

TEXAS VOICES



A NEWSLETTER OF THE TEXAS COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

President's corner

By Roni Burren, TCTELA President

Summertime thinking

“Summa Summa Summa time!!!” I hope you read that to the tune of Will Smith’s iconic 1991 classic “Summertime.” Every lyric to this song puts me in the mood to soak up the sun, BBQ, swim, eat watermelon, and read books. Not that we don’t love teaching all the time, but the summer break is a time when we really love being teachers. There’s no shame in that. Summer is also a great time for TCTELA. As an organization our leadership is comprised of educators, and we too enjoy our down time for the summer.

This summer TCTELA leadership will be visiting the site of the 2023 conference in Denton, TX. Our annual site visit is a way for us to ensure that our annual conference is what teachers need. I’m sure you noticed leadership at the 2022 conference walking around, asking questions, answering questions, and trying to make sure our members have an excellent conference experience. I encourage you to do the same thing this summer. Think about how to make the 2022-2023 school year excellent for your new group of students. What did you do well this year? What books, or writing prompts yielded the most gains? What lessons didn’t go so well?

As you relax by the pool, I encourage you to not only enjoy your much needed break, but also spend some time thinking about how you can give students the best experience for the upcoming school year.

Reference:

Smith, Will. *Summertime*. Homebase. Jive Records. Track 2. iTunes.

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Embracing
Boldness

An Exploration
of the Power
of Language

A call to arms...A call for leaders of change

By Ashley Anderson, English II teacher, Dickinson High School

Dear fellow educator –

As I begin this, I am overcome with an immense amount of pride. I am so proud of you and all of us in this career field. Pride because during the past couple of years you have continued on, you didn't give up! Even if there were many mornings we did the school-parking-lot-steering-wheel prayer. You know what I mean—eyes closed, head resting on the top of the steering wheel, one hand gripping at 10 o'clock and the other at 2 o'clock, taking deep breaths in and out, and whispering to ourselves, "You can do this." Pride because even though it is summer (and we all really, really need the rest), we attend professional development so we can actually work on getting better at what we do—helping all of our students learn. (Even now, as I write this, I am attending my district's PLC Institute—learning and growing with other teachers so we can be better for each other and for our students.)

I am about to embark on my 7th year of teaching and this profession has definitely not gotten easier, to say the very least. With so many eyes on education, both for good reasons and reasons out of our control, it would be understandable if teachers (if you) have shrank behind the politics, the marches, the stack of PD books, and even sometimes the fishbowl margarita during happy hour.

I understand. I really do.

But...I love you and respect you too much to allow you to stay there, peeking out from behind all of that "stuff"

I am calling you up and calling you out. I am calling you to take action. I am calling you to defend education and fight for what you know is right for all students. I am calling you to defend your "why" and to fight against surrendering to apathy or complacency. I am calling you to be a leader for change. **We need you for the students at (insert your school here)!**

Before becoming a teacher, I spent 8 years in the United States AirForce (4 years in the Reserve Officer Training Corp and 4 years as an active duty officer), where they trained us to be effective and directive. They train us to be leaders. They train us to be leaders of change.

The military does not do everything well, but they do know how to create a culture of accountability and how to "inspect what they expect" of ALL its members. And when you are in a life or death situation, as many of our service members are, you want to know that the people on either side of you have your back. That they value your life as much as theirs.

The state of our education system is in peril. The state of literacy in this country is in peril. You know as well as I do, as an English teacher, literacy often means life or death for our students. It's time for a change. It's time for education to change. It's time that you and I lead that change.

Change doesn't happen overnight. Military culture doesn't happen overnight either or because of brainwashing (I know some of you might be thinking that). It comes from three very simple values that hold a lot of personal accountability. Values that each servicemember is reminded of every day and expected to uphold every day. I feel these values are powerful and have a place in education. In fact, my friend, education needs to adopt these values now more than ever. These values are: Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All You Do.

Integrity First - This means that before everything else, you need to make a habit of doing the right thing all the time, whether or not anyone is watching. The best way to translate this in education is by referring to the late, great Maya Angelou. She said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." This quote was my team's mantra this past school year, my rallying cry (at times) post pandemic school year, and a daily prayer whispered when looking at my reflection in the mirror.

As responsible educators, we know that students need to be able to read and write proficiently in order to further their education and careers. We want our students to be confident learners, so we, as educators, need to be model learners. We want our students to be change makers, so then as educators we need to, in Brene Brown's words, "choose

Continued on next page

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A call to arms...A call for leaders of change (continued)

courage over comfort” to make changes in our classrooms and schools. So, if you and your team are having very little student growth from year to year, or students are less engaged and motivated than previous years, then this is the time for us to reflect and revolutionize. Find that professional development that energizes you; reach out on social media or to your teacher friends and find that data-proven strategy. Be brave enough to take risks in your classroom and to hold your teammates to a higher standard. It’s no longer good enough to just “survive” the day or the school year. Know better, so you can do better. When you are better, your co-workers will be better, our schools will be better, and, most importantly, our students will be better too.

Service Before Self - I know that this value could easily be misinterpreted, but this does not mean to work 14 hour days, put your personal wellness at risk, or to put your job before your family. This value means that the mission—student success—comes before all else...even you (and your ego) at times. As educators, myself included, we can sometimes think our reading strategy is the best for students. Or our lesson plan template makes the most sense. Or since I have been at this school longer than anyone else on my team, I know how best to run this meeting.

Service before self really means being willing to collaborate and work with others to ensure students’ success. For their survival, students must leave K-12 literate, which means 50-70 minutes a day in their English or reading/writing class can’t be the only time students are writing and reading. As English teachers we have to lead the change—we have to reach across the hallway or the curriculum to work with teachers outside of our subject. To say it more plainly, don’t be too stubborn to ask others for help.

If students’ success is our mission, then what’s even more important than your “why” is understanding your students’ “why.” The reason they show up to your class every day (or the reason they don’t) is up to you to find out. When I realized that the only reason Emiliano slept in my class every day was because he worked until 3am to help his family pay the bills, it changed how I taught Emiliano. I started sending excerpts home with him to read during his work breaks and would teach him in between class periods. Service before self takes the focus off you and asks you to put the focus on the mission.

Excellence in All You Do - Simply put, this means giving your best every day. Strive to meet the standard and then exceed it. This value is how the military ensures that every service member is doing their job well so the mission gets accomplished.

I have held many different positions and worked in several different career fields, all that held great capacity to effect change. However, I have never had more of a direct impact on change than the work that I get to do every day in my classroom. What you decide to do or don’t do will have a direct impact on your team, your school, and your students. The work we educators are doing is vital, not only to the success of our students, but also to our communities and our country.

Because the work we are doing is so important, and because you and I are human (and not soldiers), it means that our best might not look the same every day. And that is ok. But here is the thing—if you want your fellow educators and your students to



give you grace, then you must be willing to extend that grace to them. “Excellence in All You Do” doesn’t mean that if you can’t be excellent today then throw in the towel and call in sick; it just means that you are willing to give what you have. The secret to this value is teamwork. If everyone around you is striving to give their best, then that means on the days you can’t give as much, someone is there to give a little more. And on the days you are rockin’ it and haven’t even had your second cup of coffee yet, you can give a little more to help your neighbor out. My husband likes to always say, “Teamwork makes the dream work.” Teaching is hard, so don’t try to do it alone.

