

The Quote of the Day: Students respond to a famous quote (“Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror. Just keep going. No feeling is final” by Rainer Maria Rilke, for example) and consider questions such as: What does the quote mean to you? How can you relate to it, or make a connection to the world? (adapted from Kelly Gallagher)

The Article of the Week (AoW): Our students are given an article (or excerpt

of an article/chapter) with the directions to “mark confusion and show evidence of close-reading,” followed by an opportunity to turn and talk with a neighbor. An example article to use for this activity is “Attention, Students: Put Your Laptops Away” (by James Doubek, *NPR Weekend Edition*, April 2016).

Each routine to begin class can also be specified to reflect the larger learning goals and objectives of the class that day. In other words, depending on the writing prompt or the reading material, any of these routines can serve to help build student background knowledge, hook students into the content, access prior knowledge, or connect to students’ experiences outside the classroom. The flexibility lies in the choice of content in these activities; the structure lies in the routine of them.

Routines to End Class

As the clock inches closer to the end of class time, students may begin to fidget and rustle books and paper into their folders and backpacks. Antsy with anticipation of whatever comes next, this is yet another transition (similar to the beginning of class) when distractions threaten to disrupt student attention and engagement. Two closing time routines that can provide purposeful class endings:

The 3-2-1 Reflection Prompts (below are three variations):

- 3 things I learned, 2 things I found interesting, 1 question I have
- 3 concerns I have about the material, 2 questions I have, 1 thing I learned
- 3 significant events from the reading, 2 significant passages, 1 prediction

Goal Setting: In response to today's session, craft an "I will" statement.

- In our next class, I will _____.
- In our next class, I will be ready to _____.
- In our next class, my students will _____.
- In our next class, my students will be ready to _____.

The routines to end class included here are particularly important in terms of fostering metacognition at the end of learning. Building in the expectation that students will be asked to perform self-reflection and assessment on a regular basis will prepare them for this final cognitive task. Thinking about what they have learned, or still do not understand, helps to solidify their new knowledge and retainment.

Routines for Writing and Reading

Perhaps one of the most important ways we can embed routines for writing and reading in our classroom is to make time and space for workshopping. One of the pioneers of the workshop model, Nancie Atwell, spends a great deal of her third edition of *In the Middle* (the quintessential guide for implementing reading/writing workshop in our classrooms) on providing reproducibles and detailing the routines of her daily classes for teachers who want to incorporate workshopping in their own classrooms; Atwell recognizes the importance and teachable-ness of routines in a workshop model. As Katie Wood Ray notes, routines and procedures are essential to the writing (and reading) workshop classroom (52). Given that we strive to grow teacher-writers in our classrooms, we deliberately cultivate a writing workshop environment per "best practices in teaching writing" in our methods classrooms. In experiencing writing workshop as writers, our methods students have experiences from which to draw in

working with student writers in their own fieldwork and future classrooms. These routines and procedures support our methods students in feeling safe to take risks in their writing, better their writing, and grow as writers:

Mentor Text Demonstrations (I do, we do, you do): We model for students the practices and strategies with which we expect them to engage as students and teachers. In our reading and writing workshops, this often involves modeling for students particular instructional work with mentor texts and often takes the trajectory of "I do, we do, you do." To exemplify, we share with students a mentor text featuring a particular text feature and do a read-aloud-think-aloud of the text sharing the effect this text feature has on us as readers (I do). We then work with a second text featuring a like text feature and work with students in the whole-class setting to take note of and discuss the effects of the particular text feature, ultimately enacting a group read-aloud-think-aloud (we do). Finally, students are responsible for locating their own mentor text featuring this text feature and explicating its use and effect (you do); or, students are responsible for incorporating this text feature into their own writing or lesson planning (you do). A sampling of features to experiment with in reading and writing workshop:

- Parallel Structure
- Sensory Imagery
- Point-of-View
- Figures of Speech ((such as simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, personification, oxymoron, alliteration, hyperbole)

Reading With Lenses: This invites our students to critically read the work of others and to critically revisit their own

writing in their revision efforts. Below are lenses and examples of the questions students might ask themselves in taking on each lens, as noted in Heard's *The Revision Toolbox* (21-25):

- The Lens of Focus and Clarity
What is the heart of my story? Is my focus too big or too narrow? Is there a clear theme, thesis, or main idea to my piece?
- The Lens of a Stranger
What would this reader think about my writing? What would they want to change?
- The Lens of Language
Is my language clear, precise, and concrete? Are there parts where I can elaborate and add more detail? Are my verbs vivid and active?
- The Lens of Feeling
Can the reader tell how I feel about a topic? Can the reader tell how my characters feel?
- The Lens of Sound
How can I make my piece sound better? What sounds wonderful? What sounds choppy?
- The Lens of So What?
Who will care about my story, essay, or research? How can I get readers to care about my topic?
- The Lens of Sentence Variation
Are my sentences all the same length? Which sentences can I combine to make my words flow?

“Fishbowl” Modeling of Peer-to-Peer Workshop Practices: This engages our entire classroom of students in close examination of real-time practices, which in turn serve to inform their execution of workshop activities. We, for instance, ask a few student volunteers to the center of the room to be in the “fishbowl” as demonstrators of, say, the peer review process for the

day. As fishbowl students participate, we moderate their sharing of and responding to one another's writing while all other students gather around the fishbowl to actually *see* the peer review process unfold. This moderated, real-time demonstration serves to set the standards and expectations for the workshop activity--peer review or otherwise--in which all students are about to engage.

Structured Peer-to-Peer Shares

- Think-Pair-Share
Students think about and share responses to a prompt or idea.
- Small Group Inquiry Groups
Students collaborate to explore a question, problem, or idea.
- Peer Review Groups
Students collaborate to share and respond to their writing.
- Gallery Walks
Students' post their work, either in process or polished form, around the classroom (or online) and respond to one another's work per open-ended or focused prompting.

Routines to Build Student Relationships

In setting the tone for positive and professional relationships in our classrooms, we collaborate with students to write classroom guidelines informed by research and experience.

Collaborative Classroom Community Guidelines and Reflections: We open the semester with an article on “Best Practices in Teaching Writing” and, upon reviewing the article, writing our own classroom guidelines for our writing workshop community. Throughout the semester, we often refer to these guidelines as we work together in our workshop setting—and even adjust them

as informed by our classroom experiences and our evolving group identity. Moreover, we reflect on our growth as individuals and as a community per these guidelines. Prompting to initiate this collaborative writing activity:

- How can we bring to life what we know about “best practices in teaching writing” to life in our classroom?
- What do we value as a community and how will these values show up in our classroom?
- What needs to happen in our classroom for us to feel safe and inspired?
- How can we support one another in achieving our learning objectives and in growing as individuals and professionals?

Regular Teacher-Student Conferencing:

Below are prompts we regularly use to invite our students to share and reflect on their writing and their writing processes. The prompts position students at the “center” of their process and of the conference, and position us as guides or coaches who offer authentic feedback and response. Conferences, key to the writing workshop, acknowledge the social and collaborative nature of writing and provide writer experiences for methods students to reflect upon in pedagogical terms in our course.

- I’d love to hear your work; please read it to me.
- How are you feeling about this writing/reading/assignment/work?
- What do you love about this writing/reading/assignment/work?
- What questions do you have about this writing/reading/assignment/work?

- How can I help you?

These routinized activities provide space for informal and formal assessment of students, but do not contribute to heavy grading loads. This models for our preservice teachers that varied assessment can guide instruction and that assessment is not always time-consuming and burdensome in the ELA classroom; assessment is not always a five-paragraph essay that requires hours of grading and response, but rather can take the form of these lower-stakes activities (routines that can help to embolden the inclusivity of student voice in your classroom).

