

6-2016

## The Common Core, Professional Development, and Classroom Discourse

Brianne Stephens  
*Grand Valley State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/lajm>

---

### Recommended Citation

Stephens, Brianne (2016) "The Common Core, Professional Development, and Classroom Discourse,"  
*Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 31: Iss. 2, Article 7.  
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.2118>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Language Arts Journal of Michigan by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gvsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gvsu.edu).

## UNDERGRADUATE

# The Common Core, Professional Development, and Classroom Discourse

BRIANNE STEPHENS

I've always wanted to be an elementary teacher. I used to imagine myself surrounded by kids in a colorful classroom, reading wonderful books to them, introducing them to the joys of writing, and learning with and from them. Now, at long last, I am in a teacher preparation program, almost ready for my first field experience. One of the things I've learned in my classes for future teachers is that I was right to imagine myself as a teacher. I already love this profession. But my courses have also taught me that my more youthful imaginings were incomplete. Specifically, there were two really important aspects of teaching that I couldn't have known about or anticipated: the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and ongoing professional development.

The instruction about the Common Core that I have received from my professors has been somewhat mixed. While the majority of my professors have focused only on the Standards themselves—sometimes praising them, sometimes criticizing them—a few have pointed out that the CCSS, like any other document, have authors, and that we need to take those authors and their goals into account when reading and responding to the Standards themselves. As a result, I've spent the past semester researching what the most influential authors of the CCSS have written and said about the Standards; and I've found that one of the best ways to understand the authors' goals (and, therefore, the purposes of the Standards) is to study the professional development materials the authors have created in order to help teachers learn to implement the Standards.

David Coleman, Susan Pimentel, and Jason Zimba, lead writers of the CCSS, have spent a great deal of time supporting and promoting the Standards, and have gone even further to create a non-profit organization (Student Achievement Partners) that manages a website called Achieve the Core. Exploring this website and the professional development materials within it revealed some troubling discrepancies between my experiences as a student of

literature, the literature-pedagogy research that I have been studying, and the instructional techniques that the authors of the CCSS advocate for.

It's important to note that the CCSS authors have stated repeatedly that the pedagogical materials they have developed are only recommendations, and that teachers are free to select and use the instructional methods they find most appropriate. However, as White (2015) has pointed out, the most visible and highly influential author of the Standards, David Coleman, has publicly insisted that teachers who wish to help their students achieve the Core must follow his pedagogical example. He has clearly set out to retrain teachers. Indeed, even if the Achieve the Core website was not created to dictate teachers' instruction, the materials it presents for teacher training (telling teachers how to select texts, how to develop discussion questions, etc.) are likely to seem particularly credible to teachers and administrators since the authors of the CCSS support them. In addition, other reputable and influential organizations and websites (e.g., the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and Edutopia) have promoted Achieve the Core's professional development materials. And as we shall see, those materials attempt to train both new and experienced teachers to "Achieve the Core" in very particular ways.

I recognize that I don't have much teaching experience myself yet—I'm just now entering the "professional development pipeline." But I do have lots of experience as a reader and as a student of literature; and based on the research I've read and my years studying literature, I am concerned about how the teaching materials produced by the authors of the CCSS might affect the way teachers teach and, as a result, the way students respond to literature, both in the elementary and in the secondary ELA classroom. In this article, I will present a portion of what I've learned, focusing on one of the most foundational assumptions embedded in those professional development materials: that text-centered questions are the best (and perhaps the only legitimate) questions teachers can

ask during discussions of literary texts. In the remainder of this essay, I present a brief review of the research surrounding text-dependent questions and authentic questions. I then critique a sample, text-centered, third-grade lesson that focuses on *Because of Winn-Dixie*. I will conclude by offering an alternative approach to the lesson that I believe is better aligned with credible, research-based pedagogy.

### Text-Dependency Versus Authenticity

#### Text-Dependency

The authors of the CCSS identify text-centeredness, or text-dependency, as one of several necessary “instructional shifts” that set the CCSS apart from previous standards. In their discussion of this shift, they contend that students and teachers should focus rather exclusively on the literary text and that questions about literature should elicit answers focusing on the text alone. Coleman and Pimentel (2012), two of the most influential authors of the CCSS, defend their decision to include this shift by explaining that text-dependent questions “motivate students to dig in and explore [texts] further” (p. 8). Their argument is steadfast: the text alone must be central.