In closing, promise me that you won’t stay hidden behind all the frustrations, doubts, fears, disappointments, and margaritas of the past several school years. Promise me that in “Shocktober” you will remember reading this letter and these three values: Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All You Do. Let them remind you that I am calling you to take action. I am calling you to defend education and fight for what’s right for all students. I am calling you to defend your “why” and to fight against surrendering to apathy or complacency. I am calling you to be a leader for change. **We Need You!**

So, my fellow educator, I implore you and empower you to answer this question:

What actions are **YOU** going to take this coming school year?

Keep fighting the good fight.

Yours in action,
Ashley

PD2Teach: Check out these professional learning resources!

By Valerie Taylor, PD2Teach Liaison



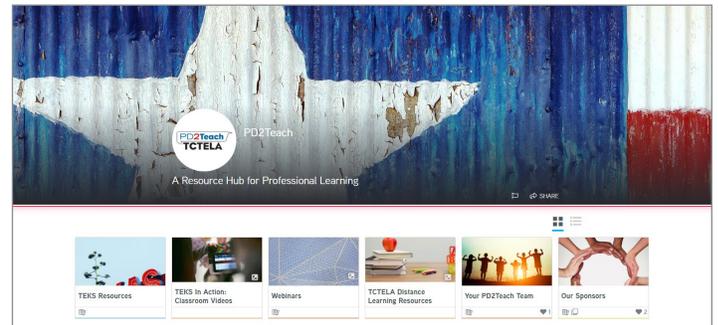
Summer is a time for rejuvenation and also a time when many educators take time to refresh their own learning. Although attending in person conferences and reading professional articles and books are great ways to participate in this learning, sometimes we need a quick way to jumpstart our thinking about a topic before delving more deeply into it on our own or with others. Lucky for us, TCTELA has a library of recorded webinars on our **PD2Teach Bulb site** that can do just that.

If you're interested in thinking more about early reading instruction, check out Danika Jaster and Markesha Tisby's *Building a Reading Foundation with Phonological Awareness* where they demonstrate ideas for helping students develop their skills of phonological awareness along a continuum of increasing complexity.

If you're thinking about how you might incorporate more digital opportunities for students next year, check out one or more of these webinars: Using *Digital Portfolios to Take Writers' Notebooks to the Next Level* with Shona Rose, *The Write Stuff: Digital Portfolios and Student Writing* with Amanda Palmer and Nina Anderson, *Best Practices for Reading in the Digital Age* with Amy Keesling, or *Curating Our World Through Multimodal Literacy* with Meagan Davis and Meredith Lee. All four of these

webinars offer practical and innovative ideas to engage students.

We also know that you may need some ideas for addressing challenging situations during the next school year, and these webinars may provide you with some ideas: Dr. Annamary Consalvo and Dr. Ann David present a variety of resources that could be helpful if you are facing a book challenge in *Finding Support and Navigating Difficulty When Facing Censorship in Your Classroom Resources*; Kelly Tummy hosts Cameron Carter, Liz Henson, Julie Rucker, Colleen Ruggieri, and Chestin Auzenne-Curl who share ideas about the importance of developing a professional network in their webinar *Professional Collaboration: Creating Feedback*; Cory Armes shares strategies for guiding learning for students who face the challenges of poverty, stress, and new language learning in *Reaching Your Most Vulnerable Students*; and Crystal Allen, Jocelyn Chadwick, and Tam Hawkins talk with Stephen Winton and Mary White about ideas for parents and teachers in *Talking about Race, Equality & Justice*.



You'll also find many other ideas for literacy instruction in the other webinars available on the Bulb site, and we hope you'll take advantage of this amazing resource offered by TCTELA for all literacy educators. We also hope that you'll encourage your colleagues to visit the site and to join our organization because we are stronger together. Happy learning!

from the blogosphere...

Fill your tank with loads of instructional ideas at:

- <https://movingwriters.org>
- <http://twowritingteachers.org>
- <https://www.weareteachers.com>
- <https://pernillesripp.com>
- <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com>
- <https://blog.heinemann.com>
- <https://readingbyexample.com>

Visit us online at: <http://www.tctela.org>

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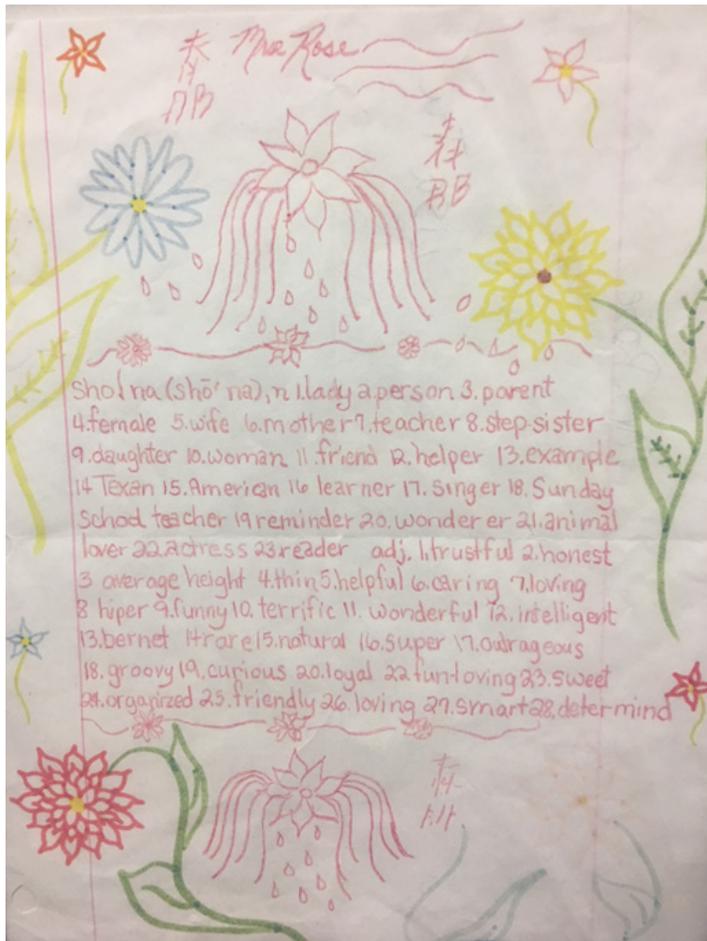


Seed ideas for prewriting: Using writing to know your students

By Shona Rose, PhD; Teacher Development Chair

The beginning of the year is the perfect time to learn more about your students and generate seed ideas that can become developed writings. Here are a few of my favorites:

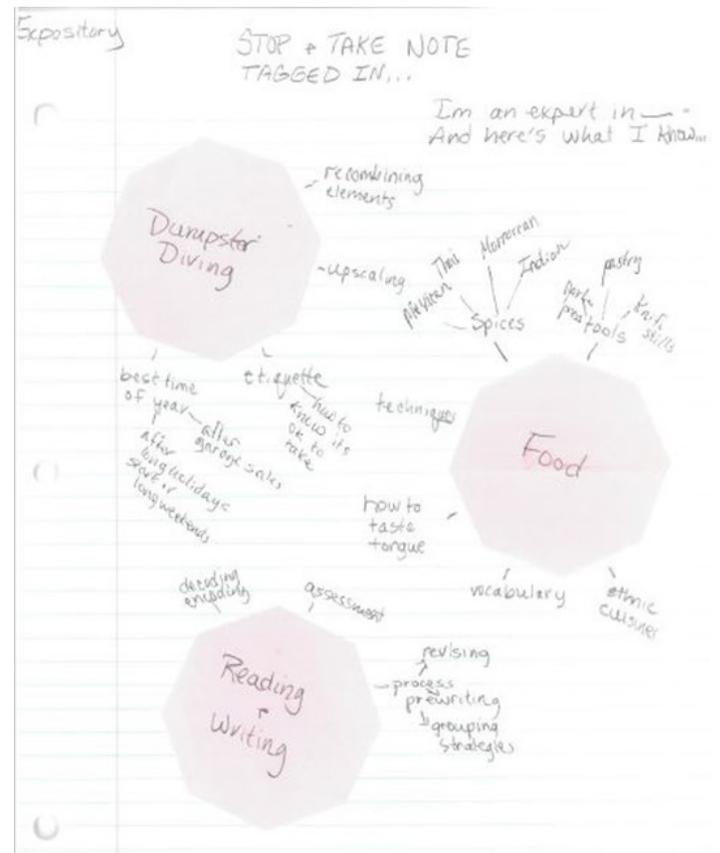
Define Yourself: When I taught 5th grade, Lisa Tu made this sweet gift for me. After students create and share their definitions, they can select a term and write about memories or instances in which they demonstrated those characteristics or how they developed that trait or title.