In inviting our pre-service teachers to participate in these classroom activities, they are provided space to develop as writers and learners, and also as teachers. Our entire classroom community is invited to, and has context for, reflecting on writing experiences through a “teacher lens.” This pedagogical reflection is critical to our students in developing their teaching identities and toolboxes.

Conclusion

These are the routines that we have identified as important to the building of a positive classroom environment, and ultimately to positioning the English classroom as a place where new English teachers are encouraged, empowered, and inspired to stay. The sampling of routines we share in this piece are not solutions, in and of themselves, to the myriad challenges facing our profession. However, we do believe that in turbulent times, in times of attack on the profession and fairly constant imposed changes, adhering to routines that work can sustain teachers and students alike. Our students report appreciation for these methods and routines not only as participants in our workshop-based courses, but also as developing teachers, which stems largely from our deliberate efforts to engage

our students in critical pedagogical reflection as they participate in our classroom activities and routines. As we move toward a more practice-based teacher education model in our programs, we must

also consider how to continue to provide our students with more and more opportunities to enact these teaching practices.

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In Praise of Poetry: Using Poems to Promote Joy, Community, and Social Emotional Learning During the Pandemic

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As we

embrace resist

the future the present the past

we work we struggle we begin we fail

to understand to find to unbraid to accept to question

the grief the grief the grief the grief

we shift we wield we bury

into light as ash

across our faces

– Layli Long Soldier, “Obligations 2,” *New Poets of Native Nations*

This year has been a wobbling pendulum, an ear-shattering tidal wave, a screeching pair of tires at a crosswalk. As educators, we have had to, in the words of Layli Long Soldier, “shift” our understandings, “wield” new tools, and even “bury” old ways of thinking. These abrupt changes have led to grief and anxiety: How do we survive teaching through the COVID-19 pandemic, as no other teachers have done before? How do we build connections across the dark void of black squares that have replaced our brightly posterized, physical classrooms? There is no blueprint, no map

for this year, and that has largely been the problem.

But there is one thing we do know: taking care of our students has never been more important. The lack of social and emotional connection young people have been subject to this year is one of the most concerning consequences of this pandemic. As educators, we have been encouraged to “embrace” (Long Soldier 2) the responsibility of managing this chaos while grappling with how to create meaningful and joyful learning experiences within the confines of hybrid learning.

As a teacher with eight years of experience and a first-year teacher working together for the first time, we find ourselves feeling lost and unsure of how to proceed. In addition to separately teaching sections of freshman and junior English, we co-teach a section of freshman English at a high school in northern NJ. For the majority of the year, our district has enacted a hybrid model with two rotating cohorts of students who attend school in-person and a single cohort of completely virtual students who attend class via Zoom.

We hope to share with you how we have attempted to bridge the gap between our “past” and “present” (Long Soldier 3) ways of teaching through the pathways of poetry. Implementing the reading and writing of poetry on a weekly basis has played an important role in the way we navigate both online and in-person modes of learning simultaneously, prioritize student engagement and choice, foster Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and honor the purpose of writing for enjoyment. We will describe our rationale for poetry, an overview of our approach, and finally, specific mentor texts and methods.

Why Poetry?

So often, poetry is deemed as archaic and inaccessible. Students often come to us with these ideas based on their limited exposure to different types of poetry. We believe the work of contemporary poets helps students break down these misconceptions. Inspired by the #TeachLivingPoets initiative, we find sharing contemporary poems helps students feel more connected to the language and subject matter, allowing them to see that poetry is neither old nor dusty, but rather that it is important and thriving.

Poetry can often be economized in terms of form. A short poem is more digestible to a student’s eye but can offer much in the

way of meaning and writer’s craft. As we will show you, the form allows students to discover and take ownership of their voice by initially mimicking the poet, developing mastery of the professional’s craft moves, and then, ultimately, inserting their own moves as they go. The universal literary themes of poetry also cater to empathy-based discussions and critical reading skills.

But most importantly, our poetry workshop supports Social Emotional Learning. We hope you notice with these mentor texts and approaches that while we are using them to teach specific skills (diction, pacing, descriptive and figurative language, structure, repetition), this work also strives to create a space where students can critically reflect and express themselves. With these poems, we ask them to consider who they are, what brings them joy, and who/what is important to them. While the hybrid environment has made us feel more disconnected to our students than ever before, poetry has served as a pathway to our students’ wellness and emotional needs. Especially this year, our students’ wellness must be a priority, and poetry can be a part of that care.

Our Approach to Poetry

Our approach to teaching poetry is informed by a reading-writing workshop model where we use poems as mentor texts for practicing close-reading and craft moves. Typically, we incorporate one poetry exercise in addition to our required curriculum every week. We begin the lesson by reading the poem with students from a Google Doc that everyone has edit access to. After reading it aloud once, we read it again and ask students to use the comment feature to note favorite lines, questions, interpretations, and personal and real-world connections. We encourage them to use the reply feature to respond to a peer’s comment—we love watching students

celebrate their peers. With some students learning remotely, working together on a shared Google Doc allows us to collaborate in real-time.

We discuss our thinking as a class, and then take a moment to notice any specific patterns that the poet has established. If there is a specific craft move we want to teach, we will highlight it. Then, we as the teachers model the task ahead: following the form and style of the poet to insert our own voice and create our own version of the poem. We model our drafting process in the same Google Doc above the poem, thinking aloud as we write. Then our favorite part: we invite students to draft. In a new Google Doc shared with us, students craft their own version of the poem. As they write, we hop between their documents to provide feedback using the same comment feature. Sometimes, because there are two teachers, one of us will continue to draft in the Google Doc to continue modeling process.

With this approach, we have also found that time for writing can happen away from the screen. At times, we purposefully instruct students to draft on paper in another room, by a window or outdoors so they are able to give their eyes a break from the screen and connect with their surroundings. For our students who are in-person, we have them close their computer and draft at their desk, in the hallway or by a classroom window while maintaining social distance. This is also a way for students to engage with writing on paper, rather than solely in a digital format. Now more than ever, we need to find opportunities for technology breaks.

Mentor Texts and Methods

A barrier to using mentor texts in the classroom can sometimes be sorting through seemingly endless options available or not even knowing where to look. We've found success with the following mentor texts.

The “My Life in 30 Words” poem asks students to craft a personal piece about what their life currently looks like, providing a reflective space for us to share in the strangeness of this year but also honor what remains normal or celebratory. There is one rule: the poem must be exactly thirty words—no more, no less. The strict word count enforces a structure and asks students to be mindful of their diction and pacing, but it also gives them the freedom to make a list or describe a moment in time.

January No Cases Calm
February Cases in China life is fine
March School gets shut down
April the worst month ever
May All virtual quarantine
June School is unfortunately over

Poem by Gavin Smith

2020 has been bad.
Protesters are getting mad.
Murder Hornets, Flying spiders,
I'm getting tired.
When will it end?
Got school to attend,
And rules to bend.
COVID RUINED EVERYTHING!

Poem by Zachary Falkenstern

Poems About Identity

This next method is inspired by Linda Christensen’s “Name Poem,” featured in Chapter 1 of her book, *Reading, Writing and Rising Up*. This piece asks students to write about their name: its origins, meanings, connections to stories or personal experiences. As Christensen writes, “Students’ names provide the first moment when a teacher can demonstrate their warmth and humanity, their commitment to

seeing and welcoming students' languages and cultures into the classroom." This is a great exercise for community building at the beginning of the year as students introduce themselves and get to know one another. We love to share with students the vignette "My Name" from Sandra Cisneros' book, *The House on Mango Street*. This mentor text

invites us to discuss the meaningful ways in which names are linked to families, cultures, personal experiences, and senses of self.

