

Restorative Justice

in the English Language Arts Classroom



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Principles
in Practice
ADOLESCENT LITERACY

Dear Reader,

As a former high school teacher, I remember the frustration I felt when the gap between Research (and that is, by the way, how I always thought of it: Research with a capital *R*) and my own practice seemed too wide to ever cross. Research studies—those sterile reports written by professional and university researchers—often seemed so out of touch with the issues that most concerned me when I walked into my classroom every day. These studies were easy to ignore, in part because they were so distant from my experiences and in part because I had no one to help me see how that research could impact my everyday practice.

Although research has come a long way since then, as more and more teachers take up classroom-based inquiry, this gap between research and practice unfortunately still exists. Quite frankly, it's hard for even the most committed classroom teachers to pick up a research article or book, figure out how that research might apply to their classroom, convince their administrators that a new way of teaching is called for, and put it into practice. While most good teachers instinctively know that there is something to be gained from reading research, who realistically has the time or energy for it?

That gap informs the thinking behind this book imprint. Called Principles in Practice, the imprint publishes books that look carefully at the research-based principles and policies developed by NCTE and put those policies to the test in actual classrooms. The imprint naturally arises from one of the missions of NCTE: to develop policy for English language arts teachers. Over the years, many NCTE members have joined committees and commissions to study particular issues of concern to literacy educators. Their work has resulted in a variety of reports, research briefs, and policy statements designed both to inform teachers and to be used in lobbying efforts to create policy changes at the local, state, and national levels (reports that are available on NCTE's website, www.ncte.org).

Through this imprint, we are creating collections of books specifically designed to translate those research briefs and policy statements into classroom-based practice. The goal behind these books is to familiarize teachers with the issues behind certain concerns, lay out NCTE's policies on those issues, provide resources from research studies to support those policies, and—most of all—make those policies come alive for teacher-readers.

The first strand of books in the imprint centers on the issue of adolescent literacy. Each book in this series focuses on a different aspect of this important topic and is organized in a similar way: immersing you first in the research principles surrounding the topic (as laid out by *Adolescent Literacy: An NCTE Policy Research Brief*) and then taking you into actual classrooms, teacher discussions, and student work to see how the principles play out. Each book closes with a teacher-friendly annotated bibliography.

Good teaching *is* connected to strong research. We hope that these books help you continue the good teaching that you're doing, think hard about ways to adapt and adjust your practice, and grow even stronger in the vital work you do with kids every day.

Best of luck,

Cathy Fleischer

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Cover Design: Pat Mayer

Cover Images: upper left by The Parents Union / CC BY 2.0; upper right by the US Dept. of Education, CC BY; bottom left by Julie Mallozzi; bottom right a still from *Circle Up* by Julie Mallozzi

NCTE Stock Number: 41014; eStock Number: 41021

ISBN 978-0-8141-4101-4; eISBN 978-0-8141-4102-1

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Winn, Maisha T., author | Graham, Hannah, author. | Alfred, Rita Renjitham, 1955- author.

Title: Restorative justice in the English language arts classroom / Maisha T. Winn, Hannah Graham, Rita Renjitham Alfred.

Description: Urbana, Illinois : National Council of Teachers of English, [2019] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019013927 (print) | LCCN 2019016181 (ebook) | ISBN

9780814141021 () | ISBN 9780814141014 (pbk) | ISBN 9780814141021 (E-ISBN)

Subjects: LCSH: Language arts—Social aspects—United States. | English language—Study and teaching—Social aspects—United States. | Youth with social disabilities—Education—United States. | Restorative justice—United States.

Classification: LCC LB1576 (ebook) | LCC LB1576 .W4897 2019 (print) | DDC 372.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019013927>

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Prologue

In the summer of 2016, as we were writing this book, our efforts were often derailed by a seemingly endless barrage of violence echoing throughout the United States. Locally, Hannah and Maisha watched in horror as a video surfaced of an 18-year-old African American girl, Genele Laird, being beaten by two White police officers outside a shopping center in Madison, Wisconsin.¹ Less than two weeks later, all of us learned about Alton Sterling, an African American husband and father who was selling CDs outside a convenience store, being killed by police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This shooting was also captured on video, this time by the storeowner, who considered Mr. Sterling his friend. The very next day, we learned that another African American man, Philando Castile, who worked in the cafeteria of a Montessori school, was shot and killed by a Hispanic police officer who claimed to fear for his life. Mr. Castile's death was captured by his partner via Facebook Live as her 4-year-old daughter witnessed and consequently comforted her mother. Killings of police officers in Dallas, at the hands of a military-trained shooter, and Baton Rouge came next, and the United States was depicted as a "nation on the edge" by the media.² Fingers were pointed and guns were drawn as a debate on whose lives mattered ensued. In the fall of 2016, as we were completing this manuscript, we started waking up—once again—to more news of police shootings, including Terence Crutcher in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Keith Lamont Scott, in Charlotte, North Carolina, launching more rebellions and exchanges between police and civilians. We couldn't forget the image of a police officer in a helicopter looking down at Mr. Crutcher and exclaiming that he looked like a "bad dude," which, we can only imagine, was a reference to his color (Black) and gender (male). There were some who pointed the finger westward to a multiracial San Francisco 49ers quarterback, Colin Kaepernick, who chose to kneel during "The Star Spangled Banner" in protest of police shooting and killing civilians. In between all the killings were verdicts of not guilty in other fatal incidents involving law enforcement and Black men and women.

Throughout all of this heartache, we—a team of educators, scholars, and restorative justice practitioners who proudly identify as Black (Maisha), Jewish (Hannah), and Southeast Asian (Rita)—kept thinking about the children. Picturing a 4-year-old child witnessing a man being shot and bleeding in the front seat of a

car while she was in the backseat was unfathomable. Images of the 15-year-old son of Alton Sterling wailing at press conferences and his father's funeral were difficult to watch. We thought about these children who witnessed these events unfolding, as well as the aftermath, as they returned to school. As educators, we know that these children—and all children who are coming of age at this time—will have to overcome trauma to be engaged in learning. As scholars, we are all too familiar with research data demonstrating racial disparities in referrals, suspensions, and expulsions that mirror the criminal justice system on the streets and in the courts. And, finally, as restorative justice practitioners, products of the restorative justice process, and believers in the ability of restorative justice to build consensus and community, we understand that we have a lot of work to do to get these critical skills into the minds and practices of teachers in every classroom and every school across the country.

Who Are We and Why Are We Here?

