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How can classroom practices support the development of students' voices, particularly Black student's voices in writing?

Kadiata Diallo , '21

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Abstract

Voice is power in and outside of the classroom. It is to the detriment of students of color that it has been so understudied. Voice is typically introduced to students in an English Language Arts (ELA) classroom as a set of rules and definitions. Choice, vocabulary, tone, and rhetorical devices are all elements of writing that are cited as crucial in cultivating one's voice as a writer. However, discussions of voice often ignore contextual influences (e.g., race, class, gender) , and by extension what is at stake for students learning how to articulate themselves, especially students of color. To the extent that there is available information, this thesis explores Black youth's experiences with voice in the classroom. In my experience and that of those with whom I have discussed it, these students are not introduced to their voice until the college level, from which time they can begin developing it more fully. I argue for supporting voice in writing earlier in students' development as writers, namely middle school. Supported by a literature review connecting isolated theories on voice, identity, interest, belongingness, and writing principles, this thesis proposes ways in which ELA educators can begin voice development in their writing classrooms. Voice as a writer's unique form of expression as informed by their grammatical and rhetorical choices, but also by the context under which they are supported to learn how to write. With this definition of voice in mind, I propose practices that range from the writing process to the classroom environment.

Opening

When asked the question, "what is voice?", most people have different answers. Voice is one of those words that everyone uses and understands when used, but no one seems to be able to define easily. In talking to classmates and friends, I found that while we all understood voice as crucial to our experience as writers, we struggled to give shape to the concept. Writing research defines voice as the writer's perspective as present in writing. In pedagogy, voice is often considered through reading (e.g., a certain character's voice). When voice is included in writing pedagogy, voice is often seen as a set of rhetorical choices about words, sentences, structure, and tone. When I asked my college friends how they defined voice, they used words such as "influence," "impact," and "thoughts." These words stray far from pedagogical definitions of voice which place sole emphasis on the mechanics of writing. In fact, many of the people I spoke with found these very mechanics that define voice stifling. They saw voice as something they have and is unique to them that they must leave behind to write in an academic setting. These thoughts held especially true for my friends of color. It may be difficult for people of color to talk about voice without talking about silence. My peers express anxiety around writing, saying that the process makes them feel vulnerable and exposed. These anxieties may be based in conceptions of voice that assert everyone has to find their single unchanging "authentic" or "real" voice. Yet, they also held onto their voice as a valuable part of themselves. College is when they discovered the value of their voice as a powerful tool for advocacy, and with this discovery came feelings of regret that they had not had this understanding of their power earlier. Like my friends, I'd only begun learning about voice, my voice, and histories of silence in college. This was not soon enough, as it took me a couple of semesters to truly develop my voice and use it to its full potential.

As a student interested in English Literature, it became clear to me through the years that writing was a useful space for constructing and experimenting with voice. Writing has become an essential part of modern life. Every day we use writing to communicate, whether through email, or messaging, or blogging. Those who cannot write, or cannot write well, are at a loss when it comes to written social interactions. For these reasons developing writing skills allows us to use our voice, to advocate for ourselves and for others. The protests during summer of 2020, demonstrated the power of voice and the need for advocacy. When I looked to see how students were being taught voice, I found little on the social implications of developing a voice. All materials or lessons I found on voice placed emphasis on grammar and rhetoric (e.g., use shorter sentences to sound more dynamic). The results were surface level to say the least and ignored the sociocultural implications of whose voice was heard, amplified, or silenced. Theory on voice itself was rich, but I found few overlap between theory and classroom practice. I found that taking voice to practice meant making connections that exist but are not made between theory and practice. All this to say, I wrote this thesis to enter a conversation about deepening students' understanding of voice in writing at an earlier age.

Literature Review

VOICE

In the literature, voice is found, given, and taken, yet it is not consistently defined. In the following section, I will briefly outline the history behind defining voice as well as the concept of silence in order to discuss the power dynamics related to voice. From there I will attempt to define the concept myself. The history of voice construction is wrought with disagreements

about what it really means and whether it matters in writing at all. With all definitions of voice, we find that it is always social and even political. I find that **voice is a writer's unique form of expression as informed by their grammatical and rhetorical choices, but also by the context under which they are supported to learn how to write.**

Defining Voice

Peter Elbow (2007) wrote that "this conflict about voice in our field echoes a much older conflict about the self in language". Various perspectives on the self in language result in different goals for writing and ideas about what good writing looks like. Scholars have tended to approach voice from two points: (1) voice is a powerful tool that reflects self and should be expressed in writing, or (2) voice is a constructed concept not inherently reflective of the self as it is socially informed and should not be valued over all else in writing. On the one hand are the humanists and those who saw voice as an "individual accomplishment," and on the other are postmodernists and those who saw voice as a "social/cultural accompaniment" (Sperling and Appleman 2011).

