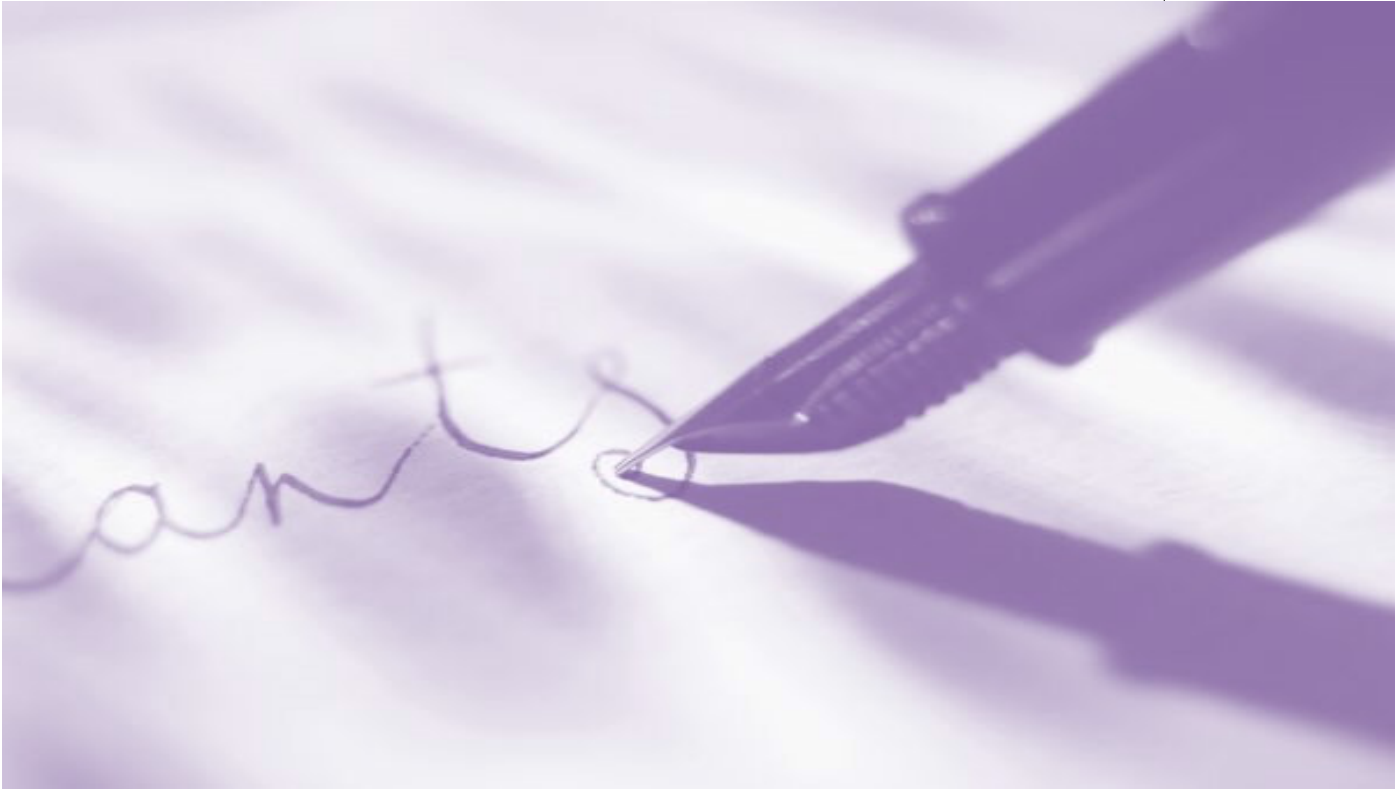# Eastern Illinois Writing Project

Summer Institute 2021

I-Search Research Anthology

Jason Burns

iSearch Research Paper

The family van never stopped. My dad wasn't one to take breaks from the road. But eventually it would be necessary. He would run out of coffee. It was early in the morning; we usually left right at the break of day so we had about two or three hours behind us. But I was done sleeping. The worst part about going on vacation is coming home. There really isn't anything to look forward to anymore. Sure, sleeping in your bed is nice, but it's just your bed. You've been there before and it isn't interesting anymore. I'm bored in the car already. A country song fades in and out of the radio and my mom hates that, so she turns it off. I tell her I'm bored because I'm twelve and our family vacation is over and all twelve-year-olds are jerks like that. She tells me to read the book I brought and turns back around. I was not a reader. I didn't like books, but my mom, a third grade teacher, insisted that I take a book with me on vacation. I struggled through the first part of *Jurassic Park*. Lots of technical jargon, no real dinosaurs, a few moments of tension, but pretty slow. But then...then…as my dad drove on towards the next coffee stop, the T-Rex paddock scene happened. I have a memory to this day of frantically trying to read that scene so that I could read it all over again. I remember looking up from my full bench back seat and seeing the family climb out of the car for breakfast after we finally stopped. I wasn't hungry for food, I needed to read this book, and then I needed to read it again. That was all it took--one scene from a novel for me to love reading and want to write just like Michael Criction did in the T-Rex paddock scene.

I think all writers like to write. It's the fun part. It's the part that is satisfying because the work is moving along and the progress can be seen with each typed word. There is something to look back on and be proud of, or some anticipation about something that will be written. Exciting ideas that spurn on our fingers that try desperately to keep up as our mind races with

new and interesting phrases. Writing is fun, but pre-writing is not fun. It's the chopping vegetables part of cooking dinner, it's the moving furniture and laying down of tarps before painting a room, it's packing all your clothes, and your book, and your Gameboy before a family vacation. You know the good part is coming, but right now, you're stuck in the drag. The part we all wish we could skip and just get to the good stuff already. But it is a necessary part, and one that all students need to work on.

Throughout my research I came across several websites that discussed the importance of pre-writing. This is something that I have always been completely aware of and have tried and tried to get my students to understand. But most of my students view pre-writing as nothing more than extra work. I want to change that. I want my students to understand that by using a variety of pre-writing strategies before you write it makes the writing easier, faster, and more organized. By spending a little bit of time planning a lot of time can be saved later. On the web site UCWbLing, I found a blog written by Nat G that explains how pre-writing "increases efficiency by helping the writer map, plan, or brainstorm about their writing before beginning a first draft." (G) Pre-writing gives students a chance to think about their writing before beginning and allows them to map out what they are going to say, what order they are going to say it in, and how they are going to say it. Doing these three tasks at the same time is daunting. Pre-writing will save the writer valuable writing time because these three tasks are completed beforehand, all the writer has to worry about is writing well.

Choosing the correct pre-writing activity for the type of writing being done is important also. Each writing type is designed to help the writer think about their work in a different way. The University of Kansas KU Writing Center website provides an explanation of several different strategies such as listing, clustering, freewriting, looping, and the journalistic questions. Each one helps the writer lay out their ideas in a slightly different way making each a unique activity to help the writer with their ideas. Listing for example "is particularly useful if your starting topic is very broad and you need to narrow it down." (KU.edu) The process is pretty simple: write down

all the ideas you can think of on your topic, group them, label each group, and write a sentence about the label (this last part can provide the beginning of a thesis statement). Clustering, sometimes called mind mapping or idea mapping, "allows you to explore the relationships between ideas." (KU.edu) The subject goes in the middle and is circled and ideas about the subject are placed around the central idea connecting them with lines. This is an especially useful tool when "determining the relationship between ideas." (KU.edu) Freewriting generates "a lot of information by writing non-stop for a predetermined amount of time. It allows you to focus on a specific topic, but forces you to write so quickly that you are unable to edit any of your ideas." (KU.edu) The writer sets a timer and writes for the duration of the timer non-stop. The idea is to write for the full time, read back over the freewrite and pick out the most important ideas, then with that tighter focus, begin writing again. Repeat as necessary. Looping is very similar to freewriting. "Looping is a freewriting technique that allows you to focus your ideas continually while trying to discover a writing topic." (KU.edu) Begin freewriting, then repeat with a tighter focus on the most interesting ideas from the previous freewrite. Continue as many times as necessary until you have specific information about your topic. This should lead to a thesis or a tighter focus of your topic. (KU.edu) The Journalistic Questions approach asks "six questions when they are writing assignments that are broken down into five W's and one H: *Who?*, *What?*, *Where?*, *When?*, *Why?*, and *How?* You can use these questions to explore the topic you are writing about for an assignment." (KU.edu) The writer needs to be flexible with the questioning, however, leaving out a 'who?' question when discussing a non-person topic for example. This is a great way to learn a lot of information about a topic before you begin writing.

Depending on the writer's type of writing, one of these strategies may work better than the other. Informational or expository writing may benefit most from the journalistic questions, while a narrative or short story might benefit from the freewriting or looping. A writer should think for a few minutes about which strategy would work best for the writing that is to be done. However, each writer is different. We all have a different personality set and one of the pre-

writing activities may work better depending on our personality regardless of the type of writing to be done. There is a theory of thought for this too. The website Nerdify places a premium on finding your writing style before beginning any type of writing. The website provides a very simple, three question process to determine this. Ask yourself: **Is my topic sensitive?** (e.g. abortion, racism, sexuality, domestic violence, etc). **Who is my audience?** (e.g. does your professor encourage expressing opinion or values in-depth research and analysis of already existing sources?). **What do other writers say about this topic?** (i.e. pay attention to the writing style of articles on your topic)" (Nerdify.com) These simple questions can help the writer focus on the writing style of the writing they will be doing. Another approach, according to Duke University, is to discover your writing personality through the Meyers-Briggs typological test. Nat G states, "This is an interesting concept because, based on your personality traits, it may be easier to facilitate or accommodate your writing personality using a variety of pre-writing techniques...Depending on those needs, your pre-writing strategies may change or be adapted to accommodate them." (Nerdify.com) I took this test and the results were mixed, but I think it holds some merit. By thinking about my personality, I was able to think on how I go through the writing process when I am not teaching, and it does fit. I like to freewrite before diving into my writing assignment because I am more spontaneous, do not like to plan things out, and I have a high opinion of my own ideas. Freewriting (and looping) helps me gather and cut through my thoughts and ideas to find the best ones.

I know and expect that my students have a more difficult time writing than I do. I also expect that the assigned writing might not be the type of writing they enjoy most. This is why determining which pre-writing activity works best for each writing type is paramount. Trying these different strategies will also give students valuable experience with each one and should help them determine their favorite. Maybe they will even enjoy the writing process more, now that the pre-writing part is beginning to make sense to them. The hope is that one day,

spontaneously, everything will click, like a T-Rex breaking out of their paddock setting off a string of events that leads to a student eager to grasp more.

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Lexi Dooley

The Importance of Social Justice in the Classroom I-Search

I am going into year three of teaching at the first school I began my career at. At a predominantly white, rural district school it can be difficult to have certain discussions and have certain topics integrated into lesson plans. I had students who were very open about their opinions, and anyone who disagreed with them would be causing a bigger issue in the classroom. I was very hesitant to say anything to my students, thinking they would not want to learn from me anymore if they thought I was on the opposing side. However, that is all behind me now. After the year of 2020-with COVID, the election, and everything we have ever known being turned upside down-I have decided that social justice issues are extremely important to be bringing into the classroom. Whether this be conversations about the inequality between men and women, people of color, Native Americans, etc. I want to teach all of it. Students need to understand that the world is not exactly like their hometown. They will not always be surrounded by American-born white individuals who farm for a living. It is my role as a teacher to expand their thinking, to give them opportunities to truly understand the world outside of their own. If I don't teach my students about these things, then I don't think most of them will ever learn. A lot of my students have decided that they are not goingto college. They have other plans for their futures, and that is great. I fully support my students. However, I feel like they will be missing out on opportunities to be in a more diverse setting, and to learn about other people's backgrounds and cultures. College is typically where a lot of small-town kids open their minds, and see the world beyond their hometown. It is sad to me that my students might not ever get that opportunity just because they plan to stay around their hometown after high school. The world is full of beautiful, and brilliant people, no matter their age, gender, race, etc. They deserve to be taught, learned about, and discussed.