In this poem, student Katie Bang navigates her two names—"Eubin," her Korean name, and "Katie," her American name.

Katie and Eubin.

People nod and smile at Katie.
People tilt their heads and frown at Eubin.

People don't pause for Katie to repeat herself.
People pause and ask "Spell that out for me?" to Eubin.

People call on Katie without hesitation.
People pause and cough awkwardly at Eubin.

People make Katie feel welcomed even when they don't know who she is.
People make Eubin feel judged even when they don't know who they are.

But somewhere, People know the correct way to call on Eubin.
And there, People try to call on Katie without stuttering and mispronouncing anything.

People immediately type Eubin's name into their computers.
People have to ask Katie to write down her name for them.

People nod and smile at Eubin
People tilt their heads and stare at Katie.

Eubin and Katie.

Poem by Katie Bang

To explore how our emotions and identities are tied to people or places, we read a seven-line, untitled poem by Nikki Grimes, who packs a punch with two succinct similes and a culminating metaphor about Oklahoma out of a "need to get [her] feelings out"

(Grimes). This poem provides students with an approachable template to practice crafting figurative language. Though simple in structure, this poem allows students to share about the people and places that are important to them.

<p>I think of my dad and my heart fills Like a cup of joy, my eyes fill Like a body of water, and I am lost in a happiness Of my tears.</p> <p><i>Poem by Marissa Williams</i></p>	<p>I think of Florida and my heart brightens Like Fort Myers, my eyes tear Like the hurricanes, and I am lost in a heatwave of those sunny beach days.</p> <p><i>Poem by Aidan Slee</i></p>
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To round out our identity poems, we invited students to write a piece after the original “Random Autobiography” poem by Mary Ann Larson. As its title suggests, the poem invites us to consider life events that viewed in isolation might seem insignificant, but

when strung together at “[r]andom,” create a snapshot of who we are. Students borrowed sentence starters from Larson (“I have...,” “I am...,” “I saw...”) and played with structure and repetition.

<p>I have never been out of the country, yet the beauty lies within the borders. I have been to Hawaii and seen fire shows and hula dancers. I saw sharks and dolphins swimming under me.</p> <p>I have seen many different exotic cars. I want them all, I need them all. I have a dream of a huge garage, Filled from wall to wall.</p> <p>I have lost keys, wallets, everything I own, I usually find them but not without a scare. I am still looking for some of my things</p> <p>I’ve learned many life lessons. I’ve learned responsibility trumps excuses every time. I’ve learned my worth as a person is measured by my worthiness as a friend. I’ve learned change, which is not often easy and not often kind, is always good.</p> <p><i>Poem by Tyler Bajakian</i></p>

Poems for Finding Joy

As the pores of our news feeds are often clogged by negativity, we strive to share poems with students that promote positivity and celebrate what we love. With JP

Howard’s “praise poets and their pens,” we encourage students to mimic her repetition of the word “praise” and insert what they wish to celebrate, honing in on perhaps the smallest of details.

praise my family who supports me
how they make me laugh when I need to,
Then hug me until I stop crying.
praise how they have
made me feel accomplished for the smallest thing,
and scent of homemade meals,
praise what we have been through to get here,
Gently let me down without hurting,
We have been resilient
praise our difficulties and our sadness,
let our time heal
at home, at work, in cafés, even in school
praise how we hold our memories up to light,
gentle and cupped in palm of hands
sometimes that's all we need
praise movies and music
how my face lights up when I am in your presence
praise power of love and happiness
who played a important role in my self discovery ,
crying behind a closed door.
praise how I enjoyed my week,
while I stressed about school and chores when I don't need to,
because everyone needs to heal, especially because we need to.

Poem by Maria Silva

Continuing with the theme of joy, we discussed with students the idea of poems as gifts. Using words like gift wrap, we can craft poems to appreciate the important people in our lives. Our mentor text, Aracelis Girmay's "You Are Who I Love," encourages students to zoom in and use precise, descriptive language to craft strong

imagery as Girmay does ("You, selling roses out of a silver grocery cart"). This piece allowed students to build something they could give to others while also honoring the most important people in their life. During the holiday season, students gave these poems as gifts to their loved ones.

You, twirling your hair on your finger
You, laughing and singing to the spanish music on the radio
You, in the kitchen cooking chicken with all the spices on the counter
You, loving your incredibly confusing job
You, watching your favorite show "F.R.I.E.N.D.S" on the DVR
All the DVD's on the stand that holds the tv
You, being the independent and hard working woman I long to be when im older
You, with your amazing smelling perfume that sticks to all your clothes

Walking into the house and immediately smelling the scent of you and all the memories we have made together in this house

You, straightening your hair in the morning every day and letting the burnt smell linger in the air

You, loving me no matter what and not being afraid to talk to me if I need anything

You, yelling and making sure that I wake up in the morning to get to my classes in time

You, working you butt off just to make sure we have everything we need to live

You, you mama are amazing and you are the one I love

Poem by Imari Tirado

Who are you?

Are you who I love?

Are you who I'm supposed to love?

As days get worse

You start shining brighter

Some days you are the reason why the day gets darker

Are you who I'm supposed to love?

You, working so hard, never giving up

You, caring for family

You, throwing away your life for your family

You, are someone I admire.

You, make struggles struggle, always helping, trying to find a solution.

You, are someone I question my love for.

Who are you?

You, are someone I'm not close with, even though you are the closest.

You, are someone who always helps me in times of need, but I still struggle to help you.

You, telling me to clean my room

You, who scolds me on the littlest things

You, who tells me to be more active

You, are only trying to help me take care of myself.

Who are you?

I want to know you better, always close yet so far.

You, are someone who makes me feel safe yet so dangerous.

You, are someone I want to get closer with.

You, are who I aspire to be.

You, are someone I am grateful for and appreciate.

You, are someone I love.

You are who I love.

Poem by Andrew Kim

Closing Thoughts

With this approach, we have noticed the profound impact of using poetry to create a communal space across a virtual platform. In-person conversations with hybrid students open naturally between the bell and logging into Zoom; and most significantly, connections are being forged between students in each square on the screen. Our virtual students who we have never seen in person this year have become three dimensional. While our students' poetry has shown that they long for a day when we can learn altogether in person, it is also clear that we can create some semblance of community and belonging in the meantime.

Our work this year has only further solidified our belief that poetry reveals our vulnerabilities. When "we wield" our words through poems, we can turn our vulnerabilities "into light," bravely sharing our work and building empathy as we listen to others. We write alongside our students to model our own vulnerabilities and to let them know we too feel vulnerable in the face of uncertainty.

We must carry on poetry well after the pandemic has passed. It deserves to be inhaled and exhaled weekly over the course of the school year as a way to build community and offer safe and creative spaces for student expression, and for this to be made possible, it must occupy a permanent place in ELA curricula—not just during poetry month, not just to demonstrate skills, not just as a stand-alone unit.

But we want to note here that while poetry has been *our* approach, our "light" (Long Soldier), we acknowledge that there are other pathways to navigating this year we have yet to discover. In a way, as poetry has allowed us to carve a new path, it has also encouraged us to question and redefine our values of what is most important to us as educators. How is our purpose being redefined by this pandemic and how do we

allow this time to redefine us in meaningful ways? For us, for now, it's embracing one poem at a time.