Introductions, Game of Thrones Style: Donna Reid and Adam Holt from Kinkaid School in Houston, Texas used this strategy in their TCTELA Session on Pastiche! First, they play a clip of Daenerys Targaryen (and a short one of John Snow). Then students write their own introductions. After sharing, students select one of the titles to explore more in depth. Ande Parlow created bookmarks for students after they wrote their introductions.

Stop and Take Note: I adapted this strategy from a technique Jennifer Wilkerson uses for crafting an angled anecdote. Students Stop and Take Note of what they could be “tagged in”—something they are known for. We start out with, “I’m an expert in _____” on the Stop signs. Then we try to add at least three levels of branching using the stem, “And here’s what I know...”

The additional branching helps students dive deeper with what Dr. Joyce Armstrong Carol calls coherence chains (2002). Once students have fleshed out a few ideas, they can take these ideas and create a draft.



Teacher Models: Teachers of writing write. Having models of your own helps students learn and connect with you as a writer and co-learner. Here’s mine:

Part of travel is experiencing the culture inherent in cooking: the methods, the spices, the community and conversation. But what is all the experience worth if you never bring it home to share with your friends and family?

Seed ideas for prewriting: Using writing to know your students (continued)

A few years ago, I stayed in a home with a Berber family in Morocco. Together, we made bread. We walked the donkey to fill the water vessels (made from tires) at the well. We prepared the food in the courtyard and bent over the tagines to stir and poke until the juices flowed and the veggies were tender. Then we sat down to hot, sweet mint tea and challenged each other to see whose was the best.

Soon, I'll have a party. I'm gathering the hardware—lump coal, terracotta cookware, basins for the coals, teapots and glasses. I've ordered the spices and tea.



I'm planning the guest list. The day before we meet, I'll purchase the perishables. My guests will select the wine.

At 6:00, the doorbell will ring. We'll all gather to chop, sip, and sear. We'll make the tea and laugh while the tagines do their magic. I'll share the pictures and stories from my trip. Then we'll fill our senses with flavor and fullness of Morocco-by-proxy.

These are just a few of my favorites. You can find more ideas to connect with your students at <https://www.bulbapp.com/u/seed-ideas~1>.

Starting the school year with a new vision of structure

By Alissa Crabtree, Vice-President of Affiliates and Memberships



Chelsea was a veteran teacher who was extremely eager to begin the 2021-2022 school year. Recouping from the historical year of the COVID-19 pandemic, she, along with thousands of other educators, was looking forward to returning to normal and having her students physically in her classroom. She prepared her “getting to know you” activities and classroom contract procedures, and she even hand-wrote 127 personal notecards to introduce herself to her new students. After 14 years of teaching, Chelsea had survived virtual classrooms and felt prepared to start the new year strong.

As my girlfriends and I like to say, “It was all good until...”

Chelsea did everything she had been trained to do to start the school year on the right foot. She utilized every relationship-building tool she had, every routines and procedures tool she had; she even spent hundreds of dollars on incentives, organization bins, and labels. Chelsea had prepared herself for the learning gaps that her students faced by creating pre-loaded pathway lessons to support concepts and skills that the students may have missed the previous year. What she had not expected, however, was the gap in social learning that the majority of her scholars exhibited. During the 2021-2022 school year, teachers just like Chelsea experienced something very similar. Ask any teacher around you, and more than likely, they will tell you that this previous school year was the most challenging yet! Our learners were more impulsive, emotionally charged, and anxious than ever, and we were not adequately prepared to support them.

We must learn from this previous school year. It would be insane for us to assume that this next year will be any different. To strengthen our “Beginning of School Year” procedures, there are 10 actions that will meet the needs of our learners and set the foundation for optimal learning. (See table on page 7.)

The 2022-2023 school year is steadily approaching, and for optimal learning to occur in our classrooms, many of the behavioral distractions we experienced this last year must be minimized. Structure is critical, and we cannot assume that our scholars have the tools necessary or know how to demonstrate the expectations. Most importantly, I stress the power of student-teacher-family relationships. Relationships go far beyond cordial conversations and the occasional visit to an extra-curricular event. Don't get me wrong, these are important, but the post-COVID learner needs to know that there are clear and safe procedures and expectations in the classroom. Our scholars deserve an educator who supports their goals, holds them to high expectations, and provides them with the social tools necessary to succeed.



Continued on next page

Starting the school year with a new vision of structure (continued)

10 Steps to Strengthen Your Classroom Environment for the 2022-2023 School Year	
Establish relationships and communication before the first day of school	If you receive your rosters before the first day of school, send communication to the student and their family. Introduce yourself, establish a Zoom meet and greet, and ask your scholars questions about themselves. By doing this, you open up the line for communication and already gain insight into the individuals who will be with you throughout the year.
Greet every learner at the door—every day	First impressions are everything. No matter the age, scholars want to know that their teacher is going to be friendly and care for them. On the first day, shake their hands (or fist bump), and ask them to introduce themselves. By doing this, you are demonstrating a social skill that many of our youth are missing—how to greet someone. Continue to do this every day. Believe me, it truly will make a difference.
Establish a no cell phone classroom	If you would have asked me pre-COVID to do this, I might roll my eyes and state that I have bigger fish to fry than battle cell phones; however, our learners have been inundated with screens, and it has created an overly anxious society. Consider the fights that broke out in your classroom or on your campus this previous year. The majority of them were instigated or perpetuated via social media or text messaging. Establish from day 1 the expectation and communicate the reasons. Communicate these reasons to the families as well. You can set up charging stations in your classroom to encourage students to part with their phones for the duration of your class.
Avoid having students use their computers for the first 10 days	Many of our districts have moved to a 1-1 model. This is great, and we know that purposeful technology use is imperative for our scholars to obtain real-world experience; however, much of the rage and social anxiety we witnessed this last year was from excessive exposure to screen time. The frontal cortex is still developing during these formative years, and this is the time that our scholars develop the ability to problem-solve and control their emotions. With the overuse of computers, individuals are weakening their ability to think critically and rationally. Before asking students to jump on a computer, spend time getting to know them, teaching them how to hold conversations, and solve problems on their own.
Teach technology etiquette	Once it is time for students to engage in personal technology, teach them how to do it. Do not assume they already know, no matter their age. Create posters for technology etiquette and outline the expectations and procedures for use. Rehearse these strategies, and provide immediate feedback on use.
Practice routines and procedures	When I mention this one, I usually get a groan of frustration from teachers at the secondary level; however, this is crucial. Whether you teach 5-year-olds or 18-year-olds, routines and procedures need to be clearly outlined, practiced, and reinforced. Many of our students suffer from trauma, and let's face it, COVID did not help the situation. Even our most obstinate learners thrive when there are clear routines, procedures, and expectations. This structure provides a safe and nurturing environment. I recommend spending the first six weeks of school reviewing these routines and procedures and practice, practice, practice. You will be exhausted, but by the seventh week, it will be smooth sailing.
Foster autonomy through the co-creation of classroom contracts	This is an oldie but goodie. When students have a say in the classroom norms, student norms, teacher norms, and consequences, they have a belief in the system. Once the contract has been created, communicate this contract with the students and their families. Reinforce them daily and praise the positive!
Establish a clear line of communication	I am a huge fan of Remind 101. It is free and easy to use, and you can communicate with students and families without displaying your phone number. Even at the secondary level, scholars and their families appreciate reminders, updates, and pictures. I don't know about you, but I still want to receive pictures and updates on my daughter's learning when she is in high school. By communicating this way, you invite parents/guardians to stay "in the know" of what is going on in their child's life. When you do this, you build the bridge between school, the learner, and their home.
Create a safe learning environment by modeling and practicing how to have academic conversations	Host daily academic conversation circles regularly the first few weeks of school. Engage students in fun and interesting conversations after modeling and providing expectations. Students can discuss topics of interest while you provide immediate feedback on the process. As the weeks progress, strengthen their conversations by switching to academic inquiry and concepts. Reinforce the expectations and procedures. It is all about practice and feedback!
Establish goal setting and monitoring system	Individual student efficacy can be fostered and grown through the use of purposeful goal setting and regular monitoring. Meet with students one-on-one to discuss their learning goals and offer a clear tracking system. It may take some time to do this, but start from the first week of school. It will set the expectation that goal setting is a part of the culture in the classroom, and it will help you foster relationships with your learners.

