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Calls for Manuscripts

*Excelsior: Leadership in Teaching and Learning* provides a forum to explore issues related to teaching and learning at public and independent colleges and universities with programs in teacher preparation.

*Excelsior* solicits original, thought-provoking manuscripts of various formats, including papers presenting research on issues and practices important to teacher education and in-depth discussions of perspectives on issues and practices that contribute to the preparation and professional development of educators. A third format—Nota Bene—should contain brief, focused articles; book reviews; or website or technology recommendations.

**Deadlines for submission:**
- June 1 for the fall/winter edition
- December 1 for the spring/summer edition

Manuscript Preparation and Submission

To submit a manuscript to be considered for review:

- Send an electronic file compatible with Microsoft Word as an e-mail attachment to the editor, Cynthia Lassonde, at lassonde@oneonta.edu.
- Manuscripts must follow APA style as outlined in the most recent edition of the APA style manual.
- Research and Perspectives manuscripts should not exceed 25 pages, including references. Nota Bene manuscripts should not exceed 5 pages, including references.
- Include a 100-word abstract for Research and Perspectives manuscripts.
- The cover page should consist of the title of the manuscript, a suggested running head, as well as the authors' names, affiliations, addresses, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers.
- Omit headers and footers except for page numbers.
- Omit all identifiers of the authors and affiliations from the manuscript. Be sure computer software does not reveal author's identity as well.
- Secure all permissions to quote copyrighted text or use graphics and/or figures of other non-original material. Include permissions with manuscript.
- Data-based manuscripts involving human subjects should be submitted with a statement or verification from the author that an Institutional Review Board certificate or letter approving the research and guaranteeing protection of human subjects has been obtained from the researcher's institution.

Manuscripts will go through a blind review by peer reviewers and the editor. The review process will take approximately three months from time of submission. All manuscripts will be judged on their scholarship, contribution to the knowledge base, timeliness of topic, creative/thoughtful approach, clarity and cohesiveness, appropriateness to category, and adherence to preparation guidelines. Selections may also be affected by editorial decisions regarding the overall content of a particular edition.
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Message from the Presidents

It is with great pleasure that we introduce to you our new and revised journal from the New York State Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NYACTE). The current officers of the board have spent a great deal of time and energy in working with the current editor, Dr. Cynthia Lassonde, to develop this scholarly journal. We express our gratitude to all those individuals who, in the past, have established the foundation for our current efforts.

In the spring of 1985 the New York State Association of Colleges for Teacher Education published the first issue of its journal named The Journal of AACTE/NYS, later changed to The Journal of NYACTE. Helene Napolitano wrote her President’s Message in the initial volume noting that the publication project was first introduced by Tony Baratta during a previous executive board meeting. Tony Baratta served as journal editor from 1985 into the early 2000’s. During its many years of publication, the journal has included contributions from teacher educators throughout the state tapping, as Baratta has noted, “the richness of the environs of higher education institutional resources” and offering both novice and veteran writers opportunities to contribute to the profession through scholarly publication.

From 2003 to 2005, the journal has continued to grow, not only with published volumes but also with reflective planning, discussion, and reorganization by the members of the NYACTE Executive Board. The board’s intention was to broaden the journal’s mission, focus, and readership by taking it nationwide beyond the borders of New York State. A journal with such rich education resources should be refereed by a more varied review committee and have as wide a readership as possible. Accordingly, the name of the journal also should reflect this expansion but still reflect its source of publication. Fittingly, the Executive Board has entitled this transformed journal, Excelsior: Leadership in Teaching and Learning.

The motto of New York State, Excelsior—Ever Upward, offers to us the challenge to strive for excellence in publishing and to you the contributors and readers the same challenge—to strive for excellence in your pursuit of the knowledge that will make you superior teacher educators.

Margaret Egan, Past President, NYACTE
College of Mount Saint Vincent

Robert J. Michael, President, NYACTE
State University of New York, New Paltz
In this, our first issue of *Excelsior: Leadership in Teaching and Learning*, we hope to begin a conversation among our readers. In this issue a common theme has emerged from the manuscripts that were submitted by authors and groomed by the reviewers. As you read, you may note, as I did, that each article expresses the importance of opening conversations and the value of fostering dialogue among instructors, students, peers, and other stakeholders.

The conversation begins with Robert Nistler’s article on peer mentoring. Nistler created a partnership between junior- and senior-level undergraduate teacher candidates. The mentor/mentee relationships flourished and promoted growth because dialogues were cultivated among peers through oral and written reflections and feedback.

Next, Althier Lazar, Cathy Pinto, and Natalie Warren write about teachers’ views of children’s cultures and ways they described how their views influenced their instructional decision. Specifically, they analyzed the language teachers used to describe their perceptions. Documented interviews unlock a dialogue to prompt readers to reflect on their culture, cultural perceptions, and cultural sensitivities.

Wen Ma’s thoughts about Nystrand’s dialogic approach to instruction promote understanding of authentic question and uptake as well as related theoretical and pedagogical issues. He proposes that Nystrand’s approach leads to dynamic classroom discussions that engage learners in inquisitive dialogues about issues.

Additionally, Joanne Dowdy examines how graduate students in a Literacy Stories/Video Writing class participated in dialogue journals and video journals to make personal connections with the content they were learning. Graduates learned not only through their reading and reflections but also through their discussions about content that occurred in this video environment.

Finally, this issue’s Nota Bene section written by Abigail McNamee and Mia Mercurio is a Book Corner that provides resources for teacher educators to use with and make available to candidates regarding extending conversations about coping with world-event trauma. In particular, the resources listed in this disquieting, yet discerning, piece relate to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The articles in this issue, in their own ways, encourage those of us in teacher education to open dialogues in diverse ways and for varied purposes. *Excelsior: Leadership in Teaching and Learning* seeks to do the same. We invite our readers to continue the conversation these authors have begun. Lend your voices to the dialogue by sending us papers on issues, practices, and resources or book reviews in teacher education that are important to you.

Editing *Excelsior* so far has allowed me to spur dialogues with many new colleagues and some old acquaintances. I would like to acknowledge the help of several people and groups who have supported the journal’s progress along the way. They are the members of NYACTE’s Executive Board; the National Editorial Board; the Editorial Review Board; my colleagues from SUNY College at Oneonta, especially Joanne Curran and Connie Feldt-Golden; NYACTE members for helping to spread the word about our calls; John Hamon, Editor of the New York State English Council’s Monograph; Kathleen O’Mara, Editor, and Nancy Sacco of *Phoebe: Gender and Cultural Critiques*. And, finally, my husband Mark and daughters Ann, Jill, and Kelly for sharing my excitement and anxieties about putting out this first issue.

Cynthia A. Lassonde
Editor
As part of the field experience, these students planned, taught, and analyzed at least four literacy-related lessons over the course of the semester. The analysis, report, and videotape sequence of each lesson was shared in pre- and post-teaching conferences with the course instructors. (Costa & Garmston, 1994) During these conferences, the lesson design prior to the lesson, the videotape sequences of the lesson, the discussion of the lesson, and the analysis and written reports of lesson analyses.

**Mentors**

The first cohort of five mentors was advised into the program when they set up their education coursework plan that included student teaching during the Fall semester and to serve as mentors for the final Spring semester. In subsequent years, students wishing to be mentors did so for their senior year. This enabled them to complete remaining coursework and to participate in the literacy field experience as students when completing their methods coursework. In addition, mentors performed the role of cognitive coach, providing high levels of content and student teaching examples, but also mentoring strategies that included coaching techniques (Costa & Garmston, 1994) during the program. The analysis, report, and videotape sequence of each lesson was shared in pre- and post-teaching conferences with the course instructors. (Costa & Garmston, 1994) During these conferences, the lesson design prior to the lesson, the videotape sequences of the lesson, the discussion of the lesson, and the analysis and written reports of lesson analyses.

**Why Mentor?**

Upon completion of their student-teaching semesters, a growing number of preservice teachers expressed their interest in mentoring with the course instructor. The first cohort of five mentors was advised into the program when they set up their education coursework plan that included student teaching during the Fall semester and to serve as mentors for the final Spring semester. In subsequent years, students wishing to be mentors did so for their senior year. This enabled them to complete remaining coursework and to participate in the literacy field experience as students when completing their methods coursework. In addition, mentors performed the role of cognitive coach, providing high levels of content and student teaching examples, but also mentoring strategies that included coaching techniques (Costa & Garmston, 1994) during the program. The analysis, report, and videotape sequence of each lesson was shared in pre- and post-teaching conferences with the course instructors. (Costa & Garmston, 1994) During these conferences, the lesson design prior to the lesson, the videotape sequences of the lesson, the discussion of the lesson, and the analysis and written reports of lesson analyses.