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A Global Pandemic: The Ultimate Test of Teacher Adaptation

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Making a foolproof lesson plan is impossible when it comes to teaching. Sure, one might have engaging techniques and every minute filled with an activity, but it is almost guaranteed that something will throw a wrench in it. We never know how the students will react, if technology will work flawlessly, or if there will be a drill of some sort to ruin the perfect lesson. Teachers have been able to adapt to any of these situations and change their plans in a second. It is a very useful skill a teacher has and uses daily. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in spring of 2020, teachers were thrown into a whole new fire: online teaching. In a quick turnaround, teachers had to learn not only how to do their jobs online, but also how to help students learn how to learn online.

Teachers found a way to adjust to the ultimate curveball of turning their practice upside down and learning an entirely new job in a short amount of time. Their lives, communities, and institutions changed in an instance. I think of when this first occurred in March 2020, and the first thing I did was call my colleagues on my team to figure out what to do. I knew there was no way I would make it through without my coworkers because this situation was going to be very new and very challenging. Many teachers adapted to this situation and helped parents, students, coworkers, and their own families adjust to this new normal. We started making screencasts to show students where to find things, as well as many announcements on Canvas to keep students on top of tasks and aware of what was coming up. We still do this in online learning, and it is incredibly beneficial.

While it is amazing these teachers could change their profession overnight, it might be more interesting to analyze how teachers adapted to their students' learning needs in an online setting. At first, my team and I focused on how to meet students' needs and be compassionate about their new normal. However, once we realized this would continue, we had to come up with ways to keep education equitable for all students, whether traditional, hybrid, or virtual.

The first issue many educators faced was students' equitable access to technology. Muir describes the majority of disadvantages to teaching online as lack of access to technology and the resources that go along with it (7). Administrators and educators came together to find technology for these students to keep an equitable practice for those who might not have access to the resources at home; our district provided loaner laptops to any students who needed them, and this helped with equity. This problem had to be tackled first and foremost or students would fall behind their peers. Teachers advocated for their students and worked with parents, just like they might in the physical classroom environment, to make sure equity was not a problem. Teachers took the time to learn the struggles the students faced and made sure to practice the flexibility they have used in their profession as long as they have been in it.

In my own practice, I have been virtual teaching for about one year for the students who do not feel safe with the brick-and-mortar setting. Even with as much time as we have been working online, we still deal with internet failures, bad connections, and

inability to access technology applications. I work with my students to problem solve and face all troubleshooting with compassion because my students matter, and I know this is as hard on them as it can be on me. We talk out problems; I point them in the right direction for technological help if I cannot solve it myself, and we all practice a lot of patience. However, with this huge curveball of online education thrown at all stakeholders, teachers like me were able to adjust to ensure their students' education continued during the pandemic, no matter what the format may be.

Once technological resources were broadly available, the next obstacle became personalizing education to support all students, as teachers did in their physical classrooms. "Even if full personalization is not possible in face-to-face teaching, the teacher can develop different versions of the teaching material so that to fit to the learning styles of the largest number of students [sic]," and that is what teachers set out to do (Franzoni and Assar 28). In my own experience as a teacher during this time, I had to find ways to accommodate all of my learners, as well as adjust feedback and communication with them. It became increasingly hard once an online element was added in to address where students struggle and help them to understand how to improve. I spent time fiddling with resources (Google Voice, Canvas discussions, and Remind) that would improve my students' understanding and finding ways to get in contact with them that allowed for personal responses and feedback. At the same time, I wanted to keep an open line of communication for clarity and discussion when we did lessons or if they had questions on their feedback and grades. I, like most teachers, had the benefit of knowing my students prior to the transition to online and knew how to personalize lessons for them, but it still

required huge amounts of adjusting on many of us. However, as the next year rolled around, and we realized the pandemic would still be a factor, I quickly learned how to get to know 150 new students I had never interacted with in person. I spent weeks learning their learning styles and accommodations through analyzing messages they sent me, communicating during office hours, and just noticing what tripped them up as they learned. Through this, I have been able to cater my instruction to my students in a more personalized way as a virtual teacher, like I would in a traditional classroom. While we may use Canvas modules, Nearpod, and Padlet more often to engage in our lessons, we still find ways to accommodate learning needs and make the lessons as engaging as the physical classroom.

Flexibility became another issue teachers had to adjust their definition of and work with a different scope. Kirkwood and Price stated, "Educational provision is changing significantly, and distance educators have a leading role to play in developing flexible programmes for prospective students coming from a variety of backgrounds, contexts, and geographical locations" (10). During the pandemic, teachers were faced with this challenge. Students were no longer coming to school to do their work during the hours given; they were now juggling their jobs, family responsibilities, and the stress of not knowing what to expect from the situation. Teachers adapted to assist students, while tackling their own challenges of family responsibilities, stress, and other issues that may require solutions.

I still struggle with setting boundaries for work and my own life but have realized the importance of space from the career when one works in the same place they live, as I have been working from home for the entirety of the pandemic. It continues to be a struggle, but I have continued to adapt by

logging off and finding time to do things I love beyond teaching. This has helped me from burning out as much as I could during this difficult time. I encourage my students to do the same through creative writing outlets, online discussions about non-subject things, and trying to engage as much as I can of things that I know they enjoy, allowing for some burnout to be taken off of them during the school day.

Teacher adaptation has always been of the utmost importance to the profession, but in a global pandemic, teachers not only had to adapt to their students, but to a nationwide shift in education. While there were times of immense stress and feelings of being lost, teachers made it seem effortless and as if they had been training for this for years, as opposed to a few days to a few weeks. Teachers have been training for this for years, though. Every time a lesson went less than according to plan or a student acted out during a lecture, teachers were working on their adaptation that would lead to the ultimate test in flexibility. While this pandemic of COVID-19 added a huge curveball to teaching, it just showed what

teachers have known all along: we are the ultimate adaptors and will continue to care for our students in any situation, no matter how far away from us they are. Keep it up, teachers; we've got this.

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Training Adaptive Teachers

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During the summer of 2020, I began planning the field experience course that launches our English Language Arts teacher candidates' year-long school placements. As I reflected on the skills most valued in the middle of the pandemic, adaptability rose to the top of the list. Education reporting has covered the myriad ways teachers have adapted: changing classroom routines, revising curriculum, and figuring out new modes of instruction, often while facing uncertainty about their schools' plans (Fielding; Schwartz). A spate of online advice for teachers has echoed refrains of adaptability, such as this one: "Be nimble, and make changes along the way" (Tate). It was highly unlikely that field experiences would begin on time, if they would begin at all, but candidates needed to start gaining pedagogical experience. How could I design an assignment that helped candidates start to develop adaptability before beginning their field experiences?

1. Defining Adaptability

It's undeniable that adaptability is a cornerstone of teaching. Individual learners present strengths and challenges, schools themselves are "highly dynamic and fluid working contexts" (Collie et al. 127), and "change, variability, novelty, uncertainty, and transition" are embedded within any school day (Martin 696). Danielson's Framework for Teaching, used by school districts and educator preparation programs, names "demonstrat[ing] flexibility and responsiveness" as a feature of effective instruction, and the Council of Chief State School Officers' Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium's

(InTASC) standards list "adapting" as a performance indicator: "The teacher designs, adapts, and delivers instruction to address each student's diverse learning strengths and needs and creates opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in different ways" (7). In other words, adaptive instruction, what Parsons et al. call "an awesome balancing act" (206), is how teachers differentiate for individual learners (Mascarenhas et al. 3-4).

