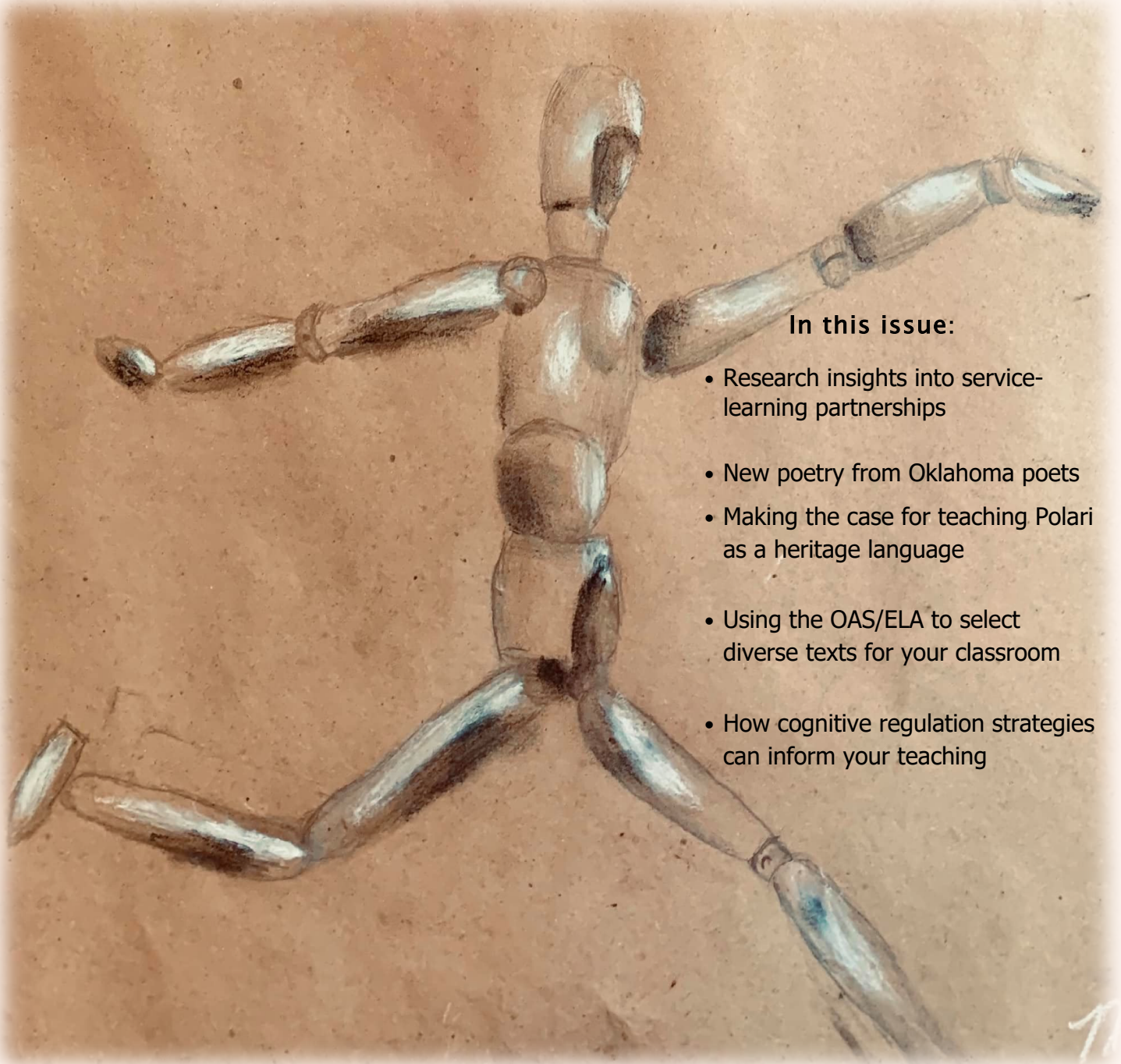


Oklahoma English Journal



In this issue:

- Research insights into service-learning partnerships
- New poetry from Oklahoma poets
- Making the case for teaching Polari as a heritage language
- Using the OAS/ELA to select diverse texts for your classroom
- How cognitive regulation strategies can inform your teaching

The **Oklahoma English Journal** is a peer reviewed journal, published by the Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English as an affiliate journal of the National Council of Teachers of English. OEJ publishes articles of interest to classroom teachers, librarians, administrators, and university professors across literacy studies and the humanities regardless of teaching level.

Submission Guidelines

Authors are invited to submit creative, multimodal submissions as well as traditional texts. OEJ encourages many forms of communication including poetry, prose, narrative, graphic stories, art, and photography.

- **Research Articles** should be organized around the following categories: introduction, literature review/theoretical framework, methods, findings, discussion, and implications for future research, practice, and policy.
- **Practitioner Articles** should be theoretically sound and pedagogically applicable.
- Both **research articles and practitioner articles**, including references and appendices, should be less than 4,000 words.
- **Reflections, Expert voices, Geographical views and Teaching tips** should be less than 1,500 words.
- **Book reviews** should be between 250 and 1,000 words, to include a brief synopsis of the text, as well as possible teaching ideas, accompanying texts, and personal response.
- We welcome P-12 student book reviews and essays, including co-authored reviews: student/teacher, student/ student, and student/caregiver. Co-authored book reviews should explore both perspectives of the same young adult or children's literature text.
- We welcome P-12 visual art, especially connected to or inspired by reading.

Acknowledgments

The current *Oklahoma English Journal* editor is Julianna Lopez Kershen, Ed.D. You can reach Julianna at julianna.kershen@gmail.com The Fall 2020 OEJ issue will be co-authored with incoming 2021 editor Michelle Waters. Michelle will serve as OEJ editor from 2021-2026 (5 year term).

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Publishing with OEJ	<i>Inside front cover</i>

From the Editor

I am excited to share with you this issue of the *Oklahoma English Journal*, as it is full of exciting learning and teaching ideas that will inspire your classroom and professional thinking. The issue opens as Dr. Tara Hembrough shares her research about the bridges built between university students and children participating in service learning efforts meant to enhance literacy skills. Just as Dr. Hembrough asks readers to think about how we strengthen community partnerships, she also lifts up the voices of Native children in Oklahoma. Likewise, our issue closes with a well-researched essay by Dr. Lara Searcy, Lauren Fodor, and Allison Grossman, all of whom collaborate to encourage us to rethink our selection of young adult texts in the secondary English classroom. This challenge serves as another model for classroom community-building, as they advocate that shared texts become a path for reconnecting and highlighting youth voices. In between these informative articles are many essays, practitioner reflections, and poetry meant to inspire and buoy you forward in these tumultuous times.

I also want to take a moment in this space to highlight important new research and classroom resources out by university faculty across Oklahoma. University of Oklahoma Professor Lawrence Baines has recently published *Privatization of America's Public Institutions: The Story of the American Sellout* (2019, Peter Lang Publishers). In this book he asks: Should our public institutions continue to be privatized, and what are the effects of privatization on public goods and democracy? In subsequent chapters Dr. Baines analyzes current privatization efforts of the American military, the American correctional system, P-12 public education, and our public higher education system. His analysis highlights how the current privatization efforts primarily affect vulnerable populations, many of whom have little voice in resistance. Additionally, while privatization of public institutions is accelerating,

we have yet to truly analyze and understand the implications of these efforts. Teachers of all levels will appreciate this well-researched critique of current policy.

Closer to our ELA roots, recently Oklahoma State University Professor Shelbie Witte, co-authored *Literacy Engagement Through Peritextual Analysis* available from NCTE publishing at <http://bit.ly/NCTE-peritext> (2019). This book is an engaging resource for classroom teachers, aiding them in teaching into a work's "peritext" – the elements surrounding the main content of a text which support and facilitate the reader's understanding. Peritext includes the book cover and design, illustrations, tables and figures, as well as the table of contents, appendices, glossaries, dedications and author's notes, references, source notes, and more. Dr. Witte and her co-authors provide a categorical framework for identifying and analyzing peritext, as well as how to use these texts-within-a-text to deepen students' conversations, analyses, and understanding. As teachers build on students' knowledge of text features and text structures, peritextual analysis becomes a next step to advance student learning.

I'll end by highlighting University of Oklahoma's Professor Crag Hill and his book *Critical Approaches to Teaching the High School Novel* (2018, Routledge). This collection of essays, co-edited by Dr. Hill and Dr. Victor Malo-Juvera provides an excellent support for high school teachers looking to expand their knowledge of canonical texts and introduce new perspectives into their classroom.

After reading this issue, I encourage you to explore these additional professional resources. Finally, the Fall 2020 issue will be my last and will welcome Michelle Waters as co-editor. I look forward to our collaboration! ... *Julianna*

Creative-Writing Workshops, Community Learning, and Civic Action:

A Case Study Involving College Students at the Boys and Girls Club

Tara Hembrough, Ph.D.

Introduction

Almost three decades ago, Ernest Boyer, a famous American educator, wrote a book entitled *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990) to express his concern that universities were overlooking their mission to address community needs. As one early figure of the community-learning movement, Boyer asked writing faculty to fashion classrooms blending theory with praxis by introducing students to community-related issues via their participation in local activities within the greater classroom experience. Taking a cue from Boyer, Janet Eyler and Dwight Giles (2007) argue that students located inside the community- as-classroom may benefit from a curriculum utilizing “the tools, concepts, and facts of the particular learning situation” (p. 184). Today, with community-learning approaches having gained greater prominence, a growing number of faculty, including those concerned with writing-oriented disciplines, are experimenting with community learning (see College Composition and Communication [CCC], 2016).

As a valid concern, community learning can be problematic when students do not participate fully, understand the project’s bigger associated issues (McGarrell, 2009), or value what community partners have to offer in return (Deans, 2000). Despite these risks, a growing number of writing faculty are implementing community-learning initiatives, including those involving college students and children, with a few researchers describing the teaching and

mentoring relationships forged between low-income and racial/ethnic minority participants on both sides. By instituting a community-learning design that prompts students, including those who are socioeconomically, geographically, and racially/ethnically marginalized themselves, to engage with children in similar circumstances, writing faculty may address larger questions involving literacy and other educational concerns. As one scenario for this community-learning design, faculty can consider engendering teaching and mentoring relationships between their students and children from extracurricular programs, including the Boys and Girls Clubs, a governmentally funded organization for its members aged five through 18, which promotes citizenship, character and leadership development, and academic preparedness and college access (see Boys and Girls Clubs of America, 2018).

Acting in conversation with community-learning designs, the study’s author participated in a partnership between her university and the Boys and Girls Clubs’ local branch, with students acting as teachers and mentors to children involved in a creative-writing workshop as part of the Club’s activities. Because the students and children possessed a low SES and lived in a rural area, and a portion of both groups were Native American, the study’s participants were marginalized by these demographic factors. The community-learning initiative’s purpose was to formulate mutually beneficial relationships between the students taking university creative-writing classes

and children representing Club members. As rationales for students' study participation, they hoped that in instructing children in creative-writing and imaginative- thinking subject areas, the students might expand their sense of civic awareness. In establishing the study, the author posed this research question: Would the students view the nature of their socioeconomic, rural, and/or racial/ethnic backgrounds as being key to building relationships with Club members possessing similar demographic features and thus take advantage of the workshop's opportunity to expand their civic ideals and establish subsequent, like goals for their continued civic participation?

Theoretical Framing

Community learning promotes students' academic, psychological, and social growth and heightens their communication and leadership capabilities (Foli, Braswell, Kirkpatrick, & Lim, 2014). By enrolling in courses, foreseeably including creative-writing classes, in which faculty implement a community-learning vision, students can reap numerous benefits: First, students may identify gains in their self-efficacy levels because through community learning, they can assist others while undergoing a transformative, educational experience (Stevens, Geber, & Hendra, 2010). Second, students can engage in lifelong-learning practices by connecting their education with real-world conversations and civic activities (Lisman, 1998). Third, students may learn about diverse cultures and, consequently, reduce social stereotypes' impacts upon themselves (Seider, Gillmor, & Rabinowicz, 2012).