The first interpretation of voice, as a powerful tool that reflects self and should be expressed in writing, is a humanist one. With a focus on individualism and human agency, this interpretation "of ownership, in which voice is a good to possess and use - one can find and then have a voice that is one's own, and one can put that voice into one's writing" (Sperling and Appleman 2011). Here the self and the voice are both stable and interchangeable. From this perspective, the individual's voice reflects the self and is thus a direct representation of their sociocultural context (Sperling and Appleman 2011). A humanist interpretation of voice acknowledges that it is almost impossible to avoid voice especially in a writing classroom. Thus, voice as a concept is present and influential (see Elbow 2007). In writing, one's voice is framed

as carrying meaning in a way that a reader can find relatable. Linguistically, the individual's voice and the choices they make when translating it to writing (e.g., stresses, punctuation, syntax) give their writing an almost aural quality that the reader can identify with a person (Sperling and Appleman 2011). Alternatively, voice as an individual is valuable to the writer in that it makes them more comfortable when writing. Inviting a student to approach writing with their own voice or how they would "normally say it" allows them to enjoy writing as they are not grappling with the negative feelings associated with conforming to a certain style of writing (Elbow 2007).

The postmodern view of voice is one that asserts voice as constructed by the writer and shaped by social and cultural influences as well as context. An individual's voice is the reappropriation of voices from various social interactions and cultural history (Sperling and Appleman 2017; Bakhtin 1981). Additionally, instead of one true voice, writers use multiple voices depending on their situation with which voice they use being dictated by how they've learned it to be used in that context. If one's voice is simply a manifestation of themselves in writing, an undeserved focus is placed on sincerity as the goal and marker of good writing. Here we come to what Ian Barnard (2014) calls "the elusivity" of the authentic or natural voice.

The authentic voice is conceptualized as found within a writer. This conception of voice perpetuates the myth of the fixed unchanging voice (Barnard 2014; Klaus 2010). Regarding student composition, these ideas can be a disadvantage to student writers. Instead of seeing their voice as adaptable and developing, they may be discouraged if told their writing needs a stronger voice. Strongly associating the voice with the self, students may reject revision or perceive it as a criticism of themselves. Further, emphasis on authenticity in composition also unfairly positions non-academic writing as more authentic, and thus more valuable, writing than academic writing

(Barnard). Students learn to associate academic closed form writing not real or natural and feel uncomfortable or resistant to academic writing. Instead, Barnard suggests voice, in the postmodern sense, is always already present and "waiting to be discovered, let loose, and refined" and it exists in multiple forms all in flux. If a student sees their "academic" and "non-academic" voices both as developing and in flux, it may be easier for them to slip in and out of their different, but equally valuable voices.

As Elbow (2007) suggests, both sides of the great voice debate, voice as authentic and voice as constructed, have a vested interest in the power associated with voice--who has it and who does not. The group that values voice uplifts its ability to give students agency and influence in their writing. The postmodernists, however, see authenticity as an elitist concept that fails when we question whose voice is deemed authentic and whose is not. With obscure rules about what is authentic, or who labels writing authentic, it is easier to claim certain voices are more inauthentic than others (Barnard 2014). A consolidation of the two camps gives a definition of voice that is both constructed giving students access to it as it is teachable yet gives value to the authorship that comes with humanist ideas of voice which gives legitimacy to student writing. An access and legitimacy that is crucial for marginalized voices.

Silence and the Black Voice

It is difficult to talk about voice without talking about silence. Who is heard and who is not heard in the classroom? In discussing silence, I aim to attend to marginalized voices, particularly the Black voice, how they've been silenced and how they managed to amplify themselves despite all odds. By silence, I mean social structures that oppress a group of people through strategic implementations (e.g., banning enslaved peoples from learning how to read and write). To provide example, I will consider studies of young Black boys and girls in the works of

David Kirkland and Gholnecsar E. Muhammad and Marcelle Haddix respectively. Kirkland explores the historical silencing of Black people in the United States, writing specifically about ways in which Black boys in his study found ways to expand their literacies outside of the classroom. Kirkland redefines silence as an empowering tool for Black boys to process their search for voice. Muhammad and Haddix focus on Black girls and how valuable it might be to center their literacies in English classrooms. With a focus on digital literacies, Muhammad and Haddix outline the ways in which Black girls' literacies, multiple and contextualized, can be a helpful framework for text choice.

