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Guest Editorial:

Bridging the Poverty Gap in the United States

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Consider for a moment the reality of poverty in the United States. According to the 2010 U.S. Census over 46.2 million or 15.1% of the population lived in poverty marking the highest level since 1993 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2011). Michigan University's National Poverty Center (NPC) reported that these people range from the working poor who make \$22,113 per year for a family of four to the extreme poor who survive on two dollars per day. In addition the number of children living in extreme poverty has risen sharply since 1996, and in 2011 2.8 million children survived on only two dollars a day (NPC).

Furthermore, census data shows that minority and immigrant children live with greater frequency in poverty. NPC projects that 38.2% of Black children and 35.0% of Hispanic children live in poverty. The rate of poverty among immigrants is also high. The Pew Hispanic Center reports that 30.8% of all foreign-born children live in poverty and 46.1% of Mexican children live in poverty in the U.S. (Patten, 2012). These rates of poverty are shocking when you realize that almost half of all children, who are immigrants from Mexico, live in poverty. In addition to linguistic and cultural barriers that immigrant children face, these children bring to school the insecurities and stresses of living in a family whose bills often surpass their income. Furthermore children in poverty often suffer from poor health, poor vision, illnesses, malnutrition,

lack of educational services, and gaps in schooling among other issues that contribute to their lower achievement in school (Rothstein, 2004).

What does this mean for our classrooms? The connections between low achievement in school and social class have been widely documented (Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks, 1972; Reardon, 2011), yet legislators continue to operate under the assumption that schools alone can solve societal inequities that include social class. For example the No Child Left Behind Act and the Race to the Top Initiative require schools to overcome differences in achievement among all children regardless of their backgrounds. The idea that schools are responsible for ridding society of its problems by curing its children was not, however, invented by the most recent administrations. At the turn of the 20th century when the Great Wave of Immigration began, bringing more than 20 million foreigners to America, education was falsely viewed as the way to overcome all inequities including race, social class, and gender. Reflecting Dewey's Progressivism, schools at this time were given the responsibility to assimilate immigrant families and rid them of their deficiencies (Ravitch, 1988).

Rather than approaching our children from a deficit perspective focusing on what they are lacking, we must approach our

children with an asset perspective--capitalizing on the skills and strengths that children do bring with them to the classroom. For example Kris Gutiérrez's (2008) work with migrant Mexican students in California shows how honoring the home language and culture of students from low socio-economic and minority backgrounds can help student develop a voice and future sense of themselves as learners. She showed the potential positive results when "educators... arrange educational environments in ways that incite, support, and *extend* students' repertoires of practice" (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 160, my emphasis).

While schools throughout the nation are answering the call to address issues of poverty in the classroom by challenging the traditional model of learning, the effects of poverty on children are real and can be debilitating for students and their families. It is also true that schools cannot address all the needs that these children have without the support of other community organizations and the federal government. We, as educators and citizens of the United States, must recognize the extent and impact of poverty and insist that funding is available for access to pre-K and early childhood education, after school and summer school programs, and that schools support teachers and researchers who seek to implement innovative school programs. We all have a stake in these efforts.

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Valuing Language Experience in *Reading Ghana*

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For the past two years, I have worked periodically with educators in Ghana as a volunteer consultant with the Canadian NGO, CODE (formerly Canadian Organization for Development through Education). Through *Reading Ghana*, CODE provides leadership in teacher education concerning early literacy. *Reading Ghana* is primarily a program of in-service teacher training designed to support teachers as they institutionalize their new National Literacy Acceleration Program, commonly referred to as NALAP. Developed with financial assistance from USAID, NALAP is a prescriptive program that directs teachers to use specific strategies to foster reading comprehension. Among those strategies is the Language Experience Approach (LEA). LEA is new to teachers in Ghanaian primary schools and encouragement and support are needed as they take initial steps toward implementation. What follows is the story of one special LEA lesson with Lucy's class of five and six year olds. After the story, I give careful consideration to the challenges inherent in LEA as well as those particular to the context. I conclude with reaffirmation of LEA as appropriate pedagogy within *Reading Ghana*. Before the story, I present some background information concerning both primary schooling in Ghana and *Reading Ghana* to assist readers in conceptualizing the situation.

In Ghana, primary schooling begins at age four when children enter Kindergarten One (Kg1), the first of eight years ending with Primary Six (P6). Lower Primary, the level at which *Reading Ghana* has been

working, includes two years of kindergarten (Kg1 and Kg2) followed by Primary One (P1) through Primary Three (P3). Currently, 90% of children ages six to twelve attend primary school, an increase over earlier records. Some educators attribute the improved attendance to the school feeding program introduced approximately seven years ago. It guarantees children in the designated schools one nutritious meal each day. Class sizes vary widely. I have visited lower primary classes with enrollments from high teens to more than forty. Large kindergarten classes are often taught by two teachers or a teacher and an assistant. Many teachers in the lower primary classes, however, have little or no formal teacher education.

Primary schooling is free, meaning that no school fees are assessed and textbooks are supplied to children by Ghana Education Services (GES). Providing basic classroom supplies (such as chalk) is the responsibility of the local school administration. Families are expected to furnish children with school uniforms and supplies such as notebooks, pens, pencils, and crayons. In practice, these policies often result in classrooms and individual children having few resources.

CODE offers assistance with both resources and teacher education. In collaboration with its in-country partner, Ghana Book Trust (GBT), CODE is helping to establish school libraries. Through the libraries, books are made available for classroom read-alouds and children's independent reading. For teacher education, GBT and CODE are offering *Reading*

Ghana for lower primary classroom teachers in three school districts in the Ashanti Region, near Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana. Using a pyramid organizational structure, training began with international consultants training eighteen lead trainers who in turn are working in teams of three to provide training for classroom teachers. Training usually spans three five-day workshops and is followed by periodic classroom visits from the lead trainers during which they assist and problem-solve as needed.

