Spring 2023

Creating the Pause: A Theoretical Approach to Helping Students Achieve Creative Independence

Amanda J. Anderson
Missouri State University, Amanda0511@live.missouristate.edu

CREATING THE PAUSE: A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO HELPING STUDENTS ACHIEVE CREATIVE INDEPENDENCE

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, English

By

Amanda Anderson

May 2023

CREATING THE PAUSE: A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO HELPING STUDENTS ACHIEVE CREATIVE INDEPENDENCE

English

Missouri State University, May 2023

Master of Arts

Amanda Anderson

ABSTRACT

This paper will detail how the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic revealed the need for a modification of our current educational best practices. This modification asks that teachers create an intentional Pause where students can spend time dwelling on content and making their own meaning before teachers intervene through scaffolding and front loading. It uses a combination of personal experience, review of best practices, and Covid-19 data to show that best practices did not transfer well during the pandemic. It will then provide evidence for the addition of the Pause as well as addressing anticipated counterarguments.

KEYWORDS: creativity, independence, education, scaffolding, front loading, flipped instruction, failure, Covid-19

WRESTLING WITH CREATIVITY: A THEORHETICAL APPROACH TO HELPING STUDENTS ACHIEVE CREATIVE INDEPENDENCE

By

Amanda Anderson

A Master's Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College
Of Missouri State University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts, English

May 2023

Approved:

Alan Tinkler, Ph.D., Thesis Committee Chair

Margaret Weaver, Ph.D., Committee Member

Jonathan Newman, Ph.D., Committee Member

Julie Masterson, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper would not have been possible without the support of my loving husband who encouraged me to pursue a graduate degree in literature when no one else thought it wise, and even decided to marry me in the midst of the chaos. He has encouraged me to take risks and push forward when all I want to do is crawl back to my comfort zone. I am grateful.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my thesis committee. Dr. Tinkler taught me that sometimes your idea is more important than what everyone's reception of it might be and that your ideas are really as valuable as you believe them to be. Dr. Weaver taught me the importance of structure and discipline whilst writing a large piece, but infinitely more important than that, when deep panic set in she calmed the wild seas of writer's block with a promise: "I won't let you drown." Dr. Newman inspired me, through taking many of his courses, to continue to pursue academia. His seemingly endless knowledge of his field set an example of what it looks like to love your work and what the relentless pursuit of knowledge can yield.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge all of the friends and family members who have answered the phone despite knowing they would be subjected to a tedious thesis reading. You are all worth your weight in gold.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

This theory was born in the year 2020. It is a year most notable for marking the beginnings of a worldwide pandemic. Like most horrific, life-altering occurrences, this one revealed our shortcomings. It put humanity under immense pressure to adapt and conform to a new way of life whilst simultaneously clinging desperately to the old. While we all have stories of loss in connection to the year 2020, we are now left with an overwhelming amount of new data and information to contend with. Amongst this data and information lies an analysis of our education system.

2020 happened to mark my first year as a certified teacher. My timing has always been impeccable. Thus, the pandemic was not the only fear haunting my psyche. On August 23rd I would face 8 blocks of roughly 25 freshmen and sophomores each, all of which expected me to say something profound and all of which had only recently crawled out of their quarantine hideouts. I spent the beginning of August trying to wrangle bulletin boards into Pinterest-worthy completion on a scanty first-year-teacher budget. I spent hours building a Canvas classroom that would hopefully, somehow, radiate both fun and tough simultaneously. I shyly approached veteran teachers hoping they would have mercy and guide me through mountains of curriculum that had so suddenly landed in my lap.

On August 21st, two days before my adventure was to truly begin, an all-staff meeting was called to inform us of a modality change. We gathered in the gymnasium, masked and anxious. Our principal stood on the basketball court and calmly announced that, due to the persistent spread of Covid-19, Lebanon High School would be moving to a hybrid model of learning, effective immediately. The gymnasium erupted into conversation, while I, the fresh out

of college first year teacher, stared wide eyed into the abyss. The noise faded to a loud hum while I contemplated my life choices. No one had prepared me for this.

The next few days were dedicated to a crash course in hybrid learning. Our students would be divided into two groups by last name. Students with last names starting with A-J would attend school on Mondays and Wednesdays. Students with last names starting with K-Z would attend school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Fridays would act as virtual days as well as teacher workdays. On the days the students would not be attending in person, we were expected to construct some sort of online assignment that could be completed at home. It was chaos in its purest form, but our administrators had rediscovered the words "flexible" and "adaptable" and encouraged us to practice both in these trying times. So, we pivoted and got back to work.

The English department understood our teaching methods would differ from our fellow departments. They typically do. In this particular high school, 5th period was extended to accommodate for multiple lunch shifts and thus, it acted as a study hall for those students who were not actively in the cafeteria. Extra time with these students meant our relationships were strong. As I puttered around trying to help them with their various homework assignments, they often confided in me their frustrations. I noticed that there seemed to be a consensus – Math sucked. As an English teacher, I could certainly relate to a distaste for the subject, but when I began to ask questions and inquire further, I quickly realized that it was not the content that these students were struggling with. It was the structure.

The Math department had opted to use the hybrid schedule in a unique way. New content was presented to students on their virtual day as well as an assignment over that new content. Then, when the students arrived the next day in person, the entire class period was dedicated to questions and one-on-one instruction. Students were expected to attempt the assignment on their

own first and come to class the next day with questions prepared. If the entire class seemed to be at a total loss, the teacher could use the time to re-teach, but, in theory, this would be a rare occurrence. Of course, the Math department had not invented this method. Flipped Instruction was a strategy I had heard whispers of, but I had never seen it implemented.

It was received poorly. The teachers and administrators alike were receiving angry emails and phone calls from parents accusing them of not teaching. The common gripe was that these teachers were merely slapping content online and expecting the students to teach themselves. Student grades were slipping almost as quickly as morale. The math department, however, stuck to their guns despite public outcry. They understood that change was painful. They understood that there would be a messy adjustment period because students were never expected to think in this order. They had disrupted the commonly accepted chronology of learning.

Students did adjust, eventually. They realized that in order to get the grade they had to, at minimum, take a stab at it. They had to watch the videos and rumple their eyebrows and throw their pencil down in frustration. They had to fail, and they had to understand what they didn't understand so that when they showed up to class the next day their teacher knew how to help them. It was working. However, at the end of the school year, we learned that the 2021 school year would return to normal, and, regrettably, the math department abandoned ship for more familiar waters.

I can assure you I was not thinking of the theoretical implications of this move until well after I had survived my first year of pandemic teaching, but as I furthered my education and my career, I started to become more aware of how broken our current system is. It brought me back to the LHS Math Department's 2020 Flipped Instruction Scandal. Perhaps, if students were being

given the space to explore new concepts on their own without teacher intervention pre-pandemic, the transition to online/hybrid learning would not have been so painful.

Post-pandemic and post-worldwide school shutdowns, a popular and rather frightening rumor began to circulate. Because schools had been shut down to prevent the spread of the virus, students had missed out on essential learning. In short, students were now behind, and the students who were already behind were drowning. The closing of schools had created a gap, an educational void that needed to be filled quickly or risk a generation of "Covid Kids" that were lacking basic skills. Because students were unable to successfully transition into an online workspace, many of them did nothing at all during the shutdown. Administration did not feel they could punish students for their lack of participation due to the emergency of the circumstances.

Until I began my work at the high school level, I had worked as a paraprofessional with 4th and 5th grade students with learning disabilities. I expected these students to struggle, and I was eager to provide the support they desperately needed. When I moved away from the special education department and began to teach at the high school and, later, the college level, I fully expected to see a drastic change in critical and creative thinking. This hope was quickly squashed when I saw my students struggle to cope with phrases like, "What do you think?" and, "This paper is yours. I can't tell you what to write". Even more frightening, they balked at assignments that allowed them creative freedom. They much preferred being told, step by step, what to write about.