Kirkland's *Search Past Silence: The Literacy of Young Black Men* (2013) looks closely at the literacy of young Black boys. Kirkland follows several young men as they move through school, home, and many other social scenes. He tracks them as they use their multiple voices and literacies in these different locales. Grounding his study of literacy in sociocultural contexts, Kirkland clearly outlines the importance of voice as counteractive to silence. From here our definition of voice can move beyond grammatical syntax and rhetoric. Kirkland writes:

> The soul of a people lives in that people's voice and is streamed in the continuous sounds that run deep like rivers through their lineage. When voice evaporates, its people begin to fade away, but not in a gradual or even sudden sense. A certain condensation proceeds, as the people's history and story, narratives of self, get tangled in the air, fused with the overbearing and dominant voices of others, only to suffer a hegemonic mutation muffled in clouds and then ultimately lost forever. (2013)

For marginalized peoples, here Black and Brown students specifically, their identity is shrouded in harmful stereotypes and misunderstanding. Black and Brown students walk into a classroom

with their abilities always already assumed to be lacking, and are often not given enough, if any, support. The English classroom especially can be harmful as there is a standard for language despite the existence of multiple linguistic dialects. The expectation of standard English in classrooms results in the silencing of voices that need to be raised instead. As Kirkland suggests: "stereotypes rely on silence". Kirkland defines voice as an expression of humanity, and so for him anything including laughter and even silence is voice if it conveys the humanity of the subject. This is useful for defining voice in a sociocultural context because it shows the ways in which silenced groups have managed to voice themselves into existence. By equating voice with humanity, as voice is what enables students to, literally, rewrite their own narratives.

Focusing, alternatively, on the literacies of Black girls, Muhammed and Haddix (2016) assert that centering Black girls in English classrooms is beneficial to all students. Black girls, doubly marginalized on both racial and gender fronts, want representations of themselves and space for identity exploration in school reading and writing. Black girls use writing as a meaning making, transformative process of resistance through writing about social issues (Muhammed and Haddix 2016). Communal spaces, Muhammed and Haddix suggest digital literacy programs, are helpful spaces for Black girls developing collaborative literacy. Outlining Black girls' literacies as "(1) multiple (2) tied to identity, (3) historical (4) collaborative (5) intellectual [and] (6) political/critical," Muhammed and Haddix suggest these literacies should be used as the basis for texts chosen for English classrooms. They also push English instructors to be both informed about issues faced by Black girls and use Black feminist pedagogical practice in their classrooms (Muhammed and Haddix 2016). Ultimately, Muhammed and Haddix argue that using these texts along with an informed use of Black feminist practice results in a study of literature that centers humanity is beneficial for all students.

Kirkland's work is enlightening in terms of how the young Black boy faces and uses silence and wields multiple literacies. Muhammed and Haddix's work draws similar implications about Black girls' literacies and extends Kirkland's by suggesting that we must center them in English education for the sake of all students. What is missing from the written account of each is the critical application to practice. That is to say, they may be putting these theories to practice, but I've not found much written account of this. Haddix (2018) does provide an account of implications for practice from her writing workshop which I will discuss in the following section. What the voice literature has done is highlight how voice encompasses identity and cultural belonging. I wonder what this role of voice means for classroom practice. Following an overview of how descriptions of how writing might be effectively taught, and future directions identified for writing instruction, I will draw from existing discussions to identify factors crucial to the development of voice in writing.

TEACHING WRITING AND VOICE

Before outlining practices[1] informed by the theory for teaching voice in writing, I review several works that reflect current thinking about writing pedagogy, as they offer information about writing practices and/or principles. I chose these specific texts because of how important they are to the field of writing research, how relevant they are to voice in writing specifically, and they vary in years published giving me a better look at what practices changed and what did not.

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[1] The practices described go beyond the classroom and include writing workshops because often these spaces have greater creative opportunity to experiment with non-traditional practices.