The idea of text-dependency in the classroom is not new; it stems from New Critical theory, which has been and continues to be highly influential in the teaching and learning of literature (White, 2015). In fact, both Adler, Rougle, Kaiser, & Caughlan (2003) and Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith (1995) found that, by and large, American schools have adopted a monologic approach to teaching, where the teacher uses text-dependent questions, sometimes referred to as “test questions” (e.g., Nystrand, 1991, p. 264), to control the direction of literary discussion. Principally, these researchers noted the students’ lack of talking time in comparison to the teacher’s.

In light of these and other findings questioning the effectiveness of text-dependent questions, Johnston (2012) concludes that such questions are problematic because the knowledge targeted by these questions is fixed or certain. Hynds (1991) concurs, reporting that the fixed nature of text-dependent questions results in students’ becoming dependent on their teacher to tell them what is right or wrong about literature. In other words, in classrooms where text-dependency dominates, the students may assume that the teacher will think and reason for them. Hynds goes on to say that if teachers approach literature as only having “one right answer,” they may “disempower students in dealing

with interpretive difficulty on their own, creating submissive students” (1991, p. 119). Because motivation is foundational for present and future success in any subject (Dewey, 1916/1944), ELA teachers should be using strategies that support a student’s long-term, active engagement in reading and interpreting literature, not following models that create passive students by focusing their attention on a hunt for the “one correct answer.”

Aukerman (2008) has spent a great deal of time researching the idea of one right answer. She mentions the I-R-E model that is used in many text-dependent classrooms: initiate, respond, evaluate (p. 56). According to this model, the teacher initiates a question, a student responds, and the teacher evaluates and usually elaborates on the student’s answer. In her analysis of the effects of this sort of recitation, Aukerman supports Hynds’ ideas that teacher-dependency will inevitably follow text-dependent questions because “only the teacher’s evaluation matters” (p. 56). Instead, she advocates for authentic questions and shared evaluation from the entire class.

#### Authenticity

Unlike test questions, authentic questions are open-ended without a specified answer (Nystrand, 1991, p. 275). According to Johnston (2012), these questions “[offer] uncertainty, and thus [enable] inquiry... and [invite] dialogue” into the classroom (p. 52). With this inclusion of inquiry and dialogue, Dickson (2005) found that in classrooms that employ authentic questions, students act as “active participants in the search for knowledge” (p. 112). As they become less dependent on their teacher’s scaffolding, they begin to think for themselves and reap the benefits of doing so. Cognitively, with this increased responsibility, Dickson found that students were able to “articulate thoughts” and “provide support for their ideas” more clearly than students in text-dependent classrooms (2005, p. 112). Students’ abilities in the ELA classroom would benefit more from authentic questions, encouraging dialogic discourse in the classroom.

The authors of the CCSS argue strenuously against the use of open-ended questions because they believe these conversations move students away from the “actual point [the author] is making and farther away from understanding the text” (Achieve the Core, n.d.-c, p. 3). It is important to note, though, that authentic questions, like text questions, do use the text for support. For example, White (1993) offers the following authentic question for students studying *A Wrinkle in Time*:

Much of this book focuses on the battle between good and evil, between light and darkness. What do you think the author might be trying to tell us about the conflict between good and evil? What message might she be trying to communicate with us? Support your answer by referring to specific passages in the text. (p. 33)

Even if White had not asked students to refer to the text, the question would be impossible to answer fully without using examples from the book. If given this question, students would not be able to hunt and search for a single “correct” answer that is spelled out in the text for them, but they would be able to use what they have learned about the characters and what they have analyzed in the plot to answer this question about good and evil.

Well-planned, authentic questions are not so open that they are not related to the text at all. In contrast, they are a way of bringing the text to a level where students can reason with, explore, connect to, and respond to the text from their own experiences and minds. The answer may not be based solely on the text—students may also draw upon other sources of knowledge—but the text is still its foundation, so standards can still be met and close reading is still a key element.