Reading Ghana has been designed as intentional support to teachers as they implement NALAP. More specifically, *Reading Ghana* is offering training concerning reading comprehension to enhance the training initially offered by GES as part of their introduction of NALAP. Within *Reading Ghana*, LEA is introduced to teachers as a strategy to bolster oral

language development and to demonstrate to children how spoken language becomes printed text for later reading. To this point in *Reading Ghana*, LEA has been presented as a whole class activity because grouping for instruction is, for the most part, unfamiliar pedagogical practice in the schools concerned. As described in *Language Experience Approach to Literacy for Children Learning English* (Winsor, 2009), trainers explain to teachers that LEA chart story writing can be prompted in a variety of ways such as discussion of pictures, real-life experiences, read-alouds, and cultural events such as holidays and other celebrations. Further to that, LEA is described as a multi-step sequence and teachers are encouraged to accommodate their particular contexts and children's interests and needs in their implementation. Figure 1 summarizes the core information provided in the *Reading Ghana* guidebook for teachers (Winsor & Crawford, 2012).

Figure 1: Summary of LEA Sequence of Activities

1. Share an experience, either a real one such as taking a nature walk together, or looking at and talking about a picture or forthcoming event, or reading a book together.
2. Engage in discussion about the shared experience. Teachers and children talk together to discuss many more aspects of the experience than are written.
3. Write a chart story about the experience. Typically, the children dictate their story to the teacher who writes it for all to see and read.
4. Re-read and work with sentences, words, and letters. Engage the children in repeated readings of the story as well as in activities that focus their attention on particular aspects of the text.
5. Respond to the experience through drawing, writing, or other comprehension activities (such as dramatization) to personalize and extend their experience.

NALAP materials supplied to all schools include both teacher and children's resources. Included are large pictures of familiar activities. Originally intended as vocabulary teaching resources, the pictures have been used extensively to demonstrate

how LEA can be integral to NALAP prescribed lessons. By current national policy, the medium of instruction in lower primary is the children's mother tongue with English introduced gradually. At P4, English becomes the medium of instruction.

Not all are comfortable with this policy, but because of it, lower primary teachers write classroom LEA chart stories in the children's home language, unless the writing is done within an English lesson. As a point of interest, NALAP materials support instruction in eleven Ghanaian languages. For most children and teachers currently involved in *Reading Ghana*, their mother tongue is Twi, an alphabetic language with just twenty-two letters.

In summary, the context of *Reading Ghana* is one in which new curricular programming and materials have been introduced and change is expected of classroom teachers. *Reading Ghana*, an in-service program, is supporting the expected change by providing training in reading comprehension strategies, including LEA.

Launching LEA in Lucy's Classroom

In the early months of *Reading Ghana*, I asked Lucy, a Kg2 classroom teacher and a program coordinator, to help me gain insight into how LEA might function in a typical Ghanaian classroom. Together we gathered materials and made plans for me to visit her classroom on the first day of the new term. I wanted the event to be special for the children and possibly to serve as an example of developmentally appropriate literate activities in future training sessions. In brief, I sought a reality check on my knowledge of LEA within the multi-lingual, resource-limited context in which most *Reading Ghana* teachers work.

Traditionally, on the first day of a new term, students spend time cleaning the school compound. The day I visited was no exception. When Lucy and I arrived, one of the first things she did was dispatch two upper class students to sweep her classroom. They worked industriously with their whisk-like stick brooms, then arranged the desks, and wiped the chalkboards to prepare for the

arrival of the five and six year olds, most of whom came in uniform on this initiation day. To those accustomed to brightly decorated, resource rich, appropriately furnished, comfortable and inviting classrooms, the room Lucy and her assistant share with twenty-five children might appear as a barren shed. It is, however, similar to most Ghanaian classrooms I have visited. Shown in Figure 2, the structure is simple; it has a cement floor, open windows with no glass or shutters, and is furnished with narrow desks, benches wide enough to accommodate three children, a small table to serve as the teacher's desk, and well worn chalkboards. No bookshelves, books, or other print or paper supplies are at the ready for regular use, but for today's activity, Lucy has procured sheets of drawing paper.

Figure 2: Lucy's School



To make the day special for the children, I provided ten rubber playground balls for sharing and a package of crayons for each child. We numbered each ball and drew ten boxes on the chalkboard. Speaking in Twi, Lucy explained to the children that they could borrow the balls for outdoor play, but must sign their names in the appropriately numbered boxes before going out and check off their names when they returned the balls to the large storage basket. Their name signing as borrowers was the first authentic

literacy act of the term. It proved a challenge for most! Typically, children in kindergarten are not taught to write their names so much help was needed. Putting her hand over theirs as shown in Figure 3, Lucy helped the borrowers write their first initial, then she completed their names for them to see.

Figure 3: Help with First Time Name Writing



When it was time to return the balls, they quickly matched the numbers on the balls with those in the boxes, found their names, checked them off, and dropped the balls in the basket for another day. Active play as shown in Figure 4 is not a part of usual lessons, but it was welcomed.

Figure 4: Outdoor Play with New Rubber Balls



The children had engaged in the shared activity of LEA; now it was time for them to talk about it. Conversation was lively in response to Lucy's request that they tell her

about their outside activities. They expressed happiness at having had an opportunity to play football and told of their individual experiences of scoring goals, tossing and catching, and playing with particular friends. Not all talk was about their play. Some children, fascinated by my presence with my camera, said they would inform those who did not come to school today (typically some do not come on the first day of term) that they were taught by Madam Lucy and a white woman and that they had their pictures taken.

After a few minutes of their excited commentary, Lucy explained that now they would work together to write about their activities. The previously animated conversation ceased. Children became quiet. Having their teacher write what they said was an unfamiliar activity. They approached it cautiously. Only the more confident children chose to contribute to their first collaborative chart story. As can be seen in Figure 5, the children's dictation was written in Twi on the chalkboard.

