



VIRGINIA  
ASSOCIATION OF  
TEACHERS OF  
ENGLISH

## Virginia English Journal

---

Volume 70  
Issue 2 *Winter*

Article 4

---

2020

### Writing that Values Multiple Ways of Knowing: Supporting Early Career Teachers' Efforts to Promote Literacy Development


Lauren A. May

*Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*, [laurenmay@vt.edu](mailto:laurenmay@vt.edu)

Heather Wright

*Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*, [heatw18@vt.edu](mailto:heatw18@vt.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.bridgewater.edu/vej>

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

May, Lauren A. and Wright, Heather (2020) "Writing that Values Multiple Ways of Knowing: Supporting Early Career Teachers' Efforts to Promote Literacy Development," *Virginia English Journal*: Vol. 70 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.bridgewater.edu/vej/vol70/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals and Campus Publications at BC Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Virginia English Journal by an authorized editor of BC Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [rlope@bridgewater.edu](mailto:rlope@bridgewater.edu).

---

## Writing that Values Multiple Ways of Knowing: Supporting Early Career Teachers' Efforts to Promote Literacy Development

### Author Biography

Lauren May is a doctoral student at Virginia Tech in the School of Education. She is studying how language and culture influence secondary classrooms.

Heather Wright is a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech in the School of Education. She is studying how classroom teachers can support the voices of rural adolescent students.

### Abstract

Early career secondary English teachers manage challenges that complicate their efforts to support students' literacy development, including feelings of inadequacy as teachers. This paper focuses on low-stakes writing strategies that teachers might use to promote literacy development in the classroom and decrease their feelings of inadequacy. The authors, Lauren and Heather, use the lenses of dialogic pedagogy and the reflective turn to draw upon literature on the blending of reading and writing instruction and elements of autoethnography to examine their efforts to support students' literacy development. Working from the literature and pedagogical reflections, the authors offer suggestions for instructional practice teachers can use to support students' literacy development. Key findings explore multiple ways of knowing and low-stakes writing activities.

### Keywords

low-stakes writing, writing to read, reading comprehension, secondary education, early career teachers

### **Writing that values multiple ways of knowing: Supporting early career teachers' efforts to promote literacy development**

As former public-school educators and current doctoral students doing education research, researchers Lauren and Heather looked to the literature and their own experiences to better understand teachers' efforts to promote student literacy. Employing elements of co-autoethnography (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Stewart & McClure, 2013) and reflecting on lived experiences, Lauren reflects on the first year of teaching: They swear they read it. A seventh-grade classroom of 26 students claims to fully comprehend Chapters 4-6 of *The Outsiders* from last week's in-class readings. However, the shifting eyes and inanimate discussion tell the first-year teacher that this is not the case. The question still arises on how Bob was killed, and silence follows a discussion question on why Ponyboy feels bad about cutting his hair. For fifteen minutes at the beginning of every class, this first-year teacher lost vocals reading aloud in the text in an effort to promote literacy. Similarly, Heather reflects on the second year of teaching in a ninth-grade classroom: The 22 students are mystified as to their low grades on yesterday's quiz. Earlier in the week, they were following along in class, reading aloud *Romeo and Juliet*, quoting the prologue from memory, and talking about nuances of the characters' family dynamics. But on the in-class quiz based on the homework readings, the majority of students cannot recall if Tybalt is a Montague or a Capulet, nor remember the sequence of events that led to Romeo's exile. They swear they read Act 3 for homework. The second-year teacher is perplexed.

Empirical studies and literature reviews have shown writing has a positive impact on reading (Applebee, 1984; Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000; Graham & Hebert, 2010; Graham et al., 2018; Graham & Santangelo, 2014; Klein, 1999) and that one way to promote literacy in the classroom is through writing (Collins et al., 2017; Gao, 2013; Graham & Hebert, 2010; Rhodes, 2013). The connection between reading and writing to promote literacy provides a unique vehicle for exploration in the secondary English classroom, but what does the early career teacher do when he or she does not feel equipped to make such connections in their own classroom? The concept of low-stakes writing, also commonly known as writing-to-read which stems from the concept of writing-to-learn, refers to teaching that combines reading and writing in the classroom while focusing on literacy enriching writing activities (Graham & Hebert, 2010). In this paper, we examine ways early career teachers can use low-stakes writing to engage students and develop students' reading and writing skills.