Two seminal works provide a basis for what we currently think of when we describe writing pedagogy: Flower and Hayes (1981) described the cognitive process theory of writing, and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) focused on the psychology of the writing process. Flower and Hayes provided a model for writing composition as a cognitive process on the basis that composition is a set of goal-oriented thinking. Their model consists of three groups of processes with subcategories among them: the task environment (i.e., the assignment), the writer's pre-existing knowledge of the topic, their audience and writing, and the writing process itself. The writing process consists of three processes in order of planning, translation, and reviewing. The language used to label these processes is important as it frames writing as a translation of the ideas formed and goals set by the writer during the planning process. Once the writer has translated their ideas into written language, they can then review their writing by evaluating and revising. This framework changes the way we view writing from ambiguous stages to a set of actions, making it easier to teach. Bereiter and Scardamalia make similar assertions about writing as a cognitive, knowledge transforming process. The framework of knowledge transformation, as opposed to knowledge telling, is goal-oriented and thus results in more intentional writing. Bereiter and Scardamalia provide instructional implications to their theory and suggest educators teach their students about the writing process, demonstrate the thinking processes behind writing planning, and provide scaffolding to support challenging writing. They also suggest that educators make writing a meaningful process by taking personal significance into consideration when producing assignments.

More recent considerations of writing pedagogy have highlighted the role of voice. For example, in "Black Voices Matter," Shenika Hankerson (2017) advocates for the power of voice and the need for more theorizing about the topic. Importantly, Hankerson emphasizes the value

of conversations about voice in writing classrooms. Looking specifically at Black students and African American Language, Hankerson promotes a focus on voice linguistically, historically, and subjectively. She provides a three-week lesson plan "in honor of a culturally sustaining pedagogy [that] centers the rich literate practices of culturally and linguistically diverse students," (Hankerson 2017). While Hankerson's work is centered around a college course, the purposes she outlines for each assignment in her lesson plan are valuable and applicable. If our aim is to bring voice to Black students sooner, using principles that guide a college course with age-appropriate material may be useful. Three key takeaways from Hankerson's lesson plan are the inclusion of texts about voice as a concept, providing students with resources to continue learning about voice, and encouraging students to bring their voices into the classroom.

Similarly, Marcelle Haddix (2018) demonstrates cultural relevance and Xu et al.'s concept of multiple standpoints in her essay on her work with the Writing Our Lives program. Writing Our Lives is a program that uplifts and supports radical youth literacy which Haddix defines as "ways of knowing, doing, writing, and speaking by youth who are ready to change the world,". Born out of a community need for spaces outside of the classroom for students to feel comfortable practicing their writing in any form they wish, the writing workshops garnered great interest from Black students. There is an urgent desire for spaces like these. In implementing the successful elements of Writing Our Lives, Haddix urges educators to redefine writing so that it includes everyday writing practices and writing relevant to the students' communities. Further, she provides five principles to implement in writing programs: "[1] Teachers must be writers. [2] Students must see themselves as writers. [3] Teachers must cultivate spaces for students to write. [4] Students must have opportunities to write in multiple ways, for multiple purposes, and in

multiple genres. [5] Teachers must honor and respect youth-led and youth-centered writing

practices." (Haddix 2018).

In "Changing How Writing is Taught," Steve Graham (2019) covers major findings about

how writing is taught from 28 studies ranging various countries and grades. The studies found

that some classrooms have exemplary writing instruction, but most are inadequate. In classrooms

with exemplary writing instruction, teachers allotted significant time to writing as well as the use

of evidence-based instructional practices (e.g., peer conferencing, Graham 2019; e.g., Cutler &

Graham, 2008; Dockrell, Marshall, & Wyse, 2016; Hsiang & Graham, 2016). In classrooms with

inadequate writing practices, however, little time was allotted to writing, students wrote

compositions, as opposed to short responses, infrequently, there was insufficient use of writing

specific instructional practice, and there was an absence of digital writing tools (Graham 2019).

While Graham does not mention voice specifically, he does mention that studies found

persuasive writing and expository writing to be neglected in writing instruction. These two forms

of writing can be important sites for voice development. He suggested that writing is often

neglected in the classroom and pointed out that this is incongruous given the increasing need for

writing skills in society. Graham suggests increased time on writing and increased knowledge

about writing on the part of teachers and administrators. He argues that increasing knowledge

about why writing is important, how it develops, and how to teach it effectively is crucial to

classrooms and school systems devoting more time to writing. In order to change how writing is

taught for the better, Graham is suggesting the centering of writing through professional

development (e.g. taking time to provide ongoing, intensive professional development, use the

time to "improve writing instruction within and across grades," "Use technological tools to

support PD, such as podcasts, blogs, or digital spaces where teachers or principals can share their

successes and seek assistance, Collect data on whether the instructional practices presented in PD achieve the intended effects; readjust and modify as needed"; Graham 2019).