Figure 5: LEA Story in Twi on Chalkboard



English translation is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Chart Story in English Translation

Edward kicked me.

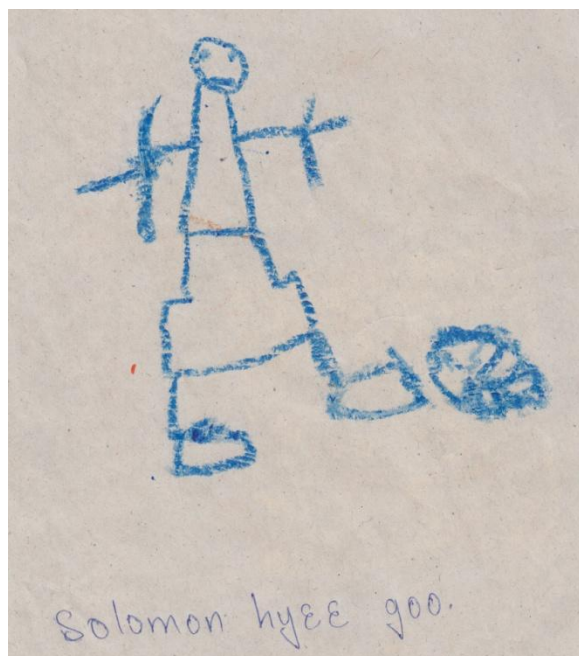
Maafia tackled me with her leg.

I scored a goal.

Their first person statements are indications of the newness of the activity. It might be anticipated that with experience they will shift to less personal and more inclusive expressions when they write collaboratively.

After rereading their text chorally several times, first as a whole class and later in small groups, the children proceeded to record their individual experiences. Using their new crayons, they ambitiously created illustrations of their running, kicking, and scoring. Solomon's drawing shown in Figure 7 was typical.

Figure 7: Solomon's Expression of Playing with the New Rubber Balls



When asked to tell about their drawings, children dictated brief sentences to Lucy or her assistant who wrote beneath each drawing. Although not always part of LEA, the writing was an accommodation meaningful to the children who eyed each letter and word as they appeared on their pages. Lucy provided children who were unable to write their names dotted lines to trace. The children were thrilled when she

explained to them that by tracing, they had written their names just as the children in upper classes do. For those who had previously signed to borrow a ball, it was the second instance of explicit attention today to what might be the most meaningful word they will ever encounter. Their literate lives were launched.

At lunchtime, class was dismissed as the kindergarten children do not regularly attend afternoon sessions. The morning had been a genuine learning experience for everyone involved. The children's literacy had moved forward in this new term and I had glimpsed some of the challenges and benefits of implementing LEA in a *Reading Ghana* classroom.

Challenges LEA Presents

Lucy and her colleagues who foster literacy development among their young students through LEA are confronted with many challenges. There are those inherent in LEA as well as those that are particular to the *Reading Ghana* context.

Two inherent challenges are individually identifiable, yet inextricably related. The first is flexibility; the second is teacher knowledge of language and literacy development. While LEA has a core structure similar to the stages described in Figure 1, it nevertheless is flexible in several respects. It can be structured as a comprehensive program organized in units with each one typically carried out in classrooms over a number of days. Alternatively, it can be limited in scope and included as a strategy within a prepared program (Temple, Ogle, Crawford, & Freppon, 2005). In either format, it can be altered and molded to address students' developmental stages, their instructional needs, and their interests. As well, it can be adjusted to employ the available time and resources. Flexibility is also inherent within

the conduct of particular practices such as taking dictation. Landis, Umolu, and Mancha (2010) cite the example of it being difficult for teachers to know whether to overcorrect or undercorrect students' contributions to a piece of dictated writing. Such flexibility demands astute teacher decision-making, and therein lies the link to the second inherent challenge, teacher knowledge.

To engage children in developmentally appropriate tasks, ensure their motivation, and scaffold their learning in ways that result in steady progress toward independent literacy is demanding of teachers' capabilities. In this respect, implementing LEA presents a sharp contrast to using many prepared programs, and may be a contributing factor to why LEA is not currently in widespread use (Nessel & Dixon, 2008; Wuthrick, 2000). Rather, many schools prefer to use programs prepared by experts, programs they consider well organized, capable of providing systematic instruction, and "for many busy teachers, these programs are preferable to an approach such as LEA that involves more planning and decision making" (Nessel & Dixon, 2008, p. 3). While there are vast differences in prepared programs and in the extent of their use, the central premise, nevertheless, constitutes recognition that LEA is a demanding approach to instruction.

The challenges of flexibility and need for teacher knowledge are at least as pertinent to the Ghanaian context as to any other. In a country where significant numbers of primary teachers have no formal teacher education, the challenges are magnified. So too, the challenges are manifest in somewhat unique ways when they bump against traditional practices. One example is illustrative.

At the heart of LEA instruction are the children's experiences and their dictated stories. Although teachers can plan in advance for particular learning and language experiences, until the children's dictation has been taken, it is impossible to plan specific letter, word, and sentence activities. When teachers are required to submit, in advance, weekly instructional plans for approval by school administration this necessary indefiniteness of planning can be a source of anxiety and misinterpretation concerning teacher responsibility-taking.

Other challenges, too, are pertinent to the *Reading Ghana* schools. There is an ever-present shortage of resources to facilitate implementation of LEA. In particular, programming is curbed by shortages of writing supplies and literature for sharing and independent reading. Having the NALAP materials has significantly increased the availability of developmentally appropriate texts and the on-going work of CODE and GBT is actively addressing the dearth of available books. With well-resourced libraries, over time, the challenges teachers face will be lessened.

The final challenge facing teachers in many *Reading Ghana* schools as they implement LEA is class composition. First, many classes are very large. Connecting individually with children is a near impossibility. Second, the challenge is made more complex in some situations by the linguistic profile of the children. While in most classes children share the same home language (mother tongue) with each other and with the teacher, in some, the class population represents more than one mother tongue and it can be that the teacher does not speak the languages of all children. Such multilingual situations pose extensive complexities for both oral and written communication, including supply of books.

