ICTE NEWSLETTER

WELCOME

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International Council of Teachers of English

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Please send all ICTE Newsletter correspondence to Stacey Wilkins at
stacey.wilkins@icte-educators.org
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What's inside:

Recommendations for IB Students Taking their Individual Oral

By **Brad Philpot**, *Philpot Education, Frankfurt, Germany*

May 2022 was a unique exam session for students taking their International Baccalaureate Diploma, and it produced some unique insights into learning, teaching and examining. Due to Covid accommodations, all individual oral exams – a component usually marked internally by teachers – were marked externally by examiners. After uploading recordings and submitting my marks and comments, I waited, like all teachers, eagerly for the results. When they came out in July, they were… interesting.

For those who are not familiar with the nature of the task, the instructions ask students to examine, in a 10-minute presentation and 5-minute discussion, how a global issue of choice is presented through a literary work, a non-literary body of work, and extracts from each of these. I cannot help but hear the Mission Impossible theme song when explaining the individual oral (IO) to my students. There are a lot of moving parts.

In fact, there are five: 1) an extract from a literary work; 2) the rest of the literary work; 3) an extract from a non-literary body of work (BOW); 4) the rest of the non-literary body of work; and 5) the global issue that runs through all four elements. Despite all these moving parts, my students and I find this form of assessment the most fun because the task asks you to curate texts and make connections, like creating a murder wall with string and tacks. Good performances are exciting to listen to!

With so many moving parts, it's not strange that the IB awarded high grades to IOs that sounded like well-oiled machines. Students who memorised a script did well. Students who clearly announced their organisational plan did well. Students who used IB-speak, such as 'global issue', 'BOW' and 'extract', did well.

But what about students who got all the parts mixed up? What if they failed to explore the non-literary body of work, define their

global issue, or submit a proper extract? Examiners saw and heard a range of 'non-standard' practices: extracts based on music scores, outlines submitted instead of extracts, screenshots of movies without captions, 7-minute performances, and teacher interruptions, just to name a few.

I had two students deliver similar, mediocre performances. Both did not reference the rest of the non-literary body of work at all, which is a common pitfall. One received a 6 and the other a 2 (on a scale of 1 to 7). In my opinion, they should have both earned a 4. But what does this erratic marking tell us? Stick to a script!

The official IB line claims there is no formula to performing well on the IO. Results prove otherwise. Here is a link to two organisational methods that have proved successful for students. When using scaffolds like this, students are not going to get a 2. Do these methods guarantee a 7? Of course not. But they do enable students to get 7s.

What's more, students should hear what level-7 performances sound like. Here are two orals that scored a 7: The first one https://philpot.education/mod/page/view.php?id=2257   is insightful, articulate, and analytical. She's the student we all dream of having in our class. But be careful. To weaker students, her performance may make a 7 sound unattainable. The second performance is methodical, rehearsed and calculated. He shows how a 7 is attainable, even for the average student.

Do scripts and methods kill creativity? They can, but they do not have to. Scripts and methods are like training wheels on a bike. No one has won the Tour-de-France with training wheels, but we all learned to bike with a little help.

I hope these insights help you to help your students. If you like the links to the free

resources, use the following code to get a discount on my Support Site for *English A: Language and Literature:* **ICTE**. Add this code to your basket as you check out for a 20% discount.

Brad Philpot *has a passion for language, learning and creativity. He is the author of* English A: Language and Literature *and* English B for the IB Diploma *with Cambridge University Press. He is the Director of Philpot Education, a provider of resources and workshops for the International Baccalaureate. He has held various roles in international education such as teacher, diploma coordinator, textbook author, examiner, consultant, workshop leader and authorisation visitor. Since 2008, he has organised professional development events for over 5,000 educators worldwide. He has personally trained over 3,000 teachers. He has an MA in Education and an MA in English Literature and Linguistics from the University of Amsterdam. Brad has lived and worked in the United States, Turkey, the Netherlands and Germany. He currently teaches at Frankfurt International School. He can be reached at* **brad@philpot.education**.

"You Have an Accent…"
Two African Immigrant Educators Navigating Accents, Race, and Space

By **Dr. Olabisi Adenekan,** *Oakton College, Des Plaines, Illinois and* **Dr. Mellissa Gyimah-Concepcion,** *Elgin Community College, Elgin, Illinois.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This story is the second part of a two-part series written by Dr. Adenekan and Dr. Concepcion. The first part was featured in our underline winter newsletter.*

African immigrant scholars and educators are the invisible Black population in the U.S. (Louis et al., 2017). While conversations around the many linguistic practices of Latinx and African American communities are becoming more frequent (Baur et al., 2020; Rosa & Flores, 2017), the language practices of African immigrant educators remain a mystery (Esnard et al., 2019; Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2017). As two immigrant scholars with Nigerian and British accents respectively, we navigate many spaces that prevent us from exploring the complexities of our identities in this U.S-based space, and/or have experienced certain positioning in classrooms because of how we sound. We find we are typically "othered", especially in our predominantly White Institute (PWI) college classroom contexts.

Looking Inward: Theoretical Framework

Our experiences are nuanced, and we find the need to centre ourselves in order to resist being othered, and to explore the complexities our cultural backgrounds and accents raise. Therefore, we take up African-centred theory in our classrooms and find it most useful to combine this centering of self with storytelling (Maracle, 1990). Storytelling or narrative is an invaluable practice amongst Africans and African Americans given the oral nature of our cultural practices and our history of colonisation and oppression (Amoah, 1997; Nakhid & Farrugia, 2021; Scheub, 1985). We use our accents as a gateway to explaining our historical and cultural backgrounds, making sure we bridge these aspects to our students' lived experiences and context. We firmly believe in the importance of garnering a better understanding of the African diaspora writ large to provide access, appreciation, and

better inclusivity of accents that are different from the mainstream.

African-centred theory focuses on "what Africa's past, culture, and traditions have to offer" (Dei, 1994 p. 4). It provides a theoretical basis for individuals of African descent to express their unique cultural experiences and values, and be understood within the same framework (Karenga, 1986; Verharen 1995). We intentionally draw on these factors to navigate our professional and personal worlds. It is a "studied, vigorous, and creative elaboration of African culture and ideology" (Shujaa, 1994, p. 321), allowing opportunities to create "a frame of reference which affords phenomena to be viewed from the perspective of the African person" (Asante, 1991, p. 171), thus creating a sense of identity, agency, and validation as African immigrant in our classrooms (Dei, 1994).

Accents are a major cause of negative perception of the nonnative by some native speakers of English.

Looking Inward and Outward: Our Classroom Praxis

Accents are a major cause of negative perception of the nonnative by some native speakers of English. Carlson and McHenry (2006) point out that when a person of British-influenced accent speaks, they are perceived as polished and refined, while one of Asian-influenced speech is perceived as competitive (Leong & Hayes, 1990; Stewart, Ryan, & Giles, 1985). These are annoying, but

positive perceptions, which may favor the said accented person. However, what happens if the accent has no bearing with the acceptable accent of the majority – a "foreign accent" – an Indian, Italian, Greek, Portuguese, Slovak, Spanish, or even the West African influenced accent?

