Teacher-Researcher

Action Research Conducted by the Teachers of Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven

A Collaboration with the Connecticut Writing Project-Storrs University of Connecticut

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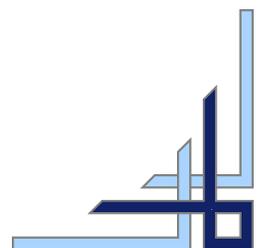Marcy Rudge, Annie E. Vinton School, Mansfield
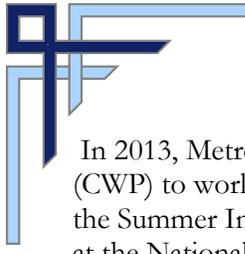Susan Laurençot, Montville High School, Oakdale

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Introduction

In 2013, Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven hired the Connecticut Writing Project (CWP) to work with their faculty after one of their English teachers—Steve Staysniak—attended the Summer Institute (SI) and then, with the help of an action research grant, presented his work at the National Writing Project Urban Sites Network Conference in Atlanta. After the CWP worked with the Metro teachers for a couple of years, partnering with them for a High Need School Grant was the next step in a logical progression.

Metro presents some interesting opportunities because they are a small magnet school with only 30 teachers on staff, so we were able to work with a critical mass of the entire staff. We did some traditional professional development (PD) during the 2014-15 year, but mostly we facilitated an elaborate action research program that involved 19 of the 30 teachers in the school, with three teachers—Steve Staysniak, Leslie Blatteau, and Danielle LaPan—in leadership roles helping the director oversee the 19 individualized action research plans.

In August of 2014, these three teacher leaders and I met for a three-day planning institute, followed by two days of traditional PD, one of which involved the teacher leaders and I meeting with all interested teachers to describe and initiate the action research program. Each of the three teacher leaders, in addition to applying for action research mini-grants for themselves, took responsibility for working with five or six colleagues (sometimes according to grade level, sometimes according to content area) and met with them to help them draft a proposal. These were then submitted to me who, with the help of Jane Cook, who was serving as our Grants Program Leader, reviewed the proposals and sometimes made suggestions or requests for revision. Then funds were distributed with offer letters and the teachers began their research. Some bought books. Some attended conferences. There was great variety. By mid-year, the teachers had to submit mid-year reports, and then by years end (June 17, to be exact), each teacher had to submit a final report.

Throughout the year, the teachers met with their designated teacher leader for ideas, support, guidance, and suggestions. Some did this often and some did this infrequently, as needed. Some teachers worked alone but many worked in grade level or departmental teams. There was a math team of three teachers, a world languages team of four teachers, and a 12th grade team comprised of an English teacher, a tech teacher, and a business teacher. These teams met regularly to review research and plan instruction.

The final reports submitted to the CWP were edited by Graduate Assistant Director Michelle Resene and undergraduate intern Eric Miller in preparation for this publication. As a final capstone on the year's work, two of the three teacher leaders and I ran a three day mini-institute for nine of the school's teachers. This included two English teachers, four history teachers, one world language teacher, one math teacher, and one science teacher; five teachers—English, history, math, science, world language—were all on the 9th grade team. With the teacher leaders taking the principal role, we spent one day working from Tom Newkirk's *Minds Made for Stories,* one day working from Gerald Graff's *They Say, I Say*, and one day from Maja Wilson's *Rethinking Rubrics.* The teachers are now in the process of composing an article for their district and an action plan for their building based on their summer work.

Dr. Jason Courtmanche
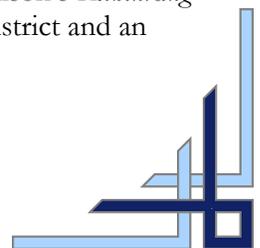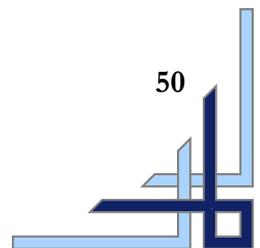Director, Connecticut Writing Project

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The Trial and Error Approach to Helping Teens Develop Their Scriptwriting Skills
By Furahi Achebe

As a digital video production teacher, it was my intention to improve the writing of scripts. The goal of the grant was ultimately achieved but in an utterly surprising way. Initially as a new teacher, I thought that painting the wall of our classroom would improve scripts because it would allow Moviemaker users to use any picture as a background for their stories. With a backdrop that is replaceable in the editing process, the writer becomes empowered to set the story anywhere.

I informed the students in advance that if we chose to use the grant money to paint the wall, I would need them to submit scripts written last year in their media classes and also to write new scripts after the painting. I was surprised to learn that despite my enthusiasm and the students' enthusiasm about painting, the students felt uncomfortable writing scripts both with and without the green screen wall.

Students enter the Digital Media Pathway as sophomores. Selecting the Digital Media Pathway allows students the option of taking Digital Movie Making, Broadcasting and Animation as electives in their sophomore, junior and senior years respectively. In the Animation class in January 2015, I asked the seniors to each submit an old script. Only two students responded out of 15. One of the "scripts" was just a little dialogue in Spanish between two characters. I then gave a graded assignment in my Broadcasting and Animation classes to write a one-page script. Very few students responded, and I had difficulty understanding why students were refusing to work.

I was complaining to a colleague that I couldn't get my students to write scripts, and she said, "Did you teach them how to write scripts?" I realized then that it was wrong for me to assume that they had any prior knowledge of script writing.

I began to teach script writing in April. I started with a review of the three act structure using a video entitled *Screenwriting 3 Act Structure in Movie Scripts*. In a class discussion, the students were then asked to summarize what they learned from the movie. The students were then shown an animated short called "Monkey Symphony" that pointed out the beginning and ending of each act. In the next class I showed a video about the 5 plot points titled *3 Act Structure—Story Structure Tips—Screenwriting*. In this tutorial, the instructor used a movie to discuss the acts within a story. We used that same movie to discuss the plot points, which were also a topic in the tutorial.

With knowledge of story structure in hand, I asked my students to select a short script off of the web and summarize the storyline and then tell which parts of the story represented which plot points. In the next lesson, we watched a movie about script formatting entitled *How to Format a Screenplay: Five Basic Elements*. I then divided the students into 5 groups that would each teach the class the following information about their script element: how it is formatted, when to use it, is it capitalized? I then used a script entitled *Absolute Power* as an example of a properly formatted script. We went around the room reading the script aloud with each person saying which script element they were reading. Their choices were Character Name, Dialogue, Scene Heading, Action and Parenthetical.

I gave the students a quiz on the definitions and formatting of each script element as an assessment. Here I was only testing memorization of the rules. The students did poorly. Because the averages were so low, I informed the students that there would be a retest in the next class. The next test was of slightly higher order thinking; the students needed to identify the various script elements from a printed page of script. Students performed well on this test.

In the next lesson, I introduced Celtx.com as a website where they could create and collaborate on scripts. It also makes formatting the screenplay easier. I sent students a link to the website's registration form and asked them to register. In class we used the Celtx software to collectively write a movie about the life of survivors of a zombie apocalypse. There was high interest in adding to this story. In this lesson I demonstrated through our brainstorming how to get from an idea to a story with a good plot.

I then gave the students the assignment of writing a three page properly formatted script for their final project. They were told that the storyline must have embedded in it three acts and the five major plot points. Over the next five classes, I consulted with the students on their plots and formatting. Most students made very little progress until the deadline for submission was very close. When we got down to the wire, what I saw was surprising; the students generally produced screenplays of good quality. A few of the students created such complex stories that they went well beyond three pages. One student who was very reluctant to create a script found herself very proud of the script that she ultimately created.

I learned an important lesson; if you want your students to be able to do something, show them how.

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Supporting Authentic Research in the 12th Grade Social Studies Classroom
By Leslie Blatteau

The Classroom Challenge

I teach a Senior Seminar entitled "International Issues" in which 12th graders engage in college-level research in order to write a 6-8 page analysis of a human rights issue of their choosing. The 2014-2015 school year was the second year I taught this course with this explicit desired outcome. What I learned from the first year of teaching this course became my challenges for the second year:

- Students arrive to this course with underdeveloped reading and writing skills. As a result, they struggle to engage in the research process; while their interest in the topic is high, their ability to identify, comprehend and synthesize higher-level texts limits the scope of their work.
- Students arrive to this course with significant gaps in their background knowledge related to current events, world geography, and global politics.
- Students arrive to this course without having experienced and engaged in a long-term and independent (yet supported) project. As a result, the necessary tasks of maintaining a calendar and chunking large, under-bounded assignments into smaller more manageable ones are not yet part of the habits of mind of students in the course.

In addition, I realized my need to improve how I embedded the teaching of these skills into the course. I also needed to strike a more effective balance between supporting students and ensuring they could support themselves. My arbitrary due dates did not ensure consistent productivity among the majority of the students. I knew there had to be a better way. Thus, I started this school year knowing I needed to focus on more explicit teaching of skills; I needed to prioritize background knowledge development; and I needed to model for students how to manage their own long-term projects in order to arrive at the finish line with a product of which we could be proud.

How I Addressed the Challenges

I took multiple approaches to address these challenges. The first approach involved investing in specific books to start the year with that I knew would help to increase background knowledge and engagement for all students. In the past I have had positive experiences with using children's books to introduce complex subject matter to students. With this in mind, I purchased three books about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights designed for a younger audience. In addition, I purchased several copies of the *Atlas of Human Rights*; a well-designed, accessible, resource that could help students increase background knowledge in the areas I previously identified related to geography and global politics. I knew that starting the year and our research process with these books would yield better "right out of the gate" results. My belief that how you start can impact how you finish influenced this decision.

The second approach involved reaching out to colleagues with expertise in the areas of teaching reading and writing. First and foremost, I worked closely with 9th grade English teacher Steve Staysniak. Not only does Steve know the students in my class from having taught them as freshmen, he also has been working to develop his own practice with respect to our school's student-centered learning philosophy and shift to Mastery Based Learning. Steve challenged me to increase student-to-student conversation in my classroom; particularly related to their research projects. While I was already experienced with individual conferencing with students to support their research and writing, I had not done enough with student-to-student conferencing and peer-to-peer feedback throughout this process. Our conversations centered on Steve's evolving practice of conducting "Roundtables" in his classroom periodically throughout the school year. This instructional choice stems back to our visit to the East Side Community School in the summer of 2014 where we witnessed the power of roundtables and their impact on students' ability to articulate what they have learned and why they have learned it. While I had planned to visit East Side and/or Casco Bay in the spring, some schedule changes compelled me to limit travel, exploring research and addressing challenges in different ways.

As a result of this shift, I also reached out to the Critical Friends group at my school. Using a clear and effective protocol, the Critical Friends group invites colleagues to present a dilemma to the group and receive feedback related to the dilemma. I focused on the third challenge listed above; related to students' struggle with deadlines and the independent nature of the work. I titled the dilemma "Routines, Independence, Monotony and Progress(?)" and used the following questions to frame the discussion:

- How can I maintain the individualization and student-centeredness (hallmarks of the class) while still ensuring that students make progress, feel the urgency and get to the finish line?
- How can I strike a balance between offering developmentally-appropriate support and creating a dependent environment for students?

Our discussion yielded several practical and implementable ideas not only for me, but also for my colleagues who were also in attendance. I will discuss these ideas in the following section.

Finally, I learned to address one of my challenges inadvertently; as it should be, I learned directly from a student's experiences about how to best meet students' needs. Often, visitors from local universities come to my classroom to satisfy observation requirements or to forge partnerships with my school. On one of these visits, after students introduced themselves and their research topics, a visitor connected with one specific student and discussed his topic, the Rwandan Genocide, with him in detail. She recommended that he view *Hotel Rwanda* in order to develop background knowledge about the topic. After hearing her recommendation and the enthusiasm the student exhibited as a result of her suggestion, I realized I had missed a crucial opportunity to use film as a resource in my classroom to help students develop background knowledge. I knew this would become one of the prongs of my Connecticut Writing Project research moving forward.

