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Bottled Up: Unlocking the Voice of the Struggling Reader

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Many teachers find voice a hard concept to teach and an even harder one for students to master. Add a struggling reader into the mix, and it may seem as if voice is too complex a concept and skill to teach. What exactly do we mean by voice? How do we teach it? How do we know when students have found it? These are not easy questions, but they are ones worthy of discussion and discovery for us as teachers and for our students. Voice is deeply ingrained in the history of literature and in history itself for that matter. In history, we find the great voices of nations, of people, of communities, of individuals. We hear their struggles, their battles, their cries, their celebrations. The voices of the past are heard in the present.

Similarly, when we read, voice comes to us - from the characters, from the writer - because the writing on the page embodies voice. Literature is a conduit for time-travel where a writer can speak to us directly from the past (Hammer), where a voice can travel across race, class, religion, etc. (See "What is Voice" for a more detailed description.) We as teachers can begin to use the terminology of voice, academic terminology, and model our thinking about voice, and eventually with consistency our students will "get it." The definition of voice is not simple sentences, so let me begin by exploring some ways to define voice. There are two different ways to view voice: 1. Voice is what is authentic, what is "you." We each have our own sound to our voice, our own style. We each have a unique perspective from which our voice comes. 2. Voice is attached to performance, to role playing and drama (Hammer). It gives us our presence, or lack thereof. We adapt it to our audience and purpose. It is important to note that these two concepts are contradictory in nature, a paradox. The very paradox is one thing that make voice so hard to teach. Later in the unit, I get into more detail about what is voice, but before I do, let me explain where I'm from and for whom I teach.

I teach at Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School in New Haven, CT. Our school is an Arts magnet school, one of two comprehensive arts high schools in the state. Students major in an arts concentration like dance or theatre as well as take college-preparatory classes in core academic subjects. Our students come from about twenty surrounding districts, and while many of our students are honestly interested in their art, many students come because of our small enrollment size of 430. Our school is comprised mostly of Black (not only African Americans), Latino, and White students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. New Haven is an inner-city so we face many of the same problems and challenges similar cities face, such as poverty, low reading levels, apathy, and tough home-lives for students. Fortunately, the magnet school system desegregates the population to make it more diverse.

I'm writing my unit for lower-level 9th graders, especially for the ones who read far below grade level. I teach

a class called "English 9 Lab" designed specifically to target struggling readers. We call it a lab class because we use the reading and writing workshop model, allowing students to learn a skill and then experiment using that skill. It is a double-period class allowing students to have double the time, daily, in English class than they would have regularly. My students' reading levels are anywhere from 1st or 2nd grade to 6th or 7th. The curriculum is focused on the direct teaching of reading comprehension to increase students' reading levels at least two grades in one year. We typically shoot for three or four, depending on what difficulties the students have. The goal is to close some of the reading gaps in 9th grade so students can then be successful the rest of their years in high school and beyond.

This unit will also work for higher levels, as it is pedagogically necessary to teach all students analytical thinking. The two differences between what I do with my lab classes and what I do with my honors 9 classes are: 1. With the lab class I teach direct reading instruction so students can gain basic comprehension skills, while with the honors class they already have these skills. Instead, I give the honors class the language with which to talk about their reading process. 2. With the lab class, the material I use to teach analytical skills is at students' grade-levels, and often I use non-print texts to teach a thinking/reading skill and then have them transfer their thinking to print texts. The material I use with the honors class is much more difficult and sophisticated, but when I teach close reading to my honors class, within the next few weeks I teach it to my lab class as well. Basically, my focus on voice is twofold: at first it helps the lower-level readers comprehend by "hearing" the characters - making inferences and meaning. Secondly, it is an avenue for analysis, to deconstruct the effect to see how the writer created voice - how it works in literature and thus in life. I teach both aspects to all my students, regardless of their reading levels. This is an important consideration, because too often we never teach lower-level students high-order thinking.

Rationale

So often society and schools in particular, do not teach or want our students to think for themselves. I know this sounds radical, and many will argue the statement, but in most classrooms, the teacher's thinking sets the agenda. The teacher solely decides what gets taught and what students should think about what gets taught. When students question the content or the purpose for learning the content, many teachers feel the student is being recalcitrant and oppositional. And if a student challenges a teacher's pedagogy - well, forget it. To the principal's office they go.

For me, so much of teaching voice revolves around the whole concept of students as *independent* , critical thinkers - ones who question and sometimes challenge what they hear, see and read. Often this may mean that they are challenging what I'm teaching them or having them read. I welcome this, of course while teaching them how to voice their questions and challenges in an intellectual and respectful way. Thinking is an essential part of being a productive, literate member of society, one who can "accurately and effectively weigh words and articulate ideas with skill and clarity" (Schmoker 53). Believe me, this can be uncomfortable and scary for many teachers, occasionally for me too. Bell Hooks, in her book *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black,* calls the kind of class environment I'm talking about, in her chapter entitled "Toward a Revolutionary Feminist Pedagogy," a "pedagogy of liberation." The students are liberated to think - to think differently, to agree, to question, to wonder.

In fact, the *students*' *thinking* largely sets the agenda. What I mean by this is that when teaching a story or a

novel, for instance, I may have one or two concepts or skills I want to be sure to discuss, but other than that I have very little preconceived notions of what will come out of discussions. I don't "teach books"; I teach skills and concepts. The students pre-record their thoughts in their response journals, sometimes based on my own prompts, sometimes not. Class time is largely spent in seminars where students discuss their ideas and analyses while I facilitate. Other times, I may present a mini-lesson, but again students are the ones constructing meaning and "figuring things out." In sum, while I teach them the skills and often provide the material, the sense students are making out of what they read, hear, and view sets the agenda. Their *voice* is the focus of the class, not mine. This is not to say that I do not ever put my two cents in, but when I do it is often as a colleague and not as an authority. My students are aware that I do not know everything, and I am ok with that fact.