In their efforts to understand the role of adaptability in effective teachers, Collie et al. utilize Martin's three-pronged definition (Collie et al. 130). Adaptability can be cognitive (a change in thinking), behavioral (a change in actions), and emotional (handling emotions in a way that allows for challenge and newness) (Collie et al. 130). All three types are related: for example, when a teacher faces an unexpected occurrence in the classroom, cognitive adaptability can pave the way for emotional adaptability. Along these lines, Sutton found that teachers who used "reappraisal" while experiencing negative emotions in the classroom (i.e., looking at a situation from a different perspective) were more likely to stop, think, and regulate their emotions (268). In this case, rethinking (cognitive adaptability) allowed for emotional change (emotional adaptability) and new actions (behavioral adaptability).

These definitions primarily see adaptation as a way to respond to specific circumstances, however, missing an implied but important first step: teachers must first recognize the need to respond. When we colloquially talk about "teachable moments," for example, we refer to seizing

an unexpected moment to teach a lesson that we did not anticipate. For teachers to be highly adaptive, they must continually recognize the possible ways they might shift instruction or approach in order to enhance their students' learning. Anders et al. put it this way: "the best teachers are successful because they are thoughtful opportunists who create instructional practices to meet situational demands" (qtd. in Mascarenhas et al. 5). When we adjust our definition of adaptability to include being on the lookout for reasons to change instruction, adaptability becomes more of an outlook, not just a way to weather unpredictability.

2. Reflection and Revision

What types of assignments might teach this approach to adaptability? Mascarenhas et al. suggest using vision statements, as their research indicated that adaptive teachers have a strong vision for their instruction (8-9). They also recommend close ties between coursework and field experiences (11), and Collie et al. encourage purposeful reflection so that teachers can reconsider how they handled situations in the classroom (133). NCTE's 2020 position statement on methods courses also cites "opportunities for structured conversation and reflection" as integral to effective field experiences (Gallo et al.). Dewey would connect this practice to the particular properties of reflection: "reflection upon experience gives rise to a distinction of what we experience (the experienced) and the experiencing—the how." Once we can better see the how, or the "method," we can imagine other possible methods (hence, revision). Reflection could also give teacher candidates the space to develop an adaptive viewpoint overall, helping them use their knowledge of their students to seek opportunities to impact their learning.

As I planned for Fall 2020, I thought about the ways our program already utilizes

reflection. Narrative reflection helps our candidates "lear[n] to live within the particular cultural, historical, and cyclic situation of each classroom" (Clandinin 139), critical reflection helps them "identi[fy] and chec[k] the accuracy and validity of [their] teaching assumptions" (Brookfield 3), and reflection on their instruction helps them think through the impact of their instructional choices. I sought a new assignment, however, that required candidates to reflect on adapting instruction to a new situation.

3. The New Assignment

As part of a new assignment, I asked candidates to respond to a change in conditions. First, candidates designed a lesson plan around a short text for their future face-to-face school placements. After they received feedback and revised these plans, candidates were asked to adapt and teach them in a virtual setting with their peers. They received feedback directly after teaching and then reflected again on the text as well as their planning process. Multiple stages of this assignment integrated reflection and revision in order to strengthen candidates' metacognitive awareness, their willingness to revise plans, and their ability to look for potential instructional alternatives (see table 1).

Table 1
Possible Adaptive Actions

Assignment Steps	Adaptability Types (Martin qtd. in Collie et al. 130)	How
1. Design a lesson plan around a short text.		
2. Peer review in class. Use feedback to revise the plan and explain changes.	Emotional Cognitive	Experience emotions in response to feedback. Recognize opportunities to enhance learning. Change lesson plan and articulate decision-making.
3. Adapt the revised lesson plan for a Zoom lesson in our class.	Emotional Cognitive	Experience emotions in response to changes in the assignment. Recognize opportunities to shift the lesson. Select changes and articulate decision-making.
4. Teach the redesigned plan.	Emotional Cognitive Behavioral	Experience emotions while teaching (i.e., nervousness, excitement, etc.). Recognize opportunities to veer from the plan. Make instructional changes while teaching.
5. Receive feedback on teaching from peers.	Emotional Cognitive	Experience emotions in response to feedback. Recognize opportunities to enhance learning.
7. Reflect on the process.	Cognitive	Rethink the text.

		Reflect on planning and revising. Offer alternatives for future instruction.
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4. Future Adjustments

By the end of this assignment, more than one candidate reached out to ask if they could create yet another version of their lesson plan after teaching it. Some made significant changes during each stage of their plan, pointing to specific feedback or moments that led them to those changes. All of these candidates seemed more likely to adapt instruction to the specific contexts of their field placements once they arrived. Others, however, minimally revised their plans. Still others needed the practice teaching experience in order to buy into revision at all. For example, a candidate taught with an undeveloped and unrevised plan, but after teaching, outlined several specific revision ideas for future instruction.

So, candidates were learning how revisionary thinking could enhance instruction, but I doubt they were thinking of adaptability as an outlook that embraces continual instructional reinvention. Why? Although “adaptability” was on my mind as I designed the assignment, I failed to explicitly name or define it. Furthermore, I did not ask candidates to consider the significance of adaptability in their evolving philosophy of teaching. As I contemplate adding these steps for next year, I keep returning to Sheridan Blau’s “performative literacy,” which could be a helpful corollary for talking about adaptive teaching. An “enabling knowledge,” performative literacy includes a “willingness to suspend closure—to entertain problems rather than avoid them” (19) and “a willingness to take risks” (19). Teachers with these same characteristics would be more likely to notice problems and possibilities in their students’ learning and to seize moments to

enrich it. Drawing on Blau, conditional language, such as “could” and “might,” could help teacher candidates practice identifying alternative instructional choices.

In fall, this assignment will include readings on adaptability as well as prompts to connect feedback, practice teaching, and learners in their placements to potential changes to instruction. For example, in the final reflection, I ask candidates to share what new textual insights they gained after teaching. Next time I will ask candidates to connect their new observations of the text itself to potential changes in how they could approach the text in their placements. A performative literacy framework would suggest naming more than one instructional direction and multiple reasons why teachers might choose one over the other.

Perhaps more than anything, teaching this assignment has made me consider how to integrate adaptability more explicitly into methods coursework. This assignment focused on a change in modality, a condition that I knew candidates would face in their placements this year. But an “Adapt a Unit” assignment could focus on identifying potential instructional adaptations based on contexts created by the instructor and/or the candidates themselves, such as the particular cultural and linguistic backgrounds of a class or interdisciplinary curricular opportunities. To foster adaptability through a collaborative case study approach, candidates could work together to create multiple instructional possibilities for each case.

Ultimately, English Language Arts teacher educators need to think about how we help candidates become “thoughtful opportunists” who can recognize and take

advantage of possibilities to enhance student learning (Anders et al. qtd. in Mascarenhas et al. 5). There are far more pieces to the adaptability puzzle than this assignment can address, but I believe an important start is recognizing adaptability as not simply a willingness to respond to change, but rather as a stance that values shifting to enhance student learning over and above the best laid plans.

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How Padlet Encouraged Student Collaboration and Engagement in My Virtual Classroom

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“Alright, so we just finished reading Chopin’s ‘The Story of an Hour,’ and the scene of Louise Mallard sitting in front of the open window and listening to the sound of birds stands out to me. What might the window symbolize? What themes are developed in this story?”

I surveyed the faces on twenty rectangular screens. Okay, I thought to myself, “wait time.” 1... 2... 3... 4... Students’ eyes darted, microphones stayed muted, chins brightened from concealed phones that lit up, and I could swear I heard birds chirping by my own window—their helpful attempt to break this awkward silence that ensued. I sighed.

“Max, please sit upright. Your camera has been facing the ceiling for two minutes.”