What I Learned from the Research

With respect to the use of children's books in a 12th grade classroom, the research supports my hypothesis. In Melissa Reiker's qualitative study, "The Use of Picture Books in the High School Classroom," she cites Carr's belief that students respond positively because they are visual learners. She goes on to write, "The interplay between text and illustrations may appeal to students who enjoy the same kind of experience when texting, playing a video game, or working on a computer" (6). She also cites Giorgis claim regarding the "bond develops between the teacher and the students during a picture book read-aloud, a bond that reinforces the power of words" (7). I can attest to this phenomenon as I framed our reading of *We Are All Born Free* with the idea that we would purposefully set up a vibe that reminded of us of how we read when we were younger. We put the chairs in a circle, we passed the book around from person to person, and we read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to each other; studying the pictures that accompanied each article. This vibe that I created also connects to Reiker's third point: "Picture books offer a medium in which all students, regardless of background knowledge or level, can succeed" (7). I worked to ensure a baseline awareness of human rights, among all of the students that ultimately united them and drew them more deeply into the work.

After my conversations with Steve about the need to shift to a classroom where student-to-student conversation takes precedence, I also looked to the research for reinforcement and support. While I didn't exactly construct "writing groups," as I went more with a research, thesis, and evidence peer-to-peer share approach, the Guidelines for Writing Groups from the NCTE served me well. For example, since students weren't giving feedback on other students' actual writing, students could focus more on "higher order issues like argument, organization and evidence." In addition, with each student discussing their research process, thesis and evidence, all of the students collectively strategized solutions to common problems by hearing about each other's obstacles and successes along the way. I also followed the advice of the NCTE guidelines in that I developed a response template for students to reflect on and write about their experiences in the Seminar Share. As the guidelines point out, "a written response in which students reflect on what they have learned can be a great low-stakes writing assignment that offers the opportunity for metacognitive reflection" (para 4). In a course where the primary focus is on a high-stakes summative writing assignment, it is crucial to have low stakes assignments that meet the needs of both student and teacher.

I have continued work to do with the premise of "Why Talk is Important in the Classroom." I have begun to study the work of Fisher, Frey and Rothenberg in *Content Area Conversations* but need more time to synthesize and apply their ideas to my own practice. The key takeaway that most influenced my practice and will continue to motivate me to dig more deeply is that "oral language is the foundation of literacy, and as such, it requires focused attention in planning" (43). And as I will discuss in more detail in the following section, my ongoing focus for this course relates to the premise that talk in the classroom must be used to develop students' thinking not simply to evaluate whether or not they know the correct answer.

In addition to what I learned from conversations with Steve and an examination of related literature on the subject, I also learned a great deal from the Critical Friends session where I

presented my dilemma. Facilitated by Charline Cupole, Metropolitan's Library Media Specialist, I successfully framed my challenges and left the session with specific strategies that I quickly worked to implement. The takeaways from my colleagues focused on maintaining the individualized approach that is a hallmark of my classroom while simultaneously putting students in more control of their own planning and research process. They recommended that I move away from administering my own deadlines (which students tended to miss anyway) and shift to a system of student goal setting and self-monitoring. With this in mind, it becomes less about disappointing or ignoring me and more about honest and realistic reflection partnered with more purposeful time management. I benefitted from the structured nature of the protocol in that the finish line of the hour was clear; we ended with colleagues offering their ideas. So often conversations with colleagues ramble and amble without reaching a definitive end point. The timed protocol and Charline's facilitation made sure we ended on time with a clear goal in mind.

Lastly, I witnessed the important role that film can play in developing background when I witnessed one student shift from novice to motivated researcher as a result of film. I looked to the research to confirm what I observed. In the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, Brad Smilanich and Nicole Lafreniere asked an important question and followed up with a succinct and compelling answer, "Why does film make such a difference to our struggling and reluctant students, the students who refuse to engage with text? The answer is deceptively simple: Film offers an immediacy and accessibility that the printed text frequently does not. Students who are intimidated by, or impeded from, accessing print text are able to discuss film with acuity and insight" (604-5). I witnessed the power of this immediacy with my student. And the best part of the experience was that one film that increased confidence by developing his background knowledge on the topic opened the door to increased research, close reading and critical questions. The film laid the groundwork for his purposeful seeking of a deeper understanding of the atrocities in Rwanda. What clearly worked so well with this student, I want to embed into my practice for additional students in the coming years.

How My Classroom Teaching Changed/Impact on Student Learning

When I compare the two years that I have taught the International Issues Senior Seminar, it is clear my teaching has changed. First of all, my introduction of the Seminar Share (which we did three times throughout the year), demonstrated to students the importance of developing their voices on their human rights research topics. Not only that, they learned about the role that collaborative working groups can play when it comes to inspiration, problem solving and feedback. In order to achieve these outcomes of increased student voice and self-efficacy, I structured these sessions on the back end so I could be as close to invisible as possible during the actual class time. This means I created working groups based on students' strengths and areas of improvement. In addition, I put students together based on their research topics. Related topics sometimes worked well together; however, on the flip side, divergent topics paired well in order to give students a wide range of discussion points for their time together. Groups were composed of between four and six students. During the first seminar share, I provided students with our course's essential questions, which they had seen several times before, and a protocol to guide their work. See below for excerpts from the plan that students received during the first sessions:

Essential Questions
- What can we do to make the world a better place for everyone?
- What are human rights? Who decides?
- How have people both locally and globally worked to address human rights issues and make improvements in the lives of human beings?

Protocol
1. Introduce the topics of your writing that you plan to share
2. Review and discuss the essential questions BEFORE you share your writing
3. Begin to connect your writing topics to the essential questions
4. Create time for each student to share
5. Ask clarifying questions after each student shares
6. Make connections to what each student shares
7. Examine and connect to the map provided

By the end of the year, we moved away from the general and much more into the specific with respect to students' ideas and work. As you can see from the protocol below, students not only present their project, thesis and evidence, they also self-assess on the rubric in order to make their thinking and their progress visible to both themselves and their classmates. In addition, students wrote a reflection on this seminar share experience which yielded thoughtful responses; further evidence of the power of student-to-student teaching.

Protocol

Once you settle into your groups, use the following protocol to guide your conversation. The length of each person's share should be about 10 minutes; followed by about 5 minutes of written and oral feedback by team members (see Listening Guide). Each person will present the following:
a. A brief introduction to the project
    i. What is the human rights issue?
    ii. Why does it matter?
b. Self-assessment: Thesis/argument
    i. Explain where you are on the rubric and why
c. Self-assessment: Selection and use of evidence
    i. Explain where you are on the rubric and why
d. Obstacles and next steps:
    i. Identify any obstacles to your project; ask your team for support
    ii. Explain what your goals are for the next two classes
    iii. What will your next steps be? Why?

HOMEWORK: Write a 250-word response to today's Seminar Share using the following prompt:

As a result of today's Seminar Share, I have learned even more about the complex issue of human rights. Not only is __(your own topic)__ a serious problem in our world today, but the issues of _____, _____, and _____ also threaten people's human rights on a daily basis. (Describe one of these issues in more detail based on what you learned during the Seminar Share.)
As I reflect on what I learned, I think the global community must _____ in order to address these issues. This is necessary because_____. In addition, I hope to even learn more about _____ because _____. I didn't realize how significant it is when examining the big picture of human rights. Overall, I think the Seminar Share was _____ and I look forward to _____ in the future.

In all honesty, I was not sure about the use of the template for the written reflection homework assignment. While several students in the class struggle with crafting written responses, several students are on the opposite end of the continuum and write fluidly and fluently. What proved to me the power of the template and its usefulness were the responses from those highly skilled students. They did not balk at the prospect of using a template; rather, they focused on the parts of the assignment where their own ideas stood out and engaged in thoughtful analysis of their own and their classmates' work. In addition, struggling students could get right to the task of writing versus stressing about how to start and were able to capture their reactions and analysis of their peers' thesis, evidence, and overall research process.

Students responded positively to this shift. Rather than a class-wide conversation where 25% of the students dominate the conversation, every student actively presented and actively listened for the entirety of the session. Through informal exit tickets and one-on-one conversations with students, I learned that they felt professional, academic and well informed during these sessions. Several students admitted that they didn't think it would go as well as it did. But 100% of the participants reported how much they enjoyed it, despite their initial nervousness going into the experience. In addition, I believe these seminar shares paved the way for students to gain experience and confidence with presenting. In mid-April, Metropolitan students were invited to an Earth Day and Social Justice Conference at Southern Connecticut State University. Five of the students in International Issues presented their work to an audience of 150 high school and college students, as well as leaders in the environmental justice movement. The academic focus of their presentations stood out most to me in that they confidently articulated their thesis statements, as well as key evidence that supported these ideas. I believe students' success at this conference is a direct result of the seminar share practice in our classroom.

In addition to the shift to the Seminar Share, I also implemented practices I gleaned from the Critical Friends group. To recap, the focus of that work centered on the critical tension between the support I provide and the independence I want students to develop. Ultimately, I devised a system where students created their own calendars and due dates in order to map

out their progress and chunk the large task of a research paper into smaller parts. I provided students with a copy of a calendar for April and May, as well as a list of the "chunked" assignments or milestones that should be prioritized on their calendar. I made copies of these calendars so I could monitor their progress and then returned their originals, so more importantly, students could monitor themselves.

Periodically, I conferenced with the students to give them an opportunity to reflect on and talk about their progress. However, this was different from previous conferencing because it was in the context of their own goal setting versus the arbitrary deadlines I had assigned before this shift. Students benefited a great deal from this shift. I witnessed their accountability, time management skills, and investment in their work on the paper increase. Student-created deadline hold much more weight with adolescents than teacher-created ones. In addition, this shift aligns with one of our graduation competencies: Initiative and self-direction. Several seniors used their long-term work on the Human Rights Research Project as evidence for this competency in their 21st Century Portfolio Defense (a new graduation requirement at Metropolitan). As I shift into planning mode for next year, I know that I will incorporate the use of self-directed calendars and goal setting earlier in the school year.

My last lesson learned and classroom shift is similar in that the bulk of the change will happen next school year. Having witnessed how film supports the development of background knowledge, I feel a little frustrated that I didn't think of it sooner. However, the test case this year demonstrated that the confidence level of the student who watched *Hotel Rwanda* before starting his research was significantly higher than those of other students with similar skill sets. Thus, in addition, to the books I have purchased that will help me improve classroom instruction related to student-to-student conversation, feedback, and goal-setting, I will also create a documentary film library with the theme of human rights to use with students. Having taught this course for two years now, I am familiar with the topics that students are most interested in, and I can tailor the film library to meet these needs and interests. I look forward to using these films earlier in the school year to help students get a jumpstart on their research and writing.

Conclusion

Overall, I realize I cast a wide net with respect to the classroom challenges I faced and solutions with which I experimented. However, my support network at Metropolitan yielded such food for thought, I felt able to address these challenges and use the Connecticut Writing Project grant to support further development in these areas. In addition, I value how much I learned from watching a student navigate the process; identifying what motivated him to complete his project with a growth mindset. I look forward to expanding this process even more next year.

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Authentic Audiences for Authentic Student Work
By Nataliya Braginsky

Introduction

The 9th grade Humanities class I teach is about identity and justice, and the creative and critical work that students produce is central to it. From co-created class magazines to oral history projects, from original poetry writing and performance to social action projects in their communities, this student work is highly authentic. However, I am not sure how aware students are of their work's authenticity and significance in the world. Therefore, the classroom challenge I wanted to address was centered on building investment and engagement among students toward their work. In other words, my goal was to seek authentic audiences, both live and media-based, for the important work my students are already doing. I believe having authentic audiences would engage my students, encourage them to put more effort into their work, and finally, support students in seeing the importance of their perspectives, their words, and their ability to communicate significant ideas with the world through writing and media creation.