Having A Nigerian Accent in a College Composition Classroom

In my undergraduate English college classrooms, I tell stories from a different cultural perspective to my students. I often forget that my experiences and global exposure automatically means that I tend to think and do differently (Smith, 2018); this, in addition to my prominent Nigerian accent, means that sometimes students mistake my intentions, or initially seem lost because they simply do not understand what I am saying. I use stories as an entry point to help them understand what I am trying to convey, and to assist with meaning-making. Because of the negative single story often associated with my country and accent, I often feel that I have to clearly present my credentials in order to establish and authenticate my integrity. This constant need to prove my reason for occupying the space when I do not look and sound like those around me, is crucial for acceptance and relevance. I share many childhood stories, specifically about growing up in various cities in Nigeria, my educational journey, anecdotes of my experiences as an educator in Nigeria, my transitioning to the United States, and my professional journey. It is also the reason that, following this story-sharing, one of the first tasks my students complete is to write an introspective narrative piece about their identity, focusing more on those salient, but unrecognised strengths.

Over the years, I have noticed that this task invigorates class discussions to a level where most end up valuing and appreciating people and their identities more. This is because it forces us to recognise and confront our biases, while simultaneously, respecting the strength and capabilities in ourselves and others that may have been otherwise overlooked.

Being Ghanaian with a British Accent in a Literacy Doctoral Programme

My accent in a doctoral context makes me come across as an expert or as standoffish. I understand it can be due to people's perceptions of the British accent, or the British in general. To bring some levity and eschew some potentially inaccurate ideologies about being Black and British, I share anecdotes of my life as a Ghanaian, born and raised in the U.K., who found herself as a researcher and scholar in the U.S.

I teach many educational research classes and use this as an opportunity to share my epistemology and connect it to my lived experiences; this involves race, cultural background, faith, and being a woman in academia. I try to make connections for students across the intersectionalities of my identity. I use research methodologies such as ethnography and narrative inquiry to also help students understand not only how to conduct research, but how to be cognisant of being humanising across multiple cultures.

I often have students talk through and code my written stories about my upbringing and culture. In those moments, I find that students are often shocked that my identity exceeds my British accent. In fact, it surpasses their notion of what being "British" means (which in many exchanges, consists of high-tea, scones, beautiful architecture, different British

idioms, British sports, and having a Queen). I foreground my African heritage and culture and speak of my personal stories as an immigrant in the U.K., and in the U.S. In these moments, there is usually a shift from seeing me as an interesting concept, to a robust, culturally complex individual that has more to teach them than British words and phrases.

> In those moments, I find that students are often shocked that my identity exceeds my British accent.

Thoughts

We believe it is important to garner a better understanding of the African diaspora writ large to provide access, appreciation, and better understanding of accents that are different from the mainstream. We do this through telling our stories and using that to centre and normalise our accents and therefore our lived experiences, instead of having it "othered". Thus, exploring these intersectionalities of our African immigrant scholars' language practices and identities enables us to reposition African immigrant educators in classrooms, at PWIs, and within conversations around the nuances of being African immigrant educators in the U.S. By asserting our language practices in literacy classrooms and spaces through storytelling, we can enact change regarding the lack of discussion around African immigrant identities and language practices, in robust and humanising ways.

Dr. Olabisi Kehinde Adenekan *Dr. Olabisi Kehinde Adenekan is a college professor, educational researcher, learning behavior specialist, an expert in literacy instruction, and trainer with three decades of experience in higher education, both locally and internationally. Often describing herself as the epitome of diversity, Dr. Adenekan has the positioning and freedom to straddle many worlds. She is passionate about literacy instruction, language acquisition and use, cultural responsiveness, minority empowerment, advocacy, and educational equity matters. She can be reached at* **adenekan@oakton.edu.**

Dr. Mellissa Gyimah-Concepcion *is an assistant professor of English at Elgin Community College. She was born and raised in the U.K. to Ghanaian parents and has lived in the U.S. for nine years. Her global experiences and background imbue her with a love and passion for understanding and honouring people's lived experiences. Her research interests include dialogic literacy experiences, critical literacy, African immigrant pedagogies, and positioning theory. She can be reached at* **mgyimah-concepci@elgin.edu.**

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A New International School Recruitment Cycle is Starting:
Should I Attend In-Person Fairs?

By **Peter Smyth**, *Search Associates, Surrey, United Kingdom*

With COVID making international travel almost impossible, there is now clear indication from most international schools that they would like to see a return to interviewing and recruiting new teachers and administrators in person. The virtual fair recruiting event did prove successful for some schools, and I do believe that moving forward we will see a more hybrid approach to the recruiting fairs offered by companies. For example, at Search Associates, five of our 15 fairs will be virtual this year. But schools have clearly indicated in their feedback that they are excited about meeting and hiring people in person.

In this issue, I decided to focus on what this new recruiting landscape means for teachers and professors in their job search process.

Will I secure a position if I attend a fair?

The chances are high: for example, at our last in-person fair held in London in February 2022, more than 70 percent of our candidates attending were offered a position. Candidates later turned many of those positions down, but the statistic does show that opportunities exist.

There is no firm guarantee that by attending a fair you will return with a new job in hand. We do find that candidates who are open to a wide range of different countries are more successful than those focused on just one specific country. Personally, I enjoyed attending two recruitment fairs when I was a teacher candidate.

As a teaching couple, teaching the same subject, we knew it would be a bit trickier to secure roles in the same school and felt that meeting schools face to face would be beneficial. We were offered jobs at both fairs we attended, but with our young-family needs only one fair met our specific criteria. At each fair, we really enjoyed learning about different

schools in various parts of the world and we did end up taking wonderful jobs in a part of the world we had never considered before. We sure do miss Panama on those dark UK winter days! So why attend in-person?

A great question! It is a costly and time-consuming commitment attending a fair. There is no guarantee that you will be successful securing a position, so why would anyone put themselves through it?

An in-person job fair allows candidates and schools to have face-to-face interviews to determine if there is mutual interest and a good "fit" between school and candidate. For those candidates new to the joys of teaching overseas, fairs are also a wonderful place to learn about international education, as well as about various schools, including those located in more remote parts of the world, through school presentations, workshops, and networking. There really are endless opportunities out there. It is also a chance to meet and connect with colleagues and recruiters from around the world. Even though a school may not have a position for you this year, there may be an opportunity to create a connection and relationship that will serve you well down the road.

The next in-person fair will be held in Singapore on November 11-13. Click here for a complete schedule.

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Peter Smyth *is a Senior Associate at Search Associates UK South including the areas of London, the South East, the South West, the East of England, and the West Midlands in the United Kingdom. He has taught in international schools in the US, Middle East, Panama and started his teaching journey in the UK. He can be reached at* **psmyth@searchassociates.com.**

My India Problem

Dr. Jason S. Polley, *Hong Kong Baptist University, Kowloon Tong, Kowloon, Hong Kong*

Editor's Note: This story is the second part of a two-part series that examines Indian literature. The first part was featured in our underlined winter newsletter. See "Post-Colonial India: Midnight's Children and India in the 20th-21st Century" By Sally Holm, Phillips Academy Andover, Andover, Massachusetts.