Our paths crossed because we all care deeply about both children and the adults in school buildings who impart their wisdom, values, and lived experiences to these children, both implicitly and explicitly. Maisha, a language, literacy, and culture scholar with one foot firmly planted in English education, met Rita, a restorative justice practitioner and educator, through a leading restorative justice attorney and mutual friend, Sujatha Baliga,³ who believed in our commitment to examining the intersectionality of restorative justice and education. Maisha was familiar with Rita's work with Cole Middle School and used a report documenting this work in her restorative English education training (Sumner, Silverman, & Frampton, 2010). Rita heard about Maisha's work in transforming ideas and talk into concrete artifacts that can be disseminated to induce cultural change. When Maisha and Rita first sat down together, Rita stated what should be obvious when we think about implementing restorative justice classrooms and schools but was not obvious to Maisha at the time: "I'm not into training kids. It's the adults who need training, not kids. Why should the kids carry the issues that are created by adults, for us? We are the ones who made this mess and now we have to fix this!"

Maisha and Hannah met at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where Hannah was a graduate student and Maisha was the Susan J. Cellmer Distinguished Chair in Teacher Education and director of Secondary English, and in the early phases of creating a Restorative Justice English Education⁴ project for preservice middle and high school English teachers. Hannah was interested in classroom talk and, prior to graduate school, had extensive experience developing curricula and working in teaching and learning spaces in both nonprofit and public school sectors in New York City, Tel Aviv, and Chicago. After learning about Hannah's

experience as a teacher and curriculum developer, Maisha invited Hannah to join the Secondary English team, and they went on to co-teach the English Methods course and Hannah supervised student teachers, drawing from their experiences as classroom teachers in elementary and secondary environments.

Rita learned about restorative justice practices after many years of advocacy for youth of color using *social* and *transformative* justice philosophies, working to transform relationships in both the personal and the familial realms and in group, systems, and societal relationships, at both the macro and micro levels. Restorative justice, according to Rita, works relationally with power and invites everyone to speak their values to power by engaging in social issues that affect how people live. Restorative justice principles were present in the many social movements and struggles Rita learned about and has witnessed in her lifetime, such as the Montgomery boycott during the Civil Rights era and the end of apartheid in South Africa and that country's engagement in a truth and reconciliation process to "right" the "wrongs" of apartheid and the harm it caused.

We came to one another as stakeholders in classrooms and schools across the country. We agree that teachers need and deserve more support in building relationships with their students, but that these relationships should not function independently of their curricular choices. In our previous work with teachers, we found ourselves assembling materials from many different resources but wished there were a resource book that could serve as a road map for integrating restorative justice in the teaching of various subjects. This book is the outcome of our collective funds of knowledge, designed to share our experiences of and recommendations for teaching, writing, and learning restoratively.

What Do We Mean by Restorative Justice?

So what is this thing that people call "restorative justice"? At its core, restorative justice is a paradigm shift that seeks to make building and sustaining equitable relationships essential to everything we do. Yes, it is that simple. It is also one of the most powerful forms of accountability; through restorative justice processes—Circles, restorative case conferences, and conversations—stakeholders build consensus to right wrongs. In the context of the criminal justice system, restorative justice asks three simple questions: Who was harmed? What do they need? Whose obligations are these? These questions are a paradigm shift from our current criminal (retributive) justice system that privileges crime and punishment by asking: What is the crime? Who did it? What do they deserve? The former questions position the victim or the person or persons who have been harmed as agentive and deserving of having their harm addressed.

What does this have to do with classrooms and schools? The American criminal justice system permeates everything we do, especially in the ways most schools are currently constructed. Classrooms and schools have traditionally been (and continue to be) sites of punishment and systems of punishment, starting with early practices such as wearing dunce caps, sitting in the corner of the classroom, and even corporal punishment.⁵ Isolation and even complete removal have become standard practices in classrooms and schools, which means children are missing precious time that should be devoted to learning, building intellectual curiosity, and finding platforms to amplify their ideas. In addition, a police presence is business as usual in many schools. Because it has become difficult in our education system to distinguish between the person who caused harm and the person who experienced harm, we contend that restorative justice is an opportunity and an invitation for teachers and students to address needs and obligations and to establish values that allow for a robust learning environment.

Reading This Book: An Overview

In bringing together our authorial voices, backgrounds, and beliefs, we are asking the same question posed to Mary Rose O'Reilley and her colleagues in Ihab Hassan's graduate seminar at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, at the height of the Vietnam War—how do we teach English so that people stop killing? O'Reilley (1984) stated:

My particular concern here is to explore the contribution we as teachers of writing and literature can make to “peace and world order studies,” new curricula challenging our pose of moral neutrality on campuses across the country. Because my own “peace studies” course developed in the context of a traditional rhetoric program, I hope it will have something to say to our concerns about the relationship of classroom teaching to community values. (p. 103)

While elsewhere Maisha has asked how math, social studies, and science (in addition to English) might be taught in a way that helps people to stop killing (Winn, 2016), in this book we focus on the English language arts classroom: how it can be transformed into a deliberate, equitable, and thoughtful “change lab” using writing and reading techniques that inspire empathy, discussion, and social action, providing opportunities for teachers and their students to engage in a restorative English education. Although we offer suggested practices, anecdotes from teachers, and curricular concepts focused on how to engage in a restorative English education throughout this book, the work of restoration is at its core about *mind-set*; it is not a convenient program or list of best practices. All adults working with children have to engage in the difficult work of retraining their minds to be more critical of their own biases and finding tangible ways to exchange this bias for true

understanding and valuing of fellow human beings. This book reflects the interwoven importance of educator mindset and classroom technique in illuminating the qualities of a restorative English language arts classroom. Chapters offer windows into restorative philosophies, future reading lists, and pedagogic practices in the following order:

Chapter 1: Brings the need for a restorative English education into focus and articulates its alignment with the NCTE literacy brief on adolescent literacy.

Chapter 2: Offers a history of restorative justice in education and gives an overview of the power of Circles in redressing harm and creating community.

Chapter 3: Offers specific ways that ELA teachers can approach their curriculum and pedagogy to create a restorative English educative space.

Chapter 4: Provides the means for educators to assess themselves and their classrooms in the context of restorative justice principles.

Chapter 5: Outlines next steps and provides specific, concrete examples of how teachers and teaching teams can continue this work beyond this book.

The following chapters provide a road map for how English teachers can significantly engage in the work of integrating restorative principles into their classrooms. We fear this work will sound ephemeral; however, given the current climate of violence against Black and Brown people and the sparring between #BlackLivesMatter and #AllLivesMatter, it is time to do transformational work, starting with the English classroom and using the tools that have influenced the thinking and actions of others. ELA teachers have the opportunity to work with mediums of literacy that can be transformative for their students and themselves; this book seeks to support this work.