**Background**

In this program, junior-level undergraduates enrolled in the literacy block of courses were paired and assigned classroom settings for the duration of the study. The study consisted of two selected urban elementary schools. Both schools were described as socio-economically disadvantaged by 95% or more of their populations qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Mentors worked in selected classrooms one period per week for 13 weeks.

**Literacy Block and Field Experience**

In this program, junior-level undergraduates enrolled in the literacy block of courses were paired and assigned classroom settings for the duration of the study. The study consisted of two selected urban elementary schools. Both schools were described as socio-economically disadvantaged by 95% or more of their populations qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Mentors worked in selected classrooms one period per week for 13 weeks.
of a student she liked better to receive a special prize. I was anxious to distance myself from that toxic semester.

The mentoring program described herein was an elective experience open only to students who completed student teaching during the Fall semester. Too often, students who graduate and enter the workplace immediately after student teaching do not have formal opportunities to reflect and reconceptualize their understanding of what it means to teach. Exposure to various classroom environments and teaching philosophies during their education program and subsequent student-teaching assignment can leave students confused about their beliefs if not given further opportunities to reexamine them. Teacher education faculty observed that in the absence of such reflective opportunities, a number of promising teacher candidates were opting for nonteaching careers following what they considered less fulfilling student-teaching experiences.

In general, mentors offered several reasons for wishing to participate in this project. Mentors wished to challenge themselves by experiencing learning in a grade level in which they were less familiar. They hoped to share knowledge about content, teaching, and pedagogy they had developed since their field experience with less-experienced undergraduates. They expected to broaden and deepen their understanding of teaching and learning. Finally, they desired an opportunity to step back from the professional classroom and return to the academic classroom to clarify their professional directions.

Support for Mentoring

Research on mentoring documents its effectiveness in providing valuable professional development for both new and veteran teachers (Holloway, 2001). Wong (2002) identifies the critical role effective mentoring relationships can play in successful teacher-induction programs. Holloway (2002) cites statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics of 2001 indicating a growth in mentoring programs for beginning teachers and the benefit in improved instruction that teachers report from involvement in such programs. Rowley (1999) acknowledges the growth of mentoring programs and emphasizes the importance of careful selection and preparation for mentors. Rowley identifies six qualities of a good mentor. The good mentor is committed to the role of mentoring, is accepting of the beginning teacher, is skilled at providing instructional support, is effective in different interpersonal contexts, models continuous learning, and communicates hope and optimism.

Literature on mentoring also shows that various education groups have differing understandings of mentoring functions (Franke & Dahlgren, 1996) and that there are many approaches to the mentoring process (Williams, 1993). While mentoring is thoroughly explored for beginning teachers, there appears to be limited research on educational applications of mentoring in which undergraduates mentor fellow undergraduates during preservice development. Instead, studies generally describe experienced teachers who serve in the mentoring role (Holloway, 2001; Silva, 2000; Wong, 2002). Over several years, the author’s observations of professional interactions among undergraduate preservice teachers paired during their field experiences indicated potential for the benefits of a more formal mentoring process. Consequently, this mentoring program developed whereby preservice teachers formally mentored other preservice teachers as a means for both to develop more fully as professionals.

The Mentoring Program

During the mentoring semester, mentors were enrolled in a three- to six-credit graduate course devoted to the mentoring experience. Flexibility in credit assignment allowed mentors to best fit mentoring coursework into their credit load for the semester. In their prior role as students in the literacy field experience, mentors had experienced and become familiar with the four-lesson teaching cycle. Mentor responsibilities included the following:

1. Lesson plan review in which mentors discussed mentee lesson design accounting for content, objectives, management, learner special needs, and assessment.

2. Review/critique of videotaped lessons during which mentees shared with mentors segments of their videotaped lesson that they felt represented critical incidents in their learning about teaching. Mentees and mentor used each film session to collaboratively identify areas of strength and continued work.

3. Observations of mentees in the professional setting during their half-day field experience each week. Mentors focused on the interactions of mentees with cooperative teachers and elementary students.

4. Written dialogue and reflection regarding all aspects of the learning experiences for both mentors and mentees. Mentors also maintained a similar journal with the course instructor.

5. Attend weekly two-hour mentor seminars in which issues regarding effective mentoring were discussed.

Mentors worked with the course instructor to jointly complete one instructional cycle for each of their mentees prior to working with mentees on their own. During each weekly two-hour mentoring seminar, instructor and mentors discussed issues related to communications with mentees and strategies for providing effective feedback; explored literature related to supervisory/instructional coaching, assessment, and classroom management; and shared ideas for resolving conflicts encountered in mentoring relationships.

Methodology

Education Program

At the time of this study, education students at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, the site of this study, were required to complete methods coursework in science (3 credits), math (3 credits), literacy (6 credits), and social studies (3 credits). Generally, these courses were taken during a student’s junior and senior years with student teaching typically completed during the final semester of coursework. Literacy and math were taken concurrently during one semester while science and social studies were paired for another semester. The program’s most extensive field experiences occurred during the literacy block. This mentoring program grew out of that field experience.
Benefits

Across two semesters, nine senior-level undergraduates (all female) served as mentors to thirty-two junior-level undergraduates enrolled in a literacy block of coursework. All nine mentors enrolled in a graduate course that explored issues regarding mentoring and that had been designed for this program. Three mentors in the first cohort enrolled for six credits in the course while the remaining six mentors took the course for three credits. The three mentors with a heavier credit load in cohort one each mentored four students while the remaining two mentors worked with two mentees each. The course instructor worked with the remaining ten students. In cohort two, each mentor worked with four mentees and the course instructor worked with twelve students. One mentor, from cohort two, had been a mentee during cohort one of this study, and six of the nine mentors had completed their undergraduate field experience at one of the sites at which they mentored.

Mentors attended two-hour weekly seminars to explore issues of mentoring in general and to discuss specific concerns related to their mentoring experiences. They were required to read Ayers (1993) To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher prior to the beginning of the first weekly seminar.

Mentors kept a journal documenting their interactions with mentees and others in the field experience and reflected on all they experienced. Weekly seminars were audi-taped and a different mentor served as participant-observer collecting written field notes of each seminar. Analysis based upon qualitative methods included review of mentors’ reflective journals documenting experiences for this project, field notes of the weekly mentor/professor seminars, mentee journals, and transcriptions of audiotapes of the weekly mentor seminars.

Qualitatively, and with a focus on the research questions, analysis of data sources by mentors and professor sought to induce, derive, compare, and enrich themes, categories, and conclusions from the data through the use of grounded theory, constant comparative method, and analytical induction (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Collectively, each cohort of mentors and the professor reviewed data collected for a given semester of the program. Collaboratively, findings were categorized as they responded to the research questions.

What Was Learned?

Over the course of two semesters, this undergraduate mentoring project demonstrated that undergraduates who had already completed the literacy practicum and student teaching could effectively mentor fellow undergraduates. More importantly, for purposes of this article, it clearly illustrated that mentors grew in their understanding of the nature of collegial relationships and the role of coaching.

Benefits

Mentors displayed a commitment to personal and professional growth throughout each semester. Experiences with mentees helped mentors reflect on their educational beliefs and understandings. One mentor shared her thoughts on this development.

This [mentoring] is really helping me further define my own educational philosophy [regarding] classroom management, student/teacher relationships and interactions, the importance of reading and writing across the curriculum. My mentees ask me questions, too, that make me think and make me look at and talk about my beliefs and how I got to where I am.

Active engagement in mentoring provided an authentic setting for mentors to develop their supervisory techniques from a coaching perspective. Often, mentors’ prior experiences in the field came to bear on how they approached mentees. Mentors were sensitive to issues such as being nervous when observed while teaching. “I went to see Laura first and I knew she was sort of nervous so I decided to stand at the door for a minute to get a general feeling of what was going on in the room.” In addition, mentors learned that professional relationships gradually developed given requisite time and expertise. Toward the end of the semester, one mentor who struggled to develop a positive relationship with her mentee, acknowledged the evolving nature of building professional relationships.