1

Over the past decade, my India problem has been reframed.

2

I used to gaze in wonder, like an amazed playgoer, at the pan-India evoked by Salman Rushdie—this most especially in his much-prized *Midnight's Children*. Winning first the 1981 Booker, then the 1993 Booker of Bookers,[1] *Midnight's Children* became (and remains[2]) necessary reading for readers of English fiction.[3] The novel came to arm readers, critics, and students (especially students, and to great effect) with a panoply of critical approaches and sensibilities/ sensitivities: Indo-Anglian, intertextuality, metatextuality, magical realism, postmodernity, postcolonialism, reflexivity, unreliability, allegory …. And beyond India expressly, Rushdie's stylistic "pyrotechnics"[4] synchronized to symbolize a pan-Indian national collective. A mastertext of maximal inclusion.

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1 … and then the 2008 Public Vote for "The Best of the Booker," *if* we're still counting/that still counts.

2 *Midnight's Children* was, or portions of it were, for example, on the English syllabus at Assam's Tezpur University in Fall 2019.

3 Well, at least for enthusiastic (or guilt-ridden) students and autodidacts who necessarily read "necessary" English fiction. For instance, my first ever academic conference paper, delivered at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, in 2001, focussed on Shakespeare in *Midnight's Children* and was loftily titled "Salman Rushdie's Synaptic Snapshots and Slap-Shots: Sannyasis in Nikes; buddha and Buddha; and Aggressive Holy-Men." Yet here's a counterpoint to my alacrity/guilt. Five-years ago, a Sri Lankan associate, who at the time was completing a PhD in English Lit, dismissed *Midnight's Children* simply as "too difficult."

4 I had to implement this descriptor; it's ubiquitous in Rushdie criticism. See, for instance, Srivastava 2005: 212, Gopal 2009: 156, and Heydari-Malayeri 2012: 22.

A Nationsroman! The epic bespoke a post-Partition Indian national imaginary, an authorially constructed India running in parallel to the socially constructed ones Benedict Anderson was addressing in the same period vis-à-vis[5] literacy, sovereignty, and the news in *Imagined Communities* (1983[6]).

3

Rushdie's collection *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), a title that nods at Anderson, includes the piece "'Errata': Or, Unreliable Narration in *Midnight's Children*" (1983). Therein, Rushdie admits his narrator "Saleem is wrong" (22). Yet in the space of about a page, the author's postmodern remove transmutes *mistake* into *meaning*. Rushdie avers, "When I first found out my error[7] I was upset and tried to have it corrected. Now I'm not so sure. The mistake feels more and more like Saleem's; its wrongness feels *right*" (23). Certainly, readers of all stories, official and unofficial, ought "to maintain a healthy distrust" (25), so "the narrator" of Rushdie's essay banally says. But the problem is that history, however chutneyfied,[8] and however it feels, has real consequences on real agents. Authors of the homeland, however they re-imagine and metafictionally curate it, have a responsibility to history—to its agents *and* inheritors. This is especially exigent for texts claiming to narrate the "new" nation. Thus Haresh Trivedi,

who adapts Catherine Cundy, bemoaning the "Rushdification" (as opposed to the "Indianization") of "decolonized" Indian English fiction (1999: 188); a result of the Rushdie Effect.[9]

4

Amitav Ghosh, in *River of Smoke* (2011), the second volume of his Ibis Trilogy, which includes *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *Flood of Fire* (2012), offers an insightful example of how (imagined) communities form in response to social recognition. A year before the First Opium War,[10] in Fanqui-town,[11] lascars, Zamindars, and all manner of official and criminal personages from the Indian subcontinent would have seen themselves as, among others, Bihari, Bengali, Parsi, Goan, Tamil, or Arakanese. What came to unite these disparate men, Ghosh speculates, was the label Ah chaa, a Cantonese appellation reproducing the achhas these men were habitually heard to utter. The Hindi achha can mean assent, consent, understanding, or surprise, or it can signal a question. In other words, achha was (and is) pervasive,[12] perhaps not unlike the many *las*[13] common, for instance, to Cantonese, to Hong Kong English, and to Malaysian and Singapore Englishes. Ah chaa collected these men. A shared identity emerged. These Indians' L1[14] variety bespoke the polyvocal privilege of Guangzhou at the time. Consumed by linguistic diversity,

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5 …and très Midnight's Children à propos.

6 Timely, given Rushdie's accruing fame in the period.

7 (misidentifying General Dyers' 50 troops at Amritsar's 1919 Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, where 379 Indians were officially killed, as British instead of Indian!)

8 The metaphor runs through Midnight's Children.

9 … ie, Rushdie's influence. His work, his international presence, helped to relocate Indian English Fiction (whose literary renaissance heyday fizzled out by the late 1950s) from third map to prized centre.

10 1839 (the war).

11 an erstwhile gweilo (foreigner) enclave called Saap Sam Hong (Thirteen Factories) next to Shamian island in Guangzhou, then a hubbub of international (nautical) trade.

12 … and likely code-mixed into a variety of different languages from the Indian subcontinent circulated in Guangzhou at the time.

13 (and long *laaaaaa*s!)

14 Your first language is your L1.

Ghosh interweaves the formation of what was colloquially known as *The Redhaired*[15] alongside regular applications of the pidgin dialect. His narrator sees pidgin as a Cantonese corruption of the word "business." The "business" dialect, fascinatingly, was a combination of English, Portuguese, and Hindusthani delivered in a mainly Cantonese grammar. Ghosh has already attuned readerly eyes and ears to code-switching; *Sea of Poppies* integrates bhashas[16] including a barely decipherable mariner patois, one that had my Urdu L1 Pakistani students in Hong Kong as absorbed as my Assamese L1 ones in Upper Assam.

5

In Ghosh, readers encounter a host of differentiated characters intersecting in disparate global South zones (India, Mauritius, Canton, Singapore, then-lonely Hong Kong) concomitant to The Great Experiment, namely Great Britain's trafficking of indentured labour from India north to Mauritius in conjunction with its (Great Britain's) simultaneous smuggling of opium from India east to China. And what Ghosh does is intimately zoom in on distinctive micro-stories. Michael Ondaatje, originally from Sri Lanka, offers his own timely historical maritime narrative. He intermingles colonialism, exile, and regionalism in *The Cat's Table* (2012)—this through the eyes of an 11-year-old Ceylonese boy, who boards a ship for London unaccompanied in 1954.

6

As Rushdie continued capturing—and representing—the literary limelight, a period integrating his private Joseph Anton *nom de guerre*-phase,[17] other Indian writers of literature in English worked to fictionally encapsulate regional individuals, not national multitudes. Many also used verisimilitude to counter the carnivalism—the expectation of the everyday outrageous—that Rushdie had helped popularize as commonplace to the Indian spectacle. Novels like Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* (1988), Gita Mehta's *Raj* (1989), Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1994), Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (1999), not to mention Rohinton Mistry's "Emergency" Bombay novels,[18] all worked to show that India contained multitudes, and that no single novel[19] could reliably capture a cohesive, unified idea[20] of India.