Nonetheless, in a few community-learning programs described, students' acts of tutoring others in literacy and writing practices resulted in oppressive effects for community members. Such cases involving Caucasian students from upper- and middle-class backgrounds and community members, who were impoverished and racial/ethnic minorities, produced a negative

impact (see Donahue, Fenner, & Mitchell, 2015), with some students viewing themselves as "saviors" offering their services to undeserving "others" (Schutz & Gere, 1994, p. 133). Still, recent community-learning, writing researchers focusing on scenarios involving both students and community children, who are racial/ethnic minorities and/or from low-income backgrounds, document positive results concerning this demographic context. In these latter studies, the students, being more similar demographically to the children they engaged, identified gains in acting as mentors and role models. Examples of these community-learning formats involve students corresponding with high schoolers in letter-writing programs (Faulkner-Springfield, 2011) and tutoring elementary-aged children (Davi, 2006; Yeh, 2010).

While researchers, including Faulkner-Springfield (2011), Yeh (2010), and Davi (2006), discuss community learning from the writing classroom's perspective, few studies exist concerning community-learning initiatives involving socioeconomically and/or racially/ ethnically marginalized students, including English majors. Furthermore, there is little information about community educational programs affecting Native American students and/or their communities even though the community-learning format is a culturally-fitting, customizable, non-Westernized means for promoting peripheral groups, including Native Americans, to engage in meaningful educational experiences (see Sykes, Pendley, & Deacon, 2017), and community learning may impact participants' civic engagement and awareness (Espino & Lee, 2011).

Because Native American culture shapes how some Native students describe their experiences (Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintron, 2007), often, community-learning projects provide them with safe spaces to utilize their tribal knowledge, strengthen their academic persistence factors, and teach and mentor others. Notably, when tribal

students mentor and teach local children, they may become more committed to their own education, too (Nelson & Youngbull, 2015; Sykes, Pendley, & Deacon, 2017). Additionally, when Native American students and the children they mentor are from the same tribe, this relational tie assists students in feeling supported and connected likewise (James, West, & Madrid, 2013), as tribal cultures are unique in nature (Fletcher, 2008).

For the current study, through a community-learning initiative offered within the reviewed literature's scheme and based upon the study's research questions, the author, a faculty member at an Oklahoma university, developed a partnership with the Boys and Girls Club. The study's purpose was to determine whether providing the Club's children with a creative-writing workshop and a mentorship process, with the objective of contributing to the children's future potential college entrance, would result in positive outcomes for the students themselves, including the strengthening of their civic ideals and goals. Investigating this initiative as a curricular model that might illuminate larger patterns of interest, the author presents ways in which the study fostered a group of socioeconomically, geographically, and racially/ethnically marginalized English majors' investment in a community-learning design, as well as encouraging students to interact with their communities along ethical and tenable lines.

Methods

Purpose and Participants

The research design used an exploratory case study (Cresswell, 2012) involving a university and K-12 community partnership to explore participants' beliefs and practices regarding creative writing, imaginative thinking, civic action, and racial/ethnic diversity. Research was conducted over two summers at two sites, the participating university and the Boys and Girls Club. Participants included 14 undergraduates, 34 child Club members, the English department

chair, and 2 Club co-directors and 1 staff member, who consented to participate as required by the university's research board. Table 1 provides demographic information about student and child participants.

Research Initiative

During the Club's summer session, the English department chair and the author, an English faculty member, presented a creative-writing workshop taught by English majors for elementary-aged children. According to an ACT National Curriculum Survey (2016), a confederation of first- through twelfth-grade, language-arts teachers; developmental and first-year writing, rhetoric, and literature faculty; and workforce representatives agreed that their populations must be able to compose for various purposes, contexts, and audiences, including ones related to creative writing and imaginative thinking. Thus, in order to address the literacy standards that many teachers and bosses value, the study's students taught the Club's children the arts of creative writing and imaginative thinking in crafting creative texts. In orchestrating the workshop, the chair and the author also identified the local Club's needs by engaging in discussions with the Choctaw co-director, who appreciated an opportunity for the students, including younger tribal members, to lead the workshop, as community learning promotes tribal students' exploration and sharing of their identities (see Sykes, Pendley, & Deacon, 2017).

In preparing workshop materials, the English majors utilized lessons fashioned from their creative-writing classes featuring nonfiction, fiction, and poetry (see Bartleet, Bennett, Marsh, Power, & Sunderland, 2014). Oftentimes, teachers' curricula fail to match Indigenous pupils' needs, worldviews, and native knowledge constructs (Curnow, 2011; Munroe, Lunney Borden, Murray Orr, Toney, & Meader, 2013), yet because the students hailed from a community with a large tribal presence, and most were Native American themselves, the study addressed and

countermanded this issue. For the workshop, the students offered class sessions daily in two-hour segments spanning two months' course, as working with the Club's children over a somewhat longer timeline was important in building relationships (see Foli, Braswell, Kirkpatrick, & Lim, 2014).

Table 1.
N = 14 Students and 34 Club members

	Students	Children
Demographic information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -between ages 20 and 30. -have a SES at or below the poverty line. -12 women and 2 men. - 8 Choctaw, 1 Chickasaw, and 5 Caucasians with non-legally documented tribal heritage. -all English writing majors with an appreciation for creative writing and English education, preservice teachers, and/or students with an interest in teaching college. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -between ages 6 and 9. - most have a SES at or below the poverty line. -13 girls, 20 boys, and 1 who did not identify a sex/gender. -19 Caucasians, 7 Native Americans, 2 Latino-Hispanics, and 1 African-American.
Civic and family background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 7 possessed tutoring experience with children ranging from elementary- to high-school ages. - 11 volunteered or were employed in scenarios involving these child instructional types: church events, library-reading programs, afterschool programs, and substitute-teaching pools. -2 had parents who were English teachers, a factor influencing the former's decision for study participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -All reported a desire to attend college in the future.

Materials and Procedure

An exploratory case study involves an in-depth data collection from multiple sources to provide a case description and its themes (Cresswell, 2012), and the author utilized diverse instruments to generate results, including documents, surveys, interviews, and observations (Yin, 2009). To provide for the study's background information, the author viewed

documents including university webpages about community-learning opportunities, as well as webpages concerning the Boys and Girls Clubs. In fashioning the survey and interview questions and planning the study, the author also relied on the CCC's Statement on Community-Engaged Projects (2016) and a study by Sykes, Pendley, & Deacon (2017).

The study's participants provided various data types. The students took pre- and post-surveys, each with Likert-style and open-ended questions; engaged in pre- and post-interviews; and discussed their experiences with the author during the author's Club workshop observations. To provide information concerning the students' sociodemographic, academic, work-related, and community-oriented factors, students answered pre-survey questions about their 1) backgrounds; 2) creative-writing coursework; 3) teaching, tutoring, and work/volunteer experiences; 4) personal, educational, career, and civic ideals and goals; and 5) study participation rationales. Likewise, for the post-survey, students reported on how the Club's workshop affected their conceptions of teaching and mentoring acts, and civic-related ideals and goals. In the interviews, amongst giving other information, the students also elaborated upon their survey answers by discussing the workshop's proceedings, including the successes and drawbacks they experienced. Additionally, students shared their lesson plans.

Besides the students, the remaining participants were the children, English department chair, and Club staff. The children received a survey packet at the workshop's end, with a mix of Likert-style and open-ended questions soliciting their sociodemographic data, as well as information about their creative-writing interests, academic backgrounds and plans, and experiences with the Club's workshop. Also, during and after the initiative, the department chair, co-directors, and the staff member engaged in interviews providing a context for their roles in hosting the workshop.

To provide for flexibility and adaptation, the study applied a constructivist, grounded theory method to collect data and formulate themes in it linked to the research questions (Strauss, 1987). After gathering the data, the author and another writing researcher noted participants' responses to the quantitative data from the Likert scale questions and then evaluated participants' responses to the surveys' open-ended questions, interviews, and author's observation notes for references to the study's research question. To explore the study's common strands, the researchers analyzed the data by reading and annotating documents, locating themes, generating a coding scheme, and coding the data (Bricki & Green, 2007). Within the data coding and analysis process, the researchers coded all data to create internal consistency, and the correlation coefficients used to assess inter-rater reliability within the dataset ranged from good to adequate in all areas.

Findings

Overall, findings indicate that participating in the community-learning initiative at the Boys and Girls Club benefitted students' civic practices, as they built relationships with their younger peers possessing similar backgrounds but few models for college exploration. According to students' post-survey, all ($n = 14$) agreed that their workshop participation "assisted [them] in addressing community-learning teaching and mentoring objectives that were both appropriate and tenable," given that they desired to participate in "a short-term, but meaningful, community-learning-based, creative-writing workshop over a single summer's course" (see Foli, Braswell, Kirkpatrick, & Lim, 2014). In turn, according to data from faculty and staff post-interviews and the student and child post-surveys, all students, faculty, and staff ($n = 18$) and 88% of the children ($n = 30$) agreed that the students experienced gains in their ability to act as short-time teachers and mentors in fostering the children's desire to

continue their education and attend college in the eventual future. Consequently, the study offers a major finding, with the students' investment in a community-learning initiative involving a workshop for Club children having benefitted and promoted the students' personal conceptions concerning their further potential engagement in comparable civic practices.

Students' Define Their Relationships to Civic Participation

In an open-ended, post-survey question, when students were asked to "conceptualize [their] workshop roles and the traits [they] adopted," 79% ($n = 11$) described themselves as "mentors" and "role models" who directed the Club's children to learn about creative writing and also consider college. Thus, the workshop benefitted students' community-learning-oriented civic practices and ideals (see Deans, 2000), as they defined empowering roles for themselves (see Lisman, 1998) and fashioned meaningful teaching and mentoring relationships with the children (see Davi, 2006; Faulkner-Springfield, 2011; Yeh 2010), with their younger peers possessing similar demographic contexts to the students' own. Indeed, this comparable demographic dynamic assisted the groups in building symbiotic relationships, as both populations came from impoverished and rural settings, with some identifying as Native American.

In responding to an open-ended, pre-interview question about the student's rationale for workshop participation, all ($n = 14$) indicated that they joined the initiative at least partially for the "service credit" they could list on their résumé. Nonetheless, all also reported a desire to invest time in local children by contributing civically to a community-learning program with creative-writing elements. Similarly, in the post-survey, all students ($n = 14$) agreed that they "enjoyed mentoring the Club's children," and 93% ($n = 13$) believed that they "excelled in addressing the workshop's mentoring objectives

in some capacity.” In looking to the future, all students ($n = 14$) both “planned to become more involved in [their] community” and expressed “an interest to engage in subsequent creative-writing workshops” either sponsored by the Club or offered elsewhere.

“... the workshop benefitted students’ community-learning-oriented civic practices and ideals (see Deans, 2000), as they defined empowering roles for themselves (see Lisman, 1998) and fashioned meaningful teaching and mentoring relationships with the children (see Davi, 2006; Faulkner-Springfield, 2011; Yeh 2010) ...”

Likewise, in the post-survey, 71% of students ($n = 10$) reported that their demographic features, including factors associated with their place of residence, SES, and/or race/ethnicity, “assisted [them] in building a strong connection with the children” (see Pewewardy & Cahape Hammer, 2003). Specifically, concerning race/ethnicity, all students ($n = 14$) believed that their ability to “empathize” or “sympathize” with aspects of the tribal children’s backgrounds (see Seider, Gillmor, & Rabinowicz, 2012) led them to be “more aware” of the racism that area tribal groups have endured (see Pewewardy, 1994). Additionally, through an open comment for the post-interview, 71% of students ($n = 10$) explained further, regarding the literature’s call for the need to dispel racist elements that may arise during community-learning programs (see Green, 2003), that they had learned more about the culture and/or concerns of local tribals in interacting with the Club’s children themselves. Concerning race/ethnicity demographics, 64% of the students

($n = 9$) or the majority and 35% of the children ($n = 7$) or an approximate third were Native American. Thus, the student and child populations differed markedly in their racial/ethnic numbers. Still, according to students’ post-interview, open commentary, over half of the tribal students ($n = 5$) identified the presence of the workshop’s tribal children as being instrumental, on the students’ part, in their formulating impactful teaching and mentoring relationships, including dynamics involving student/child participants from the same tribe (see James, West, & Madrid, 2013). Overall, in the post-survey, all students ($n = 14$) agreed that the workshop led them to “demonstrate care for the Club’s children,” “create inclusive spaces,” and “respect diversity,” civic objectives associated with community learning, mentoring, and the inclusion of tribal groups (see Pewewardy & Cahape Hammer, 2003).

