

excerpt from “Student Authority Revisited”

**by
Robert C. Small, Jr.**

... Many of us still tend to focus our attention on what we think students don't know, but our time of hip hop and computers, videos, TV, etc. has created a vast world of language experiences that no one person can master. Much of that vast world belongs more to our students than to us. Thus, if we say overtly or by our actions that WE know ENGLISH and that the students don't and then try to stick to what we know, we limit rather than enrich what will happen in our classes—even more than twenty-five years ago when I was trying to put my ideas down on paper. Perhaps more important today than at that time, we throw away the opportunity for relevance, for engagement, for excitement. I suspect we also give the students the opportunity to discover very quickly what we don't know that they do know and, if they are inclined to meanness, to trap us into revealing what we don't know.

I believe that this perspective is so important because students today have an even richer, more diverse experience in regard to stories and the English language and writing than I did when I was a teen. Stories for me were limited to those few I listened to on the radio that were designed to appeal to young listeners, mostly in the late afternoon, and those I watched on television on the few channels available. But much of what was broadcast then either was planned for young children or, to an even greater extent, for adults. I read, of course, but even my reading was pretty well controlled by teachers and my parents. Today, with the explosion of specialty magazines and the continuing availability of fiction and non-fiction in reasonably cheap paperback books and with a hundred or more television channels available through cable and dish, the number of stories that many teens have read and seen is immense. How does this explosion of possibilities contribute to the increased knowledge base of today's students? In the original article I made the point that "What the English curriculum should seek to promote in the study of literature is, then, a looking inward for the bases in knowledge, experience, and feeling, which will bring further meaning to the work" [my emphasis]. Little did I know then the multitude of bases today's students would be able to look inward toward: stories, movies, MTV, newscasts, even video games. There is so much more to select from....

excerpt from “Oral Language SOLs and the Veterans History Project”

**by
Catharine J. Meechan**

... During October 2002 I attended the National Book Festival in Washington D.C. While exploring the various booths under the Library of Congress tent, I was drawn to a video playing of a WWII veteran sharing his military experiences. The interview was part of the Veterans History Project sanctioned by the United States Congress.

The Veterans History Project was created to gather the stories, photographs, and memorabilia from those veterans who served during WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Persian Gulf wars. Once the stories are collected and documented, they are sent to the American Folklife Center to be catalogued and archived for future generations to utilize for research.

Like every classroom teacher, I am always searching for the “all-in-wonder” activity to engage and teach my students, and hopefully they come away from the lesson with more than just a grade for the gradebook. My school is situated in the heart of a military-rich community, and I felt the Veterans History Project was the perfect assignment to cover the Oral Language and Writing SOLs and to inspire my students to explore their nation’s past....

excerpt from “Using Creativity to Fulfill the Standards”

**by
Lisa Kenny**

... Using the novel, *A Day No Pigs Would Die* by Robert Newton Peck, my students were able to meet [twelve SOLs].... nd they met all of these in a four-week period of time as I used both conventional and alternative methods of assessment.

Students are arranged into one large circle to read the novel. I alternate between reading aloud and having students read silently. Every three chapters or so, they break into groups of five and ask each other comprehensive, open-ended questions on what they have just read while I walk around the room monitoring the exchange of information. If a group has questions that cannot be answered, they must write them down to bring back to the larger group. My seventh grade students thoroughly enjoy trying to stump each other. Through this process, they are learning to listen, communicate, and understand crucial elements such as the importance of setting, character, theme, perspective/point of view, and plot.