I have had several occasions to plan and view [lessons] and I am feeling more comfortable with them and with asking questions. I think the more I do it, the better I will feel because we are developing a tie with each other.

In addition to their work with mentees, interactions with other mentors during seminars provided opportunities for mentors to address those issues most pressing to their work with mentees. As one mentor noted, the relevancy of these discussions was appreciated.

I felt like we went in a hundred different directions today [during mentor seminar]! It seemed as though we all had a bunch of things on our minds! I am really enjoying this time because we are discussing REAL issues. . . .

Increasingly, seminar discussions further challenged mentors to reflect on what they were learning regarding content and pedagogy as noted in the following mentor’s comment.

The first thing that came to mind when I began to think what was useful for me was how everything is related. I had thought about it before during the Reading/Language Arts class last year, but it finally made sense now, in and outside of the classroom. What really made it click was each seminar. We would start talking about each of our experiences and the different issues that arise and they all seemed to fit together. We all shared some experiences, but each of our mentees gave us new issues to think about. I found it amazing how connected all of the experiences we were having [were] as well as how our research fit into our discussion of our mentees. By the end of the semester, I found that it came very easy to find connections between things.

Over the course of the semester, mentors’ knowledge and expertise were recognized by the university instructor, the classroom teachers, and in most cases, their mentees.
I really enjoy going to class on Wednesday and talking with Sue. She is very encouraging and loves to share ideas with me. It is almost as if she considers me to be a colleague of hers.

Several mentors also began to analyze the course professor's interactions with their mentees in terms of their evolving beliefs regarding supervision. Their observations became more critical and informed. Journal reflections such as the following indicate one way mentors developed expertise as they assumed greater responsibility for teaching this past semester.

We talked about the social skill for a cooperative learning lesson, and I was trying to get her to think about having some kind of chart while brainstorming about how the kids would work in a group. It was so hard for me not to just say, “YOU NEED TO DO THIS!” although he was giving some of those directions. I remember talking about how if it is our idea then they won’t own it, and if you don’t own it, they don’t really get excited about it. She said “OK; quite a bit, but she didn’t really embrace the idea. I was really frustrated because I knew that if this student were given the time and the right questions, she could have come to those conclusions on her own.

All mentors believed their participation during the mentoring semester was instrumental to their growth as individuals and that it strengthened their convictions about their roles as future teachers. Although mentors were at times frustrated and concerned about the new, seemingly different and difficult role, they felt the mentoring experience helped them reflect upon and share their learning. The first cohort of five mentors co-wrote an accepted proposal to speak at an international conference; two members of the second cohort of four developed a manuscript. The third member of that cohort used the special interest research topic for a presentation. Still another mentor served as a consultant for the development of a laboratory school in a nearby school district.

We hope that you will be able to maintain the support we have now, and through our mentor relationship, continue to develop a life-long learner. I have tried to illustrate to my [class] the importance of being a life-long learner. This mentor relationship has been an especially rewarding and learning time for me. I could not have replaced it for anything. It far surpassed my expectations, and I can only hope that I will be able to maintain the support we have now, as well as into the future.

Most notably, mentors developed professional relationships with their professor and the best classroom teachers. These relationships were more collegial than the traditional professor-undergraduate student relationship. As one mentor noted:

Looking back, it becomes difficult to express all that I have learned and what I am going to bring with me into my first job. I know that the issue of professionalism will forever remain ingrained in my brain. I have seen how actions and behaviors can influence the way that others perceive you. The realization that I can be a researcher is one thing that I never would have dreamed about when I came to this university four years ago. I have gone through the process and I am not afraid of it, or the terms that are used about learning new things.

A mentor's support system can be made up of colleagues in a safe environment. At times, each mentor struggled with how to help mentors grow in their thinking about teaching. A number of mentors reported receiving their journals from their students and sharing them with their colleagues.

Challenges

At times, each mentor struggled with how to help mentors grow in their thinking about teaching. A number of mentors reported receiving their journals from their students and sharing them with their colleagues.
In addressing mentors' difficulties managing their time, follow mentors suggested that they make time to work on their own. Many mentors commented that they were trying so hard to do what they thought they should do that they were trying to be perfect, but sometimes, it just wasn't working. In fact, some mentors found that they were trying so hard to be perfect that they were preventing themselves from being perfect. One mentor expressed her sense of empathy for another mentor,

"I want to reassure her, but things that I say don't seem to have the same effect as if her mentees were all up to par. This reminds me of that feeling of failure. I know that many things can be learned during that process, but it's very discouraging."

Mentors also looked at their videotapes from their field experiences so they might better "know what to expect" from their mentees. They also voluntarily asked for feedback on their own teaching from other mentors during the seminars. This allowed them to reflect on their own teaching and to receive suggestions for improvement from their peers.

Commitment. Mentors were encouraged when noting potential and growth in their mentees. "She [mentee] has made so much progress in so many areas. I think she would make a wonderful mentor next year. She is very responsible, professional, and has the desire to learn." Mentors recognized the value of such qualities as they contributed to their mentoring effectiveness. Not all students, however, demonstrated an equal commitment to professional growth. Although mentors showed concern for all of their mentees, they were occasionally frustrated by mentees who seemed less willing to fully commit to their teaching experiences. As one mentor and the following mentor's comment captures that sentiment.

"I sat and watched Sarah during the seminar and she was trying so hard to do more. I just hope that I can offer support without inflicting my strong beliefs on the students that I work with! Of course, I want them to constantly question me and not solely for my knowledge and the process to be a good teacher. He [mentee] is not showing me that he is ready to be a professional."

Mentors varied in their abilities to balance their continued learning with a shared responsibility for their assigned mentees. Four mentors, in particular, were highly challenged throughout their mentoring semesters in their interactions with at least two of their mentees. These mentors struggled to find a reason why their mentees were not doing well. Reasons given included "low self-esteem," being "nervous," or not able to "take risks." Many times mentors were unsure whether they should "abandon" their charges or "push" them to reach them. One mentor lamented, "I don't think I can find the words to explain what I want to tell them. It's a process of learning and being patient with our mentees that I needed to learn the most."
help them….This seemed like a logical expectation for any student to have and thus I could appreciate where these students were coming from. Then I got a little angry at being doubted. In all honesty, I did have more experience in the field than these students. I think that it will just take time for everyone to relax and begin to see that the mentor/mentee relationship can be very beneficial to both parties.

Those mentors who tended to devote considerably more time to their mentees seemed to address this issue more successfully than did others. By mid semester of each of the two semesters of this study, one mentee began contacting the university professor to plan her lessons and/or review the videotape because she felt she was getting insufficient guidance and feedback from her mentor. Two mentors (one each semester) had difficulty consistently attending the field setting while their mentees were teaching. Relative to the other mentors, these two were also available less often for lesson planning sessions and for reviewing and reflecting on videotapes of their mentees’ lessons. When confronted with these issues, these mentors cited lack of time or the fact that the mentees “do not trust me in the mentoring role.”

Mentors were under pressure in a variety of contexts to demonstrate expertise in pedagogy, content, and the classroom environment. As they helped mentees plan lessons, they had to draw on their knowledge base in literacy instruction, and on their related experiences. It was not uncommon for mentors to think back to what they may have been like at similar points in their education. Reflecting on a lesson review session with two mentees, one mentor demonstrated such efforts.

I think I asked the “right” questions. I saw their minds churning and in their eyes, a reflection or image of [me] just last spring. They hadn’t heard about PROCESSING!! I briefly explained it. When did I learn about processing? Did I not know it then either?

**Conclusions and Implications**

Providing undergraduate education students with quality opportunities to experience the workings of actual classrooms through field experiences can greatly benefit preservice teachers in their professional development. Such experiences, however, require a great deal of support and supervision. A mentoring program such as described in this study offers a level of support for students in field experiences that may not be possible when one instructor is responsible for an entire class of students. For example, the teaching cycles and supervision required of students in the Literacy Methods field experience for this study required a minimum of eight hours per student for their lesson cycles and four hours per week on site for classroom observations. Adding qualified mentors to assume a measure of those supervisory responsibilities added to the feasibility and effectiveness of the field experiences. Five mentors and one course instructor on site each week provided a much greater level of supervision for each field experience student.