The studies I've highlighted demonstrate the importance of goal-oriented writing, teaching about the writing process, personal significance of writing, teaching about voice as a concept, encouraging students' voice development, taking time for writing, and understanding that change in writing instruction may go beyond the classroom. In the following section, I will outline three ideas to keep in mind when developing writing practices for the classroom.

CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Having reviewed the literature and worked to define voice and situate its importance within the classroom, I wondered about the practices instructors might adopt in the effort to teach voice. Classroom practice is the process by which multiple elements within a classroom system interact to result in learning. These are the tangible actions by instructors, from course material selection to interactions with students, that dictate the classroom environment. With the previously reviewed literature and examples of effective writing instruction in mind, I argue for three classroom elements crucial to helping Black students understand and effectively use voice in their writing. First, cultivating a sense of belonging through culturally relevant instruction is a necessary foundation to all learning and particularly learning about voice. Second, the active and intentional development of interest for writing which will result in the final element, the cultivation of a sense of belonging that encourages students to include their identities in and learn to identify as writers.

Identity and Adolescence

Identity is defined as an individual's self-representation in relation to groups that surround them (Renninger 2009). Identity is not singular. That is to say that an individual can identify with multiple groups and domains (Berry and Candis 2013). For this literature review, we will consider students' identities as adolescents, writers, as well as their cultural identities.

Erikson maps identity along with age as a series of crises with adolescence being a time where the individual struggles between the consolidation of their identity and role confusion. In middle and high school, adolescents are increasingly expected to figure out who they are and use that knowledge to make daily decisions. In this struggle, adolescents attempt to distinguish themselves from those around them, while also seeking connection and belonging (Toshalis and Nakkula 2006). Middle school, just as they are entering adolescence, is when students begin to position their self-representations in relation to those around them (Renninger 2009). For this reason, Middle school classrooms are pivotal spaces for identity formation and concepts of voice at that age would be beneficial. I am interested in content at the middle school level as it is a critical junction for identity development.

Along with being students, adolescents construct their cultural identity, or the interplay between their race, class, ethnicity, language, and consequent values, through processes of trial and error (Berry and Candis 2013). As they spend most of their day in school, students bring and continue to construct their identities in the classroom. Adolescence itself is a social construct; adolescents test out their ideas about the world and ask questions about who they are or who they should be, and receive answers from figures of authority (i.e., parents, teachers) (Groenke et al 2015; Toshalis and Nakkula 2006). These answers, whether the adolescence accepts them or not, generally reinforce social norms and hierarchies of power. For students at the intersection of

certain identities, namely Black students, adolescence does not look the same as it does for their White counterparts. Answering the question of "Who is the adolescent?" Groenke et al. assert that the same behaviors that mark a young white male adolescent (i.e., rebelliousness and sexual curiosity) serve to criminalize and hypersexualize young Black people. Some students have the privilege of adolescence and others do not. To disrupt these ideas about Black adolescents, Groenke et al. suggest the introduction of Young Adult Literature written by Black youth. Once again, we find the solution to be students wielding their voice in an effort for self-authorship.

Students' development of identities as writers corresponds with their interest development for the subject. Based on which phase of interest development students are in, students will approach writing and feedback differently. Renninger (2009) makes the following two connections between interest and identity formation for young writers: "1. With age, those in earlier phases of interest development are likely to be increasingly challenged by social comparison; their readiness to learn may be additionally complex if the content on which they are working also requires them to revise existing understanding [and] 2. Those in later phases of interest development may be less subject to the vulnerabilities of self-representation when participating in the tasks and activities of the domain than are their peers in earlier phases of interest development because they already identify with the domain." Thus, we know that interest development is critical to supporting students identify as writers. In the following section, I will outline the phases of interest development and how identification with writing maps onto these phases.

Interest

Hidi and Renninger (2016) conceptualize interest as having two components: "(1) the psychological state of someone while engaging with content and (2) the cognitive and affective

motivational predisposition to re-engage with that content over time." They posit a four-phase model for interest development: triggered situational interest, maintained situational interest, emerging individual interest, well developed individual interest (Hidi & Renninger 2016). Students with developed/developing interest in an area will come to associate themselves with the content; interest-driven learning causes students to want to re-engage with the learning at later points (Hidi & Renninger 2016). Developing interest can lead to a developed ability to set and meet goals, feeling of self-efficacy, self-regulation (Hidi & Renninger 2016).

