

**LANGUAGE  
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JOURNAL**

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# Language Experience Forum Journal

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Language Experience Forum Journal is a refereed journal of the Language Experience Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association. The journal is aimed at teachers of literacy at all levels. It provides a forum for discussion of ideas and issues related to the teaching of literacy to all groups of students and across multiple disciplinary areas.

Submit articles to the editor:  
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## Guest Editorial:

# *Race to Nowhere*: Community Engagement and Education

Jerad Crave  
University of North Carolina Asheville

*Race to Nowhere*, directed by Vicki Abeles, documents the detrimental effects of America's testing culture on students, parents, and teachers. The film features "stories of students across the country who have been pushed to the brink by over-scheduling, over-testing and the relentless pressure to achieve .... it reveals an education system in which cheating has become commonplace; students have become disengaged; stress-related illness, depression and burnout are rampant; and young people arrive at college and the workplace unprepared and uninspired" (<http://www.racetonowhere.com/about-film>, 2013).

As an elementary school teacher and doctoral candidate, I am familiar with the focus on current practices of accountability and test-based achievement in public schools. My decision to host a screening event on our college campus grew out of my desire to start a community conversation about what is happening in local public schools and its direct impact on the teachers, students, and community at large. In addition to the dialogue about public education, I also hoped to further enhance the connection between the university and the community and to begin to build a collaborative and unified voice for reform.

Over 150 people, including high school and university students, parents, teachers and others concerned about the state of education, attended the film screening and conversation. I invited four individuals to serve as a panel to share their reactions and thoughts on the film before opening the floor to audience responses: two heads of private schools, a high school student,

and a fellow education faculty member. The high school student shared experiences similar to those depicted in the film. For example, due to her heavy work load, she had resorted to completing assignments with others, which was often viewed as cheating instead of collaboration. The university professor noted that many incoming freshman have high test scores on the SAT or ACT, but respond poorly to the rigor of university assignments, which often call for more creative and problem solving skills. The head of a private school advocated for an alternative to the testing culture and endless hours of homework at his school. He asks teachers to give meaningful and relevant assignments, encouraging collaboration on activities, and critical thinking.

During the open discussion, there was a shared consensus that public education is going in the wrong direction. Audience members brought forth thoughtful and heartfelt questions, suggestions, and concerns, about how schools' current emphasis on testing is not preparing students to engage in the critical thinking and creativity required in today's society.

I still receive emails from individuals who were at the screening of *Race to Nowhere* asking what they can do to help, and my advice is to use their voice, talk to teachers and administrators, write to legislators, and be proactive. This film led to an engaged community conversation about schools. You may wish to host a screening and conversation in your area. It may be the first time some in your community have looked at the issues facing students and teachers in our current high test-anxiety environment.

# Fostering Digital Literacy in Preservice Education: Designing a Digital Gallery

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University of North Carolina Asheville

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## Introduction

The proliferation of digital technologies into K-12 education has placed an emphasis on digital literacy for preservice teachers, and preparing teachers to effectively use technology in the classroom is one of the central issues the field of education faces in the 21st century (Bolick, Berson, Coutts, & Heinecke, 2003). Future teachers must be prepared to not only be proficient in the use of technology in the classroom but to be able to effectively integrate technology into instruction. Often, however, the integration of technology into methods classes for preservice teacher education programs is the exception rather than the norm (Cantu, 2000). This can be clearly seen in A National Center for Education Statistics report (2005) that indicates only one-third of the nation's teachers feel well prepared to teach with technology, despite the fact that by 2003, 82% of the schools with Internet access had offered professional development to teachers on how to integrate the Internet into curriculum (p. 14). Therefore, preservice teachers need to see technology modeled and have meaningful opportunities to use technology if they are going to integrate technology into classrooms (Bates, 2008; Diem, 2002). Preservice educators must begin to effectively engage and to model appropriate strategies for technology integration for preservice teachers (Bolick, et al., 2003).

## New Literacy and Web 2.0

In recent years the term “literacy” has expanded to include technology, which includes the competent use of available digital hardware and software (Williams, Boggs, Haas, & Szabo, 2012). Understandings of these new literacies are essential for effective teaching and learning with technology. According to Mills (2010), we are in the midst of a historic transformation or “digital turn” in which technology is redefining literacy (p. 246). New technologies require new literacies to effectively exploit their potentials (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). Literacy traditionally has been defined around text-based instruction. However, definitions of literacy have evolved to include hypertext documents, multimedia projects, and online communication. While it may not be possible to come up with a static definition of new literacies due to their ever evolving nature, Leu, Kizner, Coiro, and Cammack (2004) offer one explanation of new literacy as:

...the skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies and contexts that continuously emerge in our world and influence all areas of our personal and professional lives. These new literacies

allow us to use the Internet and other ICTs to identify important questions, locate information, critically evaluate the usefulness of that information, synthesize information to answer those questions, and then communicate the answers to others (p. 1572).