To help students find their voice, we have to give them the freedom to think for themselves and not impose our perspectives on them. So much of our voice stems from our experiences and our truth about the world. Students don't always know their truth, their perspective so we must ask them, require them, to pay attention to their voice, their thoughts. They then can then practice expressing that voice in class. As uncomfortable as this is for teachers, it is far more disconcerting for students. Largely, students come to me having no idea what they think let alone why they think what they think. It is imperative, if we are to have a democratic and smart society, to teach our students to know why think what they do, and to be able to arrive at their own thoughts - not an easy task, but doable for even the lowest-level student. In English class, it is not my job to teach students every plot point in a book, but rather to teach students to *think* about what they read, to use the book to help them make sense of their worlds, to "look at ourselves, at the world around us, critically - analytically" (Hooks, 1989).

Unit Overview

The unit will consist of five parts: what is voice; finding the voices we hear as we read; finding the author's voice; finding our voice in the classroom; and finding our voice as writers/creators. Since this unit will begin within the first three weeks of school, the first part will address how I teach students to interact with texts to comprehend what is happening on a literal level. The second part, which largely overlaps with the first, will focus on teaching students to analyze a text for the author's voice/truth and to begin to look for the voices the writer does not address, the voices missing from the text. The third part will speak to teaching students how to have an authentic discussion in class: expressing their pre-recorded thoughts clearly and articulately, actively listening, and responding in a way that encourages further thinking. This is strikingly different from many classroom "discussions." The teaching also focuses on respecting and appreciating divergent thinking - having the difficult conversations and making our voices heard even when the rest of our peers disagree with our perspective. The last part, teaches students how to stop "playing school" so they see themselves as real writers doing the things real writers do. I will also have students create a non-print text (a documentary, power point, etc.) to voice their perspective on an issue.

What is Voice?

Peter Elbow provides a more comprehensive understanding of voice with a taxonomy of different voices in *Landmark Essays on Voice* , breaking voice down into four categories: The Acoustic Voice, Dramatic Writing, Voice as Authority, and Writing as Resonant of a Real Person.

Elbow's account of The Acoustic Voice discusses the literal, actual voice created from our vocal cords - what we actually hear that comes out of a body. He describes voice as our primary form of expression; as a continuous, recognizable imprint that is distinctive to each person even as we age, like a thumb print; as something that is imitable and performative (think of famous impressionists); as something that while maintaining its distinction, can sound different depending on audience and purpose; as something made out of air (bodies and air); as something made from different registers that are a part of voice (i.e. body, hands, pitch); as something recognized by its tone that helps us learn subtext. Secondly, Elbow conveys the idea of Voice as Dramatic Writing, something to be performed where voice expresses a character. Just as we recognize the voices of people we know, we can also recognize the style of a writer because writers too have distinctive voice prints. Then there is the metaphorical concept of voice, Voice as Authority. It has a public presence; it is the way powerful writing is constructed and can move us to tears or call us to action. Lastly, when Elbow speaks of voice as writing that is resonant of a real person, he encapsulates the reason we read literature or listen to songs - because a great deal is being expressed. He raises critical questions as to how voice is transmitted across a page: How is depth (sound vibrating) heard from the page? Through sincerity? Through description? Through the expression of feelings? This is the resonant writer - the one who resonates from the page to us, the readers. Further, Elbow includes the unconscious or subconscious of the writer in voice or when the writer expresses more than one feeling simultaneously, perhaps without even knowing it. In this category, Elbow is explaining the difference between simply getting across a message and what actually happens when a writer communicates feelings in all their complexity.

I will not be teaching students the definition of voice in a mini-lesson; rather I will create opportunities throughout the unit for students to grapple with voice, their own, the characters, and the writers, while Elbow's ideas can be integrated throughout. Through discussion and direct questioning, I will help students "get at" voice and then at the end of the unit, I will reflect on their understanding with a discussion of what voice really is using Elbow's definition.

Finding the Voices We Hear as We Read

Struggling readers think that people who read well look at the page and understanding magically occurs. They don't understand that a reader needs to interact with a text, that a reader must *do* something to "get it." My job then is to make that thinking visible to the students by at first modeling my own thinking through think-alouds and then by directly teaching students the kinds of thinking that readers do (see Appendix for "What Good Readers Do"). Listening and voicing are part of what we do as readers. Most of the strategies I use are from Kylene Beers' *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do* .

The first strategy I use is called a Say Something. A Say Something essentially teaches students how to

recognize their thinking and talk about it in pairs. I always model this with another teacher (whoever is free that period). I'll tell students today they are learning a strategy called Say Something and that this will be the foundation for the reading we do in class. I usually use some vignettes from Sandra Cisneros' *A House on Mango Street* . After I model one, I put the students in pairs and handout the rules for a Say Something (see Appendix). Beers also provides prompts/starters for each type of thinking the students are practicing: comment, clarify, question, predict, and connect. You can give students a copy of these or make flip charts as I do. I print them out on card stock and then cut them into squares, each square representing a different type of thinking. I punch a hole in the top corner and attach them with a key ring. Students can then constantly use them easily as they flip through them to help them articulate their thinking.

While students are practicing their Say Something with "A Rice Sandwich" I walk around with a transparency entitled Kid Talk. I script, capture word for word, two to three good thoughts I hear from students throughout their mini-discussions. When students are done, I process the activity, having students share strengths and weaknesses of the Say Something. I then add my observations and put the scripted thoughts on the overhead. In the left column I have the quoted conversations and then in the right column labeled "thinking good readers do" I have students figure out what kind of thinking they see. For example:

Kid Talk Thinking Good Readers Do

"If I were her, I would have told the woman that house wasn't mine."