### **Challenges Faced by Early Career Teachers**

Despite hoping their efforts in the classroom will bring positive transformations to the field of education, early career secondary English teachers often encounter more challenges than anticipated (Smagorinsky et al., 2011; Stewart et al., 2019). The literature suggests numerous challenges faced by early career teachers, such as the lack of continued pedagogical support in a first full-time teaching position (Smagorinsky et al., 2013; Stewart et al., 2019) and the lack of direct writing instruction in teacher education programs (Haskins, 2017; Morgan & Pytash, 2014; Tremmel, 2001). Statistics highlighting secondary student reading and proficiency levels also reflect the need for literacy improvement (Nation's Report Card, 2019). The most prominent issue the literature addresses, however, revolves around the feelings of inadequacy concerning the teaching of reading (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2010) and writing (Draper et al., 2000; Gallavan et al., 2007).

The feelings of inadequacy concerning reading and writing pedagogy by secondary English teachers have the potential to encourage negative classroom situations and stunt student growth. These feelings of inadequacy can encourage an early career teacher to implement simplistic forms of pedagogy that mimic personal education experience (Smagorinsky et al., 2011) in attempts to metaphorically conceal a lack of confidence. Often, if engaging pedagogical practices were not retained from education programs, early career teachers will look to the school district to provide acceptable pedagogy (Smagorinsky et al., 2011), allowing the district to dictate how the reading and writing should be conducted in the classroom. Placing an emphasis on school district protocol can encourage teachers to shy away from the more student-centered, engaging practices that may have been a prominent component of teacher education programs. Smagorinsky et al. (2013) articulated this as they referred to the conforming pressures a first-year teacher felt, "campus-based influences faded in weight, propinquity, and perspective in her vision of how to teach" (p. 178). This aligns with the idea that feelings of inadequacy can appear even if reading and writing instruction practices were taught in teacher education programs. Therefore, early career teachers, regardless of prior experience, may have feelings of inadequacy that need to be addressed in the hopes that student-centered, engaging practices can then be implemented in the classroom.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To explore ways in which early career teachers can use low-stakes writing strategies to enhance reading comprehension in the secondary English classroom while simultaneously attempting to address a lack of pedagogical confidence, we used two critical lenses, dialogic pedagogy (Bakhtin, 1986; Fecho, 2011; Stewart, 2010; Stewart, 2019) and the reflective turn, (Schön, 1992) as part of our theoretical

framework. These lenses also allowed us to thoroughly reflect on our own teaching experiences.

### **Dialogic Stance**

Dialogic pedagogy seeks to bring content into dialogue with students' lives (Bakhtin, 1986; Fecho, 2011; Stewart, 2010; Stewart, 2019). It “values questioning, examines context, explores multiple perspectives, challenges hierarchical structures, and views learning as a generative act” (Stewart, 2019, p. 213). As researchers concerned with the ways in which teachers seek to support the work of students, we feel that dialogic pedagogy can serve as means of connecting with students in the classroom by bringing their own lived experiences and cultural contexts into dialogue with the content. This fits well with our goal of supporting adolescent's literacy development that values multiple ways of knowing. To review the literature through a dialogical perspective, we researched what exactly a dialogic classroom should look like. According to Stewart (2010), “Creating opportunities for multiple perspectives to transact with one another is the heart of dialogic teaching” (p.12). Therefore, a dialogic classroom involves a prepared and flexible teacher with authentic and open-ended questions that encourage student voices and individual interests to enter the conversation. This style of classroom expects the conversationalists to be civil and respectful towards the various perspectives voiced in the discussion. In our reflections we looked for indications of dialogic pedagogy by drawing our attention to lessons and activities with student-centered classrooms, students in active roles, safe environments, and growth mindsets on abilities and knowledge (Stewart, 2010). This manner of thinking allowed us to quickly sift through personal examples that focused on multiple perspectives being voiced.

### **The Power of Reflection**

The second lens through which we reflected was Schön's (1992) reflective turn, involving the detailed process of reflexivity. Schön (1992) explained that the reflective turn comes from celebrating personal histories and shifting from a “tacit” knowledge to an “explicit” knowledge (p. 122). Within the field of education, involving both students and teachers, the “reflective turn” can serve as a means of “a communicative and self-reflective practice of reciprocal inquiry” (p. 122). This reflective turn can be an effective tool for educators to participate in as it encourages the internal processing of what is already known. This processing can provide opportunities for teachers to realize strengths and weaknesses in personal teaching styles. Understanding the ‘why’ behind what works in some classrooms and what does not is crucial in supporting the goal of reaching all students with multiple ways

of knowing. Some teachers engage in elements of this process already as they reflect on daily events from within their classrooms (Schön, 1992).