Discussion

Through the creative-writing workshop, students built relationships with their younger, area peers, who possessed similar backgrounds to the students’ own, being marginalized by their low SES, rural residency, and/or racial/ethnic background, and who had few models for college exploration in their personal circles. In doing so, the students demonstrated the capacity to act as short-term teachers and mentors in fostering the children’s desire to become more creatively literate, continue with their education, and attend college in the expected future (see Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2009). Overall, then, the study findings indicate that the workshop prompted students’ establishment of a set of community-learning-centered roles and traits, which they implemented in the initiative as part of a pattern of current and potentially future civic acts.

The ability for Native American students to assume new traits while foregrounding a traditional Native identity can contribute to their academic and personal attainments (Demmert,

2001), as it did for the study's Native students, who assumed new roles as teachers and mentors serving to empower them in the initiative in a manner matching the literature (Lisman, 1998). Moreover, unlike in other community-learning studies documenting the charity-minded efforts of affluent or middle-class Caucasian students toward the community (see Littlepage, Gazley, & Bennett, 2012), in the current study, students placed a high value on assisting others similar to them socioeconomically, geographically, and/or racially/ethnically. Although community-learning initiatives connecting non-Native students with Indigenous peoples may heighten stereotypes (Pratt & Danyluk, 2017), inviting Native American students or those from Native-populated areas to engage in the workshop mitigated this risk, with some tribal students undertaking the instruction of Native children from the students' own tribe (see James, West, & Madrid, 2013). Nevertheless, providing a contrast-in-point, Chris, a preservice teacher, commenting in the post-interview, argued that his being Chickasaw and teaching other Chickasaw children to tell their stories was not as important of a factor contributing to the initiative's success as was the children's capacity to verbalize their stories in any capacity.

Implications for Future Research, Practice, and Policy

This section provides suggestions to writing teachers and writing program administrators considering community-learning initiatives involving literacy objectives utilizing creative-writing and imaginative-thinking premises and practices, the study's limitations, and future directions. As a first suggestion to those implementing creative-writing workshops in educational settings, such as the Club, according to the students', faculty's, and staff's advice, one might consider holding the workshops for a longer period, such as over a semester's course lasting approximately four months, in order to teach children in greater depth and forge prolonged

mentoring relationships. On this note, one of the study's limitations is that it did not track students' outcomes for a longer timeline to determine how their creative-writing theories and acts, as well as their career plans and civic aspirations may have evolved further. As a second suggestion, one should endeavor to fashion community-learning relationships between one's college and a nearby sponsoring entity, so that students might feel as if they are contributing toward their own community's welfare, if indeed this sense of assisting others in close proximity is a goal. In identifying future directions for researchers working along similar lines to this study in implementing creative-writing workshops with a community-learning focus that include Native American populations specifically, researchers might consider also the effects of such formats on tribal students enrolled at other higher-education institutional types, including tribal colleges, community colleges, and comprehensive research universities. This focus could expand the current study's creative-literacy-related findings involving community-learning designs with Native American students and children.

“... there exists little research addressing Indigenous peoples' academic outcomes at every educational level, including the post-secondary (Demmert, 2001), and it is crucial that teachers and writing program administrators employing creative-writing assignments understand the curricular designs, including community-learning formats, that may aid Native American students...”

Conclusion

Upon enrolling at a university, many tribal students yearn to feel that their institution values their cultures, worldviews, and communities (Mosholder, Waite, Larsen, & Goslin, 2016). Thus, the study's creative-writing workshop proved meritorious in prompting students to identify the views that they adopted and the skills that they demonstrated as writers, teachers, and mentors to the community's children as being vital to its success, as well as to the students' own civic-related undertakings and outcomes. Through a university- and Club-sponsored, creative-writing workshop, the group of English majors acted as short-term teachers and mentors for local children aspiring to increase their creative-writing-oriented literacy levels and to enroll later in college. Additionally, within the initiative, the students identified commonalities between the children and themselves regarding their shared impoverished and rural status, with a percentage of both also identifying as Native American. On this final point, the study's findings can be deemed important more largely because there exists little research addressing Indigenous peoples' academic outcomes at every educational level, including the post-secondary (Demmert, 2001), and it is crucial that teachers and writing program administrators employing creative-writing assignments understand the curricular designs, including community-learning formats, that may aid Native American students, including those who are English majors and preservice teachers, in matriculating from college and instructing others in creative literacy arts (see Guillory, 2009).

Additionally, this study is also pertinent to other audiences and stakeholders, including K-12 teachers, preservice teachers, parents, and educational after-school programs. For instance, teachers and preservice teachers who participate in community-learning programs may benefit from employing their creative-writing lesson plans with local children in a fun, educational environment.

Similarly, parents and after-school program partners who participate with their children in creative-writing workshops can encourage them to expand their knowledge of creative writing, as well as providing them with models of their older peers, including those who are minorities, who have entered college successfully. Finally, for those engaged with tribal students or possessing a tribal background themselves, practicing the art of storytelling and displaying one's creativity remain vital cultural and educational practices that should be continued and upheld now and into the future.

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Using Cognitive Regulation Strategies in the English Classroom

Danielle Nagel-O'Rourke

A Need and A Direction

Imagine, for a moment, the life of a modern American teenager. They are not so very different from teenagers of the past, except for the added stress of technology and far more pressure to attain higher education than the generations that came before them. These two factors may seem insignificant, but they have dramatic effects on students in the high school classroom. Take Lena, for example: Lena is a student with pressure from her parents to be the first to attend college, pressure to participate in extracurriculars to build her resume, pressure to work to help pay the bills, and pressure to be a good girlfriend to her boyfriend of six months. She is pulled every which way by her parents, her peers, her teachers, and herself. What does she do? How does she manage the stack of assignments for six classes, her goals and tasks for after school activities, her work schedule, and find time in the middle of it all for her family, friends, and herself? The answer that most teenagers find is: they don't. They cannot organize their personal and academic stress, and therefore suffer in silence under the daily pressures without being able to make sense of what to do, when, and how. As a teacher, I see this situation daily. This conundrum applies not just to Lena, but to many of our secondary education students in the classroom.

The American Psychological Association (APA) conducted their own study in 2013 to measure teen stress levels compared to adults, and their findings were a point that drives home the importance of providing teens the means to deal with their stress. Specifically, the APA found that on average, teens reported 5.8 on a 10-point scale, that their stress levels exceeded what is considered healthy (compared to the 3.9 average reported by adults). Furthermore, teens

reported overall stress levels to be 5.8 out of 10 on average, while adults reported 5.1 (Professional Services Close - Up,). This level of stress is likely due to the lack of coping mechanisms adolescents have learned in comparison with adults, but still presents a problem that must be addressed by those who care about younger generations of children and students.

Additionally, The National Survey of Children's Health study conducted in 2011 focuses on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) in children ages 12-17 (Moore and Ramirez, 2016). Adverse Childhood Experiences are described by researchers as stress related to events in a child's or adolescent's life, such as "physical or emotional abuse or neglect, sexual abuse, domestic violence, substance abuse or mental illness in the home, parental separation or divorce, having an incarcerated household member, and not being raised by both biological parents" (Brindis and Claire, 2017, S108). In their analysis, Moore and Ramirez found 54% of adolescents in the age range designated in the study had been affected by one of the above events in their lives (Brindis and Claire, 2017, S108-109). Additionally, "over one quarter (28%) experienced 2 or more" ACEs in their life (Brindis and Claire, 2017, S109). This is essential data in understanding why students are so stressed about their home lives because it provides perspective for teachers and stakeholders on the importance of providing students with the means within the classroom to identify, cope, and plan for stress in their lives. ACEs influence a child's resilience when managing difficult situations, which can easily present themselves in academic settings. Students who have trauma in their lives can be expected to show lowered engagement focus on tasks, due to the base level of stress occurring in their home lives. The lack of home support that ACEs imply generally leads to students acting out within the classroom as well.

Major traumas such as ACEs are not the only challenges students have to navigate. Just as adults deal with daily stressors, so too do students. However, students are still learning to traverse the social landscape of the school environment, specifically in peer-to-peer interactions.

This pressure has caused the evolution of a new type of stress, related to how peers perceive each other. There has always been anxiety regarding interacting with peers in academic and personal settings, but for the newest generations, it seems to have become more difficult. This is likely due to technological influences on the way we communicate, specifically in the form of social media. When peers interact and those interactions turn from positive to rejective, students have “increased rates of depression, increased internalizing and externalizing symptoms over time, [and] increased social withdrawal” (Masten, 2011, p. 283). Students are dealing with increased anxiety regarding social interaction online and in the school environment due to peer rejection. This stress is in addition to ACE traumas and other daily stressors students must learn to cope with, such as academic assignments.

The impact of student stress within my own classroom has been something I have had to learn to manage on a daily basis. Student insecurity regarding academic assignments has developed to the point that students are demoralized in attempting school work. They are terrified to fail, in the same way they are fearful of peer rejection. When new projects or summative assessments are assigned, students are nearly emotionally overwhelmed just thinking of the accumulation of such assignments across the span of their six hour class day. I have had multiple instances of students leaving class in tears at the idea of more work, and have had students tell me they are too anxious to even begin academic assignments because they have no faith that they can complete the assigned work before the required deadline. This frozen state of fear has created an environment not conducive to learning. Students have so much stress in their daily lives without the presence of academic coursework, that the addition of large, high-value school assignments sends them spiraling over the edge of what they feel they can manage. Due to this massive accumulation of stress, I believe it has

become the role of the English Language Arts teacher to help students learn to manage their stress by providing them the opportunity to practice using cognitive regulation strategies that allow them to identify, organize, and plan to reduce their stress.

The Kumara and Kumar (2016) research seeks to provide insight on how to give adolescents the means to self-talk their way through daily stressors. This is not an especially profound idea in the realm of psychology in coping with stress, as metacognitive self-talk has been shown to provide an awareness that allows individuals to reflect on their thinking and therefore influence their choices based on what they find in that reflection (Kumara and Kumar, 2016, p. 83). However, these findings take on an entirely new meaning when we apply the practice of self-talk to the classroom.

Allowing students time in the classroom to reflect on personal and academic stressors, as well as organizing and planning strategies to reduce that stress, is a practice that could drastically increase student advocacy and metacognition in students managing their stress themselves. Therefore, this article seeks to provide classroom practices instructors can implement in order to provide students the opportunity to cognitively regulate, as well as my own findings within the classroom regarding student perceptions of stress management based on the use of these practices in my classroom.

Methods for Incorporating Cognitive Regulation

The connection between cognitive regulation and the classroom is the best place to start. Vancouver Island University (VIU) published an article that defined the three major steps regarding cognitive regulation: students must set goals and plan regarding stressors, monitor their progression towards those goals, and evaluate their progression and make changes when strategies currently in use are not working (Vancouver Island University: Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Learning). Based on this, the best way to provide students with opportunities to practice cognitive regulation in the classroom is to provide them the time to plan, act, and re-evaluate goals related to managing their academic and personal stress levels. In my action research project, I provided opportunities in

my classroom for students to practice these methods and gathered their views on the effectiveness of these methods in managing their stress levels. This personally conducted study involved a sample size of five classes, with a total of 163 students. Students were asked to report for five weeks on notecards, considering the following questions: (1) What is your stress level on a scale of 1-10 for this week? (2) What was your stress level last week, and what caused the stress level to go down or go up? (3) Do you perceive these strategies to be negatively or positively affecting your stress levels?

In the first week of reporting, students were given their first opportunity to practice cognitive regulation. First, they rated their stress level for the week based on the upcoming stressors in their life. For week one, students reported an average 7.34 level of stress on a 10 point likert scale, with the highest level of stress being a 10 and the lowest being a 0. Students reflected on their stress by listing as many stressors as they could within a five minute period in relation to their personal and their academic lives. Afterwards, students focused on which items on the list they couldn't change. Specifically, I asked them to strike through any stressors that were either in the past, or that they had already done all they could to prepare for. As an example of the stressors in their past, I used the example of their essays they had turned in the day before. The outcome of the essay was uncontrollable after being turned in. Additionally, I gave students an example of stressors they had already prepared for. A student who studied for a test two hours daily, had extensive notes and effective study habits has less to stress about because they are well prepared.