Through a teacher's eyes

By Eva Goins, Vice President-Elect

I often tell my students that I wish they could see themselves through my eyes. I am usually greeted with one of two reactions: confusion or enlightenment. Too often our young students do not see their emerging gifts, talents, or abilities. As their teacher, it is my job to not only teach them the required skills, but to also cultivate who they are or will become as a person in their future.

The beginning of the year is paramount in setting up a safe environment where all students feel part of a group of people that are welcoming and are working toward a common goal. There are many ways to accomplish this task. The first thing I do

is memorize all of my students' names by the end of the first Friday of the first week of school. On the first day of school, I have them fill out a Google Form where they will phonetically spell their name for me, and I utilize every moment possible to practice saying their names correctly.

Each class period, I stand at my door and won't let them into my classroom until I have greeted them and have called them by their name. There is so much power in knowing your students' names. My heart breaks when it is almost winter break and students tell me that some of their teachers don't know their names yet. I know the number of students on our rosters grows more and more with every passing year, but it is our responsibility to know all of our students.

Building a rapport with your students takes some time and effort on a teacher's part, but the end rewards will outweigh any work at the beginning. Students will work up to and usually surpass your expectations that you set if they feel that you genuinely care about them. I have witnessed teachers that are experts in their subject but don't spend the time making connections with their students, and they struggle with classroom management and effectively teaching their lessons. I have also witnessed teachers that learn alongside their students and have a strong connection, and both teacher and students grow immensely throughout the school year.

Another way to build a strong relationship with your students

to have a successful year is to do whisper walks throughout the year with them. I do whisper walks at least twice a year, and more often if I feel as if my class needs it.

I do the first whisper walk before Thanksgiving break. By this time, I have almost three months of knowledge about my students. I dim the lights in my classroom and find a soft song to play in the background. I tell the students what I am doing and ask them to lay their heads down on their desk. I instruct students that don't want to participate to keep their heads up and I will move past them when I get to them. It never fails; almost every

class will have a few students that keep their heads up, but they decide to lower their heads after they see what the whisper walk entails. I go to each student that has their head down and I whisper to them why I am thankful for them and the strengths and abilities I see in them. The words that I tell my students are one hundred percent impromptu. Most students will give me a huge smile or hug. Some will just nod and put their head back down. Some will cry and need a tissue. Every student is different in how they react to the whisper walk, but one thing is certain,

after the whisper walk, I feel more connected with my students.

I will conduct the whisper walk again before the end of the school year. Instead of telling them why I am thankful for them, this time around I tell them what I've noticed about them this school year as well as what I see as their talents and gifts. I also give them their well wishes for high school. During this round, as the year closes, I tend to get emotional alongside my students.

Take every opportunity you have to get to know your students, and it will have amazing dividends toward your and their success and how much you each grow in a school year. As the new school year approaches and students are coming back to fill our classrooms, it is important to spend the time getting to know your students and building the foundation that your entire school year will be built upon.



Building relationships and supporting diverse cultures using children's books

By Angie Durand and Mary E. White, Co-Editors, *English in Texas*

The Need for Relationship Building with Our Students

Before we can teach, we must first touch. When we get to know each of our students as a person, they are more open to listening to lectures. (Well almost always.) That means if we are to build rapport with our students, we might focus on



knowing at least three to five unrelated academic aspects of this student. Do they like sports? What is their favorite meal? What about their pet? What is their favorite genre? Do they sleep late or rise early? What is their favorite video game? Do they wear a certain name-brand shoe? These are just some starters. If we focus on building rapport first, the teacher-student relationship will automatically follow.

Diverse Cultures

An average person can belong to as many as 13 diverse cultures at one time. Think about all these cultures as interests, traditions, and familial routines rather than just ethnicities. When your students walk into the classroom, imagine you see them wearing all these cultural labels. Any one of these labels can be a conversation starter. Even more so,



any one of these labels can be an entry point that draws them into a particular content.

For example, perhaps you have a student that wears the jersey of a favorite athlete. You can first make the connection about the athlete and the sport itself. If you do not know about either, this gives the student the opportunity to share knowledge with you, the teacher. Then you have a platform to share this interest and make the connection to the content of the course you are teaching such as asking the students to draw or write about what kind of jersey they would expect to see on Christopher Columbus. Or have students design a Civil War jersey for either of the armies and then give supporting details. The details should be equal to the ones the student was able to give you regarding that favorite sports hero.

How To Include Youth and Teenagers through Books

So how do we include children's literature across cultures and interests? By providing books of the same cultural categories too. It is fortunate that we are in a literary age where books are written across a myriad of nationalities and interests. Their award-winning authors look like our students and have the same interests. You are one Google search away from discovering them.

One such way to use children's books to make a direct connection with your students is to simply start with their names. Try to find a book that includes the names of your students in it. A connection to Sally could be made with *Silly Sally* by Audrey Wood or to Sally in one of the *Bailey School Kids* books. Linking to the same name can open the door for students to share why they have the specific name, thus an opportunity to share family culture. You can also compare the character's attributes from the text to the student's attributes, using the text as a vehicle to open the doors of communication, while building trust.

Occasionally students are teased about their cultural hair styles. Level the playing field by reading books such as *I Love My Hair!* By Natasha Anastasia Tarpley or *Nappy Hair* by Carolivia Herron.

To add books and conversations about diverse religions and races, check out *I Am Whole: A Multi-Racial Children's Book Celebrating Diversity* by Shola Oz. For authors of adolescent literature, you may want to investigate the works by Angie

Thomas and Jacqueline Woodson.

Overall, once we establish a rapport with our students, the next step is to locate books that sound like, look like, and act like the students you **have**—not the students you want to have. You might want to read them first though. Who knows? You just might learn something new.

Supporting language acceleration in diverse classrooms

By Isabel Tuliao, Recording Secretary

Diversity goes beyond skin color, appearance, and socio-economic status. In the classroom, diversity comes in the form of language, nationality, religious beliefs, and life experiences—all factors that dictate how a student can give and receive information and ideas. I vividly remember the time when I told my mentor, “Language represents culture, and we have to take a stance of appreciation instead of stigmatizing pronunciation or lack of, especially in the classroom.”

