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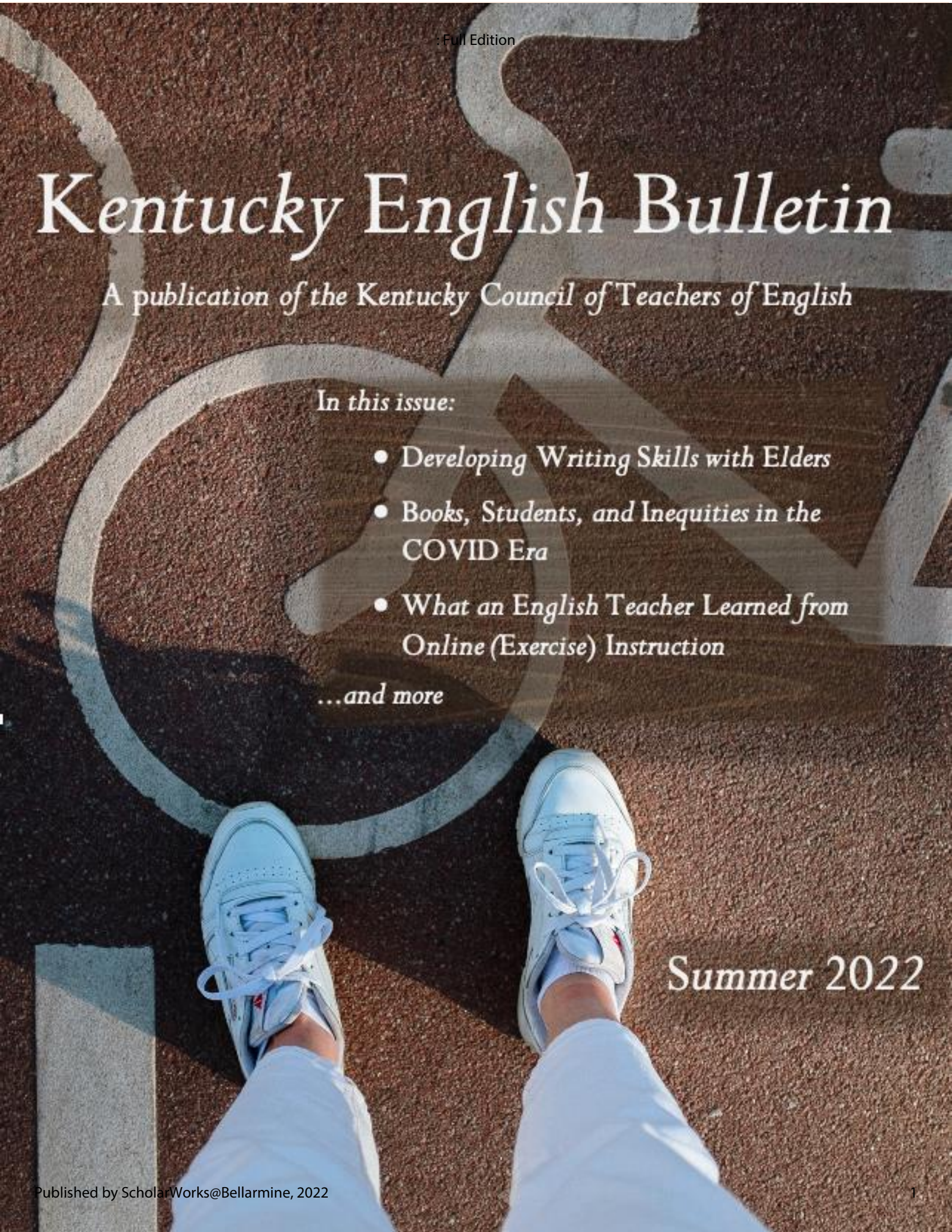
KEB Editorial Board



Kentucky English Bulletin

A publication of the Kentucky Council of Teachers of English

In this issue:

- Developing Writing Skills with Elders
- Books, Students, and Inequities in the COVID Era
- What an English Teacher Learned from Online (Exercise) Instruction

...and more

Summer 2022

If you are interested in serving as a reviewer for *KEB*, please send an email to Dr. Winn Wheeler at wwheeler@bellarmine.edu. Please include your experience and areas of interest.

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Eve Lee, editorial director

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Letter from the Editors

Greetings, KEB Readers—

For many educators, the 2021–2022 school year was one of the most challenging yet and record numbers of educators are leaving schools and classrooms. Summer break was a necessary pause from our new normal. Teachers and teacher educators though, have continued to find ways to engage students with literacies despite the challenges of the last two years. In this issue of *Kentucky English Bulletin*, we asked English educators to share about their own evolutions and the ways they reimagined their own teaching and learning.

In "Relationship-Rich Service Learning: Developing Writing Skills with Elders," Bedetti and Horn elevate the social and collaborative elements of writing in their remote partnership with a retirement community. College students collaborated with elders to help them share their stories in writing. In "Smart Home Gym Instruction and What an English Professor Learned from Spinning Her Wheels," Daoud draws lessons and inspiration from their own pandemic wellness practice on the stationary bike, reminding readers of humanizing practices that we might all strive to include in our teaching through thoughtful metaphor. Wilhoit's reflective piece, "Growing as a University English Teacher: Some Lessons Learned During the Pandemic," offers specific and tangible guidance for how online teaching practices could be incorporated into in-person classes. In "Reading for Change: Teachers Talk About Books, Students, and Inequities During the COVID-19 Pandemic," Anders offers a look at a teacher book club that grew into a larger study. Anders shares what took place in the book club and shares a reading list with readers who might also wish to engage with similar work in their own school or space. The final article, "Emerging From a Pandemic: The Evolution of the Classroom," written by Legget, Taylor, and Stanley, the authors reflect on individual experiences with pandemic-influenced teaching and learning. They share patterns and trends they noticed as in-person teaching resumed.

It is our hope that the generous reflections and thoughts of each contributor to this issue may serve as a springboard for you to consider what Fall 2022 may look like, or that our contributors' reflections may serve as inspiration for your own reflective practice as you rest before a new school year.

As we savor this break from the hustle of the school year, we hope that you are able to truly rest and nourish your spirit.

Warmly,

Elizabeth G. Dinkins, Ph.D.
Caitlin E. Murphy, Ph.D.
Winn C. Wheeler, Ph.D.
Co-Editors, *Kentucky English Bulletin*

Kentucky Council of Teachers of English/Language Arts Writing Contest for Students

Please support the efforts of KCTE/LA in recognizing the exceptional writing of your Kentucky students! We are pleased to announce that we have modified our writing contest with the following details:

- Elementary Level has now been split into Primary (grades K-2) and Intermediate (grades 3-5)
- Middle School is now Grades 6-8.
    - *If you are in a middle school with grade 5, you should choose Intermediate for your entry grade level.*
- Multimodal Composition is now a category for all grades.
    - *Multimodal compositions can be submitted as a variety of file types or a link to a video published online and include any compositions that incorporate two or more modes of creation, such as video, text, sound, voiceover, photographs (found or original), music, etc.*
- Be sure that all outside sources, including images and music, are properly cited.

Teachers with a first-place winner in any category will receive a $25 gift card and free KCTE/LA membership for the year. Please note this when you register for the conference.

General Guidelines:

Teachers may submit up to three (3) total student entries in each of the categories (for example, one middle school teacher may submit three student entries in the Narrative category, three entries in the Poetry category, and so on).

Remember: Teachers who submit more than three entries per category will be disqualified and all entries from the teacher will be disqualified.

For detailed information on guidelines, rules, and submissions, visit: https://www.kctela.org/writing-contest

Kentucky English Bulletin Call for Manuscripts

In their newly published Freedom to Teach Statement, NCTE (along with NCSS, NCTM, NSTA, and NCAC) states, "Teachers are being maligned as "harming" children and are subjected to constant scrutiny (and even direct surveillance) by many parents, school administrators, and activist groups. Some are afraid to offer their students award-winning books that may violate vaguely stated laws about teaching the history of racism or that may be misleadingly labeled as pornographic. As a result, teachers' very ability to do their job is under threat."

In this issue, we invite submissions in which authors share the ways they feel empowered in curricular decisions "to determine how to help young people navigate the psychological and social challenges of growing up."

- What inspires you as an educator?
- How do you know when it is time to make a change in your curriculum?
- How do you decide which texts your students need to hear and see in the classroom?
- How might writing help strengthen us as teachers and our students as "future members of a democratic society"?
- What texts, writing assignments, activities have helped students consider and engage with "making responsible and informed contributions and decisions about our world"?
- How can ELA be a place to engage students in change making?
- How might professional collaborations provide support in engaging curricular decisions that may be labeled controversial or deemed unlawful?

Please consider sharing the powerful work and thinking that you are doing in your classrooms with your students, PLCs, and/or individually.

Deadline: September 1, 2022

Author Guidelines:

The Kentucky English Bulletin (KEB) is the official journal of the Kentucky Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (KCTE). Published three times a year (including a student writing edition), the KEB circulates to all KCTE members, including English language arts teachers of elementary, middle, secondary, and college/university students. We seek a variety of submissions with this audience in mind, including feature articles, literary submissions, teaching ideas, recommendations for professional reading, reviews of YA and Children's Literature, and editorials.

Feature Articles

See the Call for Manuscripts section of this issue or the KCTE website: https://www.kctela.org/ky-english-bulletin-online for theme descriptions and full calls for submission.

Teachers as Writers: Poetry, Essays, Letters, and Short Stories

We accept literacy submissions of any genre including short fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, humor, and essays.

KEB Teaching Strategy Exchange

Submissions focused on classroom strategies and instruction to support the teaching of English Language Arts at all levels P-College. Descriptions of activities, practices, and procedures should be accompanied by relevant citations (as appropriate) and should include rationale, how methods were developed, modified, and used and for what purpose.

Professional Reading Recommendations

Short reviews of professional texts particularly those that have been recently published including such topics as instructional strategies, pedagogy, professional learning, and coaching as related to the teaching of English Language Arts.