Toward the goal of seeking authentic audiences for my students' work, I attended the Allied Media Conference in Detroit, Michigan. This annual conference is intended to gather artists, educators, and activists who are producing and consuming identity- and justice-oriented media. This was the 17th year for this conference; they have a significant community and network and have produced a variety of projects related to education, organizing, audio and video documentation, literature, music, and the arts. In short, Allied Media Projects and their conference is a major source of inspiration and an incredible resource for anyone doing work in these interconnected fields. As their tagline suggests, the conference is about creating, connecting, and transforming, which is not unlike the goals of the Humanities class I teach. At the conference I connected with a variety of different groups and individuals doing work that aligns with the work I am doing in my classroom. So, I was able to offer my students additional resources for learning and creating their work and also authentic audiences for sharing it. Below is a list of the resources I encountered.

Resources Gathered at Conference

Detroit Future Schools: http://www.detroitfutureschools.org/
DFS is a model that seeks to humanize education by using digital media to support students in telling their stories and the stories of their community. Their website contains a variety of curricula and resources. The close of their school year involves students organizing an event in which they share the media they have produced and facilitate activities and dialogue with community members in attendance.

Groundswell: Oral History for Social Change:
http://www.oralhistoryforsocialchange.org/
Groundswell is a network of different groups conducting oral history projects and documenting stories. Their website includes a variety of tools for conducting oral histories, as well as a directory of groups' documentary projects. Among them is the:

Trans Oral History Project: http://transoralhistory.com/
This project not only has a story bank of trans oral histories (and an upcoming archive of magazines), which will be a valuable resource as exemplars for our oral history project, but also the website offers a toolkit for educating youth about trans issues, including media representation, limited job opportunities, and more.

The Knotted Line: http://knottedline.com/
While at the Allied Media Conference, I met one of the creators of The Knotted Line, an online interactive space for exploring issues of enslavement, confinement, imprisonment, and policing in the USA from 1495 until today. It does this in an incredibly unique, creative, and informative way. The topics The Knotted Line covers are among those we study in the class, and it examines them with an intersectional approach, which is central to the course. Finally, the website offers an exemplar for social action projects students can create to educate and spread the word using digital media.

Anti-Eviction Mapping Project: http://www.antievictionmap.com/
This unique project, which I encountered at the AMC, is using maps to document a variety of social justice issues, such as eviction. This shows students the importance of community-based information and original ways to disseminate that information. While the website documents a significant amount of quantitative data, it also uses maps to house oral histories of community members. This could be a way to organize students' neighborhood-based oral histories, which they will conduct.

Streetwise Safe (SAS): http://www.streetwiseandsafe.org/
SAS is a NYC-based youth initiative to resist violence and police brutality. Most of the youth involved are queer youth of color, as they are the ones most often targeted by police. This social justice issue is a key one we will study, as it has been a critical current event and civil rights issue. Furthermore, the work this group is doing is not only useful to students in a very practical way-they produce know your rights materials and conduct workshops for youth-but also in an inspiring way in terms of how they use an online platform to spread the word, including toolkits, art, news, articles, videos, and more.

Conclusion

As the conference took place after the final days of the 2014-2015 school year, I have not yet had a chance to utilize this wealth of resources in my classroom. However, I anticipate my teaching changing as a result of them in a variety of ways. First, I have realized that the work of producing media-based projects must begin with opportunities for students to discover the spaces in which such media exists. While in the past I have shown students exemplars, I now realize that allowing students to actually explore the websites, individually or in groups, and to discover that not only the work, but also the space in which it lives, is critical to the creation and sharing of it.

Next, following in the footsteps of the Detroit Future Schools model, now realize the significance of an end-of-the-year event, which students can look forward to as a deadline as well as an opportunity to share their work. Centering students in the organizing of this event will provide real world organizing skills and will build their investment. Finally, creating an event that is not only a space to share their work, but also to begin dialogues that can

continue their work will allow for development of speaking and listening skills and will involve the community in our school.

With these more varied examples of media- and justice-based projects, I believe students will not only have more ideas for their own work, but also more investment, engagement, and inspiration for this type of work in general. Knowing that there is a context for this type of work will help students realize its significance. Furthermore, I believe having students work together to organize an end-of-the-year culminating event in which they share their work with peers, teachers, families, and community members will have a significant impact on the work students produce. I believe students will set higher goals for what they intend to produce, work harder on completing it successfully, and invest more into making it their highest quality work. Finally, I believe that this type of event will also help students feel proud of what they created, realize that their work and their words matter, and ideally, continue this type of work beyond the classroom.

Publishing Student Work in a Literary Magazine
By Charline Cupole

Classroom Challenge

Publishing a piece of work in a magazine or newspaper requires that work be polished and edited to a degree that goes beyond the typical writing in a classroom setting. I would like to create a medium for students to "publish" writing for an authentic audience and to have a place where writing and creative works are celebrated and shared with our community.

The literary magazine will provide:

- A place for students to publish finished works of writing.
- A celebration and promotion of writing at Metropolitan Business Academy.
- Students an opportunity to see their work as a work of literature.
- A deeper understanding of the editing and publication process.

I wanted to plan, organize and publish a literary magazine in May that showcased student work. In doing so, I would devise a system for student work to be submitted on a monthly basis and arrange meeting times for any necessary editing. I planned to collaborate with my library teaching assistants, the English department and graphic arts teacher on this project.

Addressing the Challenge

I addressed the challenge by researching the benefits to students when given the opportunity to publish work to an authentic audience. The library aides and I also researched and examined school publications and literary arts magazines. We collected samples, created a display, and put out an advertisement for student work. We posted signs around the school, advertising for student work submissions. We also approached key writing and arts teachers and asked them to post signs in their rooms and to encourage students to contribute work. We also targeted specific students and asked for them to consider submitting work to the magazine.

Since Metropolitan Business Academy did not already have a literary arts magazine, it was difficult to inspire students to contribute work to an unknown publication. I discussed this issue with Steve Staysniak and Anthony Sacco, both English teachers. Anthony Sacco suggested offering students an extra credit incentive if they contributed which proved to be helpful.

The Library Team also took suggestions for a magazine name, worked on a cover and created a timeline for the process. We organized all of the submissions by the first week in May and designed the layout in two weeks. The printing was done by our district Xerox Copy Center. They had quoted us $500 for 500 color copies of the 11" X 17" folded magazine.

When picking up the copies from the Copy Center, they said they were not going to charge us for the printing. After talking with Steve Staysniak, we decided to purchase books for our

summer reading club and design writing activities around the books. We purchased 20 copies of *Crossover* by Kwame Alexander and 20 copies of *The Impossible Knife of Memory* by Laurie Halse Anderson. We recruited students for the summer reading club and will use these book selections for a variety of creative writing activities over the summer and at our club meeting in September. These writing projects will be taken through the writing process to create publishable work for our first collection of writing for the 2nd edition of *The Metro*.


The Library Team also organized a party to celebrate the release of the first edition of *The Metro*. All artists were invited for a congratulatory speech, cake and juice. All artists were given a "Metro Artist" pin and were invited to sign a special copy that we later framed and placed on the wall for all to be inspired next year. At the conclusion of the celebration, the magazines were delivered to the student body and staff.

Research Findings

Through this research project, I explored the benefits to students when given the opportunity to publish work for an authentic audience. Having some background at my previous job in the Collins Writing Project and the Coalition of Essential Schools, I understood the importance of making student work public, so I revisited these two sites. In the Collins Writing Project, the final step is where students produce error-free, published work. Students rework their writing through several drafts with focus on various correction areas along the way to perfect writing for a public audience. One of the Coalition of Essential Schools 10 Common Principles, as found on their website, is "Demonstration of mastery teaching and learning should be documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks." The idea of working with students to produce high quality writing for an authentic audience prompted further investigation into the effects on student motivation and the quality of writing when producing "published" works for an authentic audience.

According to "The Power of Audience" by Steven Levy, "The most effective way to engage students in learning is to create an authentic audience, giving them a sense that someone else (besides teachers and parents) cares about their work" (para. 20) Many sources that I read, stressed the importance of writing for a real audience to motivate students to continue reworking a piece of writing to prepare their work for a public audience. The motivation increases when the audience is wider than that of one teacher.
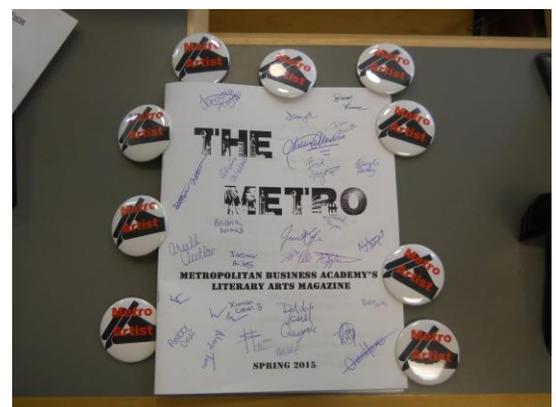
I also read *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Carol Dweck and learned about the importance of helping students develop a growth mindset to understand that their skills and abilities can be developed through continuous effort. This is especially important in the development of a writer.

I have learned that an authentic audience gives students a purpose for their writing and the motivation to write and rewrite, perfecting their work which helps to enhance their skills along the way. Students take ownership of their learning.

Impact on Classroom

The library has changed because we now have a published magazine and the experience of the process under our belt. We have made this a special publication in our school; one that has received many compliments and has made students feel proud to be published. Now that MBA has a known publication, more students will want to be a part of it next year. Several students even commented this year that they wished they had contributed.

Next year, we will use extra copies of the magazine as a means of motivating students to write for the magazine with the school community as the audience giving them a real purpose for engaging in the writing process. We also have the benefit of starting the year with a system in place for identifying and collecting work since completing the publishing process this year.

I would like to increase the amount of writing collected and work on getting a more diverse variety of writing from a larger amount of students next year. I plan to work with the English teachers to establish an improved, ongoing process of submitting work rather than waiting until the deadline in May to receive the bulk of the work. This would give us a chance to gather more work and spend more quality time engaged in the editing process.

Impact on Student Learning

The magazine impacted the students that contributed work by giving them an authentic audience for their writing. Seeing the finished work made them extremely proud and celebrated by our school community. The magazine also gave students the opportunity to share their work with each other and engage in conversations about their work. Students worked closely with their teachers to revise and edit the work to prepare it for publication in the magazine.

Students that worked on planning *The Metro* magazine took great pride in promoting the magazine and organizing the celebration and publication party. The library aides also had an authentic audience to perform for as they had to prepare the celebratory speech to give at the party and they had the challenge of designing the magazine in a way that would include all student submissions and be organized in a way that would best communicate each piece to our school community through publication.
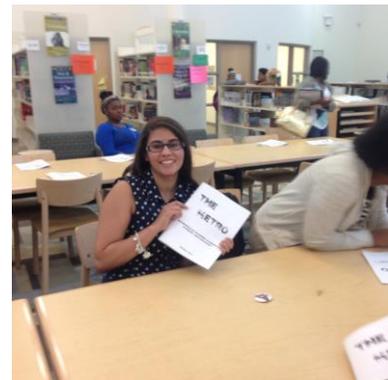
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Math Ideas Come Alive
By Kareem Cutler, Veronica Krisavage, and *Amy Morrissey*

There is a perception among students at Metropolitan that learning math is all about writing lecture notes, getting a formula, and plugging in numbers as a means to acquire the answer. Why do our students have such trouble demonstrating their mastery of mathematical knowledge on tests and in projects? Why do they have difficulty retaining what they learn? Common Core is supposed to help address some of these issues, but we feel that there is more to this problem than just a new set of standards. Students need to see math in a different way. They need to talk about math, write about it, read about it and especially reflect on what they learn, as they do in other classes. By doing this, they will realize that what they learn is no longer a set of isolated facts and their ability to retain mathematical knowledge should increase as they internalize their learning. We believe that this will also have a positive impact on their literacy skills. We decided to take part in this grant to see if our premise could be proven.