Like Lucy, many *Reading Ghana* teachers, following their initial training, are now exploring and experimenting with inclusion of LEA as they make NALAP their classroom literacy curriculum. While on one hand flexibility and teacher knowledge can be viewed as challenges to their efforts, argument can also be made that those characteristics are strengths of the approach and should be considered two of the very reasons that LEA is appropriate to the Ghanaian context. Other challenges of resources, shifts in planning, class size, and multilingualism persist, but can be managed.

Strengths of LEA in *Reading Ghana* Context

Writing about her teaching of Maori children, Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) stated, “First books must be made of the stuff of the child himself” (p.35). Her belief that learning needs to begin within the child and the child’s expression is integral to LEA. Her work, now classic, pointed the way for success in taking advantage of children’s culture and language to facilitate their journey into literacy. The importance and relevance of her message has not been lessened by the intervening decades. Rather, it has been reiterated by many such as Nessel and Dixon (2008) who remind readers that:

In general, the reading process is mastered most easily when beginners read texts that are relevant to their lives, when the words of the texts are in their listening and speaking vocabularies, when the grammatical structures of the text are similar to those they use orally, and when they are learning in a supportive environment, and when they have many opportunities to practice with reading materials of

their own choosing (Nessel & Dixon, 2008, p. 6).

It is exactly these empowering conditions that are sought for children in *Reading Ghana* classrooms. Implementation of LEA could go a long way in creating them.

Whether used as the core program or in conjunction with other strategies as it is in NALAP, LEA has inherent in it, clearly identifiable advantages. LEA does not require extensive and fluent language skills. Rather, it fosters language development, especially vocabulary growth. Such opportunities for language development are critical as children expand their mother tongue and learn English as an added language. LEA creates opportunities for all children to participate. It is not necessary for particular levels of achievement to have been reached before participation is meaningful and productive. Meaningful participatory learning stands in contrast to traditional rote learning and supports desired movement toward child-centeredness. LEA can be comprehensive in respect to children’s acquisition of letter knowledge, phonics, and other word identification skills. Helping children acquire the knowledge they need in order to gain control over the linguist nature of the language they want to read and write gives them a boost toward literacy. In Ghana, LEA can be successfully used in lessons in both Ghanaian languages and English. LEA can be implemented with few materials. Special materials such as the rubber balls given to Lucy’s children are not necessary, just fun. Success can be achieved with little more than chalkboard, chalk, and scrap paper. Finally, LEA shows children the interrelationships of speaking, reading, and writing. It models and supports their early attempts in independent use of all three. Little more could be expected of any one form of pedagogy. In theory and

practice, there is a natural fit between LEA and *Reading Ghana* classrooms.

Valuing My Experience

Working cross-culturally is always enriching; it heightens my awareness of assumptions and often invites creative reconceptualization of long held beliefs and practices. In Lucy's classroom, I witnessed a dedicated teacher skillfully engaging enthusiastic children in a yet unfamiliar learning experience. She worked with confidence and the children followed her guidance, not realizing the potential significance of such a learning event to their ultimate acquisition of essential literacy. Rather, they simply played, talked, and drew excitedly in the ways young children do when given opportunities.

My experience in Lucy's classroom makes me acutely aware of the widely recognized and extensively reported inherent complexity of LEA. Language experience is not an easy way to teach reading. It demands flexibility in classroom management, recognition of individual differences in language development, personalized record keeping and teacher skill in evaluation (Spache & Spache, 1977). Observing also pointed out to me some of the ways I can expect LEA lessons to be new and unfamiliar to participants in *Reading Ghana* workshops. For example, it is new for the teachers to consider integrating subject areas such as science and language, and more specifically, to integrate components within language lessons such as phonics, word recognition, and spelling. In addition, I was able to recognize where some particular LEA practices and typical Ghanaian practices are at odds.

One of the best examples of these differences concerns engaging children in discussion about their activities or a story they have heard in preparation for taking

their dictation. Whereas it is desirable in discussion for children to listen to each other and take turns offering ideas, opinions, and questions with just enough guidance from the teacher to ensure smooth flow of conversation, such situations in Ghanaian classrooms are quite different. Typically, the teacher calls upon one student, the student replies, then the teacher asks the listeners to praise the child's response by clapping for him or her. When a child's response is incorrect or inappropriate, the teacher usually moves on to call upon another child asking the second child to assist the first. While the conscientious efforts to offer children praise and encouragement through the clapping are well intended, such a staccato and somewhat evaluative mode of conversation tends to detract from generative sharing of ideas. Junctures such as this when new expectations and traditional practices meet deserve discussion in future workshops to guide development of LEA in culturally appropriate ways.

Reflecting upon the demands of LEA, the traditions, and the differences I observed during my visits to Lucy's and other *Reading Ghana* classrooms transports me back to my eastern Canadian classroom in the early 1970's. LEA was new then and somewhat unfamiliar to my class and me. As a beginning teacher, I sensed its potential and readily embraced the practices that seemed a wonderful match to my learners' needs. As I gained experience, I molded routines to maximize children's success. The complexities inherent in LEA were present then and there as they are now in Ghanaian classrooms, but *Reading Ghana* teachers face additional challenges. They must also accommodate the complexities of multilingualism, limited opportunities for teacher knowledge development, and scarcity of resources. I admire their efforts to help their students succeed as readers and writers through LEA and other strategies

within their new national curriculum and hold much hope for continued progress on their journey to literacy.

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Introducing Middle School Advisory Programs Through the Language Experience Approach

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Introduction

Pre-service teachers enrolled in a required Middle Grades introductory course engaged in service learning by participating in an advisory program at a local middle school. Using the Language Experience Approach (LEA), candidates reflected on the experience each week to examine their knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for working with middle school students. From this experience, pre-service teachers not only gained insight into advisory programs, they also gained knowledge about LEA as a literacy “skill” appropriate for young adolescents. The researcher set out to determine if using LEA to reflect on service learning would help candidates understand the Middle School Advisory Program.

