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Adolescent motivation to read: Can it happen?

By Carol Delaney, *English in Texas* Co-Editor

In 2005, the *Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile* (AMRP) (Pitcher, Rigdeway, Delaney, et al., 2007) was used to assess the motivational needs of readers in middle and high school. The tool found that adolescents are motivated to read by choice of reading materials, technology use, and content that is purposeful and relevant to their lives. These preferences may not always seem feasible to meet because of standards and curriculum demands, and they are often overlooked. Standardized-test-performance practices drive school-based literacy but do not take into account factors that motivate adolescents to read. Students seldom see a connection to what they do in school and what they do and value out of school.

According to the position statement of the International Reading Association (2012), “Adolescents need access to engaging and motivating content and instruction to support their continued development.” When students are forced to read content for which they see no purpose or connection, they tend to avoid reading.

Past research shows that many adolescents engage in a wide range of literacy practices that are not related to school and not viewed as “reading” in a conventional sense because they involve non-traditional texts in nonacademic settings. The importance of non-traditional texts in adolescents’ lives is evident in the popularity and increasing use of smart phones and social media. Engaging young people in traditional forms of reading is more difficult than engaging them in alluring and evolving technology. Therefore, motivating adolescents to read traditional texts for academic purposes poses special challenges.

Below are a few suggestions that address choice relevancy, and technology.

Allow time for SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) at least once a week and let students choose what they will read. During this time, read along with them. Teachers who share what they read on a daily basis tend to inspire their students.

Reading aloud to students is one of the best activities for promoting student reading (Pitcher, et. al, 2007). Listening to a teacher read helps students become enthused about particular books (Worthy, 2002).

A critical response framework is one way to motivate learners to read and respond to literature (Knickerbocker & Rycik, 2006). The critical response frame includes: the reading context, the author’s presumed intent and audience, reader’s self, meaning/ interpretation, and text support. These questions prompt the

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from the blogosphere...

Teach Mentor Texts:
Using Mentor Texts to Promote Literacy
<http://www.teachmentortexts.com/p/who-i-am.html#axzz3A9EyaFvr>

...to the website

Join TCTELA in Celebrating 50 Years of Excellence
<http://www.tctela.org/2015-conference/>

President's Message

By P. Tim Martindell, President

If your district is like ours, the start of school always calls for hours of professional development, state and district policy updates, team planning, and other meetings that seem to sap the energy reserve we built over the summer. We come back the first day refreshed, but before we even get into our classrooms to prepare for those kiddoes, we are buried beneath piles of handouts with the latest in the district's and school's instructional vision. We have done data digs and calendars and feel overwhelmed by Labor Day.

I planned to take on the roll of pep rally leader here and give you stirring words of encouragement to rekindle the fire you hopefully had on your first day back. In the omnipresent optimism of our profession, I hoped to garner just the right timing and vocabulary into something inspirational enough to hang on your bulletin board to boost your enthusiasm whenever it may falter. As I searched for the right words, my officemate shared the link to the following letter. I think it does a better job than I ever could. Get a hanky and get inspired...and do not let them suck your fun circuits dry.

A Sandy Hook Parent's Letter to Teachers By Nelba Marquez-Greene

As another school year begins and old routines settle back into place, I wanted to share my story in honor of the teachers everywhere who care for our children.

I lost my 6-year-old daughter Ana Grace on Dec. 14, 2012, in the rampage at Sandy Hook Elementary School. My son, who was in the building and heard the shooting, survived.

While waiting in the firehouse that day to hear the official news that our daughter was dead, my husband and I made promises to ourselves, to each other, and to our son. We promised to face the future with courage, faith, and love.

As teachers and school employees begin this new year, my wish for you is that same courage, faith, and love.

It takes guts to be a teacher. Six brave women gave their lives trying to protect their students at Sandy Hook. Other teachers were forced to run from the building, stepping over the bodies of their friends and colleagues, and they came right back to work.

When I asked my son's teacher why she returned, she responded, "Because they are my kids. And my students need me now more than ever." She sent daily updates on my son's progress, from his behavior to what he'd eaten for lunch. And four months later, when my son finally smiled one day after school, I asked him about it. His response? "Mom. My teacher is so funny. I had an epic day."

While I pray you will never find yourself in the position of the teachers at Sandy Hook, your courage will support students like my son, who have lived through traumas no child should have to.

Your courage will support students who are left out and overlooked, like the isolated young man who killed my daughter. At some point he was a young, impressionable student, often sitting all alone at school. You will have kids facing long odds for whom your smile, your encouraging word, and your willingness to go the extra mile will provide the comfort and security they need to try again tomorrow.

When you Google "hero," there should be a picture of a principal, a school lunch worker, a custodian, a reading specialist, a teacher, or a bus monitor. Real heroes don't wear capes. They work in America's schools.

Being courageous requires faith. It took faith to go back to work at Sandy Hook after the shooting. Nobody had the answers or knew what would come tomorrow, but they just kept going. Every opportunity you have to create welcoming environments in our schools where parents and students feel connected counts.

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Texas affiliate leaders attend NCTE leadership meeting in Minneapolis

By Brian Bass, Vice President-Elect for Membership and Affiliates

Affiliate leaders from NCTE Regions 2, 4, 5, and 6 met in Minneapolis, Minnesota July 11 – 13 to collaborate on ways to increase affiliate membership and provide increased support to affiliate members. Forty-six representatives from twenty states attended the meeting including five representatives from Texas.

The attendees from Texas were as follows:

- Carol Revelle, NCTE Region 6 Representative
- Amy Rasmussen, Vice President of Membership – North Texas CTELA
- Sheri Pentecost, Conference Committee Member – North Texas CTELA
- Catherine Roth, Vice President of Programs – West Houston Area CTE & Local Arrangements Chair – TCTELA
- Brian Bass, Vice President-Elect for Membership and Affiliates – TCTELA

The meeting was led by Millie Davis, Senior Developer, Affiliated Groups and Public Outreach with NCTE. During the three-day meeting, participants engaged in a critical analysis of the values held by their organizations and members, collaborated in small and whole groups to determine how these values influence an organization's continued success, and generated plans to use this knowledge to lead to positive change within their organizations.

NCTE Vice President Doug Hesse established the meeting's framework by inviting the participants to consider why people join professional organizations. Hesse provided each participant with a sheet entitled "Tournament of Values." The sheet contained eight pairings of concepts associated with education, which Hesse termed "false pairings." For example, "local" was paired with "national" and "reward" was paired with "recognition." Hesse assigned each table one pairing and tasked the participants to determine which of the two concepts would be valued more by a group of current and potential affiliate members. After several minutes of deliberation, a spokesperson from each table reported the results, which were then recorded on a tournament bracket in the front of the room. After two rounds of discussions, participants believed that "expertise," "internal," "classroom," and "recognition" would be valued most highly by affiliate members. These concepts provided a launching point for the remainder of the meeting.