Departing from traditional notions of literacy does not mean abandoning definitions of literacy that include concepts of composition, decoding, comprehension, and response. Instead, new literacies build on foundational skills, as well as foster alternative modes of expression and representation (Betts, 2009; Leu, et al., 2004). The integration of Web 2.0 technologies then provides opportunities for teacher educators to both engage and expand preservice teachers' digital literacy skills.

Applications that have been termed Web 2.0 applications include video sharing sites, wikis, blogs, podcasts, and social-networking sites like Twitter (Richardson, 2006). Taken together, Web 2.0 applications are radically changing the way users create, share, collaborate and publish content through the Internet (Ashley, et al., 2009). Web 2.0 opens the door for a variety of students, in various contexts, to create knowledge in many modal forms and offers visual, aural, spatial, and textual modes of learning (Friedman 2006, Hartshorne, Heafner, & Manfra, 2009; McLeod & Vasinda, 2008).

Pedagogically, Web 2.0 provides students with the freedom to explore digital space and reinforces visual learning. As such, the point of using digital tools in the social studies, specifically hyper-textual forms, is to “embody complexity as well as describe it, to permit the reader some say in how history is conveyed, to create new spaces for exploration” (Ayers, 1999a).

## **Digital Project and Museum of the Cherokee Indian's archives**

In an attempt to foster digital and cultural literacy with preservice students the instructors of a preservice methods course designed a digital gallery project involving the Museum of the Cherokee Indian's online archive. Providing opportunities for students to explore materials of the past, primary sources, as well as the use of complementary technologies, has the potential to engage students actively in the construction and interpretation of history in addition to fostering digital literacies (Ayers, 1999a). This type of pedagogy is reinforced by the National Council of the Social Studies (2000) which emphasizes, “... engaging perspectives from various aspects of history...and helping students develop the habits of mind that historians and scholars in the humanities and social sciences employ to study the past and its relationship to the present in the US and other societies” (p. 3).

The archive itself boasts over four thousand books, one thousand black and white photographs, manuscript materials from 1830 to present, nine hundred reels of microfilm and many original materials in the Cherokee syllabary. Many of these materials have been digitized and placed online allowing for easier access, interactivity, manipulability, and diversity of voice (Cohen & Rosenzweig, 2006).

The authors chose the Museum of the Cherokee Indian's online archives as the centerpiece of this project for two main reasons. One, the state of North Carolina is home to the largest population of Native Americans on the east coast and few, if any, of our students have real and accurate knowledge of the history, culture and contemporary issues that Native American peoples face. By using the online archives we based our students' content knowledge in

primary and secondary source materials that had already been deemed by the tribe fit for public perusal. Second, teaching about Cherokee people is required in K-12 social studies throughout the North Carolina state standards. Therefore, the use of the online archives provided the best opportunity for our preservice students to develop their historical skills through the analysis of primary sources, developing cultural competency by working with tribal materials, in addition to developing digital literacy skills through the building of an online digital gallery.

### **Process**

Students were asked to mine the Museum of the Cherokee Indian archives for a topic that they felt was both engaging and could be aligned with the either the Common Core or the North Carolina Essential Standards for Social Studies or Art. Once chosen, students were required to choose 7-9 images from their topical search that could be arranged in a manner that encouraged inquiry based learning. For each image students were required to write a 100-200 word description of the image, provide a guiding question(s) or discussion questions for future students to consider and to arrange them in a way that would expand or highlight content knowledge. In order to ensure that students were not inadvertently misrepresenting the content of the archive or the tribe generally we held two classroom sessions with the curator from the Museum to help students sift through the archive and properly contextualize their project with a healthy understanding of the history of their chosen topic.

