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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.

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Message from the Editor

Change and Renewal

It's bittersweet to bring out this 2014 Spring/Summer issue of the Language Experience Forum Journal as I will be stepping down as editor in the fall. It has been a great four years, working with the writers who have shared their insights in the articles published in the journal and with the Editorial Board who have always been so willing to review articles and make suggestions. And it has been a highlight of my work to have a role in the metamorphosis of the original newsletter to the online journal.

I leave the journal in good hands. Two of our LESIG colleagues have already stepped up to carry on the work of the journal. You can support them by continuing to read the journal, to share it with colleagues, and to submit articles. Let everyone know that Language Experience is alive and well, promoting the literacy of children, adults, and language learners.

Best Regards,

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A Study in English Language Learning Incorporating a Language Experience Approach

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Language Experience Approach

The Language Experience Approach (LEA) incorporates a variety of models of using language to express the experiences of children in a variety of genres. Nessel & Dixon (2008) argue that in all forms the predominant principle is to use the student's own vocabulary, language patterns, and background of experiences to create reading texts, making reading an especially meaningful and enjoyable process. There are many variations of LEA within an international context and it is via an explication of these approaches that the value of LEA can be realized. In a recent paper, Joshua (2002) summarizes the language experience approach as a method of teaching reading which consists of creating stories using children's language and personal experiences. The guiding principles are: what is thought can be spoken, what is spoken can be written, and what is written can be read. Joshua speaks of the importance of children using their own words to learn to read, write, speak, spell and publish their own stories and books. McCormick (1988) describes LEA as an approach to reading instruction based on activities and stories developed from the personal experiences of the learner. The stories about the personal experiences are recorded in writing by a teacher and read together until the learner makes the appropriate connections between the written and the spoken form of the word. Landis, Umolu & Mancha (2010) suggest that the LEA incorporates students' retellings of

home and community events to construct reading materials for instructional purposes and focuses on students' descriptions of their life experiences and written transcriptions describing these events for use in reading and writing instruction.

Purpose of this Research

The purpose of this research was to explore how an LEA could assist a child's language development across the main strand and strand units of the English language curriculum within a specified learning needs context. It also investigates how LEA could be utilized to enhance the child's experience at school or the child's educational experience within a specific learning needs context. This research involves an adjusted version of the LEA with three children in a primary school setting. This approach features the creation of a language portfolio including written extracts in a variety of genres; narratives, letters, learning log entries, pieces of related art work; self-portraits, paintings and constructions. The approach featured multiple daily teaching sessions focusing on development in oral language, reading and writing. The teaching methodologies employed included active learning, talk and discussion, collaborative learning, problem solving, using the environment, the development of skills through content, the use of ICT and direct teaching. Details of learning activities under each strand are included in individual children's reports (Tables 1-8). Teacher observations of

progress were noted in learning records informed by continuous conversations and interviews with parents and teachers. As the research questions suggest, the nature of the research is mainly qualitative although it does feature some elements of quantitative research as progress in language learning is assessed in reference to the Drumcondra English Profile Indicators and the European Language Portfolio - Council of Europe Levels.

Sampling and Administration of Research Instruments

This study involved working with three primary school children--three boys--with specific learning needs in terms of language and personal development in an urban mainstream primary school setting in Ireland. The children were from the junior cycle in primary school where English is the first language spoken at home and school. In this study, parents and teachers were interviewed in relation to their observations of progress achieved by the three children at the end of the LEA. Informal research conversations, were held on a daily basis with parents and teachers so as to direct subsequent learning activities. The collection of data from portfolios was completed over three months in order to gather information and observe possible changes over one specified term. The research was completed over one year. This provided sufficient time to explore background, gather data and information, analyze, organize and present findings.

Data Analysis

As LEA was implemented, teaching records and plans from daily teaching sessions were compiled. It was decided to analyze the children's work across the strands using the European Language Portfolio - Council of Europe Levels and the Drumcondra English Profiles - Indicators for English Oral, Reading and Writing as these provided a relevant and age - appropriate framework from which progress could be identified and assessed. Findings were noted from samples taken at the beginning of the research and those completed at the end. The presentation of these models, in particular the indicators and criteria outlined for each progressive stage, were very beneficial in the analysis of children's attainment.

The nature of this research required continuous assessment and teacher observations of progress made in oral language, reading and writing as well as the elements related to the child's learning experience. Interviews and daily research conversations were conducted. Progress was not always linear but the synergies (Cooper, 2000) created between the strands as the approach was implemented were advantageous in terms of learning potential for each respective child; a factor which required teachers to make a more holistic assessment of progress achieved when completing this LEA.