In preparation for the planning phase, students were asked to study the list of "strike-through stressors," try to accept them as out of their control, and therefore relinquish their stress regarding those stressors. Students then turned their attention back to the list that they could control. Students chose their top three most stressful tasks on the list and were asked to prepare a plan regarding what they could do to reduce stress surrounding this task. Using this plan, they set aside time in their agenda to work on accomplishing these steps. After the

completion of this process, students were asked to reflect on whether their stress levels were reduced based on the planning and prioritizing activity alone.

On average, students reported a .657-point reduction in stress based solely on this reflective planning process. The highest report of stress reduction was a full four point reduction in stress. Students with drastic reduction in stress after the activity reported they felt "more in control," ... "had a plan for reducing their stress further," ... "helped organize [themselves]," ... and they understood "what was out of their control." The lowest report of stress reduction was actually an increase in stress by two full points. These students reported their stress increased because they "realized things they needed to do, ... were stressed more by talking about what they are stressed about," and because the activity did not change the fact that they needed to act first in order to change their stress. Because of the necessity of putting their plans into action, these students expressed they felt the activity would help once they had actually put effort into attaining their goals set for the week.

In week two, students were asked to update their graph with their stress level for the upcoming week. Students reported a 1.14 point shift in stress overall. Of the students who used the planning process created in week one, 80 percent reported a decrease, with an average of 2.59 points. 20 percent reported an increase, with an average of 1.5 points. Students who had an increase made note that there were more stressors this week than the previous week, and therefore the increase in stress was not due to the regulation strategy. Some students, despite seeing an increase, stated "[it] helped with classwork" and "this week has put more pressure on me, [but] I am actually taking action to improve myself."

The largest shift in stress was a five point decrease in a student who had been largely apathetic throughout the year. Lena stated "[there was] a drastic change [because] I am working on most of everything [on my list] and it helped a lot". She then went on to discuss which planning processes she executed well and which she believed had shifted to being out of her control. She approached me after class and thanked me for providing her the reflective practice she needed to organize herself. Overall,

students expressed a need for more time to reflect in class on the planning process in order to fully design an action plan and to organize a schedule to act on their plans.

One cognitive regulation process specifically centered around academics is a task analysis process, and there are many variations of what this could look like, but the main focus is to provide students with a way to break down assignments. First, students identify the tasks required for the assignment. Then, they plan what they need to know, or do, to accomplish the goal of completing that assignment. My task analysis process specifically focused on providing students with a prompt and a graphic organizer in which to utilize this analysis process. After reading the prompt, students break it down into verbs required, and the nouns associated with these verbs. This is called a “Do/What” chart

Students were provided the following prompt for their most recent unit: *How does intersectionality influence the American Dream? After reading “A Raisin in the Sun,” write a reflective response in which you analyze your own intersectionality, individuals with varied intersectionality, and the intersectionality of the characters in the play and argue how intersectionality influences the attainability of the American Dream.* In a task analysis of “A Raisin in the Sun,” students identified four verbs: reading, writing, analyzing, and arguing. After students identified the verbs, they were asked to find what they were being asked to read, write, analyze, and argue. This simple process turns one large and daunting task into smaller tasks which students can focus on individually, while excluding unnecessary language. For most students, this seemingly unnecessary step allowed students to approach a task that otherwise seems like too much to tackle.

Table 1. Do/What Chart.

Teaching Task	Do	What
How does intersectionality influence the American Dream? After reading “A Raisin in the Sun,” write a reflective response in which you analyze your own intersectionality, individuals with varied intersectionality, and the intersectionality of the characters in the play, and argue how intersectionality influences the attainability of the American Dream.	• Read →	“A Raisin in the Sun”
	• Write →	A Reflective Essay
	• Analyze →	Your own intersectionality, others with different intersectionality, and the characters in the play
	• Argue →	How intersectionality influences the American Dream
“I Can” Statements		
I can define intersectionality.		
I can learn how to format a reflective response.		
I can learn more about the American Dream.		
I can ask others about their dreams and intersectionalities.		
Thesis / Claim		
An individual’s identity influences their ability to attain the American Dream by...		

After students complete the “Do/What” chart, they are then asked to write “I can...” statements based on the four tasks they identified. This requires them to consider what they must know and do before they can accomplish that task. One such example was the “Do/What” task: write a reflective response. Students discussed how they did not know what a reflective response looked like, so they made the “I can...” statement, “I can learn how to format, style, and organize a reflective response paper.” Additionally, students identified they did not know what the word intersectionality meant, which was repeated five times in the prompt. Thus, they created the “I can...” statement, “I can define the word intersectionality.” This metacognitive process encourages students to look at tasks as opportunities to fill gaps in knowledge, and gives them the language they need to identify their needs in completing difficult tasks. . It also provides value to the assignments related to the task, as students know they will lead to the final goals in place in filling gaps in knowledge. Additionally, it strengthens student metacognition by allowing them to question a task and clarify what they know and do not know about what they are being asked to do.

After students have gone through this process for each of the four “Do/What” tasks, they have a list of micro-tasks that they can begin to

accomplish in order to work towards their goal of completing an assignment. When asking students about how they felt this strategy was useful, they reported the process “gave [them] the steps [they] needed to break a big assignment into smaller tasks that [they] could prioritize [in order to accomplish that goal]...[and] manage the stress surrounding that assignment by giving [them] the actions [they] could take to plan for meeting a goal.”

Implications of Classroom Cognitive Regulation

In order to better understand the impact of these practices on coping with stress in my personal and academic life, I implemented these three strategies in my weekly planning routine. What I noticed fit with what my students began to recognize, regarding the necessity for reflection in battling stress. The cognitive regulation practice of listing stressors and planning will likely be a tool I use for a long time. It has helped me create a more complete list of the diverse stressors of my life, and understand where I need more balance regarding the limited time I have. It has also provided me with the organizational strategy I needed to plan for the micro-tasks related to larger tasks in academics. In addition, the “I can” statements have also been a valuable tool in identifying what micro-tasks I need to accomplish in order to tackle large tasks, such as my thesis research. These two cognitive regulation strategies, when joined, provide the cognitive scaffolding my students needed to break down stressors into bite-sized tasks that are easy to schedule into weekly planning. In using the “I can” statement strategy and the stressor planning strategy, my students have reported feeling more in control of their stress because of the ability to visualize a list of tasks, and reflect on how and when to tackle said tasks.

In regard to the question of why cognitive regulation has a place in the secondary education classroom, the answer is cognitive regulation gives students the power to maintain control over academic stress and provides them with the means to manage that stress independently. Ideally, as adults we have already learned how to self-talk our way through the

cognitive regulation process in order to address problems, plan for solutions, and act responsibly in order to resolve stress surrounding them. Students require help in attaining such strategies, and cognitive regulation is a process that allows them to metacognitively manage their thoughts and to organize those thoughts to create actions that reduces their stress. As educators, we have a certain obligation to provide students with the strategies they need to be successful in life. Considering the statistics surrounding stress levels shown to affect adolescents, we must adapt such therapy strategies used in cognitive regulation to fit our classroom, in order to aid our students in becoming stress-managers in their daily lives instead of victims of their stress.

A New Role as Cognitive Regulation ELA Teachers

Not only is cognitive regulation a necessary strategy in the secondary classroom, but I believe it is the responsibility of English Language Arts teachers to incorporate it into their instruction. As teachers of English, we value the four cornerstones of language that are reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The last value of language instruction is why English instructors must adapt to incorporate cognitive regulation and self-talk. Students are already taught listening skills in regard to evaluating the message and purpose of a writer. However, students must also be taught to listen in order to evaluate their own messages. This means students are responsible for listening to their cognitive output on stress, organizing said information using writing strategies and critical thinking skills, and working to produce strategies for how to internally talk their way through implementing those strategies. When students utilize cognitive regulation strategies, they encapsulate the skills of listening to themselves, writing down and planning regarding what they are thinking, and self-talk about what they learned from such a process.

Addressing cognitive regulation’s alignment with academic standards, the strategies fit most with the Common Core standards of Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Knowledge of Language, and Range of Writing found in the Oklahoma English Language Arts Standards.

Cognitive regulation and self-talk fits with standards for ELA Knowledge of Language instruction because students must evaluate how to “present information, findings, and support evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that [readers] can follow the line of reasoning [that] the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task” (English Language Arts Standards, 50). This is because students must learn how to effectively present their stressors in a format that is accessible to them as readers of their own cognitive output. Additionally, students must learn how to differentiate between the most stressful tasks and least stressful tasks in order to designate a clear purpose in managing those stressors. Essentially, they must put into writing their thoughts regarding stress in order to organize it and develop it into a product that has a clear purpose to them in guiding them towards completing necessary tasks to reduce stress.

Self-talk strategies in managing stress also apply to the Knowledge of Language standard that requires students to “apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts...and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening (English Language Arts Standards, 54). These strategies require students to learn a new discourse of language usage. Cognitive regulation is not within the standard modes of academic writing such as narrative, informative, and argumentative writing. Instead, these cognitive regulation strategies require students to explore a new mode of writing that combines narrative and informative writing to provide students with the opportunity to reflect on information generated by their own cognition. This means they are adapting language to fit their own needs, while also learning how to use language to organize the recesses of their cognition. Specifically, students are using the narration of their thoughts, organizing those thoughts into information, then analyzing that information for what choices to make next in attaining goals related to those thoughts.

In relation to the Knowledge of Language standard, students also learn a range of writing strategies in relation to cognitive regulation. The standard asks students to “write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a

single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences” (English Language Arts Standards, 47). This relevant standard teaches students to monitor their cognition on a daily basis for long time frames. Independent monitoring of one’s own thinking produces long lasting habits in reflective practices. Additionally, students must analyze what they found through monitoring to make changes to their routines and plan for better future cognitive regulation. This incremental, information-based improvement process allows students to write reflectively over short but frequent periods of time, while also allowing students to write analytically over long periods of time less frequently.

Moving away from academic standards, English Language Arts teachers are also frequently most connected to our students due to the reflective nature of language study as a whole. When students study language, they study who they are, how they communicate, why they communicate, and how their communication affects others. Because of this, ELA is the subject area most qualified to address cognitive regulation. The use of narrative writing that addresses students’ personal experiences and the use of argumentative writing that addresses students’ personal opinions on diverse and controversial topics allows us to have a more in-tune connection with our students as individuals. This is necessary for students to truly grasp and utilize cognitive regulation, as students must adopt vulnerability in being honest about what is affecting them in life. Narrative writing and journal prompts that ELA educators currently use in the classroom already bring us to the cusp of cognitive regulation and allow us to take a step further in providing students with the means to take their well-being into their own hands, understand it, organize it, and develop skills to cope healthily with stress in their adolescent and adult lives.

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Book Review: *Child of the Dream: A Memoir of 1963*
Kody Garis

Child of the Dream by Sharon Robinson (2019).

The main character and narrator of the story is young Sharon Robinson, daughter of famous baseball player Jackie Robinson. She is very eager to get involved in important social justice activities at the time. The story also includes her two brothers Jackie and David. Jackie is 16 years old, and has a hard time adjusting to being named after and compared to his father, and as such tends to rebel. David is younger than Sharon and tends to have a more child-like and optimistic view of the world. Her mother Rachel and her grandmother Zelle Islum both live in the house and share responsibility for being head matrons of the house. Their family friend and nanny Willette is also mentioned frequently but has no speaking parts in the memoir. Another key character in the story is the family's horse, Diamond.

The book begins as Sharon describes the days before her 13th birthday. She sets the scene in ensuring that the reader is well aware of her age and disposition. She explains her love for her horse Diamond and how she uses her time with the horse as an escape from reality, stating that she feels free and tall. As the story progresses, she reveals more about her family life and how her older brother

Jackie is not doing so well in school and how he tends to get into a lot of trouble. It is also revealed that she and her older brother are part of the movement to integrate black students into previously segregated schools saying she is one of two black girls in her grade. Throughout the book, more is revealed about the era and issues regarding race and society at the time in which Sharon recalls personal experiences in which she learned about things such as the Birmingham bombings. Sharon also explains how difficult it was for her to begin to get involved in the social justice movement; she says one of her major inspirations, but also biggest fears, was the march in Birmingham in which hundreds of children were jailed. The second half of the book contains more historical references including marches, people, and events. Sharon talks about her experience watching both her father and Dr. Martin Luther King speak at the March on Washington, and how that experience changed her and allowed her to further feel more comfortable in her own skin. The book includes a 16-page insert of family photos at events and times that are all discussed in the book. For example, Sharon describes fundraisers that their family would hold at their house in Connecticut, one of which Dr. King himself attended; pictures of events like that are included.