What's New IN Young Adult/Children's Literature?

Short reviews of recently published (past five years) young adult and children's literature.

Speak Out: Professional Issues

Formatted as a "letters to the editor" sort of section, members are encouraged to share ideas, thinking, and arguments that are relevant to the teaching of English Language Arts.

Queries may be directed to the editorial board of the Kentucky English Bulletin:

Winn Crenshaw Wheeler at wwheeler@bellarmine.edu

Caitlin Murphy at cmurphy@bellarmine.edu

Elizabeth Dinkins at edinkins@bellarmine.edu

Manuscript Guidelines:

The following guidelines are intended to support authors' understanding of the preparation and submission of manuscripts to KEB. More detailed questions and other questions may be directed to the KEB editorial board:

- Winn Crenshaw Wheeler at wwheeler@bellarmine.edu
- Caitlin Murphy at cmurphy@bellarmine.edu
- Elizabeth Dinkins at edinkins@bellarmine.edu

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically and follow these formatting guidelines:

- 12-point font
- Double Spaced
- APA or MLA Style (consistent style should be evident within the text of the submission)
- Feature Articles 2,500–5,000 words; other areas 2,500 or less

Manuscripts should be submitted as two attachments in Microsoft Word:

1) Cover sheet that lists the title of the manuscript, author's name, school affiliation, telephone number, email address, and brief author bio.

2) Title of manuscript and manuscript text which should be free of references to the author's identity.

Manuscripts should be submitted via the links found on the KEB page of the KCTE website: https://www.kctela.org/ky-english-bulletin-online

Style Issues:

We do not accept the following:

- Term Papers
- Graduate Theses
- Dissertations

We encourage authors of such works to consider revision of part of the work as the central focus of feature article to the extent practices and information are relevant to teachers of English Language Arts.

Accepted manuscripts are edited in consultation with the principal author. Due to deadlines, editors reserve the right to make minor edits and revisions without seeking prior approval of the author.

Citations of the work of other authors and creators should be formatted using the current style manuals of APA or MLA. Citation style should be consistent throughout the written work.

Manuscripts must adhere to the NCTE Position Statement, "Statement on Gender and Language" found here: https://ncte.org/statement/genderfairuseoflang/.

Tables, graphs, charts, artwork, and photography should be the original work of the author or contain explicit permission from the source. These should be included as separate files rather then embedded files.

Permissions Policy:

As author, it is your responsibility to secure permission for copyrighted work that appears in your article. The author must pay any costs associated with permissions. Pseudonyms should be used to protect the identities of students. Any written work of students should have written documentation of permission from the student and from the parent if the student is a minor.

Manuscripts Review Process:

The editors will acknowledge receipt of your manuscript with an email. Each article is read initially for suitability for the Kentucky English Bulletin. If we think the article is not a good fit, we will let you know and offer alternatives to the extent possible.

After the initial review, the manuscript is shared with at least two reviewers. Reviewers provide feedback and a general recommendation about whether to accept, reject, or accept with revision the manuscript. Final determinations are made by the author. If revisions are needed authors will generally have 3–4 weeks to make them and resubmit the article. Once submissions are returned from reviewers, authors will be notified of the status of their work during the revision/editorial process. From the initial submission deadline to publication takes 4–6 months.

Relationship-Rich Service Learning: Developing Writing Skills with Elders

Gaby Bedetti and Lindsey Danielle Horn

Readers may remember going with their class, choir, or music teacher to perform at retirement homes. The teacher may have organized the annual recital at a senior community. Increasingly, people have deployed artistic and creative endeavors to combat ageism and help people stay vital and connected as they age (Gere; Ostriker; Wexler). During the 2020 pandemic, my college undergraduates collected memories *remotely* at a retirement community. The intergenerational collaboration gave voice to the elders by eliciting, recording, transcribing, editing, and submitting the stories for publication. Preserving oral history among nursing home populations promoted community literacy and provided psychological and physical benefits to elders and students alike through intergenerational relationships. What emerged from the pandemic is a relationship-rich technique for developing the student's writing and editing skills (Felton and Lambert).

To begin, I prepared for our activities by contacting area senior centers and resident communities to invite participation in our writing workshops. Through my friendship with a board member, we worked with a non-profit that has been providing housing to those in need since 1849, when it was called "Home of the Friendless" and served those left destitute by cholera outbreaks. A colleague was kind enough to lend us recorders from the Oral History Center since pandemic conditions did not permit face-to-face encounters between the students and the seniors. Finally, we are grateful to the Kentucky Foundation for Women and Eastern Kentucky University for supporting the project.

The Teacher's Goals

English teachers are aware that one of the last skills their students develop is editing, partly because writers are too close to their material to see it from the reader's perspective. According to one writer's ePortfolio, "Surprisingly, the most beneficial process was the peer reviews and professor suggestions. Hearing someone else's view has given me concrete ways to enhance my writing. Having another opinion and insightful feedback has allowed me to add depth to my writing." By working with the senior's narrative, the student collectors had an objectivity they would not otherwise have had. Like the peer reviewers in my writing courses, these students discovered they learned more about their own writing by helping shape the senior's narrative. As well, students were able to draw from their experiences with their grandparents and great-grandparents to bridge the gaps with the seniors. The students cultivated empathy through intergenerational relationships and developed writing and leadership skills while the elders experienced the pleasure of giving voice to their memories and sharing them with others.

From my perspective as an English teacher, the intergenerational collaboration successfully met the following goals:

- mentor undergraduate students in eliciting, recording, transcribing, editing, and submitting narratives for publication;
- develop the writing skills of seniors with an interest in leaving a legacy through their storytelling;
- combat ageism in the culture and help seniors stay vital and connected;
- cultivate intergenerational relationships with seniors and directors at the Ashland Terrace Retirement Community;
- be ambassadors for our schools and departments;
- make older women feel less socially isolated and invisible.

Significantly, partnering with an elder and experiencing writing as a social process provided students the motivation to prepare a polished oral history for publication. Each senior wrote five oral histories over five months. The weekly check-ins occurred by phone. This article follows one student from June to October 2020 through brief excerpts from her weekly reports (Assistants' Log: Collecting Memories Circle). Because situations related to aging are often difficult, the students had to accommodate hearing and seeing issues. Sadly, one of the senior storytellers died during the project. In all, we recorded, transcribed, and edited ten oral histories.

The Student's Experience

Fig. 1. Student recorder & editor

Fig. 2. Oral historian & storyteller (Reprinted with permission)

June 1, 2020: Meet, Greet, and Brainstorm First Prompt, Character Sketch

I (see fig. 1) was nervous, but she (see fig. 2) was talkative and made me feel welcomed. She decided that she wanted to write about Mr. and Mrs. Wallace. They were like parents to her, and she wanted to honor their memories. I assured her that I loved that idea. I'm not sure that we will ever use Zoom, because she uses the captions on her phone to understand what I'm saying.

June During the first month, Lindsey cultivated empathy by listening to her elder's needs, sharing her own experience, and establishing trust.

June 8, 2020: Develop Character Sketch

She is proud of what she's written so far. I don't think she realizes how funny she is. We ended the phone call after she gave me some good advice about sharing my feelings with people. She said that when she was growing up, her family didn't talk about things. She is glad that she can be open with her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and even strangers like me now. She likes the world better that way, and I think I do, too.

June 15, 2020: Edit Character Sketch

It was the first phone call where we really connected. She also impressed me, because as she read the papers aloud, she caught the exact mistakes I planned to talk to her about. Since she has a caption phone, we agreed that it would be easiest to discuss our main concerns over the call, then I could send her small corrections with the transcript. She begged me to organize it better, even though I assured

her it was a good start and even better than some of the first drafts I had.

June 22, 2020: Proofread Character Sketch

She agreed that I could make the revisions on my own, which I didn't want to do because I wanted the story to stay in her voice, but I suppose it's the best option. Maybe she was having an off day. We all have those sometimes.

June 29, 2020: Rehearse for Videotaping

The conversation led to us adding each other on Facebook, and her excitement about that made me happy. She wanted to show off pictures of her cat, Prissy, and she said she considers us friends now.

July 6, 2020: Brainstorm Second Prompt, a Significant Place

She already started her story about Germany. I asked her questions so she would elaborate on certain details that needed to be clearer, and she was eager to tell me more.

July In the second month, Lindsey honed editing skills by asking questions, reading aloud, making notes, and appreciating the writer's personal qualities.

July 20, 2020: Editing a Significant Place

When we first got on the phone, she expressed how much she loved the story and how few changes she wanted to make. I encouraged her to read the story aloud, though, to catch anything either of us missed. We found a few more errors, with the chronological order. I let her know I would fix them and send her another copy as well as do the illustrations this week.

July 27, 2020: Proofread a Significant Place

She made notes before I called so she could tell me what I needed to revise. She's getting the hang of our routine, and it makes me so happy. She went on to tell me about how her life changed after the pandemic. One of her biggest disappointments is not being able to go to the YMCA anymore. She told me that one of her friends there told everyone in their group that Diane hadn't been there because she was in jail. It cracked me up! That's what they call quarantine, but I can just imagine all the senior women wondering what Diane's in jail for. I love her sense of humor and the role it plays in her storytelling.

August 3, 2020: Brainstorm Third Prompt, the Pandemic

Each time I talk to her, I feel like I learn a little bit more about her heart. For example, even though they can't celebrate residents' birthdays with big parties right now, she colors pictures for the other residents and slips them under their doors when it's their birthday weeks. Speaking of her birthday is August 28th. I'd like to do something nice for her.

August 10, 2020: Develop the Pandemic Story

Diane was a little tired this morning. She was up late, messaging me about the story, and she didn't sleep that well. She read me her answers to my questions about the story, which helped me elaborate on a lot of the paragraphs we already had.

August 17, 2020: Edit the Pandemic Story

She was very chipper. She let me know she got her birthday presents and was very thankful. We read through the story in its entirety (I think) for the first time. She didn't have a lot of revisions. She added to a couple paragraphs and corrected some of my wording.

August In the third month, Lindsey connected with Diane by remembering experiences with her grandparents to show her understanding of elders.