7

These writers, as Indian, Indian diasporic, and/or internationally coded subjects of Indian heritage, work to capture Indian identities in lieu of any pan-Indian identity. The bhadralok[21] Tagore too wrestled with identity, as is reflexively plain in his 1880s-set novel *Gora* (1910). In the backdrop of *Brahmo Samaj*[22]-firebrand Gora's philosophical engagement with caste, nationalism, and romance (Tagore's focused lens is Austenian in *Gora*), is the covert fact that the hero Gora is part *gora*. Tagore's at least partly self-

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15 Compiled by Liang Kuei Ch'uan, the Chinese title of the Cantonese, Pidgin, and English glossary translates to "The-Red-Haired-People's-Buying-and-Selling-Common-Ghost-Language" (Rushdie 2008: 252).

16 Vernacular dialects and languages; etymologically linked to Bahasa, which is Indonesian for language.

17 … resulting from the *fatwa* declared against him on Valentine's Day 1989 for his portrayal of Quranic personages in the equally Othellian *The Satanic Verses* (1988).

18 *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995), and *Family Matters* (2001).

19 … even an encyclopedic novel as long as Seth's, which, at nearly 1500-pages and 600,000 words, is arguably English's lengthiest.

20 (or picture or portrait or portrayal or even evocation)

21   Well-heeled, respected Bengalis; educated in English.

22 Monotheistic Hindu reformist movement emerging in 1828 Calcutta.

modelled[23] hero Gora is, unbeknownst to Gora himself, an orphaned Eurasian.

8

Raja Rao evokes a similar sense of imposter (or at least imposed) identity in his preface to *Kanthapura* (1938), where he laments the difficulty of expressing his own *esprit de coeur* in a tongue that is not his own.[24] This sense of in-betweenness as lostness is also what Kiran Desai captures in her at once regional and international depiction of India's "Lost Generation" in the Man Booker-winning *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). Almost twenty years earlier, Chatterjee's *English, August* also detailed lostness. An IAS[25] officer,[26] Agastya's rustic post has him disaffected and unmotivated. An urban elite, with ties to both Delhi and Bombay, his discomfiture[27] bespeaks that of an entire generation. Chatterjee's first novel[28] also anticipates a return to regional fictional settings in Indian English literature. This is what Tarun J Tejpal explicitly performs in *The Story of My Assassins* (2009). Not unlike his *The Valley of Masks* (2011), which is set almost fully in strange albeit naturalist agrestic spaces, *The Story of My Assassins* resists prolonged descriptions of privileged urban zones. Instead, Tejpal's narrator, a prosperous Delhi journalist, details the decentered stories of his five would-be assassins. He charts each of their uniquely destitute narratives.

9

Certainly, Rushdie encodes a symbolic multitude into *Midnight's Children*'s nuanced narrator Saleem, who slips—even as he's swapped at birth—between identities. Hari Kunzru adapts this technique as he later encodes the Global North and the Indian Subcontinent into his chameleonic protagonist Pram Nath, who, in *The Impressionist* (2002), successfully adopts multiple personae in his quest to locate a stable identity. Without recourse to perceived ethnic escape hatches (Kunzru), or to the character machinations magical realism affords (Rushdie), more regionally attuned writers of the Rushdie period hearken back to India's literary renaissance in the first half of the 20th century, a period enveloping Indian figures as disparate as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and RK Narayan.[29]

10

Vikram Seth, in fact, also reaches further back than these Indian influences. His portrayal of just-Quit mid-century India is likewise invested with a Victorian sensibility. Yet Seth subtly dismantles this colonial apparatus.[30] Seth's *A Suitable Boy* works to privilege an assortment of regional stories while also encoding an assortment of scandals and intrigue. Consider, for instance, the amusingly cultured Chatterjee clan.[31] They are a bhadralok Calcutta family whose eldest son, an English poet and aspiring

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23 The name Tagore, after all, is a near-anagram of the appellation Gora, effectively meaning "white," or non-Indian—as in the contrast of *Desi* (Indian).

24 This locution makes me think of two critiques of colonial structure/structuring: Shakespeare's extrapolative *The Tempest* and Gloria Anzaldua's "How To Tame a Wild Tongue?" from her semiautobiographical book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987).

25 Indian Administrative Service

26 The cinematic *The Inheritance of Loss* features flashbacks amounting to portraits of the retired judge as a young man shipped to Cambridge and cruelly anglicized. He disdains everything Indian upon his India home. Thus Indianization. Once shipped back to India, anglicized Indian subjects ironically interpellate more Indians. This normalizes English conventions in India as Indian conventions.

27 … very much abetted by the "acute lethargy" derived from his marijuana habit, so the narrator memorably admits in the first paragraph of the novel.

28   … released as an English-language Indian film also called *English, August* (1994).

29   And perhaps too the (stuffy? ironical? masterful?) high modernism of GV Desani?

30 English, as an international academic field, emerged within empire as a disciplinary subject.

31 One main family in a novel opening with four family trees.

novelist, is a version of Seth himself, and is therefore a proxy version of the narrator whom we are reading. Abetting this metafictional irruption into Seth's stylistically Victorian space, are the Chatterjee daughters Meenakshi and Kakoli, whose very progressiveness,[32] cynicism, and hipness echo the ironic sensibilities of the more contemporary/postmodern mid-1990s reader.

11

In respect to Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, or any nuanced, critically informed text,[33] there's a critical danger to lionizing form, flourish, and especially reflexivity, lest we inadvertently veer back into a form of Rushdification, where style[34] can[35] displace presumed inclusion. Trivedi scathingly reminds readers that India, despite what "Rushdie believes," is not "only as old as Rushdie" (1999: 69).[36] Trivedi consequently signals how regional and micro-stories ineludibly confound the Indian Nationsroman.

12

I'm still, of course, amazed by India. And being amazed by India and Indian English fiction is still my India Problem. But my adult-life-long Indophilia,[37] as averred in my very first sentence, has evolved over the decades. My India Problem is now less about India,[38] and more about individuals in India, particularly those who problematize any solid sense of *India* per se. Rather than a wide-eyed all encapsulating gung-ho gaze as if from above, I now squint from below, calculating my every resource and recourse.

13

Weirdly, the turn in my critical gaze from top-down to bottom-up educes a paradoxical analogy. I cannot help but hearken back to Mulk Raj Anand, whose first two novels, respectively, *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936), make a virtue, so their titles imply, of subaltern or outcaste (literally) figures. Dalits,[39] like Bakha in *Untouchable*, cannot afford to be uncalculating. Even their shadows pollute Caste Indians. My India Problem, then, really exists at the intersection of recognized privilege & difference. And it's up to me, as it was to Anand,[40] as it is to all of us, as readers, as critics, and above all as persons, to do justice to these micro-stories by recognizing how they individually contribute to a multifarious India, a place once reputed to make even the gods[41] jealous.