Presentation of Research Findings

European Language Portfolio - Council of Europe Levels
Progress from Commencement to Completion of LEA

Table 1 - Listening

	Level at Beginning of LEA	Level at End of LEA
Child I	A1 Grade 3	A2 Borderline B1 Grade 6
Child II	A1 Grade 3	A2-B1 Grade 7
Child III	A1 Grade 2	A2 Grade 5

In Table 1 we see significant progress in each child's listening ability. All three children experienced noteworthy improvements; rising one level with one child experiencing improvements across two levels. These children have progressed to understanding phrases and the highest-frequency vocabulary related to the areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). By reaching B1, Child II can now understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in school, leisure, etc. when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.

Table 2 - Speaking

	Level at Beginning of LEA	Level at End of LEA
Child I	A1	B1
Child II	A1	B1
Child III	A1	B1

In Table 2 we see that all three children have risen by two levels. This relates specifically to the development of speaking and narrative structures.

Table 3 - Speaking to Someone

	Level at Beginning of LEA	Level at End of LEA
Child I	A1 Grade 3	A2/B1 Grade 7
Child II	A1 Grade 2	A2/B1 Grade 7
Child III	A1 Grade 1	A2 Grade 6

In Table 3 we see significant progress made in relation to this area of speaking. One child achieved progress across one level and two children improved over two levels. The findings relate to the observation and interpretation of non-verbal cues and a development in confidence and competence in participation in conversation.

Table 4 - Reading

	Level at Beginning of LEA	Level at End of LEA
Child I	A1 Grade 2	A2 Grade 5
Child II	A1 Grade 2	A2 Grade 5
Child III	A1 Grade 1	A2 Grade 4

In Table 4 we see that all three children progressed to the next level at the end of the research. The children understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.

Table 5 - Writing

	Level at Beginning of LEA	Level at End of LEA
Child I	A1 Grade 2	A2 Grade 6
Child II	A1 Grade 2	A2 Grade 6
Child III	A1 Grade 1	A2 Grade 4

In Table 5 we see that all three children proceeded to the next level in this category; there were significant improvements in that these skills were more extensively developed.

English Language Profile Rating

Drumcondra English Language Profile Indicators-Oral/Reading/Writing Progress from Commencement to Completion of LEA

Table 6 - Oral Language

	Level at beginning of LEA Raw Profile Score	Level at end of LEA Raw Profile Score
Child I	3	8
Child II	4	8
Child III	2/3	8

In Table 6 we see a very clear improvement in oral language development. One child achieved an increase of five indicator points, Child II increased by four, whilst Child III beginning at arguably a lower base, achieved an increase of five indicator points.

Table 7 - Reading

	Level at beginning of LEA Raw Profile Score	Level at end of LEA Raw Profile Score
Child I	3	10
Child II	3	10
Child III	2	9

In Table 7 we see that Child I and II achieved an improvement of an increase of seven indicator points. Child III beginning at an initial lower base also achieved an increase of seven indicator points.

Table 8 - Writing

	Level at beginning of LEA Raw Profile Score	Level at end of LEA Raw Profile Score
Child I	2	7
Child II	2	7
Child III	2	7

In Table 8 we see that all three children achieved an increase of five indicator points. These results are not suggestive of differences within these bands which were more explicit from observations of written samples in individual portfolios.

The Learning Experience

Data collected from interviews and research conversations indicate multiple positive effects in terms of social, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Although, these are arguably more subjective in nature, observations made by teachers, parents and pupils indicate positive benefits of this approach. There were particular improvements for all children in classroom behaviour and interactions. One teacher commented:

There is a noticeable difference in the ease at which I can teach the class as a whole group. Even though differentiation is still needed, I feel I can do more group work now. I feel (Child

I) has learned to control his own behaviour a little more and that makes everything easier.

In relation to improvements in communication which seek to lessen anxiety and improve social competence, one parent stated that their child had learned to communicate emotions in a more socially acceptable way. In terms of social cues such as eye contact, initiation of conversation and nodding, parents did comment as to improvements in awareness of eye contact but suggested that their children would require further support in this area.

The improvements in the development of language also assisted social competence. The use of role-play and social scripts as

well as opportunities to practice oral language introductions and oral language conversations was also reported to be of benefit. Similarly, such approaches demonstrating and modelling strategies for remaining calm and requesting assistance also had multiple positive effects. One parent commented that not getting one's own way and understanding that people may need to wait for help was a positive and beneficial learning experience. The use of social stories also proved favourable. The benefits of the child recalling the story and applying these social skills in new situations was recognized and appreciated by the class teacher. After the implementation of a social story learning activity and related role-play where a child was taught how best to behave in a group work situation, i.e., turn taking and listening to other people's opinions, a teacher made the following comments:

It is more rewarding to see a child change his own behaviour without having to point it out to him ... there is definitely less confrontation now and that means more time on task and a happier classroom

There were progressive developments in relation to social development in the school playground and in the classroom, as denoted by the following teacher's comments:

He asks to work with (another child) now whereas before he would not even have tried to get involved ... it's nice to see him more relaxed and smiling more.

