ENGLISH LEADERSHIP Quarterly
Conference on English Leadership
CEL Leadership for Excellence

IN THIS ISSUE

"The Deadly Power of Mean Words"

Susan L. Groenke and Lisa Scherff, editors

It is the dead of summer, but by the time this issue of *English Leadership Quarterly* is mailed to readers, the country will only be a few weeks from the Presidential election. Perhaps Susan and I are just getting cynical, but it seems that more and more, the nation is becoming polarized. If one is a Democrat, then he or she is _____ (insert derogatory phrase); likewise, to be Republican automatically means _____ (add sentence ending). Around us, the "us" versus "them" mentality seems pervasive and, already, the television ads by both candidates are turning nasty. If this is the example set by our top leaders, then how is the citizenry (and schoolchildren, for that matter) supposed to think and behave? We felt it timely, and important, to produce a themed issue surrounding the power of words.

Words have the power to promote peace and cultivate fondness, but also to advance hatred and intolerance. As K–16 literacy educators, we recognize this perhaps more than any other content area professionals—through the texts we teach and the writing that students produce. With this understanding, though, comes responsibility and questions. Words, whether through the literature we teach, the assignments we give, or the classroom talk we allow, can help or limit students. How can we best teach students about the power of words? What do we do when classroom talk becomes harmful? How do we stand up against negative language, and how do we teach that to students?

Remember the sing-songy phrase that we were taught as children? *Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.* As much as we would like to believe its truth, the reality is that words *do* hurt, oftentimes more than a punch or slap. The growth of online communication has, unwittingly, added to the number and range of words, including hurtful ones. A case in point is Megan Meier's story (the title of this editorial comes from the foundation in her name set up by her family: http://www.meganmeier-foundation.org). In 2006, 13-year-old Megan committed suicide after a "boy" she met on MySpace began a verbal war on her, spreading hate and lies to the online social network community. That boy later turned out to be Lori Drew, the mother of one of Megan's former friends, and several others who knowingly and falsely created the profile in order to torment and enact revenge on Megan. Earlier this year, Ms. Drew was indicted in federal court for her verbal abuse.

What Counts as Verbal Abuse?

Wikipedia, the collaborative, Web-based encyclopedia, offers a list of words and phrases that can be considered verbal abuse (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verbal_abuse). We offer an abbreviated and modified listing here.

- Referring to disability/medical conditions/aids (e.g., gimp, dumbo, scarface, spaz, retard, dunce, stupid, moron, dickhead) and making cruel jokes.
- Characterizing a person by a physical attribute (e.g., cunt, pussy, dick) or referencing physi-

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cal traits in a taunting manner: polka-dotted (freckles), hooknose (large nose), cue ball (bald).
- Referring to disfigurement/someone with a skin condition (dirty, monster, Frankenstein, saying somebody doesn't wash, etc.).
- Referring to someone's morals and behavior (liar, cheat, sanctimonious, goody two shoes, etc.) and, for women, calling them names such as prostitute, harlot, whore, slut, slag, bitch, and/or cow.
- Referring to someone's weight and body shape (e.g., fatty, fat ass, lard ass, beanpole) and making comments such as, "you'll break the scales."
- Referring to someone's sexual orientation (queer, faggot, dyke, carpet-muncher, nancy-boy, fudge-packer, etc.).
- Referring to someone's race, ethnicity, and/or religion (nigger, spic, Jap, bean eater, slant eyes, etc.).
- Words/phrases/actions meant to reject someone/make someone feel unimportant, such as ignoring or shunning and saying things such as, "Who wants to be with you?" Also included is not allowing someone to sit with you or join in social events. Additionally, telling someone of a different race/ethnicity to get "back to where they came from."

In This Issue

This issue contains two articles we hope will provide readers with talking points specifically related to the negative impact of words; we hope you will take them back to your schools and classrooms to discuss with students and colleagues. In "How does that Hurt?: Encouraging Teacher Leadership That Confronts Linguistic Violence in a Popular Culture Media," Jeanine Staples of University of Maryland, College Park, shows us how she teaches her students about the relationships among language, social power, and teaching. Dr. Howard Miller of Mercy College, in "Rescuing LGBT Issues from 'No Child Left Behind,' Standardization, and 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,'" speaks to the place of sexual orientation and gender identity in the curriculum. We've added a new feature to this issue: a commentary by invited guest authors, in this case key members of the Gay Straight Educators Alliance (GSEA) of NCTE. Paula Ressler is chair of the LGBT Advisory Committee and co-chair of the Gay Straight Educators Alliance. She is Associate Professor of English Education at Illinois State University. Becca Chase is a member of the LGBT Advisory Committee and GSEA, and Assistant Director of Women's and Gender Studies at Illinois State University. We close with Charles H. Golden's review of *Cultural Practices of Literacy: Case Studies of Language, Literacy, Social Practice, and Power*, edited by Victoria Purcell-Gates. ●

The Conference on English Leadership (CEL) of the National Council of Teachers of English is an organization dedicated to bringing together English language arts leaders to further their continuing efforts to study and improve the teaching of English language arts. The CEL reaches out to department chairs, teachers, specialists, supervisors, coordinators, and others who are responsible for shaping effective English instruction. The CEL strives to respond to the needs and interests germane to effective English instruction from kindergarten through college, within the local school, the central administration, the state, or the national level.