Education has, with great effort, become an environment of inclusivity. As we strive to be more inclusive and conscious of the struggles students face outside of the classroom, we are, in theory, more capable of differentiating and individualizing learning. In direct contradiction to

these forward strides, however, we also administer standardized tests and adhere to generalized educational standards. So, what is our goal in education? The U.S. Department of Education's mission statement reads as follows, "ED's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access." This is a string of words with very little concrete meaning. What does "student achievement" mean? What does being globally competitive look like? What is educational excellence and who decides? The clearest part of this mission statement is the desire to ensure equal access to education. Other than this piece, this mission feels like smoke and mirrors.

I found some clarity in an unexpected place. About a year ago, I started attending yoga classes on Saturday mornings. Our instructor is phenomenal and really knows her stuff. Anytime she asks us to "fold in", which is yoga-code for keeping your legs straight and reaching for your toes, she is constantly reminding us that the goal here is "length before depth". Before we start trying to touch our chest to our knees (depth), we should strive to reach as far forward as possible, lengthening the spine. I made an unlikely connection to education that grew the more I dwelled on the idea. When a student is presented with a new topic they should reach as far as they can on their own before the teacher steps in and provides opportunities for enrichment or depth, otherwise, how can they possibly know the reaches of their own minds?

I would like to propose that a clearer and simpler educational goal should be to bolster creativity, confidence, and independent thought and that, in order to do so, we should curricularly allow students space to wrestle with new concepts before a teacher intervenes. In our current state, students are not given time to wrestle with new material and come to their own conclusions prior to teacher intervention. This robs students of raw experience, reduces rigor, and suggests that outside interpretations of experiences are more correct/important. In this way,

the curriculum and current methods have forced teachers to become micromanagers, discouraging students from risk taking and reinforcing dependence. I want to make clear that this proposal is in no way suggesting that educators do away with proven intervention strategies like scaffolding and front loading. Best practices still apply here, merely delayed.

Structurally and pedagogically teachers are pushed toward scaffolding and best practices which do not currently include these hands-off first impressions which I will call The Pause. Teachers are also encouraged to utilize individualized, discussion-based instruction. What could possibly be more individualized than imagination and creativity? Raw, unadulterated thought? In our adult world, these are the very practices that prompt long, weighty conversations that have the power to reshape and expand our views of the world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before diving into the pedagogical proposal that this paper is seeking to present, it is important to establish what best practices may need restructuring and how they are currently being used in the classroom. After my first-year teaching experience in 2020, I found myself reevaluating the functionality of frontloading, scaffolding, and flipped instruction. I found that each practice was beneficial but that the application seemed to cause issues concerning student autonomy and critical thinking. In this section, I will establish a basis for what these three practices are, how they were founded, and how they are utilized in the classroom currently so as to frame more clearly the constructive criticism that will come later.

Front Loading

Frontloading has been a staple in education for a long, long time. While it cannot be traced back to any one specific scholar, nearly every educator practices front loading of some sort in their classroom. For example, before diving into *The Diary of a Young Girl*, a teacher would, traditionally, spend time front loading and building background information. This would include a brief overview of World War II, Nazi Germany, antisemitism, and Jewish culture. Perhaps the class is focusing on form and the teacher gives a mini lesson on letter writing and diaries. The teacher may spend a whole week front loading a new novel or concept before students actually dive in. In Doug Lemov's famous book *Teach Like a Champion* he boldly declares that, "champion teachers steer them (students) in advance towards key ideas, concepts, and themes to look for…they advise students what's secondary, not that important, or can be ignored for now" (287). This ensures that students are going to grasp the important pieces of a lesson without getting lost in the weeds.

The driving force behind front loading is schema theory. Schema theory is a cognitivist learning theory introduced to the world of psychology by British psychologist Sir Frederic Bertlett in 1932. In the 1970s, it was fleshed out and further developed by American psychologist Richard Anderson. Jean Piaget, writing in the 1920s, is also believed to be a leading researcher of this theory. Schema theory is the idea that we all have a mental framework that houses and organizes remembered information. Of course, it becomes hugely beneficial as an educator to activate this prior knowledge in order to know what our students already know; however, each student's schema is based entirely on their life experiences and thus, varies drastically. When a teacher establishes a basic idea of their classroom's collective schema, they may start to fill in the holes and strengthen the students' schemas through front loading.

After a schema is established, teachers may then choose to frontload by giving students questions to think about while they read. Students read with pre-determined goals in mind. Frontloading, in this way, provides purpose and direction as a student begins a new task. Frontloading is complete only when the teacher and their students feel the groundwork that has been laid has sufficiently prepared students to tackle the new task. Before students can truly understand and appreciate a new concept or skill, they need some sort of foundation on which to stand.

Front loading may also look like a prereading activity or brainstorming. Patricia Kelly and Nancy Farnan, a coordinator of elementary education and an English educator at San Diego university, respectively, describe these practices as, "a way to elicit students' prior knowledge about a topic, tying preconceptions to the reading and providing an opportunity to clarify misconceptions" (265). Front loading reveals not only what students already know, but also what they may incorrectly think they know. In this way, frontloading activates a students' schema and,

in turn, gives the teacher access to said schema so that they may meet students where they are at. Then, once the teacher is aware of the gaps in the students' learning, the teacher can begin to address them.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding can be attributed to Lev Vygotsky in the late 1970s, although he never used the term explicitly. It began as a psychological theory, just as schema did, and was not immediately applied to the teacher-student relationship until the 1980s. When the educational implications were recognized, it was clear that scaffolding was closely related to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory where the goal is to have students operating in a space that is challenging, but not impossible. In this zone, it is appropriate to provide the student with assistance until the task can be completed without help. ZPD theory is displayed as three rings. The outermost ring represents what the learner cannot do. The middle ring represents what the reader can do with guidance. The innermost ring represents what the learner can do unaided. Scaffolding takes place within the inner ring.

The term "scaffolding" was coined later in 1976 by David Wood, Jerome Bruner, and Gail Ross in their article titled *The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving*. They defined scaffolding as a process, "that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult 'controlling' those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence" (Wood et al. 90). Often, students will need extra support throughout their learning. It is not uncommon for a student to run into a snag or a

roadblock, become frustrated, and need adult intervention. In fact, scaffolding is so widely and completely accepted as a best practice that it is mandated by each individual state through IEP and 504 Plans put in place for students with learning disabilities.

Talip Gonulal and Shawn Loewen describe scaffolding as a temporary support that arrives just-in-time (3). They warn that, "scaffolding is not simply synonymous with teacher support" but rather is, "specific just-in-time support that gives students the pedagogical push that enables them to work at a higher level of activity" (3). This agrees nicely with Vygotsky's ZPD theory but makes us aware that scaffolding runs the risk of being too broadly defined. Gonulala and Loewen argue that the, "most salient features of scaffolding are collaborativeness, contingency, fading, and the transfer of responsibility" (4), meaning that scaffolding is a very specific type of intervention that should not be used as a blanket term to explain every intervention a teacher makes.

Scaffolding can look like modeling, schema-building, contextualizing, and metacognitive exercises. It can also look like a Venn Diagram or a graphic organizer to help students compartmentalize their thoughts. Scaffolding can appear at any point in the learning process as each individual student may require intervention at a different point in the lesson. For example, during my time teaching high school, I found that many of my students struggled with the "getting started" part of writing. They found themselves staring blankly at an equally blank piece of paper and completely unequipped to escape from the quicksand that is writer's block. At first, I modeled what writing an introduction might look like during individual conferences. When I became aware that the problem was affecting more than just a handful of students, I moved the modeling to a whole class setting. I slid a blank, college-ruled piece of paper under my document camera, grabbed a #2 pencil, and began to talk out loud, vocalizing my writing process, as I

showed them what an introduction should contain but also how to cure the I-don't-know-what-to-write illness. I showed them the ugly parts, the erasing and re-writing, and I asked them for advice – Is this the word I'm looking for? Does that sound funny? When I set them loose to tackle their own introductions, they were suddenly less insecure and had a few new writing tools on which to rely. This scaffolding via modeling was necessary in order to push students out of that outer ring of the ZPD model and back towards the center.