On day two, participants met with colleagues from different affiliates to discuss ways to increase membership. Then, participants discussed areas where affiliates can best represent the values of its members. Before breaking into small groups, each attendee reported five words representative of the work during

the meeting. Once reported, Davis created a graphic to reveal the most significant words expressed by the group. Of the words shared, "recognition," "create," "collaboration," and "expertise" were the most emphasized. Participants then attended three different roundtable sessions related to increasing membership and improving membership support. Finally, affiliate leaders met with their regional representatives to discuss the information garnered during the meeting and analyzed the ideas generated during the past two days. From the discussion with Texas affiliate leaders, several ideas emerged. Teachers want to be recognized. Teachers want to be treated as experts in their field. Members need to believe the conference is worth the monetary and time commitment. TCTELA needs to strengthen its relationship with other literacy groups in the state. TCTELA and area affiliates need to reach out to underrepresented areas.

On the final day, affiliate leaders developed a graphic representing their revelations regarding the needs of their affiliates and how they might better support their members. Included with their graphic, attendees were asked to create a "tag line" to summarize their thinking. In Texas, NCTE is well-represented. Texas has six area affiliates, and TCTELA is the third largest state affiliate in the nation. With this in mind, TCTELA's mission statement is to "advance the literacy growth of all Texas students by developing a network of diverse professionals and by providing professional development based on best practices in education." However, for TCTELA to realize its mission, more communication and more support must be provided. One factor that affects TCTELA's influence is simply the size of the state. Attendance numbers at the annual conference reveal that several areas around the state are underrepresented. A primary factor related to this underrepresentation is the conference location. To attend the conference, members from underrepresented areas have to commit a considerable amount of time and financial resources. One solution is to have strong area affiliates throughout the state. Since the size of Texas affects TCTELA's reach, it is in TCTELA's best interest to assist existing NCTE affiliates whenever possible and make a concerted effort to cultivate new affiliates in underrepresented areas. In addition, current affiliate leaders should reach out to educators in underrepresented areas. Most importantly, members of TCTELA who are in these areas should consider taking the first steps to create an affiliate. Although Texas is immense, the only way to eat a whole elephant is one bite at a time. By supporting and developing strong area affiliates, TCTELA's mission to influence the literacy instruction of "all" Texas children will be achieved. Credit: Meeting notes recorded by Curtis Bobbitt, NCTE Region 7 Representative.

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Creative text pairs: Ideas to inspire readers

By Kim Pinkerton, Vice President for Membership and Affiliates

Now that melting popsicles, stinging sunburns, and unending lazy days are just memories of another summer, it is time to refocus students and set their minds on learning. For English teachers, this is the moment to be creative in planning for the texts that our students will read this year. This is the perfect opportunity to be imaginative and ponder about deepening students' interactions with those texts. As Louise Rosenblatt teaches in *Making Meaning with Texts: Selected Essays* (2005), it is time to make sure that students are "living through, not simply [gaining] knowledge about" texts (p.63).

Text pairing provides the perfect occasion to help students live the world of literature. The current curricular pendulum swing indicates that the most logical place to start is with informational and fiction text partnerships. For example, high school teachers may choose to pair Amy Tan's modern canonized piece, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), with Anchee Min's memoir, *Red Azalea* (1994). Those who teach middle school might find that Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1955) and Tatiana de Rosnay's *Sarah's Key* (2006) make a perfect tandem. Or, elementary teachers might choose to match *Truth with a Capital T* by Bethany Hegedus (2010) with the picture book *Show Way* by Jaqueline Woodson (2005). In her article from *The History Teacher* (2012), Allison L. Baer tells teachers that "[t]he connection between fiction texts and informational texts with similar topics can be powerful, as one genre can elegantly support and enhance learning from the other" (p.283). But, what about moving beyond informational and fiction text pairs? Is there more to explore with students?

This summer John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) appeared in movie theaters. Gayle Foreman's *If I Stay* (2009) and Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993) will both make it to the big screen as the new school year opens. English teachers should consider pairing books with movies. There is no reason for classroom reads to be abandoned simply because they have been adapted for Hollywood. Readers can learn a lot from these types of cross-genre analyses that arise from book and movie comparisons.

However, English teachers can be even more creative than that. What about pairing modern versions of a work with the classics? For example, high school students would be fascinated by a comparison between *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* by Gregory Maguire (1995) and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum (1900). Of course, somewhere during this process students will have to review Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). They will be compelled to scoff at Baum's Dorothy, learn to fear Maguire's wizard, and feel disappointment at the loss of symbolism in the movie. However, the comparisons do not have to end there.

These interactions may then prompt them to read and compare the rest of Maguire's *The Wicked Years* series. They might also be interested in taking a look at how Winnie Holzman transformed

Adolescent motivation to read: Can it happen?

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reader to discuss personal connections and perceptions as well as those posed by the author. As students build connections to the text and strengthen their understanding, they become more interested and invested in the text. This framework is particularly helpful when students read provocative books that relate directly to their lived experiences.

Careful book selection can build student motivation. Books that deal with controversial issues can be compelling topics for young adult readers, giving them an opportunity to explore diverse perspectives before adopting a particular viewpoint. Each book should draw out connections in some way with the lives and experiences of students and should also represent a variety of perspectives for making sense of the world. It should be compelling enough to generate a strong aesthetic response as well as efferent understanding of the issues involved (Freedman and Johnson, 2000/2001).

Whether assigning a novel or a classic piece of literature, consider the following projects which incorporate technology use:

- Using Make Beliefs, Write Comics, Strip Generator, or some other free comic strip creation tool, students can recreate part of a story and expose bias in texts through comics.
- Allow students to create digital stories based on what they are reading; alternately, have them create new stories about characters based on character profiles.
- Have students conduct inquiry projects on topics that are appealing and exciting to them.

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Spidey senses to start the year

By Kimberly Craig, Recording Secretary

School supplies are packed on the shelves of local stores. Kids are getting restless at home, anticipating their “First Day” back to school. Teachers, most likely, have already begun some type of preparation and planning for the 2014-2015 school year. To ease into this process, teachers can look to some of the summer blockbusters that emerged in theaters, such as *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, for inspiration.

The Spidey senses teachers can learn from the Amazing Spider-Man are growing their webs; using their strengths; taking risks; and knowing their purpose.

As teachers enter a new school year, they may be faced with a new challenge: a new grade level, a new position, a new school, a new administrator, etc. Whatever the new year brings, educators should be sure to grow their web by making professional connections to support them: nurturing professional relationships with teachers of the same content or grade level, making a point to communicate and share ideas, questions, and ponderings, seeking professional contacts with colleagues at conferences, capitalizing on the expertise of people within a district—instructional coaches, department leaders and district administrators, and sharing e-mail addresses or social media contact information. Teachers should grow their web to increase the conversation about the profession.