Rather than using conventional assessment methods, once we finish reading the novel and all questions are answered, we take a trip to the school’s computer lab. There, I instruct the students to break up into their small groups to do research on the internet. I assign one group the task of researching the state of Vermont, another group to research farming, another to research pigs/swine, and the last group to research what it means to be a Shaker....

excerpt from “Student Engagement and (Neo)Victorian Literature”

**by
Erin Webster-Garrett**

... The question of how to engage with Victorian literature is one I have grappled with, not only as a teacher, but also as a student. Though I am now a Victorian idolizer, I was the most resistant of readers as both an undergraduate and a graduate student (I also blanched at the thought of becoming an English teacher, so there’s a little window into my psyche: that which I most resist is that with which I am also the most taken. Put more colloquially, “denial ain’t just a river in Egypt”). Just looking at a reading list—names such as Tennyson, Browning, Newman, Carlyle, Trollope, Thackeray, Kipling, and Dickens swimming before me—would make my eyes roll up into the back of my head as I tried (unsuccessfully) to control an involuntary snort. I was not the most mature of readers, but I was an opinionated one.

In truth, most of my instructors did little to overcome my resistance: they seemed to come from a generation who believed that the job of an English teacher is not to teach me to love the (very long) novels and poems they assign, but to give me an opportunity to teach myself to love them. I’m only half-embarrassed to say that, as a 19-year-old, I could not appreciate their confidence in me. I wanted, needed, hungered for somebody—anybody—to show me the relevance of the work I was performing. “How,” I would grouse to whoever would listen, “am I supposed to relate to people who thought piano legs were sexy?” “And why,” I would hrrumph, “should I care about what happens to Pip in *Great Expectations*? He’s just a big whiner.” I was not male (I’m still not, though I now know such terms are innately slippery. Teaching Victorian lit has taught me that, actually). And my expectations, or rather the expectations others had for me—a shy, overweight, dyslexic kid—were, if anything, mediocre....

**excerpt from “Exploring Fairy Tale in the Secondary Classroom:
The Many Faces of Cinderella”**

**by
Hood Frazier**

... Day 1: Cinderella as Product of Popular Culture

Neil Postman in *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* writes: "The ability to learn turns out to be a function of the extent to which one is capable perception change" (121). Working with fairy tales is a natural way to engage students who usually have a well-formed sense of both the structure of the fairy tale and a knowledge of its content from various popular cultural sources. Cinderella, a Disney classic animated film, has been both presented to them since childhood on home video and encountered in Disney books. Therefore, most of the students could retell this version with very little prompting.

It is important on this first day to set the tone and atmosphere in the class. Generally, I accomplish this through an open discussion about the nature of fairy tales and what distinguishes them from other forms of story. Most students mention the opening and closing: "Once upon a time.... and "...lived happily every after." These markers I write on the board and then ask students to name their favorite fairy tales. Since most of the fairy tales they recall are from popular culture and are decidedly "western" in origin, this list is both predictable and short. When I ask them if they can recall when they first became aware of such a tale, they almost unanimously say when they were children.

This discussion provides a valuable opportunity to discuss the notion that folk culture itself is contextualized; that is, there is often a pattern in when and where it appears in the larger culture. In our case, fairy tales, which originally evolved through oral tradition, have been integrated into American society as one form of literature that is appropriate for children and, interestingly, have often been transformed in order to be so. This transformation occurs when Disney, for instance, replaces the Grimm brother's pigeons with talking mice and the step sister's self-mutilation with a humorous exaggeration of trying to cram an obviously oversized foot into a dainty glass slipper. Such transformations also occurs in most of the Disney versions which add sentimental songs, happy animals and other motifs to change a rather graphic tale into something "appropriate" for children and their parents to consume....

excerpt from “Teachers Write First! The Art of Teaching SOL’s through Writing”

**by
Deanna Bradberry**

... Recently I attended a teaching playwriting workshop sponsored by The Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia. John Hardy, an experienced playwright and staffer at the Barter, helped conduct the workshop wherein a group of Southwest Virginia English teachers experienced a morning of—believe it or not—writing! As English teachers in the secondary schools, we rarely have time to sit and write—with free creative reign, no inhibitions, no students in the room! And, ironically, the practice of writing, that fun thing that we all love but have no time to do, makes us better English teachers especially if one is mother, coach, teacher. So, how do we as English teachers improve our students’ SOL writing scores? We make the time! We write!