When beginning my search I wasn't sure where to start. Why social justice issues are important? Why some teachers don't teach social justice issues? What do I want to learn/apply to my teaching? Do my students even know what social justice issues are? I decided to start with the most basic search I could think of. "What is the definition of social justice issues?" This is the best place to begin, because I want to have a solid answer for my students as to *what* we are learning about. I searched for an answer that explained this question in the best way, and I ended up finding one on a blog written by Maryville University. It states,

> Social justice is the assertion of the ideal that all humans should have the same rights and opportunities. From access to healthcare to safe spaces to live, social justice aims to level the playing field and eliminate discrimination. The idea behind social justice is that we all have innate value as human beings, and no person's value is more or less than anyone else's. (Maryville University)

This was the best answer, in my opinion. It included what exactly social justice issues are, and even gave some examples for students to better understand what is being referred to when hearing the words, "social justice issues." This gave me a better understanding of what exactly they are and allowed me to continue and narrow down my search.

When continuing my search, I realized I wanted a good reason as to *why* I would be teaching this to my students. I figured out the *what* but students always need a *why*. When continuing, I decided to just type in another very basic question, "Why teaching social justice is important in the classroom." There are a multitude of answers to this question. However, I wanted something I could tell my students. My students love having answers and reasons. If my students ask why we are learning something, or why we are discussing something, I want to be able to have a good answer. An answer that has some research/credibility behind it. A lot of students are not receptive to learning if their teacher cannot give them a good reason as to why they are learning certain topics. I want to avoid that scenario entirely. I came

across a website that helped me give me confidence in my *why.* The article stated, "Learning about social justice at a young age prepares children to be informed, young adults. Teachers play a central role, helping children understand and accept people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as those with disabilities" (Merrimack College). It is my job as a teacher to provide students with the knowledge they might not get anywhere else. This article made me even more passionate about bringing social justice issues into the classroom.

I decided to narrow down my search even more. I wanted to focus in on how I would bring social justice into my classroom. As I stated previously, I live in a predominantly white, rural area. I want my students to have open minds, but I have to be able to approach certain topics in a particular way, as to not completely close my students off from wanting to even hear about such topics. I found a really great source that breaks down the population of America; what percentage of the population is a particular gender, race, social class, etc. I focused more on the area that explained what percentage of the population a certain race was. I clicked on the tab that showed that 76.3% of America is white. This opened a tab that explained that white is considered, "A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as "White" or report entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian" (United States Census). This alone will open a discussion in my classroom. Explaining to students that the word "white" is not what they probably thought it was. I honestly had no idea white had such a diverse population. I never gave the word "white" a second thought. This definition alone will allow for better understanding in the diversity that is in and makes up America.

Researching all of the different reasons and ways to incorporate social justice issues into my classroom proved to be a worthwhile task. As stated in the paragraphs above, I learned so much about social justice issues alone. I learned how to best explain what social justice issues are, and how it is truly my job to be integrating it into my classroom curriculum. I feel that I have a responsibility to teach my students about what has gone on in the past with social justice

issues, and what is still happening today. Kids need to know the truth about what is going on in the world, in order to help them make real-world connections with what they have learned. I also learned that the white race is more than just white people who were born in America. The word has so much more depth than just the color. I am so thankful to have done the digging and research to find this out so I can pass it on to my students.

I want to be able to fully integrate social justice issues into my classroom. I still want to find out how to integrate it in the best way possible. I would love to research some lesson plan ideas, or best practices when discussing or engaging students in this topic area. I also want to approach it in an understanding, and loving way, as I know a lot of my students have probably never had any discussions like the discussions I want to start bringing into my classroom. I want to be the best example of an understanding and compassionate person for my students to look up to. The world is much bigger than our little town in Illinois. Being able to be open to discussions, topics, lesson plans, etc. that involve social justice issues will allow my students to understand that it is okay to be different. It is okay to be kind to and befriend people who are not like you. I think many students will learn a lot when discussions start happening more frequently in the classroom. Students will be able to connect skills they have learned previously with real-world situations, and the new topics we will be discussing. An article written by Matthew Lynch discusses the different skills students would be using when learning about social justice issues in the classroom. Along with empathy students would be able to "differentiate between fact and opinion to determine what is true, examine diverse points of view to look at an issue from all sides, and develop a personal perspective based on accurate comprehension" (Lynch, The Edvocate). I believe that these are all important skills students need in order to be stand-up people in this world. I want my students to be open-minded, compassionate, and loving toward anyone they may across in their journey of life.

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Brian Gebhart

I-Search: Monsters and Their Meanings

Introduction: How I Became Interested in the Topic

The monster had just taken to the sky, the devastated city smoldering in its shadow. I sat, enthralled, a five year old captivated by the glowing box of the television. The beast's leathery wings looked massive on the screen; I didn't notice the wires they probably used to hoist the creature up, or that its roar was probably an instrument played in reverse. These details were unimportant - monsters, as a rule, were fascinating to me, as a child. As a matter of fact, they still are. I grew up reading and watching all sorts of strange genre fiction. Horror, sci-fi, mystery, thriller - it didn't matter to me, so long as it was exciting and weird and full of fiery imagination. My passion for these genres has only grown in the years since, even as I've developed an appreciation for finer forms of the literary and cinematic arts. So, when I began my teaching career, and had to step back into my pre-adolescent and freshly adolescent walks of life, I wondered: could these types of stories capture the imagination of my students, as they had mine?

I was told once that I should teach what I love. Within reason, of course, and the guidelines and standards and all of the other rigamaroles that come with education, as with any profession. With these two sentiments in mind - my adoration of genre fiction and a drive to enjoy my vocation - I have tried to incorporate small creative sparks into my units and my teaching of educational curricula. I want my students to enjoy reading fiction as much as I do, because it is in the reading of fiction that a student can grow to appreciate realms both spectacularly cosmic, and intimately microcosmic. It is out of a love of reading that a love of writing can be born. These are the reasons I've tried to bring elements of monster, horror, sci-fi, and speculative fiction into my classes. These are also the reasons I've tried to bring out the inner

writers of my students, by inviting them to create their own stories of fear and wonder and weirdness. Reading and writing are ways to communicate ideas; fiction writing is a particular avenue that students rarely have the chance to explore, or so they tell me. I hope to encourage my students to think of themselves as creative writers as much as any author has imagined himself or herself.

Description of the Search:

To these ends, I have spent some time in my teaching career researching and exploring the possibilities of "metaphoric monsters" - that is, monsters that serve as metaphors for ideas larger than just themselves. It would be through these metaphors and symbolic understandings that I could justify to the students that genre fiction is worthy of analytical consideration and literary contemplation, and has its own degree of merit, as much as any other great book or classic text. Out of my research, I have studied texts that have greatly reinforced the theory that monsters can serve as symbols for social ills and fears of cultural zeitgeists. The work of Stephen Asma has decidedly proven this idea to me, as centrally embodied in his novel O*n Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*. As he has argued in that book and elsewhere, "Horror and monsters have always been politically useful. If imaginative monsters (extrapolated from nature) can help train us for survival in a hostile world, they can also easily corrupt our view of the Other. The history of monsters, from the ancients to the present, is rife with political demonization and dangerous propaganda" (Asma 958). As Asma is suggesting here, monsters like Dracula or Godzilla are not simply means to simple ends; they are not meant to be just "scary." They are meant to evoke feelings of specific dread, whether that is the taboo of cannibalism or the anxieties around atomic warfare. They function as time capsules and as

mirrors for the times they emerged from, showing contemporary audiences how a society thought and felt in a given era.

Stitched to these readings, my research into Asma led me to related findings. According to the research of Marius A. Pascale, for example, "We learn through exploration that morbid occurrences are, to an extent, natural. In doing so, it becomes possible to learn how they can be accepted, dealt with, or overcome" (Pascale 9). In other words, we use fiction to explore, and perhaps even conquer, deeply rooted fears and social ills; we use fiction as a mirror to inspect and understand ourselves. Monsters are just an exaggerated form of that process. This is an idea I felt a compelling need to combine with Janine Grazanio-King's research in my classroom, so that the students could see all varieties of fiction as having intellectual merit. According to Graziano-King, "Self-revised essays, then, give us information that we can get from portfolios only when they include timed essays - that is, from the two types of assessments *taken together*. In short, self-revised essays can tell us what students can do *on their own* with opportunities to reflect, plan, and revise, and with the support of theme-based discussions and texts" (Graziano-King 85). It is for this reason that I have given my students timed writing assignments where they must mimic authors and think like them in short story creation exercises. Beyond those initial sessions, students then take their writing and edit and revise it in workshops where they can improve upon their initial bursts of thought. The idea here is that students create a short story, as modeled after a fictional tale, but with a monster as a symbolic focus and representation of an issue that is important to them. The students then edit and revise their story so that they can refine its qualities into a story worth sharing with a wider audience, including their peers. This is the structure I decided to apply to my Dark Romanticism unit, seeing it as a natural fit with my American Literature class of eleventh grade juniors. They would be able to stretch and grow their

writing muscles, so to speak, while also being able to handle the complex workload of reading and discussing horror texts, both classic and modern, from Edgar Allan Poe to Octavia Butler.

What I Found Out & Conclusion:

My students have taken a hold of this "Monster Project" and run with it far beyond what even I had imagined. I have had students tell me over the past two years that they have greatly enjoyed this creative writing exercise, something which is sorely lacking in my regular American Literature curriculum. They have created monsters that have represented fears of adolescent social anxiety and isolation, to societal issues such as the Flint Water Crisis. Their monsters are complex and their stories meaningful, rewarded through multiple revisions and edits in various workshops that we might hold during a given week or set of weeks. That initial "timed" writing exercise, the one in which the students think they must turn in their work by the end of the hour, has proven to be a great way to spark the fire of their ideas, through trickery and force. Has it all worked out without fail? Absolutely not - I still have students who refuse to work in any timed writing session, and I still find that some students struggle with the whole idea of "monsters as metaphors." Even so, working with those students on an individual basis can prompt them into writing some story, regardless if it takes them extra time or not. Moreover, most of my students have told me - via verbal feedback and written self-evaluations - that they greatly enjoy taking the driver's seat of the writer, and play-acting at being genre fiction authors. My hope is that they can take whatever story they have written and run with it even further beyond my class, as I try to encourage them to consider themselves as creators beyond the high school classroom.

On these matters, there is still much I can do. My students have told me that they enjoy working with their creative endeavors, but my assignment for them is only so long in structure. It

might benefit them, and my class as a whole, if I stretched out the writing assignment into a full-fledged project. Having the students create their own horror stories over the course of an entire unit or semester might lead them to even greater rewards with their writing, as we continuously refine their "portfolios" (as Graziano-King might have it) into a collection of drafts and story ideas. I plan to refine my monster assignment even further, and continue to offer to my students the choice of being creative with their writing (even if it is only a single unit at most, though that may change in the future). My goal is to see what other unique writing approaches I can apply to this assignment and project, so that my students can continuously be challenged by strange but fulfilling writing practices. In addition, I am constantly searching for even more engaging authors and short stories; the more variety I have in my text bank, the more options I can place at my students' fingertips for inspiration and modeling. Further research into timed writing practice and contemporary horror stories is on the horizon for me. Ultimately, I want my students to see that fiction can be reflective and rewarding in its ability to mirror human desire and fear; in the end, I want my students not to be afraid of their grades or their assignments, or whatever form their monsters may take. I want my students to conquer their terrors and see that writing is but one more way to explore the world around them. Fishing lines or not, monsters are simply another way of learning just that. After all, no mere mortal can resist the evil of the thriller - why not have fun with it?

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Brea Lavelle

Cross-Curricular Teaching is a Must

Introduction:

"Why are we reading this again?" "Mrs., I already read this last period!" "Mrs., we read this before we left for break." These are the comments that I would hear in my room when I would bring in documents from another course. I usually brought in speeches and other documents that students might have seen in their history courses. Sometimes those documents were used to provide context for what we were reading, or I might use them for rhetorical analysis with my juniors. I have no problem teaching the same piece twice, especially if students are reading it with a different purpose in mind.