Honoring and Remembering Historical Roots

Finally, and before we can go any further, we want to ask permission from and offer respect and honor to the Indigenous peoples from whom restorative justice practices originated, including the Ohlone people and the Patwin/Wintu/Wintun tribes, whose land Maisha and Rita now live on in California. We also offer respect and honor to the Dakota Sioux, Ho-chunk, Menominee, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Fox and Sauk tribes, whose land Hannah lives on in Wisconsin. We are grateful for their generosity and to Rita's lineage of teachers in restorative justice—the Tagish and Tlingit First Nations people from the Yukon, Canada—who brought the restorative justice practice called “Peacemaking Circles” to us in the United States. The First Nations people and the First Peoples in many parts of the world have practiced this way of being with their communities, handled issues of hurt and harm using these practices, and continue to use these practices even in the face of

continued colonization and state-sanctioned violence, as in North Dakota, where they are fighting (resisting) the Dakota Access Pipeline. Recognizing the history of cultural and physical appropriation and colonization of Indigenous peoples may feel both overwhelming and necessary, especially because RJ scholars and educators have moved away from acknowledging the historical context of our work.

An Invitation

This book is an opportunity and invitation to find ways to create a literacy classroom that prioritizes relationships. We believe that when relationships are prioritized, learning will happen. We also believe that creating the foundation for relationships is just the beginning. This book can serve as a guide and a first step in this important work; however, it cannot and must not take the place of engaging in restorative justice Circle Keeper training, which we encourage all readers of this book to complete.⁶ We hope you will join us on this journey to rethinking our classroom spaces—and the ELA classroom in particular—as the site for healing and moving forward.

Welcome.

Adolescent Literacy

An NCTE Policy Research Brief

Causes for Concern

It is easy to summon the language of crisis in discussing adolescent literacy. After all, a recent study of writing instruction reveals that 40 percent of high school seniors never or rarely write a paper of three or more pages, and although 4th and 8th graders showed some improvement in writing between 1998 and 2002, the scores of 12th graders showed no significant change. Less than half of the 2005 ACT-tested high school graduates demonstrated readiness for college-level reading, and the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scores for 12th graders showed a decrease from 80 percent at the *proficient* level in 1992 to 73 percent in 2005.

Recent NAEP results also reveal a persistent achievement gap between the reading and writing scores of whites and students of color in 8th and 12th grades. Furthermore, both whites and students of color scored lower in reading in 2005 as compared with 1992, and both male and female students also scored lower in 2005.¹

The challenges associated with adolescent literacy extend beyond secondary school to both college and elementary school. Many elementary school teachers worry about the 4th-grade slump in reading abilities. Furthermore, preliminary analysis of reading instruction in the elementary school suggests that an emphasis on processes of how to read can crowd out attention to reading for ideas, information, and concepts—the very skills adolescents need to succeed in secondary school. In the other direction, college instructors claim that students arrive in their classes ill-prepared to take up the literacy tasks of higher education, and employers lament the inadequate literacy skills of young workers. In our increasingly “flat” world, the U.S. share of the global college-educated workforce has fallen from 30 percent to 14 percent in recent decades as young workers in developing nations demonstrate employer-satisfying proficiency in literacy.²

In this context, many individuals and groups, including elected officials, governmental entities, foundations, and media outlets—some with little knowledge of the field—have stepped forward to shape policies that impact literacy instruction. Notably, the U.S. Congress is currently discussing new Striving Readers legislation (Bills S958 and HR2289) designed to improve the literacy skills of middle and high school students. Test scores and other numbers do not convey the full complexity of literacy even though they are effective in eliciting a feeling of crisis. Accordingly, a useful alternative would be for teachers and other informed professionals to take an interest in policy that shapes literacy instruction. This document provides research-based information to support that interest.

Common Myths about Adolescent Literacy

Myth: Literacy refers only to reading.

Reality: Literacy encompasses reading, writing, and a variety of social and intellectual practices that call upon the voice as well as the eye and hand. It also extends to new media—including nondigitized multimedia, digitized multimedia, and hypertext or hypermedia.³

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Myth: Students learn everything about reading and writing in elementary school.

Reality: Some people see the processes of learning to read and write as similar to learning to ride a bicycle, as a set of skills that do not need further development once they have been achieved. Actually literacy learning is an ongoing and nonhierarchical process. Unlike math where one principle builds on another, literacy learning is recursive and requires continuing development and practice.⁴

Myth: Literacy instruction is the responsibility of English teachers alone.

Reality: Each academic content area poses its own literacy challenges in terms of vocabulary, concepts, and topics. Accordingly, adolescents in secondary school classes need explicit instruction in the literacies of each discipline as well as the actual content of the course so that they can become successful readers and writers in all subject areas.⁵

Myth: Academics are all that matter in literacy learning.

Reality: Research shows that out-of-school literacies play a very important role in literacy learning, and teachers can draw on these skills to foster learning in school. Adolescents rely on literacy in their identity development, using reading and writing to define themselves as persons. The discourses of specific disciplines and social/cultural contexts created by school classrooms shape the literacy learning of adolescents, especially when these discourses are different and conflicting.⁶

Myth: Students who struggle with one literacy will have difficulty with all literacies.

Reality: Even casual observation shows that students who struggle with reading a physics text may be excellent readers of poetry; the student who has difficulty with word problems in math may be very comfortable with historical narratives. More important, many of the literacies of adolescents are largely invisible in the classroom. Research on reading and writing beyond the classroom shows that students often have literacy skills that are not made evident in the classroom unless teachers make special efforts to include them.⁷

Myth: School writing is essentially an assessment tool that enables students to show what they have learned.

Reality: While it is true that writing is often central to assessment of what students have learned in school, it is also a means by which students learn and develop. Research shows that informal writing to learn can help increase student learning of content material, and it can even improve the summative writing in which students show what they have learned.⁸

Understanding Adolescent Literacy

Overview: Dimensions of Adolescent Literacy

In adolescence, students simultaneously begin to develop important literacy resources and experience unique literacy challenges. By fourth grade many students have learned a number of the basic processes of reading and writing; however, they still need to master

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literacy practices unique to different levels, disciplines, texts, and situations. As adolescents experience the shift to content-area learning, they need help from teachers to develop the confidence and skills necessary for specialized academic literacies.