Results of this project informed work at Drake University’s School of Education. The field work associated with the undergraduate literacy methods coursework incorporated the mentoring component in its design, and students interested in being mentors were able to plan their programs to include the mentoring course load. The findings of this mentoring program indicate the potential such programs may have for enriching teacher-education experiences at other institutions.

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**References**


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**Author Biography**

Robert J. Nistler, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Education at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. His research interests include teacher development for the teaching of writing, family literacy, and processes of teacher change and development. Email: rjnistler1@stthomas.edu
Perceptions of Children’s Culture in an Urban School

Althier Lazar, Cathy Pinto, and Natalie Warren

Abstract

This article addresses teachers’ views about children’s culture in one urban elementary school that serves African-American students. Teachers described their culture, their students’ culture, and how they integrated understandings about culture into their instructional practices. Deficit views of children’s culture were evident in teachers’ descriptions, especially among European-American teachers who did not live in the city. Almost all teachers described children’s language abilities as deviant. Our findings reveal the need for cultural sensitivity education for teachers and more comprehensive research in the area of teachers’ attitudes and understandings about culture.
About half of the children served by urban school districts, many of which are multicultural and are not located in economically depressed neighborhoods, are children of color. Many of these children are African-American and are not educated in schools that are predominantly Black. In fact, these children are more likely to attend schools that are predominantly White or Hispanic. The problem is multifaceted and is shaped by a range of economic, political, social, and educational factors. In this article, we focus on one factor: teachers. This is not because we see teachers as the primary problem, but because the research suggests that teachers’ cultural sensitivity has been linked to school success (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 2001). Presently, however, not enough is being done to help teachers and administrators acquire understandings about children and their cultural communities, that would help them serve these children successfully.

Cultural sensitivity is the ability to understand the history, values, perceptions, and behaviors of members of particular groups of people, without judging these to be better or worse than those of any other group (Lazar, 2004). Cultural sensitivity is a defining characteristic of successful teachers, and their families, and their cultural communities. In the classroom, teachers respect students and their families, maintain high expectations of students, understand and validate children’s heritage and culture, and weave these cultural understandings into their teaching. The present environment leaves little room for teacher education in this area. The No Child Left Behind Act is not the only factor that marginalizes professional development in the area of cultural sensitivity. University programs that educate teachers are also complicit in the problem. During the 1990s, concerns about the low achievement rates of children of color in high-poverty communities led to an emphasis on helping teachers become more culturally sensitive. This was an attempt to address the generally recognized problem of a cultural disconnect between the largely mainstream population of teachers and a growing population of teachers who serve children in our lowest-performing schools. How do teachers who serve children in our lowest-performing schools view the cultural lives of the children they teach? Do they integrate, understand, and respect the children's language? How do they integrate, understand, and respect the children's cultural frames of reference? How do they hold culturally sensitive views? Teachers who share a cultural heritage with their students, may not be culturally sensitive. Teachers of color can hold negative views toward Black children's culture. In this study, we explore some of the perspectives teachers have about the cultural lives of the children they teach in one urban school and how these views may be shaped by teachers' own cultural orientations.
Next, we asked for similarities and differences in the ways teachers across different groups responded to the survey questions. Two primary themes surfaced in the written responses: children's culture and the ways in which they incorporate children's cultural sensitivity into their teaching. We then looked to see if particular categories of responses tended to occur within specific groups, whether cultural or demographic in nature.

We also asked teachers how they describe their culture and the cultures of their students. The interviews allowed us to explore teachers' understandings of children's culture in greater depth and to provide specific examples of how they describe their students' culture. We wondered how teachers perceived African-American children who attend urban schools and what degree of overlap existed between their descriptions of African-American culture and the communities where teachers lived (urban, suburban, rural). Our focus was on understanding the cultural perspectives held by teachers and the ways in which they incorporate these perspectives into their teaching.

The teachers who participated in the study taught at a public elementary school in Philadelphia that served approximately 900 children in kindergarten through sixth grade. The children who attended the school were predominantly African-American, and were eligible for the free-lunch program. All the teachers who participated in the study were white. We categorized the teachers into five groups, based on their cultural affiliations and the communities where they lived (urban, suburban, rural). The main goal was to understand the cultural perspectives held by teachers and the ways in which they incorporate these perspectives into their teaching.

Method

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Findings

Describing Children's Culture

Teachers' descriptions of children's culture aligned with either a "deficit" emphasis or a "descriptive" emphasis. Teachers who affiliated with particular cultural groups tended to describe children's culture in similar ways. Most of the teachers in Group 5 (European-American, suburban) and Group 3 (West Indian-American/Mixed Ethnic) framed their descriptions of children's culture around what the youngsters lacked with respect to the dominant culture. These teachers emphasized poverty and non-traditional family structures as factors that played a significant role in children's out-of-school lives. Examples include:

- Poor, lower socioeconomic, lack of stability and structure, little quality time with parents.
- Urban, rough neighborhood, priorities not there fully for jobs/education, close families, lack of responsibility for some.

One European-American teacher, a twenty-five year veteran of the school, described children's culture as being oppositional to school success primarily because parents' behaviors signaled they did not prioritize school.

There's a total lack of parent support with these kids. I can't believe that some report cards still sit in the mailboxes because they don't bother to pick them up. School is a low priority for them. How would I make kids do their homework? School is more of a babysitting service to these parents. It's not really about learning.

Other deficit-oriented descriptions focused on the social behaviors that they perceived as deviant. Children's inability to get along well with their peers was seen as a defining characteristic of these children's culture.

How would I describe kids' culture? They're aggressive, and they have a hard time expressing themselves or relating to each other. They don't have appropriate ways of solving problems.

These kids are antisocial, combative, and aggressive. They don't get along with each other and are constantly nit picking. All of their coping skills are the same. When they don't like something they cry, they whine, they complain, and they fight each other. This doesn't happen with the Korean child or the Latino child who [is] also in my class.

The European-American teachers who lived in the city tended to emphasize "differences" between themselves and their students but did not claim that children's culture was inferior to theirs. For instance, the teacher who had taken a graduate course in cultural studies emphasized how children's culture was shaped by their immediate neighborhood. Note how she uses the word different to describe children's culture:

It's a neighborhood culture. Everything that they do and talk about is related to this neighborhood. The thing is, they fight (with each other) one day and then they make friends the next day. They are so quick to judge each other and they react instantly. It's such a different way of relating to people than what I'm used to.

The African-American teachers (Groups 1 and 2) and some of the European-American uniformly emphasized a descriptive view of culture that included specific language about some of the divergent beliefs, practices, and relationships among different families in the context of their social communities. Generally, African-American teachers recognized sub-cultures within the category "African-American," whereas the European-American teachers did not. The following comment was typical: "The kids are mostly African-American and Christian, with a few Hispanics, Africans, and Muslims mixed in." Similarly, the European-American teachers living in the city discussed religious diversity within the community, such as the following: "(There is a) variety among African-American religions (Muslim, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christians)."

Most of the African-American teachers felt music was a key component of their students' culture. The following comments were typical of this group of teachers:

- I would describe their culture as urban, Hip Hop. They are into the latest fads including music. They love to socialize.
- I am aware of my students' clothing, music, religion, foods, and speech. They're into Hip Hop.
- Three of these teachers in Groups 1 and 2 included the phrase "Hip Hop," to describe children's culture. This descriptor applied to more than just a musical style; it referred to aspects of dress and language use. One teacher indicated that part of the Hip Hop culture is to be seen, and she described her sixth-graders as loving the spotlight. African-American teachers also tended to emphasize children's sociability as a positive characteristic.

While African-American teachers did not describe children from the perspective of social or economic pathology, some judged children's situations as being unfortunate or undesirable.

- There's a mixture of families and extended families, but some kids are raising themselves. It's sad.
- Many eat fast food because their parents work so they don't have time to make dinner. I think that's horrible.
- One teacher used the term tragic to describe situations in which caregivers are not able to do things that would promote children's success in school (providing
consistently expressed after school, helping children with homework, providing healthy meals. Finally, one of the African-American teachers described her experience in terms of student's ability to take risks. She noted: "They are willing to try new things, but many need a push. They need structure but with flexibility."