August 26, 2020: Proofread the Pandemic Story

We discussed the letter that she needs to start for next week. She plans to write to her daughter, Jean, who lives in Lawrenceburg, Kentucky. She said that Jean was her wild child, so she will be easy to write about.

September 2, 2020: Brainstorm Fourth Prompt, Letter to a Young Person

I let her know that there was a lot she could elaborate on and/or add and she encouraged me to text her questions to get her thinking about what else to write before next time.

September In the penultimate month, the writing pair achieved an energizing synergy, the writer leading the editor and the editor learning from the writer.

September 7, 2020: Develop Letter to a Young Person

I feel like as soon as we really get comfortable with each other, the program is going to end! Diane and I made plans to see each other after the pandemic though. She wants me to meet her cat, Prissy, and some of the other residents that she's close to. What sparked our personal conversation today was when she got a notification about the U.S. sending troops to Iran. It led to wholesome conversations about Facebook, politics, and people of color. I'm glad that she is at least a little progressive. She wants to learn as much as she can about other cultures. She told me about her brothers and sisters of color at church and a mother and son who graduated from college with theology degrees and wanted to lead a Hispanic group for the ESL congregation members. I was thrilled! My uncle is from Mexico, and he'd love to hear about the things she told me. She even taught me a few Spanish words that I didn't already know, which she also did with German when we wrote her story about Germany. I'm learning from her!

September 14, 2020: Edit Letter to a Young Person

Today, Diane read the entire letter aloud. She had two or three corrections. Then we went through each of the pictures she sent me, and she explained who everyone was and where they took the photos. That way, I could compose the captions before our next call. Other than that, we talked about the pandemic. I was glad to hear that Ashland Terrace held Bingo the other night. They also allowed residents time for visitors to see them outside, as long as they social-distanced and wore masks. Diane's family is busy, but she hopes to see them soon, even though the mask-mandate is difficult for her.

September 23, 2020: Proofread Letter to a Young Person

I texted her after the phone call and prompted her with questions so she would be prepared when we discussed the new story.

October 5, 2020: Brainstorm Prompt, Aging

She added to the story and gave me a lot to encourage her to expand on. For example, she talked about how all the ladies at Ashland Terrace were sisters, so I prompted her to tell me about some of her favorite residents. It makes me excited to meet them when I'm able to visit.

October In the final month of working together, Lindsey and Diane acknowledged a pride in the writing they had produced and in their rich relationship.

October 12, 2020: Develop Piece on Aging

She added a final paragraph and encouraged me to add a paragraph in the middle about different residents at Ashland and how they are good examples of aging by staying positive.

October 19, 2020: Revise Piece on Aging

She had a fall this morning, so we chose to take the day off and take it easy.

October 26, 2020: Proofread Piece on Aging

My final phone call with Diane was bittersweet. She read the story aloud one last time and made one or two corrections. She also told me how she read it to her friend, Vena, who she mentioned in the story. Of course, Vena loved it. Brittany also received her letter from several weeks ago and was in awe. Diane complimented me as an editor and told me that Brittany liked how we wrote and polished the works together. We talked about how happy we both were that we did the project and decided on her story about Mr. and Mrs. Wallace for the submission to the Kentucky journal. It seemed like Diane finally realized that she would have something to show for her hard work because she was so excited about the future publications. She told me a few more stories about her family, the other residents, and Prissy. Before we got off the phone, she reminded me how much fun she had and how I could always call if I wanted. I told her that I would and that I would text often and visit after COVID ended. She plans to get me a pass for their dining hall so we can eat with all the people she told me about over the last few months. Overall, I would not change the experience for anything, even with the pandemic going on. I got a new friend out of it.

February 14, 2020: Submit an Oral History for Publication

Over the last several weeks, I studied *Kentucky Monthly* in preparation to submit Diane's personal narrative, "My 'Mama' and 'Daddy,' Mr. and Mrs. Ira and Mary Wallace." One of the reasons that I thought the piece was ready for submission was because it met the guidelines from *Kentucky Monthly*'s website. I emailed the revised story to [my mentor] at the EKU library to get her advice. She complimented the story but also made suggestions.

70 THE KENTUCKY EXPLORER

Lockport Humanitarians Ira and Mary Wallace

Missionaries and founders of the Kentucky Nursing Home Association dedicated their lives to service

A personal narrative by Diane Sears of Lexington, as told to Danielle Horn, a senior at Eastern Kentucky University majoring in English education.

After I was born in 1941, I lived in Lockport (Henry County) with family friends Ira and Mary Wallace, or, as I called them, Mama and Daddy Wallace, for the first four years of my life. During that time, I never heard from my birth father, but I understood that my mother worked nights in Shelbyville (Shelby County) which was an hour away from our community and too far for her to visit me often. I would end up staying with the Wallaces for four consecutive years as well as several summers. My mother would return to visit, and it would be difficult to forgive her for leaving, but I eventually would feel grateful. After all, her absence gave me the opportunity to grow to love my other family, too.

Before I moved in with the Wallaces, they were missionaries. Their last mission trip was to China, where they planned to build mission compounds outside several of the country's historic capitals. When they came back to the States in 1929, Madison College wanted Mr. Wallace to take a job teaching psychology of salesmanship for them, but he wanted to continue his work with disadvantaged communities instead. He began to evaluate low-income areas and their access to proper medical care and determined there was a problem.

In 1936, the Wallaces started the Rest Harbor Rural Association in Lockport, an organization that offered free first aid to citizens in rural parts of Kentucky. The couple also founded lending libraries and sponsored the Lee Frasure Memorial Children's Home in McDowell before building Lockport's Rest Harbor Sanitarium in 1947. The Rest Harbor Sanitarium was a nursing home on the site of the former Estes Hotel. I spent a lot of time with the Wallaces there.

When it was finished, Rest Harbor Sanitarium stood two stories tall, with rails on the second-floor balcony to protect patients. Since it was on the bank of the Kentucky River, it flooded often. During floods, we evacuated into boats, and sometimes, the Wallaces' son-in-law fished from the same docks. After that, we always held big communal fish fries, which I enjoyed. Even at that young age, I admired the Wallaces because I saw how they persevered no matter what.

Despite their status, Mr. and Mrs. Wallace also were the first people I called Mom and Dad. I knew them as devout, hard-working Christian people. The Wallaces did not drink alcohol or use any tobacco products. They rationed their food to avoid gluttony. They also did not use obscene language under any circumstances. Above all, they raised their children the way God wanted, so they insisted that we go to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Pewee Valley on Saturdays. Then on Sundays, we went to the Methodist church, which was just down the street from where we lived.

A 1925 photo of Ira Otto Wallace (1888–1964) and Mary Silvers Wallace (1896–1981) (photo courtesy of Stephen Taylor Hall and Encyclopedia of Seventh Day Adventists)

Over time, I became a friend of the minister at the Methodist church. He had what was called a "three-point charge," meaning that he took over several churches after he became a minister. Later, he became the minister at Epworth Methodist in Lexington, where I went to church as an adult. I was happy to have him in my life again, since he had known me for most of it. That friendship was just another thing that the Wallaces gave me.

When I was 4, I moved to Lexington with my mother with the stipulation that I could visit the Wallaces in the summers, which was the best time to be in Lockport. There were outdoor movies, where the townspeople set up a big screen that was open to the public so everyone could watch, and we bought our penny candy from the old-fashioned stores instead of popcorn. Then there was a vacation Bible school parade with the Methodist church on one side of the street and the Baptist church on the other. They were fun vacations, but I missed living with the Wallaces full time.

Even after I left Lockport for good, I stayed close with the Wallaces for the rest of their lives. Mr. Wallace died in 1964 while I was stationed in Germany with my husband, so I didn't get to go to the funeral, but the family was kind enough to send a picture. When Mrs. Wallace got sick, her children let me know, so that my 1-year-old, MaryAnn, and I could travel to their home in Newcastle and sit with the family. I liked having MaryAnn there because Mrs. Wallace always believed I named her after her, so it was like a part of her was still with me.

If I had to choose my fondest memory with the Wallaces, it would have to be when the Kentucky Nursing Home Association gave Mr. Wallace an award for his work. After he founded the association in 1953, he served as president from 1957–59. For this recognition, he spoke at Lexington's Phoenix Hotel, and I had the honor of attending. The association recognized how Rest Harbor Sanitarium met well-care codes that many other hospitals did not. The organization took in people who were bedridden, and Mr. Wallace protected them by putting together a committee and changing the rules and regulations for other nursing homes. I was so proud of him, especially since he was my family. At least, that was how I saw him.

About Diane Sears

Sears was born in 1941 in Stanford (Lincoln County). Over the course of her life so far, she has accomplished many wonderful things. One of her proudest moments was when she enlisted in the United States Army in 1962 and traveled to Germany. She is also proud of her marriage to her late husband, Samuel Sears, a union that lasted more than 32 years before he passed away. Diane and Sam had four children: MaryAnn, Jean, Joyce and James, as well as eight grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Diane has been at the Ashland Terrace Senior Living Facility for seven years. She chose to write her personal narrative about Ira and Mary Wallace to celebrate Mr. Wallace's success as the founder and president of the Kentucky Nursing Home Association and to honor their memories as her first Mama and Daddy.

Diane Sears

Pride makes us artificial, and humility makes us real. *Thomas Merton*

Mt. Sterling Court Days, Kentucky's oldest festival, has been around since 1794. This year, it is Oct. 15-18.

Fig 3. Screenshot of the published article in *Kentucky Monthly*, October 2021, pp. 70–71.

The Writing Learning Outcomes

The notes logged of the weekly exchanges between the writer and editor document not only the growing friendship but also the student's internship as an editor, who

- experienced writing as a social process
- experienced the many steps in the editing process
- found suitable publication venues
- wrote a query email to the identified magazine's editor
- wrote a 100-word summary of the submission
- wrote a 50-word biography to go with the submission
- wrote a cover letter explaining why the piece was a good match
- obtained copyright permission from photograph holders
- formatted the piece according to publication guidelines.