“Put your phones away. This is still class time.”

“Sam... Sam? Your screen went black. Are you still there?”

“Yes, finally! Thank you for raising your hand. What? I can’t hear you. You need to unmute yourself.”

Shoulders slumped and completely exhausted, I logged out of my last Zoom session for the day and numbly stared at the ceiling. *Ah, so this is how Max was feeling.* A mug of coffee in my hand, I concluded that no amount of caffeine could revitalize me, the once bubbly teacher who used to power-walk from one side of the chalkboard to the other filling it with abundant responses from enthusiastic students. In my brick-and-mortar classroom, I would grip the weighty chalk in my fingers, pass out the tangible handouts I meticulously created, see

the zealous hands shoot up whenever a question was asked, and analyze my students’ facial expressions and body language as validation of my teaching. After some reflection, I came to realize that it was difficult for my students to just sit passively in our virtual class (after coming from five other online courses) and listen to their teacher deliver a lengthy monologue to compensate for their lack of participation. In addition, my timid students felt intimidated socializing in our synchronous large group discussion of over twenty classmates. I wondered, *how do I alleviate or cease this problem of communication and encourage collaboration in my digital classroom?*

The Benefits of an Online Discussion Board

With the growth of virtual classes, it is crucial for teachers to integrate strategies that foster student engagement and build a sense of community in an online environment. One way to augment synchronous and asynchronous communication is to implement an online discussion board, which can provide rich opportunities for students to share opinions, ask clarifying questions, collaborate, and have their voices heard. An “online discussion” can refer to messages left on electronic bulletin boards, a virtual space for ideas to be gathered, shared, and revised. A discussion board can encourage conversations among a classroom community rather than just one between a teacher and student. In “The Context and Content of Online Discussions: Making

Cyber-Discussions Viable for the Secondary School Curriculum,” Dave S. Knowlton and Heather M. Knowlton emphasize the merits of online discussions: “Online discussions can broaden the way students connect with each other... Learning is itself a social process and through discussion, students can gain a broader perspective of course material” (40). In other words, collaborative note-taking and hearing diverse perspectives can deepen student understanding of class materials and concepts. Onyema et al. echo this point when they posit, “[With] their thoughts and opinions validated, [students are] more willing to share out loud in class afterwards... [and] learners feel the supportive presences of participating peers, mentors and experts. [This] stimulates learning satisfaction that will further encourage students to think independently and reflect on what is said during online discussions” (4853). By incorporating an interactive discussion board, such as Padlet, as part of class resources, teachers can facilitate discourse among students, create a motivational environment, improve students’ digital literacy skills, and overall, cultivate productive learning experiences in a virtual setting.

Padlet: An Introduction

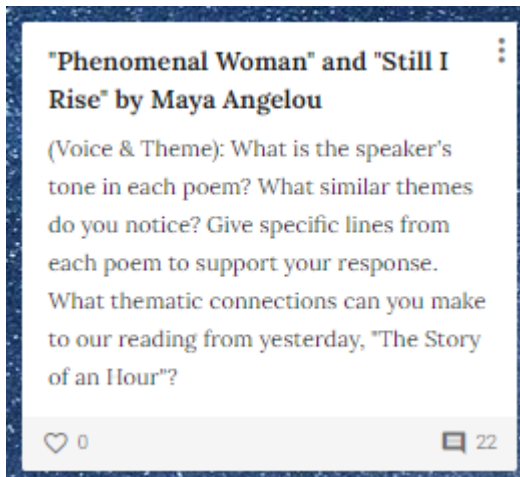
Padlet is an online bulletin board that allows both the teacher and students to write and share ideas by posting virtual sticky notes, which can include writing, drawings, images, GIFs, videos, audio, and links. Using a unique teacher-created Padlet link (the teacher can create a public or private Padlet wall for each class or period they teach using one account), students can post ideas anonymously or with their names just by clicking on a “+” button in the lower right corner. On Padlet, teachers can post do-now questions or exit slips that students can directly comment on, or students can ask questions or post insights they have during

reading; members in a group can collaborate, simultaneously working on one post (e.g. one group might create a post on symbols seen in the story while another might explore themes); they can read diverse perspectives on a topic and learn from each other; and students can create multimodal posts combining two or more modes such as written language, visuals, and audio recordings. Furthermore, students can participate in collaborative notetaking and interactive storytelling as well as use their Padlet post as their digital poster board for a project or assignment. In conclusion, it is a transformative technological tool that enhances student engagement and collaboration in an interactive space where ideas are collated and easily accessible.

How I Incorporated Padlet in My Narrative Unit

I first introduced Padlet to my students during our narrative writing unit in the second week of class. I explained, “For the first fifteen minutes of class time, we will be connecting poetry to the prose we are reading, writing down our responses to the literature in the ‘chat section’ of Padlet, then sharing our ideas in Zoom breakout rooms.” That week, my students had studied narrative elements—plot, character, setting, and theme—after reading Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” and Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour.” In order for students to further explore voice and theme developed in Chopin’s story, I linked two poems by Maya Angelou, “Phenomenal Woman” and “Still I Rise,” onto my Padlet post. I asked them to respond to the following questions: *What is the speaker’s tone in each poem? What similar themes do you notice? What connections can you make to our reading from “The Story of an Hour”?* First, I modeled the type of responses I anticipated and then gave students time to write on Padlet. Comments

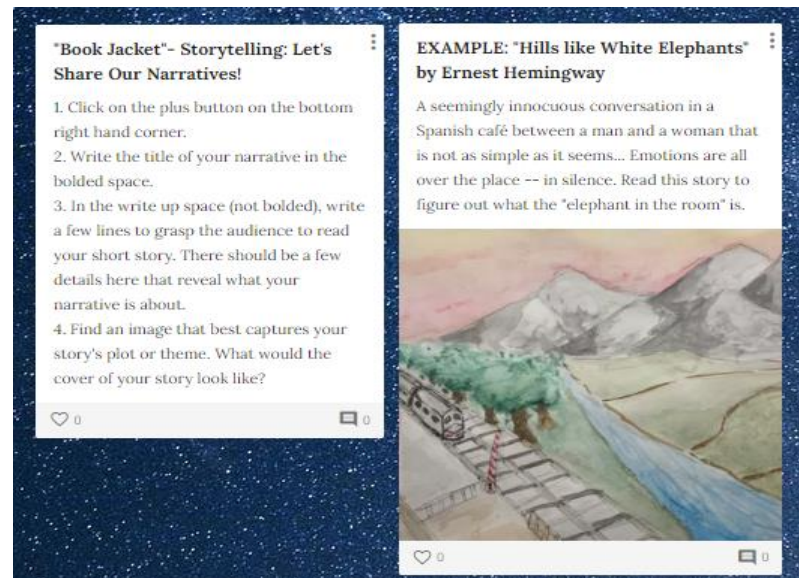
started piling on the post; students commented on how the speakers in Angelou's poems are "self-assured," expanded upon the "theme of women empowerment and overcoming oppression," and made connections among the three texts. With their responses "published" on Padlet, I asked them to take the next five minutes to read their peers' posts before they jumped into breakout rooms of four to further discuss their interpretations.