The book describes several issues and occurrences regarding race which include bombings, children being attacked by dogs, death, and racism. I thought this was both very informative and very entertaining to read. The way Sharon describes moving through life and coming into her own person while also figuring out how she can be a part of the biggest era of social justice movements was captivating. She explains her time meeting some of the most influential leaders of the movement such as Dr. King himself in a way that left me starstruck. She also spreads out the facts and informs people on litigation and lawmaking that was happening at the time while also reflecting on her and her family's experiences with it. This would work well in both a history and a literature class. I give this book a 9/10.

Related Titles: *Jackie's Nine: Jackie Robinson's Values to Live By, Promises to Keep: How Jackie Robinsons Changed America*, and *The Hero Two Doors Down*. Movies: (1950) *The Jackie Robinson Story*; Music: "How I Got Over" by Clara Ward (1951); Poem: "Jackie Robinson...An American Hero" by Stanley Cooper; Classic Work: *America Is in the Heart* by Carlos Bulosan; Art: *Jackie Robinson* by Carole Hesli.

My Mentor Teacher Saved My Life

Hannah Smart-Sawyers

In college, I remember hearing the anticipation of the "Mentor Teacher" pairings from my friends who were in the education program. The excited whispers or groans of despair when they did not get what wanted. This situation was always something that made me glad I was not an education major. I did not have to worry about the compatibility of me and a mentor teacher in order to successfully complete my degree program. You see, I was a Public Relations major. I was going to graduate and find a job in the non-profit sector. While my friends were all consoling crying children, I would be changing the world.

At least that's what I thought. Life did not quite go the way I expected, and my husband and I ended up living in very rural Western Oklahoma. I started substitute teaching, and it turned out I had a knack for making sure 22-26 kids didn't die while in my care for one day. When we moved to the Oklahoma City metro area, I started subbing again. Something to do until that perfect job came along. The perfect job came, and I interviewed for it, and then it went. In the process, I learned that I did not have what I could not gain, experience. I kept subbing and eventually landed a job at a non-profit. This job was one that chained me to a desk, and I was stuck there until I found something else.

While completing my last long-term substitute position before landing my full-time job, my principal encouraged me to obtain my alternative teacher's certificate. I did so, and it came in the mail one week after I accepted

my brand new full-time job. I placed it on the shelf and assumed it would stay there.

Once I figured out I was chained and stuck, I picked the certificate up and wondered if I could be a teacher. In Oklahoma, there is a teacher shortage, but I never saw any signs of that. I applied for countless positions but only landed four interviews. All but one of those interviews ended in rejection. A full year after I decided to give teaching a try, I joined the Piedmont Intermediate writing team.

The interview had gone okay but was not at all what I expected. I was in utter disbelief when I found out I had faked out two principals and my new partner teacher.

Enter Amy Brezina. No one ever said, "Amy is your mentor teacher." However, that is what she was and still is. We immediately clicked and we worked on our lesson plans together carefully following the curriculum map. I knew I could ask her anything and, although I might get a momentary blank stare (her classic "is this a real question" face), she would help me navigate whatever I was going through.

"I want to have the courage to say exactly what I am thinking in our PLC meetings with the confidence that she has."

Amy is the best mentor teacher. I can walk into her room anytime and know that she will have the answer. One day, I hope to

be just like her. I want to get just as worked up about everything she cares about. I want to have the courage to say exactly what I am thinking in our PLC meetings with the confidence that she has.

Our pairing, the timing of my hire, and the way things all turned out is nothing short of a miracle. While she was my mentor teacher in all things writing, she also was my mentor in what was probably the most difficult time of my life. This was a time of loss. Amy experienced it at a much more intense and insane level than me. She taught me even when life is insanely hard you can still teach. We worked to bring our kids to a brand new level of their writing ability. They excelled even though we were suffering personally.

Without Amy, I would not have any idea what I was doing. I knew what the standards were but implementing them is

something this communication major never could have done on her own.

Amy taught me way more than I could have learned in an education program. I learned how to navigate our school. I learned how to help the kids that needed it the most. She is there when I have a question. The other day she was looking for a message from me and said, "Oh no, you're not at the top where you normally are." She is always a text message away, both in school and out.

Amy literally saved my life professionally and personally.

Everyone needs a mentor teacher. Someone to guide and save their lives. My mentor teacher saved my life.

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Book Review: *I AM ALPHONSO JONES* by Kaitlyn Hicks, OKCPS student
I Am Alphonso Jones by Tony Medina. New York: Tu Books, 2017.

I chose *I Am Alfonso Jones* by Tony Medina because of the creative cover. The way the cover was illustrated made the book intriguing to me. From the crowd in the background and to main cover art, which shows a teenage girl crying over a photo of Alfonso clutched in her arms. I also read the back of the book, which includes praises for the book from seven influential authors.

The book deals with racial profiling and injustice when a teenage boy gets a clip emptied into him by cop just because he was African American and in the wrong place at the wrong time. The response to Alfonso's death was eventful. His story was in the news. The family and friends of that same boy felt his death in their hearts. His death became a debate among the people and caused others to rally the community rose up against the injustice of a situation and came together. While the book is fiction, it also highlights the true occurrences of racial profiling and police brutality.

The social justice theme I picked up on was to not be so blinded by yourself that you don't see the others around you. The officer that shot Alfonso thought only of himself when he pulled the trigger, not the family and person he would be affecting. He also did not think that the media would rise up as they did.

I learned about what it was like to be in a situation where someone I held dear was killed. By reading the story *I Am Alfonso Jones* by Tony Medina, I caught a glimpse from an outsiders point of view because I have never been in a situation of having to lose a love one because of police brutality. It was easy to stop and get a look at the big picture. I learned discrimination and racial profiling goes deeper than we are told in school. I admire how the author was able to effectively paint how people in our world are today and how we never really pay attention until something major happens.

I can apply this story to everyday life because we see racial conflict and police brutality in everyday society. By reading *I Am Alfonso Jones* I've learned what it is like for someone like Alfonso and how his family dealt with their grief and loss. This book is a helpful guide. People can learn many things such as social rights and how to exercise them in our society.

Mentors Matter:

Cultivating Meaningful Communities for Beginning Teachers

By Catlin Gardner and Elizabeth Kellogg Stingley

According to *Education Week*, Oklahoma has one of the worst education systems in the United States, marked by dwindling financial support and low academic performance (*Education Week*, 2018). At the same time, the state of Oklahoma issued 2500 provisional teacher certifications to individuals who may have no academic preparation or experience in teaching in the 2018-2019 school year (AP, 2018). Teacher shortages are not unique to Oklahoma, as the nation has seen a significant decline in enrollment in university-based teacher preparation programs (Castro, Quinn, Fuller, & Barnes, 2018, p.1). As many as half of new teachers leave the field after the first five years of teaching (Simos, 2013; Ingersoll, 2012). Although effective teachers have been shown to have incredibly positive impacts on student learning, and even a student's future earnings, many schools expend little effort to keep their most promising, new teachers. Despite most teachers choosing to enter the teaching profession to work with students and not motivated by monetary gain, retention of quality teachers does require fair pay and incentives (Hanushek, 2011, p.109). Yet mentorship and community building might be a way to foster retention. As one seasoned Oklahoma teacher explained, "Good teachers are grown, developed, and nurtured. Having a mentorship program places value on the complex and challenging work of becoming a teacher. It was like planting a seed in the mind of the new teacher. You are not alone. There are others who are willing to help you... and who want to help you."

Mentoring

Mentorship, in the context of education, is often defined as "the mentoring of novice teachers by experienced teachers" (Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, and Lai, 2009, p. 706). Mentorship can be divided into

three categories: "general support, pedagogical support, and personal and psychological support" (Gilles, Carrillo, Wang, Stegall and Bumgarner, 2013, p.78). An effective mentor provides general support by spending time with the novice teacher and offering encouragement (p. 79). New teachers receive pedagogical support from a mentor who monitors the new teacher's performance and shares knowledge about teaching. Lastly, mentors can support the novice teacher personally by listening to them and offering emotional support (p.79).

Mentorship that teachers receive early in their careers is critical because through those relationships, the novice is better equipped to succeed in their early years of teaching. Indeed, mentorship can reduce the feelings of isolation that new teachers may experience (Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005). Similarly, relationships with mentors may increase feelings of job satisfaction in new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). In the state of Oklahoma, H.B. 2885 (2014) mandated that all new teachers (regardless of path to certification) must participate in a "residency program" as a form of mentorship beginning in the 2015-2016 school year. Due to budget cuts, this program is no longer a priority, preventing some new Oklahoma teachers from having the opportunity to form these mentor relationships.

The mentorship that new teachers receive can come from multiple channels simultaneously. Beginning teachers need a group of mentors--experienced teachers, professors, and other pre-service teachers--rather than just "one person who has the knowledge to induct a newcomer" (Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, and Lai, 2009, p.719). Mentoring relationships allow novice teachers to engage in a community, which is vital to their success in the classroom.

The most obvious example of mentorship, and perhaps the most common, is the relationship between pre-service teacher and mentor teacher during the internship semester of a teacher preparation program. As the student teacher enters the classroom full-time, and eventually teaches the class as if it was their own, conversations and collaboration between the student teacher and their mentor teacher allow student teachers to grow skill sets for success early in their careers. It is easy to see why a strong relationship between the student teacher and mentor teacher is key to the student teacher's success. The pre-service teacher should feel as though they have the ability to communicate openly and honestly with their mentor teacher, and in turn, the mentor teacher should offer advice and encouragement.

However, it is also important for mentorship to continue throughout the first year of teaching. Being a first-year teacher is challenging enough. New teachers need the same social and pedagogical support that they received as a student teacher, as they continue to learn the ropes. One model, collaborative co-mentoring, begins as soon as a teacher is hired and continues throughout the teacher's career (Bickmore, 2013). This high-quality, professional development model places new teachers and veteran teachers together frequently before and during the school year to collaborate and connect. As one of the experienced teachers in this program noted "teachers need time to talk, debrief, think together and share" (Bickmore, 2013, p. 54). New teachers remarked that it was important for them to realize that veteran teachers "experienced failures" and that teaching is often "trial and error" (p. 54). At the end of the collaborative co-mentoring experience, the new teachers reflected on how some of their fears about teaching "were eased by helpful colleagues or through their own hard work" (p. 56).

Another mentoring relationship that exists is between pre-service teachers and their professors. One example is a professor who provided mentorship to students during their student teaching through blogs (Bieler, 2013). The blogs served as a way for students to reflect on their experiences as student teachers and then share those experiences with their professor, potentially allowing for more honest and open dialogue between the professor and students. However, others have suggested that the university advisor's role in mentoring students should continue past graduation

(Guise, 2013). The advisor's role post-graduation, then, is to help beginning teachers form connections to their "teaching contexts and their previous learning" and to "enact the approaches they learned in their credential program" (p. 66). Through email and social media, keeping in touch with beginning teachers throughout their careers is both easy and accessible for university advisors once pre-service teachers have begun their careers.

Additionally, it is of utmost importance for pre-service and first-year teachers to find a community of other teachers, like them, with which to interact. In fact, students in their student teaching seminar often act as mentors to each other (Spangler, 2013, p. 90). After all, no one will quite be able to understand what they are going through like those who are simultaneously experiencing the same things. Talking through their experiences together creates a "mental safety net" for student teachers (p. 90). These peer relationships can carry over into the first year of teaching, and ultimately, throughout their careers. The peers with whom pre-service teachers interact can become some of their closest friends, but also their biggest collaborators. Building a strong community of peers is critical to the novice teacher's success in cultivating a classroom community, as well as connecting to the external community.