We understood that participation in the reflective turn would offer benefits to practical-based educational research and instructional practices because, “reflection on knowing-and-reflecting-in-action is a process of getting in touch with the understandings we form ... it is central to the work of criticism, coaching, learning, and teaching.” (Schön, 1992, p. 126). Therefore, we knew this dialogue would be a necessary step in discovering successful strategies for suggestions to struggling early career teachers. In continuation of the process, it was important for us to be critical of our own prior teaching strategies. With Lauren being six months removed from the secondary English classroom and Heather being 18 months removed, recency allowed us to remember detailed accounts of successful writing strategies. Schön’s reflective turn allowed us to engage with our personal teaching histories and reflect on successful strategies.

### **Low-stakes Writing**

In order to implement the theoretical framework, the concept of low-stakes writing is necessary to address. Low-stakes writing is explained in detail in the work of Biancarosa and Snow (2004) as they suggest the combination of reading and writing pedagogies, “students who are given the opportunity to write in conjunction with reading show more evidence of critical thinking about reading. Likewise, many of the skills involved in writing-such as grammar and spelling-reinforce reading skill” (p.19).

Low-stakes writing is one example of a combined reading and writing pedagogy practice. Low-stakes writing is used in this paper to refer to teaching that focuses on literacy enrichment through writing activities. The literature suggests that by writing about what they have read, students’ reading skills improve (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Hebert, 2010). Rather than formal essays or grammar focused assessments, tasks are simple, low-stakes assignments that allow the student to connect their writing topic to the literature content. The idea behind these strategies is for students to make connections to textual content while increasing writing frequency without the pressure of a formal essay. Rather than teachers grading written assignments with high-stakes expectations, such as grammar, the low-stakes strategies offer students the opportunity to write without added mechanical pressures. While grammar is extremely important, when students feel the pressure lifted, writing can cease to be a daunting task and can be transformed into a strategic way of reflecting on the literature.

Using low-stakes writing in the classroom can serve as a means of giving teachers feelings of confidence in the process of writing instruction. These activities promote engagement with content as the primary focus and allow form to follow

function (Smagorinsky, 2019). As a result, students can work towards the development of texts that allow them to engage with content in personally meaningful ways (Boggs et al., 2018). If more activities yield student engagement, the confidence level of the teacher will rise as well (Denzine, Cooney, & McKenzie, 2005; Gay, 2000; Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Shaughnessy, 2004; Smagorinsky et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Since studies show that early career teachers have difficulties with confidence in reading and writing pedagogy, our purpose was to find specific strategies that support adolescents' literacy development that values multiple ways of knowing (Smagorinsky, 2019) and ways to bring the texts students read and construct into dialogue with their lived experiences. We determined that the best way to address this problem was through the low-stakes writing strategy (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). Therefore, this paper provides specific pedagogical, low-stakes writing instruction recommendations for early career teachers that can help respond to the challenge of engaging and supporting students as both readers and writers.

## **Methodology**

The methodology for this study uses elements of co-autoethnography which allowed us to collaboratively reflect and discuss our teaching histories (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Stewart & McClure, 2013). The initial stage of our data collection process involved a literature review to examine combined reading and writing strategies from other secondary English teachers. The second stage involved the utilization of Schön's reflective turn to compare classroom experiences. Synthesizing our experiences assisted in integrating our histories with the literature.

### **Stage One: Exploring Existing Literature**

We reviewed existing literature using complete databases JSTOR and EBSCOHost. Google Scholar was also used to find comprehensive reports on reading and writing. From the two reports used, both from the Carnegie Foundation (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Hebert, 2010), an ancestral search was conducted. Criteria for relevant strategies included narrowing our search to keywords, "secondary education; beginning teachers; low-stakes writing; reading comprehension; writing to read; early career teachers," and perusing abstracts in order to select the studies that involved the inclusion of low-stakes strategies and the impact on reading comprehension. We examined the articles we read to identify the pedagogical practices they referenced to find common themes and trends in the methods of instruction including: the need for students to craft their own new texts based upon readings and materials covered (Graham & Hebert, 2010) and the need

for students to connect their lives and prior knowledge to the text (Gaughan, 2001; Irvin, 1997).

### **Stage Two: Reflective Turn**

After generating the themes above, we examined our own practice. We asked ourselves, “*What low-stakes writing strategies in literature-based units were successful in our own classrooms?*” and “*Which of these successful low-stakes writing strategies also assisted in student reading comprehension?*” in order to focus on relevant and successful strategies. These questions allowed us to make use of the autoethnography methodology to focus on these low-stakes writing strategies with the goal of discovering practical, pedagogical strategies for the secondary English classroom. This provided us with a wide data set of low-stakes writing strategies prior to examining the strategies with our critical lenses.