Furthermore, authentic questions support the Common Core’s desire to enhance student achievement by creating high expectations for both understanding and engagement. For example, Nystrand (1991) found that authentic questions raised “fundamental expectations for learning by treating students seriously as thinkers—that is, by indicating that what students think is interesting and indeed worth examining” (p. 147). And when students feel that the teacher is genuinely interested in “what students think and not just whether they know what someone else thinks or has said” (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991, p. 264), students tend to respond by engaging substantively in the academic conversation, resulting in greater academic achievement. Ultimately, Nystrand and Gamoran argue against text-dependent questions because they result in lower academic achievement and lower student motivation. The goal in any ELA classroom, Common Core focused or not, is to increase students’ passions for reading and their success in doing so, and authentic questions are a way to accomplish both goals.

I don’t mean to say that the authors of the CCSS are wrong to be concerned about students’ straying from the text. When using authentic questions, there is certainly a danger of students veering so far away from the text that true

meaning is missed. However, Chinn, Anderson, and Waggoner (2001) studied classrooms where teachers relied on authentic questions and discovered that, although only 4.1% of questions included in discussion had an answer that could be found in the text (p. 396), student responses tripled in their use of textual evidence (p. 397). This study provides support that teachers who employ authentic questions actually help their students to remain rooted in the text, and that as a result, the students’ use of textual evidence in the classroom may even increase. Similarly, Smith and White (1993) share the CCSS authors’ opinion that not all interpretations or inferences are equally valid, but all the same, they argue that questions that allow for a multiplicity of responses and data sources result in increased comprehension and engagement.

Although most of the research cited in this paper so far is focused on the secondary level, some elementary-focused research (e.g., Many & Wiseman, 1992) allows us to conclude that encouraging younger students to respond authentically and personally to literature similarly results in more meaningful literary reflections and connections. It is no surprise that so many researchers at so many levels have advocated for the use of authentic questions in the classroom, because authentic questioning has proven to assist in creating more engaged and more autonomous readers and thinkers, helping students to meet higher standards with repeated opportunities for practice.

## Types of Authentic Questions

I am not arguing that teachers should never ask text-dependent questions. Indeed, Hillocks & Ludlow’s (1984) taxonomy of literary question types begins with three types of text-dependent questions; they argue, however, that although teachers of literature should begin discussions with text-dependent questions, they must proceed to ask more authentic questions. Hillocks and Ludlow present several different kinds of higher-order, essential questions, but space restrictions allow me to focus on only two: author’s generalization questions and structural generalization questions.

### Author’s Generalization Questions

Drawing upon Hillocks and Ludlow (1984), White (1993) defines an author’s generalization question as a question that “focuses students’ attention upon a message in the text that is implied by the author and intended for the reader and the extra-textual world” (p. 32). Author’s generalization questions will not have explicit answers found in the text, but the text is used as evidence to

infer what the author might be saying about certain themes or topics.

For example, an author's generalization question for *A Wrinkle in Time* could be, "What do you think the author might be trying to tell us about the power of intelligence?" This question would prompt students' discussion of Meg's battle between emotions and logic, Charles Wallace's intelligence that seems to deter his decision-making, and the differences in intelligence between the three supernatural guides. The text would act as a foundation for all responses, and discussion would extend beyond the world of the text by considering authorial intentions.

Hillocks and Ludlow (1984) argue that author's generalization questions push students outside of the world of the text (p. 12) to think about the generalizations the author may be making about the "nature of the human condition" (p. 11). In the upper-elementary classroom, teachers may be wary of promoting such complex conversations, but the reality is that students even as young as third grade have already experienced themes such as love, hate, jealousy, peace, and racism in their own lives and in the literature they have read. We are underestimating students' abilities by not allowing them to participate in such "profound" discussions. The authors of the Common Core are pushing for higher expectations in America's schools, and these inferential questions are a way to reach that goal.

### Structural Generalization Questions

At the top of Hillocks and Ludlow's (1984) taxonomy are structural generalization questions, which focus on "authorial choices regarding certain aspects of a story's structure and require explanations of the functions of those aspects" (White, 1993, p. 33). Students start learning about tone, word choice, organization, plot, and characters at a young age, and a structural generalization question asks students to consider how the author's decisions about structure influence the story itself. Hillocks and Ludlow (1984) explain that these questions ask students to think not only about the structure of the work itself but also what they know about all literary texts (p. 13).