As professionals, teachers have superpowers, strengths earned from experiences in the classroom. Some are detailed-oriented, some technologically proficient, while some are steeped in British literature. Knowing one’s own strengths allows people to see the strengths of others who assist in professional growth and assist in addressing weaknesses. While in team meetings, teachers can provide insight on a new resource or add perspective based upon experience. Educators must be willing to use their strengths for

the benefit of other teachers’ professional development either locally or at regional, state, and national conferences. Presenting at a conference may seem risky, but that is the point. The Amazing Spider-Man did not hesitate to take risks. Teachers should not be afraid to do the things that no one else has done before in the school or in the district. Something that seems too hard or too complicated may end up being the best growth opportunity for the year. Taking risks is a way to stretch oneself for growth, as well as the growth of students. Students are asked to take risks in their writing, in the classroom, and in life—do teachers practice what they preach? The goal this year could be to be amazing and take a risk or two.

The educational profession relies on constant flexibility and change. As a professional, teachers must commit to learning more about the profession throughout their careers. Professionals seek out the learning they need; modify and apply their learning to their current classroom; and engage in continuous improvement for all. A teacher is there to facilitate learning for their students, as well as be a learner themselves. Teachers can challenge themselves this year to be one-of-a-kind, like Spider-Man, to seek out professional learning opportunities for themselves as well as their colleagues and be a forever learner.

TCTELA supports the ongoing professional development required of each teacher. The Amazing Spider-Man is not a stagnant character, but an ever-improving individual throughout time, who uses his “Spidey senses” to be an amazing superhero. As a professional, choose to learn new things to continue improving over time, yearning for the opportunity to become “Amazing!”

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President’s Message

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Have faith that your hard work is having a profound impact on your students. Of the 15,000 personal letters I received after the shooting, only one stays at my bedside. It’s from my high school English teacher, Robert Buckley.

But you can’t be courageous or step out on faith without a deep love for what you do.

Parents are sending their precious children to you this fall. Some will come fully prepared, and others not. They will come fed and with empty bellies. They will come from intact homes and fractured ones. Love them all.

When my son returned to school in January, I thought I was going to lose my mind. Imagine the difficulty in sending your surviving child into a classroom when you lost your baby in a school shooting. We sent him because we didn’t want him to be afraid.

We sent him because we wanted him to understand that while our lives would never be the same, our lives still needed to move forward.

According to the 2011-12 National Survey of Children’s Health, nearly half of America’s children will have suffered at least one childhood trauma before the age of 18. They need your love.

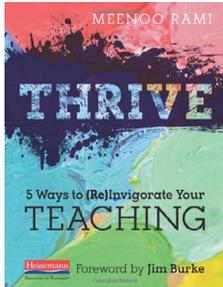
A few weeks before the shooting, Ana Grace and I shared a special morning. Lunches were packed and clothes were picked out the night before, so we had extra time to snuggle. And while I lay in bed with my beautiful caramel princess, she sensed that I was distracted and asked, “What’s the matter, Mom?” I remember saying to her, “Nothing, baby. It’s just work.” She looked at me for a very long time with a thoughtful stare, then she told me, “Don’t let them suck your fun circuits dry, Mom.”

As you begin this school year, remember Ana Grace. Walk with courage, with faith, and with love. And don’t let them suck your fun circuits dry. ptmwriter@aol.com

From <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/09/06/03marquezgreen.h33.html?tkn=MZLF%2B4b%20u1i5QvLSuWDR%2FgmQ6LwzLZgPL%2BHC&cmp=ENL-EU-VIEWS1>

Professional book review

By Margaret Hale, Ed. D., SLATE/NGTE Liaison



As summer comes to an end for educators around the country, many feel rejuvenated and reenergized to tackle the difficult work of teaching. But after a month or so in the classroom, many teachers will be on the search for ways to keep that energy going. In *Thrive: 5 Ways to (Re) Invigorate Your Teaching*, Meenoo Rami has written a book that includes not only her voice but also voices of other teachers from

the field. These voices describe five ways to stay invigorated and energized for the work teachers do: mentors, networks, intellectual stimulation, listening to oneself, and empowering students.

In terms of mentoring, Rami encourages teachers to seek out mentors—people are out there who can help if teachers will just ask. She begins by describing the different people in her life who serve as mentors; some of them mentor her on a day-to-day basis and in person, others mentor her less regularly and from across the country. Either way, these people help her see what she can do. The author also suggests ways that teachers can find mentors in their own lives and how they can work with and learn from those mentors.

About accomplished teachers, Rami says “one quality that seems essential is that an accomplished teacher must be connected” (p. 16). She encourages teachers to tap into their personal networks, school networks, local networks, national networks, and

web-based networks. Some of the networks she mentions are local affiliates of professional organizations (like TCTELA) and social media networks like the English Companion Ning.

Rami also encourages teachers to make sure to keep their work intellectually challenging. She explains that even though some of a teacher’s responsibilities, like going over rules, taking attendance, monitoring students at lunch, can seem mundane, teaching really is an intellectual job. Teachers, though, have to name the complexity and recognize that the profession requires a balance between intellect, passion, and decision-making. To maintain motivation, Rami highlights a need to strive for autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

Listening to oneself as a teacher is another of the suggestions in *Thrive*. The author describes the fears that often beset teachers—fear of failure, fear of criticism from colleagues, fear of taking a stand, and fear of having to do all the work. She provides strategies for managing those fears so that teachers can move away from them and do a better job of listening to themselves.

Rami’s final words of advice center around empowering students. She believes that empowering students leads to increased engagement, building momentum, and the chance to create a lasting legacy.

So when looking for some ways to build some energy either as the school year ramps up or a few months in, turn to *Thrive* for solid ideas that are sure to (re)invigorate teaching!
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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Review the submission guidelines at <http://www.tctela.org/english-in-texas/>

Publication: *English in Texas* Volume 45.1 (Fall/Winter 2015)

Theme: Critical Pedagogy

Call for Professional Submissions (Deadline: September 1st, 2014):

Critical literacy is the ability to actively read texts in a manner that promotes a deep understanding of power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships. It is a stance that encourages individuals to question the attitudes, values, and beliefs that are reflected in written texts. We encourage you to think about your choices of texts or media for the classroom. Do they support the dominant literacy canon and reinforce mainstream cultural norms? If so, have you addressed such biases within your own classroom? Have you modeled and encouraged connections that resonate with students’ lives (text-to-self) or helped them make text-to-text or text-to-world connections about societal issues such as prejudices toward race, gender, culture, or socioeconomic status? Have you used literacy in your classroom to critically examine unequal power relations in society (e.g., racial profiling, a lack of parity in pay among women and men, civil rights for all citizens, regardless of sexual orientation)? Have you encouraged your students to become more aware of the hidden messages communicated within texts and media that privilege some and oppress others?

Students, even young children, are capable of recognizing injustice. For teachers of elementary grades, have you used picture books or read current events to your students in order to help them problematize socially significant issues that are reflected in those texts? Have you engaged your students in group projects or book discussions that encouraged critically examining social justice within your classroom or in your students’ lives as a starting point for understanding critical literacy (bullying, classroom rules, fairness, gender issues, etc.)?