The article's acceptance and subsequent publication was edifying for student, senior and teacher (see fig. 3). The success was celebrated on several Facebook pages. The author received more than thirty likes, comments, and shares on the small retirement community's website. The student shared her elation on her own as well as the English Department's Facebook page.

Authentic learning opportunities motivate students. My students have replied to minor league baseball player blogs, written essays in response to 9/11, composed letters to their next English instructor, anthologized essays digitally concerned their career choice (What Do You Want to Be). To cultivate empathy, one prompt had students choosing someone they knew well who held an opinion with which they differed and explained how the person's experiences, circumstances, and future hopes and fears helped shape that opinion. Emerging from the pandemic, people are hungry to connect again. Instructors can connect students with seniors and provide writing prompts. Partnering with seniors gives student an opportunity to empathize with their elders and share their stories—all while they develop their own writing skills.

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Growing as a University English Teacher: Some Lessons Learned During the Pandemic

Stephen Wilhoit

As with many other teachers, these past two years responding to the COVID-19 pandemic have been challenging for me. Halfway through the 2020 spring term, my university sent our students home, and we completed the semester online. The following fall, we taught only online. Spring 2021, all classes started online as students slowly returned to campus, but we finished the term teaching hybrid courses, with some students in the classroom and others at home or in their dorm rooms. Finally, for the 2021–22 academic year, teacher and students returned to the classroom, adhering to strict mask and social distancing requirements. The pace of these changes and accompanying stress left little time or energy for reflection. All of us—teachers and students alike—had shifted into survival mode, responding as best we could to ever-changing circumstances and uncertainties.

Now that we seem to be slowly emerging from the pandemic, questions about "returning to normal" abound: Is online teaching here to stay as a widely employed pedagogy across campus? When can we safely return to the classroom without masks? How has the pandemic changed what it means to teach and learn? However, the question that has been occupying my thoughts this semester is this: What have I learned about pedagogy and student learning that can positively impact my teaching now and in the future?

When the pandemic hit, I had never taught a course online—though I have been teaching for over forty years, I knew little about the technology and even less about how to employ it effectively with students. Over the past two years, circumstances have forced me to teach in ways I had not previously imagined. Out of necessity, I have experimented with a range of instructional technologies and certainly grown as a teacher. The important question I am trying to answer now, though, is how can I apply what I have learned to improve student learning? While I know I will never be truly comfortable teaching classes entirely online, there are several positive ways that teaching through the pandemic has impacted the policies and assignments I employ in my English classes. The last two years have altered my approach to holding office hours, using our school's online teaching resources, handling assignment due dates, and varying the kinds of projects I assign in my English courses.

First, the students' move off campus two years ago fundamentally changed how I communicated with them. Before the pandemic, I supplemented classroom instruction with emails and office hour conversations. Office hours allowed me to work with students one-on-one, focusing on their unique concerns and questions, and, perhaps more importantly, helped me form strong personal bonds with my students. When in-person office hours were no longer possible, I began to hold them online, unsure how that would change the way I interacted with my students.

I was happy to find that **online office hours** worked well—students logged on when they needed help or had a question, and our conversations remained rewarding. As I became more comfortable using Zoom, I also started setting up individual online conversations with students outside office hours when they needed extra attention. Now that we are holding classes in-person again, I have decided to keep online office hours as an option: students can stop by my office to talk in person or log onto Zoom to talk with me if they like. The majority of my students prefer to stop by my office, but, to a person, they appreciate the opportunity to Zoom in for a conversation if that works best for them. I also continue to work with students through Zoom outside of office hours to answer questions.

Before COVID, I also made very limited use of our school's **online teaching resources**. Though we have a robust course management system (CMS), I only used it as a document repository, posting course syllabi, assignments, and handouts online so students would have access to them electronically. When the pandemic hit, our school's Center for Online Learning created a series of incredibly helpful workshops on how to teach online and make better use of the CMS and related technologies. With their help, I developed some basic competencies and gained enough confidence that I've continued to use some of the tools and pedagogies they covered.

For example, I've expanded the kinds of resources I make available to students online. I experimented with asynchronous forums and discussion groups on the CMS but was not satisfied with the results—the students were less than enthusiastic participants. Course evaluations confirmed my suspicions: students said they did not find online discussions helpful and that completing them too often felt like busy work. As a result, I have stopped using them. A more successful experiment involved short videos I made to support student work on the major course assignments. Because my students were taking classes from homes scattered across many time zones, I realized they might not be able to contact me when they were ready to write their papers. To help fill that gap, I created short, three-minute videos to provide additional instructions on each assignment, offer students tips on how to write them, and reminded students about requirements particular to each project. These videos were so popular, I have continued to make and post them on the CMS even now when we are having class in person again.

The pandemic-induced move to online classes was as stressful for my students as it was for me, if not more so. Many found it difficult to learn online and even harder to manage their workload; though they were making good faith efforts to keep up, they could not stay on top of work required in their courses. As their grades were falling, their anxiety levels were rising. To help them, I started to employ **flexible due dates** for the papers and projects in my class—instead of having a single due date, which had always been my practice, students had a week to submit their work without penalty. The students greatly appreciated this flexibility; it helped them manage their time and lessened at least one source of anxiety for them. Receiving the students' work electronically over a week's time also helped me manage my time. I find responding to student work online more time consuming than responding to printed texts, so having to evaluate only a few submissions a day helped. I've decided to keep this policy in place even though I'm now working with students in person again and collecting printed copies of their work. The students continue to like the flexibility this policy affords them, and I feel better able to devote the time I need to respond to their texts.

Finally, teaching exclusively online for even a short time has changed how I now approach some of the **papers and projects** I assign in my composition and literature classes. Having to experiment with online pedagogies opened me to new possibilities. For instance, submitting their work electronically made it much more practical for students to include images, sound, and links

with their papers and projects, options that enabled them to create more sophisticated, personalized work that better demonstrated what they had learned in class.

This past semester, for example, I taught a 300-level survey of the short story, a class I have taught many times before. Drawing on my background in creative writing, I teach a form of craft criticism in the course, asking students to focus on how the authors manipulate the elements of storytelling in their work, noting trends and innovations over time. There were three major assignments in the course last term. For the first two, students wrote literary analysis essays involving a close reading of a story they liked. For the final assignment, I changed things up. Instead of having students write a third analysis essay as I have for years, I instead asked them to record an oral narrative in which they told the story of a significant turning point in life. Along with the recording, the students also submitted a short paper explaining how they drew on the work of at least two authors we had studied in class to craft their own narratives. They could explain how the authors' stories impacted the content and/or telling of their own narrative.

My experience of teaching students during the pandemic significantly impacted the changes I made to this assignment. First, like many other teachers at my school, I had noticed a strong desire in my students to discuss how the pandemic was impacting their lives. The revised assignment enabled my students to explore connections between stories they studied in class and the story of their own lives. Second, my growing confidence with online teaching enabled me to have the students produce an oral recording of their narrative and submit it electronically rather than writing out the assignment and submitting a printed copy in class. The recorded narratives aligned much more naturally with the focus and intent of the assignment.

This revised assignment proved to be a very impactful. The narratives were universally interesting, moving, and well told. The students had an opportunity to demonstrate how a knowledge of craft criticism and close reading techniques helped them better understand the authors' stories and to engage with the literature in ways that were clearly relevant to their lives. The assignment not only helped students appreciate how much they had learned in the class, but also proved valuable to them personally. During class and in the course evaluations, students commented that working on this assignment, telling their own stories, helped them gain important insights into the events that shaped who they are today. Presenting their work orally—hearing their own stories in their own voices—proved especially impactful. In short, they loved the assignment, and I found it an incredibly effective way to draw the course to a close.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted my teaching in many ways. The move to online teaching was jarring, forcing me to reconsider both what and how I teach. With the help of colleagues at my institution, I learned new ways to support student learning, structure key course assignments, and employ technology in class. I realize that instructors who have been utilizing these pedagogies in their courses for years may find the changes I have described in my own teaching rather mundane, but they were all new to me and have proven valuable to my students. I am certain that without the challenges posed by the pandemic, I would not have grown as a teacher in these ways. For that, at least, I am thankful.

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Smart Home Gym Instruction and What an English Professor Learned from Spinning Her Wheels

Julie Daoud

The unexpected corollary for online teaching that I arrived at while high-fiving fellow spinners at the conclusion of a virtual ride—a ride atop a stationary bike relegated to a damp corner of my unfinished basement—is that a participant's *engagement* and, relatedly, *performance* when it comes to online learning is directly linked to two user-perceptions: 1) that the instructor is actively engaged in the virtual session, and 2) that the participant is "seen" by the instructor and fellow participants.

While seemingly disparate purveyors for growth and development, teachers of writing are often metaphorized as "coaches," a trope that suggests an inherent kinship between academic teachers and fitness trainers. Educational theorists utilize the coaching metaphor because it foregrounds a critical component of successful teaching: the act of inspiring motivation. Unlike teaching metaphors that suggest a medicinal, military or even agricultural relationship between educators and students, the coaching metaphor underscores the importance of external encouragement as an act that helps to empower participants to perform at their highest level. In other words, educators have long recognized that positive encouragement goes a long way as far as engendering a sense of personal responsibility in students and thus, helping students to achieve learning outcomes (Badley & Hollabaugh). Given the value of "coaching" tactics, I believe that many of us in higher education might learn something from the pedagogical practices of virtual fitness instructors who, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, may earn upwards of $500,000 in annual compensation (Chen). Beyond commanding lucrative salaries, those in the virtual fitness sector (e.g. Peloton, Rebel TV, and Frame Online) seem guaranteed job security: user subscriptions to various online exercise platforms are expected to continue to grow even as we begin to emerge from the pandemic. In fact, trend forecasters predict that between the period starting in 2020 and ending in 2026, at-home smart gym platforms will grow by close to 10% (Shaban).