Connection

"The woman was treating her badly because she assumes she's poor. That's discrimination!"

Comment

By doing this, students begin to see themselves as good readers, because I'm telling them they are thinking like good readers. Especially, with a class of students who have failed at being students, I need to take every opportunity to recognize the behaviors I want them to continue. I try to be sure to do this in a way that directly shows them how their *effort* brings them closer to the goal, rather than just saying "Good job."

The next step is then to teach students how to express their thoughts in writing through reader response. As they build their fluency as readers, I also want to build their fluency as writers. I start with the Write Something strategy, which is the same as Say Something except they write their thoughts instead. I'll take a short story that I can find online and then place strategic breaks in it, providing space to write. In class or at home, students will read and write something. The next day in class we will use these responses to begin developing a culture where students express their thoughts to each other by reading word for word their responses to a peer and then by sharing with the whole class through discussion.

The next two strategies come from our district curriculum, as well as current research: The I Wonder Why Question and Theory and Text Rendering. Using I Wonder Whys forces students to question what they read using higher-order thinking. After reading a text, students ask a why question - one that cannot be answered in the text. Then students need to create a theory for that question; basically they make an inference drawing a conclusion based on evidence from the text. Once they have a solid theory, I teach them how to show their reader and themselves why their theory makes sense by helping them trace their theory back to the text and to their world. In other words, once they've created a theory, they will then figure out what in the text and what in the world makes them think their theory makes sense. This is the beginning of a line of reasoning.

What's great about this strategy is that students who normally aren't strong at making inferences get better at it before I even teach it. Students learn how their voice, questions and theories in this case, can interact with the voice of the characters and the writer.

Text Rendering, as described by Sheridan Blau in The Literature Workshop, is a multi-step process that teaches students to strategically reread. The poem "Two Kinds of Intelligence" by Jellaludin Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks, I read once out loud for students as they follow along with their eyes. Next, students will "Jump-In Read." "Jump-in requires one student to begin reading the piece for a short time, and stopping at a natural point in the text (the end of a sentence or paragraph). At this time any given student can jump in and continue reading. As our curriculum states, "'There is no hand-raising or protocol for determining who reads' (Blau 128). During the jump-in reading, students will also be underlining any words, lines or phrases that resonate with them" (9th Grade Curriculum 32). Students will then conduct a Pointed Reading where as I read, they join me reading aloud the parts they underlined. We then process why a pointed reading is an effective share-out strategy: learning what others think immediately, and seeing which words/phrases resonated with whom. This part is the beginning of hearing and being aware of the author's voice, and provides a nice transition into the next section of the unit. Lastly, students then look at their underlined passages and choose the most important word or phrase and write a healthy paragraph explaining why. Once students complete this, I explain to them they have begun the process of analysis, again showing how student effort is leading them to become strong readers, to finding their voices and those in the text.

The share out process, as we call it in class, is doubly important. One, because the poem itself discusses the difference between being academically smart and being intelligent, students can begin discussing their own academic ostracism indirectly. The contrast can be seen in the very first three lines of the poem: "There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired,/ as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts/ from books and from what the teacher says," where Rumi explains/defines school-learning, the intelligence with which "you rise in the world." He discusses how this kind of intelligence is "ranked." In the first two lines of the third stanza, Rumi introduces this second intelligence: "There is another kind of tablet, one/already completed and preserved inside you." He describes this kind as "a spring," "[a] freshness." He ends the poem focused on non-academic learning, presenting it as "a fountainhead/from within you, moving out." Yes, academic knowledge and success are important in life, but the students need to realize they already have so much knowledge to share, so much intelligence already. What voices do they hear that convinces them of this? What voices tell them otherwise? How do we begin to listen to the voices that support and encourage us, while we drown out our own voice that tells us we cannot succeed? Further, they can begin to try to "hear" the writer: Which intelligence does Rumi hold in higher esteem? How do you know? Which does society hold in higher esteem? Your parents? You?

As often as I can I want them to start being metacognitive about their own academic careers so they can change the way they perceive themselves as students and so they can improve the way others perceive them as students. This issue of not being successful in school also is a thematic issue in the novel I will be starting with, *Bottled Up* by Jaye Murray. Students will already be thinking about the issue before they begin reading. Also, I want students really to pay attention to the voices of their classmates, and to learn to hear their voices in response. Thus, whenever we have discussions, students must listen with a pen - take notes, actively listen. I need to teach them directly what listening looks like (see "Finding Our Voice in the Classroom" for more on this) so I model listening with a pen and I *use their notes* all the time in the classroom. Once students have shared their most important word or phrase and explained why they chose it, the students then write in their journals "about whether or not they have changed their minds about the most important line or phrase. If they have, students will record the new passage and write why their thinking has changed. If they have not, the

students will write about how and why their original thinking was affirmed" (Curriculum 32). (See appendix for prompts for this response.) We also need to be aware of the effect others voices have on us, on our thinking, and the affirm and adjust exercise focuses students' thinking on this matter.

All of the strategies I use here, I repeat throughout the year, building upon skills and helping students create more sophisticated responses to class books and their independent reading books during SSR, sustained silent reading. Students will continue the strategies as they read *Bottled Up* and as they begin learning how to find the author's voice.