### **Wiki Technology**

To build their online gallery students were required to use a wiki platform. A wiki is a Web 2.0 application that can be defined as a collaborative Web space where users

can add and edit content to be published on the Internet. (Depending on the wiki hosting site, users could mean anyone registered, or invited or the public at large.) Heafner and Friedman's (2008) study on the use of wikis demonstrated a pedagogical shift from traditional teacher-centered instructional approaches to student-oriented, constructivist learning, which resulted in increased student self-efficacy and motivation (p. 288). The data from their study attests to the potential long-term benefits of using wikis for student learning (p. 289). In line with the literature on Web 2.0, the use of wikis in the classroom has the potential to allow students to develop their own understandings and, thus, become generators of knowledge and active contributors to the Internet. In other words, preservice teachers become guided travelers rather than passive learners (Demski, 2009)

Although numerous wiki-hosting sites can be used to house this type of collaborative student-centered approach, the instructors for this course decided to use PBworks ([www.pbworks.com](http://www.pbworks.com)). PBworks became the logical choice because it is free to use, void of commercial advertising, is largely customizable, provides a complete history and audit trail for all work related to a user's particular site, and allows administrators to control the access of other users and third party readers[a]. The open source site also maintains a 2GB storage capacity and allows for up to 100 users. In addition, the easy-to-use WYSIWG interface allows for efficient image and video uploads, as well as the ability to embed Jing ([www.techsmith.com/jing](http://www.techsmith.com/jing)) tutorials easily for students to refer to as they work.

### **Students' Experiences**

Three student projects are available on line:

1. Cherokee in Vietnam  
tinyurl.com/Cherokee-in-Vietnam
2. Principles of Design  
tinyurl.com/Principles-of-Design-Art-9-11
3. Cherokee Masks  
tinyurl.com/Cherokee-Masks

Each project integrates technology, pedagogy and content in a way that fosters meaningful digital literacy skills. Since the project was assigned early in the course, it was a first attempt by students to utilize the standards in crafting a lesson on a particular subject. While the projects highlighted here were successful, there were also projects that lacked basic technological savvy, depth of content knowledge and cultural empathy. Several of the students felt distracted by the technology: some due to the interface with PBworks, others due to discomfort with computers. This provided a good opportunity to address the real world issues of working with computers in the public schools and gave our students much needed practice with computers.

A few students really struggled with how to use the Museum of the Cherokee Indian website to address some of the standards. Because this project forced them away from a basal textbook, these students found themselves outside their comfort zone. After completing this project, they had a much better idea of how to address the standards beyond a chapter reading.

One thing we found to be missing in our execution of this project was a sufficient level of metacognition on behalf of the students. Many of our licensure candidates were not able to critically examine their own work, allowing them to reinforce stereotypes. Having students write a rationale in which they explain their choices

might allow them to recognize their own assumptions prior to completing the project.

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# FROM THE FIELD

## Language, Choice, and High School Students

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Stella Burton  
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Kathleen Fitzgerald  
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A Reading Recovery teacher and a sixth grade special education teacher used the Language Experience Approach (LEA) and interest inventories while tutoring high school students. These aspiring reading specialists used data from interest inventory surveys to plan motivating lessons that ignited fulfilling discussions on topics students found interesting. Such deliberate and calculated experiences enhanced vocabulary and comprehension development. Research has concluded that when teachers consider students' reading interests and provide them with choices, students are more engaged (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Morgan & Wagner, 2013).

Along with an emphasis on student's choices, Language Experience Approach (LEA) techniques were employed. LEA is an instructional approach that helps struggling readers connect speech to print (Ashton-Warner, 1963). According to Fisher, Brozo, Frey, and Ivey (2011), LEA has been effective with primary grade students and adults who require support with developing formal language.

### Reflections from a Reading Recovery Teacher



This high school student was recommended for tutoring to increase her comprehension skills. Her goal was to become a medical professional and I felt challenged to meet her needs. I was concerned about the importance the student placed on how she sounded when reading in contrast to understanding. A 30-minute Reading Recovery lesson entails building on a first grade student's literacy strengths. Therefore, I felt compelled to also build on this high school students' strengths. The student admitted having difficulty understanding some academic text and wanted to improve reading skills. I noticed oral reading strengths of reading smoothly

and conversationally even when the meaning was unclear. The most important priority, for me, was to teach her comprehension strategies that would set a purpose for reading and keep her constantly questioning during reading.

I looked at how using Question Answer Relationship (QAR) can be used in any subject to enhance comprehension (Pearson & Johnson, 1978). In a previous session, I introduced this strategy that involved identifying types of questions. We began by discussing teen driving. The student then read an article about a controversial subject. We practiced developing different types of questions from the article, "Driven to Distraction." Illustrations of questions we created included:

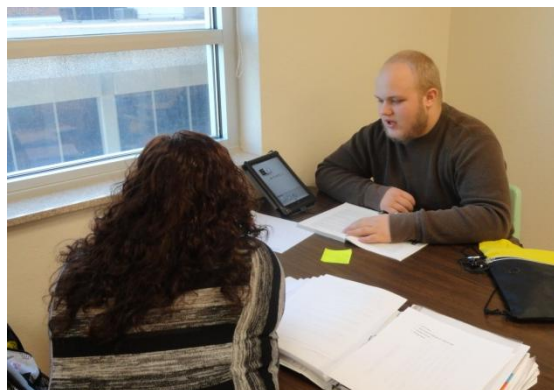
- What was the reason for debate in the article?
- Do you think graduated licenses, which place more restrictions on teen drivers, would encourage responsible driving, or would it hinder decision-making skills? Substantiate your answer.
- Compare and contrast the relationship of freedom and responsibility.