So how do these virtual home fitness platforms grow and retain online participation while universities and colleges (also deploying online platforms) seem to be experiencing declining enrollments? As these fitness juggernauts secure their foothold by retaining subscribers, the landscape of higher education has become far less certain. Experts in higher education point to pandemic-related woes as factors causing low persistence rates across academic institutions: for instance, the "zoomers" (AKA the generation succeeding the millennial generation) seem skeptical about the value of the diploma at a time when there is a high demand for labor positions that don't require postsecondary education. Aside from pandemic-related declines, there is the well documented demographic "cliff" predicted to impact higher education enrollment in coming years; the "birth dearth" of 2008–2011, a period of economic recession, is expected to cause significant declines in college enrollments. As such, colleges and universities must find strategies to win and maintain students. Robust digital learning programs promise one strategy for educational leaders to become more attractive to the shrinking numbers of would-be college students; however, there are so many versions of online learning. And not all of them are effectively working to help combat declining enrollments.

Given these looming challenges, it could be beneficial to look to the tactics of our analogues in virtual fitness instruction who continue to ramp up subscription numbers. The Peloton

platform, to cite one example of success, has a retention rate of 92% of its online user base. For the sake of comparison, data reported by *Higher Ed Dive* indicates that persistence rates for university students hover around 74%. (Schwartz).

While the online educational learning management systems like Canvas or Blackboard contrast markedly with platforms used for virtual exercise, especially as far as the purpose and target demographic for each, I have learned that there is something to be gained from observing the instructor-subscriber connection in virtual fitness realms: the seemingly multidimensional nature of the instructor's support. The "touchpoints" deployed across online fitness classes seem to be effective in terms of promoting and sustaining engagement with users.

Here are some of my takeaways from my study of these virtual coaches—instructors who are credited with offering the "most attended spin classes" as well as with offering the highest rates for "annual workouts that subscribers have completed" (Odell).

1) Offer verbal encouragement: A well-timed bit of verbal encouragement such as a compassionate "Stay with me," or "You can do this!" while surmounting a steep climb lets the participant know that the instructor is aware of the struggle and that he/she is working to instill the fortitude needed to push harder and farther. It's akin to letting a student know that despite the rigor of an upcoming test, the instructor is aware that the student is invested and will watch for his/her best effort. By working verbal encouragement into a discussion about an upcoming assignment, an instructor might foster student stamina.
2) Be attentive to the "leaderboard" and utilize opportunities for related "shout-outs": This real-time cueing from an instructor to live riders can go a long way in the virtual fitness world. Why not mediate online class time by giving accolades to students who are contributing meaningfully to the learning experience? This real-time cueing might instill intentionality in the online classroom.
3) "See" participants: The phrase "I see you" is a favorite of virtual fitness instructors; I've heard the phrase used across a range of situations in my spin classes. For teachers, its power can be as versatile and effective as it is for fitness instructors: "I see you" might be offered to a student to acknowledge that he/she is struggling; the instructor can use this phrase to offer recognition that the student is finding an aspect of an assignment to be confusing and needs a bit more explanation or support. Knowing that the teacher sees the struggle helps to offer assurance to the student that his/her instructor will make time to intercede to dispel confusion. In using this phrase, an instructor provides a level of validation to the learner-at any level of growth. Through this act of validation, an instructor can help to allay the student anxiety that might otherwise prevent a struggling student from voicing a need for attention. To cultivate a nurturing virtual environment, this affirmation can go a long way toward genuinely engaging with participants, especially those who may, by default, find themselves fading into the margins.
4) Smile, breathe, and reflect calm capability: If an instructor manifests a "can-do" presence, he/she will help to instill the same in participants as they work to manage the challenges of the workload. (I know that when I see a virtual instructor spinning with a mouth curved into a smile that the challenge is one that I can surmount.)
5) Offer pointed updates: This can be as simple as relaying to individuals an awareness of how they are doing. Virtual instructors may note improved speed across a participant's most recent series of rides; such updates can help a participant to become more deliberate about performance. Pointed updates-conveyed verbally or through chat features or even an online gradebook that students can access to

gauge scoring—can be helpful to students as well. When students are made aware of performance data, they may invest in more effective learning strategies. In other words, pointed updates enable students to track what is working well and what needs more work. As such, the updates allow them to develop mindsets for success. When students succeed, a student's experience tends to be more likely to feel positively about the pathway to graduation-a factor that might result in higher rates of persistence overall.

Ultimately, these "touchpoints" won't serve as a curative for all of the challenges of virtual teaching in a pandemic-or even post-pandemic-world. Nor will they do much to mitigate the problem of the shrinking population of high school aged students caused by the economic recession. But academics might be able to improve the connective experience for students if the virtual "guide on the side" is open to the example of the virtual "guide on the ride."

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Julie Daoud is the Chair of the English Department at Thomas More University. She earned her doctorate In 19th century English Literature, but her academic work and teaching has broadened to support a revised curriculum which provides emphasis on 1) emerging/marginalized writers and 2) the expansion of creativity through the practice of writing that features traditional genres as well as contemporary genres (like instapoetry and "ludic" writing, and 3) the craft of writing for a range of digital platforms/new media and 4) the inclusion of more training for "career-readiness" across our course offerings. Though the curriculum is unlike any that she imagined for students when she first launched her university career, it seems that to emerge from these fraught times, this sort of change is as necessary as it is comprehensive.

Reading for Change: Teachers Talk About Books, Students, and Inequities During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Darlene Anders

The United States has a long history of inequities in access to education. W.E.B. DuBois addressed this early in the 20th century when he wrote about the struggles African Americans faced in receiving equal rights and access to education (Alridge, 2015). The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s further revealed that widespread inequities limited access to education for other marginalized groups, such as women and those with disabilities (Banks & Banks, 2010). Efforts have since been made to address these inequities through desegregation, multicultural education, culturally relevant teaching, and other movements, and by the early part of the 21st century, many white Americans had come to believe that racial inequality was a thing of the past (DiAngelo, 2018; Myrie, 2016). However the COVID-19 crisis revealed this was not the case. With schools closed to in-person instruction, the students who struggled most with virtual learning were more likely to be those from marginalized groups and minorities, including immigrant and refugee students, or multilingual learners.

This article describes a research project, in which elementary ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers participated in a book club as a community of learners: The Teachers Reading for Change Book Club. In this article, the terms 'multilingual learners' and 'English learners' are both used to describe students who use or are exposed to other languages in addition to English. The term 'English learners' is often used in policy documents and laws, such as the Every Child Succeeds Act (2015), while the term 'multilingual learners' is considered inclusive and is often used in the field to reflect an asset-based mindset (WIDA, 2020).

The idea for the book club began years earlier when, as an ESL teacher, I began reading stories and memoirs about refugee and immigrant experiences. Inspired by my students' stories, I sought out books that would enable me to understand some of their backgrounds and experiences, which had been so different from my own. As a white American, I still lived and worked in the same working class neighborhood where I'd grown up in Louisville, Kentucky, and I'd never experienced the types of challenges my students often encountered.

In *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, Zaretta Hammond says that in order to be culturally responsive, we must first widen our "interpretation aperture." She encourages teachers to expose themselves "to other cultural experiences similar to those of the students you serve so you can experience alternative ways of doing or being" (2015, p. 62). What I learned from the stories and memoirs allowed me to widen my frame of reference and create a welcoming classroom where my students learned. I wondered: If more teachers read stories like these and widened their "interpretation apertures," would it help them become more culturally responsive? This was the thought seed that led me to ask: **How does reading memoirs or narratives written by or from the perspective of immigrants and refugees impact culturally responsive teaching among ESL teachers?**

The book club took place during the 2020-2021 school year, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The texts teachers read were springboards that allowed teachers to make connections through conversations. Themes that came up in the book club discussions echoed many of the conversations that were taking place outside in the larger context: racial identity;

inequities in remote learning; and the "White Bubble"—the idea that white people and others were often unaware of inequities experienced by marginalized groups. The project provides a snapshot into a historical moment in education, amidst a pandemic in which inequities for multilingual learners and others were illuminated and teachers reflected on their own perspectives.

History of Inequities in Education

Ever since DuBois brought attention to inequities in education, efforts have been made to both identify the underlying problems and structures that create these inequities in education, as well as to resolve them and make success in education accessible to all.

Early attempts to address inequities included *ethnic studies, multiethnic education,* and *multicultural education.* However, these tended to result in surface-level changes and have been criticized for perpetuating an assumption that people from different cultures can be sorted or labeled according to categories that the dominant culture has determined (Higham, 1993; Malik, 2010).

Gloria Ladson-Billings introduced the idea of *culturally relevant teaching,* in which inequities are acknowledged and addressed, saying "we are operating in a fundamentally inequitable system—[teachers] take that as a given and that the teacher's role is not merely to help kids fit into an unfair system, but rather to give them the skills, the knowledge and the dispositions to change the inequity" (Fay, 2019).

C*ulturally responsive teaching* goes a step further with the belief that teachers not only must learn about the cultures and worldviews of their students but must flip their lenses and look inward examining their own cultures and worldviews as well. In *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice,* Geneva Gay traces the beginnings of culturally responsive teaching to the ideas that came out of multicultural education, namely that teachers need to understand cultural differences and learn how to use them to change their teaching styles and make education more equitable. Without this, students from the non-mainstream culture may not succeed. She explains that "Educators also need to analyze their own cultural attitudes, assumptions, mechanisms, rules, and regulations that have made it difficult for them to teach these children successfully" (2018, 146-147).

This reflection can help teachers become aware of their own assumptions and expectations, which can prevent a "cultural mismatch" from penalizing students when their behavior and learning styles don't align with the teachers',(Hammond, 2015; Nieto, 2000). In *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, Hammond explains that in order to be culturally responsive, we must first widen our "interpretation aperture." She says, "We all operate from a set of cultural frames of reference. The challenge is that if we routinely interpret other people's actions solely through our personal cultural frames, we run the risk of misinterpreting their actions or intentions" (p. 58).