Flipped Instruction

Flipped instruction, sometimes called the inverted classroom, can be seen as a child of the Socratic Method. Socrates believed that all knowledge lies within us and that the job of the teacher is merely to bring it to light. Flipped instruction takes this idea and uses it to make structural changes to how content is presented to students. John Dewey, another advocate for student-centered learning, also tended towards the idea that students should unearth knowledge of their own accord. Both scholars provide the foundation for the reasoning on which flipped instruction was built, but the method would have to wait until the technology age before it could come to full fruition.

Our current flipped classroom method is most often attributed to Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams, two high school chemistry teachers from Colorado, though they make it clear that they do not own the term. In the 2007-2008 school year Bergmann and Sams started experimenting with what would eventually become the flipped classroom. They began pre-recording all of their lectures, which is impressive seeing as the early 2000s were certainly less technologically sophisticated than they are currently.

In 2012, Bergmann and Sams co-authored a book titled *Flip Your Classroom: Reach Every Student in Every Class Every Day* – a seemingly tall order. Their methods are created for and dependent upon technology. The educator pre-records lecture videos and posts them online for students to watch prior to class so that class time can be spent reteaching and addressing individual concerns and confusion. In Chapter 1 of their book, when recounting their discovery of their methodology Sams says, "The time when students really need me physically present is when they get stuck and need my individual help. They don't need me there in the room with them to yak at them and give them content; they can receive content on their own" (Bergmann & Sams 4-5). In this format, Bergmann and Sams assign their pre-recorded video lectures as homework, freeing up class time to individualize instruction.

It is important to note that Bergmann and Sams' school utilizes block scheduling, meaning they see their classes for 95 minutes every other day. For example, blocks 1, 3, and 5 are seen on Mondays and Wednesdays while blocks 2, 4, and 6 are seen on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This video homework is assigned on the day that the students will not be physically present, meaning they can expect to have homework every other day of the week, so that they arrive to class the next day already having digested the content. This ensures that students continue to be active participants in their learning by tackling new challenges outside of the classroom.

In 2017, a group of scholars published a book written specifically for the flipped college classroom. They make wider claims about flipped instruction stating that it provides, "new opportunities for enhanced instruction that deepens critical thinking and creativity including authentic, discovery, and problem-based learning; team-driven collaboration; intime assessment and real-time feedback; and personalized learning experiences" (Green et al. 5). One scholar

even chose to incorporate peer instruction where, after the students have watched the lecture on their own time, they come to class and reteach the lesson to a peer, deepening learning even further (Bates et al. 6). It seems that the opportunities for this method are endless and ever-expanding as more and more educators adopt and tweak flipped instruction to fit their classroom needs.

My own experience with flipped instruction was described in the introduction, although it was a bit second-hand. From what I can tell, flipped instruction is an effective tool. It tends to be more prevalent in math and science classrooms though, and still has room for growth and evaluation in the Arts. Unfortunately, it also seems to be reliant on a broader school structure that is often outside of the teacher's control. Unless the school as a whole has some sort of hybrid or block scheduling in place where students have an "off day" to view and grapple with the recorded readings/lectures, I am not sure that flipped instruction is a practical mode. Teachers may find themselves at the mercy of administrator and school board decisions where they teach all 7 (or 8, or 9) blocks every single day. Despite this barrier, in a world led and dominated by technology, flipped instruction provides an opportunity for educators to use that technology to free up time in their classrooms to address more specific student needs and promote student-led learning.

Conclusion

Each of these best practices have proven their worth in the classroom. Scaffolding and frontloading trace their roots back to the 1970s at the very least with influences dating back even further. Flipped Instruction, although a newer practice in comparison, has shown, through Bergmann and Sams' classrooms, that the model is, "more efficient than lecturing and assigning

homework" (Bergmann & Sams 3). This paper does not question the efficacy of these long-standing methods. This paper is more interested in the "when" of these methods. When should a teacher scaffold for a student? The term "front load" implies that it comes before anything else, but should it? The Flipped Classroom, in my experience, became desirable during Covid-19 due to hybrid learning but was quickly abandoned when schools returned to their normal state. Is the Flipped Classroom merely a crutch to get us through hard times, or is this method useful beyond crisis? If so, can it be effective outside of a blocked/hybrid schedule? How has data from Covid-19 prompted change in how we implement these methods?

COVID-19

In order to put our Covid learning experience into perspective it is important to frame it within the context of how educators were feeling about online learning before they were forced to use it in isolation. Prior to 2020, it seems that educators and students generally had a positive outlook on e-learning. There are a few, though, that were more skeptical. One researcher, when discussing the pros and cons of Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs, noted that colleges, "enjoyed massive enrollments, but measure of persistence, engagement, and completion all showed dismal results. It appeared that while MOOCs addressed the issue of opportunity, learners need more" (Thomson 75). Even in 2018 when this article was written it seemed that online learning was great in terms of providing access to education, but transferring the learning was still shaky at best. The article goes on to admit that Learning Management Systems (LMS) are improving all of the time but that, "too many online classees employ a formulaic approach to online education that is predictable and uninspiring" (75). Furthermore, and perhaps the most important for our purposes, Thomas points out that, "one of the assumptions that has been at the root of many distance learning creations was that when teaching a subject, regardless of format, one could employ the same pedagogical beliefs" (75). As we will discuss later, those same pedagogical beliefs or best practices that we have always employed, did not possess the amount of transferability that we assumed they would.

Moving forward to our current year, 2023, it is clear that Covid-19 brought us some startling realizations about the state and durability of our current educational structures and practices through the data that was collected both during and after worldwide school shutdowns. In 2019, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) conducted its bi-annual testing in math and reading. Because of Covid-19, the NAEP was forced to delay their next

testing date one extra year, so instead of testing in 2021 they tested again in 2022. The focus was on reading and math for grades 4 and 8. The figure below shows the change in reading scores all the way back to 1992 with emphasis on the years 2019 (pre-Covid-19) and 2022 (post-Covid-19). Figure 1 below shows a significant three point drop between the last two data years, putting both 4th and 8th graders right back to the year 1992 in terms of scores.