For example, a structural generalization question for *A Wrinkle in Time* could be, "Why do you think the author chose to make Meg older than Charles Wallace instead of making Meg the younger sibling?" This question requires students to look deeply at the characterization and development of both Meg and Charles Wallace and the relationship between the two. Once again, such discussions push students to look closely at the text and use their knowledge of textual

structures to form an opinion about how structure influences literature.

In the case of this question, students are considering how characterization and character relationships influence the story as a whole. This type of discussion and learning contextualizes instruction about story structure. Additionally, this type of question supports another Common Core idea, which is using reading to improve students' writing; it requires students to think about and like authors. If students are recognizing and interpreting structure in their discussions surrounding literature, they will surely have more background knowledge to apply to their own writing structures.

## Achieve the Core and Text-Dependency

As a student, I have always found that teachers who ask lots of text-dependent, one-right-answer questions aren't likely to stimulate much discussion. Now, as a future teacher who will undergo many hours of professional development, I've become familiar with the kinds of research discussed above: evidently, engaged (and engaging) classroom discourse about literary texts depends on asking authentic questions that are not exclusively text-dependent. And yet, the professional development materials surrounding the CCSS are actually hostile to the kinds of questions that have proven to engage students and to enhance understanding.

The authors of the CCSS do not leave teachers wondering how to create text-dependent questions and implement them into the ELA classroom. On the Achieve the Core website, they explain that text-dependent questions work to promote comprehension by exploring "specific words, details, and arguments" and later move on to view the text as a whole, all the while paying close attention to academic vocabulary (Achieve the Core, n.d.-c, p. 4). In short, a text-dependent question can be answered by solely using the text after a close reading of the words on the page; indeed, the website insists that questions that do not focus solely on the text are erroneous.

The website also includes model lessons that teachers can use in their own classrooms. One of the lessons they hold up as having excellent text-dependent questions is a third-grade lesson on *Because of Winn-Dixie*. This award-winning book by Kate DiCamillo follows the story of Opal, a young girl who lost her mother at a young age, and Winn-Dixie, the dog that she finds and adopts at the local Winn-Dixie store. Their friendship heals pieces of Opal's past, and Winn-Dixie makes quite an impact on the community as a whole. The



lesson that I analyzed focuses on chapter six. In this chapter, Winn-Dixie and Opal visit the town's library, initially scaring Miss Franny (the librarian), but eventually forming a friendship with her as they tell each other stories.

Achieve the Core's lesson on chapter six of *Winn-Dixie* follows the author's stringent focus on text-dependent questions. When it comes time for discussion, students discuss the answers to text-dependent questions with the whole group. Sample text-dependent questions (Q) and answers (A) are given. A few are listed here:

- (Q1) Why was Miss Franny so scared by Winn-Dixie? Why was she "acting all embarrassed"?
- (A1) Miss Franny thought Winn-Dixie was a bear. When she realized he was a dog, she was embarrassed because she thought Opal would think she was a "silly old lady, mistaking a dog for a bear."
- (Q5) Earlier in the story, Opal says that Winn-Dixie "has a large heart, too." What does Winn-Dixie do to show that he has a "large heart"?
- (A5) Students should see that Winn-Dixie was responding to Opal and Miss Franny feeling sad when he looked between them and showed Miss Franny his teeth. (n.d.-a, p. 7)

These text-dependent questions meet the requirements set in the "Checklist for Evaluating Question Quality" by Achieve the Core (n.d.-b) because answers can be found by solely using textual evidence and are answerable without reference to background knowledge.

The lesson plan itself also includes three non-text dependent questions that the authors warn teachers not to use such as, "Was there ever a time where an animal scared you?" (Achieve the Core, n.d.-a, p. 8) and what they refer to as "text-dependent but trivial questions" such as, "What did Miss Franny say when Amanda asked if dogs were allowed in the library?" (Achieve the Core, n.d.-a, p. 9). The authors of the lesson do not give an explanation as to why this question is trivial. One could even argue that their question about how Winn-Dixie shows that he has a large heart is just as trivial. Regardless, the lesson plan gives teachers specific instructions (and restrictions) for how to fill two days on literary instruction that meets the standards and the instructional strategies set out by the authors of the CCSS.

Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran (2003) remind teachers that in their study, "The approaches that contributed most to student performance on the complex literacy tasks that were administered were those that used discussion to develop a comprehensive understanding, encouraging

exploration and multiple perspectives rather than focusing on correct interpretations and predetermined conclusions" (p. 722). These authors make it clear that the benefits of discussion are only reaped if the discussion is authentic. The students whom they saw growing in comprehension and exploring viewpoints were those who were exposed to open dialogue and inquiry, not students sitting in a room hunting for prespecified, correct answers. Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2003) might disagree with the fact that the authors of this lesson labeled two days of searching for text-dependent answers as "discussion."

## Authentic Questions for *Because of Winn-Dixie*

It is evident that text-dependent questions are insufficient for classroom use. Such questions, exemplified in the model lesson on *Winn-Dixie*, would limit students' thinking, cause teacher-student dependency, and degrade students' motivation. Instead, Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) and many other researchers urge teachers to consider using a dialogic approach to teaching literature, including authentic questions such as structural generalization questions and author's generalization questions, as they are more likely to maximize students' learning and growth.

The non-text-dependent questions listed in the lesson exemplar are trivial and would surely not benefit students' learning, but other, well-considered authentic questions could. Appropriate, authentic questions require time and preparation, and they can (and should) focus on the text. These are sample questions that a teacher could use for the same chapter that was used in the Achieve the Core lesson exemplar followed by potential student responses.

### Author's Generalization Questions

- (Q) What do you think the author might be trying to tell us about unusual friendships?
- (A1) Maybe first impressions aren't everything. At first I thought it was weird that Opal was talking to the old librarian. I thought she needed kid friends. And Miss Franny didn't like Opal at first because she was scared of Winn-Dixie and thought it was another bear. But then once they started to talk and get to know each other, they realized they had a lot in common and could be good friends. They probably didn't think they would be friends because they are a kid and an old librarian, but by the end of the chapter, you could tell they changed their minds.

- (A2) I guess maybe the author is showing us that what's unusual for one person might be good for another person. Like normally kids aren't friends with old people unless it's their grandma. So Amanda and other kids at school might think that Opal's new friend is weird, but we know that Miss Franny is a good friend to Opal. I guess we don't really know what's unusual because we don't know what those people need. Opal needed a friend to listen to her and to talk to her, and Miss Franny did that for her!
- (Q) What do you think the author might be trying to tell us about the power of literature?
- (A1) I think what Miss Franny says about how she was so focused on her book that she didn't notice the bear coming into the library shows how literature can really take over. Like, Miss Franny didn't even see the bear! Literature sucks you in.
- (A2) It could also be that stories help us to forget sad things. When the story makes you focus so much, you aren't thinking about the other things going on in your life, and that's one reason Opal likes stories. She likes to escape.

These author's generalization questions cover two of the themes in *Because of Winn-Dixie* that are evident in chapter six. Students can use the new evidence from chapter six and previous information from chapters one to five to think critically about what the author is saying about the larger scope of humanity through the characters and events in her book. These questions would require textual evidence, but they would additionally allow students to use previously acquired knowledge (from other experiences or other pieces of literature) to answer the questions.

Discussion on unusual friendships would cover the same information that the authors of the exemplar lesson were hitting on in question five (listed previously), but the open-ended nature of the authentic question allows for student authority and multiple interpretations and increases student engagement.

#### Structural Generalization Questions

- (Q) Why do you think the author chose to have Miss Franny and Opal's first encounter together start with a story instead of having them bake cookies or watch a movie?
- (A1) My mom tells me that first impressions are important. First impressions are the feelings you get about a person the first time you meet them. I think that when people are just sitting and talking, they get

a better chance to figure out their first impressions. If you are watching a movie, you don't really get to know each other. In this chapter, I know how Opal feels about Miss Franny because they have a long time to get to know each other and become friends.