I began to get frustrated that students were often fairly blasé (at best) about reading something again. I had very little buy-in on the second read, and the writing the students produced was usually pretty lackluster. Given how frequently this was occurring, I couldn't afford to have my students not trying their best. I decided to marry the AP United States History course with my English III Language and Composition course. My plan involved an interdisciplinary approach to teach the subjects. While I couldn't teach both at the same time, I grabbed the scope and sequence for both courses and used them to create a scope and sequence for a course with a teaching partner that we called American Studies. Twenty-first teaching is about inquiry and application and project based learning; interdisciplinary teaching is a must in order for teachers can create students who are ready to tackle the 21st century problems they will face in their future workplaces.

Description of the Research:

Teachers and researchers have realized that isolated instruction is not the best way to get our students to become better critical thinkers, and they are often unable to transfer skills from class to class. Each subject has been siloed off and because of that students do not seem to think skill from one class relate to another. Teaching in isolation "does not meet the deeper learning needs of students today and tomorrow, [and] fortunately deeper learning can be accelerated by consolidating teacher efforts and combining relevant

content, in effect opening new spillways of knowledge" (Johnson 2). Johnson's article "Deeper Learning: Why Cross-Curricular Teaching is Essential" lays out guidelines for this sort of planning and teaching to work effectively. Johnson posits that "it requires enthusiastic partners, it requires intensive preparation, assessment must mirror learning, and collaboration is necessary" (2). Johnson also outlines three general phrases for teachers collaboration for purposes of interdisciplinary teaching: aligned, cooperative, and conceptual (3). Johnson provides examples, such as the written product for a document-based question (DBQ) in the history class also counting in the English course.

In his article "Implementing a Cross-Curricular Approach," David Roy puts forward the idea that cross-curricular teaching is a murky concept and that there is a general lack of clarity around this term. Roy states that "schools are often organized by Knowledge Learning Areas (KLAs) and politicians and education authorities create a hierarchy of knowledge and give precedence to some areas over others" (Roy 1). For those who have been teaching for a while, we can see the preference of certain courses over others; for example, when STEM course tracks and STEM schools seem to be preferred by state education officials. Roy continues on by saying that young people are encouraged to integrate learning experiences into their schemes of meaning as to broaden and deepen their understandings of themselves and their world, and they are engaged in seeking, acquiring, and using knowledge in an organic-not artificial way" (Roy 1). Roy ends by arguing that the links between the courses have to be made explicit. Teachers cannot assume that students will automatically make the connections between what happens in one class and how to apply it in the other class. This part needs to be made explicit. Teachers can understand this through experience – if they are hesitant to buy in when asked to do something at professional development without being told why, why should anything more be expected of the students?

Research also shows that students are more engaged when they are able to learn in some sort of cross-curricular or interdisciplinary framework. In "Capturing Student Interest with an Interdisciplinary Approach," Lois Rudnick states that "when [teaching teams] work well, students show the results by demonstrating higher-order thinking skill, a more wholistic understanding of culture, and a greater ability to negotiate the relationships between academic study and "real life" problem solving (3). As part of his

research, he spoke with teachers who have had decades of experience and asked them how literature could be used to teach history. Teachers immediately began naming books about the factors that influence history such as geography class, ethnic, and racial struggles. Literature provides an extra dimension to history, and history likewise provides context – lens through which to read literature.

In his research, Yasin Aslan found that "cross-curricular themes create active readers by engaging students in literacy tasks that emerge naturally from interesting to worthwhile topics" (1797). Yasin also found that cross-curricular instruction promotes discussion and collaboration, and builds upon students' interests, abilities, and backgrounds (Aslan). Teachers know that when students are exposed at young ages to more reading and learning opportunities, they tend to apply everything they have learned previously and become better readers.

Findings:

The research shows that there is no doubt that cross-curricular instruction is in the best interest of students. The student groups that are particularly well served by cross-curricular instruction are historically underserved populations like English Language Learners because cross-curricular teaching allows those students to make larger connections to the content they are learning. For example, if students are learning about cell structure in a biology class, then why not use a similar article and in the English classroom as a way to increase access to nonfiction texts. When students are aware of the connections in their English course and their history course (especially American Literature and American History), students are able to increase their critical thinking, make connections between skills and produce better pieces of writing. Cross-curricular instruction allows students to see connections that they may not otherwise have seen in a class that was siloed off from other subjects without the opportunity to explore the same theme in each class using different sources. Using literature to teach history helps the characters in those books come alive, to let students see those characters as living through the time period. It allows students to develop some awareness of the real life individuals living during that period and the decisions they faced. Integrating both

subjects allow for true and authentic opportunities for research and understanding, rather than being disconnected from the context of what they are learning.

Conclusion:

Teachers can attest to the fact that in our everyday lives, we don't simply use things we learned from one course in school to solve a problem. We solve math problems because we need to be able to read a sign, and we don't watch the news without making connections to things from the past. We don't make future decisions based on only one set of facts; we pull what we have learned through life experiences and what we have learned from school. It that light, it is counterintuitive at best to teach in the traditional siloed method, which deprives students of opportunities to learn context and nuance.

No one would argue that cross-curricular instruction is easy. Teachers need to be on board and supportive. Teacher ego needs to be taken out of the equation. One of the troubling quirks about teachers is that sometimes egos can get in the way of doing what is best for students. Egos should listen to their superego counterparts and stay hidden, and avoid the temptation to rear their ugly heads when teachers feel like something is being taken from them or someone is going to steal their thunder.

The teaching of cross-curricular instruction requires a partnership with all teachers who are involved. One year at my school, a US History teacher did not want another to use Lou Gehrig's Farewell speech because he had used it to introduce the rise of baseball and leisure in the United States. He got so mad that this other teacher was "taking something from his class" that he stomped all the way to the principal's office and reported this other teacher. The history teacher had always used that piece and the other teacher had always used that piece. Neither of the two teachers knew the other used it until the English teacher rolled it out before him, and the kids started saying "we already read this," "it's about a guy," "we think he dies at the end." But I am a teacher who believes that it never hurts a student to read something twice – *especially* if they are being asked to read it through two different lenses. In order for cross-curricular teaching to take place and be successful, everyone has to set aside their egos and do what is best for students.

If cross-curricular instruction is going to really work and be successful, there also needs to be support from the administrative staff for teachers who are attempting to make this sort of learning environment work for their students. Administrative staff likewise needs to make sure that they have teachers who are invested in this teaching method, and they need to be able to allow teachers to move past a present scope and sequence for the history course or the English course or the biology course. Admins should give them the freedom to create a course that has its own scope and sequence that incorporates the items from the district scope and sequence. Admins needs to trust their teachers. We as teachers and leaders can create a better learning environment for our students. We can help create students who are better readers and students who are able to transfer skills from one area of their lives to another. We can create true leaders and lovers of learning.

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[Megan McClard](#)

Informal Writing in History Classrooms- I search

Introduction:

Frequently my student's ask me why we have to write papers. "This isn't even an English class", is usually the response I get when I ask them to do a writing project of any kind, even just essay questions on a test. History is one of the easier classes to fit writing practice into outside of the ELA classroom, and I am a firm believer that writing is a skill that crosses every curriculum. But I still struggle with this because while I truly believe the History teacher is the next best writing instructor in most schools, I am in no way trained to actually teach writing. I don't know grammatical rules, and my punctuation use needs refinement. The simple solution to this issue is the one I have been taking. I seek out the English teacher in the building that has my students and we partner once a year to work on a research essay together. This system works great, as I teach and assess the research skills and the historical synthesis and she covers grammar, punctuation, and all the rules that come along with formal writing. But in reality, I know this is a way to avoid teaching writing within my classroom.

That notion is something I have always struggled with. One way that I know I can be a more effective History teacher is by bringing more writing into my classroom. But I am still bound by my lack of confidence in my ability to assess such writing. So, while I work on becoming more comfortable grading writing through an ELA lens, I have also committed to bringing more informal writing into my classroom. I believe informal writing can be just as beneficial to our students, and creates a way for non- English teachers to feel more comfortable incorporating writing into their classroom.

Description of research:

Initially, I intended to focus on how informal writing would be beneficial to my History classes as these are the classes I will primarily be teaching. This led me to begin my search with "informal writing" and "history". I found one source right off the bat that fit within those parameters. This source *Reimagining Writing in History* focused specifically on how writing in history classes not only helped engage students in historical thinking, it also prepared them for writing on an occupational level. This source reinforced the idea that in not teaching writing we were doing students a drastic disservice. With this source, I determined that I had the research backing that I needed. Now I needed to move on to some strategies for implementation of informal writing in my classroom. This led me to my next source *Using Informal Writing in Large History Classes.* This source

was incredibly helpful for me personally as it had multiple strategies for implementing informal writing specifically in history classrooms. It provided great insight as to what informal writing can look like in a history class. I was happy to have found this source because I not only used it for this paper but I also saved it to my google drive to refer to later.

Finally, I realized that the idea of this research was also how writing in history classes is interdisciplinary and there could be potentially large crossover in informal writing on both fronts. This led me to my final source which is *The Value of Creative Writing Assignments in English Literature Courses* This source reinforced the importance of informal writing in the ELA classroom. While that provided even more justification for informal writing, it also discussed informal writing on the college level. This focus on college level informal writing reinforced the importance of implementing informal writing at the secondary level. This served as a culminating source for my research because it reinforced the claim of my initial source. If higher level educational institutions are discussing and focusing on informal writing, we have an obligation to our students to bring those types of writing into our classrooms.

Research:

Writing and history classes go hand in hand, as most teachers know that research projects are just as likely to take place in a history Class as they are in ELA. According to Kelly King-O'Brien in her article *Reimagining Writing in History, "* Writing is not just a primary tool to engender historical thinking; the history class can also be the ideal arena in which to employ writing...When we neglect practice with writing when teaching history, we obscure how historians themselves work, and we forfeit a crucial opportunity to demonstrate the value of history as an arena for practice in critical reading and clear, persuasive writing." In a basic sense, we do both the subject and our students wrong by not bringing writing into History classes. But seriously, if this is so widely understood why are we not teaching History teachers how to perfect, assess, and teach writing? The article goes further to break down the authors' endeavors to create opportunities for writing in History classes that "assumed student writing could be a potential cornerstone of active learning, an opportunity not for "mastery" but for cultivating disciplinary practice and a continuing commitment to intellectual engagement—and to the joys and rewards of writing itself." Deviating from the norm of assessing for mastery is a difficult deviation for educators to make, but it opens opportunities for our students to continue to practice writing for the sake of writing.

When we bring in writing not for the sake of mastery, we open the door for informal writing to take place in our classrooms. We give students the opportunity to enjoy writing and continue to practice without the stakes being so high that they get discouraged. "Students respond to the history courses best when they have the opportunity to write their thoughts about history without concern about immediate evaluation. When they write informally to learn history, students become interested in the topic and search for meaning" (Steffens). In history classes we must focus as much on the content of the writing as we do the mechanics. Informal writing allows teachers and students to find importance in what is being said, not just how it is being written. The source *Using Informal writing in Large History classes* outlines the way one History teacher has become committed to using informal writing in their history classes. They start by using lists to outline major historical themes. This type of writing to introduce themes allows students to show all of their knowledge on particular topics in possibly the shortest writing assignments possible. However, this type of writing has multiple benefits one of which is explained in *The Value of Creative Writing Assignments in English Literature Courses* Veronica Austin explains "it is most often difficult to get students, many of whom are overwhelmed with their semester course load, to take the time to pay attention to each word, phrase or sentence and how it functions to create meaning. However, because students often treat creative assignments quite personally, treating their writing as if it's an expression of their true selves, they become motivated to see the importance of each word". And while this source is specifically discussing the benefits to college students, I would argue that this trickles down to the secondary and middle level as well. Informal writing has many benefits to our students, and if these benefits are being discussed at the college level, they should be incorporated into High School classrooms as well. This source also specifically covers the benefits to an ELA classroom, however as stated above, benefits in writing almost always crossover into the History classroom seamlessly.