Share with us your classroom practices that address social inequities perpetrated through texts or media. Help our readers visualize instruction that includes the non-neutrality of texts/media based on race, class, gender and political persuasions.

Call for Student Submissions (Deadline: October 15th, 2014):

We invite students to share personal experiences with texts or media that support dominant ideologies. What are your thoughts about teaching students to become more aware of the hidden messages within texts and media?

Edcamp proves to be a hit at regional conference

By Jennifer Engle, Editor *Texas Voices*



help the audience understand how to create an effective professional learning community, “Think about a time your group was successful... what did it look like, sound like, feel like?”

A twist on the typical book study was employed at this year’s conference. Twenty-seven professional books were scattered atop three tables around the room and attendees were given eight minutes at each station to snap pictures of or make a list of titles that appealed to them. The books from the conference are listed with publisher information on [CVTE’s website](#).

Concho Valley Teachers of English held its 5th Annual Summer Conference themed “Collaboration: Using Your Resources” in San Angelo on July 21. The organization took a gamble this year and incorporated a mini edcamp format, something very new to the educators in the surrounding forty-three districts of Region XV.

The day began with [Dr. Carl Dethloff](#), Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources and Professional Development for San Angelo ISD, delivering an entertaining keynote message about the methods for and benefits of both teacher collaboration and student collaboration in the classroom. He reinforced the idea of building relationships to make the most of collaborative efforts by showing a suitcase full of meaningful items and describing each of them. Then he went on to

The majority of the conference centered around six session slots for which attendees spontaneously volunteered to share their best practices, technology skills, and whole class book study ideas. The impromptu structure led to a much less formal environment with audience members chiming in and even standing up to share additional resources on a topic via the desktop computers available. Teachers promised to share resources on CVTE’s website and to address additional questions in the future if they arose. The audience members wrote on their reflections at the end of the day that this was their favorite conference format and urged the organization to consider it again. jennifer.engle@saisd.org.

Creative text pairs: Ideas to inspire readers

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Maguire’s book into a major Broadway musical and choose to read Holzman’s *Wicked: The Broadway Musical* (2003) or *Wicked: The Grimmerie, a Behind-the-Scenes Look at the Hit Broadway Musical* (2005) by David Cote. It is not even too far reaching to think about comparing Maguire’s book to an actual viewing of the musical. *Wicked* has played off Broadway in other cities around the United States, or better yet, take students to New York City for the real experience. There is nothing like it.

It is easy to get carried away because there really is no limit to the creative ways that teachers can pair texts across genres. The power of text comparison is amazing. If teachers step off of the swinging pendulum for a moment this year and remember there are many more ways to parallel texts than just the traditional methods, the students will be so glad that they did. pinkertonk@uhd.edu



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Thoughts From the Field

Texas Voices welcomes the perspectives of educators in the field.
The views expressed in this section are not necessarily those of TCTELA.

Write your science

By Alma Villarreal, fifth grade teacher, Edgewood Elementary

“Hi, Ms. V!” a little girl smiled at me in the lunch line.

“Hi, M’Kayla!” I scrunched my nose in reply.

“Remember when we played marbles and made a painting? My marble went zoom.”

“I remember. That was fun, wasn’t it?”

M’Kayla was in kindergarten when we made art with rolling marbles and paint, and here she was, a year later, remembering that activity. My objective that day was to give my young learners the experience and language to describe movement. M’Kayla would need words of movement to describe anything from the rotation of the earth to the reaction when two objects collide. In order to make this movement real, we dipped marbles in paint and rolled them on white paper placed in a shallow cardboard box. The results were bright, busy, abstract works of art that showed the movement on the page. We gathered together on the carpet and brainstormed words to describe how the marbles moved. Together we made a list that included such as words as zoom, zig-zag, spin, crash, jagged and loop. Using our word bank we created poems to go with our works of art. As the students recited their poems aloud that day, they were poets. The beauty was that they were also scientists. In fact, the melding of writing and science could hold the key to a deeper and stronger understanding of scientific concepts in our elementary learners. It is writing that allows students to bridge concepts from the concrete to the abstract. In the words of my colleague and campus reading specialist, Elisa Prati, “Writing cements the learning.”

The need for well-prepared students to enter the STEM fields has reignited the debate on how to effectively teach science. The connection between writing and learning in the content areas is made clear in Joyce Armstrong Carroll’s and Edward E. Wilson’s book, *Acts of Teaching* (Heinemann 2008). In this work, Carroll and Wilson make a case for “writing

to learn” (p. 326). They contend that educational practices are shifting away from teacher-driven, rote memorization toward a more organic, student-centered method. Constructivism in science has come to the forefront as a pathway to make learning more meaningful and durable. Based on Jerome Bruner’s social constructivism, inquiry promotes the use of planned experiences that allow learners “to discover” meaning (as cited in Carroll and Wilson, 2008, p. 260). In the science classroom, this translates into hands-on investigations, aligning with Piaget’s notion that one of the stages that young learners undergo is the concrete operational stage. During this stage, learners create meaning and formulate questions based on their real-life experiences. According to Dr. Joyce Armstrong Carroll’s (2008) interpretation, “Piaget repeatedly emphasizes the need for plenty of concrete activities for children at this stage, believing they must act and interact to develop understanding” (p. 242). By providing these real-life learning moments, teachers are helping students to build the schema on which to build their thinking about the world and how it works. When students have a strong sense of the world and their place in it, they are able to relate concepts to themselves, which prepares them to take supported leaps to more abstract thinking.

In order to help students progress from the concrete to what Piaget describes as the more abstract formal operational stage, teachers understand that students pass along a continuum in which both stages meld and interchange. Young learners take supported leaps into the abstract and grow more practiced as they progressively build a conceptual bank of knowledge from which to draw. The transition from real experience to abstract concept formation must be guided expertly by linking the students’ observations to conceptually correct thoughts. Teachers facilitate this progress through language by guiding students

along Lev Vygotsky’s trajectory of concept formation (as cited in Carroll and Wilson, 2008, p. 245-249). Vygotsky proposed that concepts begin as heaps of disorganized thoughts and are then sorted into complexes based on attributes. Those complexes are then used to form pseudoconcepts, or explanations, based on visible attributes. The link between pseudoconcepts and true concepts lies in the correct application of the attributes to theorize or create something new. By providing the words to pair with their haphazard heaps, teachers are providing the categories under which students can organize their thoughts. Through discussion, students can “try out” language to explain their thinking and then apply it in new situations. By providing word banks, labeled diagrams, sentence stems, and picture dictionaries, teachers provide the tools to make their thoughts visible on the written page. As Joyce Armstrong Carroll (2008) observed, “The importance of writing to learn helps students...to understand writing as representation of what they think, and to use writing to foster further, deeper thinking and to integrate knowledge” (p. 326). Given multiple opportunities to play with language in science, students are given the opportunity to explore, explain, and ultimately, understand their world.