Writing is a cognitively demanding task that requires "focused attention, serious effort, long-term commitment, and self-discipline" (Hidi et al. 2002). In an exploratory study focused on majority middle-school-age students, Lipstein and Renninger (2007) reported that having an interest in writing helped to lessen the demanding nature of writing assignments. They found that students who have an interest in writing are also more likely to "set effective goals, make use of helpful strategies, and seek feedback as they work on writing tasks (Lipstein & Renninger 2007). Consistent with Hidi and Renninger's (2016) description of four phases in the development of interest, Lipstein and Renninger demonstrated that students with more interest approach more sophisticated writing and develop confidence in their own writing, than those with less interest, and that continued engagement with writing led to voluntarily writing (Lipstein & Renninger 2007).

Nolen (2007) explores the role of the classroom context in interest development. She describes literate communities in which "reading and writing serve a central social function, providing opportunities to develop identities as writers and to experience writing as a means of self-expression and communication" (Nolen 2007). Literate communities promote multiple purposes for writing, a variety of audiences, and alternative forms of quality judgment (Nolen

2007). These three points are like Xu et al.'s (2012) emphasis of allowing for multiple standpoints from which students can engage with the content. In other classrooms, writing is seen solely as a way to demonstrate students' skills to the teacher (Nolen 2007). When cultivated in classrooms, literate communities allow space for creativity and self-expression in writing which leads to interest development (Nolen 2007). Nolen finds that making the connection between writing and communication is crucial for young developing writers and suggests that developing an interest in communication can lead to developing an interest in writing.

The neuroscientific term self-specificity describes the degree to which the self relates to stimuli both internal and external through the involuntary process of self-related information processing (Hidi et al 2019). When students make personally relevant, or self-related, connections with the content, the reward circuitry in the brain, which is often activated by extrinsic rewards, is activated thus triggering interest (Hidi et al 2019). Xu et al (2012) highlight two studies, (Sieler 2001; Basu and Barton 2007), that suggest practices that make the connection between students and classroom content explicit to promote interest. Interestingly, Hidi, Magnifico, and Renninger (in press) point to the distinction between interest in writing and interest in a topic. Their literature review found that while topic interest does not always translate to interest in writing, interest and writing can be triggered and developed when the students find the activity meaningful (Hidi, Magnifico & Renninger in press). They said, "a student therefore can find writing interesting if the instructional situation allows him/her to discover and practice the attractive, unusual, and challenging aspects of the activity (Hidi, Magnifico & Renninger in press). They suggest writing can be made meaningful by foregrounding its function to "not just record information but also to expose, reflect, discuss, argue, and communicate" (Hidi,

Magnifico & Renninger in press). These are the functions of writing that are most aligned with voice as defined in this thesis. With these functions of writing in mind, students may be better able to use and develop their voice. In this way, voice can also be used as a motivator for students developing interest in writing and thus developing their writing.

Next, we turn to belongingness and cultural relevance as triggers for interest, and as essential supports for voice development.

A Sense of Belonging and Cultural Relevance

It is difficult, if not impossible, to isolate students from their contexts. We find the benefits of contextualized instruction and material everywhere. We also find that African American students benefit from being taught by African American instructors (Xu et al. 2012). A student seeing themselves in course content, material, instruction, and even the instructor can serve as a spark for interest that hopefully develops. Considering not only race, but students' neighborhoods and family situations create a comforting sense of belonging in school environments. Each student comes into a classroom with a wealth of knowledge. This knowledge comes from the student's experiences, cultural context, physical context, and several other factors unique to each student. Especially in a diverse classroom, it is important, and more effective, to focus on what a student brings to the table as opposed to their deficits. The funds of knowledge approach frame the unique skills and experiences of students from diverse cultural backgrounds as helpful resources for learning (Moll & González 2004). Similarly, culturally relevant content, material, and instruction incorporate a student's funds of knowledge in an attempt to bridge the gaps between the student, their community, and school (Clark 2017). The results of such schooling can be empowering to students (Clark 2017).

We know that social experiences such as the need for a sense of belonging are crucial to further developing students' interest (Bergin 2016). Cultivating a sense of belonging is especially critical for students of color. Xu et al (2012) promote culturally relevant teaching after finding that for minority students learning science[2] is less about content and more about bridging the gap between the cultural practices they find at home and at school. Belonging as a belief may be culturally informed. Feeling a sense of belonging within the classroom seems to be critical to developing a connection to science content and thus an identity as a scientist. Similarly, students' perceptions of themselves as scientists are nurtured by the recognition and scaffolding of the identity work, they put into science participation (Barton et al 2013). Framing the importance of formative spaces, Barton et al suggest flexible classrooms that support students' varying identities' work toward science. Xu et al (2012) similarly promote the use of multiple standpoints in the science classroom that allows different types of students to participate in science as they best fit. Participation in science activities in and outside of the school context develops belonging. And the need for belonging prompts collaboration which develops children's interest (Bergin 2016). Collaboration, a meaning-making process, also provides students an opportunity to develop their science identity as they are empowered to play advanced roles amongst their peers (Weiss and Chi 2019; Brown 2004; Lave and Wenger 1991; Nasir 2002).