In this research, I have been able to see even more crossover between History and English than was ever imaginable. The research has also reinforced the idea that informal writing is an ideal way for non English teachers to do their part in teaching writing while focusing on objectives they are comfortable assessing. There is a myriad of research and rationale that points to the benefits and successful implementation of informal writing in classrooms. Finally, informal writing allows students the opportunity to write on terms they feel comfortable with. Informal writing unequivocally has a place in our classrooms due to the benefits to our students, and the progression of the art of writing.

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Julia Parish

When Does Intrinsic Motivation Become Enthusiasm for Education?

Introduction:

"Please just tell me no research paper." This was the first sentence I heard on Day One at my new school. Now, don't get me wrong. Research is my LEAST favorite form of writing, but it is also, arguably, the most important. So I smiled, laughed, and said, "Not this year." BIG mistake. One of the many things I want to improve on as a teacher is providing my students rigorous material while still upholding my classroom environment goal: a LOVE for learning. When students leave my class, I hope that if they have only gained one thing, it is a passion for learning something.

While this isn't always English or Math or Science, it may be How to Beat the Newest Video Game, or How Do You Run a Farm, or even How to Survive in the Halls of Angry Teens. Whatever it is, I try to instill a "yearning for learning." Sounds cheesy, right? The scene above has played back in my mind a thousand times and I struggle. Because no one wants to put in effort to something that "isn't worth it" or "is a waste of time." So I asked myself, "How can I increase students' engagement and enthusiasm for research writing?" and here is what I've found.

Description of the Search:

I have frequently seen Pinterest posts claiming to have solved student engagement and enthusiasm. They are all over the place! This is really where my interest and research began. Down the rabbit hole I fell, reading article after article with nothing new or innovative and nothing "foolproof." From there, I accessed JSTOR on the Booth Library website and simply searched "research writing" AND "motivation" using the skills I had been taught by a Booth Library during my undergraduate studies. Article after article came up. To say I was overwhelmed would be an understatement.

I talked with my English teachers from high school and my coworkers at my current school and the previous school. I even reached out to some of my students (whose input was a combination of "research is boring" and "what's the point"). I realized that no one really tries to make research writing

engaging. Is this a worthwhile endeavor? To me it is. I am always bored teaching research skills, so I know that my students are.

So I started with relevancy. The "why" of research writing. Why is this something they need to know? In what ways are these skills useful to them outside of academia? Once we find how to make research relevant to our students, then and only then, can we begin to make it enjoyable for them. Research skills are used in a variety of ways in today's society whether students recognize them or not. The definition of research is the investigation of a topic to obtain facts, applications, or ideas according to Dictionary.com. They research people they plan to date, colleges they want to attend, cars they want to drive, and even (if the term is used loosely) how to cheat to pass their classes. When they see a connection to their everyday lives, this should help them become more motivated. But what if it doesn't?

What I Found:

It is often expected that teachers like to learn. We are constantly adapting, changing, and recreating to help reach our students where they are at. However, according to the research, those same students won't meet us halfway. Why not? The answers aren't quite clear.

However, in "The transferability of library research skills from high school to college" by M. Elspeth Goodin, the study found that students who received research instruction had a higher level of research skills that were more suited to a college level than high school students who did not receive the instruction. This preparation helps students be able to have the opportunity to move on to higher education with less trauma than students who are not learning these critical thinking skills. This is great news! But what if your students aren't going to college? Will they still take research skills seriously?

Using multimodal and multigenre research helps students see the value in researching for learning's sake rather than just as a mode to get a grade (and eventually get out of school). Research writing is not JUST for students working towards higher education. In "Motivating Students' Research Skills and Interests through a Multimodal, Multigenre Research Project," Carroll states, "They turn information into real knowledge that is meaningful to them" (Bailey). In other words, providing students with creative options, choice of topic, and relevant products helps improve student willingness to learn!

Jarrod Payne and Nicky Israel looked at how motivation can affect student performance in research. According to their article, "It is particularly important to consider motivation as a student may have highly effective learning strategies and an appropriate learning style but may still perform badly because they lack the motivation to do otherwise." This shows that no matter how much a teacher may care and how well they teach a particular skill, some students will be unable to perform well and show their knowledge because they lack the motivation to help them retain the information. If we care more than our students do, we aren't helping them. We are enabling them.

Along those same lines, Murtonen's study showed that some students were not convinced of that they would need these skills in their future working life, that the same students had problems with their motivation to learn research, and that the students in question were also the ones who experienced difficulties in the learning of research methods" (600). So, it is imperative that we solve the motivation factor with research skills. Otherwise, teachers will consistently be preaching to an uninterested, underperforming choir. We will not only be wasting our time, but also wasting our students'.

Conclusion:

I still have a long way to go with this research. I'm sure that I could search forever and there would never be enough answers. I am still searching for an article or study that unlocks the secret of student motivation and engagement with research writing. The research that I have completed over the last 4 weeks has laid a solid foundation for reinventing my research unit for 9th grade English Language Arts. I would still like to dive into the inner workings of intrinsic motivation and how to instill a love of learning in our students, but I think that relevancy is the first step in this long journey.

I am going to take this relevancy and scaffold it. Start by teaching basic research skills using things students care about and slowly merge them into creating longer research works. Building on the skills that I know our 11th grade English teacher will need so that our students have the best foundation possible going into their large research project. I will continue to search for ways to get these skills to be engaging for students who do not yet see the value in research and higher education. I will find the key to students' love of learning… eventually.

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Andrea Peel

I-Search Paper

Introduction:

I teach both Pre-AP 9th grade and AP English Language to juniors, and all of them struggle with grammar. Be it subject-verb agreement, comma splices, or fragments, students all seem to struggle without any marked improvement from 9th to 11th grade. I am very lucky in that my teaching partner and I split the 9th grade Pre-AP and 11th AP students, so they circle back around to us for their junior year. We are already familiar with their writing, and the grammar improvement just was not matching their skill growth in other areas. We have tried dedicated grammar units (SAM Grammar), assigning practice through NoRedInk.com and Quill.org, and peer editing practices, but the results are not there. We have seen massive gains in analysis and organization, so this is the last component in which we are struggling to improve our instruction. So, this summer I set out to solve the grammar puzzle.

Description of the Search:

The research blogs for the summer institute have been really helpful in allowing me to synthesize the research I have found. JSTOR and some research provided in another course, ENG 5011, formed my starting point. The questions I am seeking the answers to are as follows-

1. What does the research say is the best approach to grammar instruction?

2. How do we achieve transference of grammar knowledge into student's own writing?

The second question especially is at the heart of what I want to discover. When I assign grammar worksheets students can complete them and then answer multiple choice questions about the grammar skills correctly, but that knowledge is not reflected in their writing. For example, they can recognize a comma splice and how to fix it on a warmup, but there are still comma splices all

throughout their writing. I searched for the best way to achieve the transfer of theoretical grammar rules to student writing.

What I Found Out:

All the research done on grammar instruction makes the same claim: traditional grammar instruction absolutely does not work. The way most teachers were taught when they were in school, days of drilling on parts of speech and subject-verb agreement and filling out worksheets is absolutely the wrong way to go about teaching grammar to my students. As Hartwell reported:

> "In view of the widespread agreement of research studies based upon many types of students and teachers, the conclusion can be stated in strong and unqualified terms: the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in composition, even a harmful effect on improvement in writing" (Hartwell 1).

As a new teacher almost a decade ago, I spent time going over parts of speech with my students and then handing them worksheets for them to practice labeling and proving that they had memorized what I was imparting to them. According to all the research that I have found, that is the worst possible way I could go about teaching grammar. So why is this method still so prevalent? Tradition may be hard to break, but as Meyer et al. reasoned, "traditional grammar instruction is bound to fail because it is given without any realistic *context*" (66). Teaching students parts of speech, diagramming sentences, and then moving on does not lead to any transference of grammar skills to student writing. In other words, "grammar knowledge out of context doesn't translate to grammatical awareness in context" (Micciche 717).

So what I have learned in my research is that grammar instruction needs to always occur within the writing process, not as a separate unit all on its own. This is a trend that is taking place

in most university classrooms, where first year composition courses have "widely integrated an understanding of writing as a process, along with peer review and reiterative drafting, into their pedagogies" (Lunsford and Lunsford 794). The Lunsford study of the most common errors in student writing found "that college student essays have grown longer and longer with time," so the need for grammar instruction tied to authentic writing opportunities has never been greater (792).

What does grammar instruction in context look like? First, the approach must be grounded in a Constructivist model of teaching instead of the traditional Behaviorist approach. In a behaviorist approach, "students are required to practice and be tested on skills in isolation; it seems simply to be taken for granted that the skills will transfer, that they will be applied when relevant" (Weaver 156). All the research shows that this transfer does not occur, so Weaver's Constructivist method of teaching grammar focuses on "applying the concept or skill when, and only when, their own writing suggests a need and readiness" (156). Weaver lays out a list of 12 approaches for teaching grammar in her book, *Teaching Grammar in Context*, the most relevant of which I will list here:

1. Engage students in writing, writing, and more writing.

2. Immerse students in good literature, including literature that is particularly interesting or challenging syntactically.

3. Teach these relevant aspects of grammar within the context of students' writing.

4. Introduce only a minimum of terminology.

5. Teach needed terms, structures, and skills when writers need them, ideally when they are read to revise at the sentence level or to edit.

To move away from the traditional approach to teaching grammar and instead ground our practice in student writing, Weaver advocates for the use of mini-lessons (165). These lessons are broken down into 4 different types: the incidental lessons which involve teaching "something through conversation and casual mention" (Weaver 166), the inductive lessons which is "one in which students notice patterns and derive generalizations for themselves" about the grammar (170), the traditional mini-lesson which is a "five- or ten-minute explanation of something. It is direct and to the point" (171), and lastly the extended mini-lesson which involves a traditional mini-lesson combined with giving students an opportunity to "actively try to demonstrate or apply" the newly acquired skill (171). None of these approaches involve teaching grammar apart from student's writing; it becomes a natural part of the overall writing process. If we want students to become better writers, to learn the grammar lessons we are teaching them and actually apply them in their writing, then all the research says that this is the method to follow. Grammar and composition can no longer live separately; it is only in their union that we will find success for our students.

As for the content of these mini-lessons, that should be determined by the needs of the student population the teacher is working with. On page 795 of the Lunsford study from 2006 is a good starting place, their list of the top 10 errors in student writing includes:

1. Wrong word

2. Missing comma after an introductory element

3. Incomplete or missing documentation

4. Vague pronoun reference

5. Spelling error (including homonyms)

6. Mechanical error with a quotation

7. Unnecessary comma

8. Unnecessary or missing capitalization

9. Missing word

10. Faulty sentence structure

These are errors that are common in student writing from first year college students across the nation, so by tackling these errors in our student's writing before they leave high school, we would be setting them up for success in the future; our ultimate goal. It is important to keep in mind that these errors should never be addressed outside of the context of student's own writing, so for example error 6 in the list, "mechanical error with a quotation" (Lunsford and Lunsford 795), should be addressed when students are writing literary or rhetorical analysis since they will be actively incorporating quotations into their own writing. Teaching this skill at this point allows students to internalize the role and immediately apply it.

Conclusion:

I am going to use this new information to overhaul my grammar teaching practices. I will no longer rely on commercially produced grammar units such as the SAM grammar that I have used in the past, and I will not waste my own or my student's time by assigning them sentence combining activities through such websites as NoRedInk.com or Quill.org. All of the research points to the conclusion that though students may be able to complete these activities, none of the skills translate into improvement in their writing.

Moving forward, I am not abandoning the teaching of grammar in the classroom, but instead I will implement mini-lesson based grammar lessons in conjunction with student writing. I will teach those grammar skills that I see lacking in my student's writing, and instead of worksheets and tests I will assess through the revision process. I will look at first drafts

compared with final drafts and see if students have made the corrections necessary based on the mini-lessons that we went through together.