Last summer Soni Midha and Mohammed Aminyar from East Side Community High School in New York conducted a professional development session at Metro. We learned that they consistently have their students reflecting and writing in the math classroom. Their students have to defend their Project Based Assessment (PBAT) work before a small group of peers and a validator. When we asked how they prepared their students for this depth of work, they suggested that we should just start with small steps. We discussed this idea with our math team. Our initial goal was to increase the mathematical discourse in our classes. One of the means we wanted to use to accomplish this was by purchasing document cameras for each of our classrooms. Other teachers have used the document cameras to display student work. Our plan was to expand that idea and have students reflect on each other's work, first orally and then in writing.

In order to get students reading more, and to present mathematical ideas in different ways, we purchased copies of *Numbers and Other Math Ideas Come Alive* by Theoni Pappas. This book contains short, entertaining stories, which humanize mathematics by creating characters for various topics. For example, "Permutation and Combination have it out" is about two characters, Permutation and Combination, who just cannot see each other's point of view. Our goal was to target a topic that we were teaching, using the books purchased as a starting point, and have students read and write reflections on the stories. This was to serve as a new way to check prior knowledge, open the lesson and increase the amount of time students spend reading and writing.

Our research into new instructional practice ideas in math led us to Jo Boaler's book *What's Math Got To Do With It?*. We found that teachers in Railside High School in California "knew that being good at mathematics involves many different ways of working … It involves asking questions, drawing pictures and graphs, rephrasing problems, justifying methods, and representing ideas, in addition to calculating with procedures. Instead of just rewarding the correct use of procedures, the teachers encouraged and rewarded all of these different ways of being mathematical" (67). Improving failure rates and student interest in math does not just come from doing one thing. Math is a language in and of itself and we need to be teaching our students the various parts of that language using all of the activities, resources, ideas, and methods available to us, as the teachers at Railside High School have done.

Teach Like a Pirate by Dave Burgess taught us the importance of "changing it up" as a way to keep students engaged, motivated and eager to learn. Burgess quotes Sun Tzu: "Do not repeat the means of victory, but respond to form from the inexhaustible" (83). He presents over one hundred questions that can be used to draw students into lessons. From this we realized that we had not yet explored the wide variety of simple changes we could make to our lessons to engage students. We needed to examine what we currently were doing to see how our activities could be modified to increase engagement in reading and writing in math. These readings also reinforced the idea that one book or the document camera alone would not result in our accomplishing our goals. We needed to step up our creativity, think outside the box, and see how we could modify what we were currently doing.

Before this grant, a student completed a project by doing all tasks and showing all of their work. We now asked students to reflect on their projects. Initially this began as a simple question and answer format. Questions such as "How did your group work together during this project?" or "If you were asked to redo this project, what would you do differently?" were answered with 1-2 simple sentences. On the next project, the writing requirement increased. In addition to asking students to reflect on the project, they were asked to explain their work using proper mathematical vocabulary. Students struggled with this idea. They had the ability to solve a problem and show all of their work, but had a hard time writing down how they did it. Very few students used complete sentences in describing their work. They did not understand why we were asking them to explain what they were doing.

This inspired the next strategy implemented. After brainstorming with a fellow math teacher, we decided to mix things up a bit and have students become the "teacher for a problem." Students were now required to present to their classmates at least two of our standard "do now" problems per trimester. They needed to write their solution on the board while explaining orally the process they used to solve it, using proper mathematical language. Some students, reluctant at first, gained confidence at the board. This was, however, still a difficult task for many. To make students feel more comfortable, they were given the option of using the document camera to display their completed written work. They still needed to explain what they had done to their classmates, but the document display alleviated the pressure of writing with the entire classes' eyes on them. They were able to stand to the side of the computer and point out what they did. This method helped to give students confidence in explaining mathematics orally.

Having made these instructional changes, we decided that for their third project students were to be given the same reflection questions as they had used on prior projects, but now they were also asked to explain in *complete sentences* the mathematics behind each question. Students' writing improved tremendously on this project. Most of the answers were in fact written in complete sentences and some were even written in paragraph form. The extra focus on talking about math in a comfortable setting seemed to translate to enhancing their ability to write math.

In another classroom, reviews for tests were traditionally done individually. Students were given problems and were asked to put specific ones on the board for others to review. Keeping in mind the need to get students talking and explaining more about math, this routine was changed. Students were put into pairs to complete problems at ten different

stations. They were asked to not only do the problems, but write down how they did them, explain them to each other and then be ready to explain them to the class. Through the discussion of how to solve the problems, students' misconceptions were identified and the number of students engaged in this process was inspiring. The test given after this initial review showed improvement in students' ability to avoid common errors. A small step but an encouraging one.

To move beyond just having students reflect on and talk about what they had done, we also asked them to create word problems for one another. They became the subject matter expert. Students were more willing to persevere in solving these problems because they were about things they knew, in terms they more easily recognized because they were written by peers. Maybe the problem students were having with word problems was not so much about the word problem; the hook to engage them had not been set properly.

So moving forward, we realize that we have only begun to explore/experiment with reading/writing/talking about math in the classroom. We started late in the trimester and feel as if we did not have enough time to explore all of the things we had hoped to. We used the books purchased sparingly but still have great hope next year for incorporating them into our lessons. As we move to mastery based learning, student engagement, reflection, self-assessment and cross-curricular application will all be key. We anticipate that what we started this year will be a springboard to next year.

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Modeling Math Reflections
By John Donohue

Introduction

Math is everywhere. It's in the bills we pay. It's in the recipes we use to cook meals. It is all around us in our daily lives. Unfortunately, when people think of math, they don't think of their day-to-day usage of the subject. They instead think of the math they worked with in school, and for many, their experiences were less than stellar.

As a math teacher, I frequently hear from my students that they "stink at math," and they "very strongly dislike math." The challenge I hoped to address centered on changing this outlook. I really wanted to work with my students throughout the school year on reflecting on their work and on their progress. I wanted to show my students how to pinpoint their mathematical strengths and weaknesses, and I wanted them to be able to confidently express their approach to completing a problem.

I've asked students to reflect on their math experiences before. However, before I began researching ways to improve these thought exercises, my students would often struggle with how to complete this task. Thus, my goal was to help my students appropriately reflect on their math experiences in my class with the aid of an ELMO document camera to model a proper math reflection.

Addressing the Challenge

Developing the ideas to address this challenge required some research (both reading articles and speaking to colleagues), and some new technology (new for me anyway). I started by researching a few articles online. The two articles that I found to be the most helpful focused entirely on modeling in the classroom. Both confirmed that it was crucial to show students exactly what you expect in order to achieve the desired results. These articles were: "How To Be A Great Teacher Through Detailed Modeling" by Michael Linsin and "Children Benefit from Modeling, Demonstration, and Explanation" by R.L. Allington and P.M. Cunningham.

In addition to reading for research, I spoke with a few of my colleagues to determine how best to improve student math reflections. From the math department, I spoke with Roni Krisavage and Amy Morrissey. I also spoke with teachers from New York City during a professional development day in April. Finally, I also spoke with my wife, Mallary Donohue (a first grade teacher in New Haven), about encouraging critical thinking in the classroom. In each conversation, we reached the conclusion that it in order to have students reflect in the manner we hope them to, teachers need to complete the task with the students to model expectations.

From my research and conversations, I realized that in order to effectively model math reflections for my students, I needed to buy an ELMO document camera. With the aid of the ELMO, I aimed to make my students more comfortable and independent in reflecting on their work. Instead of giving students a prompt and simply asking them to reflect, I used the ELMO to show an example of an appropriate reflection in real time. I used Linsin's

advice to "show them what you expect by actually doing it—as if you're one of them" (para. 9). I reflected as the students reflected to show them exactly what I was hoping to see. Students were able to take very important ideas away from these examples, and were able to successfully reflect on their work in a more independent fashion.

Learning from Research

The research I conducted on helping students improve their math reflections led me to some new ideas, and also validated some of the techniques I have been implementing. From my reading and conversations, I confirmed that being extremely detailed in my model and giving students an opportunity to practice their critical thinking skills are both important in helping students improve. Detail helps students to see exactly what they need to include in their written statements. It helps students understand the key things they should be thinking about as they look back on a topic or think further about their performance. And after showing students a detailed example, they then need time to practice. As Linsin says in his article, "repetition isn't a bad word" (para. 16).

Practice in school is similar to practice in any other walk of life. In most cases, in order to become very good at something, that something needs to be practiced constantly. Reflection is no different. Students need frequent opportunities to work on their written assignments. With that frequent practice comes a level of comfort that helps students to grow and improve. I do my best to make sure my models include all the things I'm looking for from my students. I also work to make sure my students have a number of opportunities to reflect on their work and performance throughout the school year.

My readings and conversations also led me to a new idea. Instead of creating a model and simply distributing it for students to look at on their own, I learned how valuable it could be to model a reflection with the students. As referenced earlier, Linsin mentions how important it is for teachers to actually complete a task with the students. In situations like this, pulling up a desk and working just like a student can be helpful, and can help teachers point out things to include or pitfalls to avoid. This is something I tried to implement this school year, and I will continue to try to include it in my future teaching.

Changes In The Classroom

From my research and conversations, I decided to try a few things differently. These changes centered on completing reflections with my students in real time to give them an in-depth model and making sure I give students ample time to perfect the art of written contemplation. As mentioned earlier, throughout the year, I really tried to complete the reflections I assigned in real time with my students. By completing the task I assigned with my students, I was able to point out what had to be included, and I was able to mention what ideas were not as important to include. I found that this change to my reflective practices helped the students to have a clearer idea of what their written assignments should include. I hope to be able to continue to do this in my classroom in the future.

I also plan to continue to give students multiple opportunities to reflect on work throughout the year. Curriculum is so structured and requires us to cover a lot of material in a school year. Thus, it is often tough to find appropriate amounts of time for students to reflect.

However, it is an important skill for students to have. Students need to be able to pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses to determine where improvement is necessary, not only for now but also for their future careers. It is also helpful for me as a teacher because I am able to see where students feel they need improvement. This then helps direct my instruction, and I will continue to make an effort to give students a number of chances to work on their reflections in my future teaching.

Impact on Student Learning

As a result of the changes made to my emphasis on reflection in the classroom, my students made tremendous strides of improvement in their own assignments. Because I modeled thinking aloud in real time and gave students multiple chances to reflect, they took the time they were given more seriously and improved as a result. Students really worked to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in their understanding of material and in their classroom performance. With each reflection students completed, they became more comfortable with the process. They knew exactly what should be focused on, and what information was not necessary. Instead of providing one sentence and thinking that this was an acceptable response, by the end of the year, most students answered each critical thinking question with three to four complete sentences. Students also used their reflections as a place to express where they needed extra guidance. Many students feel uncomfortable asking for help out loud so many students found the value in using their written assignments as a forum to ask for more practice and help on a particular topic. Therefore, I can say with confidence that students improved in their reflective writing skills and saw the value in this assignment for their own academic improvement.