Finding the Author's Voice

This section focuses on students learning to "hear" the voice from the page, the voice of the characters and the voice of the writer. When I'm teaching the unit, the first two sections don't happen quite so separately, but for the sake of organization, I'm separating them into two sections. I will first teach students to read for voice using their favorite pieces of writing. We have a brief discussion about how music can move us, or books, or movies, etc. I always share and model using the Garth Brooks song "Sometimes I Thank God for Unanswered Prayers." Often the discussion will show us that songs and pieces can help us remember entire periods of our lives - middle school perhaps. I'll then assign students the task of bringing in a piece of writing that really "speaks" to them whether it be song lyrics, or an essay they've written, or a section of a novel, short story, or poem. Students need to bring a copy of the piece and highlight the 1-2 minutes-worth of the parts they feel are the parts that most represent that which they love about the piece - the part that speaks to them the most. Throughout the next couple of weeks, one to two students will begin class by sharing their piece: they read the part they highlighted and then explain why the piece speaks to them and what it is saying. Students listen with a pen since what is discussed here is fodder for essay topics. Once students finish their presentation and hand in the piece of writing, I'll hang in on the bulletin board made for each class entitled "We are English 9 Per. X" helping students create a group identity, a concept needed to help them overcome their deficits - the beginnings of creating a "class voice." At least every week for the first month or so I'll give students a Quiz Rehearsal (see Appendix) to see how well they are learning about their peers, how well they are listening to the voices in the room.

We will then transfer and build upon the discussion of voice using *Bottled Up* . The novel is a great one to use for struggling readers for multiple reasons. First, the content is something they are very interested in: a student and addict, Pip, has to go to counseling and all of his classes or the principal will call his father, an abusive alcoholic, to expel Pip. Afraid of his father, Pip begins a journey of self-discovery trying to figure out who he is and what he wants. Meanwhile, his little brother Mikey, whom Pip is mostly responsible for, changes from an innocent child to someone who loses his innocence in a family full of addicts.

The writing in the book is very good and very layered so students can really learn to recognize and appreciate author's craft. Pip and his little brother, Mikey, have strong voices - easily analyzable. We'll read some of the book in class together, aloud, and students will read some of the book at home. This is one book they don't mind reading at home, so it works well. What sections of the book get discussed will mostly be up to students as they share their pre-recorded thoughts. I will have certain passages I want to read closely for voice. The kinds of passages we mostly focus on are called "Philosophical Passages," as stated in our curriculum, or those passages that show what a character is feeling or show how a character is thinking about something. These

passages help us determine characters' perspectives and help us "get at" an author's truth. They focus our attention on the voices that leap from the page into us. They are the passages with which our own voices dialogue. They are the passages that help us see how the writer constructed the text.

Pip had a very unique and strong voice. One way Murray creates his voice is her use of hyphens. In the beginning of the book as he gets sent down to the principal's office, Pip explains: "I grabbed my never-been-used-before seven-month-old note-book, good for carrying into any class, and started walking. In the front row Jenna was looking at me. She's one of the good girls - the high-honor-roll, never-get-into-trouble untouchables" (6-7). He clearly describes himself as a non-student and Jenna as his opposite. Similarly, after getting in a fight at a party while being driven home by a police officer, Pip retells conversation, starting with: "'You seem like a smart kid,' Officer Wanna-Be-Your-Pal was saying" (41). We can hear Pip's voice in his descriptions, as if he's talking to us - we hear his tone of voice, his subtext.

Pip's sarcasm, what Elbow would call his performance or what he shows to the world, is deeply contrasted with his inner-voice, his true-self. This voice is set apart from the rest with extra space between paragraphs and is italicized. These passages show us Pip's pain, his wants and needs. In fact, Murray begins the book with Pip's intimate thoughts: " *I remember when all I wanted was a ten-speed and a six-pack of Hershey bars. Now all I want is to be left alone*" (5). Immediately we see how unhappy Pip is even as we then see the tough exterior he shows the world. Towards the end of the book, he's babysitting Mikey, so he takes him to his counseling session. They are in the waiting room and Pip is the narrator:

He wasn't talking. He wasn't goofing around. No knock-knock jokes. No

questions. Not a word about M&M's. Something was up with the kid. I was

hoping some pizza would set it right.

We ate the slices while we walked, but he still had nothing to say. After a few

minutes I stopped thinking about it. It was a kind of break for me not having to listen to him yap for a change.

I want all the questions to stop.

I want more answers. (157-8)

Murray is not only showing the change in Mikey as he loses his innocence, we hear Pip's relief in this on two levels. First, he's relieved that his annoying little brother, annoying to Pip, finally stopped bugging him. But more importantly, we see that he really just wants more answers. This passage is great because kids can also listen to their own voices as they connect to Pip. Who doesn't have unanswered questions?

Mikey certainly does. He asks Pip questions all the time, and his M&M questions represent his innocence: "Why do they call them M&M's? Why don't they call them G&G's or B&B's?" (36). Pip's annoyance is evident as he recommends to Mikey, "So go on www.whogivesacrapaboutm&s's.com" (36). Of course this doesn't stop Mikey: "If you put M&M's in a bowl and put milk on it like cereal, what will happen?" (62). We can literally hear a young child who asks ten questions in a row. Pip keeps blowing off Mikey's questions, but Mikey's questions really represent his own. Pip tells us, " *I want to go to the M&M's factory so I can get the answers to all the really important questions*" (175). Again, Pip's public and private voices are on display and are contrasted about many things. The M&M example is just one of them. The idea of our public and private voices can lead students to not only analyze Pip's, but to also look closely at their own. What voice to they present to the

world, through body language, through their words and tone? What voice is their inner voice - what does it sound like? What does it look like?

Simultaneously, I will have students responding in writing (typing actually) to journal prompts that we will also share during discussion. Two examples of the prompts are: 1. On the outside, people think I'm. . . On the inside I'm really. . . Explain. 2. One of the hardest things to do is to be honest with ourselves, to deal with our own demons and issues. Really think about who you are. Are you pretty self-aware and reflective about what your problems are and how you deal with them? Do you not think about that kind of stuff often? Why? How is that strategy of self-awareness/reflection working out for you so far? The rest of the prompts for the book are in the appendix. As we share, I will loop back to their ideas, helping them become more aware that their ability to share in class is a representation of their ability to have their voice heard - by themselves and by others. If I find students are not doing the prompts at home, I make them do them in class. The one thing struggling readers and writers do is AVOID work, and they are *very* good at this. In fact, they've been very good at this their whole lives, which is how they ended up in high school not having a lot of academic skills. I do not allow them to avoid their work or they'll never learn how to do their work.