I grew up as a simultaneous bilingual. I was fortunate enough to learn Tagalog and English at the same time. I even received the English and Journalism award when I graduated from high school. Upon arriving here in the United States, people will be shocked to hear me speak fluent English. “How come your English is good?”—a common comment I get when meeting people. I bite my tongue to not say, “It is *not* supposed to be?”

You probably detect a hint of sourness from my inner thoughts, but that was my experience as an adult immigrant. Now imagine a student coming from another country, possibly a different time zone, eager to know more about a new place and its people, only to be ushered into a room where the first thing that gets slapped into their face is the rules of conventions. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, subject, predicate, subject-verb agreement, and don’t forget the six-syllable types. Instead of being asked where he/she/they are from and what holidays and traditions they celebrate, they are asked and assessed if they know the letter names and sounds of the English alphabet. Don’t get me wrong, knowing the alphabetic principle is necessary. It equips you to know the language, but there are better ways to make language acquisition more inviting and humanizing. So, my question to you now is, “How do we create safe spaces and opportunities to accelerate language acquisition in the literacy classroom?”

First and foremost, do not be the grammar police. I was once invited to eat lunch with my new co-workers. One by one, they introduced themselves to me, and one of them was a self-proclaimed grammar cop. Guess what I did? I avoided speaking to her the whole hour we were together out of fear that she’ll catch me saying something grammatically incorrect. And worse, she’ll correct me in front of the whole group! She was a really sweet and nice person, but I feared rejection and opted to preserve the little confidence that I have as an English language learner. That whole hour was wasted when I could have known her better as a person and co-worker. The same thing applies to our students. When they are always corrected for doing something wrong, we send the message that they are not up to par to the standards that invisibly exist, that they are not enough, and there is something wrong with them that needs fixing. Remember that behavior that is praised gets repeated, so always look for actions and efforts that need to

happen continuously and praise them generously.

The next thing that I want to say is normalize mistakes. Approximation is part of learning. It is when things are not too easy and not too hard. For students who are acquiring a new language, they are approximating their way through language and literacy development. They will make mistakes, and we need to create a culture that acknowledges mistakes and supports the next steps moving forward. It shouldn’t be yes or no, correct or incorrect all the time. One way to do this is to provide students with progressions as a tool to guide their work and serve as a goal setting guide. I was inspired by the work of Valentia Gonzalez (2019) when it comes to sentence stems. I combined this with the idea of using progressions, which I learned from the staff developers at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. This led me to create tiered sentence stems for students to use as a tool whenever they are expected to turn and talk to a partner and share responses. It can also be a way to introduce simple, compound, and complex sentences to emergent bilinguals.

Progression of Talk

★	★★	★★★	★★★★
Allow newcomers to use body responses such as nodding, smiling, or thumbs up to express agreement to your statements about _____.	{Character A} is _____.	{Character A} is _____, but _____.	In the text it says _____ This makes me think _____.

Lastly, embrace your students’ language and culture and learn from them as well. My former sixth grade students would get a kick out of hearing me pronounce a word that has the letter ‘r’ sound—i.e. calling Rolando’s attention because he keeps talking to his seatmate. Instead of saying Row-lan-dough I would say Rrrrrrrro-lan-doh. And I realized that it’s a connection that I have with them since my first language, Tagalog, is phonics-based just like Spanish. Another one of my favorites is the pupusa that one of my parents sent me for breakfast. Up to this day, I cannot forget its savory taste as well as the perfect acidity of the freshly-made pickled cabbage that accompanied the dish. My student was late to class that day because she waited for her mama to finish preparing the pupusas for which I really did not mind.

All this I remember because, as humans, we are wired to connect and share our experiences and beliefs with others. In terms of language learning, looking for similarities first before pointing out differences while using appropriate tones and gestures is a huge investment that pays off and goes a long way.

Language empowerment in South Texas

By Donna Herrera, Middle School Section Chair

Rio Grande Valley harbors such a unique experience for both the student and the educator. An area of 94% Hispanic/Latino, we are so proud of our culture, language, *y comunidad*.

The valley consists of blended bilingual programs in which many districts advocate for dual immersion learning to strengthen students in English and their native language, mainly Spanish. With this in mind, the curriculum used in the classrooms needs to be adaptable and inclusive of our students' needs and experiences. South Texas has kept evolving to fit those needs. The curriculum isn't simply about cognates, differentiation strategies, pronunciations, etc.; it is the emotional connection and purpose behind how it is being taught and how it is being received. A student at any age adopting a new language will face many insecurities and a sense that what they may have to say can only be done correctly in English. But that is far from the truth.

A typical day in my classroom goes like this...During a quick-write, a student feels inspired to write a poem in Spanish. As we share our pieces, they preface that it is in Spanish, then ask if it's okay. "Yes! Of Course! Let's hear it!" The class listens and comments on the rhythm, and discussion erupts, "What else were you trying to convey? What if you add..." The author will reply, "Ay! ¡No pensé en eso!" As a class, we excitedly separate ourselves to the dry erase boards on the walls, each putting their pieces with others, creating a poem of their own. Some students try to emulate the same student-made poem in English while keeping the same theme and rhythm. We discuss that a direct translation doesn't always keep the same *soul* of the poem—the rhythm. Other students keep certain lines "because it just sounds so much better in Spanish." We bring it to a close and continue throughout

connects us and inspires us.

I think back to when that same student was hesitant to write anything because the words they wanted to write down were in Spanish. Let's dive into it! Let's talk about it! What started as hesitation now becomes confidence in their code-switching abilities, and they see English as less intimidating, a new creative outlet.

Aside from the English language being intimidating, the next hurdle is bringing relevance to their lives in an English-speaking world. We can read texts about Louis Armstrong or Miles Davis and explore the significance of jazz in United States history. But we can also bring it back home, "Who here has heard 'La Vida es un Carnaval' by

Celia Cruz?" A few raise their hands, then many more once I play it for them. The students mention it's ALWAYS played in *quinceas, bodas, en los bailes*. Their parents dance or they dance with their parents; we stand and dance cumbia in class. "But Miss, that doesn't sound like Armstrong...", but at precisely minute 2 on the 47th second there is a sudden change in rhythm. Salsa. They notice the shift in tempo, too.

Their cumbia stops for a moment because they're interested why it is suddenly different if they have heard it many times. This is the exact moment to switch gears. This is *Latin Jazz*. Conversations of similar songs they grew up listening to, not ever knowing they were jazz.

Then the moment of connection and clarity. A discussion of how we can all influence each other erupts immediately after. We thought ourselves to be the other, and in reality we share so many more commonalities with our world regardless of language, geological location, and culture.

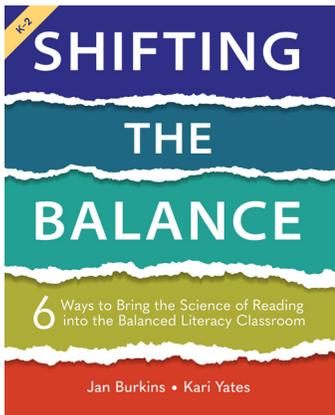
That is the power of language. That is the power of a bilingual environment. This is not just a lesson in isolation; numerous teachers who are native Spanish speakers themselves see the value in bilingualism for communication and self-expression. The Valley embraces and encourages its community, welcomes diversity, values the importance of bilingual education, and acknowledges the need for an authentic representation of bilingualism outside the Rio Grande Valley. Why? Porque el lenguaje es union. Es poder.



the lesson to reference the brilliant connections or themes inspired by that student-made poem. Our spontaneous detour only strengthens the lesson and their understanding. Language

Book review: *Shifting the Balance: 6 Ways to Bring the Science of Reading into the Balanced Literacy Classroom* by Jan Burkins and Kari Yates

By Markesha Tisby, Elementary Section Chair



We are currently living in a time when everyone has an opinion about how students learn to read and the best ways to ensure that all students learn to read. While seemingly common terms are thrown around like confetti, the lack of truly common language sprinkles discord between those whose unity students would benefit from the most. Literacy leaders, Jan Burkins and Kari Yates have authored a much-needed text for primary teachers

in *Shifting the Balance: 6 Ways to Bring the Science of Reading into the Balanced Literacy Classroom*.