Adolescents also begin to develop new literacy resources and participate in multiple discourse communities in and out of school. Frequently students' extracurricular literacy proficiencies are not valued in school. Literacy's link to community and identity means that it can be a site of resistance for adolescents. When students are not recognized for bringing valuable, multiple-literacy practices to school, they can become resistant to school-based literacy.⁹

1. Shifting Literacy Demands

The move from elementary to secondary school entails many changes including fundamental ones in the nature of literacy requirements. For adolescents, school-based literacy shifts as students engage with disciplinary content and a wide variety of difficult texts and writing tasks. Elementary school usually prepares students in the processes of reading, but many adolescents do not understand the multiple dimensions of content-based literacies. Adolescents may struggle with reading in some areas and do quite well with others. They may also be challenged to write in ways that conform to new disciplinary discourses. The proliferation of high-stakes tests can complicate the literacy learning of adolescents, particularly if test preparation takes priority over content-specific literacy instruction across the disciplines.¹⁰

Research says . . .

- Adolescents are less likely to struggle when subject area teachers make the reading and writing approaches in a given content area clear and visible.
- Writing prompts in which students reflect on their current understandings, questions, and learning processes help to improve content-area learning.¹¹
- Effective teachers model how they access specific content-area texts.
- Learning the literacies of a given discipline can help adolescents negotiate multiple, complex discourses and recognize that texts can mean different things in different contexts.
- Efficacious teaching of cross-disciplinary literacies has a social justice dimension as well as an intellectual one.¹²

2. Multiple and Social Literacies

Adolescent literacy is social, drawing from various discourse communities in and out of school. Adolescents already have access to many different discourses including those of ethnic, online, and popular culture communities. They regularly use literacies for social and political purposes as they create meanings and participate in shaping their immediate environments.¹³

Teachers often devalue, ignore, or censor adolescents' extracurricular literacies, assuming that these literacies are morally suspect, raise controversial issues, or distract adolescents from more important work. This means that some adolescents' literacy abilities remain largely invisible in the classroom.¹⁴

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Research says . . .

- The literacies adolescents bring to school are valuable resources, but they should not be reduced to stereotypical assumptions about predictable responses from specific populations of students.
- Adolescents are successful when they understand that texts are written in social settings and for social purposes.
- Adolescents need bridges between everyday literacy practices and classroom communities, including online, non-book-based communities.
- Effective teachers understand the importance of adolescents finding enjoyable texts and don't always try to shift students to "better" books.¹⁵

3. Importance of Motivation

Motivation can determine whether adolescents engage with or disengage from literacy learning. If they are not engaged, adolescents with strong literacy skills may choose not to read or write. The number of students who are not engaged with or motivated by school learning grows at every grade level, reaching epidemic proportions in high school. At the secondary level, students need to build confidence to meet new literacy challenges because confident readers are more likely to be engaged. Engagement is encouraged through meaningful connections.¹⁶

Research says . . .

Engaged adolescents demonstrate internal motivation, self-efficacy, and a desire for mastery. Providing student choice and responsive classroom environments with connections to "real life" experiences helps adolescents build confidence and stay engaged.¹⁷

A. Student Choice

- Self-selection and variety engage students by enabling ownership in literacy activities.
- In adolescence, book selection options increase dramatically, and successful readers need to learn to choose texts they enjoy. If they can't identify pleasurable books, adolescents often lose interest in reading.
- Allowing student choice in writing tasks and genres can improve motivation. At the same time, writing choice must be balanced with a recognition that adolescents also need to learn the literacy practices that will support academic success.
- Choice should be meaningful. Reading materials should be appropriate and should speak to adolescents' diverse interests and varying abilities.
- Student-chosen tasks must be supported with appropriate instructional support or scaffolding.¹⁸

B. Responsive Classroom Environments

- Caring, responsive classroom environments enable students to take ownership of literacy activities and can counteract negative emotions that lead to lack of motivation.
- Instruction should center around learners. Active, inquiry-based activities engage reluctant academic readers and writers. Inquiry-based writing connects writing practices with real-world experiences and tasks.

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- Experiences with task-mastery enable increased self-efficacy, which leads to continued engagement.
- Demystifying academic literacy helps adolescents stay engaged.
- Using technology is one way to provide learner-centered, relevant activities. For example, many students who use computers to write show more engagement and motivation and produce longer and better papers.
- Sustained experiences with diverse texts in a variety of genres that offer multiple perspectives on life experiences can enhance motivation, particularly if texts include electronic and visual media.¹⁹

4. Value of Multicultural Perspectives

Monocultural approaches to teaching can cause or increase the achievement gap and adolescents' disengagement with literacy. Students should see value in their own cultures and the cultures of others in their classrooms. Students who do not find representations of their own cultures in texts are likely to lose interest in school-based literacies. Similarly, they should see their home languages as having value. Those whose home language is devalued in the classroom will usually find school less engaging.

Research says . . .

Multicultural literacy is seeing, thinking, reading, writing, listening, and discussing in ways that critically confront and bridge social, cultural, and personal differences. It goes beyond a “tourist” view of cultures and encourages engagement with cultural issues in all literature, in all classrooms, and in the world.²⁰

A. Multicultural Literacy across All Classrooms

- Multicultural education does not by itself foster cultural inclusiveness because it can sometimes reinforce stereotypical perceptions that need to be addressed critically.
- Multicultural literacy is not just a way of reading “ethnic” texts or discussing issues of “diversity,” but rather is a holistic way of *being* that fosters social responsibility and extends well beyond English/language arts classrooms.
- Teachers need to acknowledge that we all have cultural frameworks within which we operate, and everyone—teachers and students alike—needs to consider how these frameworks can be challenged or changed to benefit all peoples.²¹
- Teacher knowledge of social science, pedagogical, and subject-matter content knowledge about diversity will foster adolescents' learning.
- Successful literacy development among English language learners depends on and fosters collaborative multicultural relationships among researchers, teachers, parents, and students.
- Integration of technology will enhance multicultural literacy.
- Confronting issues of race and ethnicity within classrooms and in the larger community will enhance student learning and engagement.²²

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B. Goals of Multicultural Literacy

- Students will view knowledge from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives, and use knowledge to guide action that will create a humane and just world.
- Teachers will help students understand the whiteness studies principle that white is a race so they can develop a critical perspective on racial thinking by people of all skin colors.
- Multicultural literacy will serve as a means to move between cultures and communities and develop transnational understandings and collaboration.
- Ideally, students will master basic literacies *and* become multiculturally literate citizens who foster a democratic multicultural society.²³

Research-Based Recommendations for Effective Adolescent Literacy Instruction

For teachers . . .