This empowerment can be crucial for marginalized students developing an interest in and eventually identifying as writers. Additionally, instructors should aim to create sustainable structures of belonging in their classroom as opposed to one off attempts to include culturally

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[2] In part because interest has a physiological basis, interest research shows that findings in one content area generally apply to others (Renninger & Hidi 2016). Therefore, while these findings are in science, they may be applied to writing in this context especially since they are more generally about interest and classroom practices.

relevant materials or topics. Instead of including a lesson about Black authors, incorporate Black authors into the curriculum. The goal is for students to see themselves in the classroom and the work they are engaging with.

That being said, the difficulty in implementing cultural relevance into a curriculum is understandable. Cultural relevance and contextualization as concepts are the antitheses of the standardizing practices of US curriculums (Young 2010). Even if instructors want to incorporate cultural relevance, the task may be overwhelming due to limited time and/or large class sizes. There is a lack of research around the actualization of cultural relevance in complex heterogeneous classrooms (Morrison et al. 2008). Studies such as Clark's (2017) suggest the inclusion of culturally relevant texts as a feasible first step, especially for those confined by a curriculum. Further steps, such as professional development centered around cultural relevancy/diversity and faculty immersion into the students' communities, require much more effort from the schools and teachers (Morrison et al. 2008).

Practical Implications

Although I was not able to locate an existing literature on how to effectively support the development of Black and Brown voices, there is relevant work that is informative for thinking about what support of this type might include. I have defined voice as a writer's unique form of expression as informed by their grammatical and rhetorical choices, but also by the context under which they are supported to learn how to write. Studies from three literatures inform my consideration: identity and adolescence, interest development, and belongingness and cultural relevance. From this work, three complementary and interrelated examples of writing principles and practices are identified. I expect that these practices will be adapted based on the classroom setting. I consider the classroom environment, materials, and methods, in turn.

Classroom Environments That Support Writing

The literature on identity, belongingness and cultural relevance underscores that learning

involves more than just its content. The classroom environment shapes the way students view

themselves and what they feel comfortable bringing into the classroom. This can then translate

into what they feel comfortable bringing into their writing. Classroom environment hinges on

two factors: materials and content, and the instructor. First, as cultural relevance promotes

students' sense of belonging, it is important to make the content students learn and the materials

with which they do so culturally inclusive (e.g., identity specific texts, texts chosen by students,

materials from the community like journals, newspapers, and zines). Culturally relevant content

begins in expansive curriculums and goes down to lesson plans. During middle school, writing is

often in the context of an English curriculum. What students read influences their voice and their

views on which voices matter based on which they hear. We must ensure that a diverse range of

voices are heard in the classroom. One way to achieve this, as Haddix (2018) suggests, is to

include youth writing in the classroom. In this way, students will have an opportunity to bring

their writing, their identities to class. This also uplifts and empowers their writing outside of

academics. Second, writing teachers should be interested in writing and identify as writers.

Haddix simply states that teachers must be writers; Graham (2019) stresses the importance of

teachers' investment in the content they are teaching[3]; Xu et al. (2012) emphasizes the

importance of teachers demonstrating interest in their subject area. Xu et al. suggest that

instructors should be interested in their subject and teaching their subject, their students'

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[3] "Teachers devote more time and attention to teaching writing if they are better prepared to
teach it, feel more confident in their capabilities to teach it, derive greater pleasure from teaching
it, and consider it an important skill (e.g., Brindle et al., 2016; De Smedt et al., 2016; Hsiang &
Graham, 2016; Kiuhara et al., 2009; Rietdijk et al., 2018; Troia & Graham, 2016)." (Graham
2019)

interests, and developing connections with their students. Students need an adult who understands writing and is rooting for their interest in it.