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32 (Meenakshi's having a sexual affair; Kakoli has a German suitor; the young women show their midriffs—this all in early 1950s India)

33 … "Indian" and not.

34 (seductively)

35 (pyrotechnically)

36 Rushdie (and, incidentally, my father as well) is born in 1947. As one of midnight's children born on 15 August 1947, when the British officially Quit India, narrator Saleem therefore can be read as a possible world version of Rushdie himself.

37 Perhaps better understood as Indomania—at least from my Hong Kong context, where I'm regularly asked why I'm an Indologist (and obvious Indophile). Hong Kong-based Sinologists and Sinophiles who also originate from the West, of course, typically do not need to justify their scholarly interests and motivations. Immediate context certainly matters. Thus, too, the necessarily preemptive, because textually allusive, content of this piece. One way to problematize Rushdie's pan-India portrait while simultaneously evidencing my own scholarly preparedness to do so, this irrespective of my *gora* subjectivity (or positionality), is by offering literary counterexamples by other writers of Indian English fiction.

38 (meaning a pan-Indian mythology)

39 Now officially called the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

40 (who completed a PhD in philosophy at Cambridge in 1929)

41 (or, in some Indian narratives/imaginaries, including, among many, Tagore's *Gora*, Anand's *The Village* [1939], Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* [1997], and its sequel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* [2017], competing recognitions/manifestations of a singular God)

Jason S. Polley *is associate professor of English at Hong Kong Baptist University. His research interests include Indian English fiction, experimental nonfiction, and comics reportage. He has articles on John Banville, District 9, Jane Smiley, Watchmen, Wong Kar-wai, House of Leaves, Joel Thomas Hynes, critical pedagogy, R Crumb, and Bombay Fever. A co-authored article on multimodality in David Foster Wallace is forthcoming. He's co-editor of the volumes Poetry in Pedagogy (2021) and Cultural Conflict in Hong Kong (2018). His monograph is Jane Smiley, Jonathan Franzen, Don DeLillo: Narratives of Everyday Justice (2011). His creative nonfictions are Cemetery Miss You (2011) and Refrain (2010). He can be reached at* **jspolley@hkbu.edu.hk.**

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Creating Projects for the Planet:
SDGs in Practice

Dr Jennifer Williams, *Take Action Global, Florida, USA*

As a literacy specialist, I started off in my career focused on the science of language. I was captivated by the way that letters came together to form words and on how words could join to express ideas. My early studies in linguistics and global languages had me seeking out patterns through precise analyses of structure in morphology and syntax. As a practicing speech-language pathologist, I was in the business of phonetics and phonology, and for me, communication was key in all aspects of education – from expression to understanding to behavior to wellbeing and happiness. My love of language brought me to the conversations of global collaboration and sustainability, and seeing the impact for our planet and its people has provided a space for me to better understand how the science and the art of literacy can converge to provide real-world context in teaching and learning. Today, those beginnings of conversations have grown and developed into an international movement welcoming educators from across the world and across the curriculum. Teachers are now finding the community and the resources to take action, and they are partnering up with their students to make it all happen.

SDGs: Our Roadmap for Action
In 2015, the world came together to determine a plan of action for the future. Organized as a set of 17 goals, the Sustainable Development Goals map out a path to ensure we have a healthy planet and that every person has access to food, clean water, and equal rights. Referred to as the SDGs, the Global Goals, and "The Goals," this "blueprint for peace" has a due date of 2030 and calls on every person to do their part, recognizing that even small actions make a big difference. For us in education, the SDGs have become somewhat of a roadmap as we set out on taking action in our classrooms and schools. We even have our very own Goal in SDG 4: Quality Education

for All, with a call for the world *to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. With topics such as Life Below Water, Clean Energy, Zero Hunger, and Sustainable Cities, the Goals offer the perfect place for students to advance their foundational understandings of concepts and facts. Through projects and hands-on/minds-on/hearts-on activities, they are able to apply knowledge in ways that are meaningful, relevant, and oftentimes representative of the issues that matter most to them.

Raminder's class, Source: Raminder Mac, India

the way for sustainable development through literacy and STEM. She guided her students to create an environmental outreach project to support the local community. After developing and distributing solar lamps to people without reliable light and power, Raminder's students led community events to create awareness of environmental conservation with street plays, puppet and mime shows, and rallies. They tasked themselves with spreading a message of eco-friendliness and developed literacy skills as they took action.

SDG Poster Source: UN

Multimodal Expression of Ideas

As teachers look to create projects for the planet in the classroom, edtech can support students to share their stories and ideas with the world. Social media with hashtags like #TeachSDGs, #ClimateActionEdu, and #TakeActionEdu are perfect ways to amplify student ideas and share out requests for feedback, resources, or invitations for collaborators. Students also are using edtech to share their own stories, creating podcasts, blogposts, public service announcements (PSAs), and video blogs (vlogs). Tech tools like Minecraft in Education, Adobe Express, Padlet, and Wakelet are making learning accessible and fun and show that learning can be multimodal, bringing in elements of gaming, graphic design, curation, and creativity, all

Literacy across the Curriculum

Everyone has a place in The Goals. I've heard Humanities teachers say "The Goals are all Humanities" and science teachers say "The Goals are all for us in science." Arts teachers and math teachers and language teachers have expressed similar thoughts. And, for all of us, this means there is great opportunity for interdisciplinary work. As we think about reading, writing, listening, and speaking, we can use the Goals to align the work of literacy across the curriculum with a purpose. Raminder Kaur Mac, Dean of International Affairs at the Choithram School in India, is one educator who is using the Goals to lead

while building skills and opportunities for collaboration and sharing. A few ideas from global classrooms:

- Building a model of a city powered by renewable energy and recording videos to explain the types of energy and the impact
- Designing a webpage to teach others about a "buy local" class advocacy campaign
- Creating an infographic to visualize data around gender inequality
- Writing and producing a song about the importance of planting trees and reforestation
- Building a sustainable city in Minecraft and then modeling with materials for a presentation to the school board to advocate for sustainable school yards

The Climate Action Project invites nearly 3,000,000 participants from over 145 countries each year to join for six-weeks in a free, online project that moves classrooms through exploring causes, effects, impact, and action around climate change. Students are invited to create in a way that is meaningful to them at local and personal levels with final projects including inventions, advocacy campaigns, theater productions, shareable learning resources, and research. Projects like this can bring the Global Goals to life for our students and can bring classrooms to a global stage to contribute to the Agenda for 2030 in meeting all the Global Goals. Tree plantings, virtual exchange, peer feedback, perspective taking – everyone can be included in the work of taking action for our planet, and today is the perfect time to get started!

Climate Action Education

Today, our young people across the world are leading a movement around environmental justice and climate action. And, as we see countries begin to mandate climate action education and endorse climate literacy initiatives, teachers and schools can join youth by preparing with professional development and professional collaboration.