In our desire to provide early career secondary English teachers with successful strategies to implement, the first part of our data analysis required us to examine our combined strategies and literature review findings under the critical lenses of dialogic pedagogy (Bakhtin, 1986; Stewart, 2010) and reflective turning (Schön, 1992). Using the study of Stewart and McClure (2013) as a model, we implemented a stance of engaging in dialogue with our combined teaching experiences: “This stance frees us from having to appear alone in the instructional state; instead, it enables us to engage in the collaborative process of learning together as a community” (p. 95). Since dialogue generates conditions for meaning to be made (Bakhtin, 1986), we were able to identify successful instructional strategies in our teaching histories; it was essential for us to dialogue about writing practices that provided room for student voice in addition to resulting in student literacy enrichment. Our reflection through this lens enabled us to think about successful strategies that were conceived through the implementation of student-centered discussion, teacher reflection on student interest, challenges to standard assessments, and active class participation in learning. We discarded most instructional strategies on the basis that we did not perceive these strategies to fit within the schema of our understanding of Bakhtin (1986) and Stewart’s (2010) explanation of dialogic pedagogy. The strategies that remained were considered upon completion of our personal reflective turns.

Utilizing Schön’s (1992) idea of the reflective turn as a lens, we gathered examples of emotions and memories pertaining to the teaching of writing in the beginning of our separate careers. Heather, who taught at a rural high school, reflected on writing-based and project-based assignments used in the secondary English classroom. Assignments reflected on were from across all grade levels that drew upon student understanding and connections to various texts. Lauren, a former middle and high school teacher, looked back at the specific texts read in classes and



pulled out strategies that involved the implementation of successful writing instruction strategies.

After engagement in dialogue with the existing literature, making the reflective turn on our own teaching experiences, and dialoguing with each other, we prioritized two key strategies that combined low-stakes writing methods with reading enhancement: crafting new texts to privilege student experiences and making connections between the lives of students and texts. These strategies created pathways for success in our own classrooms and posit suggestions that can support early career secondary English teachers' own efforts to provide high-quality reading and writing instruction in contemporary classrooms.

### **Teaching Context of the Researchers**

We, as researchers and former secondary Virginia and North Carolina educators, know that the teaching of reading and writing involve demanding tasks requiring student interaction and engagement. Lauren comes from two widely different teaching backgrounds where one school district required the utilization of specific writing strategies; the other district allowed freedom over the pedagogy implemented in the classroom. Heather's district aligned with this latter description of educators implementing instruction at personal preference. Though we both grew to appreciate the minimal instructional guidance in our districts, we understand the many challenges that early career teachers have with the implementation of reading and writing instruction.

### **Understandings**

The literature reviewed supports the notion that students gain more insight on English content when the text at hand connects with low-stakes writing (Graham & Hebert, 2010). Our reflective work, in dialogue with the existing literature, highlights two examples for effective literacy instruction that supports students. First, based on themes of crafting new texts, where students write responses to the reading that involve personal reactions or emotions (Graham & Hebert, 2010), students can write narrative essays or diary entries using the voice of a selected character to study the nuances of characterization and plot. The students' work is encouraged to be creative and complex, from imagining the frustrations of specific characters to examining reflections on character's lives. This work privileges student experiences, allowing them to predict events based on personal experience or imagination. Second, based on themes of connection, where prior knowledge and lived experiences are used in conjunction with the reading (Gaughan, 2001; Irvin, 1997), students reflect upon characterization, setting, and overall plot. This is shown in activities that reinforce prior knowledge connections such as the

designing of travel brochures highlighting the setting, inclusion of plot props, incorporation of character voice and appearance, or implementation of interdisciplinary activities. Making interdisciplinary connections across subject areas based on personal histories encourages students to understand the concepts and connect the class content as it unfolds.

In order to support early career teachers, we suggest these two strategies for adaptation into their secondary English classrooms. Through the detailed analysis of each strategy and associated examples listed below, we defend how these multiple ways of knowing, low-stakes writing strategies can promote student literacy development. Lauren and Heather felt these strategies lessened their feelings of inadequacy concerning the teaching of reading and writing that is often felt during the first years of teaching.