Middle school philosophy centers on developing young adolescents intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically. The Association of Middle Level Education’s document titled “*This We Believe*” describes 16 characteristics of exemplary middle schools and gives middle school advocates tools and theory on how to work with young adolescents (NMSA, 2010). One of the specific characteristics is that “Every student’s academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate” (NMSA, 2010, p. 14). Middle schools often use an advisory program to address this standard. An “advisor” in a middle school has the role of being an advocate for a small group of students (NMSA, 2010). Advisory groups participate in activities that promote

acceptance, trust, awareness, and goal setting. In addition, groups participate in service projects and team building (Niska, 2011). These advisory activities provide groups of students with common experiences that allow them to engage in critical thinking and communication (McGee & Fauble-Erickson, 1995).

Traditionally pre-service teachers learn about middle school advisory programs through lecture and in-class group projects. This study looked at teaching the concept of advisory using service learning and LEA.

Language Experience Approach and Service Learning

Research associated with teaching the language experience approach includes immersing candidates in the use of novels to teach dispositions (Mottart, Vanhooren, Rutten, & Soetaert, 2009), and using language experience approaches to identify expectations associated with mentor/tutoring relationships (Rajuan, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2007). Service learning also benefits from a language experience approach. Research illustrates that candidates who participate in service learning gain insight into social needs of students (Caro & Quinn, 2011) gain knowledge of content (Chupp & Joseph, 2010), learn and develop skills of problem solving, critical thinking skills, communication (Colby, Bercaw, Clark, & Galiardi, 2009; Sedlak, 2003), and develop a deeper understanding of themselves (Colby, Bercaw, Clark, & Galiardi, 2009; O’Meara & Niehaus, 2009). In addition, service

learning has been shown to enhance motivation (USEPA, 2002), and provide academic aspiration (Spring, Grimm, & Dietz, 2008). The research suggests that service learning can help middle school pre-service teachers learn how to work with young adolescents as well as learn about the values inherent in a middle school advisory program through in-depth reflection. In this study, candidates were asked to reflect on their experiences using the LEA.

The Setting

ArtSpace is a K-8 Charter School in western North Carolina serving 90 students in its 6-8th grade programs. The focus of the school is on interdisciplinary learning with art specialists planning collaboratively with grade level teachers to foster experiential learning and art integration. The advisory program at this Charter school takes place three days a week and is called T.R.I.B.E.S which stands for Trust, Respect/Responsibility, Identity, Bonding, Effort, and Service. Students participate in their T.R.I.B.E.S. to discuss issues, socialize, participate in self-esteem activities, and communicate with an adult. In addition, students engage in service projects which have included volunteering at the local retirement home and veteran's hospital, participating in a school-wide composting program, serving at the local soup kitchen, collecting canned goods, and mentoring younger children.

The Activity

The pre-service teachers in this study were paired with a T.R.I.B.E.S. team, participating as both observers and participants in all aspects of the T.R.I.B.E.S. experience. The theme for February was called "Empty Bowls: Hunger in Our Community and Around the World." The

T.R.I.B.E.S carried out research about hunger in various countries and created posters to display their findings. Students participated in activities to build self-esteem, and they discussed issues relevant to their lives. On two occasions guest speakers from MANNA Food Bank and a local dietician spoke about hunger in Western North Carolina and the importance of healthy choices. Middle school students watched a documentary on anorexic teens and engaged in conversations about the information they gained. All T.R.I.B.E.S. members made and decorated ceramic bowls that were used in a fundraising event. The culminating event was a fundraiser for the local food bank called "empty bowls." Students made soup from different countries and gave presentations on hunger in their region of the state.

Research Design and Data Collection

A case study approach was used to identify pre-service candidates' knowledge of, skills in implementing, and dispositions needed for advisory since the project investigated "characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2011, p. 1). Field notes of the pre-service teachers written as LE narratives were examined to identify the impact of Service Learning. They were asked to describe the experiences they had as they assisted the classroom teacher and taught a small group of students. Using the Describe, Examine, and Articulate your Learning "DEAL model," (Ash, Clayton, & Moses, 2007) candidates' experiences were coded into three categories: knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The DEAL model is a graphic organizer used for critical reflections and begins with "engage in service" followed by first **Describing** the experience and then **Examining** the experience through the lenses of three categories: Knowledge, Skills, and

Dispositions. Knowledge in this setting referred to characteristics young adolescents display, information associated with advisory programs, and specific academic content gained. Skills referred to classroom management strategies and/or instructional strategies. Dispositions referred to candidates' perceptions of what it takes to be a middle school advisory teacher.

At the end of the experience, candidates used their LEA reflections to share what they found to be most profound about the experience. This corresponds to the DEAL model's final segment (**Articulate Learning**) in which candidates share what they gained from the experience based on their reflections and summaries. Their final reflections were also coded according to knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Analysis of Data

Candidates' LEA field notes and final summaries were analyzed using a coding method described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Yin (2011). Data was sorted into common patterns and/or themes to describe what pre-service teachers gained. In an effort to establish "the facts" as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), candidates served as a "response community" (p. 182). Findings were shared allowing candidates to question, correct, or dispute any of the data reported.

The researcher identified the total number of comments for each category based on knowledge, skills, and dispositions to illustrate what students learned. The findings for each category were described combining similar descriptors. Percentages of similar findings within each category were calculated and put into a table to display the descriptors that related to knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Findings

Every candidate was able to identify knowledge, skills, and dispositions they obtained from the experience of working with an advisory group for a month. Likewise, each candidate was able to describe knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for becoming a middle school advisor.