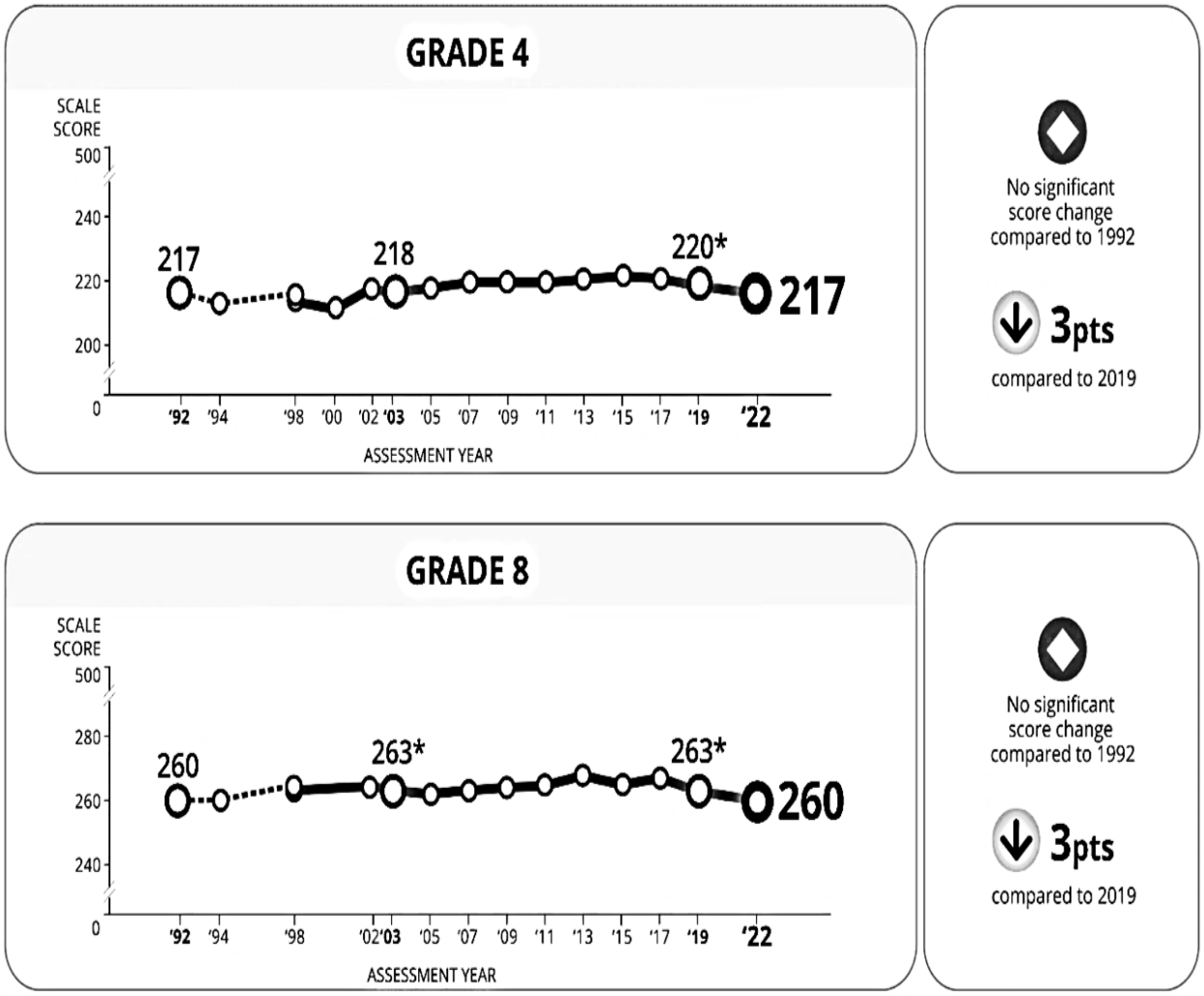

Fig. 1. NAEP. "NAEP Report Card: 2022 NAEP Reading Assessment." *The Nation's Report Card*, 2022

There seems to be a correlation between the pandemic and the dramatic reversion back to our scores from 20 years ago. As evidenced by the graph above, this is the sharpest decline we have ever seen in the history of NAEP between two testing years. The fluctuation typically tends to be a mere point at a time. The drop is also intriguing because, in 1992 schools were not providing accommodations for this test (as evidenced by the dashed line). In 2022, accommodations were provided (as evidenced by the solid line). This means that the current average score is not only equivalent to a score from 20 years ago but to a score that was obtained without accommodations. These accommodations include but are not limited to extended testing time, breaks during the test, responding orally to a scribe, directions read aloud, large print version of the test, and braille and sign language availabilty (NAEP).

Data like this has manifested within administrators, parents, and teachers the logical fear that there is a gap in student learning; a gap that must be closed at the risk of students being behind the national and global standards. Organizations like The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), American Institute for Research (AIR), The International Community Foundation (ICF), and countless others are constantly collecting data to compare schools on a national and global scale in order to determine where educational systems seem to be thriving and failing. One of these organizations that focuses exclusively on data surrounding women and children gave the following report on the Covid-19 crisis in collaboration with others:

> The global learning crisis has grown by even more than previously feared: this generation of students now risks losing $17 trillion in lifetime earnings in present value as a result of school closures, or the equivalent of 14 percent of today's global GDP, far more than the $10 trillion estimated in 2020. In low- and middle-income countries, the share of children living in Learning Poverty—already over 50 percent before the pandemic—will rise sharply, potentially up to 70 percent, given the long school closures and the varying quality and effectiveness of remote learning (The World Bank et al. 5)

Their term “learning poverty” is particularly interesting here as it mirrors the idea of a “learning gap”. To put things into perspective in terms of the number of children affected and the amount of learning lost over the course of the pandemic, the same organization states that, “over the two years since the start of the pandemic, 147 million children missed at least half of in-person schooling, and of these, 25 million missed nearly all of in-person schooling due to school closures, amounting to 2 trillion hours of lost learning” (UNICEF 35). All of this to say, there is very little question as to whether the gap exists, and it seems we have cause to worry.

During the Covid-19 shutdowns, educators did their very best to shift learning completely online within a matter of days. Hot spots were provided to those students without internet access so that they would have access to their online school work. Teachers made themselves available via Zoom and email during regular school hours, and often, outside of regular school hours. They assigned homework and posted videos using various platforms like Canvas, Google Classroom, and Blackboard. They spent hours researching engaging, user friendly technology like Zearn, Blooket, FlipGrid, EPIC, and countless others. Some of these applications were already being used prior to Covid-19, but teachers found themselves relying on them in a way that they never had to before. Despite their best efforts, students simply did not respond well to the move to an online format.

Teachers attempted to use these technologies to do what we have always done. We were not naïve enough to believe that teaching through technology would be the same as teaching in the traditional classroom, but we thought the technology would be supplemental enough to create similar results. The assumption was telling students that, when they became stuck or confused by the content, all they had to do was shoot us an email and pop into a Zoom meeting would replace the raising of a hand or coming up to the teacher’s desk for help. We thought that YouTube

videos and Blooket games would replace engaging classroom activities. We thought Discussion Boards would replace whole class discussions. We thought that assigning a Zearn lesson alongside an assignment would replace re-teaching. We thought that we were still scaffolding and front loading, just using a different modality.

Perhaps our biggest mistake was that we assumed we knew how students would use the technology we provided, but without a teacher there to intentionally initiate and situate The Pause, it disappeared all together. We did not realize that, in person, we could control the timing of when students would stop and dwell. Online, students didn't know where to linger. Their learning turned into the completion of arbitrary online tasks with no real roots in inquiry. Pre-Covid, teachers implemented The Pause subconsciously through freewriting activities, independent reading, and bell work. The time for these activities were all made possible by the presence and protection of a teacher. Until Covid-19 made its appearance, we were unaware of our role in creating this Pause, let alone its importance. When The Pause was lost during the move to online learning, teachers found themselves frustrated and confused, trying to find the missing link.

The complaints I heard most frequently from teachers during pandemic teaching were in reference to student effort and engagement. The following phrases were repeated often during our Zoom meetings in 2020:

"They're treating this like a vacation…"

"They aren't turning in any work!"

"There's no accountability!"

"Most of my students haven't logged on in weeks."

"3 students showed up to my last Zoom."

"My emails and phone calls go unanswered."

The frustration was palpable as teachers tried to find the balance between grace and rigor. The territory was uncharted for all parties, and the sudden shift had left schools grasping and improvising at every turn. The unavoidable move to technology had created a disconnect between teachers and students, but more frighteningly it had created a disconnect between students and learning.

In my district, a policy was created to ensure the move to online learning did not tank student grades. It was made in good faith. The world was tumultuous and frightened. The pandemic was not the students' faults, and their grades should not suffer due to a state of emergency. The policy stated that student grades could move up but not down. For example, if Sally had an 82% and chose to do absolutely no work the remainder of the school year, her final grade would remain an 82%. If Sally had a 27% and chose to turn in assignments and actively participate in online learning, her grade would reflect her work. Students and parents were fully aware of this no-fail policy and regardless of good intentions, it created a precedent. If the student was passing, they had no external motivation to complete assignments. They completely checked out. This reduced online participation to less than half. Many teachers found themselves furiously creating assignments and uploading content for a classroom of ghosts.

In this pandemic situation, our best practices did not transfer. Providing scaffolding online was not only difficult, but it also did not push our students into that highly desired ZPD as evidenced by participation and engagement. Front loading a lesson became extremely challenging without being able to get live feedback from our students like we normally would in a traditional, in-person setting. Students had trouble grounding themselves in the new content because there was no one there creating the space for them to dwell and make meaning.