### **Crafting New Texts**

Imagination plays a key role in the crafting of a new text. This terminology refers to an original text or assignment created by the student. In this context, the new text is crafted based upon an adaptation or reflection of a previous text. Responding to the text first requires the student to access lived experiences and engage in reflection. The response could be, “a personal reaction to the text or analysis and interpretation of it” (Graham & Hebert, 2010, p. 14). A personal reaction, or individualized experience-oriented reflection, requires that the students comprehend and engage with the material. Extending ways of responding to the text, through personal and analytical reactions, allows for more thorough textual comprehension (Graham & Hebert, 2010). Therefore, the crafting of new texts allows the teacher to not only see that the student comprehends the initial text, but also that the student can personalize the assignment. The character diaries and monologue narratives described below offer specific examples of effectively requiring both personal and analytical reactions to the text, demonstrating aspects of dialogic pedagogy. These examples were specifically chosen because Lauren and Heather found them to be successful in their classrooms. However, these strategies can also be applied to other texts to foster student engagement and support student growth.

#### ***Hamlet***

Heather used Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* to teach narrative inquiry, implementing literature analysis through storytelling. The goal was for the class to find personal and social connections with the text before transitioning into narrative essay writing. Following the reading of *Hamlet*, students wrote narrative essays using the voice of a character, using a specific plot moment for the character to narrate a

potential inner monologue. Examples of essays that students composed were creative, nuanced, and rooted in text for support. One essay was told by Ophelia as she was drowning, reflecting upon the perceived loss of Hamlet's love and the juxtaposition between her anger towards him and her continued devotion. With the Ophelia essay, a character whose narrative is limited in the play is literally given an audible voice in the tale. The student who constructed the essay, not a confident writer, expressed in her post-essay reflection that she had never been prouder of an assignment. Other essays' perspectives included the gravedigger as he's trying to concentrate on his craft, Hamlet as he struggles with whether to kill Claudius or not, and Gertrude as she reflects on her grievances towards her son with her dying breath. Because students had already read, analyzed, and researched *Hamlet*, they had a common text that they felt confident in and had related with prior to the writing process. This created the groundwork for students to apply connections to the text, resulting in a complex understanding of the material, the chosen character, and universal themes. In order to write Hamlet's inner struggle on whether or not to kill Claudius, the student had to discern what the relationship between Claudius and Hamlet was like before, during, and after the scene, as well as understand why Hamlet would have a divisive relationship with his uncle. With that understanding, the student was able to construct a new narrative that showcased personal perspectives. Heather perceived that the assignment was successful with her students because they were invested in compelling characters from the story as they brought in their knowledge and personal lived experiences into dialogue with the text. This strategy can be applied to a variety of texts. It provides room for student expression and offers a creative outlet for demonstrating understanding of the text.

### *Lord of the Flies*

While the *Hamlet* example offers the crafting of new texts as a summative assessment, the journals of *Lord of the Flies* offer a formative style of assessment. In the English classroom, Lauren read and analyzed *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding with her students. Pausing at critical sections during the reading, students kept journals with discussion questions and responses, which gave the students a safe space to craft new texts, as these entries were only read by Lauren. It was in these journals that Lauren would create various assignments asking students to craft their own texts based on the readings. One of these assignments was a diary entry, similar to the *Hamlet* narrative that Heather describes. After finishing certain chapters and having discussions on character development, students were asked to choose one character: Ralph, Jack, or Piggy and write a diary entry, imagining and articulating the deeper feelings of the character based on events in the novel. This approach to crafting new texts allowed students to make connections with characters in the story while, simultaneously, having them show understanding of

the plot. This assignment was enacted on several occasions at various points in the novel, allowing for a low-stakes writing strategy that engaged students with the content and promoted literacy development. Students commented on their enjoyment of combining a character's personality with their own to create these entries. Lauren perceived this strategy as successful when students added their own beliefs and assumptions to the diary entries. This combination of their lived experiences and the text reflects elements of dialogic pedagogy in the classroom. Therefore, this strategy could be implemented with any literature piece that uses characters. It can also be used as a low-stakes writing tool for assessing student understanding regarding character development, emotions, or plot development.

### **Connections**

The second strategy of making connections can be seen in a variety of forms. It is engaging for students when they can bring their personal lives and ideas into dialogue with classroom texts. Irvin (1997) referred to "metacognition" which is referencing how, "readers and writers must monitor their progress, understanding, and purpose for reading and writing" (p.8). Irvin discussed how students need to incorporate reflections into personal learning as much as possible. The examples of this strategy that Lauren and Heather present offer two ways teachers can not only assist students in a lack of content knowledge, but also how to gain that knowledge and apply it in their lives outside of the classroom as well. The two examples of brochures and interdisciplinary activities follow Gaughan (2001)'s advice on, "creating opportunities for students to read and write about their lives... to try on different voices .... to think and write about ethical dilemmas" (p.63) and the importance of that process. This strategy is useful when teachers want students to analyze the literature by bringing personal experiences into dialogue with classroom assignments, implementing dialogic pedagogy. When opportunities for multiple connections to be explored are available to students, they are encouraged to bring prior knowledge and their own lived experiences into the classroom.