Also, since I teach Pre-AP and AP students, I will be sure to focus on the most commonly found errors in college student writing as found in the Lunsford study. My students are almost universally on the college-bound track, so I want to be sure that I set them up for success when they leave high school.

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Rebecca Powell

iSearch for a Better Way to Research

"Guess what everyone!? It's research time!" This is ALWAYS met with groans. Wait until I add on, "the final assessment for this unit will be to present your findings in an essay format." I can hear the heads thunking down on the desks now. This will be the first year I will ask my students to produce an essay to showcase their research rather than a presentation. While visual presentations are important, I always felt like I was taking the easy way out of my research units. Truly after students have found everything they need, sticking it in an essay format should be easy peasy. Unless they are always asked to do the same old thing. Unless the process is always fill in box 1 followed by box 2, etc. What if we plugged this tried and true writing process into something that fits into a section of pop culture (like, maybe court TV) and made the research writing process a little more relatable for our students?

Teachers often find it difficult to keep students engaged when writing an essay. Throw in the concept of research and the engagement level just continues to plummet. Yet, in every class I have observed or from every English teacher I talk to the research writing process is *almost* always the same. Students simply feel like this is something we need to get through (a hoop to jump through, if you will) to pass this class. Often, they cannot see the relation this research paper has to the real world. With all this combined, students can struggle to hone in on a research topic if one is not provided.

In *Prove Your Case: A New Approach to Teaching Research Papers* , Stephen L. Broskoske asserts that "[w]ithout a sense of direction, students do not understand what to look for in the professional literature or how to present the information when they write" (31). Not only are students routinely unengaged as they often view "[research] papers as research for research's sake," but they also would very understandably have issues finding relevant sources to support their unrefined topic (31). Broskoske presents a new approach to teaching the research paper by using "the analogy that writing a research paper is like a lawyer defending a court case" (31). Now we are cooking with fire! What a relevant way to engage students in the writing process. With all the courtroom drama shows on TV, kids have probably seen one before. Even if they haven't seen an example of a courtroom drama on their own time, there are so many examples that it is easy enough to pull up a clip to watch and analyze before tackling this new approach. I even started brainstorming different (appropriate) Law and Order episodes to use for this purpose.

Broskoske goes on to break down this analogy piece by piece in comparison to the process of conducting and presenting research as follows: "lawyers frame their case (as the students define their topic), search out evidence (as the students search for sources), present the evidence (as the students write the paper), and make the closing argument (as students draw a conclusion)" (31).

Now we have dipped our toes into the idea of using media to connect to a "standard" writing assignment. We can analyze the clips of how a lawyer lays out his/her case and mimic that format. As outlined above, each piece of the planning, researching, drafting, and writing process parallels the way a lawyer defends a court case. The use of popular culture can make something that once was boring more relatable to students in the classroom. But why stop there?

From here, I imagine an extension of the writing assignment into a multimodal/multigenre type of presentation. After going through the case defence process as students produce a written assignment, they can present their findings using a voice over on a powerpoint accompanied by visuals that represent the text, a skit of a lawyer presenting their case, a comic strip, a video, or a poem. Including this type of presentation as a culminating assessment "encourage[s] students to carefully select information from the research they want to communicate and to analyze it in ways that they may not if they are merely reporting it in a traditional format" (Bailey and Carroll 82). By reformatting the standard written research paper into an expanded multimodal/multigenre project like Bailey and Carroll outline in their article *Motivating Students' Research Skills and Interests through a Multimodal, Multigenre Research Project,* we are allowing the students to show more of their interests throughout the project's completion.

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Stephanie G.J. Powell

Instructor-Librarian Collaboration in Teaching Information Literacy

Introduction

During this age of information, more than ever college students are experiencing the

paradox of information overload; the proliferation of digital information resources coupled

with the access to publish online regardless of authority has created a host of challenges for

first-year writing students that did not exist 30 years ago. For students raised in this age of

"googling" for information, I see their point. It makes sense to choose resources that involve

minimal difficulty or effort to find— regardless of their authority or appropriateness as a

source for college-level research.

In my experience, working as a librarian at a small community college, many of the

first-year writing instructors I worked with were finding that students displayed information

searching skills that relied on "hits" provided by internet search engines rather than critically

evaluating and choosing sources. This is definitely not unique to adult learners as I have also

seen these same behaviors trickle down to the high school or even middle school English

classes that I have taught. But why is that? I believe the simple answer is that information

literacy skills are skimmed over during the students' secondary years, but at no fault to the

classroom teachers. With the increasing number of required state standards and objectives that

must be covered each school year, it is difficult for classroom teachers to find time to help

students with these skills. This is where librarians should step up and collaborate with

teachers to support students becoming literate in information seeking. I know these

collaborations take time and trust; it can be difficult for writing instructors to give up any

class time they have with their students. My aim in investigating these issues is to examine

current research in the curriculum of first-year writing programs, to explore methods of assessing instructional support from libraries, and to demonstrate the potential need for further research in librarian and writing instructor collaboration in regards to student development of information literacy skills.

Research

Just as I want for all of my students, I began my research by using some of the EIU's library databases. I quickly found that the problem I identified is not rare and plenty of research is out there on the topic. It appears that many post-secondary institutions have embedded information literacy programs in their first-year writing programs to help students develop critical thinking and information literacy skills that will enable them to be successful academically and professionally. Additionally, assessment of the effectiveness of these programs has become more important than ever with the emphasis on standards-based instruction. It is no longer enough for libraries to provide "one-shot" instruction sessions in these writing courses; librarians must closely collaborate with writing instructors and demonstrate that students are becoming information literate.

First-Year Writing Curriculum

Like any subject of study in higher education, the curriculum of First-Year Writing courses is ever-evolving. In the simplest of terms, curriculum is the content to be learned in a course; however, this is only one small facet. "In other words, curriculum consists of the complex relationship between subjects of study, learning environments, and learners' and teachers' histories, motivations, and aspirations, among other factors" (Lerner 19). While this description provides a comprehensive definition of curriculum, it does not include the outcomes of a well-planned curriculum.

For decades, a solid curriculum has been identified as one that follows the appropriate standards-based plan. The term *standard* is just one of many used to describe these lists of learning expectations. The WPA (Writing Program Administrators) identifies them as *outcomes* while the ACRL (Association of College & Research Libraries) refer to their list as a *framework*. Regardless of term, both sets of standards have some overlap in goals for first-year composition programs in U.S. postsecondary education. Both include goals of critical thinking where students should have "the ability to analyze, synthesize, interpret, and evaluate ideas, information, situations, and texts" (WPA 2). Additionally, both mention goals for learners to be able to identify where appropriate sources can be found to meet information needs and how to follow ethical/ legal guidelines and copyright laws (ACRL). Lerner explains that this type of intended curriculum "values particular student actions (study, practice, read, evaluate, apply, learn, conduct, explore, give and receive feedback, revise, and reflect) (21).

Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking is another common buzzword in academia. Much like *information literacy* it has joined the list of other heavily-used but difficult to explain terms. It is a universal goal that college instructors want their students to achieve, but more often than not, when it comes to teaching these set of skills, instructors "shift the discussion from defining critical thinking to identifying 'features' of it and, especially, methods for encouraging it in their students" (Katz 1). The term *critical thinking* is used strictly for pedagogical pursuits. Ultimately, instructors want their students to become strong critical thinkers.

Katz points out another reason critical thinking is a hard concept to explain is because it is not a concept that is praised professionally. "Nor do we use the term in normal academic work; we don't refer to our colleagues' work as good examples of critical thinking; we don't in

examining the history of the disciplines discuss, say, the dispute between logical positivism and Wittgenstein in terms of which side did better 'critical thinking'" (Katz 1). Instead, standards state that we want students to be able to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate, but what are we really asking students to do? As instructors, when we are trying to explain these skills to students, we begin by providing synonyms to each skill, but eventually we find our way to demonstrating the skills at work through teaching with exemplar texts. But if we really want our students to be able to think critically themselves instead of just imitating our examples, we must model how to think, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and use information appropriately.

Assessment of Library Instruction

The effectiveness of library instruction in information literacy sessions is most often measured using some sort of method that allows course instructors and students the opportunity to provide feedback and/or value of the librarian's instruction. In an extensive review of undergraduate information literacy instruction, Erlinger identifies seven general assessment types: surveys, focus groups, objective tests (locally developed), classroom assessment techniques (CATs)/ performance measures, authentic assessment, rubrics, and standardized tests (445). Additionally, she organizes the different assessment methods by employing two higher-level frameworks—formative versus summative assessments and Kirkpatrick's four levels of assessment model—to group methods "based on how they are used or what type of learning they measure" (445-446).

Formative and summative assessments are not assessment tools themselves but rather categories or ways to classify types of assessment. Formative assessment typically happens during instruction or at the closing of one instructional session before another takes place. It is informal and used to provide quick, immediate feedback for both the students and instructor. Its

use is important because it provides the opportunity to improve instruction or to "re-teach" a concept while instruction is still taking place. Summative assessment takes place after instruction ends, and it usually uses a more formal tool. Pre-tests/post-tests, standardized tests, and other tools that assess an individual student's level of competency at the end of an instructional unit are common forms of summative assessments.

The second framework used by Erlinger is Kirkpatrick's Model which categorizes assessment activities into four levels of assessment (Kirkpatrick Partners). Erlinger explains that this model helps instructors organize what they are trying to find out about their students (446). Each of the model's levels has a distinct goal that can be phrased into a simple question:

Level 1: Reaction- Did they like it?

Level 2: Learning- Did they get it?

Level 3: Behavioral- Can they do it?

Level 4: Results- Does it matter? (Erlinger, 446)

Like Erlinger, other researchers use similar research tools and models to assess library instruction's impact on students' information literacy skills. Walker and Whitver used pre-test/post-test summative assessments that were "comprised of 15 questions aimed at gauging respondents' understandings of information literacy and research concepts" (4). Although they bluntly state that their research should be considered "exploratory," their findings represent the overall importance of collaboration between first-year writing instructors and librarians. Additionally, their study allowed them to develop the "Environmental Model of Information Literacy Development in College" that "provides a visual representation of the complexities of IL (Information Literacy) development" and acts as a "codification of those factors influencing IL skill development among students who receive research training" (Walk/Whitver 9-10).

Reflection on Research

      Finding resources that discussed teaching information literacy skills to first-year writing students was not as difficult as I had expected. It appears that many students are arriving to college under-prepared, and researchers are looking for ways to help support these deficiencies. I plan on taking what I have learned from this research and applying it to develop some goals for my own library instruction program at the high school where I currently work.

      My biggest take-away from this experience is that students need regular exposure to instruction in information literacy skills and simply meeting with a teacher's class one time is not enough. Of course, forming a collaborative relationship with classroom teachers will take time, so I believe that if I begin to better evaluate the library instruction the students are receiving, I will be able to show how essential it really is to the curriculum. Additionally, if this research has taught many anything else, it is that these issues are not unique and further research is needed. I would like to be able to make a contribution to that.

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Kimberly Snider

Motivation in the Classroom

THE STORY OF MY SEARCH

Motivation is something that many students don't have right now. I want to know why or how can I change this. I have noticed over the past five years of teaching that a small population of my students want to do the best that they can in any activity or assignment that we do. Hard work is something that I pride myself on, so the fact that so many of my students don't have motivation to do their best really gets to me. Where I teach, we have a retake policy. If I was a student, I would take full advantage of this, but many of my students who get a passing grade are fine with their efforts. I was also a student that came in early or stayed after school to get help with a class that I was struggling in. Those students are few and far between now. This deeply saddens me. I want my students to be motivated and to give their full effort for the time that they are in my classroom.