Including Voice in Classrooms

Foundational knowledge is essential to developing and deepening interest (Renninger & Hidi 2016). Adopting and expanding on Hankerson's lesson plan, I suggest that students need exposure to voice as a concept as well as the cognitive writing process. Taking some class time to encourage metacognitive work may be helpful for students' understanding of how they write and reflect their voices or voices. For the middle school classroom, this may be short historical readings on advocacy, writing exercises that ask students to change voices, and even simplified versions of Elbow's voice theory and Flower and Hayes writing model. Hidi, Magnifico, and Renninger (in press) suggest games-based writing exercises are motivators for students as they develop and deepen enjoyment of and skills for writing. Writing games involving voice may show similar results while giving students the space to discover and try out their multiple voices. Another way to give students space to express their voices through writing is having a class blog in which students can post about topics they are interested in or respond to assignments. With a blog, students can interact with one another's writing and, in turn, one another's voices. This may encourage students to write for themselves and each other rather than for the instructor.

Writing

First and foremost, students should be writing as much as possible. Graham's (2019) review showed that a key difference between adequate and inadequate writing instruction is how much time students spend writing in class. Students should be writing a lot, often. And instructors should spend more time on writing instruction. As for the writing, I propose three

suggestions based on the theory for interest development. Instructors must provide multiple

standpoints for approaching writing, keep interest development in mind, and encourage students

to see themselves as writers. As Haddix (2018) asserts: "students must have opportunities to

write in multiple ways, for multiple purposes, and in multiple genres." Different students have

different needs and different interests, and providing various ways for them to engage in the

writing process draws more students in. Xu et al. (2012) suggests community involvement as a

standpoint. Involving students' community in writing may include using texts written or often

encountered outside of school (i.e., locally published newspapers, magazines, and zines as

mentioned above). Another way may be to ask students to interview community members or

their family and write an article about whichever they choose. This is useful for writing practice

as it is culturally relevant and involves writing students may encounter daily. Instructors should

also keep students' interest development in mind, as some activities may work better with groups

of mixed interest levels, while others may work with groups at similar levels (e.g., peer-editing

work may be most helpful with students at similar phases of interest as they may share writing

goals and may not be intimidated by a student with a more developed phase of interest; Lipstein

& Renninger 2007). Students' interest development may also inform what type of writing

feedback they should be getting. As writing is often individual, it is helpful to look at each

students' development individually. This is especially crucial as we've learned interest

development leads to identification. In addition to attention to interest development for identity

formation, instructors should encourage students to identify as writers.

Conclusion and Implications

I began work on this thesis with the intention to review literature on voice, and

specifically that describing ways in which support might be provided for Black students to

develop their voices as writers. It turns out that there is relatively little written on this topic. Instead, I have worked to develop an answer to my question by drawing on a synthesis of literature in which related work has been considered. These include studies on identity and adolescence, interest development, belongingness, and cultural relevance, writing research, Black studies, Educational Studies, and motivation. Key findings include defining voice as socially embedded is important and should inform how voice and writing is taught in classrooms; adequate writing instruction is rare in traditional classrooms but not impossible; in order for students to develop as writers they should identify as writers and voice may be an important motivator for developing interest in writing.

While my suggestions have not been put into practice, I do offer some implications about current practice that warrant attention. Discussions of voice often ignore contextual influences (e.g., race, class, gender) , and by extension what is at stake for students learning how to articulate themselves, especially students of color. Creating a writing practice that centers these voices has taken stringing together multiple literatures, but maybe an effective way at present to address the issue. This lens also appears to complement and extend the discussions of the existing methods for teaching of writing. Specifically, consideration of contextual influences, interest, and identity. Flower and Hayes and Bereiter and Scardamalia work on the writing process as a set of goal-oriented actions is a useful way to teach students about the process, thus leading to more intentional and meaningful writing. While the interest research complements these ideas, including voice can help achieve the goal of making writing more meaningful. And, while Hankerson's work is more specific about voice and teaching the concept, reading it against the other literatures allows us to extend it to a younger audience. Similarly, Haddix's reflection

on her writing workshop can be applied to the traditional classroom, especially when read along

Graham's suggestions for changing writing as it is taught in the traditional school system.

Maybe the way to find methods to teach writing that work is to get more teachers writing

about their practice. Haddix's work on her writing workshop is useful because it outlines

practices that she's seen to work in writing. Similarly, Xu et al's work is useful because it

outlines the methods used by exemplary teachers. This is all to say that, while theory is

important, the best way to find useful classroom practices is from what teachers are working well

in their own classrooms. With more teaching writing about writing instruction, maybe an

extensive list of effective practices can be developed to be used in the ongoing professional

development Graham (2019) recommends.

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