Although the text specifically targets K-2 teachers, its contents would benefit literacy practitioners who work with a range of

readers as well as those with a range of experience in the field. This roadmap helps to bridge the gap between science and current instructional practices all while lifting the level of reading instruction. The text is written in such a way that the information provided remains precise and scientific yet non-threatening; competing ideas are revealed as complementary. This creates a safe space for its readers to review, reflect, and revise their classroom practices with grace or celebrate those that are in alignment with science and balance.

Beyond the introduction, the reader finds six chapters or shifts: Rethinking How Reading Comprehension Begins, Recommitting to Phonemic Awareness Instruction, Reimagining the Way We Teach Phonics, Revising High-Frequency

Word Instruction, Reinventing the Ways We Use MSV (3 Cueing Systems), and Reconsidering Texts for Beginning Readers. Burkins and Yates structure each chapter identically. They present a common instructional practice to reconsider, explore several common misunderstandings, provide scientific research, propose the instructional shift, and share instructional routines for immediate implementation. This body of work assists literacy educators in being responsive to student needs while employing a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction. Our hope lies in the fact that “many educators—whether ‘balanced literacy’ or ‘science of reading’ proponents—are gravely concerned and committed to disrupting systems that perpetuate reading failure” (Burkins & Yates, 2021, p. 2).

Reference:

Burkins, J., & Yates, K. (2021). *Shifting the balance: 6 ways to bring the Science of Reading into the balanced literacy classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Stenhouse Publishers.



2019 Affiliate
Website of Excellence Award



2019 Affiliate
Journal of Excellence Award



2020 Affiliate
Newsletter of Excellence Award

Changing our relationship with literacy

By Meredith Lee, Editor, *Texas Voices*

Many of us became literacy teachers because we fell in love with reading and/or writing. I grew up loving books, dreaming of writing my first novel, and using words to spar in matches of wit. As a new teacher, I was convinced that I was going to change the minds of my students who hated English—they were going to walk out of my classroom loving Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and appreciate analyzing the earthy complexity of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. I worked hard to find creative ways to contort traditional reading and writing to appeal to my students. And while, for a select few, this worked, most trudged through the literature and essays, humoring me.

During the 2020-2021 school year, I had the opportunity to go back into the classroom because of the need for virtual learning during COVID. It was here that my students taught me that literacy was more than literature and essays. One of my students was incredibly adept with makeup, she even had her own YouTube channel; another was designing his own video game, writing pages and pages of background information essential to the lore of the game; another was using her Instagram account to combat narrow definitions of what athletes’ bodies should look like. All of these students were engaging in serious literacy activities, none of which fit neatly in the traditional boundaries of school literacy. The STAAR test wouldn’t recognize their ability to script and edit a video, develop complex worlds, characters, and rules, or curate social media posts that challenged societal norms. Each of these students had been underserved by traditional literacy classroom practices that labeled them “Struggling”, “At Risk”, or “Did Not Meet.” I realized that I needed to “break up” with my narrow view of literacy.

This past year, feeling wiser after seeing the dynamic literacies of my students from the year before, I again had the opportunity to teach because of teacher shortages. I had a class of ninth grade STEM students that, despite their adeptness in math and science, often struggled in English and would loudly declare that they *hated* reading and writing. After listening to them talk to each other about video games for a semester, my colleagues and I changed the final project for the semester from a literary analysis essay to a video game design project. Students had to analyze short stories of their choosing and create video games inspired by the themes, motifs, and symbols of those stories. Their goal was to “pitch” their game at the end of the project to be developed by a video game company. It was a resounding hit. Students that never participated before became animated; they went above and beyond the requirements of the project, some choosing to develop

concept art, coding demos, and developing 3D models.

They had to defend their choices, connecting back to central themes. Not only were students drawing from literature, but they also drew from their own video game literacies (Did you know that according to Entertainment Software Association [2021] 76% of Americans under 18 play video games?). At the end of the project, one student wrote, “I never felt like English class was for me before, but this project made me look forward to it every day.” These students were practicing literacy in complex ways that challenged and excited them, even if it looked a little different.



Literacy, when we allow our definitions of it to broaden, becomes active instead of passive. It is something that we *do* instead of something to be learned. I have begun to question more and more why we insist on perpetuating the reading of Shakespeare and the incessant writing of literary analysis when these practices are only meaningful to 1% of our students and do not reflect how they (or most of us) practice literacy in the real world.

As a literacy coach, I conducted hundreds of writing conferences a year and almost every single one of them began with the student saying, “I’m not a good writer,” only to discover that they wrote their own poetry or fanfiction or music or scripts for YouTube. The message they had received from traditional classroom literacies was, “What you do doesn’t count.”

So what if we did make it count? What if we embraced students’ literacies, whether it is playing video games (James Gee has a wonderful book called *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*), dancing and/or singing (one year I had a group of girls choreograph and film an interpretive dance about child abuse as part of a rhetoric project—it literally made me cry), developing media content or campaigns (Mirra and colleagues [2018] had students document their crumbling school building and present a documentary to their school board), or the diverse ways they and their families engage with language (oral history projects are powerful for all ages)?

Brian Street (2012) poignantly explained that “literacy not only is not the royal route to liberation, but is as often a means of enslavement” (p. 32). I think back to my first few years of teaching where I held my students’ creativity and proficiency captive by narrowly prescribing literary analysis and tired literature. When I changed my relationship with literacy, it changed my students’ relationships with it too.

It’s time we all “break up” with traditional, narrow notions of what counts as literacy, and let our students lead the way.

Continued on next page

Changing our relationship with literacy (continued)

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Crucial conversations

By Charles Moore, President-Elect

The other day, in a debrief session following day two of a remote summer conference, one of the teachers with whom I work invited me into an amazing conversation.

He complimented one of the speakers—@ me on twitter if you want to know who—and shared with me how impressed he was with the speaker's gravitas and presence on the stage. Even over an internet connection, the passion and strength of this speaker's exigence was palpable. The teacher talked about the awe he felt just listening to and watching the man on the big screen in our auditorium.

I had to admit to my colleague that I too was struck by the conviction and capacity of the man speaking to us. His posture, perfectly balanced. His voice, strong and deep. His tone, pitch perfect. For 90 minutes, he spoke to us about the needs of teachers and solutions that would help us o'erleap our obstacles. The words were precise, perfect in cadence and sound, as he wove dozens of threads of thoughts into a tapestry that represented a call-to-action for educators. Teachers and administrators, he professed, must commit to the collaborative processes and systems that support learners and, according to the research, lead to high levels of growth and achievement for students and their schools.

So as this teacher and I ruminated on our shared learning experience, I couldn't help but point out—steer the conversation through this powerful shared connection—that the speaker took his power not so much from the knowledge he had gained from a decorated career as a change leader, but from a place internal where he had taken ownership of the ideas through writing and presenting to others.