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Implementing Technology for Writing in a World Language Classroom
By Chia-Lien Griffin, Fatima Nouchkioui, Karima Taroua, and Joanna Lopez

As participants in the Connecticut Writing Project grant, we were able to purchase Samsung Galaxy tablets for our world language classrooms. This purchase allowed us to tackle many challenges that we have had when it comes to students' writing performance, including the implementation of 21st Century Competencies. Some challenges have been students' lack of focus, motivation, and independence. The lack of technology in the classroom was preventing students from improving their research and their writing skills. We completed research of our own to learn about the implementation of technology. During our research, we found great information on the use of technology in education articles found on sites such as TeachHub. We also attended tech talks and conducted teacher classroom observations. Our team of world language educators at MBA has learned a great many strategies to implement in the classroom including new ways of lesson planning and giving student feedback that have in some ways changed our teaching. Students have also greatly improved their writing skills through the use of technology. They have improved their learning motivation and independence as well as improving on their research and writing skills.

In the beginning of the school year, student writing was a major focus for improvement. The students' inability to transfer their thoughts into writing in the target language caused several problems, made worse by the 90 minute block that is required in our high school schedule. As a result, students struggled with motivation and the ability to maintain focus during instructional time, and we experienced behavior issues that stemmed from this.

Although our school provides technology for all teachers to use, the number of students (approximately 400) makes it impossible for all classes to have access to technology at all times. Furthermore, although students have technology of their own that could be helpful in the classroom, this technology also causes a major distraction during instructional and participation time due to social networking. We want technology to be used in ways that will provide students advantages in their learning.

Before implementing the use of the Samsung tablets that we purchased for the classrooms, it was difficult for us as foreign language educators to be able to assess students' performance in the four modes of communication: listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Without the use of the tablet technology, it was difficult to identify all of the students' skills and strengths in multiple areas. It was also hard for a language teacher to help any student who is frequently absent from class to get caught up with their peers. With the use of the tablet technology in the classrooms, teachers are now able to immediately share any information and feedback with students via Google.

Many of our challenges were addressed by downloading language content and writing apps so students could use them in order to review concepts, preview missed lessons, conduct research, and write essays. We also had several meetings with our world language supervisor, who recommended using learning centers and teaching strategies by designing multiple activities to assess the different language skills and abilities of each student. We attended tech talk sessions to learn and utilize apps such as Smore, Piktochart and many others. Some of us also attended the Northeast Conference on Teaching Foreign Languages (NECTFL) and

shared our learning about the multiple uses of technology in language classes. We also read articles such as "Good Ed Tech Activities for All Skill Levels."

With the Samsung Galaxy Tablets, students were able to demonstrate the 21st century skills in the different activities that included the four modes of communication. The tablets helped the students to stay on task, to be more motivated, and to be more independent. Completing these outcomes raised their self-esteem and reduced the number of behavioral concerns in our classrooms.

During our research we learned that technology is a good tool for classroom differentiation. TeachHub had many suggestions for incorporating technology, for example, "for older kids, have them research the impact technology has had on a particular time in history or science or include a unit on science fiction and technology in your Language Arts curriculum" (para. 11) So, we experimented with this type of research activity in our own classroom. In addition, in the article "Go Beyond the Classroom: The Benefits of Tablets in Education," we learned that tablets can be used for multiple tasks that do not necessarily require students to go on field trips or to visit sites on their own in order to complete a specific research project. This article also mentions that students can be assigned fun activities such as scavenger hunts where they have to research a required list of items or the environment where the items can be found.

On the Samsung Business Blog, we read about the importance of implementing necessary safety precautions when integrating the Internet into the classroom, especially when creating blogs to use outside the classroom for discussion during and after school hours. Blogs motivated students to be involved and to write, which allowed students to work collaboratively to give each other feedback and become better writers, but security precautions were necessary for this application.

We also learned that the technology could not only be used for the students' learning but also for the improvement of our teaching. The tablets helped us with lesson planning and with our own research. Our teaching began to change with the use of the tablets by the creative implementation of new ways to present our objectives and lesson plans to the students at the different levels of the target languages. Lessons became more interesting for students because of the use of tablets. The students are able to see videos, listen to podcasts, and utilize the Internet for research. This has changed our students' classroom behavior as well. The students are more engaged and motivated. They exhibit greater self-esteem and self-sufficiency. Our teaching has been driven by the students' improvement. We have created a student-centered environment which has become an inviting learning site for colleagues and visitors to view.

Our teaching continues to improve with the use of technology by increasing the levels and variety of activities provided to the students. In the future, we will continue to implement new educational apps for students to use for reviewing, editing, and practicing the target languages. Classroom tasks have been changed and continue to change especially for students with special needs and truancy issues, giving students the opportunity to learn at their individualized level and pace. Student growth has been evident during language district assessments, especially the writing portion, which is evaluated via the world language rubrics provided by our district. Through the tablets we will continue to provide student feedback in

a timely manner, allowing students to revise their written work and improve their writing. As teachers, we have been able to know our students better and identify their strengths and weaknesses as well as their hidden skills.

Students have shifted from teacher-centered learning to a more self-directed and collaborative learning environment. They are now having fun learning. They enjoy class and are fully on task for most of the class period. They are also able to see the positive uses of technology for educational purposes, rather than see technology only as a distraction in the classroom and to other students. They are also able to demonstrate their learning in different ways and express pride in their skills that they were not given the opportunity to show before. Students showed improvement in their demonstration of the 21st century skills by reaching from competency to exemplary levels on district assessments. Students enjoy working with each other in groups and continue learning from one another's feedback. Technology has allowed students to improve their learning, and as educators we are happy to say that we also have gained so much and have had fun using technology and implementing our new knowledge for the improvement of the writing skills of our world languages students.

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Providing Effective & Collaborative Feedback through Technology
By Christopher Hekeler and Jon Cap

Classroom Challenge

Our ultimate goal was to create a collaborative paperless classroom community where each student would create a digital portfolio. All student work would be uploaded into these portfolios, where we could search for, review, and provide informative feedback on their work. Then students could upload revisions and graded rubrics. Within this community, students could also approach other students to ask for peer review and assistance prior to or after submitting work for grading subsequently enriching the classroom environment.

Addressing the Challenge

We purchased iPads and the iAnnotate application. Utilizing these tools allowed us to cultivate and implement the described electronic classroom and enhance the cooperative classroom experience.

We used iAnnotate as a tool to explore the effects of how technology can augment the value of peer review and coaching in the writing process. Pursuing this avenue of development fostered our students' growth as writers. The use of the application provided concentrated real-time feedback to our students regarding their work. The user interface is intuitive and allowed us to annotate and manage student work. The functionality of this application also allowed for multiple documents to be open on separate tabs allowing for contrast and comparison of student work and the ability to provide examples to students to further enrich their writing skills. Additionally, this application was utilized for peer review of student work. Engaging students in the review process and coaching them on how to provide positive and constructive commentary will teach them the value of accepting and learning from feedback and encourage growth as effective writers and students.

Research Findings

There are several themes that emerged from our research, professional development opportunities, and conversations with coworkers. The type of feedback that is given to students is critical. The feedback given to students is not intended to make them feel better about their work, rather it provides an opportunity to make their work better. When providing feedback, we tried to use terms like "what if" rather than "but." This allowed students to improve creatively without fear. This was due to the belief that when students are given feedback that is heavily negative, it might be counterproductive in movement towards the goal.

We learned the following about feedback:

(1) Feedback is a balance of positive and constructive criticism that teaches students to be better writers.

(2) Feedback is a process that teaches students how to revamp their work. Individuals sometimes provide feedback that comes across more like a grade than as a way to improve.

(3) Students are successful when they are given the opportunity to discuss and explain their work and receive explanations as part of the feedback process. This is evident at Metropolitan Business Academy in several of our courses. Steve Staysniak uses a process called roundtables to provide students with valuable feedback. Chris has taken a similar approach in the Ecommerce Entrepreneurship course where a panel of outside validators provides feedback, advice, and support to students' business plans.

Change in Classroom

The iAnnotate application via the iPad changed our teaching in various forms. The most important and critical aspect was the digital impact of the application. We were able to provide feedback without wasting paper on various revisions. Students were then able to upload their final documents to their online portfolios. The time and productivity factors were major changes. Once a document was revised, edited, and feedback posted, it was sent back to the student in a timely manner. One of the responsibilities of being a business education teacher is to stay atop of new technologies, web tools, apps, and other devices that can be infused into the classroom. The iAnnotate application is another tool which can be used to connect with students and keep them on the cutting edge.

Impact on Learning

The impact on student learning was that they had a digital copy of their learning that they could post to their portfolio, share with peers, and use to demonstrate their growth. Timely feedback enabled the students to improve their writing and course documents. Thus, overall, we feel the funds were well spent on both the iPads and the iAnnotate software since productivity was improved all around.

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The Writing Process from Narrative to Argument in the Secondary English Classroom
By Matthew Monahan

Even at the senior level English students continue to struggle when it comes to generating or revising using feedback on written assignments. This may be attributed in part to teachers' and peers' over reliance on editing rather than big picture or structural problems and suggested solutions. Students may also run into issues related to the decoding and understanding of written feedback that is unaccompanied by conferencing or personal interaction.

In order to address these issues, I hypothesized that my students would benefit from timelier and generally accessible feedback. This brought me to question my method of delivery; in the past I relied largely on Microsoft's Office Suite, Word specifically. It occurred to both me and other members of my department that a move away from Microsoft toward Google's platforms would increase both accessibility on the part of our students and ease of use. Although students at MBA were at one time trained on Office, I believe the focus was more on such functions as mail merge and not so much on Word's review functions. Regardless, the introductory business course in which this learning took place was in fact replaced some time ago.

My initial goals for my classes were by June 75% or more of English 4 students would demonstrate school recognized writing/graduation standards through the completion of portfolio work in the three following areas: narrative writing (Personal Statement), analytical and argumentative writing (Lens Essay), and informational writing (the I-Search task). Additionally, with regards to specific writing tasks—i.e. narrative, analytical, and argument—70% or more students would grow one or more competency levels, i.e. from novice to emerging, emerging to competent, etc. The mechanism for tracking growth would be student portfolios.

Some 49 of 53 students, or 92%, submitted portfolios. Satisfactorily, 85% of English 4 students advanced one or more bands on the 21st Century competency continuum, i.e. from novice to emerging, emerging to competent etc. 75% or more English 4 students scored competent or higher in the Accessing and Analyzing Information competencies. These numbers in terms of both drafts and completion of process writing pieces were accomplished through the use of Google docs.

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Using Technology and Timely Feedback to Improve Student Understanding
By Danielle La Pan

Students often struggle to give and/or receive feedback on writing assignments. Part of this may be due to lack of clarity and part of it may be because they've never had to give constructive criticism to a peer before to help them improve their writing. Often times, students focus on the minutia, like spelling and/or grammar errors, instead of focusing on the big ideas that will ultimately improve a piece of writing. Additionally, students often run into problems decoding/understanding written feedback, whether it is from a teacher or a peer, because it isn't discussed as a class; instead, feedback is often read and thought about when students are working on their own.

Another challenge in an English classroom is showing students various reading strategies and showing them what good readers think as they read. Often, I find myself explaining my thinking, but I can't show them exactly what I'm highlighting, writing in the margins, or stopping to re-read without taking up a great deal of valuable class time to explain my ideas. Even when I do explain my thinking, I have no guarantee that all students are following along or that they understand what I'm talking about because they have no visual aid to assist them. Lastly, it is very difficult to review something quickly in an English class, whether we are reviewing the answers to a grammar handout/quiz or trying to review a piece of writing a student completed during class as a model or exemplar.

In order to address some of the issues I was noticing in my writing classes, I realized I needed to be able to give students better feedback and instruction through modeling and timeliness. I needed to find a visual way to demonstrate things during my classes, which is why I thought an ELMO would help. I observed a math teacher in my building using an ELMO to give immediate feedback to his students regarding their homework assignment. He was able to take the completed assignment from his student, put it under the ELMO, and walk his whole class through the equation, step by step. I realized that this would be very useful in my own classroom when talking about writing, specifically argument writing, as well as when reviewing grammar, so that everyone could see the model.