Research on the practices of highly effective adolescent literacy teachers reveals a number of common qualities. Teachers who have received recognition for their classroom work, who are typically identified as outstanding by their peers and supervisors, and whose students consistently do well on high-stakes tests share a number of qualities. These qualities, in order of importance, include the following:

1. teaching with approaches that foster critical thinking, questioning, student decision-making, and independent learning;
2. addressing the diverse needs of adolescents whose literacy abilities vary considerably;
3. possessing personal characteristics such as caring about students, being creative and collaborative, and loving to read and write;
4. developing a solid knowledge about and commitment to literacy instruction;
5. using significant quality and quantity of literacy activities including hands-on, scaffolding, mini-lessons, discussions, group work, student choice, ample feedback, and multiple forms of expression;
6. participating in ongoing professional development;
7. developing quality relationships with students; and
8. managing the classroom effectively.²⁴

For school programs . . .

Research on successful school programs for adolescent literacy reveals fifteen features that contribute to student achievement:

1. direct and explicit instruction;
2. effective instructional principles embedded in content;
3. motivation and self-directed learning;
4. text-based collaborative learning;

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5. strategic tutoring;
6. diverse texts;
7. intensive writing;
8. technology;
9. ongoing formative assessment of students;
10. extended time for literacy;
11. long-term and continuous professional development, especially that provided by literacy coaches;
12. ongoing summative assessment of students and programs;
13. interdisciplinary teacher teams;
14. informed administrative and teacher leadership; and
15. comprehensive and coordinated literacy program.²⁵

For policymakers . . .

A national survey produced action steps for policymakers interested in fostering adolescent literacy. These include:

1. align the high school curriculum with postsecondary expectations so that students are well prepared for college;
2. focus state standards on the essentials for college and work readiness;
3. shape high school courses to conform with state standards;
4. establish core course requirements for high school graduation;
5. emphasize higher-level reading skills across the high school curriculum;
6. make sure students attain the skills necessary for effective writing;
7. ensure that students learn science process and inquiry skills; and
8. monitor and share information about student progress.²⁶

This report is produced by NCTE's James R. Squire Office of Policy Research, directed by Anne Ruggles Gere, with assistance from Laura Aull, Hannah Dickinson, Melinda McBee Orzulak, and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, all students in the Joint PhD Program in English and Education at the University of Michigan.

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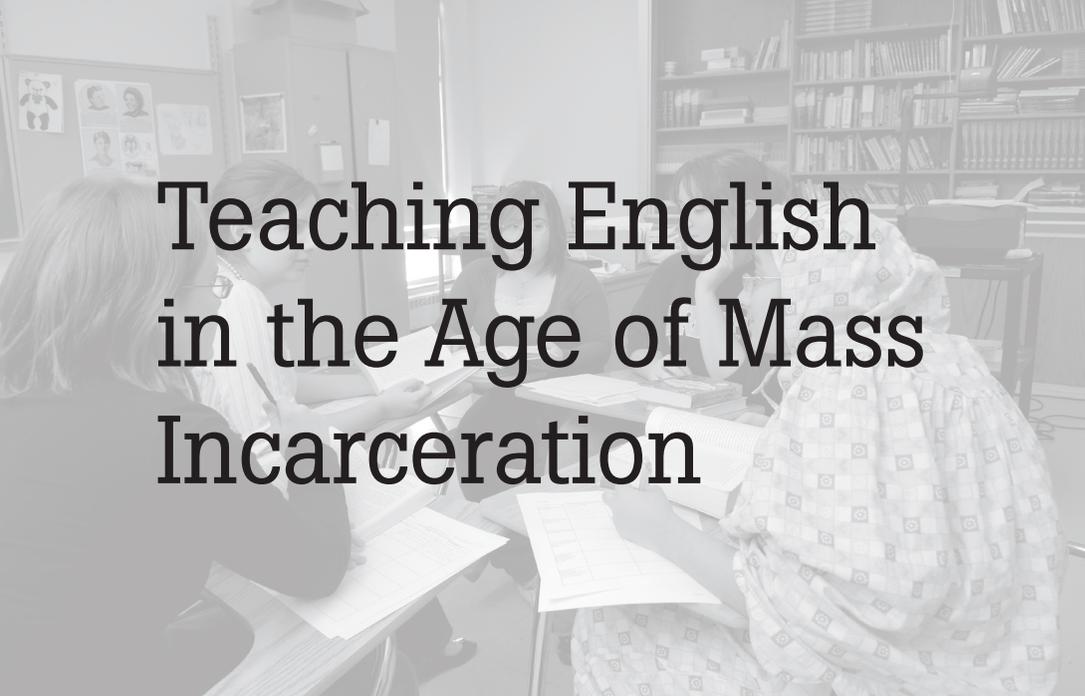
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This publication of the James R. Squire Office of Policy Research offers updates on research with implications for policy decisions that affect teaching and learning. Each issue addresses a different topic. Download this issue at <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/literacy/127676.htm>. Read more on this topic at <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/chron/highlights/127825.htm>.

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Teaching English in the Age of Mass Incarceration

We begin our discussion of restorative justice with the questions that drive our work: Why should English teachers have to think about the impact of mass incarceration and unequal treatment that we raised in the preface? Why must we concern ourselves with the realities of criminalization that strike hardest the poor, Black, Latinx, Indigenous, LGBTQIPA+, differently abled, and other minoritized⁷ children in our schools? As an English teacher, you might be wondering about the connections we see—because isn't the ELA classroom a space where teachers can use writing and reading to visit imagined worlds? All three of us (and we imagine many of you as well) have used literature to catapult us into another time, space, or experience, and, perhaps, to escape challenges in our lives. Maisha recalls getting lost as a child in the L. Frank Baum Wizard of Oz series, marveling over the fact that a series that focuses on various characters such as Ozma, The Patchwork Girl, and Rinkitink preceded the widely adored film. Hannah spent many hours engrossed in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, captivated by the alternate universe Tolkien's fantastical characters inhabited. Rita's love

for poetry—including poets from her native Singapore such as Chandran Nair, Lee Tzu Pheng, and Kirpal Singh, and Ugandan Theo Luzuka—connected her to longing for home. Rita recalls spending time with Rumi, grasshoppers and geese with Mary Oliver, and soulful, quiet moments with Richard Wagamese. Reading and writing was a way for Rita to enjoy and commune with friends and family.

As former English language arts teachers, Hannah and Maisha built on those memories, using expository and creative techniques to transport students into new paradigms that drew on imagined worlds through persuasive writing and imagining/writing themselves in the role of a character. In doing so, we asked students to use different lenses and consider perspectives other than their own, not as an effort to dismiss their individual and collective truths, but rather as an opportunity to practice empathy.