This was the key idea I wanted to communicate: humans internalize and take ownership of knowledge, skills, and dispositions when they imprint their learning through their writing and the opportunity to share their learning with others. This is true of our students as much as it is the thought leaders to whom we listen and subscribe. The adults get to consider themselves writers and presenters. So, too, should our students. Simply inviting students into a space where they have the opportunity to see themselves in the mirror with "writer" listed on their educational name badge can change the course of their lives. When we ask them to write from a place of authority or present to their peers, we present the opportunity for them, like our esteemed speaker, to internalize and "own" their knowledge.

If we want our students to exhibit the dispositions that we associate with critical thinkers, then we must demand it of them,

and of ourselves. We too, the best readers and writers in the classroom, must commit to the practice of writing and sharing, collaborating with our peers, coordinating with others in our profession to seek out and capture the best possible practices to engage in a continuous cycle of improvement. We are, of course, as dedicated professionals, committed to putting the best version of ourselves in front of kids every day. It is to this end that I implore my colleagues to both be writers, and teach writers. Be a presenter of new ideas, and teach the kids to do the same.

For those who want to write and can't find a place to do so, look at the links below for opportunities. This organization has multiple modalities built with the intent to serve writers and presenters. This publication, *Texas Voices*, acts as a sounding board for the ideas of our amazing board members and members of our organization who are comfortable with a newsletter format. If you have an idea that is more formal in nature, based on research, that would fit into a more scholarly arena, then *English in Texas* might be the place. Don't be intimidated by the perceived rigor of writing for a peer-reviewed journal. While our publication is academic with high standards and accomplished and esteemed editors, anyone can be supported through the process of publishing a scholarly article. I've heard they even let "old 'ball coaches" contribute.

Maybe you have an idea that's been percolating and you want to share it with others in a face-to-face way. That's where I want you to think hard about submitting a proposal for our 2023 conference. I remember that nervous moment before my first public (outside my district) presentation at the most recent conference in San Antonio. It was stressful and took time and concentration, but I haven't looked back, growing in strength and conviction ever since, standing grounded in the work, leaning into the research, striving to bring the best to those whom I can help.

Maybe one day someone will have the conversation I wrote about above, about me.

If you want someone to listen to your ideas, send me an email at mooreliteracy1@gmail.com. I'll get you some support.

Other ways to share your voice:

- *Texas Voices*: https://www.tctela.org/texas_voices
- *English in Texas*: https://www.tctela.org/english_in_texas
- TCTELA Conference Proposal: <https://ventureall.wufoo.com/forms/rza9syq0bms6kq>

TCTELA: You take me higher!

By Valerie Taylor, PD2Teach Liaison

At the end of her book *Being the Change: Lessons and Strategies to Teach Social Comprehension*, Sara K. Ahmed writes, “There is no magic formula for making the world a better place. It happens in the moments we break our silent complicity, embrace discomfort, and have candid conversations about what stands in the way.” Those of us who were fortunate to attend (in person or virtually) the TCTELA conference in February were privileged to hear Sara speak to us about the lessons and strategies she has used for just this kind of work. And then we had opportunities to sit and talk with other attendees who heard Sara’s words and wanted to join her in the work of making our world a better place.



These kinds of opportunities are just the kind of relationship-building (and world-building) ones that our organization offers us. I was fortunate to have been encouraged to join our organization in the fall of 1984 when it was called the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English (TJCTE). Dr. Joan Shiring, my methods professor at the University of Texas at Austin, strongly suggested that all of us in our class become members of TJCTE as well as NCTE, for she knew we could find professional homes there. And I have. In the almost forty years since I became a member of our organization, I have relied on the people who make this space and this place my professional home. From you all, I have learned, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to serve in leadership roles, to attend and present at conferences, to write for and read publications, to sit and visit with friends from around the state and the nation.

I believe strongly in the mission and vision of TCTELA and the people who lead and help to run our organization. Our mission states: “TCTELA will 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.” And our vision states: “The vision of TCTELA is to be recognized by educators, policy makers, and other stakeholders as a leading voice in the field of English language arts and reading.” How do we do this work—advancing literacy growth and being

recognized as a leading voice in the field? It begins with the voices of our members, and it grows with the relationships we develop as we share our voices. We (and I really do mean you and I) can help this web of relationships continue to grow by inviting (and maybe sponsoring) English Language Arts educators who have not yet found our organization or who belonged in the past but no longer do.

At the beginning of this century and at the end of her NCTE presidency, Anne Ruggles Gere shared in her keynote address that she had decided that she wanted to give money to the organizations that represent the things she lives for instead of organizations that try to prevent the things she might die of. That year, she inspired me to begin giving TCTELA memberships to other English Language Arts educators who might not otherwise join our organization. I continue to do this because I believe in the people who make up our organization, and I want others to find their professional home here as well. Our family of educators continually impresses me with our dedication to mentoring our members who want to serve as leaders for our organization, with our leadership’s openness to shifting our organization’s structure (sections instead of committees, for example), with our members’ enthusiasm for new conference formats (online, hybrid), with our sponsors’ support of our desire to learn together throughout the year (PD2Teach webinars, for example), with our newsletter and journal and social media presence and quality, with our collaboration with NCTE, and with our recognition of the need to respond and act to create a more diverse, equitable, and humane ways of teaching and being.

NCTE
National Council of
Teachers of English®

I am mostly just grateful that I belong to and in this organization (TJCTE, TCTE, and now TCTELA) and that it connects me with you as a fellow member, for I know that this connection, this relationship is one that allows me to “Surround [myself] only with people who are going to take [me] higher” (Oprah Winfrey).

Reference:

Ahmed, S.K. (2018). *Being the change: Lessons and strategies to teach social comprehension*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Too much equality, not enough equity

By Christina Cavness, Assistant Principal, Dickinson High School

As educators we are taught and believe that “all” students have the capacity to learn and grow. However, are we doing everything in our control to ensure that “all” students meet those outcomes, from our most enthusiastic all the way to our most challenging students?

The only way to truly answer this question is by reflecting on our practices and the path we have forged thus far. While the mirror can be a wonderful place because it allows us an opportunity to see our own beauty, it can also be intimidating as it forces us to see our flaws. The metaphorical mirror of education practitioners is no different from students. After surviving the Santa Fe school shooting in 2018, I took a hard look in this mirror. I felt defeated. I had gone to work every day and poured my heart into my students: every single one of them, just the same. Yet somehow there were still eight young adults and two colleagues who were staring back at me in the mirror.

That’s when I saw the problem.

It sounds so simple now, but not every one of my students needed the same amount of me each day. Some needed more, some needed less, and some needed the most. And every day it changed. A student who typically was a high achieving and self-sufficient human found out their parents were getting divorced. Meanwhile, a student who struggled with anxiety and required daily encouragement was offered a major role on the yearbook staff and gained confidence, even if only for a day. Roles reversed. Attention needs interchanged. This was the turning point in my career. I shifted from being equal to being equitable.

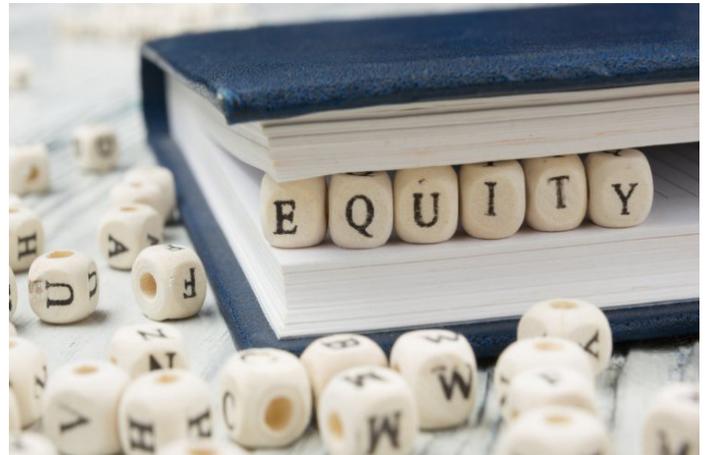


I began to look at every aspect of education with an equity lens and one guiding question... “*Is any student being excluded because of this _____ (assignment, lesson, policy, procedure, assessment, standard)?*” If the answer is yes, then something needs to be changed.