Students will also be reading some poetry that complements or contradicts *Bottled Up* . One poem I use is "My Papa's Waltz" by Theodore Roethke. This is a great poem because of its ambiguity. The poem describes a small boy's "dance" with his father, on the one hand innocent, and on the other hand violent as the father has "whiskey on [his] breath" (1) and his hand "Was battered on one knuckle" (10). The speaker further alludes to violence as Roethke writes, "At every step you missed/ My right ear scraped a buckle" (11-12) and "You beat time on my head/With a palm caked hard by dirt" (13-14). The students love to debate whether or not the dance is just a dance with a father who happens to be drunk or if the dance is a metaphor for abuse. It is a great exercise in close reading and can be used to see the benefits and cons of being ambiguous with our voice. We can also see that in life and in poetry, things can have more than one meaning.

Another poem we'll read is "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon. Lyon uses anaphora as many of the lines begin with "I am from. . ." What follows the phrase are many metaphors that represent the speaker's life: "I am from clothespins,/From Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride" (1-2), "I'm from the know-it-alls/ and the pass-it-ons" (12-13), "I am from Artemus and Billie's Branch,/fired corn and strong coffee" (18-19). Lyon ends with a culminating statement, "I am from those moments - /snapped before I budded - /leaf-fall from the family tree." Students will study this poem and then write one for Pip or Mikey, using some of the symbols and metaphors in the book: M&M's, questions, photo albums, garages, bottle caps, the site. They will then write one for themselves, learning how to express their voice, their past and present, in verse. We will then share and post on the wall.

Once students have begun the pre-writing phases of their essay/project as explained in "Finding Our Voice as Creators/Writers," we will look at models of essays (see Lesson Plan 2) not only so students can see the different ways one gets one's voice heard in writing, but also to continue to learn how to hear the voices of a writer. Since in order to "hear" what "they" are saying has a lot of layers, the concepts I'm going to focus on for the beginning of the year are audience, purpose, and tone. In the 9th grade curriculum, the first finished piece of writing the students must do is an issue paper that focuses heavily on writing for audience and purpose and varying one's language accordingly. Consequently, we will analyze models for these concepts, just as we will analyze our own voices.

Finding Our Voice in the Classroom

According to Lev Vygotsky, a 20th century educational philosopher, a learning-centered classroom is one where both the student and the teacher are responsible for the learning. They work in a partnership using a four-step approach that Jeffrey Wilhelm calls "explicit teaching": 1. The teacher models and thinks-aloud while the students watch. 2. The teacher models and the students help. 3. The students practice while the teachers help. 4. The students practice independently (Wilhelm 11). This model of teaching is not simply giving instructions, but is instructing students by scaffolding the learning. Further, Vygotsky suggests that children learn to read and think by speaking aloud as they do something, by processing the learning (following the teacher's modeling). When they speak aloud, they make visible their voices - the ones the represent their making-meaning, their connections - in essence their thinking.

The set-up of my classroom is a direct reflection of my pedagogy: my desk is in the back corner and the desks are in a circle including the one I sit in. When I need to teach mini-lessons I stand in the front of the room or in the middle of the circle near my overhead projector. When we are having class discussions using a seminar-based approach, I sit in the circle as a participant. The hardest part of facilitating a true seminar is shutting up and letting the kids talk - really talk. Only then can they begin find their voices. When I do speak as part of the discussion usually it is to model a kind of technique I want the students to use or one I see them forgetting about, like looping back to what a couple of people have said and making connections among classmates. I also teach students *how* to have a discussion and when I interrupt them I stand up so they know I'm not a participant at that moment. I model ways which we can use our voice through discussion.

Mike Schmoker in his book Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning discusses the importance of discussion or what he calls "argumentative literacy" when he quotes Gerald Graff, noted professor: "Talk - about books and subjects - is as important educationally as are the books and subjects themselves" (65). Schmoker continues his support of discussion when he quote Mike Rose, an education professor at UCLA: "All students need opportunities to talk about what they're learning: to test their ideas, reveal their assumptions, talk through the places where new knowledge clashes with ingrained belief" (66). Along with journaling, class discussion is a place where we can take the voices of our society, of our parents, of our teachers, of our media, of our texts and wrestle with them to make sense of our world for ourselves.

What do I mean by a class discussion? I mean a true discussion where the class talks about and explores something orally *with* each other - where students can learn they do have a voice; they do have something to say, and they can practice the skills to use that voice effectively. Typical class discussions are the teacher asking a question and then a student answering it, followed by the teacher further prompting the student/class, and more answers. OR a typical discussion might sound like one student sharing his/her thoughts and then another student doing the same, followed by another. Students may be talking near each other but they are certainly not talking *to* each other. They are still talking to the teacher, because that's who "grades" them. What I mean by discussion is when someone shares his/her thoughts and the students take in those thoughts and respond in a way that furthers thinking about the other person's thinking. I give students a description of all the different skills involved in discussion (see Appendix). Using this guideline, for the first month or so of school, students keep it on their desks so I can show them when they are doing what I expect.