I immediately took my writing experience from the Barter workshop into my classroom at Rural Retreat High School. I began with my composition students and took them through the steps of the Seed (courtesy of the Barter workshop)—the creative germinating of ideas by asking them questions. First, I asked them to think of five “who’s,” or persons they could briefly describe—no stopping to think and no pauses with the pencil. The second step was to write a brief description of a “what” or a “moment in time,” again with five examples, all unrelated to each other or to the “who’s” already in existence on paper. Thirdly, students wrote five “where’s,” or specific places where a play might begin....

**excerpt from “Seven Sure Signs of the Tired Writing Teacher
(And How to Jumpstart Seven Teachable Moments)”**

**by
Judy Self**

... Could this ever have been you?

It's 9:30 p.m. You're so tired the couch rolls under you like a boat. You have bus duty beginning at 7:10 a.m. tomorrow. You've just finished grading one class set of persuasion papers (the big one – 31 students), and you still have fourth period's left (the little one – only 22 students). You pick up the first paper, Jason's, read it, roll your eyes, throw up your hands, murmur one of the statements below, mark a few areas, dash a quick note about a usage matter, jot a C- or D on the paper and toss it, face-down, on the cushion beside you, eager to forget it. Inside, you secretly know that you'll remember it tomorrow when you hand the papers back, but, alas, the whole class moves on tomorrow to read a selection in the literature book. Maybe you feel a little bit guilty that Jason doesn't seem to be improving his writing skills. Maybe you feel a little bit glad that Jason, who likes literature, will be relieved to move away from writing tomorrow.

If the above sounds familiar, you may be suffering from TWTS -- a recently identified syndrome whose acronym is pronounced "twits" – standing for "tired writing teacher syndrome." Luckily, teachers who contract it suffer for only several days, but, unfortunately, it can recur. Following is a list of typical statements emanating from TWTS victims. Examine the list and give yourself a point for each utterance that could have been yours. (A score of two denotes a mild case of TWTS; a score of four is a full-blown case; and, a score of five or more is serious enough to need two mental health sick days, the first spent pigging out on chocolates in front of the TV watching the inane daytime lineup, the second spent in serious lesson planning, utilizing some of the ideas in this article. Some relief from TWTS is guaranteed, or your money back!)

- 1) "I can't let them write a paper yet; they can't even write decent sentences (or paragraphs) yet."
- 2) "This paper is such a mess that I don't know where to start!"
- 3) "All I ever get from him is a listy paper!"
- 4) "These kids don't revise (even when I give them time in class to); they just recopy their first drafts."
- 5) "My students know how to write a 5-paragraph theme, but they are such boring papers."
- 6) "I just can't get them to elaborate!"
- 7) "Dead words. All I get from them are sentences with words as flat and interesting as concrete sidewalk sections."....

excerpt from “The Need for a Culturally Responsive Curriculum”

**by
Carolyn Hopkins**

... As an African-American English teacher, I find many things disturbing regarding the issue of race in our public school system curricula. Critics frequently claim that multicultural education is essentially divisive and that school curricula should be based around the nation’s common culture (Ravitch, 1991-1992). Proponents argue that the goal of a pluralistic curriculum is to present the truth, a goal that does not necessitate ignoring commonalities (Hillard, 1991-1992). In addition, some proponents suggest that the most common approaches to multicultural education do not go far enough if they focus on inclusion and do not incorporate a critical examination of the Anglo-European ideology that undergirds traditional public school education. I believe that a curriculum that is culturally responsive capitalizes on students’ cultural backgrounds.