The following remarks by a teacher convey that the children's ability to narrate a story and make a presentation in front of the class demonstrated progress in language and social development.

There is definitely an improvement in (Child III). His language has really improved, and his stories make sense

now. He still needs assistance in scaffolding his story but when he speaks in front of the class he is more confident and the other children react well to him. They listen to him and enjoy his stories now and he has benefitted from that socially.

Another parent commented that providing the child with more language and sentence structures and providing opportunities in social and group situations was advantageous. The issue of individual difference is an important one in the interpretation of observations of perceived progress. Whilst these children learned social skills which enabled them to work successfully in group situations, one teacher observed that the children in this research tended to prefer to work as independent learners.

He still prefers to play on his own at times but he knows how to find his way into games and circles of friends...he has that option now and he is more confident because of that.

The use of ICT, music, art and field trips as well as the implementation of activities incorporating multiple learning styles and the facilitation of special interests proved to be popular with the children. It was important that the children were introduced to new areas of interest in order to broaden their focus and enable them to access all areas of the curriculum. If they can apply approaches used in the learning and developing of their special interest then these skills can be transferred and applied to other areas of the curriculum (Morgan, 2009). It was also beneficial for the children to experience successful learning experiences to raise their morale. Overall, parents commented that the variety and interest provided by the subject matter sustained motivation and interest but

advised that behaviour required monitoring, understanding and sensitivity on an individual basis.

Discussion of Research Findings

In terms of oral language (Council of Europe Levels) significant gains were made in the area of listening: from A1 to A2 in two cases and from A1 to B1 in one case. After considerable prompting and modelling of appropriate active listening behaviour by teachers and multiple opportunities to practice such oral activities in small groups and in pairs, the children showed signs of considerable improvement.

All three children made progress across two levels in speaking skills (A1 - B1). In relation to the ability to converse with someone, two children progressed across two levels (A1 - B1) with one child achieving success of a slightly lesser but notably significant degree (A1- A2). As anticipated by the researcher, the area of oral language saw the most significant gains with notable success achieved in reading and writing.

Three children progressed to the next level in reading (A1 - A2). All children experienced a progression of seven indicator points. It is worth considering current research recommendations in relation to specific aspects of reading development (Delano, 2011). At the end of the process, children were able to describe briefly simple differences between text types (e.g. stories, poems and informational texts). The use of interactive ICT software as recommended by Delano (2011) was a beneficial addition to the process as it provided a more enjoyable, kinaesthetic and tactile way to access the language curriculum. It assisted greatly in the motivation for learning for these children within a specific learning needs context. There was marked progress in all three children's ability to retell stories

and informational texts in sequence, incorporating important ideas and relevant details.

In terms of Council of Europe Levels, the results showed that all three children progressed to the next level (A1- A2) with two children moving towards the higher range of this level. The improvement in their work was apparent from samples of writing from their respective portfolios. In terms of the Drumcondra English Profiles, three children experienced an increase of five indicator points. In the process of devising a writing programme, recommendations by Delano (2011,) and Myles (2003) were considered and implemented.

The Learning Experience

Data findings gathered from interviews and research conversations indicate that the experience itself was beneficial not merely in terms of cognition and literacy but in terms of broader personal and social development and establishing a basis for future life-long learning experiences as described in The Learning Experience. The importance of personal and group experience are relevant considerations in the implementation of LEA. Taylor (1992) addresses the significance of both. Parental responses in interviews noted significant achievements in this area. Findings from this research would suggest that children benefitted from a combination of independent and shared experiences.

In this research, the value of the personal experience is an important consideration, particularly in the development of children's competence and confidence in using oral language; to improve social situations in order to make them more comfortable, positive and enjoyable. LEA enables children to express and articulate experiences unique to them and so provides the opportunity to find and express one's

own voice. Many educators have noted the value of the personal experience expressed through oral language, reading and writing. For a child in a special needs context, the benefits of this cannot be underestimated.

The individual ability to comprehend and apply experience relates to comments made in relation to the concept of theory of mind and emotional understanding (Kuzmanovic, Schilbach & Lehnhardt, 2011) and children with specific learning needs. Research findings derived from interviews convey positive effects of LEA in relation to the creation of positive experiences with the child's peer group and friends and support the view that there is much to be gained from mapping one's experience to another. Whilst the three children in this study were individuals in every sense they did benefit from participating in cooperative learning activities within this social context and working together in undertakings across the three strands.