In our large group meeting prior to using Padlet, students remained quiet with only a few sharing their ideas; in these breakout rooms, however, they were much more animated. For example, Liz shared, "My Padlet post was about how Louise in 'The Story of an Hour' wants freedom and independence from what is seemingly an oppressive marriage. In 'Phenomenal Woman,' the speaker also wants to escape societal expectations of how women should behave or look like." Sam added, "I agree. I chose the quote, 'I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size...Phenomenal woman, that's me.' The speaker defies society's standards of 'perfect' but is still 'phenomenal.'" Addie contributed, "She's confident and sassy. I like her," and the group members chuckled. In another breakout room, Aaron read his post to the group and explained how he focused on the

historical context of when Angelou's poems and Chopin's short story were written. His peer responded, "That makes sense. I wrote about Mrs. Mallard's desire to be liberated and not live for her husband in late nineteenth-century patriarchal society. It relates to Angelou's speakers' bold defiance against oppression and discrimination." Having direct access to classmates' and their own ideas on Padlet facilitated discussion and interactive learning. In short, collaborative learning promoted deeper reading comprehension and confidence as students' interpretations of the texts were either validated or revised.

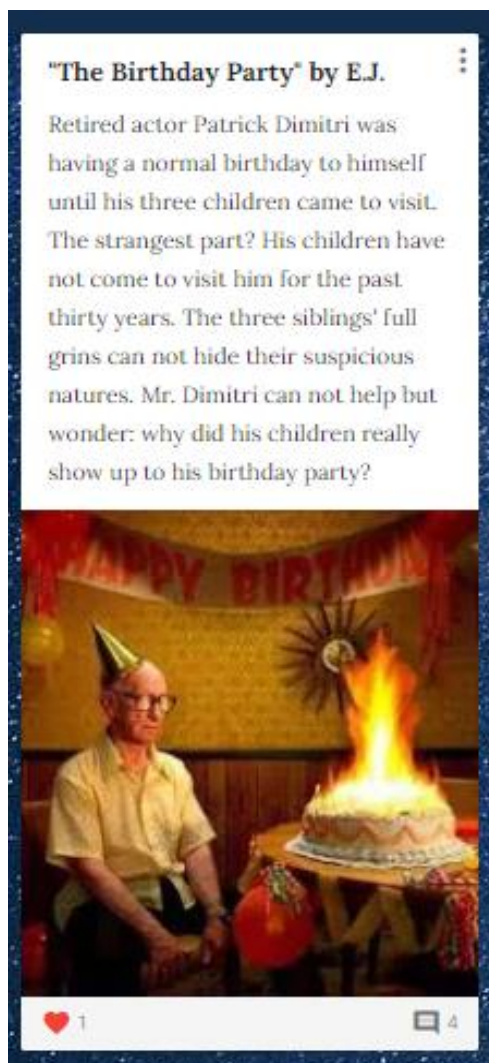
After analyzing literary elements in short stories and poems, my juniors wrote their own four-to-five-page narratives. To give my students an audience to share their writing with, I asked them to create a "book jacket" to "sell" their stories on Padlet. First, students created their own post with the title of their narrative essay, an image as the cover of their story, and captivating lines to hook readers. Next, students took ten minutes to read their classmates' posts and



respond to them. For instance, Ava, who appreciates historical fiction, titled her post "Escaping Convention" and wrote:

Charlotte, now a grandmother, narrates her story of what she believed to be her new beginning. Back in 1979, she was just a teenage girl looking to become an independent woman but was tied down by tradition. Eventually, she comes to a point where she must choose what she will become and whether her fate is decided by patriarchy and societal norms.

One of her peers clicked on the heart icon to like her post and commented, “I really like how your story addresses societal norms that women had to follow and how tradition can affect someone’s aspirations.” Another classmate responded to Ava, “Cool! I like how ‘Escaping Convention’ focuses



on the woman wanting to escape her old, abusive life to pursue a better one.”

In another example, Eli, who enjoys suspenseful thrillers, titled his piece “The Birthday Party” and explained:

Retired actor, Patrick Dimitri, was having a normal birthday by himself until his three children came to visit. The strangest part? His children have not come to visit him for the past thirty years. The three siblings’ full grins cannot hide their suspicious nature. Mr. Dimitri cannot help but wonder: *why did his children really show up to his birthday party?*

Classmates commented, “The plot intrigues me. I wonder why his children came to the party. Were the three people not really his kids? It makes you think about the possibilities.” Seeing which story genres and

posts students enjoyed and responded to, I strategically placed them into breakout rooms. In these groups of four, students reiterated the title of their narrative, discussed why they chose the image they did, then read a short excerpt of the most captivating lines from their stories. I joined my students' rooms and saw smiles, questions asked, and compliments, as well as constructive criticism, exchanged. Ultimately, providing a means for students to share their writing on Padlet encouraged interactive storytelling and overall, higher engagement.

How Padlet Enhanced Student Experience in the Virtual Classroom

In the first few weeks of remote teaching, I dreaded the “wait time”—the agonizing fifteen seconds in which my students and I had a competitive stare-down after I asked a question, then I dejectedly groaned, “That wasn’t rhetorical by the way.” In addition, I was a reluctant online teacher who naively thought that technology hindered genuine conversation, and that only traditional in-person classes could stimulate the advantages of a face-to-face discussion. Just as the use of Padlet did alleviate some of the challenges of discussing literature via Zoom, it also made me rethink what counts as “genuine conversation”—that oral conversations are not the only means of effective communication. For instance, after reading, commenting, and sharing written insights on Padlet posts, students were much more confident in discussing their interpretations of Angelou’s poems and excerpts from their narrative essay. Moreover, writing down ideas in a public forum meant that it was “permanent” and “published,” so students thought more deeply about the content and how to articulate their thoughts into words. Reading diverse analyses also gave students a fresh perspective on the topic, which led some to

evaluate and revise their own original thoughts. Ultimately, teaching virtually this year enlightened me to see the benefits of experimenting with online technologies that I was initially skeptical of. My takeaway from this experience was that by blending traditional and digital learning, both teachers and students can develop different forms of communication skills and augment ongoing learning—including multimodal, digital, and collaborative learning—that transcends the physical boundaries of the classroom. After all, as teachers, it is our responsibility to nurture student engagement, critical thinking, and discourse, but to also successfully adapt our classrooms and teaching strategies to the changing nature of education in the digital age.

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School Dreams: The Runaway Class

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1

The cage rattles at first slowly
then louder and louder until the gates rip
away from the windows
in a spectacle of uncontrolled fury
catapulting through a compliant sky
they windmill to the oblivion
of dark space fathoms upward
the windows no longer barricaded
stand still transparent and bare observing
children as they look back at the windows
the light intensifies a shade brighter
every second in a rhythmical pulse
like someone's pumping illumination
from another world a blaze fires the glass
to yellow white orange their eyes blinded
by the extraordinary power of quick-paced
infinitesimal moments packed into one picture
of time frozen imprinted on students pointing
their faces to windows shattering into a trillion
specks of dust lit up and dispersing in air

2

the class sits in awe listening
to slow faint whistles
from space entering the room
circulating through their ears

gliding inside bodies lifting them
up for a dance around the room
the brilliance of a new light
is too much to bear
they scramble around desks
wild-eyed children
with a teacher sitting befuddled
pandemonium races through their heads
and pushes them to open space as the wind calls
with a gentle coolness to the skin and directs
the students to a free world in front of their eyes
dazzling in its glory *shout Hallelujah! Hallelujah!*

3

the wind curls itself around the student body
leading them to the promised land
of deep outer space
initiating the million kids march
one step into immaculate fluorescence
and not knowing what to expect
yea but they walk into the valley of light
unaware rootless aimless one-by-one
together they walk the plank
at the room's end into waiting clouds
that swallow them up their lives harmonizing
inside a celestial canvas an escape to freedom
withdrawal commences as they leap off
the end of the world into a mile-high blue daze
a separate reality sends a soothing flow of cool

against their faces leading to a shortcut through
clouds and sky with yellows blues golds
reflecting off their skin