Motivation and laziness go hand-in-hand. I haven't only noticed a lack of motivation in the classroom, but it has overflowed into student's extracurricular activities. Good enough is good enough for this generation of students and I am not okay with this. I have tried fun activities, but many of my students only do enough to get the task finished. I have tried videos that they watch with a purpose to ELA, but they don't want to complete an assignment with it. We have Sustained Silent Reading projects due every quarter, but they say that reading a book and completing a project is too much work. I am constantly reading books and researching effective ways to motivate my students to read and write more consistently. I do not think that there is a perfect solution for student motivation, but I do think that there is way that we can increase student motivation.

Building a relationship with our students is half the battle. If they believe in what you are teaching them, then they will do anything for you and work their tail off. I pride myself in creating relationships with my students and my team. This is how I motivate most of my students, but how can I motivate the un-motivated?

THE RESULTS OF MY SEARCH

After pondering this trend for a few years now, I decided that it was time to try to find some solutions to motivate my students in the classroom. My next step was to search databases for research proven strategies to try to turn this unfortunate trend around. I learned that there were a couple of major classroom strategies that showed a positive incline of student motivation in education. These two classroom transformations are either a flipped or blended classroom.

From my research, I first had to fully understand the factors behind student motivation. According to Deci and Ryan's theory, "motivational strategies such as rewards and threats undermine autonomy and thus lead to nonoptimal outcomes such as decreased intrinsic motivation, less creativity, and poorer problem solving" (315). Rewards and threats would lead to extrinsic motivation, but wouldn't increase intrinsic motivation. These strategies would just put a band-aid on a lingering problem. Rewarding students would help them complete the work, but wouldn't promote problem solving skills either. Students need to believe in what you are teaching and want to learn about it.

The blended approach is commonly used in classrooms today, but I hadn't thought about the benefits it has on student's motivation. "In their assessment of online learning motivation, Lim and Kim (2003) created a typology of six learning motivation variables that included: (a) reinforcement, (b) course relevance, (c) interest, (d) self-efficacy, (e) affect, and (f) learner control" (284). In this study 60 students were surveyed (285). "The study utilized the Learning Motivation Questionnaire composed of 24 question items representing the six sub categories" (Lim & Kim, 2003). This study posed some interesting findings that I need to take into consideration when preparing delivery methods of instruction for their students.

According to the findings of the study, "regarding preference in delivery format, those learners who preferred online learning method showed significantly higher mean scores for perceived learning, learning application, learning activity, learning motivation, and learning involvement than those who did not" (287). This means that I need to create multiple opportunities for students to work with content in their classrooms. This would be why the blended approach works well for peaking student's interests. This approach allows students to learn the same material just in different ways. This also stems back to building relationships with our students and knowing their various learning styles. Some students may

learn better through movement (kinesthetic) or some maybe visual learners and need to watch a video to understand. As a teacher, I need to be able to introduce information in a multitude of ways.

Content relevance also seems to play an important role in student motivation in a blended classroom. "From the study findings applicability of learning content seems to be one critical factor of instruction design to sustain students' learning interest and promote learning increase during the blended instruction" (291). I need to also make sure that I can show my students the relevance of the knowledge that they are learning and how important it is to them in the future. I constantly have students asking why we need to learn how to read or write. Many of them say that they won't need these skills in their future career, but communication is a commonality that connects everyone.

The flipped classroom is another strategy that I have researched that seems to promote student motivation. This strategy interests me, because with a flipped classroom students do most the learning at home, so I feel that this strategy relies heavily on intrinsic student motivation. One of the advantages of a flipped classroom is that, "teachers using the method report seeing increased levels of student achievement, interest, and engagement" (Herreid & Schiller). I feel that you would have to motivate students to learn this way, before jumping into this approach right away. I do think that many students do probably benefit more from watching a video before class, than paying attention while the teacher is lecturing. Having access to the lecture will allow students to go back and watch for any information that they may have missed. This could ease some stress in the classroom. Just like the blended approach this could benefit various learning styles, which would help students to think positively about the content and motivate success. "A central theme in all of this activity is the idea that active learning works best. Telling doesn't work very well. Doing is the secret. Active student engagement is necessary, and one of the best ways to git it is to use stories to catch students' interest and emotion" (Herreid & Schiller).

Either a blended or a flipped classroom seem to show an increase in student motivation. I just have to find what works best for my students. I could change from year to year, but I think making a change will allow for change. If I keep doing what I have always done, then I will get the same result and in turn continue to see a decline of student motivation in the classroom.

REFLECTIONS ON MY SEARCH

As I reflect on my research, I plan to use the blended approach until I become more comfortable with implementing a flipped classroom. I might try lecture videos occasionally to see how my student react to learning this way. I plan to accommodate more for my students learning styles and introducing content in a variety of ways. I typically just use a PowerPoint and lecture, while the students take notes, but this has to change. I have found many different tech tools to use that introduces the content in more engaging ways. I also won't use rewards in my classroom, because I learned that this might extrinsically motivate them to get the assignment finished, but it won't intrinsically motivate them to critically thinking about the content. Keeping students moving and working with the information presented is what will help students buy into what you have to say. You have to make learning fun and student motivation will increase. There will always be a student that refuses to participate, but you have to build a relationship with that student and learn what they need in your classroom to successful. I don't think there is one solution that is going to fit every situation, but I have to find out what works best for me and my students. I am hoping there will be continued research on the decline of student motivation in the classroom and hopefully others will share what has worked in their classrooms. I want my students to continue to be motivated and to give their full effort for the time that they are in my classroom.

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Dustin Uher

Building Better Writers Through Innovative Grammar Instruction

Introduction

Sitting in my classroom is the symbolic treasure of my grammatical journey: *Warriner's English Composition and Grammar: Fifth Course*. It is the textbook from which I mastered grammar, and I initially thought my students would follow suit.

Unbeknownst to me until now, the focus of this paper finds its origins in my own ninth grade English class. At that point in time, I had no idea that I wanted to be an English teacher, but I loved reading and writing. Specifically, I loved grammar. I loved learning the linguistic tricks of the trade that allowed me to identify the function of every single word in any sentence: prepositions, participle phrases, gerunds, subjects, predicates, conjunctions, direct objects, intransitive verbs, complex sentences, and more. In fact, one of my fondest memories - and ironically only memories - from 9th grade English is my group correctly diagramming "The Preamble" from our Constitution for bragging rights. I found the puzzle of diagramming sentences satisfying and rewarding in 2011, and I still do.

Relying on my passion and knowledge for grammar, upon entering the profession I figured that teaching grammar would be one of the easier aspects of my job. However, as I enter my third year of teaching, I discovered that teaching grammar has proven to be the most difficult component of my curriculum.

Last year - Pandemic School Year of 2020 - after what I thought had been a successful series of lessons on basic components of a sentence - subjects, predicates, prepositional phrases, and conjunctions - I expected to see high-end grades on students' assessments. Their practice on

NoRedInk (a grammar instruction website focused on data-driven, individualized, and scaffolded skills and drills) proved solid along with classwork. However, upon grading their quizzes, as hard as it is to admit, I discovered that nearly all of them were below my expectations and the majority of them were awful. Sitting with my fellow ninth grade teacher, we could not determine what caused these grades, eventually resigning to the pandemic as a scapegoat. In fact, a student remarked the same message to me on multiple occasions in slightly different words, "Mr. Uher, I hate grammar. I'll never be good at it." Although I have no control over the former, I can maybe conquer the latter.

After this moment and various other failures in the unit, I figured it was time to interrogate my methods of grammar instruction and was inspired to restructure and inform our curriculum moving forward. Therefore, I took this opportunity to explore a multitude of goals and questions at the intersection of grammar and writing pedagogy.

The Search

I quickly discovered that researching grammar pedagogy would result in an overwhelming amount of information to sift through. Therefore, I narrowed my line of questioning to the following inquires:

- How can I help roll out a more effective approach to grammar instruction?
- What do both research and leading scholars suggest are the best and worst methods of grammar instruction?
- How does grammar instruction inform growth in student writing?
- How can I help develop effective, independent, and lifelong writing habits (such as editing and revision) in my students?
- Should grammar be instructed at all?

Turns out, research on grammar instruction has deep roots - several sources referred to it as "The Great Debate". I became excited to examine what teachers and scholars for years have been mulling over. Rather than moving from one of the above questions to the next, I found myself jumping around and back from question to question to gain as much information as possible while also satiating my curiosity and practical needs.

A broad range of sources proved useful and not all are represented below. Teacher blogs and websites such as *Edutopia* and *KQED* were just as informative as scholarly publications from the *National Council of Teachers of English* website and *The English Journal* accessed through JSTOR. I acquainted myself with grammar celebrities, such as the late Contance Weaver, whose influential work and research was incredibly informative and helpful in my search; I also briefly explored foundational studies dating back to the 1960s that have informed grammar instruction and research up and through today. Needless to say, my research was robust.

Although I have completed a reasonably widespread search on best practices in grammar instruction, I believe I have just scratched the surface. Nonetheless, I observed some common threads throughout various sources that will inform my teaching moving forward. This search was well-worth the time and effort and has led to some significant discoveries.

Discoveries

Section I*: Established Research - Teaching Grammar in Context, not Isolation*

While sifting through some established scholarly research, there was a consistent thread of teachers and scholars emphasizing the importance of "teaching grammar in context of writing", the same title of Connie Weaver's pivotal text. Nearly every source I consulted suggested this approach.

Established research from Ronald J. Harris (1962) shows that teaching grammar language and skills in random and isolated events - such as drills in a textbook - does not transfer into student writing. Both Weaver in her work, *Teaching Grammar in Context* and Peter Burrows in his work, *A Creative Approach to Teaching Grammar,* cite this pivotal and foundational study as a transitioning point in grammar instruction. Even further, Weaver goes on to state that "decades of grammar studies tell us…. that teaching grammar does not improve reading, speaking, writing, or even editing in a majority of students" (1996). However, Weaver (1996) demonstrates through real classroom examples that intertwining grammar instruction with writing instruction can lead students to more deeply understanding a grammatical concept and employing it in their writing - teaching "minimum grammar for maximum benefit" (19-24).

Albeit shocking, I had not heard of this approach until doing research for the Eastern Illinois Writing Project, which led to an epiphany. I was doing *exactly* what a foundational study of grammar told us teachers not to do. In my class, I have been relying on "isolated exercises" to teach my students to recognize grammar terminology and identify parts of a sentence with the intention of carryover in reading and writing. In fact, I could not believe I was erring so egregiously in this manner that I searched to see if there was more recent research that confirmed (or not) this phenomenon. Turns out, Burrows refers to a more current study by Andrews et. al (2004) that reviewed 4,691 analyses on grammar instruction and one of the largest conclusions from this review suggests that, again, isolated grammar instruction had little effect on children's writing.

Bolstering all of the above, Amy Benjamin, a pedagogical grammar expert, stated in an interview that in the Summer 2019 issue of *ATEG Journal* that some of the most pressing issues of grammar instruction are teachers 1) not teaching grammar at all and hoping kids catch it, 2)

using the isolated exercise approach of picking out parts of speech and 3) resorting to contextless, boring lessons on grammar (Burke 2019).

Ultimately, what I have gleaned from looking at scholarly research is that I need to shift my approach from isolated grammar instruction to one of writing in context. In fact, I have been using *NoRedInk* to heavily emphasize mastery of grammar exercises instead of the writing-based component the platform offers. Initially, I figured this exercise-based method was the best method because that was exactly how I learned grammar - through drilling and diagramming sentences. I assumed that this method held a large responsibility in my ability to write and read. However, I now question that, and I hope to offer my students some engaging and contextually driven instruction that develops them as critical writers.

Section II: *Best Practices & Suggestions for Grammar Instruction*

While discovering the established research was eye-opening, finding methods and ideas of teaching "grammar in context of writing" proved beyond fruitful. I will be leaving this research process with many approaches to grammar instruction that I hope to implement into my own classroom and introduce to my department in the upcoming years. All of the ideas that follow align with the established research above and present creative and non-traditional methods of teaching grammar and writing while also addressing a concern that I have encountered while teaching grammar.