Scaffolding and frontloading activities became tasks that students simply completed so they could check it off their to-do list and move on to the next thing. This is, of course, assuming they chose to participate in the work at all. Instead of supplementing the learning, these extra front loading and scaffolding assignments just served to make the move online more tedious. Students found that they could jump through the hoops via task completion, achieve the bare minimum, and their teachers would be none the wiser.

The goal, of course, is to develop teaching practices that are applicable regardless of mode or student profile. Covid-19 revealed that our best practices do not transcend time or students. Techniques that were proven successes, backed by data, and published in books showed a frightening lack of transferability as soon as they were met with stormy weather. We know best practices work in our classrooms, so what happened? The question then becomes: How can our best practices be modified in such a way as to prevent this history from repeating itself?

THE PAUSE

The pandemic did not show us that our best practices are invaluable or broken. It merely showed us that Covid-19 has shifted education to a new plateau. Like most moves to new climates, this calls for lifestyle changes. When moving from Georgia to Minnesota, we don't throw away our old, favorite sweater; we simply add a coat over the top. Likewise, there is no reason to throw out best practices when we just need to add an additional step. In order to serve our students, we have to adapt to this new climate, and we must better prepare ourselves in case of another storm.

To do this, I believe we must turn to Stephen North's idea of Lore. Education rarely means reinventing the wheel. We all exist inside the mansion that is education. Over the centuries, we have added new rooms and locked old doors, but we never burn down the house, and we keep good track of all of the keys. We do this because we are aware that the world affects what we do and that the world is ever-changing. Our students are beings in the world, and they are heavily impacted by their surroundings. Thus, our job doesn't just ask for change; it requires it. Every year we teach different students with different needs. We are now painfully aware that sometimes, when worldwide, pandemic-level changes occur and we are unprepared, student needs go unmet.

In the Literature Review section of this paper, I mentioned famous psychologist Lev Vygotsky. He was a huge proponent of scaffolding through his Zone of Proximal development. He believed that students should always be operating in a space where the work is challenging enough that they cannot simply tackle it on their own, but not so difficult that it cannot be tackled at all. In the ZPD, students are working alongside a more learned person who is helping

them move through the challenging content. This was quickly adopted into the educational field because it just makes sense. But Vygotsky forgot something, a component that is crucial to student success – The Pause.

The Pause asks that teachers wait a breath before implementing their best practices. For example, as adults, when we encounter challenges or problems, we often find that there is a period of productive struggling. Rarely does someone sweep in right away and start guiding us, step by step through the issue. Instead, there are a series of trial-and-error moments that must occur before we reach out for help.

Say, you find yourself with a flat tire along the side of the road. First, you pull over out of harm's way, then you step outside your vehicle to assess the damage. After you have an idea of what exactly has happened to you, you start weighing your solutions. If you know how to change a tire and you have a spare, great! You swap the tires and get on your way. Perhaps, though, tire changing is not one of your many talents, so you turn to the internet and find a YouTube video to walk you through the process. Maybe you can't find the spare tire, so you turn to your owner's manual and find that it is in a compartment in the bottom of your trunk. We work through these problems logically – trying, failing, trying again. Our last resort is calling the tow truck because, well, that usually costs money.

There is a pause before the help comes, and in that pause, a productive struggle should occur where students attempt to come to some sort of solution or understanding on their own. Also, just like we pull over and address the situation when our tire blows, students need to know how to stop and assess their learning situation before seeking solutions. In this way, the teacher becomes a passive participant stepping in only after a curious and thorough investigation of the new learning has been conducted by the student. After this has been accomplished and the

student has shared their thoughts and findings and has truly stretched as far forward as they can, the teacher makes an appearance. They are not showing up to save the day or steal the glory. They are there to scaffold and front load, just as they normally would. They are there to listen to what the student found while they were wrestling with the new concept and push them deeper, to challenge them to continue their critical thinking and to thrive in their ZPD.

If we do not give students time to dwell in this pause, I fear we do them a disservice academically, but socially as well. Words like "rigor" and phrases like "critical thinking" require that students be responsible for their own learning. Students will never be able to master rigorous work if they are unfamiliar with the joys of overcoming failure. Students will never be critical thinkers if their learning is immediately front loaded, scaffolded, and pointed in the right direction before they even have the chance to see what it is they are to learn. When teachers jump in too quickly, it perpetuates the already present power dynamics that exist between students and teachers. Paulo Freire, in his famous text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* is focused exclusively on the liberation of students. He argues that, "Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information" (Freire 79), meaning that in order for students to truly have access to a liberating education they have to do the cognitive work. The passive transfer of information can only lead to what Freire calls the Banking Model of Education. In this model, students act as the bank while the teacher plays the role of depositor. Like a bank, the student remains stationary and passive while the teacher deposits knowledge into their brains like coins in a piggy bank.

In contrast, a problem-posing classroom ensures that "the students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration and re-considers her earlier considerations as the

students express their own" (Freire 81). Through this exchange, the power dynamics are, at the least, less pronounced. When we become co-investigators, the student has just as much responsibility and voice in their learning as we do. In fact, there is a chance, as Freire points out, that the time our students spend dwelling could lead them to unearth thoughts and ideas that we ourselves had never considered. Through this sharing of ideas and considering and reconsidering, our students become something more powerful. They undergo the failure-try-again cycle over and over again in this Pause until they become comfortable with it and begin to associate failure with opportunity.

From what I can tell, there are at least a handful of respected educators that believe in this sort of intentional pause approach to learning, but they seem hesitant to say so, perhaps due to unwanted pushback. In 2020 our English Department head decided to require all English teachers to participate in a book study. The book was *180 Days* by Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle. In this book, they give a detailed outline for how teachers of writing should structure their school year. Our department head was asking each of us to adopt this new structure into our classroom. This meant following a rigid, timed lesson planning structure (2-minute book talk, 10 minutes of reading, 10 minutes of writing, 8-minute minilesson, etc.) as well as creating 4 genre-specific writing units: Narrative, Informational, Argument, and a conclusive Multi-genre project.

In the book, there is also a small section where Gallagher and Kittle talk about students reading whole novels without interruption. Mind you, this is not at all the intended take away of this book, but it caught my eye because, at the time, it felt so unorthodox. Traditionally, when students are reading the same book as a class, they are assigned a certain number of chapters or pages to read as homework so that they might return the next day prepared to discuss the assigned section. The teacher may give out a quiz of some sort to ensure the student has read and

to check for understanding. Then, this cycle is repeated until the novel is completed. To just set a student free with a book without guidance seemed like borderline insanity to some of my colleagues. What if they got all the way through *The Great Gatsby* without recognizing the green light for what it truly was? What if they missed all the allegories and the foreshadowing and the theme? The whole novel approach was almost immediately dismissed. The above quote came up briefly in our department meeting and was laughed away.

Looking back on those questions, I find them to be a bit silly. Well meaning, but silly. This whole novel method was one that would allow students to create their own meaning before the teacher points out those key textual components, like symbolism. It doesn't mean that those key textual components won't be pointed out later, just not now. Gallagher and Kittle mention this quickly saying, "We decided students should read the entire book before any discussion would occur. By reading the entire novel first on their own, students generated their own meaning-making before the teacher and other students intervened" (Gallagher and Kittle 67). Meaning-making is a beautiful term. Would the students miss things in this whole-novel approach? Almost certainly, but they would also have the opportunity to find their own meaning in the novel – not our meaning, their meaning. They may even find a meaning we had overlooked because of our exclusive focus on the "important" parts.

Gallagher and Kittle did ask their students to keep Thought Logs as they read. These Thought Logs were highly unstructured notes that the students would make as they read so that, when they finished the book, they would be able to look back on their ideas and share them. They found that, "many students were not comfortable with the openness of the Thought Log approach. They were much more familiar with being told what to think and how much to think, but we each explained to them the value of generating their own thinking…this vagueness can be

unsettling, but we want students to start making these judgements" (Gallagher and Kittle 57). Again, this is a small portion of a large book that has very different goals than pushing the whole novel approach, but it underscores my point about the importance of including The Pause. Why is the vagueness unsettling? Why isn't it liberating? The answer is: Students are not permitted to dwell in the uncharted long enough to feel comfortable there. Without The Pause, students ask, even expect, us to fill that space for them. They do not realize that their thoughts are of equal value, and they are completely unfamiliar with exploration as it pertains to learning.