### ***Transylvania Brochure***

While teaching *Dracula*, Heather saw that the students were intimidated by the setting, the characters, and the structure of the story. In efforts to help students build confidence through better comprehension of the text, Heather's students crafted brochures for tourists in Transylvania. Brochures, or guides, are a means of packing a large amount of material into a digestible text with the purpose of drawing in a reader. The goal of this assignment was for students to compile information about the gothic setting and its importance towards the novel's plot while developing an understanding regarding characters considered both insiders and outsiders of

Transylvania. For the assignment, students were to take on the persona of Count Dracula and think about why he would want to lure people to his home. Then, students were to consider how rhetoric within a text could entice visitors to travel to Transylvania. Knowing why Dracula wanted to lure visitors, how could he do so in written form on a brochure? What would bring people to a land far different than their own? The tone used in the brochure could be serious, sarcastic, or even ironic. Students were to research Transylvania while also using the text of *Dracula* as evidence. Images and illustrations were encouraged to help students visualize the novel's setting as well as add additional elements of persuasion for the imagined reader. Heather saw that students were excited about the activity and were invested in their research, actively sharing new findings with their peers, asking questions about discoveries, and playing around with language in their texts. Doing research on Transylvania, from the history, myths, location, and culture, allowed students to find information apart from traditional lecture. This information directly related to the classroom text and provided background knowledge for students as the unit continued. This assignment could be modified or adapted to fit the needs for numerous texts. It provides students with many opportunities to both express creativity and demonstrate understanding of the content.

### ***Interdisciplinary Reflection***

*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne offered Lauren's students a chance to be immersed in the Holocaust experience by following the son of a Nazi. Prior to beginning this novel, Lauren realized that most of the students had never heard of the Holocaust. In Lauren's school, students were separated into teams. Each team had one teacher for each content area, which allowed for easy collaboration with the team's History teacher. Together, Lauren and the history teacher developed slight accommodations to their units in order to align Holocaust learning with *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. Discussion questions, historical overviews, and videos were all shared between the teachers so that information would overlap for students and be fully digested. With this full immersion, Lauren incorporated time for students to write personal reflections. These personal reflections were required to implement both textual evidence of the Holocaust from the novel as well as historical facts learned and reviewed in the History and English classes. Students were encouraged to include questions they had concerning the novel or additional historical details. The writing was reviewed for accuracy in both subjects and many students commented on how much more engaged they were with the content during this collaboration. This form of low-stakes writing offers students a way to gain literacy skills by connecting with the text at a more personal and interdisciplinary level. This strategy can be modified to incorporate any text with various disciplines. School structures and designs may impact this implementation, especially for

schools where not all students have the same teachers. The successfulness of this strategy will depend on the time spent requiring students to draw upon their prior knowledge. The concept of bringing outside experiences into the classroom, from home cultures or other educational settings, allows the students to connect with the content in more meaningful ways. Additionally, the students' realization of content applicability to other classes or aspects of life allows them to experience the connection process and, hopefully, begin to make more connections in other areas of life as well.

### **Implications**

This paper offers engaging ways of utilizing low-stakes writing in the secondary English classroom that can be adapted to a variety of texts. When teachers have strategies that work, that they can see be successful in the classroom, their confidence grows. Based on data from the literature and our personal teaching histories, the two strategies of creating new texts and connecting prior knowledge are the recommendations that we suggest for early career secondary English teachers to implement in their classrooms, as they were successful in ours. Listening to the students is important when attempting to create a dialogic classroom where students bring their lived experiences and ideas into discussions and assignments. When we suggest listening to students, we do not just mean "hearing" them in an auditory sense. Creating opportunities for dialogue is not enough in the classroom. Students must also feel that their voices are heard and valued in the space of the classroom. Teachers have the ability to provide students with assignments that create opportunities for dialogic expression. Beginning this practice as an early career teacher allows the skill to develop over time, becoming more refined and helpful for students along the way. What the students take away from these activities is helpful for teachers to know as it can assist in the adaptation of beneficial strategies. Though our study was limited to the teaching experiences of our own personal histories, we believe that these strategies have broader usefulness in aiding early career teachers. This type of research leads to three implications, or calls to action, for teacher education programs, early career teachers, as well as experienced teachers.