The first few times students practice having a discussion, I tell them we will practice having a discussion for ten minutes. Then I let them practice, listening with a pen. I try very hard not to interrupt here. Once they

have finished, I explain that I'm going to process the discussion for them and note my observations. We discuss what went well and what we're not good at yet. As students practice having discussions, if I want to introduce a new technique I will model it or talk it through. For instance, when teaching students to use quoted passages from a text in their discussion, I model how I find the passage and then tell the rest of the class to find the passage so we're all looking at it before I speak. Further, so students aren't simply going from one passage to another randomly, I mention "if you have a passage that is similar to X's, now is a good time to share it. Make sure you make the connection between the quotes clear for everyone." As teachers, we have to decide constantly when to interrupt with instruction. I always let students know that silence is ok - it is the sound of thinking, and sometimes when I think students are stumped I present them with some options of what they might say next. Similarly, when I want students to get better at responding in a way that encourages further thinking, something they are NOT good at, I change the rules. I may say that no one can change the subject or the path of the discussion until at least three people have talked about someone's thought. To clarify, I might stop the class after "Johnny" spoke and say, "now three people need to talk about what Johnny brought up before moving on to something else." At first, students are hesitant and stumbling, and yes this takes a lot of time, but the payoff is enormous later on in the year when discussions become second-nature to students. I use prompts from *They Say I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* to help students move through both oral and written discussions (see appendix).

I will help improve class discussions by videotaping a few discussions and then the next day in class, have students process and evaluate the discussion. When we do this, I want to introduce the body as a part of our communication system - body language as a voice of its own. We will discuss how this is part of our voice and students will analyze their body language and what it is "speaking." Part of teaching struggling readers to be successful in class is to teach them the body language of students: sitting up straight, following the speaker with one's eyes, making occasional eye contact, nodding occasionally, using our pen, etc. My students are not in on this "little secret" of how body language affects a person's perception of others, because it has a voice.

We continue to practice over the course of the year - the goal being to teach students how to have the hard conversations, the ones where there is a great deal of conflict. They will also look at how they go about getting their voice heard, in class, in life, etc. We will learn strategies for getting our voices heard when our thinking diverges from the majority both orally and in writing. I want students to understand that getting good at this type of discussion can have a HUGE impact on society as it is necessary in a democratic society. Later in the year when I begin to explain this concept, I ask students to look at their society and find the discussions that are not being had or the ones that are unsuccessful (they often cite the war, politics, etc.) and we practice having them.

Finding Our Voice as Creators/Writers

I've said before that some of my struggling readers feel like they have nothing important to say, or they may feel they have nothing academic to say. Add to that the task of writing - my students are rendered voiceless. Besides giving them the tools to be able to write for multiple purposes and multiple audiences for life, I want them to see themselves differently - not just as readers, but also as writers. They do have something to say, a truth to be told, and they can learn how to say it in writing.

This part of the unit focuses on how to teach the writing process when the student thinking sets the agenda

for the paper. Students and some teachers alike have a hard time with the concept of student-chosen issues as the focus of the essay. It's important for students to learn how to look at their world critically, to find what's worth exploring - listening to the voices around them and then joining the conversation. One way they do this is through writing. I spend an entire period explaining and discussing the whole idea of students as real writers, as opposed to someone playing school and writing for a grade. I do this by analogy, relating the skills they'll learn as they write to the moments in their lives when they'll need them - argumentative skills, learning to look at an issue from someone else's perspective so you can direct your address to them, finding their voice and helping them learn how to make it heard from the paper or how to make it powerful from the paper so it has its intended effect. I introduce the concept that a piece of writing is supposed to have an effect in the first place. For most of my 9th graders, this is a novel concept. Our writing is supposed to *do* something, for the writer and for the reader.

There are a few different roads to a finished piece of writing. The students may get their idea for the paper from any of the readings, from class discussion, or from their reader response journal. Students comb their notebooks, homework, etc. looking for a few issues they feel compelled to write about. I have the students focus on issues, because I really want them to learn how to figure out what their perspective is and then in turn learn how to express it through the writing process. Further, when they write about issues, their "thesis" is always debatable. In other words, there are inherent questions in issues, as opposed to topics where there are already answers. For example, a topic might be child abuse, and there is a great deal of information on that topic, but the students' job is not to inform. This is not a report; it is an essay. What about child abuse is the student wondering about? Perhaps the student may wonder why Pip never told anyone about his abusive family. Why don't victims of abuse always tell? The "so what," the question makes the topic an issue, makes it worth writing about. When there is a "so what" for the writer, the reader will too feel more invested because the ideas in the paper then matter.

Many of the skills and strategies I will use for this part is in the 9th grade curriculum, but I will outline them here briefly. Once students pick a few issues they want to explore, they write Possible Ideas for Possible Papers, which is a framework for students to help them begin to realize their perspective. Once they determine that they aren't writing about something everyone will say "no duh" they then write three discovery drafts. Discovery drafts help them play around with how they want to approach the issue, what their voice sounds like on paper. Students spend 20-30 minutes on each, making their thinking visible to themselves. This gives them a structured opportunity to pay attention to the voices of the text, of society, of those in their lives, of themselves and synthesize them into paragraphs. They don't need an introduction or anything - it's a more organized way of brainstorming. Before they determine which issue they want to write more about, they practice talking to each other about their drafts using Talking Points, also in the curriculum. Much as an orator uses notes or a teacher uses a lesson plan, talking points allow students to prepare for a discussion on the paper they have floating around in their head. Experienced writers may do this thinking silently and quickly, but inexperienced writers need to be explicitly taught. Some questions they might discuss with their partners are: 1. Where did this idea come from? 2. Who's your audience? 3. How are you planning to lead into this piece? 4. How is the way you see the issue different from theirs? 5. What's the next problem you need to solve in order to write this paper? I ask students to list their thinking on one side of the paper and their audiences thinking on the other. This way they can help their audience look at the assumptions they make and see why a student's "way of thinking makes more sense than the way they're looking at it" (9th Grade Curriculum).

I always model this for students using an issue I find in my own life or readings. I tell students the effect they are going for in their paper is for their audience to say, "Hmm. I've never thought about it like that before." If we can get our audience to say that, we've begun the process of having our voices *truly* affect someone. We

discuss when this would come in handy, the power in it.