Finally, the student developed her own questions to present for me to answer based on the text.

Vocabulary building was also a focus for this student. Another goal was for the student to discover that although synonyms are similar in meaning they can have different connotations in text. We viewed a PowerPoint presentation that modeled the shades of meaning strategy (Twain, 1890). We then read text that elicited emotions

through vocabulary. I modeled that substituting words neutralizes the emotions and then the student engaged in her own practice of substituting synonyms and determining connotation.

### Reflections from a Sixth Grade Teacher



This high school student volunteered for tutoring because he wanted to improve his overall grade point average. At first, the student seemed easily distracted regardless of the setting in which we were working. However, he figured out ways to use stimuli to help him to focus on his learning. Headphones plugged into his Nook reader device assisted him with focusing his thoughts and drowned out extraneous noise. To counter visual distractions, we used graphic organizers and modes of presenting information that are visually stimulating. I encouraged the student to view difficulties in his environment as motivation to succeed.

To reinforce comprehension, literary elements such as symbolism, imagery, figurative language, tone, and theme were presented as a graphic organizer chart. This student's interest inventory indicated that he was ecstatic about John Steinbeck. I used this information as a springboard for tutoring lessons. For example, I chose a reading selection from a biography about John Steinbeck. The student was challenged to use this biographical work to

think of common themes with all of his literature. At first, the student seemed to hesitate, but then he thought of a theme, “learning from the poor.” This was a breakthrough for this student--that he actually understood the author’s message. It also took him a fraction of time to formulate his thoughts. Strategies used in this lesson were directly supported by the LEA and Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of interaction with the text (Rosenblatt, 1978).

The student requested assistance in how to locate sources for his research paper from English class. I demonstrated how to locate research articles on the University’s home page using my Ipad and my Android Smart phone. The student learned how to use the search engine for psychological research and how to identify scientific and humanistic perspectives surrounding a topic. One of his research topics was regarding the transgender community. At the conclusion of our last tutoring session, the student appeared surprised that there would be no more sessions.

## Conclusion

Strategies used by these aspiring reading specialists were practical and can be employed immediately in a high school classroom. To motivate students to read, a teacher should informally assess and build lessons around students’ interests and choices. These strategies will transform each lesson into a rigorous language experience to increase proficiency with vocabulary, comprehension, and writing.

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*advice to young beginners, personally contributed by leading authors of the*

*day (pp. 85-88). New York: D. Appleton.*

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**LESIG: Language Experience Approach to Literacy Across Content Areas**  
**Saturday, May 10, 2014, 1:00-2:00 pm**  
**59th Annual Convention, New Orleans**

This session explores the use of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) in a variety of settings and across age groups with a particular emphasis on using this literacy strategy with ELLs, struggling readers, and across content areas. LEA provides support for readers because they are actively engaged in creating meaningful communications. This strategy is especially beneficial for reading across content areas and for struggling readers because it draws on students' experiences, thus providing meaningful and relevant texts which students can use to hone language skills. We hope to see you at our session.

**Session Chair**  
Jeanne McGlenn

**Keynote:**

**Using Picture Books With Tellability**  
Ana Lado

**Round Table Presentations:**

**What about LEA as a Reading and Writing Assessment?**  
Linda Burkey

**Andy the Duck Goes Digital**  
Debra Jo Hailey and Patricia Alexander

**Using Wordless Picture Books, “Talking” Quilts, and Magazines to Produce Complex Language**  
Jane Moore

**Using an Integrated Language Experience and Technology Approach with English Language Learners to Build Oracy and Literacy Skills**  
David Salyer

**Exploring the Harlem Renaissance with Gifted Fifth-Graders: A Language Experience**  
Mary Beth Van Sickle and Michelle Fazio-Brunson

**Using Vignettes to Generate Language Experiences**  
Deborah Williams

**The Power of Language Experience for Fluency Development: Teacher and Student Perceptions within a Summer Reading Clinic Context**  
Belinda Zimmerman and Melanie Kidder-Brown

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