Alfonso Narvarro Carvallo, Peru, Ming Yao Hsiung, Taiwan

Ready to take action on the 17 Global Goals? Here are some ways to jump in:

- [Download the SDG poster](#) (schools should use the poster without the UN emblem) and post it in your classroom. Engage in discussions around "goals" and invite students to share on the Global Goals that look interesting to them at first glance.
- Invite your students to check out the [EarthProject app](#) (free and available on iOS and Android) to record daily actions, see impact for the planet, and even work in teams to earn spots on the Global Leaderboard.
- Join the [Climate Action Project](#) (6-week free online global collaboration project on SDG 13), [Climate Action Day](#) (1-day free online global collaboration event on SDG 13), and [Climate Action Schools](#) (full year online project for schools on SDG 13)
- Bring climate literacy to the classroom library with our *[Climate Action Booklist for Classrooms](#)* with over 150 titles curated by 20+ global educators

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Dr. Jennifer Williams *is the co-executive director and founder of Take Action Global, a non-profit organization committed to climate education for all. She is also the co-founder of TeachSDGs and the author of* Teach Boldly: Using Edtech for Social Good (ISTE). *Connect with Jennifer on Twitter at @JenWilliamsEdu and learn more about ways you can get involved with SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 13: Climate Action by visiting www.takeactionglobal.org. She can be reached at* **jenwilliamsedu@gmail.com***.*

How our Brains Respond to Stories:
Incorporating Storytelling Across the Curriculum

By LeeAnne Lavender, *Stories for Change, Ontario, Canada*

As an English teacher, you already know that stories are powerful and essential in helping us understand our world and the human experience. Every day as you work with students, you see the magic of stories as they open up your students' imagination, social consciousness and understanding of self.

Brain science continues to grow and reveal new insights about the science behind the magic of stories.

For teachers of all subjects and disciplines, science suggests that if we want students to really learn what we are teaching (in any content area), stories are a key strategy for evoking engagement, embedding information into our memories, and creating compassion and trust in our classroom. This is not something just for English teachers (although we can certainly maximize the impact of what science is revealing, too!); it is an essential

way we can reframe our curriculum so it is meaningful and purposeful for our students.

As an example of how storytelling can be used in any setting, I'll share a professional learning example. In the spring of 2022, I facilitated a workshop with a group of diverse educators where storytelling was used as a way to connect and reflect on key events from
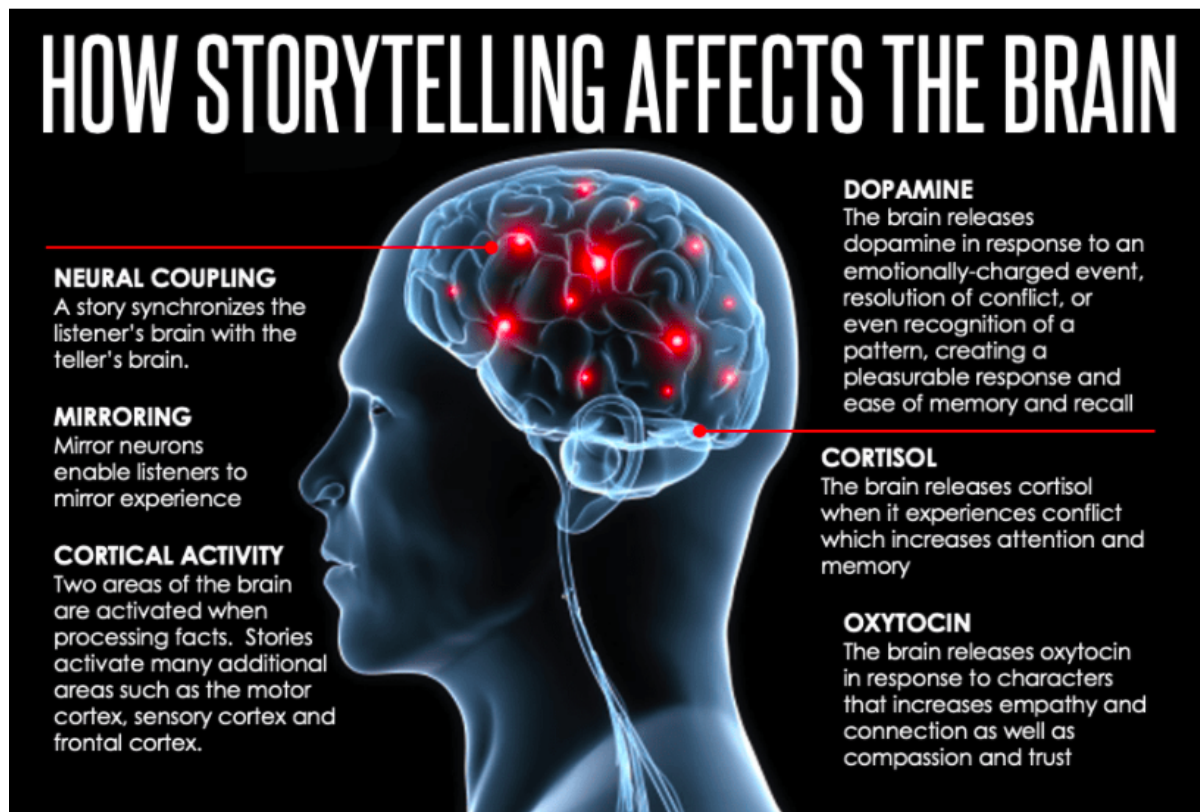
Image from https://www.pamelarutledge.com/story-power-the-psychology-of-story/

2021. The primary tool for the workshop was a simple plot mountain featuring the five basic components of a story's plot (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution). The educators mapped their past year using the plot mountain and then shared their stories in groups of four in breakout rooms. When they returned to the main Zoom discussion room, many similarities were noted amongst the shared stories. Many educators had experienced upheaval as a result of Covid-19 and experienced climax moments where their jobs changed significantly. Many learned they had strength to persist and keep going in the face of numerous obstacles. And in sharing these stories, the teachers connected and felt a shared sense of catharsis and belonging.

Were our brains producing dopamine, cortisol and oxytocin? Absolutely. And this created an impactful experience that allowed us to feel supported and heard, one that we will remember for a long time.

In a math, history or art classroom, teachers could use this simple plot mountain exercise to help students reflect at the end of a unit, or to review existing knowledge before launching into a new lesson. Students could create a plot mountain to capture the story of an electron, or a set of fractions, or a significant moment in history. This is one simple idea for incorporating stories into any subject area.

For English teachers who consistently work with stories, reading more about brain science and storytelling can also help us deepen our practice in a variety of ways.

We can share aspects of brain science with students so they begin to have a meta-understanding of their experience with stories and narrative texts. We can evaluate our curriculum to see if we can open up new learning experiences and opportunities for students, particularly as they reflect on their emotional experience with a story. We can even build in specific learning activities to focus

on the parts of a story that might result in the production of dopamine, cortisol and oxytocin to deepen learning and connection with the text.

Stories help our students learn and remember. Stories help our students understand the world in ways that are rich and purposeful. Stories open up intercultural understanding and empathy.