Next, we will think back to how Murray created Pip's voice, how Bloom made his heard so students will begin to consciously craft their paper to reflect their voice. This takes years of practice, but we can't wait until they are older to begin. Students then write a first draft, ready for workshopping. I directly teach peer workshop together in a whole group first. Students need to learn how to talk about the craft of writing - act as sample audiences for each other. Since they may have never heard this "voice" before I model for them and then they help me as I guide them, giving them the language to express their constructive criticism. Students then work in groups as they workshop each other's papers. I provide them with protocols for each stage of the process, to structure the discussion for them until they no longer need my help.

It is tough for my students to accept that writing is indeed a process, a recursive one at that. They want to bang a paper out and be done with it. I try to get them to understand exactly how powerful a practiced and crafted piece can be - the power it adds to their voice. Once they have re-envisioned and redrafted one or two more times (or more if needed), I finally look at their paper and provide some feedback for the final draft. It's important for me to note, that a finished product may still have quite a bit of errors/weaknesses. While I do not use the John Collins method of grading, I do grade for specific things I've taught; for this paper I will focus on: audience and purpose are evident; position on issue is clear; reasons for position are evident; concrete examples are used; heading is in MLA Format. I do not yet worry about a clear thesis statement, or that the introduction is funneled, or that the reasons are in the most effective order. I'm looking for students to play the game - to work the process and begin to try to communicate effectively and clearly in writing. I keep student writing in portfolios in my room, so students can always go back to earlier work to practice a new skill.

For example, when I do teach thesis statements and introductions, students can go back to earlier works and rewrite the introduction, ending with a clear thesis statement.

Once students have completed their finished product the last two steps are very important: going public and reflecting on the process. Depending on the size of the class and the length of the papers, students either read their paper to the entire class or to each other in small groups. Students need to listen with a pen for the following information: the issue the person's writing about, their position on it, strengths in the way they've crafted the paper. Once all students have read their papers, students need to type a reflection (see Appendix).

Lesson Plan #1: Writing for different Audiences and Purposes

Objective: During the next two days, all of you will be able to analyze your own ability to write for different audiences and purposes as a result of brainstorming, writing two letters, and highlighting them.

On day one, students will brainstorm the different types of writing they do (i.e. text messages, IM's, notes to friends, essays in class, etc). We will list these on the board and then students will provide examples of the different kinds of language one would use for each. I will then present a mini-lesson on what diction is and what the different levels are: formal, colloquial, informal, slang. I will model by showing how the same phrase would sound different at each level. Students will then, with my help, label the examples listed on the board with the appropriate level of diction. We will then discuss how and why we use different levels of diction for different audiences and purposes. We will talk about how our "voices" change accordingly. Together we will

discuss real examples from the students' lives, showing students they already do this adjusting of their language.

Students will then be given a scenario: You were at a party last night at a friends' house, such a good one that a neighbor called the cops. You ended up being late this morning missing an important test. They will then write two letters, one to the principal explaining why they were late and need to take the test another time, and one to a friend retelling your adventures. Students will keep in mind their audience and purpose as they write.

During day two, students will share their letters with each other, providing examples for the class as to how their language changed depending on whether or not they wrote to the principal or to their friend. For homework, students will write a 250-word minimum analysis comparing their two letters. They must include examples from the text, their letter, *showing* how their language changed (or didn't) and practice using the academic language they learned yesterday. How does their voice sound different in the letters and why?

Lesson Plan #2: Analyzing a Published Essay for Audience, Purpose, and Tone

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Objective: In three days, all of you will be able to analyze a published essay for audience, purpose, and tone as a result of teacher modeling and guided practice.

On day one and two, we will review what we learned about voice, audience, and purpose. I will then explain that just like our language gave us hints to audience and purpose, published writers' language does the same thing. I'll pass out "Can 35 Million Book Buyers Be Wrong? Yes." by Harold Bloom, an article arguing that the Harry Potter books are not good literature and subtly disparaging its readers. We will read the article together once, and then I will model how I begin to determine audience and purpose. For example, I may start with looking at where the article was published: *The Wall Street Journal* . I will talk about who reads that, and also discuss the concept that one can have a primary audience and a secondary audience at the same time. Bloom starts the essay with, "Taking arms against Harry Potter, at this moment, is to emulate Hamlet taking arms against a sea of troubles. By opposing the sea, you won't end it. The Harry Potter epiphenomenon will go on, doubtless for some time, as J. R. R. Tolkien did, and then wane." I might say how Hamlet, written by Shakespeare, was very ineffective in his inaction against his troubles. I'll define "epiphenomenon" and say who J.R.R. Tolkien was. I'll explain how the one thing I already know about the audience is that they are people who are well-read and would know these allusions and vocabulary. I will also talk about how Bloom's voice is coming across to me, the facial expressions I'm intimating he's have while reading this. About half-way through the article I'll invite students to help me. Once we've finished, I'll hand out a list of purposes for writing and students will pick one or two they think fits Bloom's purpose. We'll end the class with determining audience and purpose.

On day three, together on the overhead, we'll write a response paper (1-2 pages) explaining our choice, going back into the text to use examples to show how we arrived at our conclusions.

Over the next few days or so, students will practice analyzing a published essay for audience and purpose, writing response papers that emulate the one we wrote together.

Lesson Plan #3: Sharing Our Voices with the World

Objective: Over the next few days, you will voice your truth about an issue as a result of presenting your multimodal text to the class.

Over the next few days, students will present their multimodal text to the class with a brief introduction as to what issue(s) their texts speaks to. Once all the presentations are over, students will write a reflection on their own project as well as evaluate the effectiveness of their peers' by choosing the one or two presentations they thought were the most effective and then providing examples to show why they think so.