The goal of the Teachers Reading for Change Book Club project was to enable participants to "step into another cultural experience" (Hammond, 2015, p 58). Throughout the book club experience, the expectation was that participants could widen their "interpretation apertures" by reading narratives or memoirs written from the perspectives of refugees or immigrants and then discussing the texts with others. This would allow participants to learn about others, through the texts and the conversations, and reflect on aspects of their own cultures and values as part of a community of learners, which research shows is an effective model of professional learning leading to change in teaching practice (Hopkins et al, 2019; Penner-Williams et al, 2017)

The Teachers and Texts

Participants in the Teachers Reading for Change book club were ESL teachers I had met in a professional capacity. These teachers expressed an interest in being part of a teachers' book club

to read memoirs or narratives written by or about refugees and immigrants in order to promote culturally responsive teaching. I sent a recruitment email to 12 ESL teachers in Kentucky and Indiana inviting them to participate in the book club; 8 invitees accepted. All of the teachers who accepted were elementary ESL teachers in Jefferson County (Louisville), Kentucky. Their interest and participation in the book club indicates their openness to learning and exploring change in their practice.

They were a genial group of young women, most in their 30s and 40s. In addition to being teachers, many of them were mothers as well. When they talked about their students, they often referred to them as their "kids."

Six of the teachers participated in an initial interview, in which they talked about their cultural backgrounds. Of those teachers, three grew up bilingual in the United States. Another grew up identifying as American but living outside the United States. Another teacher described her cultural background as a "conglomeration of different European backgrounds" and another simply as "white."

In choosing texts for the book club, I wanted to avoid texts that would encourage generalizations about culture groups. Sonia Nieto faced a similar challenge when presenting case studies of students from diverse backgrounds in *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education* (2000). Nieto faced criticism from some who believed that her use of the case studies would indeed be "perpetuating stereotypes about particular ethnic and racial groups" (p. 374). Convinced that the case studies had the potential to help others understand much about students from various backgrounds, she decided to include them. "I took their criticisms seriously, but I nevertheless pursued the idea because I knew that case studies of real students portrayed within the cultural and socio-political context of their lives could be very powerful" (p. 374), she said. To mitigate this challenge, I chose texts that presented the "cultural and socio-political context" of the lives of the narrators rather than being narrowly focused. All of the texts, including the fictional texts, are anchored in lived experiences, which gives validity to the cultural representations.

The texts were:

- *How Dare the Sun Rise: Memoirs of a War Child* by Sandra Uwiringiyimana. This is a memoir told by the author who survived the Gatumba massacre against Congolese civilians in Burundi in 2004. In her story, Uwiringiyimana describes her experiences during the massacre, her time in a refugee camp, and ultimately resettlement in the United States as a teenager with her family.
- *Refugee* by Alan Gratz. This novel intertwines three fictional narratives based on true stories: one set in 1939 focusing on a family of Jews and their flight from Nazis; another story set in 1994, told the story of the Cuban refugee crisis during which 35,00 Cuban citizens fled to US; the third narrative was told from the perspective of a Syrian teenager, who fled their home in Aleppo due to the Syrian Civil War.
- *A Very Large Expanse of the Sea* by Tahereh Mafi. This novel, featuring a narrator who is a teenage Muslim girl, offered the perspective of different cultural experience than the other texts. It was realistic fiction, but the main character was a complex person and not a stereotype, and was based on Mafi's own experiences, according to the author.

Project and Methods

Three book club meetings were held: October 12, 2020; November 30, 2020; and January 26, 2021. Book club meetings were held via Google Meet and lasted about an hour each. Six participants attended the first book club meeting. Five participants attended the second meeting, and six attended the third meeting.

Six teachers also participated in an initial interview after the first meeting. Interview

questions were intended to encourage participants to reflect on their own cultural beliefs about what is valued in their culture. The interview questions were adapted from C*ulturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement & Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* (Hammond, 2015). For example, I asked participants to think about their family stories or what earned praise for children and how these reflected core values in their family and culture. I hoped participants would begin to see some of the deeply held ideas that may manifest in the way they expect others to respond. Hammond says that the "inward reflection means being willing to listen and change in order to respond positively and constructively to the student who may be culturally different in some way" (2015. P. 56). After the last book club meeting, five teachers participated in final interviews, in which I asked them to share their takeaways from the book club experience.

The book club meetings consisted of semi-structured conversations based on text protocols "Save the Last Word for Me" and "The Final Word" from National School Reform Faculty (2019). Participants took turns presenting a passage that resonated with them. In each conversation round, the 'presenter' either read a passage that was especially meaningful or described a particular passage and explained why it struck them. Respondents were asked to respond to the quote or passage in any of the following ways: expanding on the presenter's thinking; providing a different perspective; or clarifying the presenter's thinking. The conversation rounds continued until each participant had a turn to present. This structure was chosen to ensure that discussions had research validity rather than simply consisting of casual conversations.

Louisville, Kentucky in 2020

Many of the conversations during the book club meetings reference the socio-political context of the United States in 2020, which included a pandemic that resulted in lockdowns and school closures; racial justice protests; and the realization by many that there were racist ideas and structures still extant more than half a century after the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout 2020, many Americans became aware that there were vast inequalities in our country that they had been oblivious to. News during the pandemic often highlighted inequities that permeated the legal, educational, and healthcare systems. The Black community suffered more as a result of COVID-19. Black people died from the virus at a higher rate (Fuller, 2020). In education, the closure of many schools resulted in remote learning by which students received instruction virtually. Again this hit minorities harder as many who were already in need of extra support, including English learners, found remote learning difficult or inaccessible (Cardoza, 2021; Washington Post, 2020). Add to that the fact that many people had lost their jobs; gatherings with family and friends were restricted or halted completely; even churches were closed (Louisville Courier Journal, 2020). In addition, across the country, there were several widely reported instances involving police officers in which Black individuals died. Two of these took place in Louisville. According to an article in the Washington Post titled, "What white Americans can Learn about Racism from the Coronavirus." the pandemic "sharply magnified the country's racial disparities and inequities…Unlike other disasters and crises, the coronavirus seems to have laid bare the structural inequities across the board—in healthcare, economics, even in criminal justice—all at once" (Williams, 2020).

This feeling was present in Louisville, where racial justice protests coincided with the pandemic. In March, Breonna Taylor had been shot by police officers in her apartment. At one point, Louisville's mayor issued a "dusk-to-dawn" curfew as protests calling for the officers who shot her to be arrested and charged continued throughout the spring. On June 1, in the midst of continued protests over the police killings, a well-known local Black businessman was shot and

killed when the National Guard was called to break up a large crowd that had gathered in Louisville.

By the end of summer, there were 26 billboards in Louisville that featured portraits of Breonna Taylor. The billboards carried a message supporting the arrest of police officers involved in her killing and a quote from Oprah Winfrey: "If you turn a blind eye to racism, you become an accomplice to it" (Vogt, 2020).

When the first meeting of the Teachers Reading for Change Book Club took place, October, 12, 2020, school buildings were still closed to students. In downtown Louisville, doors and windows on buildings were shuttered with plywood, looking as if they were prepared for an impending hurricane. In reality, the boards had been placed there to protect against possible damage should demonstrations turn violent. Now, the shuttered buildings were an eerie, tangible symbol of the trauma and injustice that so many people in Louisville and across the country felt. This reality had been part of the teachers' experience, and, in their conversations, participants often made connections to aspects of this context. Topics that came up included racial identity, remote learning, and the "white bubble."

Racial Identity

The issue of racial identity emerged as a theme during the conversation around *How Dare the Sun Rise: Memoirs of a War Child* by Sandra Uwiringiyimana. The narrator, who's African, didn't identify as black until she came to the US:

> "*I realized it didn't matter how I saw myself, because other people saw my skin color…. in America, my skin color did define me, at least in other people's eyes. I was black first, and then I was Sandra."*

Robin DiAngelo says that, "Our understanding of ourselves is necessarily based on our comparison with others….We come to understand who we are by understanding who we are not" (2018, p. 11). Participants echoed this in their conversation, pointing out problems with attempting to label cultures. as well as the "one-dimensional racial structure, which is so deeply ingrained in our national consciousness" (Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, & Suda, (2012, p.16).

This "labeling" can lead to youth who identify with multiple ethnicities having a sense of ambiguity and being marginalized by multiple culture groups. One participant said, "it's a very conflicting, confusing thing."

Another participant connected to her own background, saying, "My dad's white, and my mom's Hispanic…It's a very strange feeling. You don't feel one hundred percent of anything. You kind of feel in the middle."

Other participants pointed out how the narrators in both *How Dare the Sun Rise: Memoirs of a War Child* and *A Very Large Expanse of the Sea* struggled with having multiple cultural identities in a system that labels people according to culture or race. One teacher said, "It's very limiting, like there was a very specific thing [she] had to be, but [she] could never hit the mark."

Remote Learning

At times, the conversations veered from the books as the connections participants made to the texts led to other ideas. One of these topics was the challenge that many of their students were experiencing during remote learning, called non-traditional instruction (NTI) in Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS). When schools went virtual, many English learners struggled to stay connected to school. In the first weeks of remote learning, about 5% of JCPS students had not made contact with their schools or teachers. One fourth of those students were English learners (McLaren & Krauth, 2020). In addition, English learners who did stay connected to schools, often juggled responsibilities on top of their school work, often serving as translators for their families and sharing technology with other siblings (McLaren, 2020).

This issue surfaced in the conversation during the first book club meeting when one teacher said

that a student wasn't turning in her own school work because she was helping younger siblings with their work. Another participant echoed the teacher's concerns and added that although older students can often be helpful in communicating with families, it comes at the cost of their own education. This experience is not uncommon among refugee and immigrant families (McLaren, 2020).

English learners, who are already more likely than native English speaking peers to struggle academically, were missing opportunities to develop relationships and practice their English through conversations and other interactions as they did during in-person school (Cardoza, 2021). Hammond (2015) describes positive relationships as one of the cornerstones of culturally responsive teaching, and the teachers talked about how they still tried to build relationships during remote learning. During the second meeting, one teacher brought up how classroom teachers that she worked with let their students have time to talk during their online class meetings, but she noted that it was still difficult to provide a space for interaction opportunities.