Knowledge. Knowledge was defined as characteristics of young adolescents, advisory programs and/or the content of such programs. The most common focus was descriptions of the characteristics of young adolescents (see Table 1). Comments about the advisory program itself were missing, and only two comments related to learning new academic content. A closer look at the adolescent characteristics shows that candidates were able to articulate the social and emotional behaviors young adolescents exhibit (60% of the responses).

Table 1: Categories Candidates Discussed Regarding Knowledge Gained (n=20)

Emotional	Social	Physical	Intellectual	Content Knowledge
28%	32%	12%	20%	8%

Skills. Skills are classroom management and instructional strategies teachers use. There appears to be a connection between candidates' abilities to identify the characteristics of young adolescents and what it takes to work with them (See Table

2). The majority of candidates' responses focused on establishing communication skills and finding ways to enable students to cooperate with one another (44%). A second highlight was that candidates realized that they needed to make their teaching relevant

to the lives of their students. Specific suggestions included establishing structures, teaching manners, teaching students how to use self-regulation skills, and teaching

specific instructional structures. These descriptors suggest candidates were able to consider specific tools to address the social and emotional needs of their students.

Table 2: Skills Identified as Important to Middle School Advisory Teachers (n=20)

Communication and cooperation	Teach specific structures	Make everything relevant
44%	32%	26%

Dispositions. The third category addressed effective dispositions for advisors and what candidates perceive as being the most important personal attributes of an effective middle school teacher (See Table 3). Attitude was seen as extremely important. Honesty, confidence, and flexibility were identified as important personal characteristics. Candidates’

responses provide insight into the importance of building relationships with students, creating a safe environment, and being an advocate for children and one another. A few candidates reflected that knowing content and planning and practicing lessons were important dispositions teachers need to be effective middle school advisory teachers.

Table 3: Dispositions Identified for Effective Middle School Teachers (n=20)

Personal Characteristics	Building Community and a safe, caring classroom	Planning and knowing your content
40%	40%	20%

Implications

Using the Language Experience Approach, candidates in this project articulated knowledge, skills and dispositions associated with becoming effective middle school advisors. Candidates had an opportunity to identify characteristics of young adolescents by working with them in an actual advisory setting. They were able to identify specific tools and dispositions necessary for working as an advisor in a middle school.

The experience also demonstrated how the value of using LEA to reflect on experiences. The activities pre-service teachers engaged in with middle grades students allowed them to gain insight into

how young people think and to experience first-hand how young people respond to service projects. Through Language Experience Approach candidates articulated their concepts about advisory programs, thus making these concepts available as a springboard to develop interdisciplinary units and specific strategies for creating powerful, supportive classrooms for young adolescents.

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Preservice Teachers Knowledge and Use of Web 2.0 Tools

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Technology has earned a place as a component of the language arts (Mason, 2010). Incorporating the use of digital tools into language arts instruction is necessary because these digital tools have become an integral part of today's world. This means technology deserves a thoughtful pedagogical role in 21st century classrooms (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed 2008).

Just as "reading" has changed to "literacy," "literacy" has expanded to include technology, which includes the competent use of available digital hardware and software. Many of today's students have grown-up with these digital tools and, because they are accustomed to using them, have developed approaches of communicating and processing information which are different than those of previous generations (Prensky, 2005; Tapscott, 2008; Wosley & Grisham, 2011). These students maybe referred to as "digital natives" (Lei, 2009). Other students have not had this background but are entering the digital world with some anxiety. These students maybe referred to as "digital immigrants" (Lei, 2009). Still, both digital natives and digital immigrants regularly use digital tools for social purposes.

However, caution is required as we consider the role of digital tools for educational purposes (Berk, 2010). Berk believes that being a digital native is not enough to ensure academic success and that using digital tools in the classroom does not automatically equal effective teaching practice and/or student understanding.

The purpose of this study was to determine if and how much preservice teachers, those students who are attending university classrooms taking education classes and who may be digital natives, are familiar with various technologies and Web 2.0 tools. In order to inform our instruction and integrate the use of collaborative digital tools into the course work, two questions were developed:

- 1.What digital tools are used by undergraduate education students on a daily basis?
- 2.Do undergraduate education students know and use Web 2.0 applications?

Review of Literature

The rapid creation of digital tools that might be used in education is challenging educators to identify and/or develop the

most effective use of these tools in the classroom. Thus, several organizations have attempted to develop technology position statements. The National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) has developed educational standards for technology which include: essential knowledge of content, teaching/learning strategies, effective learning environments, digital-age learning culture, professional knowledge and skills, and digital citizenship. In addition, the International Reading Association (IRA, 2009) has stressed the importance of integrating information and communication technologies (ICTs) into current literacy programs.

Digital tools are important in the modes of communication used by today's students. They are accustomed to receiving information quickly, having choices, and multitasking (Prensky, 2001; Alvermann, Phelps, & Ridgeway, 2009). Teachers need to use digital tools effectively in presenting their lessons. The effective use of digital tools in the classroom presages a change in communications between students and teachers. Teachers who employ digital tools effectively will offer student's ample opportunities to access, evaluate, search, sort, gather, and read information from a variety of multimedia and multimodal sources (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed 2008). This change in teaching techniques requires planning the opportunities to use digital tools, but must also include developing the ability to convert the data/knowledge received into usable information.

Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is a term used to describe internet applications that are designed to be collaborative in nature rather than propriety (as were the older Web 1.0 internet applications). Some of these applications

include presentation tools (such as prezi, wordle, and podcasts), and community tools (such as google docs, wiki, smartboard). Web 2.0 tools are becoming popular and useful with researchers and practitioners because they have the potential to blend learner-centered activities with social and collaborative functions (Williams & Chinn, 2009).