Cultivating Community Relationships

The significance of community in the life of a teacher unquestioningly dictates their experiences in the classroom, as teachers must understand their students in order to best serve them (Chavkin, 2000, p. 287). Valuing the experiences with which students enter the classroom is fundamental (Kretovics, Farber, & Armaline, 2004, p. 213). In a study exploring the importance of teacher involvement in *El Barrio*, or the Latino community in which the schools are found, it was discovered that both students and teachers benefitted when teachers were involved in the external community, as teachers were better able to understand their students' cultures, identities, and epistemologies. Because of their cultural understandings, teachers could more effectively create curriculum that was representative of their students, bridging the gap between school and home lives of their students (Irizarry & Raible, 2011, p. 200-201). School curriculum does not always consider the cultural identities of students. The divorcing of a student's

external community from their academic learning may cause misunderstandings that ultimately fail students, disproportionately impacting those from lower socioeconomic and diverse backgrounds (Irizarry & Raible, 2011, p. 187-188). Through sustained teacher involvement in the external community, educators can begin creating classroom spaces that are culturally inclusive, allowing students to identify both with their school and home lives (Irizarry & Raible, 2011, p. 188; Cohen-Vogel, Goldring, & Smrekar, 2010, p. 56).

Classroom communities are important because they allow students to find respect, understanding, and safety among peers (Greene & Mitcham, 2012).

“Teachers, architects of community, recognize the importance of encouraging collaboration and respect among students in [our] classrooms and schools, and the value of nurturing atmospheres of respect,” (Green & Mitcham, 2012, p. 13). Through this concept, teachers allow students to take part in building classrooms that reflect their own identities as individuals, as well as a group, (Green & Mitcham, 2012, p. 13). Students are responsible for joining in and shaping their environment together, as the teacher is to be a facilitator and active participant within the community (Green & Mitcham, 2012, p. 14). As teachers transition their spaces from “teacher-centered environments” to “student-centered environments,” relationships can begin to form on mutual ground (Gallagher & Goodman, 2008, p. 148-149). These notions of community are all the more important in the English classroom, as it is often a site of developed empathy and understanding, suggesting that the literature and concepts of humanity that are taught can help foster empathetic growth (Mirra, 2018, p. 4). Notions of empathy shape and build communities, and they are crucial to the continued growth of pre-service and in-service teachers, students within the classroom, and societies surrounding public education.

In schools, teacher leaders influence three distinct areas: “schoolwide policies and programs, teaching and learning, and communication and community relations,” (Phelps, 2008, p. 120). In assuming leadership roles, teachers serve students in their classrooms and beyond them, expanding their impact (Phelps, 2008, p. 120). Through advocacy, teachers can transform their classrooms and their students’ educational experiences by empowering them to take control of their learning (Duckworth &

Maxwell, 2015, p. 5). Teachers also model advocacy in action for their students by being involved in the community. For example, teachers in Oklahoma, West Virginia, Arizona, Colorado, and Kentucky walked out of the classroom in Spring 2018 in support of increased school funding and teacher pay raises (Turner, Lombardo, & Logan, 2018). Learning how to serve as an advocate can be developed through pre-service teacher programs and mentorship (Duckworth & Maxwell, 2015; Peters & Reid, 2009).

Community Nurturing

Teachers must establish communities with other teachers in order to build a sense of community in their own classrooms. They must be involved in the community at large and inspire students to do the same. Although a teacher is often overscheduled and overworked, they should take the time to lead and learn how to do so effectively. Mentor teachers and mentorship programs can equip first-year teachers with the leadership and relationship-building skills necessary to succeed as an educator. This leadership does not have to be explicit, but it has to be present for new teachers, as well as students, to benefit both in and outside of the classroom.

The changes that begin in these learning communities can move beyond the classroom, fostering growth and inclusivity in the lives of teachers, students, and the larger community. However, for the first-year teacher, creating these communities of teachers and students requires active leadership and sustained support through mentorship. Beginner teachers must be supported in order to create and sustain classroom communities. New teachers cannot model community building in the classroom if they do not feel as though they have a community from which to grow. Thus, mentor teachers have the essential task of welcoming first-year teachers into a school’s community, allowing the first-year teachers to welcome their own students into their classroom. When students attend a school in which teachers feel welcomed and supported, they too will feel welcomed and supported.

One Oklahoma teacher mentioned the idea of “dandelion teachers,” those who love their job and are always striving to better themselves and those around them. When we look at the news, it seems as though Oklahoma is full of “dandelion teachers” who are often plucked away by other states with greater

consideration for educational policy as well as greater educational funding. When we find these teachers, we must be willing to nurture them and create communities in which they can thrive. We must put mentorship programs in place that encourage the continued growth and development of new educators, so they are empowered to teach with compassion, act with urgency, and lead by example, shaping the future of education and the lives they touch along the way. If the state of Oklahoma wants to solve its teacher shortage, perhaps the real changes should begin with those entering the classroom for the first time. By implementing stronger mentorship programs in schools and investing both time and resources into a group of brand new teachers, education in this state would be drastically improved in the future. Imagine a future where instead of burning out, new teachers maintain their enthusiasm and passion for their jobs, influencing their students to become enthusiastic and passionate about their education. Imagine a space in which both students and teachers feel welcome and eager to participate in the learning process. If we truly believe that children are our future, why not equip the people teaching children with the support and resources they need to make sure that our future is a bright one?

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The Case for Teaching Polari in Schools as a Heritage Language

Alex Ruggiers

Introduction

Imagine walking down the halls of your local high school or middle school and hearing one student say to another: “Hey! I love your riah, where did you get it done?” Or perhaps: “Want to grab some jarry? We could try that new place on the third floor of the mall, as long as you don’t mind you lallies getting tired going up those stairs. What would you think? Would you assume that you just overheard a handful of words that your Generation Z pupils are using that will be gone with the passing wind? Or would you realize that what they’re actually doing is conversing in a language called Polari?

Polari is a small cant language that can be traced back in origin to anywhere between the 16th and 19th centuries, but became popularized in Britain because of its use by the counterculture, specifically gay men and other “undesirables” such as Roma people, theater workers, and poor sailors in the underground scene. The language was primarily used as a means of cover, a code-speak to allow communication with other members of the LGBTQ community without inviting the unwanted attention of the police or other hostile pedestrians. However, by the late 1960’s the language had fallen into disuse as homosexuality became increasingly visible and decriminalized in England. After all, if a language was invented to protect yourself from life-threatening dangers, and those dangers became less prevalent, it would naturally follow that the language would fall into disuse.

It’s an easy thing, then, to agree that the language has served its passive, utilitarian purpose, commit the knowledge to your bank of trivia and move along. But as a teacher of language, I know that language is certainly not only a passive tool simply to get us through our days with as little struggle as possible. Language has purpose beyond the utility it provides. It brings people together. It brings people to tears. It brings people joy, and it can hurt them too. Language helps people see the world around them in new lights. Which is why, in addition to the evidence provided by years of research, it is important that

LGBTQ students have access to the only language that has ever been tied to their community.

What is a Heritage Language, Anyway?

Before delving into the how and why of teaching heritage languages, it is important to understand the breadth of debate surrounding how heritage languages are defined. Anne Kelleher from the UC Davis Center for Applied Linguistics writes that “The term “heritage language” is used to identify languages other than the dominant language (or languages) in a given social context” (2010, p. 1). The way she defines the term is purposefully broad, because different languages might or might not qualify as a heritage language depending on who you ask. For instance, in places like the Middle East, India, and China, where many dialects of the same language are frequently lumped together, it becomes difficult to discern where a heritage language ends and the dominant language begins.

“... a heritage language can also be understood as any language that a person, family, or community feels a connection to or that feels “familiar,” regardless of one’s depth of mastery over that language.”

In North America, there is debate as to whether indigenous languages count as heritage languages, because many indigenous Americans may never have had contact with someone who speaks the language of their grandparents, and by some standards, speaking the language at home is a key marker of a heritage language. However, as Kelleher notes, and for the sake of this article, a heritage

language can also be understood as any language that a person, family, or community feels a connection to or that feels “familiar,” regardless of one’s depth of mastery over that language. By the latter understanding, Polari falls safely into the category of “heritage language” because Polari has distinct cultural and historical ties to the LGBTQ community.

The Importance of Teaching Polari

One of the preeminent reasons access to Polari is vital to students who are a part of the LGBTQ community is that language is a marker of peoplehood, and as such language is an important cultural artifact that should not be denied to anyone, including queer students. The LGBTQ community is extremely unique and diverse. It spans all ages, races, and religions. This lack of homogeneity makes identifying the culture of such a community more difficult. The case could be made that sexuality and gender are not enough to tie a global group of otherwise unrelated people together as a culture. After all, what makes a culture? Who can be considered a “People”?

Scholar of American Indian Studies Tom Holm is notable for his introduction of what is called the Peoplehood Matrix, a way of understanding how different shared aspects of indigenous cultures tie together (Holm, 2003). He theorizes four components that can be used to understand an otherwise loose band of people as a “People”: language, place, ceremony, and sacred history. Even if the Peoplehood Matrix, one of the best models currently available for attempting to determine peoplehood, were applied to LGBTQ people, the community might still not qualify. Since no scholar has created a similar model for LGBTQ populations, it is tricky to assert that LGBTQ individuals make up a cohesive People based on any evidence other than the individual experiences of members of the community. In other words, that is a discussion for another day and another article.

However, based on Holm’s matrix, language is an essential part of Peoplehood. And while there is no “official” language used by LGBTQ people, slang has always been a part of the culture. And in the case of Polari, that slang became formalized to the point that it became its own cant language identified by users as an essential component of survival throughout the mid-twentieth century. The usage and meaning of what a cant is can be oftentimes inconsistent, but for the purpose of this article, I am relying on a definition found in the Oxford English Dictionary which is thus: “The peculiar language or jargon of a class: The secret language or jargon used by gipsies, thieves, professional beggars, etc.; *transferred* any jargon used for the purpose of secrecy” (“Cant, n.3”, 2019). And

while Polari is unlike other languages in that it is a small cant language with a vocabulary of just a few hundred words at most, it finds similarity with many other heritage languages like Ottawa in that access to it is limited to the few remaining elders of the community who have both mastery over the language and the relevant historical knowledge to provide necessary context.

But teaching Polari could have other impacts on students’ sense of self than instilling a stronger sense of peoplehood. Jennifer Leeman from the department of Modern and Classical Languages at George Mason University, in writing about the ways heritage language education programs impact identity, notes that “the notion that students’ language is closely linked to their identities, and thus that disparaging their language, or the language of their communities, is damaging to students’ sense of self” is a major theme in current discussions surrounding how best to practice heritage language education (Leeman, 2011, p. 484). She was talking specifically about the ways that schools privilege some kinds of Spanish over others and thus create an environment in which students themselves are harmed due to the intrinsic connections between language and identity. When schools shame students, overtly or even through microaggressions, for speaking the “wrong” kind of Spanish, they send a message to that child that their identity which is intertwined with their dialect is inferior. Thus, if Polari is to be taught as a heritage language in a K-12 school setting, much care must be taken by teachers and administrators to resist privileging “proper” English over English laced with Polari.

One major difference between Spanish and Polari, however, is that Polari is not currently spoken by enough people for it to fit into the same frame of understanding. Most LGBTQ people are not raised by other LGBTQ people, and when they are, Polari is not something that they are likely to be raised speaking. The problem for LGBTQ students then, lies not just in the fact that a language belonging to a marginalized community risks being hierarchically denigrated, but that access to the language itself is so limited.

In 1995, Steven Wright and Donald Taylor conducted a study in which they attempted to gauge the impact on self-esteem of Inuit and mixed-race Inuit/White children of heritage language education. They found that children who were educated in their heritage language showed a substantial increase in their personal self-esteem (Wright & Taylor 1995). In 2017 a similar study was conducted by Lindsey Morcom at Queen’s University with Aboriginal children with similar results, indicating that heritage language

education supports positive self-image (Morcom, 2017). If we extrapolate their data and apply it to LGBTQ people, who most of the time are unaware they even have a heritage language to call their own, educators might be able to make a positive impact on a community which, according to the Center for Disease Control, are five times as likely to attempt suicide compared to their peers (CDC 2016).

Finally, heritage language education can be used as a tool to resist assimilation. In 2016, Tuba Yilmaz, a researcher at the University of Florida, when examining the motivational factors behind bilingualism in immigrant communities, discovered that children who did not learn their heritage languages or failed to upkeep them, “tend to devalue their heritage culture and become assimilated quickly” (Yilmaz, 2016, p. 193). As LGBTQ people’s identities are already vulnerable to erosion and assimilation by the nature of their occurrence among predominantly cisgender and heterosexual families and school communities, combating that assimilation and promoting cultural pluralism through heritage language education is vital.