The White Bubble

Amidst the events of 2020, conversations around the country often referenced a "white bubble," the idea that white people were often unaware of inequities that disadvantage minorities (Fuller, 2020; Hawkins, 2020; Ringer, 2020). In the 1960s, the majority of white Americans thought that black people had equal opportunities to education, housing, and jobs (Myrie, 2020). According to a Pew Research report, in 2016, Black and white Americans had widely different beliefs about how fairly Black people were treated in the legal justice system. Half of white Americans thought Black Americans were treated fairly by police, however the majority of Black Americans thought that Black people received less than fair treatment by the police (Stepler, 2016). In addition, many people are unaware of "other genocides," because they often don't receive media attention, and students don't usually learn about them in school as they do the Holocaust (Totten, n.d.).

The teachers talked about "the bubble" in the second meeting. Their comments included an expansion of the idea of the bubble to include an unawareness of "other genocides" and what sometimes happens when people are displaced. One teacher brought up a scene from *Refugee* in which the narrator, Mahmoud, who had fled the Syrian War and survived by going unnoticed, now was stranded on a boat and needed to be seen in order to be rescued. This passage resonated with the participants who made connections between Mahmoud's feelings, and recent protests against racial injustice. One teacher commented that her interpretation of the book was affected by the current events:

> [Mahmoud] was talking about how he was so used to being invisible. And he said that he was basically thinking that being invisible can be helpful, because people aren't gonna bother you, but it doesn't really bring about any change….it's better to be visible and speak out. That's the only way people are going to notice you and want to help you. So, I thought that was really powerful, especially thinking about all the [racial justice protests] going on recently and how for so long people like me growing up, I was kind of given the impression that racism was over, because I went to a predominantly white school, and we didn't really get a lot of exposure to all the racism that was still existing. We were given the impression that with Martin Luther King, racism ended. And so it's only with this recent movement …. that I think more people like me have started noticing there are still a lot of major issues, and we need to do something to help.

Participants also connected Mahmoud's character's actions to the current socio-political context:

> One participant criticized anti-immigrant thinking by some Americans, saying "'…we

> have all the Mexican refugees, and America is like, 'no more. We need to build a wall.'"
>
> Another said, "It makes me think it depends on what side of history you stand on. What are you doing? Are you being complicit, or are you aware of the desperation that people have in their lives where they have to flee, where there is no choice?…It's still very relevant."

These ideas align with Hammond's (2015) view that one's perspective determines their beliefs about what is considered right or wrong and why understanding our own perspectives is important.

The teachers talked about the importance of becoming aware of others' perspectives and experiences. One said:

> It might feel like a bubble, because you're safe in your school. You're safe in your neighborhood. You're safe in your little niche that your family has established for themselves. Then on the other side, here's the rest of the world…. These are the things that we need to care about.

Although the texts may have provided windows (Bishop, 1990) and opportunities for participants to learn about students from different cultures (Florio-Ruane, 2001; Hammond, 2015), the conversations gave the teachers opportunities to construct new learning and view others' perspectives also. Comments during the meetings often revealed that teachers were reflecting on their prior thinking and creating new learning as a result of being able to experience the narrators' perspectives. Participants commented that they also benefited from hearing others' perspectives. All of the teachers who participated in final interviews said the conversations helped them further widen their "interpretation apertures" by hearing how others responded to the same texts. "It makes it so much more powerful just to share the experiences that we've had and talking a little bit more deeply about the books. It feels like we are taking and applying what we learned from the books."

Through their conversations and comments, the participants showed evidence of practicing "awareness," in which teachers "Locate and acknowledge their own sociopolitical position…." (Hammond, 2015, p.18) and are "aware of their own cultural lens on interpreting and evaluating students' individual or collective behavior…." (p. 18).

In their final interviews, teachers commented that the book club experience encouraged them to strive to create welcoming classrooms. Some teachers said that it made them consider students' perspectives when choosing and presenting materials. One teacher said the book club experience made her more mindful about "how we're choosing to present things" to students, who may be sensitive to some topics. She also commented that understanding some of the backgrounds of students made her think about the importance of addressing socio-emotional needs as well, "making sure that we're not just taking care of their academic needs but thinking of the child as a whole."

Participants also commented that reading the stories enabled them to view students' cultures more broadly. One teacher mentioned that her thoughts about culture had expanded as a result of the book club experience, saying, "It's more than just food. It's more than just that surface level stuff we tend to talk about." Another referred to her experience reading *How Dare the Sun rise: Memoirs of a War Child,* and said it enabled her to "see firsthand what that girl went through. [It] helps you to understand your students and to understand the difficulties they've been through and just have a greater appreciation for them."

Overall, the teachers were enthusiastic and positive about their participation in the book club, reporting afterward that they benefited from learning about refugee and immigrant experiences as well as hearing other perspectives, some valuing the experience enough that they wanted to continue beyond the time period of the

research project. Several participants reported that they told other teachers at their school about the book club and wanted to continue the book club into the next school year. One teacher summed up her experience, saying the experience led her to "share those books with other teachers in my building so that they in turn can have that background knowledge and empathy for their students… and be able to provide the best instruction possible for them, so they can make their dreams come true."

The number of English learners in US classrooms has been steadily increasing over the past few decades, and classrooms are becoming more diverse. However, the majority of US teachers have cultural backgrounds that may be significantly different to those of many of their students (Banks & Banks, 2010; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Hopkins, Gluckman, & Vahdani, 2019; National Center for Education Statistics; Penner-Williams, Diaz, & Gonzalez, 2017). Even among those teachers from what are historically thought of as "minority" backgrounds, many may have grown up with a "monocultural education themselves." For these reasons, culturally responsive teaching practices will be essential in enabling all learners equitable access to education, and book clubs like the Teachers Reading for Change Book Club could help support teachers in developing their culturally responsive teaching practices.

Suggested Reading List

The following are books that I have read and shared with others. This list features fictional narratives as well as memoirs by individuals. The stories, which are all anchored in lived experiences, represent a range of personalities and backgrounds, across cultures, and have helped me widen my "interpretation aperture" as I sought to understand perspectives of diverse learners.

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Emerging From a Pandemic: The Evolution of the Classroom

Victoria Leggett, Taylor Stanley, and Daniel Shirey

The initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic left the world in a survival mode, and public schools were no exception. Mandates of mass quarantine ended most in-person social experiences and emptied classrooms. The education system was unprepared for the challenges presented by quarantine, yet adapted quickly. As classrooms morphed to a solely virtual realm, education technology and diverse instructional strategies evolved to compensate. Pre-pandemic, telecommunication from students to teachers was a rarity, but quarantine caused it to be a necessity.

Although in-person learning has largely returned in the 2021–2022 academic year, some educators are still in a survival mode. In addition to weathering the constant hurdles that teaching presents, we face the short- and long-term effects of the pandemic, such as a deficiency of necessary social or communication skills or the above-average rate of absences due to continual individual quarantines. As teachers slowly emerge from the effects of the pandemic, we must take the opportunity to reflect on our experiences. Through examining all that has occurred and the residual effects, we can discern what worked during the quarantine, what didn't, and what improvements should be actualized.

We have noticed a deficit in communication skills increasing with the duration of the pandemic. In an effort to bolster this stunted progress, there should be a concentration on literacy-based education, enacted in classrooms regardless of standard disciplinary boundaries. As early career and pre-service teachers, it feels somewhat audacious to point out current classroom issues and to speculate about possible improvements. However, our unique circumstances give us insight because we observed classrooms as students and pre-service teachers before, during, and after the pandemic: Victoria Leggett completed her first year teaching in the 2021–2022 school year; a Master's in Teaching student, her time as an educator is exclusively post-pandemic. Both Taylor Stanley and Daniel Shirey completed clinical observation hours during and after pandemic quarantine restrictions. Ms. Stanley completed student teaching in Spring 2022 and will begin her first year in the classroom in Fall 2022. Finally, Mr. Shirey completed all observation hours and will complete student teaching in Fall 2022.

When compared to our pre-quarantine clinical observations, post-quarantine era students appear to be less comfortable communicating, both socially and academically. As students and teachers reenter traditional classroom settings, teachers at all stages of their career should work together to bridge the communication gap that developed during the pandemic. This can be done by shifting to a literacy-based curriculum that utilizes active learning and multimodal tools. Encouraging educators to take up more responsibilities might seem unrealistic given public education's current conditions, but the current lapses inhibit current and future learning. Communication skills for civic engagement, multimodal learning, and active learning can help adapt education to better serve students in a post-pandemic learning environment.

Engaging Communication Skills for Civic Engagement

When completing our clinical requirements this semester, it became evident that students' communication skills decreased compared to pre-COVID performance observations. Students experienced difficulties participating in class discussions because of challenges in verbal communication. For example, Taylor noticed less diverse vocabulary usage among students and subsequent frustration at the inability to express their thoughts and feelings with educators and peers. Similarly, a cooperating teacher expressed concern, not only over students' communication difficulties academically but also socially, citing more interpersonal issues caused by lack of or miscommunication. This cooperating teacher described how when students would fight before the pandemic, they would have a period of ignoring each other and then eventually discuss the issue and resolve the conflict. However, this year students' conflicts are not resolved and they refuse to talk or communicate. She described students being obstinate in wanting to discuss the issue, indicating a lack of understanding in how talking with their peer could solve the issue. Finally, veteran educators in our teacher social circles throughout Kentucky also noticed that students could not verbally communicate their wants, needs, struggles, or state their emotions accurately. These difficulties replicate themselves in written communication, not in syntax and grammar, but in the ability to translate their thoughts into writing effectively.

The skill to accurately and precisely use language is vital for students' academic and socio-emotional development, meaning these challenges among students are a significant area of concern. Although this issue was not unforeseen, as many of our clinical educators and colleagues expressed, teachers anticipated these issues because of the nature of learning virtually. Many students felt nervous and apprehensive about virtual learning, and their classroom participation decreased. Compared to in-person learning, students talked dramatically less, and despite educators' best efforts, encouraging student participation in a sea of black boxes on a screen proved difficult.