In the case of my kindergarteners, the science lesson began with the heaps of knowledge scattered on their papers as a mess of colors, lines, and circles. Sitting together as a class, we created complexes by picking out lines that looked the same and different than others. Using a marble and drawn arrows, we created a T-chart that aligned how the marble moved and the line it left behind. Students used the picture dictionary to pick out these lines in their marble art and tell how the marble moved to create the lines. Students were invited to tell the story of the line by moving like the marble. Some students created pseudoconcepts by theorizing that a dot



TRUST: Bridging the gap between home and school

By Gabby Cruz, third grade teacher, Cedar Brook Elementary

Last week, I was talking to my cousin and I asked her about how her daughter did at school, and she told me that she did okay. We then talked about the school year, and she mentioned she had a busy year so was unable to get involved with school. This conversation made me realize parents and teachers can live in two different realities. Does it have to be like this? How can we narrow this gap?

Ever since I began my teaching career, I have always heard the myth that parents are not involved in their children's education. Initially, teachers might think Hispanic parents are not interested since they do not attend school activities, might not answer the phone when the teacher calls, and are not constantly at the school.

I have always attended workshops that say it is important to have good relationships with your students' families, but what exactly does that mean? Valdes suggests "Schools expect a 'standard' family, whose members were educated and saw their role as complementing the teacher's in developing the children's academic abilities....For the parents on the other hand, some had little schooling and few notions of how school works and yet they valued education" (Freeman, 2011, p. 185).

Hispanic parents are interested in their children's education no matter what their socio-economic situation may be. Their lack of involvement can be attributed to many factors including lack of information, language differences, different work hours and/or limited social networks. For example, my next-door neighbor has complained to me on several occasions that she was unable to attend a specific school event simply because she was unaware of it. She either never got the notice paper or the notice arrived too late. Another example occurred recently when I received a call from one of the moms that I had a couple of years ago requesting assistance with a small dilemma regarding my former student who is currently enrolled in high school. Her daughter was having problems at school with one of the teachers, and the mom was incapable of securing an appointment with the teacher. Once she finally got it, they could not communicate due to their language differences. The mom set another meeting, but this time requested I attend with them. Language barriers such as this create problems between families, schools, and the teacher. Finally, work-hour differences create additional barriers. My husband has only been able to attend a few school events throughout the year because they are always scheduled during his work hours. This does not mean that he is not interested.

As a Hispanic mom and teacher of Hispanic students for more than ten years, I would like to offer ideas, such as: home visits, classroom visits, conversational nights, communication binders, and homework on how to establish rapport between teachers and parents.

Home visits: It is important for a teacher to know the home life of the students, know their funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, 1993), which are skills and abilities families possess to function in society. This option would go a long way in disproving myths about Hispanics families.

Classrooms visits: Encourage parents to come visit your room. You can invite mystery readers, offer the opportunity for parents to pick a book in advance, so they feel comfortable and can come read in your room in Spanish.

Write your science

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meant a stop in movement. I showed them that a spin or bounce could also form a dot and still move. Finally, students were invited to take their thinking into the abstract by imagining themselves as a marble, spinning and bouncing and zooming. Then I asked the students to use the chart to select the verbs and adjectives that described their movement. The result was a collection of diverse and beautifully crafted poems that aligned movement with description. One student put the words "left and right" in his poem after the words "zig zag." This showed me that he could imagine movement and accurately describe it.

Pairing Bruner's constructivism with Piaget's learning stages and Vygotsky's concept formation will transform today's classrooms into active hubs of student-centered activity. The merging of thought and language will be apparent on the walls, in the journals, and in the speech of the students. In science, this means plenty of experimentation and real investigations to form anchors of meaning, explanations and language provided in the form of diagrams, charts, word banks, graphs, tables, picture dictionaries and sentence stems. As Dr. Joyce Armstrong Carroll (2008) states, "Writing is thinking on paper" (p. 363). By placing language on the page, students are aligning thought with language and creating an anchor from themselves to the page. This separation, an abstract concept in itself, is the bridge between their concrete experiences and theoretical thought. Not to mention, it is just makes learning fun.

"Ms, V!" M'Kayla announced in the lunch line.

"Yes, M'Kayla?" I responded.

"I want to be a scientist when I grow up," she stated.

"You're already a scientist," I told M'Kayla.

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Time to get organized

By Melissa Pabon, English II teacher, Spring Woods High School

Random stacks of paper cover the desk, threatening to tip over in an avalanche of grading, ARD forms, and STAAR data. Filing cabinets overflow with outdated lesson plans, all sense of the former organization now gone. Microsoft Word documents from five years ago are haphazardly saved to the computer desktop. Sound familiar? This is not your desk that I am describing. It is mine.

For my first several years of teaching middle school reading, this was what passed for “organization” in my classroom, up until I received an opportunity in a new district to teach English II. While I wanted to bring my knowledge and expertise to my new position, I also wanted to leave my clutter and developing hoarding tendencies behind.

Teacher organization is a subject rarely approached, except in impossible-looking projects on Pinterest. Yet, many teachers will spend precious class time lecturing students on organization, without turning around to address their own piles of junk growing wild on the desk. “But that’s okay,” teachers think to themselves. “Maybe I’m just a little messy, but at least I know where to find all of my important things!” Many factors in a teacher’s daily life contribute to this type of “survival organization”: lack of time, growing amounts of paperwork, and fewer boundaries between work and home life. However, fellow teachers, there is another way: combining several free and easy-to-use digital tools with an analog system requires time investment up-front, but yields powerful dividends for years to come.

Evernote

Evernote is my powerhouse digital organizational tool; it is literally my brain. I use Evernote for work stuff, home stuff, and even stuff like favorite shades of foundation. In Evernote, rather than “less is more,” the opposite is true: “more is more.” The more information that the user keeps in Evernote, the more powerful the app. The more places that Evernote is downloaded—I have the app on my school laptop, home desktop, iPad, and iPhone—the easier it is to access that information wherever you are. The more people, such as teammates, subscribed to Evernote, the greater the collaborative opportunities.

Teachers need a little bit of clutter to facilitate their naturally creative tendencies, without feeling too constricted. It is possible to maintain this sense of creativity, yet remain organized with Evernote’s powerful search capability. While it is definitely possible to get fancy with Evernote’s notebooks, stacks, and tags, I have found it easy to pull up the information that I need by simply typing the subject in the “search” bar. Need all my notes on “inferencing lessons”? Just typing in the “inf-” pulls up the notes that I have taken from professional reading sources, lesson ideas given to me by other teachers that I would like to try, training notes that I snapped pictures of and uploaded, and pictures of student work models.

Evernote can be downloaded from www.evernote.com.

Dropbox

Depending on your school’s stance towards technology, accessing your personal server folders from multiple computers can be easy—or it can be very, very difficult. Or, you may be able to get into your personal server from any computer on campus, but be thwarted while trying to log-in from home. To work around this issue, I have turned to Dropbox to hold the documents that are still in progress, only saving them to my server folder once they are complete. Dropbox gives me the flexibility to work on my files from home, whenever the urge to perfect that PowerPoint strikes. I am also able to share files with my teammates, and Dropbox notifies me when any changes have been made.