I also believe that Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams, the two teachers discussed earlier as the major founders of Flipped Instruction, saw the power of The Pause. By presenting material to students prior to class and allowing them the time to dwell with and unpack new material independently, they were unknowingly creating a pause. The trouble with Flipped instruction, which I mentioned in the Literature Review, is that it tends to be more beneficial within the math/science realm, and it also requires some sort of block scheduling in order to truly be effective. The Pause is much more versatile across disciplines. It can be used with any schedule or subject because it is intentionally created by the teacher, not the circumstances. I mention Flipped Instruction because I believe its mass adoption during Covid-19 was our first indication that our best practices needed some revamping. The trouble is it became a Band-Aid. As soon as the pandemic calmed, many teachers reverted back to their old ways, not realizing that the new normal was here to stay.

As educators, we have countless pedagogical strategies thrown our way that are great *in theory* but do not transfer well into practice. In this section I will highlight some of my own successes with The Pause, and how I have chosen to implement it in my own classroom. I will also point to the practices of other educators that have unintentionally also served as pauses,

though they may not recognize them as such. All of the following examples, both mine and others, show that timing is absolutely crucial in this implementation.

This year I faced a new challenge in the classroom. I was asked to fill a remedial reading position for grades 6 through 8. I had taught Title I Reading before at grade levels 4 and 5 but this has certainly proven to be uncharted territory. Upon collaborating with my administrators, I quickly learned that they had no qualms about my desire to try something different in the classroom. My exact words were, "Are you okay with me experimenting to figure out what works?" to which they responded in the affirmative. I fully acknowledge how lucky I am to have been given this freedom. The students had been placed with long-term substitute teachers for almost a year as their previous teacher had fallen ill. The class was highly unstructured. This provided an opportunity for exploration (as well as some behavior challenges). After combing through my student's NWEA scores I found that most of them were scoring around the second-grade level. To say I was shocked would be an understatement. Since then, I have conferenced with each student individually. I asked them to talk to me about their experience with the NWEA test. Here are some of the responses I received:

"I slept through almost the whole thing. When I woke up, I had 10 minutes left, so I just clicked random answers."

"There was way too much reading. I didn't read it all."

"It's boring"

"I hate reading, and the passages are so long."

"I didn't sleep well the night before."

"I just didn't care."

"I wanted to get it over with."

I think I disguised my panic well. At least they were honest, I suppose. I started formulating a plan. These were students that had already given up on the idea of reading. How could I get them to care? What would make them decide to be learners again?

Lynda Barry is a writer and a cartoonist with unbelievable talent. Her books are quite literally works of art. As I was struggling to figure out how to get through to these kids, I ordered her book *Syllabus* thanks it being recommended by a colleague. It is truly a beautiful book, even before one starts to read it. The cover is the imitation of a composition notebook. Upon opening it you realize that Barry leaves no stone unturned. Each page is exploding with color and bursting with images and words with zero regard for margins. A lightbulb went off. Surely a book as unique and wild as this one would catch the eye of angsty teens too, right?

I brought the book with me to school the next day and did a book talk with it, displaying it under the document camera. I knew my students wouldn't necessarily be interested in the content, though I did read them an excerpt, so I focused on the form. We examined page after page of Barry's drawings of monsters and Batman and trucks and countless other things that felt random but were actually deeply meaningful. The students were particularly interested in the fact that it was Barry's real notebook that she had decided to publish. The enthusiasm was cautious, but it was evident.

I quickly submitted a request for two bulk boxes of mini, colorful notebooks to our receptionist for approval. Thanks to Amazon Prime, I had them in just a few days. I had told the students that I was going to order them, and they asked me every day whether or not they had come in. When they walked in and saw the boxes, they were excited. They wanted me to open them right away. I did, and hurried discussions began about which color notebook they wanted.

Seeing as this was the most excitement I had seen out of them all year, I was happy to oblige their color preferences.

After the dust had settled, the big question came – What do we do with them? How do we start? I showed them Lynda Barry's notebook again, emphasizing the creativity and how full the pages were. Each of my classes had voted between three book options earlier in the semester meaning that some of them were reading *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan, some were reading *Skeleton Creek* by Patrick Carman, and one class had chosen *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton. I explained that they were to keep their notebooks close to them as we read and that they should draw people, places, things, or ideas that they found to be important in the story. I emphasized that this activity wasn't graded but was intended to help them remember and keep track of the parts of the story that mattered to them.

In a room full of angsty teens you quickly establish a scale of angst. Some students bring their teenager-y attitude once or twice a week, but there are a select few who treat angst and attitude like a religion they have practiced since birth. There was one girl in particular that made it clear on day one that she did not like to read, that reading was in fact stupid, she didn't want to be here, and she intended to sleep. I had another student who was so frequently in either in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension that I never knew when to actually expect his presence. When I asked him why he seemed to get into trouble so much his response was, "I don't want to be here. It gets me out of class." I share these student outlooks not to be negative or to put down teenagers. Each of these students are near and dear to my heart. I share them so it is clear what sort of deep-rooted mindsets about learning I was, and still am, trying to combat.

Once the expectations for the notebooks were put in place, and there weren't many, we began to read. Eventually a routine was established so that, after independent reading, the same

students would pass out the notebooks and then wait for me to begin reading our whole-class book. Once I was finished, there was a pause where I asked students to draw the part of the story that they found most memorable into their notebooks. There were no rules or leading them in any particular direction, just students and what they were compelled to draw from our reading.

The student I mentioned earlier, the one who often used ISS and OSS as vacation, drew something unexpected one day. I went around collecting notebooks after they had all rushed out the door. I peeked into his, fully expecting to be met with blank pages. Instead, he had drawn a wood nymph peeling herself away from a tree. His class was reading *The Lightning Thief* and at one point in our reading that day, there had been brief mention of this very scene. It wasn't at all important to the plot of the story. Rick Riordan hadn't even given this wood nymph a name, but for whatever reason, this student, this tough, unruly, unreachable student had found the nymph significant. He was, reluctantly, learning.

If this student had been told what was important, had been told that the wood nymph was unimportant and that he should focus instead on, say, the obvious tension that resides between Percy and Annabeth, it would be the same as saying that what was important to him (the wood nymph) was actually not important at all. By allowing this student to pause and make his own meaning out of this story, he was more engaged and interested than he had been all year. This was a student who was failing nearly every class because he refused to do any work either in class or out of it and yet, he picked up a pencil and doodled a wood nymph in a mini red notebook for a subject he declared to hate most of all.

This Pause has the power to give students the autonomy that adulthood will undoubtedly require of them while simultaneously allowing them to determine what it is that matters to them. We don't often create space in our classrooms for students to tell us what they notice or what

they find important and, often, when they do, we redirect them to what some other, more important, entity claims is valuable. Should we be steering students away from their inquiries in favor of our own? Is teaching only about the right answers?

I made another strategic choice at the beginning of my move to the reading room. I decided that I would start each class period with a would-you-rather question. I did something similar when I was teaching English at the high school and received pushback. As a life-long learner, starting a class with intriguing, thought-provoking questions seemed completely rational, even fun, but my colleagues did not feel the same way. In my school, we collaborated through Professional Learning Communities or PLCs. In these groups, teachers who are teaching the same content and grade level come together to share strategies, align content to state standards, and build curriculum. Once, I came to a PLC meeting excited about a journal prompt I had come up with. Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle whose classroom structure we were currently adhering to suggested that students write in a journal every single day. I decided to make my journal prompts fun.