Conclusions

This research suggests that significant gains can be made in the areas of oral language, reading and writing when the child is provided with relevant and appropriate opportunities to develop these abilities. As all children participating in this research had specific learning needs, these findings suggest that the implementation of LEA can significantly assist a child's language development. Data collected from interviews indicate multiple positive effects in terms of social, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Although these are arguably more subjective in nature, observations made by teachers, parents and pupils indicate positive effects of this approach. There were particular improvements for all children in classroom interactions, the ability to ask questions and

contribute to class discussions, conventions in turn taking during conversation and the ability to participate in group activities and social interactions in the school yard. Whilst these findings suggest improvements in language and intrapersonal development it is important to remember that children with these conditions require on-going support with regard to their behaviour. This is an important consideration and has important implications for future practice as children with autism and Asperger's Syndrome vary greatly in terms of their ability to regulate their behaviour. This research supports the view that improvements can be made in the areas of personal and intrapersonal development as some children with specific learning needs i.e. autism and Asperger's Syndrome require long term appropriate assistance if they are to achieve their full potential.

There is scope for further research and investigation in the areas of empirical research with regard to reading and writing and children with specific learning needs in relation to individual difference. The development of appropriate and accurate assessment procedures which adequately reflect progress attained by children within the context of their specific learning challenges provide significant opportunities for further enquiry. The differentiation in diagnosis of autism and Asperger's Syndrome and oral language delay is another issue which provides multiple avenues for further investigation and one which is becoming increasingly more relevant in contemporary educational settings. The regression of language and appropriate interventions which can support children in this regard provide scope for further research and development. The appropriate use of social stories and social scripts as well as effective teaching approaches to develop social and communication skills (verbal and non-

verbal) are issues which are discussed concisely in this research and which require extensive further investigation. The benefits and challenges of teaching children to ask questions is an issue which required attention in the implementation of this LEA and which facilitates supplementary study. The factors affecting responses to intervention are important variables in the interpretation and consideration of these research findings and provide multiple opportunities for further exploration.

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Experiencing Bullying through YA Fiction: Impact on PreService Teachers

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According to national surveys, 30% of U.S. students in grades 6 through 10 report that they have been involved, either as victims or bullies, in bullying. Bullying can occur whenever there is an imbalance of power, threatening actions, or an intent to harm another. Media attention to bullying and school-wide programs are at an all-time high. Particularly authors of adolescent fiction have recently written a number of books which examine bullying and its impact on adolescents. However, research continues to indicate that often adults do not intervene when they observe bullying since they often believe that this is a natural “rite of passage” and children need to learn “how to stand up for themselves.”

The intent of this study was to identify the attitudes preservice teachers bring to the

classroom and whether their attitudes are changed by “experiencing” bullying through YA fiction. The researcher conducted a survey of students enrolled in a course on Adolescent Literature before they read YA novels in which the main characters are bullies or bullied. During the reading of novels, students engaged in Language Experience activities, documenting their experiences with bullying and their possible reactions to bullying in their future classrooms.

All students reacted to a pre-reading survey which included eight commonly held beliefs about bullying, victims, and perpetrators. Respondents were asked to write about the statement or statements that generated their strongest reaction.

N=17

	Statement Chosen for Response by Candidates
Bullying is the most common form of student violence in U.S. society.	2 Bullying is common and prevalent at all grade levels Easiest form of violence to conceal and easiest way to harm someone.
Bullies suffer from insecurity and low self-esteem.	1 Important to realize that the bully is dealing with problems too.
Bullies are looking for attention. If you ignore them they will go away.	3 Ignoring the bully will generally make things worse and it ignores the underlying problems
Children outgrow bullying.	1 Bullying is part of a lifelong pattern that stems from deeper issues which must be addressed.

Victims of bullies need to learn to stand up for themselves.	2 This is the excuse some adults make about bullying, placing blame and shame on the victim.
Most bullying occurs off school grounds.	
Teachers know if bullying is a problem in their classes.	
Bullying is a rite of passage and children outgrow its effects.	8 Bullying affects persons well into adulthood. Domestic and child abuse are forms of bullying. Bullying has long lasting effects on the victim.

Discussion

Most candidates recognized that bullying is a common form of violence in schools, that bullies must be confronted and that bullying prevention is important to the mental health of all students. 47% of this sample of pre-service teachers recognized that bullying has long lasting impacts on the mental health of both victims and bullies. Victims can continue to experience feelings of insecurity and isolation as a result of bullying. Also bullying continues into adulthood as bullies often continue to use power to threaten and intimidate those they perceive as less powerful.

Problematic responses occur for statements 5 and 7. The idea that bullying can be handled if victims just stand up for themselves is false and yet many of the respondents agreed with this statement showing that this is a commonly held belief. Victims are often instructed to confront the bully when the victim is often incapable of such behavior and this is the reason he/she is the victim in the first place. Respondents disagreed that teachers know that bullying is occurring in their classrooms when in fact

teachers are often aware of bullying but do nothing or little to address the situations, generally because they believe victims must learn “to stand up for themselves.” Thus victims are told they must find the resources to deal with bullying behaviors which continues to prevent them from reporting bullying while parents and teachers often look the other way, thinking the victim must be the one to address the bully.