I read three articles about using an ELMO titled "Using Technology to Encourage Writing," "Teaching with Technology," and "Why Would I Use a Document Camera" to help gather more ideas on how to use the ELMO. I learned that the ELMO was really great for giving immediate feedback to students while conducting whole-class instruction. You can put a student's work under the camera and model feedback by either writing directly on it or by writing on the white board while the document is projected there in order to avoid defacing the student's work. It is a great way to model editing as well, by having students look at the same piece of work and identify run-on sentences and other grammar issues in a piece of work. The ELMO also helps the teacher be able to make impromptu changes to their lesson when necessary because copies aren't needed. Finally, I learned that the ELMO is extremely helpful for visual learners who need to see what you are explaining in order to understand a concept fully.

Lastly, I read an article called "Formative Assessment and Self Regulated Learning: A Model and Seven Principles of Good Feedback Practice" to learn more about how to give useful feedback to students. This article focused on how/when to give feedback in order to have

students get the most out of the feedback. In order for students to be able to give good peer feedback, they first need to understand what good feedback looks like, as well as have a deep understanding of the task they have been given. Many argue that grading student performance is less impactful than giving students feedback and allowing them time to improve their work. Since feedback is so important in writing, the ELMO makes it so that a teacher can model for the class, a student can model for the class, and/or a class can explain what feedback they would give and why while the class looks at the document on a large screen.

As a result of my observation and research, I was able to effectively use an ELMO in my writing class from January to June of the 2014-2015 school year. I was able to copy a piece of student work and then model the feedback I was writing in order to improve a student's argument paragraph. My students were able to see the comments I was writing while hearing the explanation of why I was giving those comments. I was able to show them paragraphs that had been scored exemplary and break down for the class what made them exemplary by underlining and highlighting specific parts of the class. I was able to show them paragraphs that were on the verge of being exemplary and model for students what additions could have been made to push that student to the next level.

Not only was the feedback specific to assignments we were working on at that moment, but the examples were from their peers, which made it more meaningful than looking at an example I had written. At the beginning of the year 19% of students were novice at identifying and using textual evidence in their paragraphs, 32% were emerging, 38% were competent, and 11% were exemplary. After using the ELMO to give feedback on student work, model how to write an exemplary paragraph, and review argument writing notes throughout the year, 1% of students were novice, 5% were emerging, 49% were competent, and 45% were exemplary. At the beginning of the year, 28% of students were novice at writing a strong warrant that connected their evidence to their claim, 66% were emerging, 7% were competent, and 0% were exemplary. By the end of the year, 1% were novice, 19% were emerging, 58% were competent, and 22% were exemplary at the writing task.

Teaching grammar can be difficult. I have used grammar handouts and worksheets throughout my teaching career, but reviewing them has always been difficult because students are so focused on listening to what the correct answer is that they miss the explanation of why that answer is correct in the first place. With the ELMO, I could put the answer key up on the board for everyone to see. This way, students could see the answer, but also pay attention to my verbal explanation of the answer, or they could see what I was highlighting or underlining when I was explaining a dependent clause or an appositive. It not only saved class time because I didn't have to continuously repeat what the correct answer was, but it also helped students have a deeper understanding of the comma rules, which ultimately helped them use commas appropriately in their own writing and on grammar worksheets. Most students failed the first comma worksheet they did earlier in the year, but over 75% scored an 80 or higher on a comma worksheet at the end of the year, which is a huge difference from previous years. Many students also shared that they had a deeper understanding of when and where to use commas during their final presentations in June.

I am very excited to have an ELMO in my class starting in August next year. I think it will be an asset when I model reading strategies early in my curriculum. I also think it will be very

helpful when teaching students about giving peer feedback. Students often rely on me to give them constructive feedback because I haven't previously had an effective way to model feedback. When students write their personal statements in October and November, they often tell me in their feedback form that the peer feedback wasn't helpful to them. I think that will change next year because I will be able to show them how to give good feedback prior to asking them to peer edit for one another. Ultimately, I think that will make my students stronger writers, and I think their narratives will be even better than in previous years.

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Finding Their Literary Voice: Examining the Process of Students' Revisions through Listening
By Devin Lawless

Introduction to the Learning Lab and the Editing Process

I am the coordinator of my school's Learning Lab, a quiet learning environment for students of any learning level to come and complete work. This year I was fortunate enough to have one student tutor during one period in addition to myself. One of the issues that the Learning Lab has had is that it is understaffed when there are many students coming to the lab at once. The use of the lab has grown every year, and the number of staff has stayed the same, making it difficult to give each student the individualized help that they would like to have when working in the lab. One solution the Learning Lab came up with, in accordance to the understaffed problem, was the Audio Editing Stations. The main purposes for the Audio Editing Station was for students to listen to their written work, to prompt them to write reflectively, and to make students respect the art of thoughtful revisions. Audio Editing also helped teach students to edit on their own.

Often students come to the Learning Lab to write essays and lab reports, and then return to their scheduled class. The overall goal was to have students learn to stop and take a moment to review their work. First drafts of work can be atrocious, and it can be a daunting task for anyone to take the time to correct the draft, let alone a fourteen year old who has difficulty with the challenge of writing in the first place. I wanted to find ways to help students learn to be more independent workers when editing their work. Students addressed this problem by using Text-to-Speech technology. I also tried to find a way for students to look through their drafts and find surface errors before asking myself, a tutor or the instructor look over the draft for the next set of corrections.

 After every editing session in the Learning Lab, students filled out a short survey to track how many mistakes they caught while editing. Six female students and six male students edited their written work. There were twenty-one editing sessions in total. This does not include any sessions where the program was used to read sources for writing. Once the students listened to their work, I or another tutor would sit down with students and go over the draft to continue the editing and revising process.

Why the Learning Lab Decided to Examine Audio Editing:

The solution to students being too dependent on tutors and staff was to place two Audio Editing stations in the Learning Lab classroom that were only to be used for editing written work. The audio Editing Stations consisted of a Chromebook, a set of headphones, a mouse, a hard shell case, and a storage bag.[1] In the beginning the main idea was to help students edit with some kind of technology[2]. At first the researchers were unsure of what type of

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[1] The two mice were donated by the Metropolitan Library, because if the mice had been purchased the grant would have been over budget.

[2] I came up with this idea because I have been using this editing process for the last two years that I have been in graduate school at SCSU. This is an extremely helpful tool. I wish that I had had this program earning my undergraduate degree.

technology to use. So, they spoke with Steve Staysniak and asked to see if he could help further develop the audio editing ideas. Steve came up with the idea of having a designated Editing Station.

A few sources were reviewed in order to further shape the project design. It took a few weeks to decide what programs and technology to buy, but it was finally decided that using a free text-to-speech application and buying Editing Stations was the right direction to go, because software has many complications attached to it. Software usually has a subscription process which runs out after a year. Also, each student would need a login; it would cost a lot of money for each student. In the end, it was better to use Google Read and Write, because it is a free application and all the students would need would be a Google account.

The most helpful source that this study utilized was Tammy Conard-Salvo and John M. Spartz's work "Listening to Revise: What a Study about Text-to-Speech Software Taught Us about Students' Expectations for Technology Use in the Writing Center." Salvo and Spartz addressed many of the concerns about using this type of technology. The difference is that they use software instead of using a free application such as Google Read and Write. Although the programs are different in some ways, I have used both and I believe that the most important features are included in the G.R.W. Salvo and Spartz make a valid point that a classroom or writing center cannot have only the technology, the students also require human interaction and feedback[3].

Some of the Research Examined:

After speaking with Steve Staysniak, and reviewing the sources about T.T.S technology, I thought that it would be useful to survey students after each editing session. I also learned that this form of editing could be useful, not only for special education students, but also for regular ed students. Salvo and Spartz make the observation that there is:

> [. . .]a common "misunderstanding [of] who can benefit from adaptive technology." Most students and educators assume that adaptive technologies exist only to benefit those with learning and physical disabilities, thus ignoring benefits for students who have not been identified as having special needs (43).

This is exactly how this technology assisted the Learning Lab this year. Students that normally needed someone sitting with them the entire period going through every mistake were able to edit their work with little assistance.

One thing I would like the Learning Lab to do differently next year is to have more tutors and train them how to use Google Read and Write for most of their editing sessions and tutoring sessions. It will be very helpful not only for editing papers, but also for evaluating and using sources for essays.

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[3] I have personally used the program that Salvo and Spartz discussed and used in their study. I found that Kurzweil was complicated and very expensive. It had too many features; G.R W. has everything necessary for editing purposes.

How Teaching and Learning Changed in the Learning Lab:

Another use for the T.T.S technology was for students to listen to and evaluate sources and find quotes in written work to use in essays. This use of the technology was not recorded. My methods for teaching changed because I would sit with students and explain how to use the program one on one. It made the tutoring process more effective, because the student and I would listen to drafts a few times. The students would begin the editing process by listening to the first few sentences with either myself or the tutor to find surface errors. The next time, they would take our advice and listen on their own to find the patterns of errors. The final time they would listen, I or the tutor would listen with them to find the ideas they could expand on or transitions that would sound better than what they had originally used. Students were also motivated by a reward system[4].

How Learning Changed and Data was Collected:

The Audio Editing Stations helped students see that editing is a never-ending process. They learned to view their written work with a critical eye and to make thoughtful revisions. Students were asked to answer the following questions about their work: Did you notice a pattern in your errors? If yes, explain what pattern you noticed? How confident do you feel about your piece of work? What part of your writing is the strongest? Why? What is the weakest part of your writing? Why? What are your plans for revising your paper? How many times have you edited this piece of writing? Were there any errors in your writing?

Summary of Data Collected from the Survey:

Almost 83% of the participating students were freshmen from classes such as Writing Workshop, Chemistry, Alive, World History, Senior Project, and English I. All but one noticed errors in their writing but only slightly more than half were able to identify a pattern of error, and their focus was mostly on surface errors such as commas and capitalization. Despite this, students did express confidence in their written work, but with extremely varied ideas about what, exactly, was strong in their writing. Asked to identify weaknesses, students again focused on surface errors such as punctuation. In terms of attitudes toward revision, most identified rewriting as a goal for improving their papers, and slightly more than half the students had already written at least a second draft of the paper they were working on at the time.

How the Editing and Data Process will Change in the Future:

Student writing did improve in respect to surface errors. Next year, the survey questions will be changed; they will be tailored questions to analyze how the process helped them. Many of the open-ended questions will be taken out, because the students were too vague with their answers this year. The current questions were created the way they were for the current survey because the tutor and I had limited time to work with the students during the school

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[4] The Learning Lab uses a reward system with snack passes. Every time a student comes to the L Lab they receive a stamp on their snack pass. A student needs three stamps to have a completed pass to get a snack. If a student audio edited a piece of written work, they would get an extra stamp for the day.

day. I wanted to avoid creating a long survey, because if the surveys were too long the students might not want to participate.

Another thing I hope to accomplish in the learning lab next year is to train the tutors to use the program in other ways such as note taking, source reading, and editing. Another issue with the process and surveying is that students believed that their work was perfect with no errors once they were done editing. Further experiments will need to be conducted to adjust the students' evaluations of written work. Next time, I might begin the editing process by having students look at an exemplary version of the work; this will show the student what is expected of them concerning written work at their level of learning.