The prompt I shared with my group was my most creative one yet. My students loved it, and the conversations afterward were rich. I showed my students three images. One was a spooky mansion, one was an adobe, and one was a castle. I gave them 10 minutes to choose one image and write a story. No rules, no guidance, just the students, their imagination, and a 10-minute time cap. They absolutely exceeded my expectations. They wrote stories about hauntings and getting lost in the desert and knights and battles. It was so much fun and had broken up the monotony of our regular routine while still meeting the writing expectations. When I shared this win with my group, though, they had questions. How did this relate to the Great Gatsby unit? Shouldn't the daily writing questions be academic? Shouldn't the journal prompts lead into what

was going to be talked about that day? I quickly deflated, confused that they couldn't see that learning was happening. Each and every day my students came to class anticipating what crazy, kooky question I would have for them. It was 10 glorious minutes of unstructured writing where students didn't have to worry about being right or wrong. They could just pause and drift through their creative thoughts. The real kicker? This was often their very best writing.

My would-you-rather questions that I am implementing now received pushback of a different kind that will be discussed in a later section, but the takeaway is the same: Creating a pause where students are given time to create and explore and wrestle with their creative thoughts is not one that is welcomed with open arms despite the obvious passion it brings out in the students. Whether we care to admit it or not, many of our students could not care less about writing an argumentative paper or reading a dusty novel. School is something to be survived, not enjoyed. Forgive the repetition, but The Pause makes them…pause. They find themselves unintentionally enjoying learning.

And it is learning. As much as some would like to label this time unacademic, the results say something different. The only way for students to achieve true academic growth is by learning to love learning. Elliott Eisner asks a couple of really powerful questions saying, "How can we help our students view their work as temporary experimental accomplishments, tentative resting places subject to further change? How can we help them work at the edge of incompetence?" (Eisner 210). School only becomes mundane and boring when students are told what and how to think. By reinstating the creative challenge that comes with seeking answers and coming to our own conclusions, students suddenly have a reason for being, and they realize that their teachers trust them enough to allow them to make their own meaning and their own mistakes.

PUSHBACK

Like any new pedagogical technique, this one is no stranger to pushbacks and questions. This technique has room for growth and welcomes the friction that comes with constructive criticism. This section will discuss anticipated counterarguments by recognizing potential problems within this structure and offering practical solutions.

Mental Health

Both during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, the nation saw a frightening uptick in mental health issues. Lockdowns and social distancing requirements led many to feelings of loneliness and isolation. The constant unknown, the media, the panic all led to a population riddled with anxiety and fear. Losing loved ones and being unable to be with them in their last moments had many fighting for closure and connection.

In 2022 the American Psychological Association published an article in their *Trends Report* that provides some staggering data about the mental health of students post-Covid. The APA quotes data from a 2020 survey given by Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago. This survey found that, "71% of parents said the pandemic had taken a toll on their child's mental health, and 69% said the pandemic was the worst thing to happen to their child" (Abramson 69). They also share data from the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* which reported a 31% increase in mental health related emergency visits in children ages 12 to 17 when compared to data from 2019 (Abramson 69). All of this led to the passing of the American Rescue Plan Act in 2021 that was intended to supply funding for schools to hire on-site psychologists. There is no doubt that the pandemic left its mark on the mental well-being of children, and while the American Rescue

Plan Act was an honest attempt at reform, I know my school district still does not have an on-site psychologist. I would venture to say we are not the only one.

With this knowledge about mental health, we must acknowledge that this Pause requires that students spend time in a creative space where they are asked to play with new ideas and theories on their own. It requires that, over time, students become comfortable operating in a state of productive struggle. Especially at first, this could be a somewhat stressful change. Some might argue that, after the turmoil of the pandemic, the worst possible decision would be to delay support; they would argue that now, more than ever, students need adults to reassure them and guide them through the complexities of learning to help mitigate stress and anxiety.

There is absolutely no doubt that students' mental health should be a top priority, and there is no doubt that this new plateau Covid-19 has placed us on is riddled with stressors and confusion and uncertainty. The answer, though, is not to make our students more reliant but rather, resilient. We cannot go back to the way things were before. What we can do is give students a safe place to fail and wrestle with new thoughts so that, should they find themselves forced back into a space where we, the teachers, are unable to guide them, they have the skills and confidence to independently tackle challenging content. It is also important to note that the work that students do in The Pause need not be graded. It is an experimental space where mistakes are not punished by arbitrary marks. While students may experience discomfort due to delayed intervention, there is comfort in knowing there are no negative repercussions for

There is a chance that this modification of best practices could rebuild student confidence over time and help students uncover how good they really are at solving problems. This slowing down and dwelling could even be therapeutic – an escape from a fast-paced world that doesn't always have time to truly listen to and understand the complex thoughts of young people.

Learning Disabilities

While many of our students' mental health struggles can be traced back to the pandemic, some of our students were struggling pre-pandemic for completely unrelated reasons. In the Literature Review, I mention state mandated scaffolding. This scaffolding is typically provided to students with diagnosed learning and behavior disabilities through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan. Some of these students are required by law to spend a certain number of hours each week in a special education classroom to receive extra support. Sometimes these plans require that students be given more time on assignments or be given the opportunity to test in an alternative setting, amongst other things. The question then becomes, how does this added "pause" apply to these students? Does it apply at all? We certainly cannot postpone their scaffolding; it is required by law. What does The Pause look like for these students?

Differentiation is crucial, but the good news is, we know our students. We know their temperaments and their limits. For example, if you know Johnny is going to start throwing pencils if he spends too much time wrestling with a new idea, perhaps his "pause" lasts 5 minutes. Maybe Sarah has a bit more patience, and you know she can spend more time in that challenging space, so her pause lasts 15 minutes.

As a teacher of remedial reading, I am no stranger to working with students who are either reluctant learners or living with a disability. This method shows promise across all demographics as long as the student's individual, differential needs are taken into account. In the conclusion to this chapter, I will provide an example of The Pause being beneficial to my own classroom, despite almost all of my students being at-risk in some capacity.

Mindset Shift

Change is hard, and it tends to be particularly slow when it comes to the world of education. Just like the flipped instruction experience the math teachers had in my introduction, we should be prepared to encounter pushback from students and parents when implementing this method for the first time. Parents do not like to see their students struggle. Students do not like struggling. We work in public service, and it is our job to serve our communities. What do we do when parents and their children resist the change?

I think the answer lies in transparency, and I think it begins with our students. We want our students to be able to think metacognitively, so we should explain to them why we are teaching them the way we are teaching them. I have learned through my experience in both middle school and high school that students deeply appreciate being treated like adults. They like it when we share what we are working on with other adults. It makes them feel included and like we truly value their feedback. So, we tell them about The Pause. We explain the benefits. We are honest about what we don't know, and, perhaps most importantly, we ask them to try it. There is no reason to be secretive about our methods here, and students tend to react better when they are part of the decision making. If this is thrown at them with no prior knowledge, the disruption in routine and structure could be jarring, leading to student shutdown and resistance. If this is avoided, and we choose to pull back the curtain, chances are students will go home and explain to their parents this new thing that is going on in their classroom. Student buy-in will inevitably lead to parent buy-in, giving us a chance to prove that this works.

When this method is adopted, it must be fully embraced and committed to if results are to be celebrated. Education is a marathon, not a sprint. We live in a world of instant gratification and thus, there will be a period of time at the beginning of implementation where some cannot

see the finish line and will accuse teachers of not teaching. It will be imperative that administration back their teachers and trust the process. As results start to show and as students adapt, the community will begin to see the benefits of this move.

Time

We have addressed students and parents, but there is a good chance that administration and teachers themselves may be skeptical and resistant to change as well. Perhaps the most frequent comment made by teachers when they are asked to try something new is, "I don't have time," and quite frankly, we don't. Pacing guides, priority standards and standardized testing have us always racing to the next unit panting, sweaty, and chasing our tail. This pausing to explore requires just that – a pause. It seems that education is constantly calling for more more more, making it harder for students to achieve mastery. This Pause asks that those in power acknowledge the benefits of applying the brakes.