Engagement in reading, talking, and writing about beliefs and reactions to the situations depicted in novels about bullying is an important activity for pre-service teachers. Changing long-held attitudes can be difficult but through the process of living with and writing about characters, through Language Experience, these candidates began to increase their awareness and sensitivity to the issues of bullying in their classrooms. An annotated bibliography of novels is provided to help teachers select and share these stories in professional development groups or with their students as whole class and literature circle selections.

Annotated Bibliography of Adolescent Fiction on Bullying

names will never hurt me by Jaime Adoff
Penguin Group, 2004, 186 pages, High School

Rockville High has the usual mix of adolescent characters. Kurt who listens to metal music is labeled a “freak.” While Mark aka “Floater,” who used to be the one getting beat up, is now a problem solver, a stooge for the principal. He keeps the peace between all the cliques at school especially when it is beneficial to him. Ryan, a senior, seems to have it all—he’s the quarterback of the football team and has a beautiful girlfriend. But he also has a darker side; his father is physically abusive and it turns out that Ryan is sexually abusive. Tisha struggles with being bi-racial and is constantly being harassed by other kids. As their lives intertwine, these characters fall into roles of victims and victimizers.

“If I was cool, I wouldn’t get picked on in school. Wouldn’t get kicked on, wouldn’t catch shit from everyone- seems to think its open season on me. Laughter behind my back follows me home on the bus. They’re not laughing with me- at me. Attacking with smirks, and words hurt, you know. Sticks and stones break your bones, but words can kill your soul- explodes with every put- down, every beat down. Shards of broken self-esteem cutting up all my dreams- welts on my mind from fighting my self against my self. I become less than everything, everyone else. I used to be me, now just a fraction of a piece of a part of the whole. I can’t find any more reasons to be here-reasons not fear-hate turned against myself becomes something really dark-this is how it starts- and it’s only first period...”

Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson
Puffin Books, 2001, 198 pages, High School

Melinda Sordino, a freshman at Merryweather High School, has no friends since the night she called the police to bust up an end-of-summer party. Ostracized by her former friends and classmates, Melinda has withdrawn into herself and refuses to talk to anyone, including her teachers and parents. An art assignment becomes the therapy which helps her to deal with her pain; she was raped during the party. Still harassed and terrorized by the boy who raped her, Melinda is finally able to “speak” out and be heard.

“Her eyes meet mine for a second. ‘I hate you,’ she mouths silently. She turns her back to me and laughs with her friends. I bite my lip. I am not going to think about it. It was ugly, but it’s over, and I’m not going to think about it. My lip bleeds a little. It tastes like metal. I need to sit down” (p. 5).

Thirteen Reasons Why by Jay Asher
Penguin, 2007, 288 pages, High School

Clay Jensen listens to a series of tapes in which Hannah Baker explains her loneliness and alienation and eventual decision that life is not worth living. Hannah is a victim of the rumor, innuendo, peer pressure, and bullying that overwhelm teen lives.

Hannah says: “You don’t know what went on in the rest of my life. At home. Even at school. You don’t know what goes on in anyone’s life but your own. And when you mess with one

part of a person's life, you're not messing with just that part. ...you're messing with their entire life" (p. 201).

Sleep Rough Tonight by Ian Bone
Penguin, 2004, 241 pages, Middle/High School

Alex Pimentino was always getting bullied and beat up by seniors who said he bothered them and should keep his mouth shut. But when the Jockey arrived, fresh from prison, a whole new type of bullying began. Under the pretense of helping Alex become a man and a brother-warrior, the Jockey set out to punish Alex, as if he knew it was Alex's fault he had gone to jail.

"Unfortunately, his tormentor couldn't hear him. A noisy crush of boys filled the bathroom, each yelling for blood. Alex's voice, muffled as it was under the boy's humongous armpit, was lost in the din. It was not much more than a vibration against the giant's rib cage, but still it would not stop. Not for lack of audience, not for physical pain, and not for fear of reprisal" (p. 1).

Kissing the Rain by Kevin Brooks
Scholastic, 2004, 320 pages, High School

Moo Nelson, an overweight fifteen-year-old boy, is constantly bullied in school. He and another boy, Brady, "take the 'rain'" everyday--the tormenting harassment and cruelty of their peers. But bullying doesn't stop at school. When Moo witnesses a murder, designed by the police to frame a criminal, he is terrorized by both the police and the gangster. Moo must make tough decisions about the truth and how to stand up for himself.

"I'll tell you what you do – you do what you do. You walk through it all with your eyes down. Umbrellarize it. It's the only way. What else is there? Go BLUBBING to someone? Be PROUD? STAND-UP-AND-FIGHT? Don't make me laugh. That kinda stuff don't work. Ain't NONE of it works. Mom told me once – 'If you don't get upset when they make fun of you, they'll stop.' – but that was 3 years ago, and I'm STILL waiting for em to stop. I mean, I got patience, but 3 years waiting for something that ain't gonna happen? That ain't patience, that's world-record STUPID" (p. 34).