These findings show that teachers' descriptions of children's culture were consistent across the groups. For example, one African-American teacher described her students' culture as diverse, reflecting both traditional and contemporary influences. She noted: "Our students come from different backgrounds and have unique perspectives that enrich our classroom."

Other African-American teachers also highlighted the importance of cultural diversity in their teaching. One teacher stated: "We incorporate stories and materials that reflect the variety of cultures in our school, which helps our students appreciate different ways of life." Similarly, one European-American teacher described her students' culture as a mix of traditional and modern influences, noting: "Our students come from different parts of the world, and this diversity enriches our classroom activities."
Children’s Culture

indicated they modeled Standard English and corrected students in conversational situations. The following examples typify the approach used by these teachers: Sometimes I correct them when they speak or ask a question. Speaking Standard English (modeling); exposing them to various examples of Standard English being spoken.

I help my students by modeling and making them feel comfortable. The results indicate that African-American teachers tended to help children acquire Standard English through spontaneous, informal, and verbal interactions. What is not revealed in these data (and substantial research) is the complexity of the teacher’s role in helping children acquire Standard English. The teacher would need to use a variety of approaches towards helping children acquire Standard English.

Discussion and Implications

The goal of the study was to determine teachers’ perceptions about children’s culture—specifically their language—and to explore links between these views and teachers’ own cultural backgrounds. The results indicated that there were significant differences between the views and cultural backgrounds of teachers from different cultural groups. For example, teachers who described themselves as “cultural outsiders” with respect to their students tended to view children’s culture in terms of cultural divides. The other group of teachers, who described themselves as “cultural insiders,” tended to view children’s culture in terms of cultural similarities. These findings reveal that teachers’ perceptions about children’s culture are shaped by their own cultural backgrounds.

Professional development programs that challenge stereotypes of children and their communities need to be critical, inquiry-based, and involving continuous reflection. There are several avenues of inquiry that can help teachers interrogate the shifting and complex nature of culture and language. For example, the changing cultural and linguistic landscape of many communities has helped teachers become more culturally sensitive. Understanding the changing and transformative nature of culture is important for teachers if they are to build curriculum and instruction that is reflective of children's experiences.
Deficit perspectives of children's culture persist even though it has been recognized for more than a decade that cultural sensitivity is a key attribute of successful teachers of diverse backgrounds. Early childhood intervention: The social science has become institutional racism. Black dialect and academic success: A study of teacher expectations. Reading Improvement, 25, 34-38.

For instance, one can be a wealthy Irish-American female, Democrat, lover of opera, atheist, and lesbian. That person may be privileged by virtue of her race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation, but she may experience discrimination in various forms. As part of an examination of one's culture, it is important to include an investigation of one's linguistic heritage. Many of European-American teachers we interviewed talked about their parents and grandparents learning English during the immigration wave of the early twentieth century. They have a deep understanding of the social and historical issues that have shaped the history of their language. They also need to question their own beliefs about English language subgroups. As a result, they are making conscious efforts to diversify their instruction and to include children's cultural backgrounds in their teaching. The point is that the English language is still evolving, prompting questions about what constitutes the standard in Standard English.

In the classroom, teachers need to invite students' out-of-school lives into the classroom. Avenues for inquiry include studying children's popular culture, using literature that mirrors children's lives, and relating other content (history, mathematics, science) to real issues and problems that define their local community. The extant research supports making cultural sensitivity education a priority for educators. The research also points to the need for increased support for educators who are working in diverse schooling environments. This requires studies that explore cultural sensitivities and their impact on academic achievement. It is crucial that educators who work in schools that reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the nation understand the importance of cultural sensitivity and how it can be integrated into their teaching.


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**Sharing Perspectives and Practices**

**Open Discussion: Revisiting Nystrand’s Dialogic Approach**

**Wen Ma**

**Abstract**

In this essay Nystrand’s dialogic approach for teaching and learning English language and literature is revisited. This approach emphasizes the use of authentic question and uptake for the students to make substantive discussion and for developing their literate thinking. Then, some theoretical and pedagogical implications of this approach are discussed in light of a sociocultural view of learning.

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**Author Biographies**

Althier M. Lazar, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor at Saint Joseph’s University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she teaches courses in literacy education. Her research interests include preparing teachers for urban schools and using culturally responsive literature in elementary classrooms. Email: alazar@sju.edu

Cathy Pinto teaches special education classes at Gateway Regional High School in Woodbury Heights, New Jersey. She is a doctoral student at Widener University in Chester, Pennsylvania. Email: catpina@msn.com

Natalie Warren is a first-grade teacher at Glenwood Elementary School in Short Hills, New Jersey, where she is involved in curriculum restructuring. Email: nrw317@gmail.com
In recent years, numerous discussion-based programs (e.g., Daniels, 2001; Langer, 1995; McMahon & Raphael, 1997) have been developed to tap the dialogic potential for learning literacy and English. These programs, such as those involving the use of open-ended questions and the sharing of personal experiences, have been shown to be effective in improving students' literacy skills.

Among the varied classroom discussion models, Nystrand (1997) conducted important research on classroom discourse and advocated a dialogic approach for learning English language and literature. Nystrand (1997) found that the monologic model, which dominated classroom discourse, limited students' participation and hindered their ability to engage deeply with the material.

In the following, I attempt to analyze the important components of this dialogic approach based on Nystrand's seminal work on classroom discourse. Then, I discuss its theoretical and pedagogical implications, focusing on some instructional considerations in implementing this model.

### Authentic Question and Uptake

Why is student-centered discussion educationally so valuable? How is discussion used as a tool for extending the students' learning and thinking? Let us begin by taking a closer look at how Nystrand arrived at the dialogic model. His colleagues and he examined classroom discourse in a variety of settings, including secondary schools and schools within the United States. Based on their analysis, Nystrand concluded that the predominant classroom discourse mirrored the monologic model, characterized by teacher-dominated discussions where students' participation was limited.

Nystrand (1997) thus called for student-centered dialogue for teaching and learning literature, the central concept of which is the use of authentic questions and uptake. "Almost all teachers’ questions," Nystrand maintained, "required students to recall what someone else had said, not to articulate, examine, elaborate, or revise what they had said." As a result, the predominant classroom discourse sounded like recitation and echoed the Initiate-Respond-Evaluate (IRE) pattern (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979).

In contrast, Nystrand drew on Bakhtin (1981), Vygotsky (1978), and a number of other scholars to develop the theoretical foundation for his dialogic approach. Nystrand’s model emphasizes the use of authentic questions and uptake in order to facilitate deeper and more substantive dialogic exchanges.

### A Sociocultural View of Learning

Nystrand drew on Bakhtin (1981), Vygotsky (1978), and a number of other scholars to develop the theoretical foundation for his dialogic approach. This approach is based on the premise that dialogic interactions, centered around the two key concepts of authentic questions and uptake, facilitate the student’s learning and thinking through dynamic and engaging discussions in the classroom. Specifically, this framework makes a number of important assumptions about dialogic interactions for learning literacy and literature.

First, dialogic interaction in the classroom provides the needed context for one to engage with the literary text. Furthermore, the dialogic interaction draws the participants’ attention to the specific content or issues the perception, formulation, and articulation that extend and advance their thinking and understanding. In addition, dialogic interactions provide optimal opportunities for individuals to talk it out. In this process, the individual’s thinking becomes more transparent, and the interactivity between the participants provides a rich context for learning.

Nevertheless, just as discussion-oriented research and theory have illuminated that discussions can spur one’s thinking and encourage reflective reading and writing, discussions as well require one’s intellectual engagement and critical thinking.
Open Discussion

with the text, as research and theory about reading-writing relationships have clearly shown (e.g., Olson, 1994). Martin, D’Arcy, Newton, and Parker’s (1976) work further suggests strong connections between adolescents’ reading and writing (cf. Lewis, 2001; Miller, 1992; Morita, 2004), resulting in a significant impact on their learning processes. Wildey’s (2002) results indicate that students who actively engage with the text and discuss their ideas with peers develop a more critical understanding of the material.

Moreover, previous research indicated the importance of active listening to students’ success. A study by Nystrand (2001) found that students who were actively engaged in classroom discussions demonstrated a higher level of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Similarly, a recent study by Applebee et al. (2003) showed that discussion-based approaches to developing understanding in middle and high school English were effective in enhancing students’ performance.