Dropbox can be downloaded from www.dropbox.com.

Analog: Filing Folders and The Recycling Bin

True, there are some things that are impossible, or ineffectual to keep in digital form. To organize these things, I use an In/Out file folder system, in which I keep track of the various forms and other paperwork that need my attention. To avoid clutter buildup, I process and deliver this paperwork as quickly as possible, often taking care of it on the same day that I receive it. I use a similar system for grading: each class period has an “In” folder and an “Out” folder, stapled to the wall behind my desk. I instruct all students to put their work in the appropriate folder—and to never place anything on my desk. Since I instituted these folders, I have never lost an important form or a student paper yet. Better still, with my paperwork corralled away, I am able to use my desk to actually work, rather than using it to store paperwork.

Lastly, the recycling bin is the greatest asset to my analog organizational system. Once I have recorded important information in Evernote, and processed and delivered necessary paperwork, hard copies go into the recycling bin. Nothing is left behind to camp out on my desk.

The biggest advantage to this system? When it was time to move classrooms at the end of the year, I was able to move my entire classroom of “teacher stuff” on one cart.

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The case for Abydos

By Jaynaia A. Griggs, English I teacher, Willowridge High School

My experience as a first-year teacher was like learning to drive on the Autobahn; there was not a whole lot of room for error. As I enjoy my “Imaginary Summer” full of professional development, reading books about different teaching strategies, and lesson planning I have had ample time to think about all the things I would do differently if I had only known better. Teachers should be encouraged, maybe even required, to take The Abydos Writing Institute before they ever set foot in a classroom.

How NOT to Teach Writing

Now that I have taken the Institute I find myself going back in time and regretting most of what I did this year. Last year I started with something “fun” like teaching the Parts of Speech... in isolation of course. If I could go back and do it again, I would take a sample of my students’ writing and discuss with them one-on-one where they would like to see their writing by the end of the year. From there we would ratiocinate for the parts of speech and then set progress goals to move them to the next level. I would also start early using writing conferences as a way to build rapport and trust amongst the students.

Now that I am more familiar with the reading/writing connection, I am a definite believer. I want to sing it from the mountain tops and spread the good news to every teacher I see. Never again will I give my students a writing assignment without first having them read mentor text. This enables them to see what is expected of them as well as gives them inspiration. That inspiration is what was missing from my students’ writing all year. At the time, I could not put my finger on the problem. I just knew their writing was void of emotion and feeling, and that made me sad for them and sad for myself. Reading their writing quickly turned into a form of self-flagellation, penance for my teaching sins. As a student, I loved reading and writing. In my head I was a “Writer”, and that gave me the confidence and freedom to write freely. That was something instilled in me by Kelly Tummy, my 10th grade Creative Writing and ELA teacher. She is the person who helped me find my voice as a writer. That is the gift I vow to give my students next year and beyond.

STAAR Factor

Writing for state assessments has taken writing and made it something phony and contrived. As adults, rarely are we put in the position to write about a topic that is unknown to us and on top of that given less than 45 minutes to do so. Knowing this, someone has still decided that this is the best way to find out if our students are capable writers. According to TEA’s website, the 2014 English I STAAR pass rate was 72%.

Either something is seriously amiss or the test is intentionally designed for students to bomb, but that is a conspiracy theory for another day. In a misguided attempt to teach my kids how to rise to this awkward writing occasion I followed the advice of my Campus Instructional Specialist and had them write 26 line expository essays over and over, and over again. In my gut I felt like this was not the right thing to do, but she was the expert. Right? Test day came and my students were completely burned out; worse than that they were still turning in work that was not good enough to earn a passing score on the test. Talk about an epic fail. Next year my approach will be totally different. Writing is not something that is done in a vacuum. It is a form of self-expression that needs to be respected by Pearson, state legislators, and school administrators. I will not compromise the integrity of the authentic writing process. I will not rely on formulaic gimmicks and graphic organizers.

Seeing the Light

I will be forever grateful that I had the opportunity to attend the Abydos Writing Institute this summer. I can only compare Abydos to sunlight after being in the dark for nine months. Having participated in the instructional strategies myself I know that they work. I know that the result is authentic writing, quality writing that even exceeds the writer’s expectations. If anyone reading this is a first-year teacher (or even a veteran) I implore you to go to your administration and plead the case for Abydos. Demand that you be sent to the Abydos Writing Institute, it will change the way you look at your job as a teacher of reading and writing. It will change the way you write. I could not have written this piece without the strategies of Clocking, Ratiocination, and Grouping. Actually, I encourage teachers of all disciplines to attend the institute, not just ELA teachers. Remember that 72% state pass rate for the English I STAAR test? You already know that your administrators will direct everyone to embed writing assignments into their curriculum. If you attend the Institute, you will have a greater understanding of how writing can be used to reach your specific curricular goals. After all, as the old saying goes, “writing and reading are fundamental.” The ability to teach the fundamentals in an effective way that students can actually utilize in school and beyond is priceless. We all know that as educators you will have challenges with students, curriculum, and administrators. However, being open to changing your methods and embracing proven techniques will make those challenges easier to overcome.

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You, the teacher, the advocate: Understanding students exposed to domestic violence

By Patricia Mendez, third grade teacher, Cedar Brook Elementary

I can still hear the apprehensive voice of my five-year-old daughter's kindergarten teacher as if it were yesterday. She spoke with concern after noticing that my daughter seemed distressed and disconnected in class. When asked what was wrong, she responded, "I don't want my mommy to die." Even though I completely understood why she felt this way, as I had recently left an abusive marriage, which she and her older sister witnessed, it still surprised me that these fears dug deep enough to affect her during the school day. Today, now three years later and a teacher myself, I understand first-hand the very real effects domestic violence has on children who fall victim to it by either witnessing or experiencing the abuse themselves. As educators, we must understand what domestic violence is and how it affects children in and outside of the classroom. By doing this, we arm ourselves with the necessary knowledge of domestic violence to advocate for our students' well being.

What is domestic violence anyway?

Understanding domestic violence may seem hard for some because our society has become desensitized to its horrifying reality due to its commonality. It is generally known as intimate partner violence involving continuous physical, emotional, verbal, sexual or psychological abuse of one partner to the other. Look around. Chances are you know someone who is or has been a victim of domestic violence. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that one in four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime, accounting for two million injuries each year, from which almost 17,000 end in homicide ("Domestic Violence Facts," 2007). Most of these women have children who are sadly witnessing and even experiencing the abuse themselves. In fact, an estimated 12 million children in the United States are exposed to domestic violence each year ("Children who witness Domestic Violence"). Simply turn on the television and chances are you will come across yet another fatal domestic violence story. In a short span of only fourteen days, from May 1 through May 14, 2014, The Domestic Violence Crime Watch website reported that 35 women and children lost their lives to domestic violence ("Domestic Violence Headlines"). It is so common that some are now calling it an epidemic.