- (A2) I think it might be because it shows how the characters are similar. Right away, I know that Miss Franny and Opal are both story tellers and like to share about their past. Also, it might make Opal happy to have a friend who tells stories since her dad doesn't like to tell stories about her mom.
- (Q) Why do you think the author chose to end this uplifting chapter with the entrance of Opal's enemy, Amanda Wilkinson instead of leaving it on a happy note?
- (A1) It reminded me that even when good things happen, there are always bad things in the world. When Opal met Miss Franny, that was a positive thing, but Amanda coming in reminded me that Opal still has a hard life and the story isn't over. She still has to go through some hard stuff.
- (A2) I think it showed the difference between Amanda, Opal's enemy, and Miss Franny, Opal's new friend. We don't know a lot about Miss Franny yet, but I already know that they are very different. Miss Franny is kind, patient, and funny. Amanda is snobby and rude. They are opposite characters.

These structural generalization questions ask students to think about character relationships and the sequence of plot events and how the structures created by the author influence the story as a whole. Students cannot answer these questions without first understanding the content of the chapter (and the chapters before) or without knowledge of text structures in general.

Instead of focusing on the superficial knowledge of Miss Franny thinking Winn-Dixie was a bear, this first structural generalization question asks why the author chose to have Miss Franny and Opal spend their first day together sharing a story instead of another event like watching a movie or baking cookies. The ensuing discussion would bring out more textual evidence and require the students to think deeply about the characters and how humans relate in general.

I am not arguing that creating and implementing authentic questions are easy, uncomplicated tasks (see, for example, White, 1993); nor am I saying that author's generalization and structural generalization questions are the only appropriate questions to ask. Nor am I suggesting that teachers should

never ask text-dependent questions. It seems to me that a teacher could begin discussion of chapter six of *Because of Winn-Dixie* with a few text-dependent questions in order to gauge students' basic comprehension of the text, but the teacher would not stop there since the text-dependent questions are simply not sufficient enough for a challenging ELA lesson. In keeping with Hillocks & Ludlow's (1984) taxonomy, after beginning with some text-dependent questions, the teacher would move on to authentic, open-ended questions such as those listed above after ensuring comprehension through text-dependent questions.

If the teacher follows this approach, then he/she would be enacting the dialogic classroom model suggested by the research reported earlier in this article. The students in his/her classroom would be treated "seriously as thinkers" (Nystrand, 1991, p. 147), they would be empowered "to deal with interpretive difficulty on their own" (Hynds, 1991, p. 119), they would be highly engaged due to the inquiry and uncertainty presented in the questions (Johnston, 2012, p. 52), and they would be able to "negotiate and construct meaning through interaction between their background knowledge and the text" (Ghaith & Madi, 2008, p. 14). This would help any student in becoming a critical thinker and a confident, lifelong reader. The dialogue and authentic questions presented in this alternative approach set high expectations for students. Thinking, participation, engagement, and success would infiltrate the classroom, and the well-intentioned goals set by the authors of the CCSS would become reachable.

## Authentic Questions in My Future Classroom

My dreams of my future classroom still include a full library and student work hung on the walls, but as a result of the professional development I've been exploring and experiencing, I now also think about literary discussions—the questions that I will ask as a teacher during English language arts. While I cannot speak as a teacher yet, I can speak as a lover of reading and as a student of literature; as I've witnessed the effects of various kinds of teacher questioning and read the research about the effects of test questions on students, I have become convinced that the professional development materials put out by the authors of the CCSS are inadequate representations of the type of questions that teachers need to employ in order to create a cognitively-challenging and personally-engaging ELA classroom. I urge teachers to look further into this research and choose their own professional development materials carefully in order to create the best learning environment possible for their students.