Many teachers feel comfortable using some Web 2.0 applications, like Facebook and Twitter, but many have little or no idea how to use these applications in the classroom. Some of these applications allow students to create personal profiles as well as to connect, network and interact with family, friends, and other students who have some of the same interests (Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

One of the key theories that promote social interaction in learning is Vygotsky's theory of socio-cultural perspective, which states that cognitive growth is impacted by society and culture and is not accomplished alone (Driscoll, 2005; Ormrod, 2004). According to Clark and Peterson (1985), teachers and their beliefs may play a significant role in education reform since teachers' beliefs lead to actions which influence students' learning. As such teachers' beliefs play a critical role in restructuring the teaching of the core subjects in education.

Several research models have been employed to examine human beliefs because of the growing interest in the relationship of peoples' beliefs to their behavior (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). These authors point out that a person's beliefs are formed by perceptions of how others view the concept in question (in this case, the use of digital tools in education) and a person's beliefs *precede* actual behavior. It is important to look at

perceptions with future research that examines actual behavior (Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011). It follows that perceptions regarding the use of digital tools in the classroom will be a determining factor in how these tools are actually used in education.

Methods

This study used a researcher-developed survey, based on information from a “Web 2.0 technology” course, to discover how much familiarity students had with various digital tools, with special emphasis on Web 2.0 applications. The researchers edited the questions to ensure that they did not prompt any specific responses about technologies and/or digital tools. The survey was given at the beginning of a required education course in order to determine how much technology should be incorporated into the coursework.

Participants

There were 100 preservice teachers from one northeast Texas university working within one suburban school district. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 48 with an average age of 26. There were 75 Caucasians, 14 Hispanics, 11 African

Americans. The majority of participants were female (96) with 4 males. None of the participants had previously taken a “technology in education” course which is not required in this teacher preparation program.

Results

As the majority of the questions had a “yes” or “no” response, the data analysis consisted of a simple tally of each question, which was then turned into a percent. The results of this one-time survey, which was given at the beginning of an education course, showed that these preservice teachers knew about and used various technologies and digital tools, but they were not confident in using Web 2.0 tools.

Survey Question #1. Participants were asked if they access the internet on a regular basis. This question asked for a yes/no response. All 100 participants acknowledged that they used the internet on a regular basis.

Survey Question #2. Participants were asked to list what they accessed when they were on the internet. The participants had a variety of answers, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: What Participants Access on the Internet

Responses	# Responses Given	% of Responses Given
Email	71	71%
Facebook	70	70%
Search Engines	36	36%
Banking	24	24%
Shopping	15	15%
CNN	14	14%
Research	11	11%
You Tube	10	10%
Online Classes	9	9%
Map Directions	5	5%

Survey Question #3. Participants were asked if they used their cell phone to access the internet. This question asked for a yes/no response. The results showed that 90 participants (90%) said yes and 10 participants (10%) said no.

Survey Question #4. Participants were asked if they used their cell phones to text. This question asked for a yes/no response. The results showed that 85 participants (85%) answered that they do text while 15 participants (15%) answered they did not text.

Survey Question #5. Participants were asked if they knew what Web 2.0 tools were available to them. Participant could respond to this question in one of three way, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Availability of Web 2.0 Tools

Responses	# Responses Given	% of Responses Given
No	86	86%
Maybe	12	12%
Yes	2	2%

Survey Question #6. Participants were asked to list what web 2.0 tools they used for academic learning. Participants listed a variety of responses as seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Web 2.0 Tools Used

Responses	# Responses Given	% of Responses Given
Prezi	8	8%
Voki	6	6%
Podcasting	3	3%
Blogs	2	2%
Promethean Boards	1	1%

Survey Question #7. Participants were asked how comfortable they felt using Web 2.0 tools. Participants had three choices as seen in Table 4.

Table 4: How Comfortable Participants are with Web 2.0 Tools

Responses	# Responses Given	% of Responses Given
Not at all	86	86%
Somewhat Comfortable	14	14%
Comfortable	0	0

Survey Question #8. Participants were asked if they wanted to learn more about Web 2.0 tools. This question was a yes/no response. All 100 participants answered that they would like to learn more about this technology tool.

Discussion

The results showed that all 100 participants used the internet. These participants used various internet applications primarily for social networking (email, 71%; Facebook, 71%). However, they also used the internet for personal business (banking, 24%; shopping, 15%; map directions, 5%) while some was used for learning purposes (CNN, 14%; research, 11%; online classes, 9%). Ninety percent of the participants indicated that they used their cell phone to access the internet. Thus, to answer the first question, *what technologies are used by undergraduate education students on a daily basis*, it was found that these preservice teachers did know about and use basic hardware and software tools for social communication, personal business, and education.

When asked what Web 2.0 tools were available to them, most of the participants (86%) did not have any idea about these internet applications. Twelve participants (12%) thought they knew a little about Web 2.0 but only 2 participants (2%) stated they knew what it was. So, when the participants were asked what Web 2.0 tools they had used, only 14 participants responded they

had used Prezi (8%), Voki (6%), and podcasting (3%). Thus, it was not surprising that no one said they were comfortable using Web 2.0 tools and that all the participants were open to learning more about Web 2.0 tools and how they could be used in the classroom. Thus, to answer the second question, do undergraduate education students know about and use Web 2.0 applications, it was found that the majority of them were not familiar with or confident in their ability to use Web 2.0 tools in the classroom.

Coursework

Two of the researchers, Boggs and Williams, used the results of this study and integrated several different Web 2.0 tools into their coursework. In an introduction to reading course, Boggs introduced *livebinders* for the students to create an electronic strategy notebook. She also had a technology week where students were introduced to various Web 2.0 tools like *wordle*, *prezi*, *blogs*, and *wikis*.

Williams was working with students who were in their first semester of their student teaching experience. During their first semester, these preservice teachers attended seminar classes one day-a-week and did their student teaching in various K-6 public school classrooms two days-a-week. Williams divided her students into research groups and assigned them to investigate different Web 2.0 tools. Each team had to learn about their assigned tool and present their findings to the class, as well as model its use. In addition, these first-semester-student teachers had to incorporate one of the Web 2.0 tools into one of the lessons they were required to teach in their assigned K-6 classroom.