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Journaling in a Video Environment: What Teachers Have Learned from the Process

Joanne Kilgour Dowdy

Abstract

Graduate students in a literacy course were engaged in learning interview skills for video, writing an edit script, and editing their first video presentations. They also posted responses on a listserv, as members of a dialogue journal community, to three books that were required reading for the course. Their growth as teachers, writers, and video producers is presented in the ways they talked about writing and teaching.
Video Journaling

Video Journaling

Journaling as a form of learning and reflecting has been with us since the time of Julius Caesar, St. Augustine, and Samuel Pepys (Conhaim & Page, 2003). The journal is most commonly defined as writing that centers on personal thoughts and events as it allows the writer to focus his or her responses on experiences (Kandt, 1994). We now use many forms of journaling at the college level to coax students into the habitual cycle of (a) reading, (b) writing, (c) reflecting, (d) writing, and (e) reading. This writing process facilitates students' confidence in their ability to communicate through the written word (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1986; Graves, 2002). Journal writing operates as a window through which teachers observe the strengths and weaknesses of each student in their understanding of the content being studied (Stanton, 1988). Dialogue journal writing, for instance, allows students to share their thoughts in writing over a period of time, and each party has an equal opportunity to respond to the journal entries posted on a list (Stanton, Shuy, Kreeft, & Reed, 1982).

As early as 1985, Carole Cox wrote about the importance of the composing process that filmmaking facilitated. The production process of filmmaking is also documented as a means to assess content knowledge, writing skills, and research skills (Doig & Sargent, 1996) and can, therefore, be seen as a way to enhance the language arts. In other contexts, like the filmmaking projects of the students who collaborated on youth videos (Dowdy, Reedus, Anderson-Thompkins, & Heim, 2004), participants also commented about the life skills they learned through their participation in the video production process. Journaling with video technology consequently brought about a level of language facility that was enhanced by the images that the students created in their video interviews.

Two Forms of Journals

In a class for experienced teachers called Literacy Stories/Video Writing, a culture of two kinds of journal writing was established throughout the spring semester of 2003. Students were asked to write dialogue journals and create video journals. Dialogue journals allowed students to share their thoughts in writing over a period of time, and each party had an equal opportunity to respond to the journal entries posted on a list. Dialogue journaling, according to Stanton, Shuy, and Reed (1982), allows participants to carry on an extended conversation. This is one form of journaling, and it allows the teacher to develop and guide the students’ progress. Both dialogue and video journals encourage a democratic spirit of learning by treating each student as a learner who has something to share with the group.

Two Forms of Journals

Two forms of journaling were introduced to the group in the seminar: dialogue journals and video journals. Dialogue journals allowed students to share their thoughts in writing over a period of time, and each party had an equal opportunity to respond to the journal entries posted on a list. Dialogue journaling, according to Stanton, Shuy, and Reed (1982), allows participants to carry on an extended conversation. This is one form of journaling, and it allows the teacher to develop and guide the students’ progress. Both dialogue and video journals encourage a democratic spirit of learning by treating each student as a learner who has something to share with the group.

Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning

Dewey (1938) wrote that experience is the basis of growth toward a positive outcome. He also believed that an organic connection between education and life is essential for growth. This “growing” should move outside the classroom and into the real world. The course Literacy Stories/Video Writing was offered at Oberlin College as a seminar for five doctoral students preparing to join the teaching profession. This course was designed to provide students with a hands-on experience in creating video, which they could then incorporate into their own classrooms as a new form of communication. The students were encouraged to think about their own experiences and how they could be used to facilitate learning in the classroom. This approach to learning was designed to help students develop skills in critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication, which are essential for success in today’s technologically savvy world.
Students were asked to write entries on a listserv in response to the chapters from the books; make transcripts of the video interviews and post them to the listserv so they could be discussed in class, and bring in the footage with video interviews for review.

The first journal activity involved commenting each week on selected chapters in three books: *Lives on the Boundary* (Rose, 1990), *The Skin That We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Learning in the Classroom* (Delpit and Dowdy, 2003), and *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy* (Purcell-Gates, 1995). The graduate students, one a student in a master's program and all the others in a doctoral program for literacy studies or educational foundations, were asked to post their journal entries on the listserv by a certain date before the class met. In this type of journal (Ross, 1998) students ask questions about the chapters they have read. The participants were allowed to share their personal stories, reflect on education and social issues and their own experiences, or respond with information they gathered in their classes. The journal activity allowed the students to reflect on their personal experiences in relation to the readings, the class discussions, and their own lives.

At the start of the semester students were inclined to review the assigned chapters in a formal tone, as if they were submitting their writing to an academic journal. I have indicated the date of the entry on the listserv at the end of each quote from the graduate students. The names used are pseudonyms.

**Tim's first journal entry states:**

Unlike *Hunger for Memory: Lives on the Boundary* (Rose, 1990), the chapter on *Lives on the Boundary* deviates from the hackneyed model of the educational Horatio Alger story, where the subject's will to learn takes center stage. Rose never forgets how narrowly he missed the fate of his Voc Ed buddies, and the real heroes of the story are folks like Jack McFarland, Frank Carothers, and Ted Erlandson: educators who helped stimulate his mind while offering alternatives to the quiet despair of a working-class neighborhood. (2.03.03)

**Judy's tone when she opens her response in Journal 4:**

*The Skin That We Speak* is one of the most powerful reads I've had the pleasure of experiencing. I've so far made a list of all the ways I've enhanced my knowledge base as a human being andpuer. (4.07.03)

These two journal entries give an indication of the different approaches the students developed over the course of the semester. People moved from a formal tone to a friendlier, more collegial one, by the end of the semester. The online discussions, in-class exchanges, and video interview reviews helped all of us to promote a more intimate form of communication by the end of the semester, experiencing the journey as a business as usual.
Video Journaling

Video clips from several of the interviews that the teachers conducted were then selected to represent each kind of question, prompt, or follow-up strategy used in the interviews. The teachers used these clips to discuss with their classmates the language and form of these questions and how they came to be in the job they presently held. The second interview was based on a question about what they needed to say and how it related to the video screen. This process, as we all experienced, was a form of journaling that adapted as well to the video composition making decisions about video images, script writing, and the editing process.

As with the research reported by Banks-Wallace (1998), the graduate students also found that participants in an interview were more willing to tell stories from their previous experiences if they felt comfortable with the interviewer. Because each of the students interviewed someone with whom they had a relationship from school, this comfortable atmosphere during the interviews was not a problem. An example of the prior knowledge that the students included in the final edit script for their video presentation was: "If you want to stop or go at any time, just tell me. Okay. How are you feeling?"

The final step in the interview protocol involves closing the interview. The students found in their journey with the interview series that there are several ways to bring the interview to a close. In this class of experienced teachers, the process of creating interview protocols, video and tape recording interviews, writing an edit script as a group, and then editing the video into a ten-minute product that told a story, facilitated reflection and enhanced learning. Discussing the way in which video recording can facilitate reflection and enhanced learning, we considered the way in which the interviews proceeded to a successful conclusion, the "good questions" showed the interviewer (a) "creating rapport" at the beginning of an interview; (b) seeing the "potential in the emerging story and knowing how and what to ask in order to reach a deeper level," and (c) avoiding the "missed... from the comment. These were descriptions the students included in the final edit script for their video presentation.

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A "pitfall" in video interviewing skills, according to the students, would show the interviewer was not impartial to the person or information offered by the interviewee. The class decided, to avoid this pitfall, to make their interviews a "good brush-stroke" of questions that allowed the participants to focus on their own experiences and the "open-ended" questions that allowed the interviewer to "sustain the story." This type of questioning encouraged the participants to think about their experiences in a way that allowed the interviewer to capture the essence of their responses. The students found that using "open-ended" questions allowed them to capture the essence of their responses and encouraged the participants to think about their experiences in a way that allowed the interviewer to capture the essence of their responses.

As with the research reported by Banks-Wallace (1998), the graduate students also found that participants in an interview were more willing to tell stories from their previous experiences if they felt comfortable with the interviewer. Because each of the students interviewed someone with whom they had a relationship from school, this comfortable atmosphere during the interviews was not a problem. An example of the prior knowledge that the students included in the final edit script for their video presentation was: "If you want to stop or go at any time, just tell me. Okay. How are you feeling?"