Grammar Rants & Authentic Writing Assignments

A major obstacle that I wish to solve is generating interest and buy-in from my students with grammar instruction. Many of my students - to a certain extent - generally see grammar as boring and pointless. However, ideas from Patricia Dunn and Kenneth Lindbolm present me with many options to solve this issue. One idea includes devising a discussion around celebrities - the "Dear

Abby" Column or Bill O'Reilly- who have publicly criticized deviations of grammar (termed "grammar rants") use from edited, standardized English (2006). Introducing grammar instruction with grammar rants could peak curiosity in students with a deeper discussion about the variations of English language use and what those choices present to their intended audiences. Students can then see the knowledge of grammar is actually a powerful linguistic tool to wield.

Once I have generated buy-in from students in understanding grammar, creating authentic writing assignments can help sustain interest in grammar instruction while putting it into written practice. For example, Dunn and Lindblom (2003) suggest having students devise a piece of their choosing for submission to an actual audience - local businesses, nonprofit and community organizations, newspapers, magazines, teen print publications, and more. Since the audience will consist of people that students actually wish to communicate with, this can have students asking their own questions about grammar and writing to be sure that the piece is in top shape before submitting. In turn, students will become invested in their work and even show unexpected initiative in understanding grammatical concepts. I believe that creating real-audience assignments that encourage pride and investment in writing tasks from my high school students will reinvigorate incentive to understand how grammar can play a large role in achieving various writing purposes.

Mini-Lessons & Dodging the Grammar-Vocabulary Barrier:

Another obstacle I am looking to tackle is the language barrier that teaching about grammar presents. On top of being able to identify grammatical elements in a sentence, students often identify the main function of the word while using the incorrect term or vice versa. While this is not my main concern, I do want to be sure that students have a foundation in accurately identifying their choices in writing and what grammatical moves they are making.

Weaver (1996) suggests using mini-lessons within classwork writing assignments to sprinkle in grammar instruction and its language. For example, she demonstrates herself the success of this through focusing on comma splices (even using a grammar handbook) while her undergraduates revise drafts of their papers (21-22). Weaver, Mcnally, & Moerman (2001) also provide examples of this embedded grammar mini-lesson through elementary school teacher Sarah, who indirectly teaches "adjectives" to her seventh graders using senses and poetry; Weaver even shares her own instruction of participial phrases and absolutes while writing alternative endings to Ray Bradbuy's *Fahrenheit 451* (19-20). In both of these examples, the lesson is focused on developing writing skills while using a mini-lesson on grammar embedded within. While the language of the grammatical concept here plays a role, writing is still at the forefront. This idea of generating mini-lessons would allow me to present material multiple times to students in manageable chunks of application.

Furthermore, a final idea that considers tackling the language of grammar and student engagement is altering the language completely. In the popular educator blog, *Edutopia*, Steve Peha (2011) suggests dropping the Latin-based language for talking about grammar concepts. He has found success using language such as "main-parts", "lead-in parts", and other variations of vocabulary to practice sentence combining and different writing patterns. This approach, again, keeps writing development at the forefront while still instructing nuances of grammar.

Music & Meta-Lingusitc Awareness

Lastly, one of my major goals is for students to become self-sufficient and savvy writers both inside and outside of the classroom. Perusing NCTE's affiliate journal, *ATEG Journal,* three scholars presented creative approaches to grammar instruction that help develop student's self-awareness in their everyday encounters with language.

Cliborne and Ruday (2017) designed a lesson that centers around using relevant popular music of today to teach grammar concepts in their study titled "99 Problems and Grammar Ain't One". This lesson has students identify a grammatical concept in a song of their choosing and then explain why that grammatical concept is important to the meaning of the song. Further, Kevin Thomas (2020), editor of the ATEG Journal, reviewed Michael Zerbe's *The Rock-'n'-Roll Method to Grammar and Style* stating the book demonstrates how Zerbe "has discovered a   powerful tool for grammar education" (45). Building on these authors' ideas, I believe that using popular music would not only help invigorate grammar instruction but also builds students' linguistic awareness of the language they hear around them every day.

Lastly, Leslie Cook (2020) presented an innovative project that has her upper-level undergraduate students develop knowledge of grammar concepts through an analysis of their own language in actual writing assignments. By the end of her semester, students developed their metacognitive abilities as well as knowledge of parts of speech, clauses, sentence patterns and more (18). I found this to be an inspiring and creative project that I could potentially alter for my twelfth grade students as they consider writing expectations at the college or professional level. As Cook (2020) summarizes, her analysis from collecting this data reveals that students were in fact becoming more aware of their linguistic choices in their written language (19). Yet again, compositional abilities have been shown to develop through a targeted and specific approach of grammar instruction, further confirming Constance Weaver's notion of teaching grammar in the context of writing.

Conclusion: Moving Forward

Ultimately, my overarching takeaway from all these ideas and successful implementations is that teaching grammar within the context of writing will lend itself to not only developing

transfer into my students' compositional skills but also to creating engaging and curiosity-peaking lessons that will have my students invested in learning the elements of language. Shifting my curriculum to reflect the current established research and these innovative instructional ideas will take time and practice, but I am confident that this new mindset will eventually yield some promising results with both my own classroom and English department as a whole.

As I reflect on Weaver et. al (2001) and their suggestion that it is not a matter of whether or not to teach grammar, I also think of a larger consequence of grammar instruction. One major observation that this research led me to discover is how nearly every source I consulted mentions how grammar instruction lends itself to classroom discussions of social justice - power, race, class, language, and more. What does the term "Standardized English" really imply? As California high school teacher Carol Jago (2006) stated, "I want my students to have an influence on society. That's why I teach grammar" (19).

Warriner's English Composition and Grammar: Fifth Course still sits in my classroom leading into the 2021-2022 school year. Although I will not throw out this text that has inlaid within it my own memories of grammatical exploration, this research has illuminated the many ways in which I can use that text as an effective supplement to teaching "grammar in context" and not the "skill and drill" generator and master that I initially surmised. I will be approaching the upcoming school year with a massive toolkit of ideas that will introduce the complexity of language and the world of grammar to my students.

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Lanelle Valdez

Academic vs. Authentic Writing

"Can you read over this for me again?" Kaitlyn asked timidly. It was not too surprising since Kaitlyn was a conscientious student who was determined to pull her grade up since her knee surgery. What was surprising was when Blake, a talented but unmotivated writer, asked the same question. And when Agatha all but refused to submit her review for fear of what others might think, despite the fact that she has one of the best writer's voices in the class, I knew I had discovered something powerful. Why was this writing assignment making my students react in such foreign ways? This assignment, unlike the previous ones, was authentic. Students were writing short book reviews for the website Goodreads, and it was engendering the kind of concern about writing I could have only dreamed of a few weeks before. This experience sparked my interest in the difference between standard academic writing, like the five-paragraph essay, and more genuine writing experiences. There must be more assignments out there that would meet Common Core writing standards without making students pound out yet another essay.

I know I have to teach narrative, explanatory, and research writing, but do I have to always do essays? My department chair seems torn about it. She praised my infographic research project last year, but then insisted that we teach a formal argumentative research essay with the Senior students next year. And I sort of see why. Many college-bound students will need those skills. They won't be able to succeed without them. So how do I make the writing we have to do more engaging and what is a good balance between "fun," authentic writing and formal essay writing? When I began to come up with search terms for this dilemma, I found that

it is pretty broad and vague. This question brings up a lot of other questions: Which kind of writing is more essential/beneficial for students? Is the five-paragraph essay worth teaching? Are traditional research papers really the best way to teach research skills? Am I preparing students for rigorous college papers or for entrance to the workforce, and does that change what kinds of writing assignments they should be given? I realized quickly that I couldn't answer all of these questions, so instead I decided to focus on the five-paragraph essay written for a teacher's eyes only, and more genuine writing assignments written for a real audience.

After several fruitless searches, I finally found that the book *Why They Can't Write: Killing the Five-Paragraph Essay and Other Necessities* was very helpful in that it confirmed and clarified some of what I already suspected as a teacher: the five-paragraph essay is too artificial. "It is very rare to see the five-paragraph essay in the wild; one finds them only in the captivity in the classroom" (Warner 29). Though they do not represent genuine writing, I like that the author, John Warner, admits that the five-paragraph essay format isn't all bad. "Banning its use would have little effect by itself" (28). The problem, he posits, is the way students are taught to write. He likens the rigid organizational structures we give them to training wheels on a bike. They are supposed to help, but the extra wheels never let the child learn balance, the most essential part of riding a bike! I remember learning how to ride a bike without training wheels. It was terrifying! The only way to do it? Fall down. Once I got over my fear of falling, riding was easy. Warner applies this idea to writing. He gives students writing experiences, lets them "reflect on what's happened, and use what's been learned from that reflection next time around" (30). This sounds a lot like coaching from the book *Argument in the Real World!* In this book, the authors, Turner and Hicks, advocate for less formal assessments and more formative assessments in writing (123). As their title suggests, they are also concerned with "real-world"

writing instead of dry essays. They include whole chapters on argument in infographics, video, and social media. I am not the only one shifting writing assignments to those more authentic forms.

In the article, ""Motivating Reluctant Middle School Writers Through Publication" educator Jason Arneson decided to put authentic writing to the test. Genuine writing doesn't take place in a vacuum, so publication opportunities are necessary to give students the real experience of writing. How can they really even consider audience when the only audience is the teacher? Arneson tried different publication techniques with his 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. He found that publication potential is not a miracle cure for all reluctant writers, but he did find that some of his students were drawn into "deeper writing" (12). This is exactly what I experienced in my Goodreads review assignment. I, too, found that it was a great way to get reluctant readers interested in at least *trying* to edit and create a polished piece. It did not transform reluctant writers, but it did at least raise the stakes. Most students were much more invested in the project.

So how do we teach authentic writing assignments? "Writers working with real stakes and real audiences understand that form and content are inseparable" (Warner 29). Therefore, if we want genuine writing in our classrooms, we are going to have to teach students more about form and organization and how to make good choices in these areas. How can this be done? Personally, I think the answer is mentor texts.

I have been interested in mentor texts ever since I saw them used in a colleague's classroom. I have been studying them ever since, but I didn't expect this research journey to bring me back to them. "Very simply, a mentor text is a text created by a professional that helps us make texts of our own" (Marchetti 2). In the classroom, the teacher pulls up a mentor text or an excerpt of one, the students identify the "writer's moves" that make the piece powerful, and

then they try to apply them to their own writing. What is great about mentor texts is that by definition they are genuine. Students can study authentic writing and then produce authentic writing of their own. According to *A Teacher's Guide to Mentor Texts*, this process helps writers to, among other things, "structure a piece of writing" and "craft their texts to match their intentions" (2). The students are therefore empowered by real authors to make real, informed decisions about their own writing. In their book, Marchetti and O'Dell exemplify how mentor texts can be used to teach students about craft, punctuation, structure, and genre—all skills connected to the Common Core Standards. Surely, most, if not all of my writing assignments can be both authentic and standards-based. I have only begun dabbling with this idea in my own classroom, but already the assignments that use mentor texts seem to be richer.

Though authentic writing assignments are my heartbeat, I don't know that it is feasible to give *every* writing assignment a real audience or an authentic mentor text, but now that I know the impact of these sorts of assignments and how they align with my desires for my students, I will definitely be using them as much as I can. Personally, I was writing five-paragraph essays all through junior college. I was at a university before I really started to move on. Perhaps my students deserve better. Maybe it is time to retire the five-paragraph essay and take the training wheels off my instruction—let my students try, fall, and try again.

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Patricia Wagner

iSearch in Nature

I love being in nature. I grew up on the Kankakee River, and spent most of my time outdoors. As an adult, I began to notice that being in nature helped me to be calmer, happier, and less anxious. I have had to deal with anxiety and sometimes depression all of my life, and nature is a tool I have come to rely on: I consider it almost as important as medication. My daughter deals with anxiety too and says that being out in nature helps her, too.