Hate List by Jennifer Brown
Little Brown, 2009, 405 pages, High School

Valerie Leftman's boyfriend, Nick, shoots and kills six classmates and wounds other students including Valerie in the high school Commons area before killing himself. Valerie spends the next year trying to mend physically and mentally, dealing with anger, remorse and guilt for her role in promoting the hatred that led to the shootings.

"And the Hate List was real. I really was angry. It wasn't a show for Nick. ... I didn't even realize how angry he was. But I was angry, too. The bullying, the teasing, the name-

calling...my parents, my life...seemed so messed up and pointless and I really was pissed about it. Maybe back then a part of me was suicidal and I just didn't know it" (p. 388).

The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier
Pantheon Books, 1974, 253 pages, High School

Trinity High School is run by the Vigils. Their leader, Archie Costello, enjoys giving out random "assignments" that cause havoc and torment the victim. Jerry Renault is assigned to refuse to sell chocolates during the annual candy drive. But after ten days, Jerry still refuses to sell the chocolates. He has decided to take a stand and not be a victim of the random acts of cruelty which are imposed by the Vigils and their adult accomplice, Brother Leon. In the end, Jerry is destroyed while the Vigils and Brother Leon watch.

"The world was made up of two kinds of people-those who were victims and those who victimized. There was no doubt about Janza's category. No doubt about himself, either. And no doubt about the kid, taking off down the hill, tears spilling onto his cheeks as he turned away" (p. 100-101).

Whale Talk by Chris Crutcher
HarperCollins, 2001, 220 pages, High School

T.J. Jones, who attends Cutter High, is a talented athlete and a bright student, but he has chosen to forgo the status of competing with the school's sports teams. Teachers, students and alumni, all revere the athletes at Cutter. When T.J. is recruited to form a swim team, he decides to create a new kind of team for Cutter, one which is composed of kids who don't fit the "jock" mold.

"So Barbour has the jacket buttoned at the bottom and pulled down around Chris's shoulders so he can't move his arms, and his nose is about an inch from Chris's. I can't hear what he saying, but tears squirts out of Chris's terrified eyes and his entire body trembles" (p. 15).

The Battle of Jericho by Sharon M. Draper
Simon Pulse, 2005, 337 pages, High School

Jericho and his friends are invited to pledge a powerful organization at their high school, the Warriors of Distinction. They undergo hazing and various forms of humiliation as part of pledge week. Jericho is forced to make sacrifices that will affect his future and finally to engage in actions which have the potential to harm him and his friends. By the end Jericho learns about the power of peer pressure and its negative, life-changing impact.

"The Warriors gleefully began dragging the pledges across the filthy floor, making them bark or jump or roll over. They seemed to be having a great time. 'I couldn't wait until this year so I could do this to another group of pledges!' Madison boasted as he made Kofi crawl on his stomach" (p. 195).

Gifted by Beth Evangelista**Walker, 2005, 180 pages, Middle School**

George R. Clark, a gifted young man and the son of the school principal, finds himself constantly trying to avoid the “Bruise Brothers” on a school trip to the beach. Fighting back only seems to make things worse. Trapped by a hurricane, George is forced to face the situation and realizes that he had given the leader of his tormentors, Sam, a reason to hate him. He had once allowed Sam to be publicly humiliated. So Sam and George are both victims. Coming to this insight, they are finally able to overcome their animosity.

“He was bending [the glasses], twisting them like a pretzel. When both lenses popped out, he flung my broken frames into the wind. I bit my lip, determined not to cry. ‘You know what Coach Caruso said?’ Sam put his face in mine. ‘He said we should have nailed you when we had the chance. Your time has come, *Worm*” (p. 135).

End Game by Nancy Garden**Harcourt, 2006, 287 pages, High School**

Gray Wilton enters Greenford High hoping for a new start, but finds the same bullying he experienced in his old school. Being smaller than other boys and not good at sports, Gray is immediately picked out by the jocks as someone to bully. Gray’s father can’t understand why he is a victim and thinks it must be Gray’s fault. With nowhere to turn, Gray becomes increasingly depressed while the bullies become more vicious, until finally Gray explodes with disastrous results for all.

“I clamped my lips shut, but Johnson dug his fingers into my jaw joint so I had to open up, and Zorro poured thick black paint down my throat while I choked and tried not to swallow” (p. 222).

Home of the Braves by David Klass**Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002, 312 pages, Late Middle School – Early High School**

Lawndale High is a typical high school with the common cliques and rituals. The football players, the “hard guys” are the kings of the school with their brawn, demanding “respect” from anyone who fails to appease them. Joe Brickman, captain of the soccer team, accepts a certain level of bullying until his best friend, Ed, decides to defy the bullies. At the same time the school administrators issue a “zero tolerance” policy to try to deal with the atmosphere of violence in the school. In this fall of their senior year, Joe and Ed learn important lessons about dealing with intimidation.