## References

- Achieve the Core. (n.d.-a). *Because of Winn-Dixie: Grade 3*. Retrieved from <http://achievethecore>
- Achieve the Core. (n.d.-b) *Checklist for evaluating question quality*. Retrieved from [achievethecore.org](http://achievethecore.org)
- Achieve the Core. (n.d.-c) *Principles and purposes*. Retrieved from <http://achievethecore.org>
- Alder, M., Rougle, E., Kaiser, E., and Caughlan, S. (2003). Closing the gap between concept and practice: Toward more dialogic discussion in the language arts classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 47(4), 312-322.
- Applebee, A. N., Langer, J. A., Nystrand, M., and Gamoran, A. (2003). Discussion-based approaches to developing understanding: Classroom instruction and student performance in middle and high school English. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(3), 685-730.
- Aukerman, M. (2008). In praise of wiggle room: Locating comprehension in unlikely places. *Language Arts*, 86(1), 52-60.
- Chinn, C. A., Anderson, R. C., & Waggoner, M. A. (2001). Patterns of discourse in two kinds of literature discussion. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36(4), 378-411.
- Coleman, D. & Pimentel, S. (2012). *Revised publishers' criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and literacy, grades 3–12*. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org>
- Dewey, J. (1916/1944). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Dickson, V. (2005). The nature of student and teacher discourse in an elementary classroom. *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, 7(1-2), 109-122.
- Ghaith, G. M., and Madi, M. S. (2008). Reader response versus new criticism: Effects on orientations to literary reading. *TESL Reporter*, 41(2), 14-26.
- Hillocks, G., & Ludlow, L. H. (1984). A taxonomy of skills in reading and interpreting fiction. *American Educational Research Association*, 21(1), 7-24.
- Hynds, S. (1991). Questions of difficulty in literary reading. In Alan C. Purves (Ed.), *The idea of difficulty in literature* (117-139). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.



- Johnston, P. H. (2012). *Opening minds: Using language to change lives*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Many, J. E., & Wiseman, D. L. (1992). The effects of teaching approach on third-grade students' response to literature. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 24(3), 265-287.
- Marshall, J. D., Smagorinsky, P., and Smith, M. W. (1995). *The language of interpretation: Patterns of discourse in discussion of literature*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Nichols, M. (2006). *Comprehension through conversation: The power of purposeful talk in the reading workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Nystrand, M. (1991). Making it hard: Curriculum and instruction as factors in the difficulty of literature. In Alan C. Purves (Ed.), *The idea of difficulty in literature* (141-156). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Nystrand, M., and Gamoran, A. (1991). Instructional discourse, student engagement, and literature achievement. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 25(3), 261-290.
- White, B. (1993). Pulling students toward meaning or making meaning with students: Asking authentic questions in the literature classroom. *Language Arts Journal of Michigan* 9(1), 28-40.
- White, B. (2015). John Dewey, the Common Core, and the Teaching of English. *English Education*, 48(1), 11-40.

**Brianne Stephens** is an undergraduate student at Grand Valley State University. She is studying elementary education with an emphasis in English language arts.

Thank God for Ozzie Smith

When Dad chastised my brother & me for watching TV  
on those gorgeous summer Saturdays,  
I couldn't disagree, but  
baseball beckoned  
and any chance to watch our Tigers  
or *This Week in Baseball*  
was too much to pass up.  
It added up, those hours of  
Willie Stargell homers, Pete Rose dives, Nolan Ryan  
no-hitters, and  
Ozzie Smith back flips. It filled our mental record, and  
  
it paid off.

When my two-year-old son ran  
too hastily  
to the top of the stairs and  
tumbled head-first,  
I laid out like Ozzie—  
a dive so true I  
paused  
horizontal to the floor just long enough to realize I  
was horizontal to the floor  
with outstretched arms, and  
I caught his right ankle  
and held my grasp.

Ozzie, at that point, would pop to his feet  
& zip a bullet to first or flip a popcorn  
kernel into the mouth of the second baseman's glove  
for a double play,  
but I pulled in my catch,  
held this bawling boy in the acreage of my palm,  
rubbed his head,  
and muttered love, love, love.

The inning over, I set him down to  
toddle off with tentative steps,  
and my heart & soul  
did a standing back flip in celebration  
of the golden magic of perfect movement,  
a thank you  
to grace.

—Mitchell Nobis



# Be Amazing

with English at NMU

A vibrant community of leaders, learners, teachers and writers.

## Undergraduate Programs

English > English Graduate Bound >  
Secondary Education > Writing

## Master of Arts - English

literature > pedagogy > theatre > writing

## Master of Fine Arts - Creative Writing

creative nonfiction > fiction > poetry

Upper Peninsula Writing Project

Thirty-seven full-time professors

# Northern Michigan University

College of Arts and Sciences > Dean Michael Broadway

In beautiful Marquette, Michigan > [nmu.edu/English](http://nmu.edu/English)

an equal opportunity institution