Concerning teacher preparation programs, it would be beneficial to pre-service teachers if programs provided additional opportunities to reflect on reading and writing pedagogy strategies. This can be done by reflecting after strategy-share practices, journals during student teaching, or other activities that model and inspire this kind of reflection on self-efficacy. Therefore, teacher preparation programs, by acknowledging the struggles of beginning teachers, such as with struggles in teaching writing, can better support pre-service teachers.

For early career teachers, reflection is the key to this process; reflection embraces the fact that teaching is about learning and growing. It is our belief that early career teachers should continue the practice of reflection when they enter into the classroom, reflecting each day on strategies that work and those that are not successful. For Lauren and Heather, even unsuccessful strategies as early career teachers bore new ideas in the classroom, developing into strategies that were engaging and insightful.

For mentors and colleagues of early career teachers, we believe that it is important to acknowledge that the latter group would benefit from additional support; a key facet of this dynamic starts with veteran teachers remembering the difficulties that come when first entering the field. Just as we have presented strategies that have been successful in our teaching careers through participating in the reflective turn, mentors and colleagues of early career teachers can be intentional about sharing strategies that work and do not work in their classrooms. Such deliberate moves not only assist early career teachers in developing tools that can be utilized in their classroom but have the potential to strengthen the spirit of collaboration with new colleagues. That spirit of reflection and sharing will aid early career teachers throughout their career.

Along with the central focus of connecting reading and writing in the secondary English classroom, specific instructional strategies can be provided to early career teachers in order to encourage the implementation of low-stakes writing. Feeling unprepared for the profession that they have been working towards is a jarring prospect and could impact their sense of confidence. Therefore, it is our assertion that beginning teachers need concrete instructional strategies that can support student learning and build their confidence as beginning teachers.

The strategies of crafting new texts and making connections have the potential to not only engage students in a text, but also increase student reading and writing skills and teacher self-efficacy in secondary English classrooms. Through our review of the literature, analyzing examples through a lens of dialogical pedagogy, as well as making a reflective turn in considering our own successful strategies, we recommend these as low-stakes writing strategies for early career secondary English teachers. Finally, we humbly call on teacher education programs, early career teachers, and experienced teachers to prioritize low self-efficacy that can arise for early career secondary English teachers who perceive that they are not fully equipped in reading and writing pedagogy. In acknowledging and subsequently advocating that adaptable strategies are needed in the classroom to support early career teachers, not only will teachers benefit, but more importantly students will as well. Just as we desire students to be confident in their work, we want teachers to be confident in their craft and in their discipline.

## References

- Applebee, A. (1984). Writing and reasoning. *Review of Educational Research*, 54, 577–596.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). The problem of speech genres. (V. McGee, Trans.). In C. Emerson & M. Holquist, (Eds.), *Speech genres and other late essays* (pp. 60-102). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Biancarosa, G., & Snow, C. E. (2004). Reading next: A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy. A report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved from [https://production-carnegie.s3.amazonaws.com/filer\\_public/b7/5f/b75fba81-16cb-422d-ab59-373a6a07eb74/ccny\\_report\\_2004\\_reading.pdf](https://production-carnegie.s3.amazonaws.com/filer_public/b7/5f/b75fba81-16cb-422d-ab59-373a6a07eb74/ccny_report_2004_reading.pdf)
- Boggs, G. L., Stewart, T. T., & Jansky, T. A. (2018). Economic relevance and planning for literacy instruction: Reconciling competing ideologies. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 61(5), 553–565. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.671>.
- Coia, L. & Taylor, M. (2009). Co/autoethnography: Exploring our teaching selves collaboratively. In D. L. Tidwell, M. L. Heston, & L. M. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Research methods for the self-study of practice* (pp. 3-16). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer Science.
- Collins, J. L., Lee, J., Fox, J. D., & Madigan, T. P. (2017). Bringing together reading and writing: An experimental study of writing intensive reading comprehension in low-Performing urban elementary schools. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 52(3), 311.
- Denzine, G. M., J. B. Cooney, and R. McKenzie. 2005. Confirmatory factor analysis of the teacher efficacy scale for prospective teachers. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 75(4): 689–708.
- Draper, M. C., Barksdale-Ladd, M., & Radencich, M. C. (2000). Reading and writing habits of preservice teachers. *Reading Horizons*, 40(5).
- Fecho, B. (2011). *Teaching for the Students: Habits of heart, mind, and practice in the engaged classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.