How does domestic violence affect the child?

Domestic violence turns what would be a normal, healthy child into a sickly and sometimes helpless one with little to no hope. Children who witness or experience domestic violence suffer from post traumatic stress disorders, such as depression, anxiety,

low self-esteem, bed-wetting, nightmares, and are at greater risk than their peers of having allergies, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, headaches, and other impaired physical health problems ("The Facts on Children and Domestic Violence"). Witnessing and experiencing domestic violence essentially kills a child's spirit and affects them in more ways than just the physically evident.

William Gay, corner back for the Pittsburgh Steelers, chokes up as he tells his story for the Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, of how domestic violence affected him at only eight-years-old when his mother was murdered by her boyfriend. Fighting his tears, he manages to describe the anger he felt toward the world, as the questions of "Why me? Why take my mother?" ("Will's Story") rang deep inside of him. Unanswered. The change in his behavior and school focus took a quick turn as he went from "a good kid to a bad kid" shortly following the traumatic incident.

Every day these agonizing questions torment children who see and experience domestic abuse. It is no wonder these innocent children live depressed, scared, anxious and sick due to the untreated post traumatic stress disorders they carry with them.

How does domestic violence affect the student?

Simply put, a child who suffers from post traumatic stress disorder is hardly a student at all. Children exposed to domestic violence exhibit symptoms of depression, low self-esteem, aggression, are usually unable to concentrate in class, and even exhibit behavioral problems. As teachers, we know that each of these symptoms puts the student at risk of not succeeding academically, and the combination of these symptoms, is a recipe for disaster.

The YWCA Greater Cincinnati website shares that children age five who were exposed to high levels of domestic violence had IQs that were, on average, eight points lower than unexposed children ("Children who Experience Domestic Violence"). These results significantly correlate with Maslow's hierarchy of needs which places a child's need of safety in the second most significant level of needs (Harper, Harper, & Stills, 2003). Because children suffering with PTSD often experience depression, anxiety, and nightmares related to the traumatic experiences of domestic violence, their needs for safety are not met. This means that a child with this type of distressed history, is in danger of not reaching his full potential in and out of the classroom and will struggle in his development until this need is met. Based on this information, it is quite naïve to assume that a child suffering from these symptoms, related to domestic violence, can perform at his or her best in the classroom or a standardized test.

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You, the teacher, the advocate: Understanding students exposed to domestic violence

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How do I know if one of my students is witnessing or experiencing domestic violence?

The YWCA Greater Cincinnati states in their teacher handbook that some of the most common signs exhibited by a child who is to exposed domestic violence in the home are:

- Complaints of headaches or stomachaches
- Fatigue
- Constant worry or anxiety about the safety of himself or a loved one
- Low self-esteem, including a lack of confidence in both social and academic situations
- Highly emotional
- Difficulty concentrating, not just on class work but also in a social setting
- Violent behaviors toward himself or others which include bullying of other students
- Comments of suicide, most commonly seen in older students; and
- Excessive absences

What can I do? I am just a teacher.

No, you are not just a teacher. You are an advocate for your students. Sadly, the preconceived notions of domestic violence are so deeply-rooted in our society's psyche that even teachers, who are usually fearless advocates for their students, do not know how to react when suspicions arise. Thankfully, you are not one of those teachers, at least not anymore. Domestic violence is real, it is common and you know this because the evidence sits in your classroom seven hours a day.

Also suggested in the handbook are some actions you can take if you suspect that one of your students is witnessing or experiencing domestic violence, you should:

- Voice your concern to the student about the fatigue, behavior issues, sadness, and so forth that they are exhibiting in class. When dealing with older students, make sure to advise the student of your responsibility as a teacher to report any suspicion or knowledge of abuse.
- Talk to your principal or school social worker. A social worker will guide you on following the steps to assisting the child in and outside of the classroom.
- Talk to the parent. Simply because in most cases of domestic violence the male is the perpetrator, it is safer to speak with the mother about your concerns. If the mother confirms your suspicions, point her to the National Domestic Violence

Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) who connects victims with organizations in their area who provide safe shelters, food, counseling and legal assistance.

- Keep all information confidential. Do not share this information with anyone who is not directly involved in helping the child.
- Maintain a safe and calm learning environment. Remember that loud and aggressive voices may trigger anxiety for a child with PTSD.

As domestic violence becomes more and more common, it more closely affects our students. As teachers, we must not only seek to educate these children but also advocate for their well being. It is not only our professional responsibility, it is more than that. It is our moral obligation. Desmond Tutu sums it up best this way, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor" (Younge, 2009).

Three years ago I would not dare share my story and could barely speak up for myself, much less advocate for students affected by the same nightmares that often visited me. Thankfully, my daughter's kindergarten teacher knew what signs to look for and what to do about it. She voiced her concerns and because of this, both of my daughters and I received the necessary counseling and support we so desperately needed at the time. Domestic violence does not have to monstrosly occupy a child's mind forever. It can, with the help of teachers like you, become an unfortunate incident that no longer grips their thoughts, allowing them to live healthy and successful lives.
Patricia.Mendez@springbranchisd.com

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Realm of educational instruction

By Susan Ramirez, Elementary Reading Coordinator, United ISD

In a state where less than seventy percent of third grade students are passing a state reading exam with a fifty percent minimum mastery requirement, it is clear that the realm of educational destruction is fast approaching. But when tempted to blame the state for this predicament, one should err on the side of caution. In all actuality, the Department of Education never intended educational structure to capitalize on test prep. Moving away from research proven techniques and theories in regard to teaching the fundamentals of reading, writing, and thinking upon the implementation of state exams was certainly never the goal of state mandates in the new global era.

According to research by reading and brain development greats such as Thomas Gunning (*Creating Literacy Instruction for all Children*, 2000), students must begin the process of formal education at their ability level and close the gap periodically through educational scaffolding. "It is essential that all readers, but especially youngsters reading below grade level, be given materials that they can read with relative ease."

As state reading exams are often written and designed with a Lexile 200-400 levels above an average student's grade level expectancy, and likely, zone of proximal development, these exams were never intended to serve as an elementary curriculum. "Research on metacognition processes strongly suggests that poor readers find it especially difficult to repair their reading. One reason may be that

they often read materials that are far beyond their instructional levels" (Gunning, 2000).

Educational success is grounded in the roots of knowledge – knowing where students are in their learning, from where they come, what motivates them, and their ultimate destination. Motivation is perhaps a key factor which may have attributed to more than half of the scant seventy percent of third graders mastering state exams in 2014. According to Gunning, "Students will not fully appreciate reading unless the stories touch their lives." Highly effective teachers are those who truly motivate and reach students at their deepest level—their hearts. When students feel a teacher's genuine desire and relentless drive to make them successful, they rarely want to let that teacher down.

Lynn Erickson's *Motivational Theory* suggests that students begin to lose interest in learning shortly after kindergarten as academic requirements may neglect to focus on the necessity of making connections and utilizing synergistic thinking—thinking which integrates the knowledge of facts with the application of concepts and generalizations, which applies to the real world.