Inventing Elliot by Graham Gardener**Penguin Group, 2003, 181 pages, Late Middle School – Early High School**

Elliot Sutton, a victim of bullying, at his old school, decides to reinvent himself when he moves to a new school in order to protect himself from abuse. However, his “new Elliot” fits in so well with the status quo that it puts him on the other side with the boys who are the

bullies. He is invited to hand out the random violence he was trying to escape. Faced with a choice between pretending to be something he is not and taking a chance on again becoming a victim, Elliot must decide how to really “invent” himself.

“Richard spoke in a fierce whisper. “The point is this. It’s what Orwell wrote in the book. The point of control *is to control*. The point of having power is *to have power*. The point of using terror is *to use terror*. It’s as simple as that’ ” (p.70).

Shattering Glass by Gail Giles

Simon Pulse, 2002, 215 pages, High School

Simon Glass is a nerdy kid who has always been picked on and has never grown out of his social awkwardness. After seeing him humiliated, a popular student, Rob decides to change things. While Rob’s motives are hazy, it is clear that he is not helping Glass out of the kindness of his heart. Rob exerts his power over his friends and Glass to change Glass’s image and the way other kids accept him. Rob doesn’t expect that Glass has his own ulterior motives for going along with his plans. Giles shows the complex power struggles that occur among teens.

“I always thought it was connected to Rob’s scouring the yearbooks on day one. Lance’s picture scattered all over the book told Rob the one person he needed to defeat. Or maybe Rob didn’t need to defeat. Maybe he needed to annihilate” (p. 68).

Shine by Lauren Myracle

Amulet Books, 2011, 359 pages, High School

Cat is determined to find out the truth behind a hate crime committed against her former best friend, Patrick. For years Patrick, who is gay, has been bullied and ridiculed and Cat is sure one of the high school crowd is responsible for his attack. Set in western North Carolina the story shows the level of abuse and violence that is too common among young adults.

“I pictured him alone at the Come ‘n’ Go, my onetime best friend who didn’t care for the dark. It would have been pitch-black outside. No one would have been around for miles ...Patrick would have known that. He would have known exactly how helpless he was when whoever attacked him roared into the dirt pull-off outside the store” (p. 18).

Touching Spirit Bear by Ben Mikaelson

HarperCollins, 2001, 240 pages, Middle School

Cole Matthews is given a second chance at rehabilitation, through a system of “circle justice” after brutally beating a classmate, Peter Driscoll. He is sent to an island to survive on his own and in the process to learn to take responsibility for his actions. At first he is still angry and tries to escape the island. But after being attacked by a bear and being brought to the brink of death, Cole begins to have a change of heart. He begins to see things from outside of himself and realizes that he has to make amends to Peter. Only then can they both move on with their lives.

“Later after school, Cole cornered Peter outside in the parking lot. With anger that had been brewing all day, he attacked him and started hitting him hard in the face with his bare fists. Peter was no match, and soon Cole had pounded him bloody. A dozen students stood watching. When Peter tried to escape, he tripped and fell to the ground. Cole jumped on him again and started smashing his head against the sidewalk” (p. 7).

Shooter by Walter Dean Myers
HarperCollins, 2004, 223 pages, High School

The story is told from the perspectives of two students of Madison High School, Carla Evans and Cameron Porter. Through a series of interviews, newspaper clippings and other reports the story of the school shooting unfolds. Leonard Gray is bullied at school, has an unstable home life, an interest in guns, and the urge to kill “bad guys.” Most of the interviews focus on the events leading up to the shooting. The desire to fit in and not be an “outsider” is part of what brings Carla, Cameron and Leonard together.

“RE: How much bullying went on at Madison?

CP: It was pretty constant. Once you became a target, they kept zeroing in on you. Did you ever see that video game where the guy tries to run across the screen, hiding behind rocks and stuff? And every time you shoot him, he stops and changes direction? If you shoot him enough times, he goes back and forth like a real jerk. That’s what it was like sometimes at Madison. Everywhere you turned, somebody was saying something or doing something. It got pretty intense” (p. 47).

Trigger by Susan Vaught
Bloomsbury, 2006, 290 pages, High School

Leaving Carter hospital, Jersey Hatch is finally going home after almost a year of recovery and rehabilitation. But he still has severe physical limitations, including memory loss and an inability to control his speech. He has trouble remembering why he shot himself and he blurts out everything he thinks in an almost constant stream of gibberish. Treated differently by the kids he used to know as friends and even his own family, Jersey slowly begins to piece together the day that he tried to take his life almost a year ago.

“Todd’s eyes blazed. ‘Get away from my sister, you freak.’

‘Todd, I want-’

‘Man, I don’t care what you want!’ He looked like he wanted to shove me, even jumped forward like he was going to. At the last second, he pulled up and brought his fists down hard, knocking the memory book and Mama Rush’s presents out of my hands” (p. 32-33).