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Critical Literacy in Community
By Steve Staysniak

The Challenge

During the summer of 2012, Alfred Tatum's *Reading for Their Life: (Re)Building the Textual Lineages of African American Males* captivated my interest as I sought to develop better supports for the male students of color who were repeatedly over-represented in the non-reader group of students that I encountered each year. Tatum's text has continually challenged me to consider how independent reading texts can engage students in substantive topics of identity and culture. With the opportunity presented by this mini-grant from the Connecticut Writing Project (CWP) to think more deeply about independent reading, I began the 2014-15 school year with the intention of developing culturally-responsive supports for male students of color in my Freshman English classes at Metropolitan Business Academy (Metro).

From the outset of this work, I wanted to develop supports in the spirit of what Sonia Nieto calls a "multicultural learning community." In Nieto's book *The Light in Their Eyes*, she makes explicit the need for culturally responsive pedagogy to be developed in concert with the students and the greater community. Nieto states teaching and learning is "a *negotiation* among students and families, and teachers and schools. It must be, however, a negotiation that is mutually defined, constructed, and achieved" (105). With this in mind, I had a clear sense of both the challenge I wanted to address and as well as the way in which I wanted to address the challenge.

How to Address the Challenge

A community supported element was essential to the development of any culturally responsive practice I developed. Incorporating different voices in developing and refining classroom practice has been advocated since the work of John Dewey. Dewey believed those outside of the immediate educational realm must be part of addressing educational inequities. In their text *Learning Power: Organizing for Education and Justice*, Jeannie Oakes and John Rogers explain Dewey's focus on the role of the community:

> Although [education] professionals must necessarily play a key role in the development and implementation of the technical elements of reform, social activists - students, parents, community members, organizers, and advocates - are far more likely to blaze a timely, effective, and sustainable route to ending educational disparities. (18)

I shared my goal of developing culturally-responsive supports for male students of color and was connected rather quickly with our Yale Public School intern. Her idea was to connect me with the president of La Unidad Latina, the Latino Fraternity of Yale. In mid-September, the Yale Public School intern, the president of La Unidad Latina, and myself sat down. It was in this late-summer conversation that the idea for Between Brothers was conceived.

The group was going to be focused specifically on using short texts such as short stories, news articles, essays, and poetry to engage Metro students in conversations about issues

facing adolescent Latinos. Several fraternity brothers would attend each meeting and act as role models for the way they read, questioned, and discussed the text. Funds from the CWP mini-grant would be used to support the procurement of high-interest texts as well as professional materials to support my own learning and action research as I watched how the group affected independent reading habits of freshman participating in Between Brothers.

Action Research Results

In the first chapter of her most recent book *Book Love: Developing Depth, Stamina, and Passion in Adolescent Readers*, Penny Kittle builds upon an idea she attributes to the late Donald Graves when she says, "Teenagers want to read—if we let them. Students who I believe are determined nonreaders become committed, passionate readers given the right books, time to read, and regular responses to their thinking" (Kittle 1). From this perspective, I should not have been surprised that the first meeting of Between Brothers was a huge success. I was expecting five to seven students at the Friday afternoon meeting; almost twenty attended. In addition to being surprised by the large number of students interested in attending this group focused on issues of Latino culture and identity, I was surprised by the diversity of the students who attended. In addition to Latino males, African American, White and Asian students, males and females attended the meeting. As Kittle suggests, students at Metro willingly gave up the first hour of their weekend to attend a literature-based discussion group. The various elements—a community partnership, a culturally relevant text, and a safe space to share ideas—drew in students immediately.

While attendance never matched what it was in the first meeting, the three additional meetings of "Between Brothers" continued to be diverse in the grade-levels, genders, and races of the participants. What became increasingly difficult as the academic year progressed, however, was finding a time that worked for students, myself, as well as the fraternity brothers from Yale, since the group was created with the intention of being a partnership with the Yale students. This brought into question the sustainability of this kind of critical literacy group. Though the community partnership with the La Unidad Latina was effective in bringing students to the meetings and generating engaging conversations in the meetings, having to plan around Yale University's calendar significantly narrowed the range of dates available for group meetings. Connecting back to Oakes and Rogers' paraphrasing of Dewey's ideas about the importance of community partnerships, having a single community partner as I attempted to develop a sustainable support for Latino readers at Metro was short-sighted and ultimately limiting for the group.

In terms of how effective the critical literacy discussions were in developing individual students' independent reading abilities, discussions during Between Brothers gave me insight and understanding that I used in independent reading conferences with specific students. In the days following a meeting of Between Brothers, I was able to conference with specific students who attended those meetings and use topics that were discussed or specific comments made by a particular student in discussing possible independent reading texts a student might choose. This specific strategy of "capitalizing on students' cultural and linguistic histories and experiences" is outlined in *Be That Teacher: Breaking the Cycle for Struggling Readers* by Victoria J. Risko and Doris Walker-Dalhouse when they state that "teachers must understand the relationship between students' cultural backgrounds and literacy learning" (36). Between Brothers gave me new knowledge about the background of

specific students which was critical as I attempted to counsel students into independent reading texts that would interest them but were also at an appropriate level of challenge.

Changes in Classroom Practice

An immediate outgrowth of Between Brothers was a school-wide, year-long conversation about how our developing culture of reading at Metro can be fed and developed. Additional critical literacy groups are being considered for launch in the 2015-16 school year focused on African-American issues and identity, male identity, and female identity. Our school's library media specialist, students, and I have begun planning ways to set-up specific spaces in the library that are catered specifically to creating an environment for silent and independent reading. In the 2015-16 school year, we may pursue donations from local merchants such as IKEA to help design and furnish this kind of space within our school library at Metro. Discussions from Between Brothers meetings gave me a greater insight on what kinds of texts Latino students might specifically find engaging. Funds from the CWP mini-grant allowed me to purchase sets of three texts that I plan to suggest to the Between Brothers group this year for reading and discussion. The three texts each deal with identity and adolescent voice - recurring themes in each Between Brothers meeting. *Gabi: A Girl in Pieces* by Isabel Quintero and *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Saenz are both contemporary, award-winning young adult novels written in a Latina/Latino (respectively) adolescent voice. *Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing up Latino in the United States* is a volume of selected poems edited by Lori Carlson that may provide interesting openers or connections to other texts in future meetings of Between Brothers. I also used funds to purchase three non-fiction texts that may be useful for essays or background information on topics of interest in Between Brothers, or to find new areas for inquiry for meetings of Between Brothers. The texts are *The Afro-Latin@ Reader,* edited by Miriam Jimenez Roman and Juan Flores, *The Latino Reader* edited by Harold Augenbraum and Margarite Fernandez Olmos, and *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* by Juan Gonzalez. Purchasing these texts makes high-quality, high-interest writing easily accessible for students in Between Brothers.

Working with the undergraduate fraternity brothers in Between Brothers gave me a greater understanding of both the immediate benefits of partnering with outside groups to garner student interest as well as the appropriate amount of scaffolding that is necessary to have a successful and sustainable community partnership. Student curiosity about Between Brothers led to conversations with students about what we were doing in Between Brothers and why they might be interested in attending a meeting. In addition to creating interest and intrigue, the fraternity brothers brought authentic voice to conversations about issues pertinent to the Latino community that seemed to put students at ease while also making the meetings a safe place for students to voice ideas and questions. Because of the college-age of the fraternity brothers, a mentor-mentee dynamic developed between the fraternity brothers and the students in each of the four meetings. As facilitator of the Between Brothers meetings, I was able to regularly reflect upon how the three elements which the fraternity brothers from La Unidad Latina fostered curiosity, authenticity, and trust, should play an important role on my own work in developing a strong culture of independent reading in my classroom and at Metropolitan. Students must be curious about a topic or text to be drawn in on their own terms. When they engage with the text, students should be able to find what they perceive to be an authentic link to the topic or ideas in which they are interested in learning. And

students must have a sense of trust within the classroom community so that they are able to take the risks necessary to engage difficult texts and ideas.

Impact on Student Learning

The creation of a critical literacy group within Metropolitan made an impact on the way students interact with one another and with other adults in the building. Surrounding the actual meetings of Between Brothers, students engaged with one another, teachers, and administrators, encouraging attendance and emphasizing the critical and cultural focal points of the group. On a macro-level, Between Brothers positively affected relationships between students and adults. However, after one year of Between Brothers, it is difficult to determine the group's impact on individual student achievement. This is, perhaps, indicative of the time-consuming and labor intensive groundwork that goes into creating multicultural learning communities.

The most tangible results of Between Brothers were the improved relationships I had with students who attended the majority of the group meetings. With these specific students, the trust that was developed through our mutual participation in Between Brothers meetings gave me greater leverage in pushing them towards independent reading goals or suggesting they come after school to continue working on academic tasks. Though it is impossible to definitively know if it was Between Brothers that played a part in these specific students staying engaged in English class during the course of the year, it likely did not hurt.
In the second year of Between Brothers, and as our school community does more thinking about how these kinds of critical literacy groups can engage other specific populations of students, this mini-grant has helped me develop a framework for how to leverage the student engagement in these groups into gains in their independent reading in a classroom setting:

- Use pedagogically sound, research-based practices to support reading in the group setting.
- Engage a broad range of community partners in supporting the group's work.
- Communicate student participation in critical literacy groups to colleagues in order for more teachers to use the group to support academic gains.

Ultimately, these critical literacy groups provide students with a forum to express ideas and concerns in direct relation to cultural issues that directly affect their lives. As Between Brothers continues into its second year, and as we start more critical literacy groups at Metro, I hope to take Tatum's idea of an "enabling text" (46) and mesh it with an equally enabling literary, communal, empowering experience. Engaging in this type of discussion is an action that may very well lead to positive academic outcomes with regard to independent reading and a deepened sense of inquiry in other areas—but perhaps more importantly, participation in groups like Between Brothers affirms students' identities in a way that can positively affect their self-image and confidence well beyond high-school.

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Templates, Word Roots, and Combining Forms—a Formula for Better Science Writing?
By Chris Willems

I have found that our students have a difficult time creating science writing that is engaging and enjoyable to do (and read!). Too frequently, science writing is fact-heavy, with little embellishment, flavor, or story line.
Science is a subject that is inherently interesting. Unfortunately, the teaching of science is frequently bogged down by impenetrable vocabulary, lists of facts, or uninspired narrative. This is a poor model of instruction for our students.

The classroom challenge this grant supported was an exploration into improving science writing in our classroom. I wanted to know whether I could improve my students' writing by using *They Say, I Say* templates by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. My hope was that this reference text would help me expand my pedagogical strategies for choosing engaging texts, helping students write more meaningful work and ultimately deepening learning in the science classroom.

I wanted to start using more storytelling in our classroom to engage and enliven our work. I am constantly looking for ways to make our work more engaging for our students. Using stories helps to draw people in and create the "itch" that needs to be scratched. This need propels learners to new learning, and ultimately independent learning. My inspiration here is *Minds Made for Stories* by Thomas Newkirk.

I hoped to help my students become more familiar with college-level writing and college-level writing expectations. The goal was to help them be better prepared for college by being better writers. I got inspiration and ideas for the revision and writing process from *Back to the Books*.

Finally, I wanted to see if exposure to and practice with scientific word roots and combining forms would build confidence and raise the skills of our young science writers. Much of our work in Public Health and Medical Science classes involves new terminology that can frequently alienate students and keep them from the fascinating content and processes of science.

I purchased hardcover classroom copies of the high school edition of the *They Say, I Say* template book and audio CDs by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. I read the entire book and found it personally and professionally valuable. In particular, I found the orientation of the text to the novice writer accessible for high school students. I had these books available in class (and for loan) to my classes so students could read the rationale and choose their own templates.

The text truly demystifies academic writing. It has been a long time since my composition class at UConn in the 1980's, so the tips are helpful to me as I work on suggestions and exemplars for students. Specifically, the "They Say," or starting with what others are saying, summarizing, planting a naysayer in your text, and the "So What? Who Cares" (saying why it matters) are powerful techniques that students (and most adults) frequently omit from their writing.