Language arts teachers know this, and now brain science suggests we should share our knowledge with colleagues in other departments and disciplines. Perhaps you could lead a learning session with math and science teachers at your school to help them see how they can weave storytelling into their classroom practice. Or perhaps you could spearhead an interdisciplinary learning experience or project where your expertise as a storyteller can guide anchor activities and assessment.

As English teachers, our lives have been dedicated to the power of stories, and it is wonderful to see scientific evidence suggesting that what we do is a type of superpower for learning. Bringing storytelling to the entire K-12 curriculum in all subject areas can amplify that superpower in all of the best ways for our students.

Links to some excellent sites that provide additional resources for exploring storytelling and brain science.

1. How Stories Connect and Persuade Us (NPR Article)

2. Storytelling as a Teaching Strategy (TeachHub Article)

3. Twelve Ways to Integrate Storytelling in the Classroom (Vista Higher Learning Article)

4. Storytelling Games for Elementary Classrooms (YouTube Video)

LeeAnne Lavender *is a coach and facilitator for international educators. She specializes in digital storytelling, service learning and global citizenship, and she loves partnering with schools and teachers to create learning experiences that have impact and lead to deep learning. She's committed to helping educators build changemaker cultures to empower students and equip them with the skills they need to create positive, purposeful change. You can learn more about LeeAnne at* **https://www.leeannelavender.com/.** *She can be reached at* **leeanne@leeannelavender.com***.*

Investigating Mary Shelley's Frankenstein:
A "Research Later" Approach

By Tami Ranado, Independence High School in Ashburn, Virginia *and* Chris Taylor, American School of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

In some respects, serious, lengthy research is a significant feature of high school programs both in the United States and abroad. If there is a clear emphasis on research as part of a high school academic program, however, it is less clear what role the English language arts (ELA) classroom has to play in these research projects. In our experience (and in the history of our own past mistakes), much of what is described as research in the ELA classroom focuses on organization (remember notecards?) or, worse yet, on the mechanics of citation and formatting: students end up going through the teacher-assigned phases of research simply because they have to, with little engagement in the research itself (Greene and Albers 196). Because professional literary scholarship is often difficult for students to access, and because we lack a clear picture of what literary research can accomplish for high school students, substantive ELA research projects are rare.

Working in an IB World School in Warsaw, Poland, we used the introduction of a new unit of study in the Diploma Language and Literature course—the Time and Space unit of inquiry—as an opportunity to address the problem of what substantive literary research can look like in an ELA classroom. Our unit, built around Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, ran for roughly nine weeks, from the beginning of February to the beginning of April 2020. We taught the unit to four grade 11 classes totaling roughly eighty students, the majority of whom spoke English as a second or other language. Though the level of English proficiency ranged widely in our classes, the majority of the students successfully completed the IB language and literature course for either a certificate or as part of the full Diploma Programme the following year.

The unit involved two significant shifts from how we had previously approached

> Our solution to these problems was to delay research until students had developed their own understanding of the text, and then to frame that research as a debate about what kinds of context are most useful in interpreting the novel.

contextual research. First, we began with the text, intentionally delaying any research into historical or biographical context. Drawing on many of the concepts and activities from Sheridan Blau's *The Literature Workshop: Teaching Texts and Their Readers*—which describes a process approach to reading literature that emphasizes students' ability to interpret texts—we devoted the first half of the unit to asking students to "notice what they notice" in the text and describe what they saw as the interesting and important aspects of the novel. Second, when we introduced the idea of research, we framed it as part of class debate, presenting research in terms of Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein's concept of "they say / I say" and asking what types of research are useful in improving our understanding of the text. The result was student papers that, rather than simply presenting facts students found, presented arguments about the relative value of different contextual sources.

In *Creating Thinking Classrooms*, Garfield Gini-Newman and Roland Case make a distinction between research and *re-search.* As they put it, "teachers will often assign topics for independent research and ask students to assemble information from a few sources, prepare a presentation usually supported with a digital display or display board, and then share what they found about their topic" (168). They criticize these sorts of research projects for not requiring critical thinking: "Although research projects provide opportunities for students to explore topics, they may involve little genuine investigation. They may simply involve 're-searching'—simply finding out what others have discovered and reporting back on their findings" (169).

This problem of re-searching, we find, is a very real one in the ELA classroom. Either because students cannot find interpretations of a text that are comprehensible to them or because they cannot imagine ways (or lack the confidence) to challenge the expert interpretations they find, students end up presenting their research as settled fact rather than as data points in an ongoing discussion about a text.

Our solution to these problems was to delay research until students had developed their own understanding of the text, and then to frame that research as a debate about what kinds of context are most useful in interpreting the novel. Through journal notes constructed in the spirit of Blau's work, students identified difficulties in the text, first noting simple problems like unfamiliar words and difficult

sentence structures, and then building toward larger thematic questions raised by the novel: Was Victor to blame? Why the epistolary approach? This kind of evidence gathering was grounded in the text and "conversations" students were having with Mary Shelley. Students' interpretations were not framed by contextual information the teachers had fed them; rather students worked individually and with each other, working out key passages, to build knowledge about the novel.

With Graff and Birkenstein's "they say / I say" model at the front of students' minds, we began to add voices to the conversation, sharing carefully curated, accessible, high-interest resources. Students viewed videos while journaling about how their understanding of specific words on Shelley's pages were transformed by the information. They analyzed websites dedicated to mapping out Victor's travels. They read science journalism about animating objects. Our goal in sharing these kinds of resources with our (mostly nonnative English-speaking) students was to ensure that they did not become frustrated by information they could not understand and to pique their interest.

Next, we assigned groups to specific contexts to champion as the "most valuable" in reading *Frankenstein*. The students' assigned contexts would be used for the class debate, but they might not be the contexts students used for their final paper. As we approached the class debate, students became invested in their assigned context because they not only had something to say about the literary aspects of the novel, but also began to see themselves as experts and stewards of that context.

> As we approached the class debate, students became invested in their assigned context because they not only had something to say about the literary aspects of the novel, but also began to see themselves as experts and stewards of that context.

Remarkably, students listened intently, taking notes and questioning the other groups. The students' engagement made us reflect on what had changed from the debates of the past, in which participation had been less than ideal and note-taking had seemed like a classroom management tool. First, the students had been told in advance that the final paper required them to use at least two of Graff and Birkenstein's templates to respond to their peers' ideas. So, as they took notes, they were listening for gaps and misinterpretations. Doing this work during the presentations was simply more efficient than trying to revisit ideas a week or two later. Also, because students had developed personal responses to the novel, they seemed genuinely invested in defending their ideas and pointing to where they felt other students had misread passages or overlooked conflicting evidence. They were having an academic conversation, refining their theories of a text in conversation with each other.

Though they were assigned a context to argue in the class debate, the final paper asked students for their honest answer to the question: "What context is most valuable for a true understanding of *Frankenstein*?" The essays were some of the best papers either of us had read in a combined thirty years of experience teaching high school English. It is a measure of the success of the project that, though the easiest path was clearly to argue in the paper the same position they had already constructed for the debate, many students switched positions, confident in their ability to make a different argument and seemingly eager to share their thoughts about the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to the text. The authentic engagement with an ongoing class debate meant that the ideas were specific to the work we had watched students do over the previous weeks. In the end, the papers demonstrated more critical thinking than a typical ELA research project, and, importantly, they highlighted the students' voices and enthusiasm.