- Fitzgerald, J., and Shanahan, T. (2000). Reading and writing relations and their development. *Educational Psychologist, 35*, 39–50.
- Gallavan, N. P., Bowles, F. A., & Young, C. T. (2007). Learning to write and writing to learn: Insights from teacher candidates. *Action in Teacher Education, 29*(2), 61-69.
- Gao, Y. (2013). The effect of summary writing on reading comprehension: The role of mediation in EFL classroom. *Reading Improvement, 50*(2), 43–47.
- Gaughan, J. (2001). A literary transfusion: Authentic reading-writing connections. In B. O. Ericson (Ed.), *Teaching Reading in High School English Classes* (pp. 33–47). *National Council of Teachers of English*. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED458526&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- Gay, G. 2000. *Culturally responsive teaching: theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Graham, S., and Hebert, M. A. (2010). Writing to read: Evidence for how writing can improve reading. A Carnegie Corporation Time to Act Report. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved from [https://media.carnegie.org/filer\\_public/9d/e2/9de20604-a055-42da-bc00-77da949b29d7/ccny\\_report\\_2010\\_writing.pdf](https://media.carnegie.org/filer_public/9d/e2/9de20604-a055-42da-bc00-77da949b29d7/ccny_report_2010_writing.pdf)
- Graham, S., Liu, X., Aitken, A., Ng, C., Bartlett, B., Harris, K. R., & Holzapfel, J. (2018). Effectiveness of literacy programs balancing reading and writing instruction: A meta-analysis. *Reading Research Quarterly, 53*(3), 279–304.
- Graham, S., & Santangelo, T. (2014). Does spelling instruction make students better spellers, readers, and writers? A meta-analytic review. *Reading and Writing, 27*(9), 1703–1743.
- Haskins, C. (2017). The writing problem: Teacher self-efficacy and instruction. *Learning to Teach: Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies Through Research, 6*(1), 14–19.
- Irvin, J. L. (1997). Building sound literacy learning programs for young adolescents. *Middle School Journal, 28*(3), 4–9.

- Klein, P. (1999). Reopening inquiry into cognitive processes in writing-to-learn. *Educational Psychology Review*, 11, 203–270.
- Mojavezi, A., and M. P. Tamiz. 2012. The impact of teacher self-efficacy on the students' motivation and achievement. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(3): 483–91.
- Morgan, D. N., & Pytash, K. E. (2014). Preparing preservice teachers to become teachers of writing: A 20-year review of research literature. *English Education*, 47(October), 6–32.
- The Nation's Report Card. 2019. *NAEP report card: 2019 NAEP reading assessment*. Retrieved from <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/reading/2019/>
- Rhodes, L. A. (2013). When is writing also reading? *Across the Disciplines*, 10(4), 7.
- Schön, D. (1992) The theory of inquiry: Dewey's legacy to education. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 22(2), 119–139.
- Shaughnessy, M. F. 2004. An interview with Anita Woolfolk: The educational psychology of teacher efficacy. *Educational Psychology Review*, 16(2): 153–75.
- Smagorinsky, P. (2019). *Teaching English by design: How to create and carry out instructional units*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Smagorinsky, P., Ryhm, D., & Moore, C. P. (2013). Competing centers of gravity: A beginning teacher's socialization process within conflictual settings. *English Education*, 45(2), 147-183.
- Smagorinsky, P., Wilson, A. A., & Moore, C. (2011). A beginning teacher's dilemma teaching grammar and writing. *English Education*, 43(3), 262–292.
- Stewart, T. T. (2010). A dialogic pedagogy: Looking to Mikhail Bakhtin for alternatives to standards period teaching practices. *Critical Education*, 1(6), 1–21.

- Stewart, T. T. (2019). Supporting teacher candidates' development of critical thinking skills through dialogue and reflection. In G. Mariano & F. Figliano (Eds.). *Handbook of research on critical thinking skills* (pp. 211-234). Hershey, PA: IGI-Global.
- Stewart, T. T., Coombs, D., Fecho, B., & Hawley, T. (2019, Online First) Embracing wobble: Exploring novice teachers' efforts to enact dialogic literacy instruction. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*.
- Stewart, T. T., & McClure, G. (2013). Freire, Bakhtin, and collaborative pedagogy: A dialogue with students and mentors. *International Journal for Dialogical Science*, 7(1), 91-108.
- Tremmel, R. (2001). Seeking a balanced discipline: Writing teacher education in first-year composition and English education. *English Education*, 34(1), 6–30.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A.W. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17: 783–805.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Johnson, D. (2011). Exploring literacy teachers' self-efficacy beliefs: Potential sources at play. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(4), 751-761.