By the end of the semester, students in both courses indicated that they appreciated the incorporation of technology into their

coursework, as it did help them to become familiar with a variety of internet applications. However, they still did not feel comfortable using all of the introduced tools.

Implications

This study showed that many of these preservice teachers, both digital natives and digital immigrants, were not familiar with and therefore not comfortable with using collaborative internet applications. But, when they were introduced to these various tools, they were able to use some of them on their own, either through teaching in the K-6 classrooms or in their class project assignments. This suggests that these internet applications need to be incorporated into some if not all educational coursework at the university level if we want future teachers to know about and use digital tools effectively.

The first step would be to revisit both the curriculum and the assignments of various education courses. In addition, alternative text sources such as digital texts and/or electronic textbooks should be considered (Booth, 2006; Kucer, 2005). As preservice teachers are taking their required classes, it is important that university educators include these new technology literacies into their lesson plans to provide scaffolding and modeling as well as to require students to utilize these tools in their course assignments (Asselin & Moayeri, 2011; Jongpil, Jaeki, Jones, & Nam, 2010).

Also as the majority of university educators are not digital natives, various professional development sessions on how to use these internet application tools should be available (Chong Ho, Brewer, Angel-Jannasch-Pennell & DiGangi, 2010).

Future Research

Since these students might be considered technology immigrants, how can they best be prepared to teach using various hardware (iPhones, iPad, Bluetooth headset) and software programs (Web 2.0, Google Plus)? How many exposures do students need in order to feel comfortable using various hardware tool and software applications into their classroom? In this study, one semester was not enough to give these students total confidence in their ability to use these various technologies on their own. Issues such as age, confidence level, as well as the knowledge level are all important factors that need further study (Kumar & Vigil, 2011).

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LESIG Business

2012-13 Officers and Board of LESIG

President: Jeanne McGlinn

Vice President: Deborah Williams

Secretary: Jane Moore

Treasurer: Mary Strong

Additional Board Members: Tiece Ruffin and Karen Cole

Minutes of 2012 Board Meeting

LESIG 2012 Board Meeting - IRA 57th Annual Convention - Chicago, Illinois

Persons attending: Jane Moore, Deborah Williams, Jeanne McGlinn, Mary Strong

Agenda April 30, 2012

1. Welcome
2. Review and Approval of By-laws
3. Treasurer's Report by Mary Strong
4. Membership
5. Slate of Officers and recruitment of new Board Members
6. Journal
 - Soliciting Manuscripts for future issues.
7. Open Discussion
 - Name change - Pros and cons

Called to order at 2:30pm

- September 1st: Next Journal Deadline; Peer reviewed electronic online journal edited by Jeanne McGlinn; Issued 3x a year (Fall, Winter, Spring/Summer)
<http://eduweb.unca.edu/lefj>
- Treasurer's Report: Ending Balance \$2,407.01
- 2013 Proposals (San Antonio) invitations and Membership announcement will go to all emails we have
- Slate of Officers nominated and elected for 2013:
 - President: Jeanne McGlinn

- Vice President: Deborah Williams
 - Treasurer: Mary Strong
 - Secretary: Jane Moore
 - Editorial Board: Ana Lado
- Discussion of name change to Language Experience: Literacy Across the Disciplines voted on and approved. Purpose is to broaden membership and interest in sessions.
- 2013 Board meeting will be one hour before the beginning time assigned by IRA. The scheduled time for SIG Session should be Tuesday morning.
- 3:00 - 4:30 Program convened

Minutes respectfully submitted for Board approval by Jane Moore 5/7/12

Call for Program Proposals
Language Experience Special Interest Group Meeting
International Reading Association 2013

If you are interested in presenting your research or classroom experiences using Language Experience and interdisciplinary literacy practices with K-16 students at a roundtable session at the 2013 IRA Conference in San Antonio, please complete this form and email to jmcglinn@unca.edu by Friday, June 8, 2012. The convention dates are April 21-24, 2013.

Please note: No one may appear more than once on the IRA program. This includes SIG presentations and institutes. The only exception is for those who present as part of official IRA duties (such as IRA officers, editors, or chairs of committees).

Title of Proposed Roundtable Presentation (PART I):

Name of Presenter #1: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Affiliation: _____

Complete Address at Institution: _____

Phone #: _____ E-mail address: _____

Name of Presenter #2: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Affiliation: _____

Address at Institution: _____

Phone #: _____ E-mail address: _____

Please add any additional presenters and their contact information on a separate sheet of paper. Your proposal cannot be reviewed without complete contact information.

All presenters must be current IRA, as well as LESIG members !!!!! Please contact Mary Strong (mwstrong@widener.edu) for information concerning how to join LESIG or to renew membership.

PART II

On a separate sheet of paper provide the following information (no more than one page, please):

- A. Title of Presentation
- B. Brief Overview of Roundtable Topic (in paragraph or outline form). This information will be shared with members of LESIG and appear in the convention program.

Please note: Do not put any identifying information on this second page. All proposals will be peer-reviewed.

LESIG MEMBERSHIP

Please complete the form below to join or renew your membership. Checks should be made payable to: LESIG. Send form and check to:

Dr. Mary Strong
Center for Education
Widener University
One University Place
Chester, PA 19013

Check one: _____ new member _____ renewal

Check one: _____ regular membership (\$15.00 – 1 year) _____

_____ regular membership (\$40.00 – 3 years) _____

_____ student membership (\$10.00) _____

_____ graduate student complimentary one-year membership

(Sponsor signature: _____)

_____ retired membership (\$10.00) _____

Total _____

Your name: _____

Your mailing address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Business phone: _____

Fax: _____ E-Mail: _____

IRA Membership number: _____ **Expiration date:** _____

***Note: It is important that all LESIG members include their “official” IRA membership numbers so LESIG can maintain an active role at the IRA conferences. Please take a moment to document your IRA membership number . . . it counts a lot!