But beyond the use of imaginative literature, we also facilitated opportunities to engage students in thinking about race, class, gender, and privilege using reading and writing as tools for exploring the nuances of humanity, relationships, and place (Winn & Johnson, 2011). Now more than ever, we believe English teachers need to provide space in their classrooms for examining and critiquing society. In a time when racial tumult and assaults against LGBTQIPA+ peoples are being captured on cell phones and witnessed in ways that make it difficult to turn away or avoid discussions about racism, implicit bias, classism, and discrimination, it is necessary to reimagine the ELA classroom as a place to practice justice. One crucial component of practicing justice in today's schools and classrooms is being deliberate about addressing mass incarceration, what Alexander (2010) refers to as the most pressing civil rights issue of the twenty-first century. In doing so, ELA teachers have the opportunity to teach in ways that are humanizing, restorative, relevant, and sustaining.

This book is a beginning guide for ELA teachers looking to address harm and inequities in their classroom, school, and community. Elsewhere, Maisha has asked, What are conversations about jails, prisons, and isolation doing in a nice place like the ELA classroom (Winn, 2011)? In this chapter, we continue that conversation as we address the following questions:

- Why should ELA teachers care about mass incarceration and the criminalization of particular youth?
- What should teachers know about this phenomenon in connection with schooling and literacy?
- What resources support teachers who want to learn more about and challenge the discrimination against and criminalization of minoritized students?

Additionally, this chapter illuminates the relationship between restorative justice in the ELA classroom and *Adolescent Literacy: An NCTE Policy Research Brief*. This

brief sets forth four dimensions of adolescent literacy: (1) shifting literacy demands; (2) multiple and social literacies; (3) the importance of motivation; and (4) the value of a multicultural perspective. Viewing these dimensions of adolescent literacy through a restorative justice lens leads us to recognize just how integral practicing empathy and justice is to developing adolescent literacy.

Why Should We (ELA Teachers) Care?

The culture of mass incarceration—and, more specifically, the pervasiveness of the criminalization of particular children—impacts everyone (Morris, 2016; Coates, 2015). Having access to literacy or even being considered literate comes with privileges, whereas those who are perceived as illiterate, as inarticulate, or as struggling readers and writers are often relegated to a second-class citizenship in both school and out-of-school spaces. All too often, struggling learners get typecast as problems and even as potential criminals. Acknowledging America’s dubious history of literacy and the ways in which literacy was legislated away from enslaved Africans (Gilyard, 1996) is an important first step for literacy teachers in general, and especially for those who work with minoritized youth. However, simply knowing this is not enough. Giving only a brief nod to this time and place in history creates a deficit narrative that continues to hold Black children, their families, and their teachers captive. Understanding more deeply the intersections of race, class, language, and inequality is key to not perpetuating historic and chronic inequality in the classroom. Alim (2016) argues that race and language must be analyzed together in order to understand the relationship between race, language, and power. *Raciolinguistics*—a term coined by Alim—serves as an intersection for the historical context of words and language, as well as for contemporary understandings of how words and language get assigned to race in potentially dehumanizing ways.

Practically, what does this mean for you as a reader of this book? Teachers—and English teachers especially—stand in the aftermath of these debates about language, including debates about what counts as “Standard” and whose language counts as legitimate and, thus, is deemed worthy to be spoken in classroom contexts. English teachers are often unaware of their own implicit biases that frame particular children and their families as sounding or seeming un- or undereducated. Scholar Keith Gilyard (1996) moves beyond explaining African Americans’ tenuous history with the English language by suggesting that we also “flip the script,” outlining how people of African descent have been agentive with language by creating opportunities to own a language that was not intended for them to acquire. In other words, how is it that a community of people for whom literacy in a Western context was out of reach were able to not only learn to read and write but also find ways to make the language their own through writing, speaking, and

Resource Spotlight

Gilyard, K. (1996). *Let's Flip the Script: An African American Discourse on Language, Literature, and Learning*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

Why teachers should read this work:

- In a series of essays, Gilyard provides a critical overview of African Americans and language in the context of the United States.
- Gilyard masterfully reframes the narrative of African American literate practices in ways that disrupt the monolithic view of African American people's language use as solely oral.

doing? Gilyard argues that people of African descent “flipped the script”—borrowing the phrase from the youth who use it as a way to acknowledge the ingenuity of their peers. Flipping the script, in this sense, acknowledges the myriad ways young people are agentive with language and often create their own space if one isn't readily available—just as their ancestors did.

Another way to flip the script involves recognizing and integrating positive images of minoritized readers and writers. Maisha's study of Black bookstores as “supplementary” and “alternative” knowledge spaces demonstrates the importance of this. Her work includes interviews with Black writers, poets, and parents who used Black bookstore events either as part of their extended curriculum as homeschoolers or to bolster the learning (or lack thereof) taking place in their children's schools (Fisher, 2006, 2009; Winn, 2016). A theme throughout the study is that parents of Black children want to expose their

children to these positive images of Black readers and writers that they felt were omitted in English classrooms:

I always take my children with me, if I can, to listen, to meet black leaders and black writers especially. I always do. I've always done it because they're not going to get that in school and by being inundated with the media and other [negative] images. So I want them to have images—literary images of Black people who can read and write and think. So I take them [because] I want them to know our [stories]. I want them to know *our* stories from *our* perspectives. (Mrs. Shabazz, parent participant at Carol's Books and Marcus Books, qtd. in Fisher, 2006)

Keeping in mind this notion of flipping the script, we recommend that English teachers consider engaging in a sociocritical literacy—a literacy that, according to Gutiérrez (2008a, 2008b), privileges historicizing the lives of *all* students and, we would add, the lives of teachers (a curricular objective we also further explore in Chapters 3 and 4 of this book). Historicizing one's life entails examining the practices and traditions of language in connection with the literate practices we use. Why is this important for teachers in particular? Because reaching an awareness of our particular practices can help us resist normalizing ourselves or thinking that our ways of learning and being are the standard to which all students should aspire.

One Example of Teacher Practice

How might we begin to engage in historicizing practices with our students? Consider one of Maisha's favorite writing activities, the "I am from" poem, a strategy that invites students to historicize their lives, name the lived experiences of their families and loved ones, and use writing as a way to map their contributions to the world. "I am from" poems begin with listing words and images from students' lives, such as names found in the family, family traditions, food items, relatives, and more—including a category for "sayings/proverbs/words of wisdom" heard in one's family. To honor the multiple experiences and languages of her students, Maisha always invites them to write their words and images in their first language. Mapping out these responses on poster paper throughout a classroom reminds everyone in the room that they are part of something larger, and that everyone has a story.

When Maisha was a professor at Emory University directing the Secondary English program, she introduced the "I am from" poem to her students (preservice and practicing teachers) the first week of the English Methods course. Subsequently, all of her students used this scaffold with their own students, and one of Maisha's student teachers even started a phenomenon at the middle school where she was working: students shared their poems with their peers, and soon other students in the school building asked their teachers if they could write one too.