In the same vein, Sarah Shin conducted research investigating why some parents of international adoptees explain their choice to pursue heritage language education for their children. She found that some parents viewed the heritage language as a necessary part of “culture-keeping,” in an attempt to instill pride and a sense of importance attached to the culture that the child might have been brought up in (Shin, 2014, p. 190). Unlike other marginalized groups, there are very few LGBTQ people who were raised by other LGBTQ people. As such, if Polari were made available to students, it is possible, if not likely, that learning the language would serve the same purposes of resisting assimilation and keeping the culture of the LGBTQ community at the forefront of the student’s sense of self despite conflicting social identities with parents and other adults in their lives.

What Next?

If when reading this article, you thought to yourself that it is a stretch to extrapolate culturally specific languages tied to ethnic and geographically linked communities to a completely different kind of community whose only language is a cant language based mostly in English, you’d be right. The field of heritage language learning is still relatively new, and the data is sparse. The question of what would happen if a community like the LGBTQ community were reconnected with a dead language forged in the crucible of extreme oppression has not been explored fully, if at all. Sure, there have been efforts to revitalize the language, like Polari Mission, an app that provides

a lexicon of Polari words and even has a translation of the Bible in Polari (Wheeler, 2016). But to truly know what benefits a true Polari curriculum would hold for LGBTQ students, the work must be undertaken, and the data must be collected.

Additionally, community stakeholders must also be a part of the push for Polari in schools; it isn’t enough for its inclusion to be supported by the scholarship. Parents must be made aware of Polari, and demand that it be included, or else learn it themselves and teach it to their children. For cisgender, straight parents of LGBTQ children, this could be a way for those parents to preserve their child’s sense of distinct culture much like the parents in the Shin study did. For LGBTQ parents, Polari can serve as a way to transmit LGBTQ culture generationally and promote family cohesion. Either way, for Polari to make its way into the lives of LGBTQ students, Parents must educate themselves about it and engage with the language too.

Finally, the problem of who will teach Polari must be addressed. Gay-Straight Alliance clubs are one avenue, as the participants are already self-selected as those who might benefit from learning Polari as a heritage language. But the problem with GSA’s being the focal point of Polari education is that many schools do not have one, especially in rural districts. Perhaps then, Polari could be incorporated into English or History classes. Even a cursory study of the language would be enough to make LGBTQ students’ aware of Polari’s existence, and given that language is so integral to the study of people’s histories and literatures, there are many avenues through which teachers can align the teaching of Polari with standards.

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*Book Review: **Piecing Me Together** by Eril Hughes, Ph.D.*

Piecing Me Together by Renée Watson. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017. 261 pages.

"[G]irls like me with coal skin and hula-hoop hip, whose mommas barely make enough money to keep food on the table in the house, have to take opportunities every chance we get" (7).

With this stylish wording, Jade Butler accepts her big opportunity, a full scholarship at Portland's best private high school.

First and foremost, there are many passages in this teen book that will "pop" with style. For example, Jade aptly describes her new school as a place where the "mothers are the kind of people who hire housekeepers, and [her] mother is the kind of person who works as one" (5). I fully appreciate not only the writing style, but also the sensitivity that the author used in dealing with many a difficult school situation!

One of Jade's most difficult situations is when she wants, and I mean really wants, to be chosen for a study abroad program in South America. Jade has learned that "language can take you places" (17). However, will Jade find a way to go forward when she is not chosen for this program?

Readers will also appreciate the main character as Jade becomes a problem solver. She

is selected to join the mentor group called the Woman to Woman. Jade wants to start programs on finances, not just make visits to museums and to the symphony. People in this mentor program inspire her to dare to consider staging a public showing of her beautiful collages. Will she have the grit to make these changes?

Change is an important theme in this book in other ways, too. Also Jade's new friend Sam cannot understand why Jade is upset when a store worker asks her—but no one else—to leave her bag behind the counter while shopping. Jade's response to this event is "I don't know what's worse. Being mistreated because of the color of your skin, your size, or having to prove that it really happened" (137). (Again, what nice use of language!)

This response shows that Jade is a character that everyone is bound to appreciate for her articulate words and her intelligence. (Even Jade's research on York, the slave who went on the Lewis and Clark Expedition, is interesting!)

With its skillful language and its wonderful characterization, I have to say that this book is far more than just another interesting title: This book shows us that the important job of piecing ourselves together is worth the work!

MY GRANDFATHER STANDS (before my students)

Bill McCloud

Sometimes when I teach
it's actually my grandfather
teaching through me
or a grandmother
or great great aunt

I use all of my own
personal history when
teaching American history
to a group of students whose
history waits ahead of them

Our past present and future
all
all occurring
at
at the same time



The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art and Norman Public Schools did a joint project in spring 2019 for 6th graders who were interested in art and creative writing. Miranda Wrobel was photographed while she sketched this rendering of Allan Houser's "As Long As The Waters Flow" (1988).

Bill McCloud's book of Vietnam War poetry, *The Smell of the Light: Vietnam, 1968-1969* (Balkan Press), reached #1 on the "Oklahoma Best-Sellers" List (The Oklahoman). His poems are taught at the University School of Milwaukee, WI. A Woody Guthrie Poet, he placed 18 poems in six different journals in 2018. Among the fans of his poetry are songwriters Graham Nash and Jimmy Webb. He lives in Pryor, OK, and teaches history at Rogers State University.



Poetry 101 *Margaret Dornaus*

Begin with a word.
 Something, say, like love.
 Or spaghetti. (Or love.) Write it
 on the white board: Spaghetti
 is love. Love is spaghetti. Ask why.

Record the reasons. Better yet ask
 someone in your class to tell you how
 they feel about love, i.e., spaghetti, noting
 that your pairing of both singular and plural
 pronouns—*someone, they*—isn't grammatically

incorrect. But rather non-binary. Fluid.
 Hot and cold. Non-judgmental. Like love.
 (Like spaghetti.) It's all good, isn't it?
 Someone? Anyone? . . . *It's greasy,*
 says the binary guy slumped over a desk

in the back row in order not to appear
 too eager. His skin is clear. His eyes bright.
 His teeth surprisingly even. Yes, it can be,
 I respond. *It's messy,* the binary girl next
 to the binary guy splutters in a voice

that compounds meaning. *It stings.*
 This from a Goth-ridden teen with a face
 covered in an assortment of elaborate
 bullet points and piercings. *It's prickly.*
Hard-core, spicy, sticky, the blonde

dressed in hot pink ventures. *Saucy.*
Salty. Over-seasoned. Better
with meatballs, the letter-jacketed
 jock chimes in to a crescendo
 of laughter. That's what love's like.

(Like spaghetti.) *Messy, sticky.* With or without
 the meatballs. It's all that and more. Like this test
 kitchen of students—binary/non-binary—full
 of choices. Full of possibilities.
 Something, say, like spaghetti. (Or love.)

Something, say, like poetry.



Oklahoma-born **Margaret Dornaus** holds an M.F.A. in poetry translation from the University of Arkansas. An award-winning poet and nonfiction writer, her food and travel articles are published nationally and her poems appear regularly in international anthologies and journals. Her first book of poetry, *Prayer for the Dead: Collected Haibun & Tanka Prose*, released through her small literary press Singing Moon, received a 2017 Merit Book Award from the Haiku Society of America.

Under this dark weight *Jacqueline Rasnic*

Under this dark weight
of this tumorous experience,
the bloody, black and crimson lump
tears us apart.

I tell myself that prayers will protect us,
but the innerness of my heart,
those most closed-off chambers,
knows that this is not true

Nothing can protect us from
cancer
or death
or the truth
about what has become of our dreams

It is
an enormous lie
that can not be trusted
nor believed

My prayers have been ripped from my lips
Murdered in front of me

And now I understand
all of the Bible stories from my childhood
The woman turned to salt for her desire to
look back
at the life she once had
Searching for something familiar and
less horrifying than her present

Existence

We have nothing now,
but our fear and our sadness
our regrets
our shame.
And a sliver of hope

that keeps us from unraveling into
sheer nothingness

Ghosts of our former selves
I have trouble
these days
feeling
anything at all.
But I do sense
a frozen iceberg of a thing
dwelling inside of me

Paralyzing every limb
Numbing me from the inside out

A cold venom rushes through my body
seeping out of my pores
Poisoning
Poisoning
Poisoning
everything I touch
or grow
or attempt to love

Everything withers and wilts away from my
grasp

It is a sinister thing
An unfair trade
A forgetting to remember
of that innocent person
I used to be.

But I know it's best
to just keep running
To never look back
for God's sake!

To just keep moving across the sand
as the tears run down my face.

Jacqueline Rasnic has been teaching English at Edmond North High School for 17 years. She is currently working on her Ph.D. at the University of Oklahoma, and she resides with her family in Norman. Her areas of interest include teaching composition, rhetoric, and creativity.

#CensorED: A Responsibility and Rationale for How to Critically Select Texts

Dr. Lara Searcy, Lauren Fodor, and Allison Grossman
Northeastern State University

Often, educators have good intentions, but often, good intentions are not the most effective way to be an advocate for our students. Intentionally or not, many educators engage in indirect censorship and the red-flagging of books when they select texts for their classroom. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), each school needs to “develop its own criteria for selecting materials for inclusion in English language arts programs and that criteria should relate to two general requirements: materials must (1) have a clear connection to established educational objectives and (2) address the needs of the students for whom they are intended” (NCTE, 2014). Due to this, there comes great responsibility in the selection of materials-- it requires in-depth knowledge: not just of students’ backgrounds and learning experiences, but also of their abilities and interests; not just of educational objectives, but of the best practices and range and quality of materials for meeting them; not just of the particular work being considered, but of its place within the medium, genre, epoch it represents. Responsible selection demands not only the experience and education needed to make sound choices but also the ability to defend the choices made (NCTE, 2014).

We agree with this responsibility and argue that educators need awareness and guidelines about how to select texts that promote the learning of all students. To do

this, we provide a process on how to evaluate literary arguments and model these processes by pairing two young adult texts-- a more classic text, *The Outsiders* (1967) with a more modern text, *The Hate U Give* (2017). Books written fifty-years apart (or even hundreds of years) can be workshopped together to “provide students with more accessible text and diverse cultural representations” (Styslinger, 2017, p. 3). This approach aligns with the American Library Association’s (ALA) findings from the 2015 “Top Ten Challenged Books” that many books were identified as having “diverse content.” Though issues of diversity-- race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies-- are often not cited as a reason for a book to be challenged, it is an element because people are often apprehensive to read or support books about issues that do not reflect their own identities or experiences (LaRue, 2017).

Guidelines for Dealing with Censorship and “Red-Flagging” of Instructional Materials

In selecting text, there are guidelines for dealing with the censorship of instructional materials. “Regardless of setting and cultural context, classroom instruction will require educators to introduce potentially controversial materials into classroom discussion” (NCTE, 2018a). Therefore, educators need to understand and resist both direct and indirect forms of censorship. Direct censorship occurs when

districts restrict the materials an educator can and cannot use in the classroom. Indirect censorship occurs when educators attempt to avoid controversy by limiting viewpoints and perspectives that may be deemed controversial. Both deprive students of literacy and learning opportunities because “censorship leaves students with an inadequate and distorted picture of the ideals, values, and problems of their culture” (NCTE, 2018a). In other words, preventing students from reading texts simply because they may be difficult to digest, is equivalent to sheltering them from reality.

“... a central tenet in English education is to provide all students access to a range of texts through curricula and independent choice reading (NCTE, 2014).”

Another aspect of censorship educators need to consider when selecting books is the practice of rating or “red-flagging” books for controversial content. By doing this, it undermines the process of book selection based on educational criteria and significantly reduces students’ access to a range of available, complex, and high-quality literature (NCTE, 2018b). While it is important to inform parents/guardians about the educational value of, and reasoning behind, the use and selection of texts, a central tenet in English education is to provide all students access to a range of texts through curricula and independent choice reading (NCTE, 2014). NCTE advocates that educators: discuss the pedagogical and curricular purposes served by the literature we teach; commit to teaching books that may challenge cultural or societal expectations; and consider books as a whole, rather than passages taken out of context. By doing so, we promote the learning and engagement of all students by

encouraging personal choice, decision-making, and critical thinking (NCTE, 2018b).