I shared course-relevant samples from the "Dictionary of Word Roots and Combining Forms." In doing so, I helped students understand the origin of terms. "Deconstructing" more complicated science terms into their word roots helped with comprehension and built confidence. In addition, these strategies will be useful when students encounter new challenging terminology in their future health courses.

This year I learned (and relearned and refreshed my active memory) a lot about what makes for effective writing. I regularly consulted with *They Say, I Say* and the *Dictionary of Word Roots and Combining Forms* for templates and ideas for helping students write in a more engaging and meaningful way.
From *Minds Made for Stories,* I was inspired to include more stories in our class. Newkirk taught me that stories give us a pattern. Our brains rely on patterns. Having a plot allows readers (learners) to access information and stay with the arc of learning in a more natural, enjoyable manner. I particularly appreciated his argument that "when we strip human motives from our teaching, I suspect we make learning harder and not easier" (17). He also helped me see that there are stories everywhere. Even research reports tell stories. I have worked with students to help them figure out how to repackage the data that is presented in health reports (such as those about the worsening child diabetes epidemic) into their stories. I have had one student this year who told us about her 20-something brother who was recently diagnosed with diabetes. It was a powerful learning experience for the whole class that was available to us because I had explicitly encouraged and made "room" in our class for storytelling.

I have become more comfortable with the notion of giving time to storytelling and short reading assignments in class that provide structure for sustained thought and writing. I have much more work to do in this area, but I am now more attuned to the pattern of plot, tension, and resolution in the texts I share with my classes and the readings I encourage students to select. For example, I plan to use *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot next year. From my learning this year, I will spend less time focused on the medical and life science aspects of the book, and more on the motivations of the individuals, while working in a storyline around cancer—and the "characters" of our immune system and other aspects of this fantastically complicated and fascinating disease.

I brought more storytelling to our class. When there was an opportunity to introduce a topic or situation with tension, I seized it. For example, we studied the Affordable Health Care for America Act ("Obamacare") as part of the "emerging issues" in our class. In order to enliven the topic, I had the class research the topic and then debate it.

I shared the following templates from *They Say, I Say.*
- I think X is mistaken because she overlooks _____.
- X's claim that _____ rests upon the questionable assumption that _____.
- I disagree with X's view that _____ because, as recent research has shown, _____.

- X contradicts herself / can't have it both ways. On the one hand, she argues
_____.
  On the other hand, she also says _____.
- By focusing on _____, X overlooks the deeper problem of_____.

As a result of this simple insertion, our classroom debate was much richer than it would have otherwise been.

I have improved my practice by enrolling in an adult education public speaking class. I found that the techniques used in public speaking overlap with Newkirk's recommendations of seeking and telling stories. There are several goals I have with this public speaking work. I am looking to do a better job of directly engaging students while modeling effective presentation strategies. My primary ultimate goal is to help students become better presenters. This is an area I have focused on because I have found that most of my 11th and 12th grade students who have had far too few opportunities to present their ideas. Students are much more confident presenters when they can rely on the template framing from *They Say, I Say* and use storytelling in their preparation and delivery.

As our students began to write their final papers in our dual-credit Medical Science/Gateway Community College "Health 103" class, I shared copies of David Zinczenko's "Don't Blame the Eater." This exemplar includes numerous effective techniques elaborated upon in *They Say, I Say*. We read this together and discussed what made this piece of science writing so effective. I have never done something like this before in the classroom.

The notion of "arc" in writing has honestly been missing from much of my guidance to children around their writing. In our science department, we have been focused on lab report writing, and specifically on conclusion writing. This has been a very useful orientation, and has allowed us to find common ground across the four years of high school science. We have been able to highlight the interpretation of data from lab work while emphasizing concise, meaningful nonfiction writing.

While we have developed and revised lab report templates, I plan to incorporate several additional templates from *They Say, I Say*.

In order to help students explain what the data mean, I will encourage them to use:
- Our data support / confirm / verify the work of X by showing that_____.
- By demonstrating _____, X's work extends the findings of Y.
- The results of X contradict / refute Y's conclusion that_____.
- X's findings call into question the widely accepted theory that _____.
- Our data are consistent with X's hypothesis that _____.

These new moves for me have greatly expanded my repertoire. It has been simultaneously liberating and empowering to engage with the templates from *They Say, I Say* to help them enliven their science writing.

The final paper our students wrote described what they learned from career information sessions. They did independent research and crafted a paper that provided a career overview. Several students used templates in their writing, and for them the writing process seemed much more fluid and less challenging. One student included a narrative description of her nursing internship, which added personal meaning and more of a story.

This has been a powerful year of learning for me and I look forward to expanding my use of these books and techniques with my students next year. Thank you for this opportunity.

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Biographies

Furahi Achebe just completed her first year of teaching at Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven, Connecticut. Achebe teaches digital media production to 10-12th grade students. She completed research with the help of the grant to improve the quality of scriptwriting in her classes.

Leslie Blatteau is a social studies teacher at Metropolitan Business Academy. She teaches U.S. History, U.S. Government, International Issues and Peer Leadership. In addition, she works as a teacher-leader on the MBA Mastery Design Team, working collaboratively to help the school shift to a Mastery-Based Learning model. A New Haven resident and active member of the New Haven Educators' Collective, she is a strong advocate for public education and locally-controlled schools.

Nataliya Braginsky teaches a ninth grade humanities class centered on identity and justice, at a New Haven public high school. In this class, Nataliya works with students to better understand themselves, one another, and the society in which they live, examining the issues that affect their communities and how people effect change. Integral to their learning and self-expression, students create a variety of media, including photography, poetry, videos, and zines.

Jon Cap has been teaching at Metropolitan Business Academy for five years. He has a Master's Degree in Technology and Engineering Education from Central Connecticut State University. He teaches graphic and web design, programming, and Robotics.

Charline Cupole is a library media specialist at Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven. She taught business and technology courses for 14 years before transitioning to library media. Charline enjoys blending her love of reading with her technology skills to engage students in reading, writing and research activities. She also enjoys sharing her love of travel and culture with her students.

Kareem Cutler has recently completed his Master's of Education at the University of New Haven. He has interned, student taught, and began his math teaching career at Metropolitan Business Academy (MBA). During the three years, Kareem has used his extrovert personality to build positive connections with the students and staff. He openly expresses his joy of working at MBA and has settling in comfortably. Kareem believes it is essential that students continuously practice and enhance their writing skills. Although, he is an educator of mathematics, he has incorporated writing processes into his students' daily routines using writing reflections and reasoning of work.

John Donohue is a math teacher at the Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven, CT. He enjoyed having the opportunity to work with teachers involved with the CWP, and appreciated the advice given on how to make writing a meaningful part of a math classroom.

Chia-lien Griffin has taught Mandarin Chinese for students ranging from ages four to eighteen since moving to the United States from her native Taiwan. She taught for several years in New Haven's Chinese Heritage school before pioneering New Haven's Mandarin

program as a middle school teacher at Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School. After three years at Betsy Ross, she transferred to Metropolitan Business Academy where she has taught Chinese for five years now. Chia-lien Griffin enjoys exploring multicultural diversity in the classroom through student centers and student led activities.

Christopher Hekeler is a business & career education teacher at Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven, CT. He has entering his 11th year in the urban district and enjoys being on the Mastery Leadership team as the district moves towards mastery education. Christopher is also currently teaching business online at Post University.

Veronica Krisavage, after a long and successful career in information technology, returned to a passion she had studied in college - teaching. She is currently in her sixth year teaching math and business at Metropolitan Business Academy, a magnet school in New Haven. Veronica has taught Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II and Precalculus as well as Business Law, Financial Planning and Business Ethics. She enjoys her role as adviser to the junior class and the National Honor Society, helping lead the junior grade level team, and being part of a math curriculum writing team working to align the district's Algebra II mathematical standards with the Common Core State Standards. She was very excited to work with other math team members on the CWP Grant, exploring ways to change how students think, talk and write about mathematics.

Danielle La Pan just started her tenth year teaching in New Haven; this is her sixth year teaching Writing Workshop at Metropolitan Business Academy, which is a course for high school freshmen she designed herself that integrates technology while focusing on business writing, the NHPS 21st Century Competencies, and MBA's English Standards. She mentors colleagues in the building, helps lead the freshmen team, helps facilitate the English data team, is the advisory coordinator in the building for grades 9-11, and is a student support facilitator in the building. She focuses on the writing process and giving timely, constructive feedback in her class, so students are always able to grow as readers, writers, and thinkers in her class.

Devin Lawless just started her sixth year working at Metropolitan Business Academy. Throughout her years at MBA, she has had varying roles and responsibilities. Her journey began in 2010 when she taught English II and Writing Workshop part time. The year following she became Metropolitan Business Academy's Learning Lab Coordinator. In the role of Learning Lab Coordinator, Lawless assists chronically truant students to come up with one-on-one failure intervention plans, she helps students collect and organize assignments, she mentors students on topics such as time and grade management, and she helps students assess actions versus consequences. In addition to her obligations as Learning Lab Coordinator, Lawless acts as the Business Manager for the school. Lawless also manages, trains, and observes all peer tutors at MBA; she is in the process of designing a tutoring training curriculum. She feels truly blessed to work with such welcoming and knowledgeable colleagues.

Joanna Lopez is the 9th – 12th world language (Spanish) teacher at Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven, CT. She has worked with students for over sixteen years in different capacities. She began as a bilingual examiner, then she became a paraprofessional, and now she is a Spanish teacher. She is also a member of the World Language Curriculum

Writing Team in the district. Her main goal as a Spanish teacher is to enhance the cultural curiosity of her students by motivating them to read Spanish literature that will not only improve her students' knowledge of the Latin American culture but also improve their writing skills by the continued practice of writing essays on the literature or authentic materials, such as Latin American art. Her passion for reading has shown within her classroom, and she is extremely grateful for the opportunity given by the UConn CWP grant to allow students to integrate technology to improve their literacy and writing skills.

Matt Monahan teaches senior English and film studies at an interdistrict magnet high school in New Haven, Connecticut. Prior to coming to Connecticut, Matthew taught in Harlem, New York City and studied Secondary English Education at City College of New York, CUNY. Matthew lives with his wife Ashley Stockton (Magnet Resource Teacher at Ross Woodward Magnet School of Classical Studies) and his two boys Oscar (7) and Otis (5), who both attend New Haven Public Schools.

Amy Morrissey is a Mathematics Teacher at Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven, CT. She is starting her 4th year teaching Algebra I. She is grateful for the opportunity to work with colleagues on brainstorming and implementing ideas to incorporate writing in a math class.

Fatima Nouchkioui moved to the United States from Morocco, her mother country, in 2000 with the goal of becoming a language teacher. She obtained her certification in French and Arabic through the Alternate Route Certification Program in 2006, and she completed her MA in Oral Traditions in 2008. Fatima is the first teacher certified to teach Arabic in Connecticut. She has been teaching French and Arabic at Metropolitan Business School for ten years. She also taught Arabic through distance learning between MBA and Career Regional High School.

Steve Staysniak is in his fifth year teaching English I to ninth graders at Metropolitan Business Academy. Professionally, Steve's interests include mastery-based learning, text creation for authentic audiences, and developing a strong independent reading program accessible to all students in the 9th grade.

Karima Taroua is the French teacher at Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven, CT. She has enjoyed implementing learning centers that promote the use of a target language, specifically French. She explored the use of tablets in writing center in her class, and she found a way to provide immediate and efficient feedback to her students to enhance their writing skills and learning in the target language.

Chris Willems has been engaging students in personalized science investigations for over 20 years. He has the pleasure of working at an innovative, student-centered public high school in New Haven. He is thrilled to have the opportunity to learn new ways to enliven science writing and reading with colleagues and the Connecticut Writing Project.