What was it about having students write these poems and share "their stories" from "their perspectives"—to borrow the words from Mrs. Shabazz, a participant in Maisha's dissertation research—that motivated them to write? The "I am from" poem moves beyond merely celebrating differences to give students and teachers an opportunity to see the nuances in family traditions, and it also supports White students who see themselves as void of "culture" in understanding that they too have experiences that are unique to their families and communities.

A coda to this story is that one of the other teachers in this middle school informed the student teacher that the "I am from" activity was "exciting" the students "too much," and she planned to retreat to a more rote method of teaching writing that ensured students would sit at their desks and be quiet. This endnote to a story of enthusiastic student literacy is an example of the pushback against historicizing the lives of our students. Why was this teacher fearful of her students getting "excited" about writing, displaying that joy, making their writing mobile through reciting and sharing it with their peers and desiring that the "I am from" model become a school-wide phenomenon? Didn't the students at this school, which primarily served working-class African American and Latinx children, deserve an opportunity to showcase their ways of knowing and being while expressing joy in writing?

One possible answer can be found in Prendergast's (2002) essential study of what she refers to as the "economy of literacy," where she examines how education and literacy became synonymous with Whiteness after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that desegregated schools. Black and Brown students were expected to assimilate into American public schools rather than bring their full selves into the classroom.

Another answer comes from McHenry and Heath (1994), who argue that with the introduction of multicultural education, some teachers embraced "logos" for particular communities of learners. For example, Black children were construed as emerging from an oral tradition devoid of the written word. These logos ("Black children learn like A and Latinx children learn like B, while White children learn like C") were convenient yet oversimplified ways of thinking about students, their families, and cultures.

Diving more deeply, then, into the connections of language, literacy, race, and power, teachers should move beyond knowing that in the context of the United States it was illegal for enslaved Africans to learn to read, write, and, in many ways, think. Teachers should also learn about the ways in which people of African descent excavated pathways to access literacy and literacies. As the NCTE literacy brief asserts, merely implementing multicultural education is not enough to "foster cultural inclusiveness" (p. xvii; all page references to the literacy brief map to the version reprinted in the front matter of this book).

As teachers, all of us have experienced teaching and learning moments when we thought that simply introducing a book or material that celebrated diversity was the answer. But as we have learned, simple inclusion is not enough. In *Writing Instruction in the Culturally Relevant Classroom*, Maisha shared her story of using Richard Wright's *Black Boy* in an English class that primarily served African American students, only to learn from students that they were tired of reading books with Black characters who primarily experience poverty and other forms of despair (Winn & Johnson, 2011). To avoid that kind of response, we as teachers have to grow our body of knowledge around diversity and challenge ourselves to know more and do more. We have many resources to help us do this (some of which we introduce in this book), but we should also call on students and their families as valuable resources. As teachers, we cannot (nor should we pretend to) know everything. When we value multicultural perspectives in our classrooms, we can begin to do some of this important work. And we can learn from the work of others: the textual resources in this and other chapters are starting points to deepen our knowledge.

Resource Spotlight

McHenry, E., & Heath, S. B. (1994). "The Literate and the Literary: African Americans as Writers and Readers—1830–1940." *Written Communication*, 11(4), 419–44.

Why teachers should read this work:

- McHenry and Heath demonstrate how multicultural education invoked the use of "cultural logos," which prescribed teaching strategies for children in different ethnic groups.
- The authors argue that because African Americans are often celebrated as being "oral," their rich traditions in writing are often ignored.

Fisher, M. T. (2004). "'The Song Is Unfinished': The New Literate and Literary and Their Institutions." *Written Communication*, 21(3), 290–312.

Why teachers should read this work:

- Fisher extends McHenry and Heath's notion of the "literate and literary" through the Black Arts Movement and the resurgence of spoken word poetry open mics and writing workshops.
- Fisher demonstrates how people of African descent blur the boundaries between orality and literacy.

Prendergast, C. (2002). "The Economy of Literacy: How the Supreme Court Stalled the Civil Rights Movement." *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(2), 206–29.

Why teachers should read this work:

- Prendergast offers a compelling framework for how *Brown v. Board of Education* "racialized notions of literacy" (n.p.). This article is useful for ELA teachers because it traces how literacy became a form of "white property," thus making literacy and Whiteness synonymous.

A Restorative Justice in English Education Approach

What is this work that English teachers engage in when they demonstrably value multicultural perspectives and challenge themselves to continuously grow their knowledge? Throughout this book, we reference *restorative justice*—RJ—and other terms that are part of its constellation. While we provide a fuller definition of RJ in the next chapter, it is important to note here the journey that Maisha took toward understanding the intersectionality of the restorative justice paradigm and the field of English education. Early on in this work, Maisha imagined that writing and literacy teachers could engage students using a restorative paradigm that focused on selecting writing and reading experiences that build community and stimulate

dialogue about race, class, gender, and identities. Using some of the process and approaches of RJ (to which you will be introduced in subsequent chapters), Maisha imagined restorative English education as a space for reading together and sharing ideas, explicating literature, brainstorming before writing, and sharing and exchanging writing. Over time, however, Maisha challenged her own omission of the word *justice* from *restorative English education*. Omitting *justice*, she began to see, ignores the legacy of inequity for many of our students. And because English language arts and writing teachers wield both power and promise in cultivating and sustaining inquisitive learning communities, we now see English teaching as an act of seeking justice for all children (Winn, 2016; Winn, 2018). Including the word *justice* is something we see as vital for cultivating and sustaining inquisitive learning communities where students *and* their teachers can engage in the critical conversations we must have in order to learn from and with each other. Throughout the book, then, we refer to a restorative justice English education to designate RJ possibilities specifically in the content area of English.

Engaging in Literacy for Purpose and Belonging

We turn now to *Adolescent Literacy: An NCTE Policy Research Brief*, seeking connections between this document and the background knowledge underlying restorative justice that we've raised thus far. All four dimensions of the brief connect in important ways that we further address in Chapter 3: (1) shifting literacy demands; (2) multiple and social literacies; (3) the importance of motivation; and (4) the value of multicultural perspectives.

To be sure, the brief's section on **shifting literacy demands** tells us that "[w]hen students are not recognized for bringing valuable, multiple-literacy practices to school, they can become resistant to school-based literacy" (p. xv). A restorative justice English education seeks to disrupt this cycle of devaluing because we know that this issue is often at the core of miscommunication, tensions, and challenges in relationships between students and teachers. When students are encouraged to write toward the goal of having purpose and cultivating belonging, they are able to write about issues that matter to them, including the lives of their families and their communities. To this end, adolescents should be able to "regularly use literacies for social and political purposes as they create meanings and participate in shaping their immediate environments" (p. xv). We want this for all our youth, for them to be able to communicate their valuable ideas through the act of writing, which has the power to organize and galvanize others into action.