Students need to be equipped with tools that lead to more than being able to Google the "right" answer. Research, then, becomes not about re-finding what someone else wrote about a topic, but the combining of many pieces of information to develop a unique and interesting perspective backed by evidence. Delaying research, adding a debate element, and making the debate part of a greater conversation allowed for more critical, independent, and confident thinking and writing. Perhaps counterintuitively, developing their ideas about the text before encountering those of others allowed students to not just "reassert what they already believe but to stretch what they believe by putting it up against beliefs that differ . . ." (Graff and Birkenstein xxvi). Our students joined the conversation because they felt empowered

to—because they had been allowed to come to their own understanding of the novel first and then to think critically about the kind of research strategies that would be most valuable for improving that understanding. By delaying contextual research, we learned that we don't have to give up literature to teach research skills.

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Tami Ranado *has taught high school English at U.S. and international schools since 1999. Having taught in Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Poland, most recently she served as an IB English teacher in Hanoi, Vietnam and is currently based in Northern Virginia. Tami has been a member of NCTE since 2000 and can be reached at* **ctranado@mac.com**

Chris Taylor *teaches IB English language and literature as well as IB theory of knowledge at the American School of Warsaw. He holds a PhD in literary and cultural studies from Carnegie Mellon University and has been a member of NCTE since 2015. He can be reached at* **ctaylor@aswarsaw.org**.

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Understanding Cultural Accommodation and English Academic Writing in Japan

By **R. Paul Lege, PhD**, *Nagoya University, Chikusa-ku, Japan*

Many writing instructors teaching ESL in Asia may not realize the depth and scope of the cultural differences that can impact how L2 students must accommodate themselves culturally to college-level writing in English. By this, I mean how L2 students' experiences with writing (especially research writing) in their native language (Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, etc.) can have a profound effect on how they navigate writing in English (Ene, *et al,* 2019). In terms of writing culture, the attention, attitude, and approach towards writing in one's native language can impact how well students write in their second language.

I have been teaching L2 academic writing to Asian graduate students in a Japanese university for over 20 years (80% of my students come from outside of Japan). Over the years, I have seen a pattern among learners in which low skill acquisition in English writing (particularly with coherency) is related to the degree to which writing was previously taught in their first language. For example, in classroom surveys over the past decade, less than 40% of the learners in my classes (n=188) had written a research report in their first language while attending undergraduate school in their home country, and only about 1% had written anything in English before attending our program. Furthermore, over 60% of the students entering our program reported a lack of confidence in understanding what was necessary for undertaking advanced research because their previous institutions did not provide them with the necessary skills.

Attention to students' writing needs is a problem in tertiary education in Asia (Narayan, 2020). In general, three factors dictate how much attention teachers can give to writing instruction. Firstly, much attention to classroom teaching continues to revolve

around testing (Sawaki, 2017), although this is slowly changing. In many instances, large class sizes and instructional development also play some role in how much time is devoted to teaching writing skills and habits (or even basic research). Thus, testing demands, class size, and instructional development can restrict the amount of time devoted to writing practice.

The nice thing about my job is that it has allowed me to travel to many of my students' countries for conferences and campus visits (at least before Covid), which in turn has provided some opportunities for observation. During these visits, I encountered many college instructors still focused on teaching grammar, and the few who taught writing were predominately concerned with prescriptive rules. Since many college instructors in Asia meet 200-300 students per week, most feel that having time for writing exercises or instruction (whether in the native language or in English) is a luxury.

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In countries such as Japan, Korea, and Singapore, instruction driven by testing and affected by large class size determines just how much writing students can do. In China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, some instruction in basic research skills is aligned with an appreciation for differences in writing styles in the students' first languages, though not necessarily for writing in English (which is often very basic). Hong Kong represents an exception, where the design of writing courses includes higher expectations, and writing centers cater to both Mandarin and English (at least at the larger tertiary institutions). Meanwhile, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar lag behind, as tradition and socio-economic factors have played a role in limited writing instruction and writing experience.

Attitudes about writing are harder to change. While some writing instructors in Southeast and Central Asian countries today may still invoke the "oral tradition" to explain away the lack of development in this area of academia, many acknowledge that there remains no consensus on expectations in tertiary education as to what research writing instruction should entail. In many of these countries, there are few, if any, style guides in the native languages, so students generally follow the writing practices and recommendations of their faculty or supervisors (Farced et al, 2016). This in turn leads to many misconceptions about research writing. Many of the learners enter our program with the misguided view that academic writing is merely about using correct grammar and including a large number of citations. Ironically, while many faculty complain about the time investment required to assess academic writing, there persists the notion that a good graduate thesis is determined by its length rather than the quality of the ideas or arguments.

Approaches to the teaching of writing are changing, and an increasing number of studies are comparing and examining cultural

differences in the way students negotiate their writing (Siu, 2017). In Japan, for example, teachers in elementary schools start with what is called the *kishotenketsu* method, derived originally from Chinese poetry and used in compositional exercises (Spence & Kite, 2018). Essentially, this form of compositional narrative includes an introduction (*ki*), development (*sho*), turn (*ten*), and conclusion (*ketsu*). The real cultural difference occurs in the introduction and conclusion, where the Japanese writer may depend heavily on contextual information before getting to the main point.

This is not the only approach to writing in Japan. Rhetorical writing at the university level (*shuujigaku*) has roots in the Western approach to formal writing, but it has evolved to meet local linguistic needs (Kimura & Kondo, 2004). However, most Japanese students are unaware of the differences between Japanese and English with something as fundamental as the paragraph (*danraku*). In Japanese, the *danraku* is taught simply as a structural division and not as something that requires strict coherence. As such, if the learner (not just the Japanese learner) does not understand the differences in rhetorical devices between their first language and English, then they will struggle with something as simple as paragraph development in English even if they write well in their native language. Thus, approaches to writing that are taught in the native language can affect how a student negotiates what is taught in ESL writing courses.

In sum, the attention, attitude, and approach to writing in a student's former educational experience in their first language will most likely impact how well they can navigate the learning of writing in English. But cultural accommodation in academic writing is not simply about the student. Understanding these cultural differences helps me, as a writing instructor, design more effective courses because it allows me to address the specific needs that will assist L2 writers to develop their academic writing skills in English.

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When learners are allowed to discuss and make simple comparisons about such things as paragraph structure, they are beginning to negotiate the cultural differences between writing in their L1 and writing in English. And, in general, I have found that students who understand these differences are better able to improve their English writing skills.

R. Paul Lege, PhD, *is an Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Law at Nagoya University. He has taught academic writing in Japan for more than twenty years including face-to-face classes, hybrid online courses, as well as remote and long-distance learning. He can be reached at* **xrplege@law.nagoya-u.ac.jp.**

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