The class chose a clip from Dee's video script as an example of an interviewer being home schooled, we heard Dee coaxing the interviewee with her comments: "If you want to stop at any time, just tell me. Okay. How are you feeling?"

"Okay. That's all right. Just forget the camera is up there, just that we would be having a discussion about video images, script writing, and the creation of a writing community."
Responses to Learning Video Writing

Here are the responses to learning video writing:

The class was divided into three major steps:

1. \textbf{Beginning the interview, which includes creating rapport, and grand tour questions.}
2. \textbf{Conducting the interview, which includes probing, two interviewing pitfalls, the missed opportunity, the journalistic style, sustaining the story, broad brush-strokes, and filling in the blanks.}
3. \textbf{Ending the interview, which includes restating information and seeking clarification; inviting the participant to provide new or additional information; asking the participant’s advice and counsel; and, finally, allowing the participant to evaluate the story experience.}

Much like the cycle of meaning that Pierce and Gilles (1993) discussed in their work, the process of creating writing in community begins with an idea and moves on to the actual writing process, where the participants collaborate and create a product that is both meaningful and effective within and beyond their immediate community.

As previously mentioned, lister entries about the books we read represented students’ willingness to let go of “academic language” and allow their personal experiences to inform their writing. By making these connections, the teachers found that this approach encouraged students to engage more deeply with the material and to reflect on their own experiences and perspectives. Through this collaborative process, students developed a deeper understanding of the literature and of the process of creating writing in community.
Lessons Learned

Journaling helps students connect their personal experiences to the content they are learning (Conhaim & Page, 2003). The learning that evolved from this class did not only take place through the readings and creation of a video presentation. Learning also occurred in the discussions about the readings and reflections on the video interviewing journey. The time students took to write about their feelings and reactions to the three books and video transcripts, download from the listserv, and view film footage allowed them to step back from their emotions and begin to analyze their understandings on the material they were learning. When we looked at video clips from the interviews done outside of class, we were, in essence, reviewing the journal entries of the interviewers and witnessing the learning process from each individual's perspective. The video interviews gave us a chance to learn of each other's research interests. Pam interviewed her friend who had surgery to help her lose weight; Lillian interviewed a colleague who was the director of a research unit that focused on General Educational Diploma graduates at the university; and Dee interviewed children in her neighborhood who were being home-schooled. The class learned to appreciate the styles each person represented as they developed their research interests and informed their choices as interviewers with their interviewees.

Val was quoted in a video edit on the final presentation as saying, “I think one thing that stands out in your mind about your education is...” Also, the group took note and learned from the kinds of experiences that shaped the interviewers' responses to the information that was being shared by the interviewees. Val was quoted in the final edit script as asking, “Looking back, is there anything that you feel you missed out on, or that you would want to do over or change about your education?” The group took note and learned from the kinds of experiences that shaped the interviewers' responses to the information that was being shared by the interviewees.

By sharing her experiences on the issues of race and language in her email posting, some of the class members were able to untangle some of their conflicting feelings. Val's email posting also allowed the class to see that despite the differences in skin, personality, and cultural expression, we are all ultimately the same. The video interviewing journey also gave the class a wider range of opportunities to show their expertise in an area in which the instructor was a facilitator. Letting the group choose their topics and find their voice in the final presentation allowed them to control the conversation.

Reading the listserv messages was as equally important as reading the images on the television screen when we watched the interviews on video tape. Operating with many forms of language, the students were able to share their experiences with each other. For example, by sharing her experiences on the issues of race and language, some of the class members were able to untangle some of their conflicting feelings. Val was quoted in the final edit script as saying, “I think one thing that stands out in your mind about your education is...” We understand that she was basing her question on her friend's dissatisfaction with her life as an engineer.

In this process of creating and then reviewing journals, we learned to listen closely to the writer's voice and develop our observation skills. We learned to reflect on our experiences and develop a deeper understanding of the material we were learning. The video interviewing journey also gave us a chance to learn of each other's research interests. Pam interviewed her friend who had surgery to help her lose weight; Lillian interviewed a colleague who was the director of a research unit that focused on General Educational Diploma graduates at the university; and Dee interviewed children in her neighborhood who were being home-schooled. The class learned to appreciate the styles each person represented as they developed their research interests and informed their choices as interviewers with their interviewees.
In this process of turning over the reins of control to the students, they learned a ritual about the practice of video composition that they would carry with them throughout their academic career. The ritual that was intended to be passed on to their students. In essence, my actions and choices showed a belief that students in our classrooms have a high level of expertise in film and video composition, and we would be wise to give them a space in which they could explore, develop, and celebrate these skills (Dowdy, 2005).

Imitating Murata (1997), the classroom was designed to facilitate their experience of the joys and challenges of this kind of writing composition. For the first five weeks of the semester, they wanted to be told about a defined product and directions to get that "right" result and the "perfect" grade that went with it. My insistence that they do the journey and discover the product awaiting them at first made a few people irritable. However, when Dee brought in a rough edit of her video presentation it changed the atmosphere in the class for the days. She also had a husband who taught video technology at a high school before completing his dissertation on video composition. We were fortunate this teacher had the support system that made it possible for her to venture out into unknown territory as a video producer. Dee's video story was well-lit, the sound quality was good, and the participants were engaging. By the time Dee got feedback on the quality of the video production from the class, she admitted that she had experienced the kind of support for a writing assignment she had not enjoyed before that occasion. She subsequently went home and revised the video presentation to create a shorter version and then constructed an outline of a journal article that discussed the issue of home-schooling in the state where she was raising her daughter. Dee later presented her video and research at the 2003 National Reading Conference in Scottsdale, Arizona.

At well and challenges of this kind of writing composition. In other words, where we were told about the product and directions to get that "right" result and the "perfect" grade that went with it. My insistence that they do the journey and discover the product awaiting them at first made a few people irritable. However, when Dee brought in a rough edit of her video presentation it changed the atmosphere in the class for the days. She also had a husband who taught video technology at a high school before completing his dissertation on video composition. We were fortunate this teacher had the support system that made it possible for her to venture out into unknown territory as a video producer. Dee's video story was well-lit, the sound quality was good, and the participants were engaging. By the time Dee got feedback on the quality of the video production from the class, she admitted that she had experienced the kind of support for a writing assignment she had not enjoyed before that occasion. She subsequently went home and revised the video presentation to create a shorter version and then constructed an outline of a journal article that discussed the issue of home-schooling in the state where she was raising her daughter. Dee later presented her video and research at the 2003 National Reading Conference in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Future Directions

The implications for future use of this journal approach in classrooms point in the direction of quality facilities for video production, without the adequate support of technology that are also video composition will remain still a distant dream. The idea of the production process is to be able to experiment with video cameras in the home, rather than in highly sophisticated, costly facilities for video production. Without the adequate support of technology that are also video composition will remain still a distant dream. The idea of the production process is to be able to experiment with video cameras in the home, rather than in highly sophisticated, costly facilities for video production. Without the adequate support of technology that are also video composition will remain still a distant dream.
Nota Bene: Book Corner

World-Event Trauma Enters the Classroom: Can Teachers Support Students When Madmen Are Running the World?

Abigail McNamee and Mia Mercurio

The way we think about life and our own safety changed after September 11, 2001. Although the attacks occurred five years ago, the incidents of terrorism that have followed allow for no possibility of returning to an earlier illusion of safety. The events of September 11 and the post-September 11 world have heightened fears in all of us: children, adolescents, college students, and teacher educators. They have heightened our sense of vulnerability as we see and imagine details of the current war on terror and recognize the potential for future acts of violence. These events should have affected how we educate teachers.

Teachers, and the students we teach, need help as we try to make sense of, and function in, a world that seems to be run by madmen: a world where “the sky can fall, thousands die, war is proclaimed, and our sense of safety and security disappears in a day” (Greenman, 2001, p. 6). Unfortunately, we cannot create environments in which safety is guaranteed. What we can do is create environments that are physically and psychologically as safe as we can make them. Children and adolescents need the illusion that they are safe—they need to feel safe—they can develop in a healthy way (McNamee & Mercurio, in press). But it is an “illusion” because in reality safety is never guaranteed for anyone. Traumatic events are often experienced vicariously in students’ lives, but they are also sometimes experienced first-hand. Teachers need help in coping with each type of event.