There is nothing our administrators and politicians hate more than a slow-moving classroom. What is interesting though, is that these same politicians and administrators desperately want us to "close the gap" created by Covid-19. The solution, currently, is to play catch up – get as much missed content into students' brains as possible as quickly as possible. The trouble with this method is retention. The gap will never be closed in this way because there is no pause. There is no time for students to dwell, digest, explore, question and thus, the content means very little to them. We perpetuate the gap if we rush through the learning. Getting through the content is not synonymous with learning the content, reinforcing the importance of that pause.

We don't have the time simply because we are not allowed it. I understand that this is a systemic change that requires a whole different paper to fully unpack, but again, I must reiterate: Administrators and school boards will have to choose to support this change and allow teachers to utilize The Pause. There must be an acknowledgement that learning and loving to learn is bolstered by time well spent and sometimes that time should be spent sitting with our thoughts.

I will share one of my own personal experiences with time that I still find myself reflecting on. Once, in a meeting with an instructional coach, I was asked how I was structuring my lessons. I explained that I began each class with two Would-You-Rather questions, just for fun. The coach sort of cocked her head to the side and frowned.

"How long are you spending on that?"

"Oh, it varies with the question. Roughly 5 minutes."

"Are the questions academic?"

"No. They're just for fun. They stimulate conversation. The kids really enjoy them."

"I see. We should probably cut that down to two minutes, yeah?"

It was my turn to frown, but I let it go. She then proceeded to guide me through how each minute of my time with my students should be spent. 2 minutes for the would-you-rather questions. 10 minutes of independent reading. A 5-minute mini-lesson. 15 minutes reading from the class book. 10 minutes writing in their journal. She even encouraged me to make a student my "timekeeper" to help me stay on track. This is not a jab at this instructional coach. She was doing exactly as she was trained. Even my most favorite educational authors, Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle structure their classrooms by the minute. They even encourage the use of timers. We are obsessed with time, and I fully anticipate that when we ask for a slowdown, we will meet opposition.

Conclusion

Despite the potential for pushback, this modification of best practices through the addition of The Pause has shown promise in my classroom. I have found that my students are reluctant at first mostly because they aren't used to this new-found freedom. They are uncomfortable with the idea that they can simply form their own thoughts and opinions about content without a teacher immediately telling them whether it is right or wrong. With practice they realize that they are capable of critical thinking and that the most challenging episodes of dwelling often yield the best rewards. I have come to recognize that student hesitancy is okay and that it is important that they work through their reluctance in order to embrace new ways of practicing their learning.

CONCLUSION

As educators, we are still navigating the wreckage of a worldwide pandemic. It is exhausting work, and some days we want nothing more than to go back to the way things were before. We know that education does not, and most likely will never, look the same. We know our students have changed over the course of the pandemic years too; their outlook on learning, their mental health, their motivation, and their expectations have all been altered both as a reaction to the pandemic and as a reaction to our handling of it.

Our goal now should be to intentinally create The Pause. Covid, despite its countless stressors and setbacks, showed us the importance of this Pause, giving us the chance to develop new ways of implementing, expanding, and perfecting it for our students. As the pressure to close the gap increases and teachers are encouraged to plow through as much content as possible with students who are already overwhelmed by the instability of a post-pandemic world, The Pause must morph and adapt from a simple 5-minutes free writing activity into something more intricate, more focused. The need is greater now more than ever for more time to wrestle and unpack. Learning happens in times of deep reflection, not through rushed units and lessons. Students expect to be thrown "check-list content" – watch this video, do this worksheet, submit it to Blackboard by 11:59 PM. Unfortunately, the problems they face in real life (such as an unexpected pandemic) will never be so clear cut. Our Pause should now look like pondering, trying, failing, discussing, pondering, trying again, failing again, discussing, and so on. It must look this way because that is the only way to persevere through unknown territory, whether that territory be academic or pandemic. In order to prepare our students for the world, our best practice must be just that – the practicing and honing of skills that will give students the tools to

persevere through multiple genres of struggle. This requires a slow down, a Pause where students can safely practice and propose independent ideas and come to understand that learning means taking risks and revising old ideas through the lens of new knowledge.

Elliot Eisner says that, “at its best education is a process of learning how to become the architect of our own education” (212). After this statement, he goes on to explain the requirements of existing in a fast-paced, highly politicized society riddled with conflicting messages, ambiguity, and complex problems. He ends with the fact that, “our world is not one that submits to single correct answers or questions or clear-cut solutions to problems” (Eisner 213). Thus, it should be our aspiration as educators to prepare our students for this complex environment by pausing and allowing them to practice working through complex problems and ideas independently, as they will surely be expected to as adults.

We cannot keep using pre-pandemic practices because we do not live in that space anymore. We cannot start over from scratch and re-invent the wheel, because we would lose decades of valuable educational practices. The answer lies, as it so often does, in the middle. We keep those pre-pandemic best practices because they have shown success before, but we modify. We create a new territory for learning that must be crossed before we reach a place where implementing our best practices is beneficial; a pause should be created where students are encouraged to explore and problem solve without someone telling them how to do it or steering them in any particular direction. How beautiful would it be if our students left our classrooms confident that their ideas are valuable and comfortable taking the time to investigate and think critically about things that are new to them?

CoVid-19 has had a lasting impact, but the impacts do not all have to be negative ones. We can take this opportunity to refine and adjust our practice so that it will serve our students regardless of circumstance.

WORKS CITED

Abramson, Ashley. “Children's Mental Health Is in Crisis.” *Monitor on Psychology*, American Psychological Association, 1 Jan. 2022, https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/01/special-childrens-mental-health.

Banas, Jennifer R., et al. *The Flipped College Classroom: Conceptualized and Re-Conceptualized*. Springer, 2017.

Bates, J. Edward, Hasan Almekdash, and Maggie J. Gilchrest-Dunnam. "The flipped classroom: A brief, brief history." *The flipped college classroom: Conceptualized and re-conceptualized*, 2017: 3-10.

Bergmann, Jonathan, and Aaron Sams. *Flip Your Classroom: Reach Every Student in Every Class Every Day*. International Society for Technology in Education, 2012.

Eisner, Elliot W. *Reimagining Schools the Selected Works of Elliot W. Eisner*. Routledge, 2005.

Freire, Paulo, et al. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.

Gallagher, Kelly, and Kittle, Penny. *180 Days: Two Teachers and the Quest to Engage and Empower Adolescents,* Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH, 2018, pp. 11-12.

Gonulal, Talip, and Shawn Loewen. "Scaffolding technique." *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching*, 2018, pp 1-5.

Kelly, Patricia R., and Nancy Farnan. “Practicing What We Teach in Reading Education Programs.” *Journal of Reading*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1990, pp. 264–69. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40030086. Accessed 17 Mar. 2023.

Lemov, Doug. *Teach like a Champion: 49 Techniques That Put Students on the Path to College*. Jossey-Bass, 2010.

North, Stephen M. *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field*. Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1987.

NAEP. “NAEP Report Card: 2022 NAEP Reading Assessment.” *The Nation's Report Card*, 2022, https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/reading/2022/.

The World Bank, et al. *The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery*, 2021, https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-global-education-crisis. Accessed 18 Mar. 2023.

Thomson, Alexander. “Three Interconnected Distance Learning Education Challenges.” Community College Enterprise, vol. 24, no. 2, Fall 2018, pp. 74–

77. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=edo&AN=134831545&site=eds-live&scope=site.

UNICEF. *Are Children Really Learning? Exploring Foundational Skills in the Midst of a Learning Crisis*, 2022, https://data.unicef.org/resources/are-children-really-learning-foundational-skills-report/. Accessed 18 Mar. 2023.

U.S. Department of Education. “About Ed.” *Overview and Mission Statement | U.S. Department of Education*, https://www2.ed.gov/about/landing.jhtml#:~:text=ED's%20mission%20is%20to%20promote,offices%20from%20several%20federal%20agencies.

Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978.

Wood, David, Jerome S. Bruner, and Gail Ross. "The role of tutoring in problem solving." *Child Psychology & Psychiatry & Allied Disciplines*, 1976.