4

as the teacher stands motionless
looking square into a white blaring rectangle
mesmerized by its glow the mentholated
stream filters through hitting his face and he raises
his arms in desperation to the icy void crying out
to anyone in space who will listen *where are you
going? what are you doing? come back please*
his hands sweat with fear he begs his students
to reflect but the teacher's protests fade away
into an azure sky and he realizes it's show time
for the magic theater of the mind where the master
watches the farce and becomes part of it
because this episode won't click off and he knows it
the pedagogue makes his move and enters
the Broadway drama to pursue a runaway class
and like his children he ventures out of the classroom
into a playhouse of wild blue yonder

5

dream on dream on dream on as students sail
like gliders through infinity and join together
in one heavenly step to the oblivion land of
the lost and misbegotten who have left
the premises of the school the caged box
and all the zero hours driving themselves
further into porous firmaments

our big sky country a paradoxical universe
the teacher yields to the powers of light color
wind and cloud as he jumps into a friendly sky
a panicked voice pleads his case *come back*
please please the discord of scared and alone
stammers through his sad message in a Magritte sky
echoing through the ozone and boomerangs back
to his ears with the sounds of nothingness
no one's here no one's home nada nada nada
unbearable coldness and oxygen debt
anesthetize him in a final moving portrait posed
on a cloud with arms waving in the wind
its soft fingers and luminous gleam lay tracks
around his entire body and jumbled life leaving
misty trails forged by heaven's perfect hands
now holding up the communal wires
between teacher and students

6

the wind blows inside pathways
joining them together
with tidings from the far side
we love outer space and want to stay here
away from your world we found a home
where we are untouchable because there's
no reality except the one we see in our mind
return? why? as the twisted channels
of haze nudge closer to the teacher's ear
he listens to whispers of a mystical beat
with dissonant moods and rhythms
that have eluded this person like everything else

from today's events he remains on the cloud
 looking into new worlds *what are your chances*
of awakening? and then again where are
the children? will they come down? can you
find them cruising in a Magritte sky at peace?
how can you make contact? and where will
it lead you?

7

but in pursuit of the exiles'
 elusive lives that you sketched for years
 by entertaining audiences going through
 routines the stages of your life to right here
 the invisible wall an exodus for students
 into aqua nirvana and you too
 made a choice because you walked into
 the vast entanglement *what are you*
searching for in the magic theater?
 say good-bye to your Self you are out
 of the cage all those years playing
 el maestro and now the spectators
 have disappeared and look at you
 fallen on a cloud logging through space
 trying to recover what is missing *but*
what is? I ask you the students
 are absent mark them down in the white void
and where does that leave you instructor?
scanning the skies inside a foggy web
tripping through the cosmos
contemplating a return to your Self?

Pandemic Paranoia and Proximity: A Transformation

JOSEPH S. PIZZO

New Jersey Council of Teachers of English

A new school year

Grades Classrooms

Teachers Lessons

Challenges

Altered schedules

Textbooks sealed and shunned

Classrooms depersonalized

Insidious threats

From unseen aerosols

Unsocial atmosphere

Untraced contacts

Atypical behavior

Waves, not hugs

Voices commanding

“Keep Six Feet Apart”

Unnatural Separation

Clear viscous gel

For sanitizing

Protecting

Insulating

Assuring

An ominous environment

Pandemic Paranoia

And

Proximity

School and society

Based in reality

Intense toil

Risks outweigh rewards

Social Distancing

No longer The practice

A young boy

And a young maiden

Must be mandated

 To maintain

During middle school High school

Dances Proms

Study sessions Dates

Distancing now including

Classroom seating

 Hallway travels

Greetings

 Inquiry

Casual chatter

 Heightened emotions

Attempted outreach

 Disjointed Engagement

 Dispirited outlook

Human touch Removed

High fives Shunned

Fist bumps Prohibited

Hugs On high alert

Robotic students

 Masked

Gloved

 Shielded

 Separated

Shunned

Lockers Off limits
Sealed tightly
 With firmness
and precision
Hallways transformed
 To highways
Divided
 Controlled
 Unidirectional

Lessons
 Hybrid
Virtual
 Internet Intervention
 Zoom
 Meet
 Google
 Chat Box
Electronic education
 Technological diversification
Classes condensed
 Constrained
 Compartmentalized
Separation
 Space Imposition
Sirens in homes
 Alluring distractions
 Minecraft
 Fortnite
 Pokemon
 Roblox
 Instagram
 Snapchat

WhatsApp

Tik Tok Tik Tok

Go Guardian

Register Monitor

Trace Track

Learners challenged

Procedures transformed

Redefined

Repurposed

Relied upon

Focus

Brevity

Clarity

Videos

Instructional

Investigational

Inspirational

Legislated Separation

Devastation

Emotional Incarceration

Uncharacteristic Avoidance

Simplicity

Now complexity

Breathing regulations

Stress intensification

Unsolved enigmas

Daily challenges

To SEL

PBL

Group activity

After-school clubs

New lesson designs

Activities Postponements

Cancellations Expectations

Of persistence

Of continuance

Procedures to adapt

To follow

To obey

Challenges to overcome

Frustration to mount

Scapegoats to seek

Searches conducted

For targets

Frustration

Ventilation

Heroes reimagined

From typical categories

Essential service

In classrooms

Teachers Aides

Custodians Administration

In districts

In homes And communities

Bus Drivers Students

Parents/Guardians

Methodical inversion

Of Disney Maslow

And more

Consequences

Constantly dire
Hope
Losing luster
Nature separated
From nurture
Uncommonality
Unfamiliarity
Compromise
Concession
Social Convulsion
Classrooms reflecting community
Lessons losing touch
With humanity
Society shunning
Sensitivity
Pandemic Paranoia
And
Proximity
School mirroring society
A transformation
Based
In reality

Connected

KATHRYN SADAKIERSKI
Bay Path University

Stories are read over Zoom,
Students are fit to boxes
On screens,
Listening, silently.

They don't line up together,
Bubbling with excitement
On the way to recess;
We miss the discoveries,
The exclamations,
The science experiments,
In our classrooms.

Creativity looks different today;
There aren't paint stains on desks
Left from art projects,
Or playdough crumbs to be picked up.

The vibrant atmosphere,
The warmth and joy,
Aren't quite so palpable here
In homes away from home.

It's like we're without our center,
Fitting the mold
Left by restrictions

During the pandemic,
When learning styles are conformed
To one mode of pedagogy,
Virtually.

Still, learning can be personalized,
Coming alive,
Because classrooms aren't defined
By walls.

As a family, we make the best
Of these times when we can
Make teacher visits to houses,
Send birthday wishes, homemade signs,
Parades serving to remind
Us of the glue that binds
Us together,
Stronger
Than anything.

Open Minds

KATHRYN SADAKIERSKI
Bay Path University

It was once a goal
For technology to be integrated
Into the classroom,
Helping students to refine
Their digital literacy.

There were purists and progressives,
Traditionalists and techies,
Different views of how to teach,
Enriching education,
Creating the greatest reach,
Impacting students invariably.

Smartboards and smart TVs,
Chromebooks and iPads,
Redefined
The learning environment,
No longer chalkboards
Or apples on desks,
But still, doors opened
By knowledge
At our fingertips.

Technology was an ideal
Further interwoven
Into standards and tests,
A competency

To be measured increasingly.

Now, it is the only option,

Adopted fully,

No moment for hesitancy.

It is our mission

To continue educating,

Helping students thrive

During these times,

Being guides

With open minds

As we adapt

To virtual learning,

Growing together,

Becoming better.

As technology advances,

So do we.