Appendix A Handouts: What Good Readers Do

1 Recognize that reading is a meaning-making process that requires active participation from the reader

2 Use a variety of comprehension strategies to make meaning

- predicting
- clarifying
- connecting to prior experience
- summarizing
- visualizing
- comparing and contrasting
- inferencing
- questioning the text
- recognizing the author's purpose
- seeing causal relationships

1 Make a range of inferences about the text

2 Use their prior knowledge to inform their inferences, to relate ideas in the text to their world, and to place what they are reading within a relevant context of their lives

3 They monitor their understanding of the text, and when reading gets difficult they use strategies to correct the problem

4 Question the author's purpose and point of view

5 Are aware of text features: headings, boldfaced terms, italicized terms, charts, graphs, indexes - and use these to aid in comprehension

6 Evaluate their engagement and enjoyment with a text

7 Know the meaning of many words and know how to use context clues to figure out the ones which they don't

8 Recognize words automatically, read fluently, and vary reading rate to match purpose and difficulty.

Source: When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do by Kylene Beers

Rules for Say Something

1. With your partner, decide who will say something first. That person will read aloud and then stop and say something.

2. When you say something, do one or more of the following:

1 Make a prediction
2 Ask a question
3 Clarify something you had misunderstood
4 Make a comment
5 Make a connection

3. If you can't do one of those five things, then you need to reread.

4. Your partner then responds to what you said [*really* responds - more than "me too" or "I agree"] - this may be the hardest part so be thoughtful and push yourself to do it.

Suggested Olson/Probst Prompts for Affirming/Adjusting Thinking

Affirming:

I know I'm on the right track because. . .

I still believe that . . . because. . .

. . . has made me realize that. . .

So and so affirmed my thinking when s/he said. . . because. . .

ESL Strategy: scaffolding.

Give students additional prompts:

_____pointed out that. . .. .

_____mentioned that . . ..

_____reminded me that. . .. .

_____indicated that. . .. .

_____concluded that. . .. .

_____emphasized that. . .. .

Adjust:

At first I thought . . . but now I think. . .

My *latest* thought about this is. . .

I'm getting a different picture here because. . .

So and so has changed my mind when s/he said. . . because. . .

. . . has made me realize that. . .

ESL Strategy: scaffolding.

Give students additional prompts:

I don't entirely agree with _____ that. . .. .

My opinion is different than _____'s because. . .. .

My idea is slightly different than _____'s because. . .. .

Our group sees it differently than_____.

We had a different approach than _____.

Journal Response Prompts 12-16

Secchiaroli

Spend at least 15 - 30 minutes thinking and typing each prompt, 1 hour total minimum, responding to each prompt.

12. Tell them about a time that you felt invisible. Describe the experience, what made you feel that way, and your emotional reaction. Use details so we can feel the same experience or at least empathize with you.

13. Tell them about a time that you felt most proud of yourself. Describe what made you feel that way. Again use details to show exactly what it was you did and *how* that experience made you feel proud. Don't assume we'll just know.

14. Explain to them the role you play in your family (example: baby, caretaker, interpreter, mediator, instigator). How do you play this role? What do you do? Why do you assume that role? Would you change it if you could? Be clear and comprehensive.

15. Tell them about a time when you let someone down. What did/didn't you do? How did you and the other person feel? What did this experience teach you?

16. Explain to them what does victimhood sounds like? To one's self? To others?

17. What does empowerment sound like? To one's self? To others?

Reflection on Your First Issue Paper and on Someone Else's Issue Paper

Purpose: Doing these two evaluations will help you reflect upon, and think more deeply about, the papers you are going to hear/read, as well as about the one you are going to read/show them.

Time: Spend about 45 minutes on each reflection.

Due Dates: A clean copy of the Reflection on *your own* paper will be due a day or two after you read/showed them yours.

A clean copy of the Reflection on one of *their* papers will be due on or before (we'll figure this out together, in class, in a few days.)

Suggestion: Get a copy of the **text** of the paper you think you are probably going to write about for your Reflection on someone else's.

Reflection on the piece you read/showed to them:

1. Spending time with has gotten me wondering about the whole

(name of writer)

issue of .

(state the issue or problem, what would you call it *now* ?)

1. This is *how* that writer got me wondering about that issue.
2. These are some of the things I began considering or questioning.
3. Even though some members of my audience might not agree with me, this is why I personally believe it's *important* for me, as *well* , as for them to be asking ourselves those particular questions (or thinking about those particular things).
4. This is why I believe it's important for me, as *well* as for them, to start coming up with our *own* answers to those questions or issues (right now, especially at this particular time in our lives).

(page 2) Reflection on Someone *Else* 's First Issue Paper

Choose the one classmate whose paper had the strongest *effect* on you, and show us exactly what that effect was.

Here's how:

Talk about the particular issue (or problem) from which his/her paper kick-started *your* thinking about the issue. What, in your own walk-around-ordinary life, has s/he gotten you to stop and think *twice* about, to start asking yourself some *questions* about, to see a bit differently from the way you were looking at *before* . (Show us what you mean *exactly* , the kinds of things you are *referring* to, like for example.)

Explain why *you* believe that might actually *be* an important thing for you, personally to be taking a *second* look at and asking yourself some *questions* about - especially now, at this 14-15-16 year-old time in your life.

Suggested strategy - start by discovering your own answers to the questions they asked you to think about.

Appendix B: Implementing District Standards

Reading and Responding 1.0

Students use appropriate strategies before, during and after reading in order to construct meaning.

Students will continue to do this as they use comprehension strategies to understand and then to analyze texts. Much of the first part of the unit focuses on this standard.

Exploring and Responding to Literature 2.0

Any strategy or exercise that asks students to do something more than comprehend - think, analyze, interpret

falls under this standard.

Communicating with Others 3.0

Through discussion and through writing, students will meet this standard as they adapt their voice to audience and purpose.

Applying English Language Conventions 4.0

Students will focus on this standard as they revise and polish their issue paper.

Resources

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