I admit that it is difficult finding a balance that is inclusive of the nation’s population. However, if progress is to be made in the area of curriculum revision, then the writers of curricula must be progressive and fearless in their approaches to making meaningful and contemporary modifications. I am a staunch proponent of multiculturalism when teaching English literature. Moreover, I advocate that an Afrocentric curriculum should be implemented where the majority of students are African American. The current Standards of Learning in Virginia attempt to be inclusive of diverse cultural backgrounds, but they are not expansive enough in their inclusion of ethnic studies, either historically or currently....

excerpt from “Teacher Communication in the Classroom”

**by
Kimberly M. Cuny and Sarah M. Wilde**

... The body of research known as Teacher Immediacy Behaviors has grown substantially over the past 15 years. It represents interdisciplinary studies that connect the fields of education and communication. Over the past year we have had the opportunity to develop and facilitate workshops on teacher communication in the classroom for faculty and teaching aids in North Carolina and Virginia (VATE 2004), who work in elementary up through higher education classrooms. The workshops center on the connection between a teacher’s immediacy behaviors and three key classroom issues—student affective and/or cognitive learning, students taking an interest in their own learning, and the decreasing of disruptive student behaviors. In doing so, we have come to know the positive power of this perceived closeness in the classroom.

Immediacy can be defined as “the degree of perceived physical or psychological closeness between people” (Richmond 2002, p. 68). While this closeness can be enhanced through both verbal and nonverbal communicative actions, this essay will focus on the nonverbal communication of teachers as it relates to the students’ perception of closeness. Immediacy researchers have found that the major function of teachers’ nonverbal behavior in the classroom is to improve students’ affect or liking for the subject matter, teacher, and class, and to instill in them the desire to learn more about the subject matter (Richmond and McCroskey 2004). While teacher immediacy can be examined in varying ways, this article will look at the areas of teacher dress and appearance, gesture and movement, facial and eye behavior, the use of time, and finally, the classroom environment....

excerpt from “The Future Cities Project: A Challenge for Students – Write Your Research Paper, Stretch Your Mind, and Have Fun

**by
Mary Jac Brody**

... How do I get my students to write about something other than teenage pregnancy and their family's recurring disease? This was the question with which I wrestled at the end of my first year of grading research papers. These are important topics in student lives, but how do I get them to stretch their minds outside of their daily experience? I know this question is a cliché among teachers, but I had been noticing other things that led into this project long before I hit upon the project I will describe.

Those Styrofoam shapes used as packing around electronics, TV's, household items, etc. had stimulated my imagination for a long time. Every time I opened a newly received box that had some pre-formed shipping cushion, I thought it looked like a space ship, futuristic house with a pool and greenhouses, futuristic land, air, or space vehicle, and other imagined objects. I thought maybe I could also stimulate my students' imaginations using these items. The rewards were great! Once the project began students wanted to do the required science fiction reading and the research, and they wanted to convert their findings into a paper and project. They actually got excited about a research paper! And that, my fellow teachers, goes a long way to raising student performance and satisfying teacher accountability....

excerpt from “Some Thoughts on Revision: As It Goes in My Classroom”

**by
Orlean R. Anderson**

... Revision is a skill so valuable, so essential to thinking and writing, that it demands a serious portion of our precious, carefully guarded class time. Moreover, revision is a skill that requires teaching—direct instruction. Only by redesigning our curriculum and class time to include directed revision strategies will we see the kind of sophisticated, meaningful, risky revision that we as teachers of writing know move a paper from poor or mediocre to powerful, engaging, and moving.

I use specific strategies in my class to “direct” revision, to get my students “to re-see” their writings. These strategies demand that students take risks and confront the possibilities of what might be hidden or waiting in their early drafts. As they move from one activity to another, I explore with them, experimenting on an overhead with a short essay or poem I have written. My students are usually so engrossed in their own “playing” that they pay no attention to my revisions, but I can use these overheads for later discussion. After each revision, I ask them what happened. Did they discover anything? Did they uncover new details or direction? Did they find a new beginning? Did they get a clearer picture of an event or scene? Some of my students respond that, “nothing happened.” But I have learned that the majority will, with identifiable surprise in their voices, respond that things did happen, that they have seen new possibilities. I assure them it is okay if nothing happened; we will simply try more strategies. And we do. Those students, however, listen and learn as their classmates describe the new ideas they have, the new choices they have made....