In "Voice Lessons: Rethinking the Relationship Between Education and Political Participation," Meghan Condon seeks to understand why this correlation exists and uses research that began with 8th-grade students in 1988 and followed them throughout their high school careers and eight years after their graduation. Condon uses students' standardized test scores and English grades to measure their verbal communication skills, such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, and argumentation, and her research reveals that the attainment of education, or the number of years one attends a school, matters less than the degree to which students acquire communication skills (Condon 826-27, 837-39). Essentially, the higher degree students achieved the ability to read critically, write clearly, speak both academically and socially, and communicate their ideas, the more they politically participated in elections, volunteer work, and political campaigns. Therefore, when the public education curriculum focuses on interdisciplinary literacy skills, including verbal communication, political participation—essential for modern

democracy—increases (Condon 838). ELA educators are at the forefront of ensuring the development of student communication skills, which have a crucial civic component.

ELA educators have the advantage of creating a more equitable society by becoming literacy leaders in their schools. Additionally, literacy-based curriculums across the disciplines tackles students' communication deficit head-on. As a pre-service teacher seeking dual certification in both ELA and Social Studies, Taylor has noticed that some Social Studies peers are at a loss as to how to incorporate literacy practices into their future classrooms, nor do they see its value. When working in a group project aimed at learning instructional strategies for literacy skills specific to history, one of her peers stated that she was frustrated she had to incorporate these practices in her unit plan. She remarked that she did not know how to help kids learn reading and writing skills nor was that her main concern as a pre-service Social Studies teacher. Pre-service Social Studies educators are proud to be at the center of increasing civic understanding and political engagement amongst students. However, even though it is at the heart of this curriculum, some pre-service educators are less invested in teaching literacy skills. The ability to critically read primary and secondary sources, analyze evidence, and then communicate a conclusion is the inquiry progression espoused in the Kentucky Academic Social Studies Standards and they all require literacy skills. Literacy-based curriculum is intertwined with Social Studies and the civic ideals of the discipline cannot be successfully taught without teaching literacy along with the content.

One response is interdisciplinary collaboration. David Peter Noskin's "Democratizing American literature: Lessons Learned from *The 1619 Project*" shows the rewards when interdisciplinary teams come together to create an engaging literacy-based curriculum for students. Noskin collaborated with a History teacher to create an American Studies class that uses materials from *The 1619 Project* and American literature to encourage students to explore the interrelation between the two subjects (Noskin 50-51). Noskin created a class where students engage in thought-provoking questions and make civic, historical, and literary assertions using verbal and written communication skills.

When faced with what seems like a communication crisis, educators can draw upon Condon and Noskin for direction. Ensuring literacy-based instruction aided by multimodal tools will directly address the issue of communication deficits, which will have long lasting effects on students' ability to participate in a democracy. ELA educators can use Condon's research as a literacy rallying cry for teachers of other disciplines and then offer skill-based literacy activities that can aid in content knowledge and disciplinary thinking skills. And we can follow in Noskin's footsteps and become literacy leaders in our schools and collaborate with other disciplines to enhance students' communication skills and understanding of the content.

Integrating Multimodal Learning in a Twenty-First Century Classroom

During the pandemic, a new way of teaching came with a new way of learning for many students. A vast number of students, especially those in K-12 settings, were unfamiliar with virtual learning. Teachers had to learn how to provide instruction through a computer screen, but students had to learn to *learn* through a computer screen. Arguably, students and teachers gained valuable technological skills during the pandemic, but now is the time to implement those skills for long-term improvement. While students were absorbing information through a computer screen, teachers were trying to build relationships. A lack of face-to-face and even audible communication made it difficult for students and teachers to connect personally. The pandemic deprived students of many opportunities to interact with their peers in a social setting. Using multimodal strategies,

teachers can help students bridge the gap formed during the pandemic.

COVID-19 led to many school districts utilizing a distance learning system (like Google Meets or Zoom) or a hybrid learning system (like combining face-to-face student-teacher interactions with virtual student-led learning). For example, many students completed their entire course instruction through Zoom with five minute breaks between classes. Essentially, the schedule remained the same, but students would hop on and off Zoom meetings between classes, rather than socialize with their peers. Hybrid instruction combined these concepts, with some days in-person and others online. The pandemic called for an unprecedented implementation of technology into education because technology has the potential to ease the gap between traditional classroom learning and pandemic-based learning. The instability of students and educators in a traditional classroom setting during the pandemic forced the education system to be more adaptable, accomplished through multimodal learning, or a method in which educators present content through multiple modes.

Multimodal learning can provide students with opportunities to develop critical literacy skills like analysis. An example of multimodal learning would be the pairing of a podcast, a poem, and a graphic novel, which is beneficial to students because it allows students to evaluate the content in multiple ways and learn in ways that play to students' individual strengths. For instance, English Language Learners may absorb information better when their educator pairs text with actions like using Graphics Interchange Format (GIFs) or short moving pictures and short videos helps to demonstrate an idea or vocabulary word. Students who are strong readers will be able to use the audible and visual content to enhance their understanding of the text, while students who are not strong readers will be able to garner knowledge about the content to support them while they read the text (Dreher 51).

Multimodal learning can doubly serve to develop students' self-efficacy and communication skills. The more a student works with the content, the higher chance the student has of deep comprehension and retention of the content. For instance, Victoria uses multimodal learning with her students in her high school English classroom by beginning with a short lecture to introduce the Salem Witch Trials, followed by a combination of discovery methods, audible content (a podcast), written content, and a visual component (a political cartoon) to promote student-driven inquiry about the Salem Witch Trials. Each of these activities calls for more teacher preparation than traditional lecture-note structured classes. Yet, one benefit to this approach is that students monitor their own learning processes, even working with group members to clear the confusion with minimal teacher intervention. They quickly adapt to working with peers in the groups, helping analyze the content, and even having content-based discussions without prompting. This indirect learning of communication helps them complete the assignment, while also leading to stronger peer relationships in the classroom.

The activity in Victoria's class provides students with multiple modes of content, similar to Jill Perttula and Deborah Bertlesman's observe in "'Welcome to My House': Using a New Literacies Stance to Promote Critical Literacies." Perttula and Bertlesman viewed a series of ninth-grade ELA classes conducted by one teacher, and in one lesson, students were shown a series of politically-based videos and were asked to deconstruct them. This activity helped develop students' abilities to analyze audio and visual content, as they discussed camera angles, pacing, lighting, and word choice to address ELA standards that focus on point of view, perspective, and purpose.

Ms. B's strategy of teaching standards through a non-traditional method (in this case, using videos) provides students with disciplinary content while also teaching students how to absorb and analyze information from different

types of texts effectively. By using videos and other forms of media to meet the standards "through consistent integration of multimodal literacies," Ms. B found that her students "have more and different opportunities to make meaning than in classrooms that do not have a new literacy stance" (Perttula and Bertlesman 55). Like Ms. B's classroom, Victoria's students were likely unfamiliar with analyzing political cartoons as part of a Salem Witch Trials unit. However, they worked together to complete the task with little assistance. Teaching students to read and analyze multimodal texts helps them to develop critical communication skills.

Replacing Rote Learning with Active Learning

In observations before, during, and after the pandemic, we often noticed students' increased difficulties with retaining information, likely exacerbated by the effects of quarantine and social isolation—an observation also noted by a study about the effects of lost learning during COVID-19. In the study, more than 50% of teachers reported a significant loss of learning during the pandemic (Mann 4), even though, throughout the pandemic, educational systems continually sought to adapt in ways that lessened this gap. One way to build upon this ability to adapt is to shift away from rote learning (Ramya; Yibby 1), replacing it with teaching approaches that focus on how students process information to build upon the cognitive processes needed for successful problem-solving. Specifically, educators can integrate active learning by positioning students as constantly involved with instructional material (Bonwell and Eison iii). Unlike rote learning, active learning utilizes working memory, which has a longer duration and capacity and leads to a greater amount of information retained over an extended period of time (Yibby 1).

The Socratic Seminar is a common example of active learning, involving students circling their desks to engage in debate with one another, concentrating on asking questions to deepen their own understanding of the text. While Socratic Seminars are often limited to specific textual discussion, there are a multitude of additional options for ELA teachers to utilize in their classrooms. One such option is the reading strategy of dramatic role playing, where students skim a passage and plan a short play where they act as the characters from the reading. Dramatic role playing also aids in the growth of skills pertaining to research, analyzing, public speaking, and planning. Through active learning as a group, students have increased opportunities to hone essential social skills—such as conflict resolution, active listening, and effective communication—although, active learning also occurs individually in tasks like formulating questions based on class-assigned texts, reflecting on discussions in journals, or critically analyzing thematic or stylistic relationships between texts in a comparative reading.

During his practice teaching in Fall 2021, Daniel observed the benefits of active learning—increased participation and knowledge retention, alongside improved social skills development—in a Creative Writing II class. For example, in a lesson on character development, he provided an adjective word bank with corresponding definitions on the screen. Then, students chose at least two adjectives that directly related to the protagonist of a short story in progress. After adding adjective selections to a character profile sheet, he assigned them to random pairs, having students role-play a two-minute conversation, each acting as their respective protagonist. When the two minutes passed, pairs split up and switched partners, having two more conversations with other students acting as their characters. Students reflected that this activity deepened their understanding of character development and adjectives, while also fostering imagination and communication skills through public speaking and acting.

The mass quarantines implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic forced educators to change the ways they taught, wholly adapting their teaching methods from in-person processes to procedures filtered through the

barrier of telecommunication. During virtual learning, students continued to learn; however, the technological barrier contributed to decreased practice with in-person communication skills. The pandemic demonstrated the vital importance of human connection. As we continue to return to "normal" in our classrooms, we can help students address gaps in communications skills through a literacy-based curriculum that incorporates civic engagement, multimodal tools, and active learning techniques. These implementations will aid the repair of communication skills damaged by social isolation, and with improved communication skills, students can more effectively convey their needs, wants, and views both in their classrooms and communities.

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