I am also a teacher. As time has gone by and I've gotten more comfortable and competent, I've begun taking my students outside any chance I get. Unsurprisingly, they love it. At first I thought that was just because they get to be in a different environment and it's less structured; they can look and move around more. I saw those things as negatives, factors that had to be overcome in order for learning to take place. Now I see those as positives, things that aid in the learning process. It makes me sad to think that I thought learning could only occur when kids were sitting up at a desk in a classroom, listening. Period. I am both embarrassed and saddened by this, but it makes sense that I thought that. I was raised that way, as were most people. The longer I teach, the more open I am to new ideas, and the more I see that traditional model of students quietly sitting in a classroom as negative. That brings me back to nature and its positive effects on students. I am on a journey to learn about the benefits of being in nature on students' mental health and academic, social, and emotional learning.

The school at which I teach is in a small town and has a very conservative board and administration. By conservative, I mean with both ideas and budget. We almost never implement new programs, and certainly not progressive ones. We also do not spend the money we have, and we have a lot. The board and administration do, though, love to foster a great image of our school to the community. To that end, I am hoping that what I find out can be used to persuade them that more time outside for our students will mean better learning outcomes

and, though I hate to say this, higher test scores (PSA: standardized testing is faulty in both design and implementation...and I loathe it with every fiber of my being). If I can show my administration data that correlates being in nature with these, I think we can make some positive changes, like outdoor areas for classes, a school garden, and plants inside classrooms.

When I began researching, I wasn't sure how much information I would find. I was pleasantly surprised to find out that recently there has been quite a bit. There are many ways that being in nature helps students' learning, and the first one is stress reduction. Studies are showing stress and anxiety among kids of all ages are at higher levels than in the past. A 2018 Pew study found that 70% of teens responded that anxiety and depression are a major problem (Flannery). The onset of No Child Left Behind and implementation of Common Core State Standards brought a higher emphasis on standardized, mandatory, high-stakes testing, and this has most likely contributed to these levels. Some of the forms of anxiety that kids deal with are social, generalized, and OCD. They can be inattentive, restless, disruptive, and have trouble participating in class and engaging with peers (Ehmke). I have had more students in my classes report not being able to focus and feeling pressure and stress to perform well in the past 10-15 years than I did before that, and my students certainly feel it more than I ever did. There are ways to combat these, though, and being in nature is one of them. One study conducted with students learning in a forest setting one day a week showed lowered levels of cortisol, a stress hormone (Kuo). Students who live in rural environments have been found to recover faster from stressful events than their urban counterparts (Kuo). This fact can safely be attributed to the fact that rural kids are subjected to a more green environment.

Another benefit of being in nature is better attention. Students who have classroom windows that face greenspace performed better on concentration tests compared to students whose views are of buildings or the street (Kuo). When I thought about this I was surprised at first. I mean, if a student has a window to look out of, isn't she going to look out of it and not pay attention to what's going on in class? We need to keep their attention, make them only

concentrate on what we're doing in class...right? Well, no. I'm sitting here typing this in my living room. I'm surrounded by floor-to-ceiling windows, light is shining through them, I can hear a garbage truck outside, and my cat and dog are snuggled up next to me...and I am paying attention to what I'm doing. I type, stop and think, and type some more. I am a 52 year-old woman going through menopause with a ton of stuff on my mind, and I am paying attention to the task at hand, mostly. If I were sitting in a boring, white-walled classroom with no windows to look out of, I would be less comfortable and thinking about how uncomfortable I was, I guarantee it. In fact, I often work outside. Considering all of that, it now makes perfect sense that data shows that kids pay more attention when they learn outside.

Motivation and engagement are so important in student learning, and studies show that they are higher in kids when they learn outside. Recent studies by Skinner, Along, and Lekies all show that students are more engaged in content and motivated to learn when the lesson is conducted outdoors, whether it be student or teacher-generated (Kuo). Kids also exhibit more engagement with lessons indoors immediately after coming in from outside, as evidenced by the number of disruptions and teacher redirects (Dewar).

Student mental health is especially important during the pandemic we're going through. We keep talking about how far behind academically the kids are going to be after a year and a half of disrupted learning, and that is a valid concern, for sure. We also need to be equally concerned with students' mental health. In the town in which I teach, we had a young man who was a freshman in college. He had been an excellent student, active in sports and theater, with many friends. He committed suicide right around Christmastime last year. I realize that he could have been depressed and suicidal even if there had not been a pandemic that kept him in his dorm room all the time, alone. But we have to go on the assumption that that played a big part in his emotional and psychological health. I talked to my students a lot last year about how they were feeling, as I'm sure most teachers and parents did, and they reported feeling a lot of stress. The pandemic isn't over, and even when it is, kids will still be dealing with living and

learning in a world that expects them to deal with pretty mature issues: doing well, planning for the future, relationships, teacher, parent, and friend expectations, and of course social media. Taking our students outside in nature will not solve all of the problems they have but it can help them deal with them in a positive way.

One of the best things kids can do to deal well with their everyday life is to get enough sleep. Studies show many don't get enough, and this can lead to increased stress, anxiety, lack of attention. Increased time outdoors can lead to more and better sleep in several ways: natural light makes kids more alert during the day and thus more tired at night, nature can be soothing and comforting, and being outside aids in the release of endorphins and production of melatonin, a sleep-inducing substance our bodies make (NWF).

As I've learned more about this, I am surprised that we don't encourage students to spend more time outside. How can that be? I had recess twice a day until I was in high school, but those days are over. I think the schools that promote outdoor activity and learning are not very common, and probably are considered progressive. Again, how is this so? I knew it was important before, but now, studying recent research, I realize how imperative it is for us to get our kids outside. I have six to eight years before I retire, and I am going to use what I have learned, and what I will continue to learn, to try to persuade my administration that our students' emotional, physical, and academic well-being can only be improved by having them learn and participate more in nature as part of their school day.

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Kinsey Wright

<center>Advancing Language Acquisition Through Writing</center>

When thinking about topics that I would be interested in when it comes to writing, immediately I began to think about how writing could help in my particular classroom. I currently am the only certified multilingual teacher and case manager in our high school of 3,000 students. My student's languages span from many different countries, which all have vastly different ways of structuring their written and oral languages. For example, some of my students have emerged from a world where they read and write in Arabic. Arabic is read bottom up from right to left. In many programs, teachers are shown to help students with their speaking and listening skills first and foremost; later they are pushed to add in reading, and at the way end it is recommended to dabble into the writing world. I was starting to wonder if this was instead not the best practice. Could students better learn English if they start practicing their writing earlier on? Could learning sentence structure in a more hands on way assist them in putting together their own verbal sentences simultaneously. I was hopeful that through researching this topic, I could take back the information that I found and provide my findings to my district. We could possibly restructure our teaching style and really offer students the best practice when it comes to teaching language acquisition. Least of all, I could use this information in my own classroom and see if it helps my students flourish within their language skills.

For my search, I tried to use the texts that we were provided in class. I did this because it is not often that I am supplied with educational texts regarding learning writing and the way in which different types of writing can be beneficial for students. I also decided to go through some of the materials that we were provided in class as well. I felt that this was my opportunity to see what other scholars had placed out into the world in recent years. The last time I had held this many textbooks on the process of writing was in my undergrad, and I was excited to see if the information and the research has changed. To my excitement it had. With technology came great expansion on what was considered acceptable pieces of writing for students to submit. The world of creativity seemed to have opened up for students to produce not just research papers, but blog posts, tweets, scripts for later produced videos, and other fun more

manipulative ways of learning how to write. I also found that, to my surprise, English Language Learners were starting to take a forefront, or at least a chapter of their own in these different materials. For too long, teaching all domains of English (reading, writing, speaking and listening), were primarily geared to native English speakers. Students who didn't fit into that category were left to the wayside and teachers were expected to get creative when it came to modifying and accommodating their work. For a very long time, the only feedback that I would get from even my own district leaders was, "just do what you think is right by the kids". Although that freedom is exhilarating for a teacher, it is devastating when you want to provide a student with an education that has the data to prove that it should work. When researching this topic, I was so happy to see that more planning for diverse students was taking place, and that I might be able to actually return to my district leaders and say, "this is what is right by the kids, and not because I think so, but because the leaders of education and the data proves it".

What I found was that not all of our texts had areas that really just set aside how writing would be beneficial for multilingual students. However, those that did include it within their findings, had some very helpful ideas and insight to writing with English Language Leaners. Art Peterson compiles the overview of the National Writing Project and Cal Nagin's work in *Because Writing* Matters. He includes that chapter two discusses how, "classroom writing can be successfully supported by technology and examines approaches to writing that advance the progress of English language learners" (NWP and Nagin). Kylene Beers and Robert E. Probst had quite a few insights to how reading nonfiction could help assist learners in a classroom. In their text, *Reading Nonfiction*, they discuss the confusion over words with multiple meanings. They recommend that when reading articles students come equipped with their own highlighters and pencils so they can jot down what words they have questions over. They write, "We saw time and time again that kids know words; they just don't know the multiple meanings of words. This is especially true for our English language learners" (Beers, Probst 173). Allowing students to identify words that they struggle with is amazing, but this can be then pushed farther by having students write their own sentences with the different meanings of the words, after they uncover them. When Beers and Probst discuss their syntax surgery strategy, they also acknowledge that, "Syntax Surgery was initially

envisioned as an instructional strategy to help English language learners understand the word order of English sentences (Herrell 2000)" (Beers, Probst 210). This entire strategy helps students learn the parts of the English sentence, and later is there to allow them to try and structure their own sentences with the correct parts in order. In Harvey Daniels, Steven Zemelman, and Nancy Steineke's text, *Content-Area Writing*, they go through all of the do's and do not's a teacher should take when teaching writing. Although this was not specific for ELL's, I did find it helpful to look at. Chapter Six is all about finding ways to foster and keep interest in writing. Something that I find my students, and even myself struggling with sometimes. They include tips that go against the old school way of grading papers. Some such as, not marking up the entire paper, but instead focusing on one skill or editing technique you would like your student to try, as to not overwhelm or discourage them. The last text that I found to be extremely helpful was Edward Corbett, Nancy Myers and Gary Tate's *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*. I fell in love with Vivian Zamel's chapter, "Strangers in Academia: The Experience of Faculty and ESL Students Across the Curriculum". The entire chapter takes note about the teacher and student relationship when the student struggles with getting their thoughts down on paper in a fluent manner. They discuss how when removing the parameters of papers, ELL student thoughts tend to flow more freely. Although the syntax and grammar may be off, the ideas that are listed are very insightful. I felt that this chapter is one that my colleagues would find value in. It discusses that it is okay at times to struggle with reading works written by those who do not speak English primarily. However, its main focus is on ways that you can reduce both the student stress and the teacher stress in that situation. I will say this chapter was more geared to college level classes, but still felt that it proved that writing is in a way very important to learning and acquiring English. Regardless of the style and type of writing, just getting students to sit down and try it, is a win in itself.

I plan on using my findings in a couple of different ways. The first and foremost is within my own curriculum. This summer I was given a few hours to go in and really vet out my curriculum. Seeing as I am a department of one, I do this on my own. This information is pivotal in helping me not only scaffold writing in my classroom, but also in assuring that writing is sprinkled throughout all of our

lessons and not just placed on the metaphorical back burner of the classroom. The second way in which I would like to use my findings is within our back-to-school meeting as an English Language Learning Department. Although I am the only teacher at the high school, our team is fairly large at the elementary and middle school levels. I would love to take back this information so that they could look at their lessons as well and start to incorporate writing during more of the earlier acquisition stages. I think that these findings are beneficial to students regardless of their ages. If we can start having students working on their writing at younger ages, then we might have more success of having them bridge out of our program and becoming fully bilingual or multilingual in less time. Although we love our students on our case load, or primary goal is to assist them in becoming fluent in all of the languages they choose. Codeswitching is extremely difficult at all ages when learning English and it seems that writing can help students visualize where the languages are different, and where they are completely the same. The last way that I would like to use this information is within my own studies. I am currently applying for Doctoral programs within the curriculum and instruction realm. I would love to use this information within my future education, so that I can help future students and educators with enhancing their academic skills while also enhancing their language acquisition as well.

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