Directly teaching to the state exam, as opposed to utilizing a curriculum rich in classic literature, real life studies and application, and other carefully selected material, may quite literally be the downfall and ultimately lead to educational destruction for the future generation. sramirez@uisd.net

TRUST: Bridging the gap between home and school

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Conversational nights: Open your doors once a month for parents to come and voice their questions or concerns in a non-threatening environment to foster goodwill.

Communication Binders: These are two-way communication binders, which serve the purpose of establishing and maintaining consistent communication with parents.

Homework: Make homework meaningful. Invite parents to problem solve or create poems together with their kids. This way you will not only be able to see the bilingualism, but also the biculturalism of the community.

Teachers can make a big difference when they include bilingual families in the learning process. Although many parents admitted to me in confidence that they do not want to interfere in their child's

learning, it is imperative parents realize they play an integral part in the development of their child. These activities will contribute to the process of learning English and will bridge the gap between parents, teachers and ultimately students.

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The disservice of teaching teachers

By Brittani Mulherin, English I teacher, Spring Woods High School

People venture into the field of teaching for a variety of reasons. Some are drawn toward the paint-smear faces of kindergarteners while others feel more comfortable aiding high school students in expanding simplistic ideas into poignant pieces of writing. Either way, educators desire continual improvement within their charges so that they may reach their full potential. In order to get to the point of classroom access though, teachers must go through the proper channels of trainings so that they themselves may reach their potential as educators. This is expected with any career; however, it is a sorry state of affairs when those seeking to become a teacher are so often met with a frustrating lack of instruction on that very subject. Simply because a university boasts a College of Education does not mean that it is doing its prescribed duty of properly informing college students of the best ways to become teachers or even in introducing them to the most basic materials necessary for success in the field. In this capacity, what should form a strong base for new teachers has fallen woefully short of its initial goal.

When people outside of the field of education meet up with those within it, their reactions tend to deviate toward a shocked expression of incredulity often followed up by the statement, "I could never do that." In truth, teaching is not easy, but I believe something worth doing is never going to be so simple. That does not mean that the occupation should be made all the more difficult by denying teachers the tools needed to survive their first few years on the job. Teachers often leave the profession after only three years, and it is precisely because they are not set up for success in the first place. Topics such as classroom management, lesson planning, and curriculum strike me as very basic skills about which a new teacher should be armed with a vast array of knowledge in order to start his or her first year, but these are all too often skipped over in lieu of so-called pedagogical ideals.

We are bombarded with memorization of techniques, styles, and studies, hundreds of years' worth of psychology, the concept of the "ideal classroom", and a veritable parade of group work exercises. That is not to say that these fail to have a place in the proper education of a teacher, but the general insistence on these is blown far out of proportion while other, equally important if not more, elements are left out. When speaking with others in college about this gross oversight, the comments are largely a mixture of agreement although I did receive the occasional, "Oh, I think we'll just learn that on the job, right?" Wrong. Such an idea is akin to throwing a person to a pride of ravenous lions. The students and the job itself will eat you up and spit you out.

This is even more prominently the case for people striving to fill secondary positions. Instead of gaining valuable knowledge on high school curriculum, structure, expectations, and norms, would-be high school teachers are often shuffled into college courses unfairly focused on the primary levels. I shared a great deal in this stress when I discovered myself roped into creating phonics foldables or writing papers on the merits of the top five storybooks for first through third graders. What did this have to do with me and my future students at the senior level? While many of those around me (a majority within the classes, of course) sat eagerly lapping up the material to aid them in their primary classrooms, it felt like a slap in the face to me. It seemed that the university did not consider secondary teachers a serious prospect worthy of any focused attention. At one point, after expressing my concerns to a professor, they were met with a simple shrug. I was told, "Well, I know my class is mainly for those wanting to teach little kids. I don't know what to tell you." Looking back on that brief conversation now, I feel that the professor told me exactly what should become the basis for a discussion amongst colleges with teaching programs.

It is essential that colleges supply courses that provide pre-service teachers with the basic skills that will allow them to step into a classroom with confidence. These courses need time allotted for realistic classroom management instead of the band-aid ideology that is usually propagated--the "Just have a talk with them outside of the room" approach. That does not work in the real world when you have a room with thirty students, one of whom is belligerently refusing to complete any work or even acknowledge you as a human being. There also must be real work put into learning how to create effective lesson plans. Simply handing out a sheet listing a variety of formats for them is a grievous disservice, especially when the entire concept of creating creative and engaging lesson plans is so important nowadays in all levels of schooling. In addition to these, there must also be a clear focus on the teaching of specific content. As an English major, I read a lot of books and wrote a lot of papers in college; yet this did nothing to set me up to know how to teach English to my students. Therefore, I felt completely lost when I began my first year in the classroom. I was drowning in an ocean of not knowing, having to rely on a retiring teacher who was married to worksheets. Simple familiarity with a subject does not equate to the ability to masterfully teach it to others.

Colleges absolutely must step up their coaching and training of pre-service teachers. By failing to do so they are not only bolstering the problem of underdeveloped and ineffectual educators that succumb to burnout but are also turning up their nose at the growing population of a nation of students desperately in need of proper education. For these children, the future is quickly growing bleak and the best weapon to combat this is a teacher. Colleges should not deprive such teachers of a chance to make this difference.

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**WEST HOUSTON AREA COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
Presents**

Our Annual Fall Breakfast

Featuring

Victoria Young from the Texas Education Agency

And

Donalyn Miller author of The Book Whisperer & Reading in the Wild

On

Saturday, September 13, 2014

At

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8:00am – Reception and book browsing

8:30am – Business Meeting, Breakfast and Guest Speakers

Event Cost:

\$47.00 due by Monday, September 8, 2014

The cost for the event includes a \$15.00 membership fee in WHACTE for the 2014-2015 school year.
No on-site registration available. 3 hours of professional development will be awarded for attendance.

This year we are offering two different options for registering for our Fall Breakfast. You may register electronically using the EventBrite link below or you may register using US Mail by completing the form below and mailing it and your payment to the address listed.

<http://www.eventbrite.com/e/whacte-fall-breakfast-2014-featuring-victoria-young-and-donalyn-miller-registration-11415414813>

Please read the following information *carefully* about our new registration system.

Purchase Orders: If you plan to pay by purchase order and have already been approved by your district/campus, simply select that option as you proceed through the EventBrite registration process. You obviously will not be paying by credit card/debit card through our registration system, but we still need your contact information and other participant information. Please submit purchase orders to your campus/district early so that they can issue a check prior to our deadline. We must receive payment by Monday, September 8th. Purchase Orders should be issued to WHACTE at PO Box 79083, Houston, TX 77279-9083.

Registration by Mail: Should you wish to register by snail mail instead, please send us your completed registration form and check (made payable to WHACTE). Again, payment and registration must be received by Monday, September 8th and should be mailed to WHACTE at PO Box 79083, Houston, TX 77279-9083.

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