And so, my equity journey began.

Equality vs. Equity

Joseph Levitan (2016) notes the differences between equality and equity in his article “The Difference Between Educational Equality, Equity, and Justice... and Why It Matters.” What it really boils down to is that equality gives everyone the same



opportunity to achieve success. In the classroom this might look like giving every student two days to write an expository essay of the same prompt.

But EQUITY provides everyone with the appropriate tools they need individually to achieve that success. Looking back at the same expository writing assignment, we can now make this equitable by providing students with choice in the writing modality or perhaps not deducting “late points” for a student who took longer to grasp the expository task.

3 Focus Areas

The three areas of focus I found that teachers can have the most impact on to achieve equity in education are instruction, assessment, and relationships. While we would love to ensure that every policy in education was equitable, some things need to be left to the administrators to allow us more time to focus on the equity in our classrooms.

So, let’s take a shallow wade into these reflective waters...

Instruction consists of what we teach and how we teach it. Teachers invest time in the decision making process surrounding the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of lesson design, selecting the perfect text, focusing on the best strategy, agonizing over the structure and pace of lessons.

Assessment includes the way you assess student learning. Formative and summative. Formal and informal. Assessments should be just as useful for the students as they are for the teacher.

Relationships are how we interact with students, staff members and parents. Tone. Body language. Intentionality. Relationships are how we know when to show empathy and grace, or push for a higher level of accountability from our students.

In all three, we can take simple yet meaningful moves to improve equity. Let’s consider our instruction, assessments, and relationships.

Relevance - *Are our lessons relevant to our student population and do they matter to them?*

In my first semester this year I taught a lesson on “how-to” writing. I had a highly engaging lesson planned where I would have students write a “How-To Make a PB&J Sandwich” article, and then I would use their writing to demonstrate in class their

Continued on next page

Too much equality, not enough equity (continued)

actual products. Little did I know, almost every single one of my Emerging Bilingual learners was clueless as to *what* a peanut butter and jelly sandwich was. They were not common in their



home countries. Thus, I had unintentionally excluded half of my class with my pristine lesson. Knowing your students is the first step in ensuring lessons are relevant. Knowledge of their lives, desires, and goals will help you reframe lessons in a way that will connect to them.

Rigor - *Are our assessments rigorous and gauge student knowledge or are they just another check mark for our grade books?*

So often we assess students with no clear purpose in mind for the assessment except for the fact that the end of the grading period is approaching and we are still one assessment away from being in compliance with the grading guidelines. By knowing exactly what, why, and how we are assessing, we will be able to make use of the data more effectively, and so will our kids.

Expectations - *Are our expectations for learning, behavior, and communication clear and do we remind students of them daily?*

I have a seven-year-old daughter whose only chore is to feed our dogs every day. Yet, when we get home from school, I still have to remind her of this expectation. The students in our classrooms are no different. Our expectations must be reiterated and modeled daily so there can be no room for interpretation.

Equity isn't something we do to make our lessons more fun for our students or to be more "fair", rather equity is our duty. Dr. Anthony Muhammad said it best, "equity can never become a reality in education if it's viewed as charity instead of professional obligation."

As we move forward with planning for next year, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is any student excluded because of this?
2. Am I being intentional?
3. Is this what is best for students?
4. Who/what does this serve?
5. Is it equal, or is it EQUITABLE?

It is our obligation to ensure that a change is made. That change is equity in education.

Please join me at the Association of Teacher Educators conference in Nashville, Tennessee on Aug. 1 to continue this discussion.

Reference:

Levitan, J. (2016, May 2). The difference between educational equality, equity, and justice... and why it matters. *Forum of the American Journal of Education*. <http://www.ajeforum.com/the-difference-between-educational-equality-equity-and-justice-and-why-it-matters-by-joseph-levitan>

Call for submissions

Review the submission guidelines at https://www.tctela.org/english_in_texas.

English in Texas, Vol. 52.2 (Fall/Winter 2022)

Theme: Conference Theme: From Zed to Alpha: Reflecting on the past to teach for the future

Manuscript Deadline: September 1, 2022

Column Deadline: September 15, 2022

Call for Submissions: The Fall/Winter 2022 issue will focus on how the implementation of the 2017 ELAR TEKS has evolved during and after the pandemic, how the equity issues that have been raised have impacted the classroom work, and what Generation Alpha (those born in 2010 or later, following Gen Z) requires in our teaching. Principal Kafele (The Equity and Social Justice Education 50) has said, “Our work is more than just content and curriculum,” while Mark McCrindle, speaking of Generation Alpha, says that this generation, which will be the largest in the history of the world, is given “screens as pacifiers.” So how has this changed our teaching...or has it?

In this issue of *English in Texas*, we want readers to share their experiences and insights into how all the things that have happened since the 2017 TEKS were adopted have changed what happens inside the classroom in both the content and the curriculum. As you consider this, think about the following questions:

- How is Generation Alpha changing how we implement the TEKS in our classrooms?
- Are there particular strategies you use in language arts instruction that are specific to the needs of Generation Alpha?
- How are you using the ELAR TEKS and best practices to teach toward equity and social justice?
- Considering the trauma of COVID and other real-life occurrences, how do we ensure that our standards-based teaching is also relatable and that the social and emotional needs of both Gen Z and Generation Alpha students are met?
- What about texts/trade books? Are there particular ones you use to reflect the diversity in our state/classrooms? Which books have made the most impact on you and your students?

We welcome you to share your experiences and learnings through articles that are practical, research-based, and/or theoretical, as related to this topic of “From Zed to Alpha: Reflecting on the past to teach for the future.” Please refer to *English in Texas* on the TCTELA website https://www.tctela.org/english_in_texas for manuscript submission guidelines. Do not hesitate to contact the editorial team at EnglishinTX@hbu.edu should you have any questions.

Furthermore, we invite interested individuals to submit ideas for our Fall/Winter columns, “Putting It All Together” and “The Tech-Savvy Teacher” as related to the theme of “From Zed to Alpha: Reflecting on the past to teach for the future.” The below descriptions detail each column as well as provide information for contacting the editorial team regarding your column idea. Please query the editorial team BEFORE submitting your full column.

The columns to be published in this issue include:

Putting It All Together: This column focuses on how teachers differentiate for special populations, including gifted/talented, English learners, struggling readers, and other students with special needs. What experiences have you had in integrating reading, writing, listening, and speaking with these populations? What resources have you consulted? What challenges have you faced and how did you address them? To submit a column for publication consideration, please contact the editorial team at EnglishinTX@hbu.edu.

The Tech-Savvy Teacher: This column focuses on ways to incorporate technology into your daily teaching. What are some technology tools you have found useful? How do these tools inform your instruction? How do students respond to these tools? What is required to use these tools? To submit a column for publication consideration, please contact the editorial team at EnglishinTX@hbu.edu.

The Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts neither endorses nor opposes political candidates or parties. TCTELA encourages a free and open exchange of ideas. For this reason, the content of conference presentations or articles in *English in Texas* and *Texas Voices* may not necessarily reflect the views of TCTELA or its members.