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FROM THE FIELD

A Reflection on the NC EOCs

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One of the more indispensable skills I developed as a student teacher was the capacity to analyze and evaluate what Departments of Public Instruction so coolly dub *assessment instruments*—or what our students call “the state test.” During a routine University exercise, I examined the North Carolina English II End of Course Test. As every sophomore English teacher in the state knows, this test sets the agenda for English II; its results reverberate across entire LEAs, from School Improvement Plans to NC School Report Cards. I approached this exercise with a commitment to setting aside personal bias, the specter of past testing experiences, and the white noise of standardized testing’s unenviable reception in classrooms, department meetings, and mass media alike. I began with every benefit of the doubt and an adequate critical distance. What I discovered, however, not only corroborated these doubts and criticisms—it validated and magnified them.

One of the most striking features of the test is the order of the questions themselves. After a given reading passage, the questions are uniformly organized from lower-level (Remembering, Understanding) through higher-level (Analyzing, Evaluating) questions. This lower-to-higher order of questioning dovetails with the research-based practices developed around taxonomic systems like Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy. In the EOC, this approach would be effective, if not for

the fact that students are asked to make wild leaps across entire levels of questions. In principle, engaging students in a text requires a certain amount of scaffolding; in the context of BRT, this would take the shape of smooth, gradual progression from Understanding to Evaluating and beyond. The erratic jumps across levels on the test questions, however, not only fail to scaffold the texts—they actively *discourage* any engagement with them.

Then too the texts themselves have little appeal for their readers, and often they are altogether developmentally inappropriate. Themes range from exile to the complexities of marital life to nineteenth century social etiquette. (I especially enjoyed the four-page excerpt from *Anna Karenina*, which, after the first two hours of the test, is sure to inject new life into the fifteen-year-old slouched in front of the screen.) The disturbing implication is that teachers would be better off building lesson plans around short passages with zero appeal to average adult readers, let alone our most finicky adolescent ones. Or maybe the more disturbing implication is this: students would be better off memorizing a chart of BRT catchwords so I can drill them on pat answers to stock questions.

The test’s canny abilities to jettison scaffolding and bar engagement are just two ways it actively subverts students. The questions’ actual responses are another turn of the screw. One of the test’s more useless questions asks students to choose

“which group of words from the selection conveys the author’s attitude about his subject.” The options given are four-word strings of adjectives plucked from the selection, seemingly at random. This appears to be an attempt at an Evaluating-level question where the student would (ideally) provide textual evidence for her own articulation of the author’s attitude. Being a standardized test, however, students are resigned to sift through the test’s own “evidence.” Even an underprepared student stands to learn more from an attempt at fashioning his own evaluation; what can students possibly learn from combing through a dry text, looking for where random words occur?

In principle, tests should be learning experiences in themselves. This hardly-novel concept is lost entirely on the authors of the test. Rather than subtly suggesting that the written word can be a source of pleasure as well as information, the test seems bent at emptying any enjoyment out of the act of reading. Of the few silver linings, the test boasts this one: while squinting into the screen, students may find they actually love poetry. By virtue of its brevity alone each poem is an oasis; virtually every other text is either dry, twice as long as it needs to be, or both. Compared to these passages, each poem is a rushing—if tepid—drink of water, at least until the onslaught of questions. Eight unscaffolded questions on an

eighteen-line poem begs the question: How can we best discourage students from finding some remote pleasure in the act of cognition? However depleted and decimated by the questions, the poems promise respite from the test’s most grueling passage: time itself.

To truly measure student understanding, assessment instruments should be formative, scaffolded, and engaging. The EOC spectacularly fails in all three ways. Here, the test best speaks for itself: *Which statement describes the connection between the selection and the oxymoron ‘both at the same time’?* My answer: the test is outdated, irrelevant, and unequipped to assess students whose learning has been honed through Universal Design, Differentiated Instruction, Multiple Intelligences—and a host of other revolutions in the past thirty years of education. If these tests are intended to test the “complex thinking expected from 21st Century graduates,” why are the tests themselves relics from mid-century IBM? Apart from catchwords like “infer” and “theme,” I saw none of the progressive elements of the comparatively progressive Common Core State Standards themselves. The Common Core, if anything, appears to discourage *exactly* this: non-formative, perfunctory, zero-content evaluations that neither assess nor benefit the learner in any way whatsoever.

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Call for Program Proposals
Language Experience Approach to Literacy across Content Areas
Special Interest Group Meeting
International Reading Association 2015, St. Louis

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 2015 IRA Conference, please complete this form and email to Leslie Haas (lesliepacehaas@yahoo.com) by May 30, 2014.

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).

PART I

Title of Proposed Roundtable Presentation: _____

Name of Presenter #1: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Affiliation: _____

Complete Address at Institution: _____

Phone #: _____

E-mail address: _____

Name of Presenter #2: _____

Mailing Address: _____

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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 Jane Moore (drjanemoore@gmail.com) 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.

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