Another dimension of adolescent literacy is the importance of acknowledging **multiple and social literacies**. According to the NCTE literacy brief, "Adolescent literacy is social, drawing from various discourse communities" (p. xv).

Similarly, our work introducing restorative justice in the English classroom is committed to valuing the historicized lives of both students and teachers and making these literacies *visible* in classroom communities. This dimension is a reminder to all of us who work with children and youth to access their funds of knowledge and funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Making students' literacies visible, acknowledging the new "literate and literary" (Fisher, 2004) and the types of writing our young people are engaged in, is critical. Maisha, for example, recently served as a judge for the Sacramento Area Youth Speaks (SAYS) Slam Finals. One of the poets explained to Maisha how she started hearing music in her mind and writing songs as early as elementary school. These songs launched her interest in other forms of writing. Many of the youth poets found membership and belonging in out-of-school writing communities like SAYS. Maisha also observed student artists engaged in playwriting in Regional Youth Detention Centers (RYDCs). Student artists reported to Maisha that writing and being a writer helped others see them as individuals beyond monolithic labels such as "delinquent," "at-risk," and "troubled" (Winn, 2011). Perhaps most important, because their teachers valued their writing and ideas and did not ask them to conform to any particular script in their playwriting, these students felt like citizens of this community of artists.

We cannot say enough about the **importance of motivation**. This book is committed to cultivating "responsive classroom environments," as outlined in the NCTE *Adolescent Literacy* brief (p. xvi). We know that creating a responsive teaching and learning environment is never in lieu of a rigorous academic experience; rather, the rigor will come because everyone knows and understands why they are there, how they are valued, and what the goals of the community are. We don't wish to exchange the "how" to write and read for the "why" we should be writing and reading. Once teachers create a responsive classroom environment that includes student choice and is centered on learners, we decrease the chance of confrontations, of students being ejected from or marginalized in classrooms, and thus ushered through a series of obsolete practices that lead to less instruction and learning time. We also question how teachers can begin to inspire motivation if there is a culture of isolating particular children by regularly sending them out of the classroom or positioning their opinions, viewpoints, and backgrounds as contradictory to teaching and learning goals. All students should feel they are citizens of the classroom—that is, that they are valued and thus feel invested in the community.

Thinking about how literacy is inextricably linked to notions of citizenship and belonging in the context of the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2005) is a way of deepening historical knowledge and understanding the moral imperative for all children to have access to reading, writing, language(s), and a way to engage the fourth dimension of adolescent literacy—**valuing multicultural perspectives**.

Resource Spotlight

Winn, M. T. (2013). "Forum: Toward a Restorative English Education." *Research in the Teaching of English*, 48(1), 126–35.

Why teachers should read this work:

- Winn offers a framework for teaching English that sits at the crossroads of restorative justice and education, or what she calls a "restorative teacher education."
- Winn argues that a restorative English education is "a pedagogy of possibilities that employs literature and writing to seek justice and restore (and, in some cases, create) peace that reaches beyond the classroom walls" (p. 127).

What we love most about this fourth and essential dimension is that NCTE urges teachers to move beyond being a "tourist" in other people's cultures to "critically confront and bridge social, cultural, and personal differences" (p. xvii). We believe the only way to truly engage in this is to engage in history. While English teachers may not be aware of the troubled relationship between literacy and people of color discussed earlier, they often embody this relationship in their practices because these ideas have been solidified and unthinkingly accepted over time. For example, values and practices in models of Western education sort learners based on ability. We should be alarmed that schools in the United States are experiencing more segregation now than at any time since the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. The persistence of segregation post-*Brown* should be on the forefront of all our minds (Noguera, Pierce, & Ahram, 2016). Davis (2012) reminds us that "histories never leave us for another inacces-

sible place. They are a part of us; they inhabit us and we inhabit them even when we are not aware of this relationship to history" (p. 185). The restorative justice work we are doing provides the opportunity to engage with history so that we can prepare young writers not just for their futures but also for their nows. This history enjoins us as educators to confront the discriminatory practices that have haunted the profession and the young people we teach every day so that we might begin the process of restoration. Learning our histories and their manifestation in our current state of education is the beginning of that process. It is our hope that the texts mentioned and cited in this chapter will aid you in commencing or continuing your own journey toward a more just and equitable classroom.

Understanding Adolescent Literacy: A Summary (adapted from *Adolescent Literacy: An NCTE Policy Research Brief*)

Adolescent literacy is a complex issue for all of us: for *adolescents* immersed in new worlds of reading, writing, and new media; for *teachers* trying to help students continue to develop their literacy; and for *others* (e.g., *parents, employers, legislators*) trying to make sense of the multiple definitions and mandates that are associated with the phrase. When we look at the research, though, we realize there is a lot we *do* know about adolescents and their literacy.

We know:

- **Adolescents face shifting demands on their literacy:** The elementary school emphasis on the basic processes of reading and writing suddenly shifts in secondary school to more content-area learning, often dependent on the specialized literacies of various academic disciplines.
 - **Adolescents are immersed in multiple, social literacies:** Adolescents negotiate in amazing ways the multiple discourses of the social groups in which they participate, such as those of popular culture, various ethnic groups, and online communities.
 - **Motivation is extremely important for adolescents:** Motivation can determine whether adolescents engage with or disengage from literacy learning. If they are not engaged, even those students with strong literacy skills may choose not to read or write or participate in school-based literacy activities.
 - **Multicultural perspectives can make a big difference for adolescents:** Students who don't find representations of their own cultures in the texts they read or whose home languages are devalued in school too often lose interest in school-based literacies.
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How do teachers educate responsibly in an age of mass incarceration? And why should English teachers in particular concern themselves with unequal treatment and opportunity and the school-to-prison pipeline?

The authors—teacher educators and a restorative justice practitioner—address these and other critical questions, examining the intersection of restorative justice (RJ) and education with a focus on RJ processes that promote inclusivity and ownership. This book is a beginning guide for ELA teachers to address harm and inequities in the classroom, school, community, and nation. Viewing adolescent literacy, as outlined in *Adolescent Literacy: An NCTE Policy Research Brief*, through the lens of restorative justice will help teachers recognize just how integral practicing empathy and justice is to developing adolescent literacy. The authors provide concrete, specific examples of how ELA teachers can think and plan curriculum using an RJ lens to address issues of student disconnection and alienation, adult and youth well-being in schools, and inequity and racial justice through writing, reading, speaking, and action.

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