Janoff-Buhlman (1992) describes the “shattering of illusions”—one of them being the illusion of safety—that takes place when we experience trauma. Mudlaff (2000) writes that when children experience violence their belief system is called into question:

Author Biography

Joanne Kilgour Dowdy, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Adolescent/Adult Literacy at Kent State University in the department of Teaching, Leadership, and Curriculum and Instruction. Her major research interests include women and literacy, drama in education, and video technology in qualitative research instruction. Email: jkilgour@kent.edu
Such children’s sense of security and safety has been threatened, which cannot help but change their view of the world. This is a very real loss for a child and should be viewed as an experience that causes grief, much like the death of someone they love. (p. 30)

When children and adolescents become vicariously aware of war, large-scale violence, and terrorism, their illusion of safety may become bruised. When they experience these events first-hand, their illusion of safety may be much more seriously damaged. The bruising may take the form of worrying about whether the adults in their life, whom they have assumed to be powerful enough to guarantee their safety, may not be able to keep them safe; more serious damage may take the form of fear of loss, or actual loss, of family members, friends. When either happens, the illusion of safety needs to be re-established. Teachers need to be able to respond when students experience vicarious traumatic events. As on September 11, they sometimes experience the traumatic event first-hand themselves while being the first-responders for their students.

We cannot avoid integrating, into our teacher-education programs, help for teachers in creating or recreating an illusion of safety. Such help does exist in the form of literature focused on trauma produced before and after 2001 and written for adult- and child-readers. Texts focused on trauma existed previously for professionals; children’s books also existed, focusing primarily on war. What follows, however, is a small sampling of what has become available after the traumatic attacks of September 11, 2001. These resources offer specific information on how children, adolescents, and adults react to traumatic events and information on what is needed. Some resources offer a model that can be adapted to new traumatic events of how teachers and others responded.

For Teachers

What Happened to the World? Helping Children Cope in Turbulent Times
Written by Jim Greenman
BrightHorizons.com (2001)
Available as a download at no charge at http://www.brighthorizons.com/talk to children/docs/whathapp.pdf

Written soon after September 11, this small book begins:

Children’s lives have always been marked by change. Each day brings new revelations that life is filled with storms as well as sunshine. No child ultimately escapes from the experience of fear, loss, grief, and trauma. But extraordinary events that shatter the sense of security of everyone they know and love put a particular pressure on the adult in their lives to be at their best as parents and caregivers (p. 6).

Greenman beautifully organizes the information contained in this book addressing how we feel when children need our help, common emotional reactions to trauma, common changes in behavior, taking care of yourself while understanding and supporting children...and these topics are just the beginning, a preparation for what teachers need to be effective. The balance of the book is divided by the particular needs of children according to age: children under three, preschool children, elementary school-age children, and junior and high-school children. It concludes with changes we can implement to help children cope with stress, how to answer children’s questions, issues of military service and respect for others, tips for teachers, and websites on children and stress.

Forever After: New York City Teachers on 9/11
Anthology Collected by Teachers College Press
Forward by Michelle Fine and Maxine Greene

This collection of essays, just released in July, is written by teachers in the New York City public schools. It documents the experiences many teachers in New York City faced in caring for their students on September 11, 2001, and for many days, months, and years after.

For Students

September 12th: We Knew Everything Would Be All Right
Written by students of Masterson Elementary School in Kennett, Missouri
New York: Scholastic (2002)
Recommended for ages 5 and up

With the help of their teacher, the 18 children in Robertson’s first-grade class tell the story of September 11 and 12 in their words. They also created all the artwork presented in the story. The book begins with a description of the events of September 11. The following pages, however, concentrate on the next day: “September 12 was a new day. We knew everything would be all right, because...the sun came up and the birds started to sing again.” The book ends with the sun coming up yet again, one day later. The last page is a strong reminder of the book’s message: “NOT the end.”

The first-graders are candid with the reader not only in their words but in their drawings. The vocabulary is uniquely a first-grader’s lexicon. The child-authors are the narrators, and readers learn about their feelings through the children’s words and drawings. A child-reader could easily identify with the children who wrote this story knowing that other children experienced what they experienced and felt as they did. Many children experienced September 11 in much the same way as did the authors themselves.

This book does a remarkable job of helping the child-reader understand it is acceptable to feel frightened, because writers—their peers—have expressed the same feeling. The refrain “everything would be all right” is repeated throughout the book. Common experiences, such as going back to school, seeing a teacher’s smiling face, reading stories, and singing the National Anthem, have helped children across America feel safe again.
On That Day
Written by Andrea Patel
Recommended for ages 3 and up

On That Day responds to the violent events of September 11. The book’s message suggests that even though bad things happen in the world, individual people always have a choice to do good things. The author uses language young children can understand, explaining that “sometimes bad things happen because people act in mean ways and hurt each other on purpose.” Although there are no specific characters in this book, the author draws the child-reader into a shared experience. She writes, “Whether you’re three years old, or thirteen years old, or thirty years old, or one-hundred and three years old, you can help.” The book goes on to list all the things a child-reader can do, such as sharing, playing, laughing, and being kind to others. The story reassures the child that “when bad things happen, only a small piece of the world breaks. Not the whole world.” The author takes the position that ultimately the goodness of people will win over badness.

Children are encouraged to feel they are not alone, that many people felt fearful, sad, or angry when the United States was attacked on September 11. The book attempts to reassure readers and help them feel it is appropriate for them to experience fear, sadness, anger, and anxiety about violent events.

Additional Titles

Here are other books teachers and their students may find helpful:

Understanding September 11th: The Right Questions about the Attacks on America
Written by Mitch Frank
Recommended for ages 8 and up

Written by a Time magazine reporter, this book is organized in the format of questions that young people may ask about the events. Frank answers the questions in an honest and easy-to-understand fashion.

The Day That Was Different: September 11, 2001: When Terrorists Attacked America (It’s Happening to U.S.)
Written by Carole Marsh
Chicago, IL: Gallopade International Press (2001)
Recommended for ages 4 through 8

This is a factual, yet sensitive, book that provides information for children to understand in an easy-to-read manner. Topics include:
  • Other Days That Were Different
  • The Government in Charge: What Happens When America Suffers an Attack?

The New York Times: A Nation Challenged, Young Reader’s Edition
Written by the staff of The New York Times
NY: Scholastic (2002)
Recommended for ages 9 through 14

Created on the first anniversary of September 11, the editors and staff of The New York Times published pictures and text that had run originally in The Times over the previous year. They succeeded in finding age-appropriate material for the recommended age group.

With Their Eyes: September 11th—The View from a High School at Ground Zero
Written by Annie Thomas
Recommended for ages 12 and up

This book was written by an English teacher at Stuyvesant High School, which was located four blocks from the World Trade Center. The collection of ten student interviews allows the reader to understand a unique perspective of that day from a group of unlikely observers.

Dog Heroes of September 11th: A Tribute to America’s Search-and-Rescue Dogs
Written by Nona Kilgore Bauer
Recommended for ages 10 and up

Although it took five years after September 11 for this book to be written, it was worth the wait. This book tells the courageous stories of many search-and-rescue dogs and their handlers at Ground Zero, the Pentagon, and the Fresh Kills Landfill. Readers will learn about the heroic efforts of man and animals alike.
Final Thoughts

The title of this Book Corner is taken from Charles Simic’s (2006) poem entitled “Madmen Are Running the World” that recently appeared in The New Yorker. While the poem itself is somewhat oblique and probably meant to be a metaphor of a world gone mad, run by mad…well, persons, the title captures the time in which we live and teach. Our world, now, is not only difficult to understand but dangerous. Our illusion of safety is vulnerable as we experience vicariously and first-hand a world that has seemingly gone mad. Teachers and their students are left coping with this new reality. We believe these resources may help.

References


Author Biographies

Abigail McNamee, Ed.D., Ph.D., is Chair of the Department of Early Childhood at Lehman College/City University of New York, professor of early childhood, and a child psychotherapist. Her research interests include children’s conceptualization of their cultural group, death, and divorce, as well as helping children cope with stress and trauma. Email: abigail.mcnamee@lehman.cuny.edu

Mia Mercurio, Ed.D., is Assistant Professor of Literacy in the Department of Early Childhood and Childhood Education at Lehman College/City University of New York. Her research interests include the use of picturebooks to help children cope with their fears, particularly those related to critical life issues such as death and violence. Email: mia.mercurio@lehman.cuny.edu