Teaching Challenged or Banned Books

The field of English education, especially, can contribute to disrupting inequitable hierarchies of power and privilege through our attention to the literature we select and use and the discussions we have. Though it may be uncomfortable to reflect on experiences with diversity and inequality, we deepen our understanding of social justice the more we practice facilitating difficult conversations. Our goal is to create meaningful dialogue and to stay engaged as educators who will put forth the effort needed to promote the learning of all students (NCTE, 2009).

In order to do this work, we must support intellectual freedom which “is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction” (ALA, 2019). Therefore, in addition to our own beliefs about the selection of materials, censorship, and diversity, we must also believe in our students’ right to read (NCTE, 2018c). We must believe knowledge is gained through reading. We must believe that shielding our students from educational texts because they may express difficult or uncomfortable ideologies, only hurts them in the end. More than anything, we must believe all students are worthy of the opportunity to gain education and understanding through reading.

However, this freedom is often called into question when a book is challenged or has been banned. According to the American Library Association (ALA), “Books usually are challenged with the best intentions—to protect others, frequently children, from difficult ideas and information. Often challenges are motivated by a desire to protect children from ‘inappropriate’ sexual content, ‘offensive’ language, or materials deemed ‘unsuitable to an

age group” (ALA, 2019). Again, people may have what they consider to be “good intentions,” but those intentions do not promote the learning of all students-- especially those students whose identities or experiences have often been labeled as “controversial” or have negative associations with them. Our classrooms need to be the “windows” and “mirrors” in which students see others and themselves reflected (Bishop, 1990). As educators, we allow these “windows” to become “sliding glass doors” when we help our students “walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author” (Bishop, 1990). As educators, we provide this reflection as a “mirror” when we first recognize our own privilege and perspective and then honor the lived or fictional experiences of those we read about in our curriculum.

A Process for Creating Literary Argument Rationales

A process that can help educators prepare for these critical discussions is to create an argumentative rationale for the teaching of commonly challenged or banned books. Using argumentative elements from Smith, Wilhelm, and Fredericksen’s book, *Oh, Yeah!?!: Putting Argument to Work Both in School and Out* (2012), Table 1 outlines the components needed in an effective argument about the evaluation and selection of a text, as well as a rationale for teaching it in a secondary English language arts classroom and national resources.

Table 1. Evaluating Literary Arguments

-
- **AUDIENCE:**
 - For what grades is this book especially appropriate?
 - What diverse identities will students explore in reading this text?
 - race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic
-

-
- status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies
 - How does this book provide a “window” and “mirror” into their experiences? (Bishop, 1990)
-

- **PURPOSE:** To what particular standards, objectives, literary or psychological or pedagogical beliefs, does this book lend itself?
-
- **PURPOSE:** In what ways will the book be used to meet those objectives?
-
- **CONTEXT:** What problems of style, tone, or theme or possible grounds for censorship exist in the book? Include information on previous challenges from: [ALA](#) and [NCTE](#).
-
- **CLAIM:** Assuming that the objectives are met, how would students be different because of their reading of this book? Why SHOULD this book be taught in a secondary classroom?
-

A) Interpretative Argument- Answer the Authorial Reading Question/s about your text:

- “What would this mean for the audience the author was writing for and how do I (adolescents) feel about it?;”
 - “What does this mean (for adolescents)?;”
 - “What does this mean to me (for adolescents)?”
-

B) Judgment about Character

Argument- Write an Essential Question that relates to a Character in the Book and then answer the question using your character’s evidence. The EQ and Answer should support your claim about what students learn from this character that relates to the real-world.

C) Argument about Idea- Write an interpretive argument as to what the central idea or ideas of the text are. Evaluate those

ideas by writing a detailed summary of the text.

D) Evaluative Argument- Evaluate whether or not you should teach the text.

Propose a solution based on research on how to respond to book challenges. Be sure to include an explanation of “how adolescents make meaning through text” (NCTE I & II). Provide information about an alternative text selection that has a similar theme/audience. Include information from resources on how to respond to book challenges from: [ALA](#) and [NCTE](#).

What alternative reading could you assign that is similar in theme?

Conclude with your **position statement on censorship**--as an educator/reader/parent/student.

Using this argumentative template, educators may be better able to articulate their process for selecting a potentially challenging text and provide a rationale for why that text should be taught in a secondary English classroom.

The Outsiders (1967)

As educators, one of the questions we should ask ourselves is: “How can I help my students find encouragement to be themselves in high school-- a place filled with adolescent struggles such as stereotyping, peer pressure, and self-esteem?” An answer to this question resides in the novel, *The Outsiders*. This book is about an ongoing conflict between two groups of teens-- the “Socs,” who reside on the east-side of town and typically come from families of money and the “Greasers,” who reside on the west-side of town and typically are viewed as delinquents and outcasts. The conflict between the two groups stems from the difference in their socioeconomic class, a major aspect of diversity that many teenagers can relate to.

The Outsiders was published in 1967 and then found its way onto the Banned Book List after first being challenged in 1986 in Wisconsin (ALA, 2013). South Milwaukee schools expressed their disapproval of the book due to the use of drugs and alcohol, profanity, and because “virtually all the characters were from broken homes.” Sadly, for these reasons, the book is ranked #38 on the list of Most Frequently Challenged Books from 1990-1999 (ALA, 2013).

Perhaps the reasons for which *The Outsiders* is most challenged are characteristics that make it perfect for adolescents in a high school English class-- socioeconomic differences, family struggles, and exposure to peer-pressure. Ignoring these issues because they are uncomfortable doesn’t make them disappear, as author S.E. Hinton recalls from her own experiences. S.E. Hinton began writing the novel when she was fifteen, and it was published when she was seventeen. Therefore, this book was written by a teenager, about teenagers, and for teenagers, which leads to its credibility and status as a young adult “classic.”

Aside from the realities expressed in the novel, a vital lesson in *The Outsiders* comes from the point of view of Ponyboy Curtis, the youngest of The Greasers. Ponyboy’s character offers the most valuable and realistic takeaways for adolescent readers. Greasers are stereotyped as tough, criminal, rebellious, and of lesser intelligence than The Socs. Ponyboy, however, is none of those things. He often expresses emotion through crying, is academically advanced, doesn’t enjoy violence, and particularly admires Soc girls. Though he receives frequent teasing from the other members of The Greasers for being unorthodox, Ponyboy’s relentless ability to be himself is the glue that holds the group together. Most importantly, Ponyboy expresses the realization that the differences between the Socs and the Greasers are petty. In reality, they’re all just high school kids dealing with

their own high school problems. Ponyboy's narrative has the ability to encourage students to be genuine in who they are, regardless of the struggles which may weigh on them.

Banning this book because some parts seem "inappropriate" or "unsuitable to an age group" only prevents kids from identifying with parts of diversity and identity that they may need to better understand (ALA, 2019). *The Outsiders* has the ability to inspire teens to occupy self-acceptance, have sympathy for their peers, and embrace—rather than condemn—existing differences. What could be more perfect for a high school classroom?

The Hate U Give (2017)

To what extent can a major tragedy bring out the bravery and heroism of a person? The answer to this question is portrayed by Starr Carter, the protagonist in the banned book, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. Though only released in 2017, it is already listed as #8 on the Banned Book List (Gomez, 2017). Ultimately, throughout the coming-of-age story, Starr concludes that the best version of herself is her true self. She does not want to hide who she is anymore or live two separate lives. This is an important message for students because often, teenagers have a hard time deciding on whom they want to be-- which is why many students will be able to relate to Starr and her struggles with identity.

Some issues in the book may cause controversy related to those mentioned by the ALA: "inappropriate" content, "offensive" language, or materials deemed "unsuitable to an age group" (ALA, 2019). One of the first times the book was banned in a school system was in 2017 in Texas due to the language that is used. Another issue people find with this book is that they believe it was written to portray police in a negative way. That is not the case, however, because the book was written to shed light on a situation and to provide a fictional setting to the very real deaths of teenagers such as Trayvon

Martin. In addition, "inappropriate" language and content such as the mentioning of drugs, gangs, abuse, violence, and profanity are other reasons why people do not think this book should be taught.

The best audience for this book is high school students because the book gives perspective to adolescent issues through the protagonist, Starr-- someone struggling with life in her neighborhood. Issues with relationships, friends, and family are all things Starr faces throughout the book and students may also face them as well. Due to the diversity of schools today, there are students from different backgrounds and races, so parts of the book that deal with racism may also resonate with adolescents. For example, if they hear racist comments or are treated differently (even by their friends) because of how they look, Starr provides an example of how to deal with these challenges and stand up for oneself.

Unfortunately, *The Hate U Give* has been listed as banned since its release in 2017, but it should not be. As educators, we should feel that censorship takes away knowledge from students in the classroom. Censorship causes more harm than good because "when children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part" (Bishop, 1990). Therefore, Starr's mother's message speaks the truth of being seen and heard: "brave doesn't mean you're not scared, Starr," she says. "It means you go on even though you're scared" which is something students need to hear (and read) to help them grow (Thomas, p. 331).

Pairing Classic and Modern Texts

After using a process to create a literary argument rationale, educators should also consider how to pair classic and modern texts together-- such as *The Outsiders* (1967) and *The Hate U Give* (2017)-- to "interweave

authentic reading and writing processes into classrooms, increase student comprehension and motivation, reach diverse learners, and foster diverse perspectives (Styslinger, 2017, p. 13). *The Outsiders*, written in 1967 and *The Hate U Give (THUG)*, written in 2017 share similar themes even though they are written fifty-years apart. Both books relate to controversial and life issues that many high school-aged students may face in their lives. For example, the protagonists--Ponyboy (*The Outsiders*) and Starr (*THUG*)-- are both teenagers trying to figure out similar issues in their lives regarding poverty, violence, and family. There is also a comparison between the two regarding the violence and injustice of diverse groups-- in *The Outsiders* injustice is shown by the differences between the Greasers and Socs and in *THUG* issues of justice are presented between people of color and law enforcement. Both characters tell their stories from their own perspectives which allow the reader to visualize and understand what two young characters-- from very different time periods, cultural backgrounds, and settings-- face in their daily lives.

The Outsiders (1967) takes place in the 1960's during a potential "golden age," but like the famous Robert Frost poem, "Nothing Gold Can Stay," the symbolic dream of innocence was lost both with the deaths of Johnny's character and President JFK. Conversely, *THUG* (2017) takes its meaning from Tupac Shakur's poem, "A Rose From Concrete," to describe how one can rise up from the ghetto. This image reflects Starr's own identity triumphs and portrays current events students will have experienced recently, such as the deaths of innocent Black teenage due to police brutality. Regarding cultural backgrounds, Ponyboy represents struggles from a white, male perspective and Starr represents struggles from a black, female perspective. Both characters examine the difficulties of their lives-- especially based on

the sides of town where they are from. Starr is a good example of someone whose identity changes based on which part of town she is on. Starr lives in Garden Heights, a primarily black neighborhood characterized by poverty and violence, but she attends a predominantly white private school. She is faced with the challenge of adapting her identity in these different settings, which allows the reader insight into the internal conflict they may have when they do not feel accepted because of who they are.

"Therefore, literature should reflect the diversity of life-- race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies."

Conclusion

Educators have the powerful responsibility of bringing "the life-giving power of literature," as Maya Angelou states, into their classroom through the texts we select. Therefore, literature should reflect the diversity of life-- race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. We reveal these diversities to our students by providing them with texts that "foster a responsive classroom environment with connections to real-life experiences" (Styslinger, 2017, p. 5) -- especially when "real-life experiences" are lived through the "sliding door" of fictional characters in fictional settings (Bishop, 1990).

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Both **Lauren Fodor** and **Allison Grossman** are undergraduates in this program at NSU and took Advanced Composition for Teachers during Summer 2019. This collaborative article stems from an assignment candidates completed in that course which is designed for students to learn different modes of composition, how to approach writing as a recursive process, and how adolescents compose texts.



Winner of NCTE's Journal of Excellence Award!
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OKCTE and the Oklahoma English Journal's Editor, Dr. Julianna Kershen, were honored at the 2018 NCTE Annual Convention in Houston, TX to receive the 2018 Affiliate Journal of Excellence Award. Congratulations Dr. Kershen & OEJ!