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Louann Reid: 2008 CEL Exemplary Leader Award Recipient

A member of NCTE and a teacher for 34 years, Louann Reid is a prolific writer and former editor of *English Journal.* Under her leadership, the journal provided a forum for in-depth professional conversations and won five APEX awards for publication excellence. Reid also served on the executive committee of CEL for 10 years, including two years as Chair. Admired for her leadership and organization, her advocacy for membership diversity, her thoughtfulness, and her keen ability to accomplish CEL and NCTE goals, Louann Reid embodies all the values and ideals of leadership that qualify her to receive this year's CEL Exemplary Leader Award. Don't miss her presentation on Tuesday, November 25, 2008, during the Conference on English Leadership (CEL), San Antonio, Texas.

"How does that hurt?": Encouraging Teacher Leadership That Confronts Linguistic Violence in Popular Culture Media

Jeanine M. Staples, University of Maryland, College Park

Linguistic violence is the random or systematic ways in which words are used to subjugate individuals and groups, promote hardship, instill erroneous and/or stereotypical thinking, and advance inhumanity through distancing or fallacious categories of human worth.

The occurrence and consequences of linguistic violence (my definition is above) in popular culture media should be of great interest to Reading/English/Language Arts (RELA) teachers and administrators because most students learn the power and implications of language within RELA classrooms. Such learning can be advanced to counter the use and impact of words that wound individuals and groups to which they refer or with whom they identify. For instance, teaching students concrete ways to recognize, confront, and eliminate linguistic violence can inspire cultural sensitivity and global awareness. It can contribute to whole bodies of citizens reared in critical consciousness[1] and counter word usage they understand as detrimental to individuals and society. It can also correct the imbalance that exists within the paradigm of language and power. To encourage these possibilities, instruction and leadership within RELA classrooms should include attention to linguistic violence, particularly as it occurs in the widespread factions of popular culture.

Attending closely to linguistic violence and the ways students can be equipped to counter it begins with teacher leadership. RELA classroom teachers are commonly considered "teacher leaders" because they consistently pilot social justice initiatives through instruction (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001). Specifically, teacher leaders examine methods of practice that present progressive, critical strategies to motivate students, promote their engagement, and assist learning processes. Teacher leaders also implement these methods of practice and share them with colleagues in multiple disciplines. However, many teacher leaders need administrative support to deal with linguistic violence because centralizing this concept in classrooms gives rise to certain risks. Words that wound are embarrassing, volatile, unsettling, and commonly afflict "others"—individuals who are not white, middle class heterosexuals. These characteristics can build a context that intimidates even the most fearless teacher leaders (Schick, 2000; Sleeter, 2001).

Teaching students concrete ways to recognize, confront, and eliminate linguistic violence can inspire cultural sensitivity and global awareness.

This article presents a framework for teacher leaders who are interested in addressing linguistic violence with students and colleagues. As an African American urban teacher leader and researcher, I have discovered a system for broaching wounding words that encourages teaching/learning participants (like students and colleagues from other disciplines) to do the same. To promote more RELA leadership in this area, I first briefly discuss the relationships among language, social power, and teaching. Second, I highlight some of the ways linguistic violence occurs in popular culture media and how I have worked with students to identify the ways these words can wound. I close with my framework for confrontation of linguistic violence.

Considering Language and Power in the Context of Teaching

Hurtful words are frequently exerted in popular culture media. Words that wound, characterizing individuals as inadequate—and therefore less valuable than those considered normal and favorable—are used to subjugate. Words like "nappy headed hos," "bitches," "dykes," "kikes," and "niggers" come to mind. Individuals who use these words (openly or privately) and can be considered power brokers because of their access to broad communication arenas in the public domain, wield the power of these words and wreak havoc on their listeners.

Propagators of racist and sexist language incite disorder and the deconstruction of humanity in several ways. First, they disregard the insidious nature of wounding words. This ignorance breeds delusions and contempt, which are the bedrocks of hate and violence. Second, they often have little understanding of the force of words in general. Invocations of spoken words effect change because they enact an interaction of intention and signification between and among speakers and listeners.

Positionality also plays a role in the turmoil. The power brokers who use wounding words often represent some faction of the centralized majority. As a result, their words

arguably indicate some undercurrent of viciousness in society at large. Missed opportunities to indict their usage imply complicity in potentially widespread hate-mongering. Supporting teacher leadership in the battle against linguistic violence in popular culture media is a primary way to deter this complicity. But be forewarned, this is easier said than done.

More than two decades ago, Purnell (1982) stated that "teaching [teachers about] language use is one of the most controversial arenas in academia" and leadership (p. 231). She explains that this controversy is a result of concerns about "whether we shape our language or it shapes us and whether we can actually influence language use and corresponding ideas" (p. 231). She argues that teaching teachers about language is further complicated because it cannot be separated from the context that informs it. To further explain the role of context as a bedrock for language learning, Purnell presents a brilliant discussion of a "bias" linguistic anthropologists have noted as ubiquitous within human populations. This bias relays and performs instances of racism, sexism, and other "isms" through linguistic iterations. That is, the general ideas one has about what happens in the world outside oneself and the ways people are categorized, labeled, or conceptualized are not unilaterally realized by external events. Rather, up to a certain point, one sees, hears, contemplates, and empathizes with whatever the grammatical system of one's language has made one sensitive to, and has trained one to look for in experience (Purnell, 1982).

Kluckholn (1976) set a precedent explanation of this bias. He describes it as "sinister" because "everyone is unconscious of [their] native language as a system through which we understand and enable racism and sexism" (p. 149). He explains:

> The language says, as it were, 'notice this,' 'always consider this separate from that,' 'such and such things belong together.' Since people are taught from infancy to respond in these ways, they take discriminations for granted as part of the inescapable stuff of life. (p. 151)

The danger of this bias, when unchecked, leaves members of dominant groups, to which the majority of RELA teachers belong (DiAngelo, 2006; Synder, 1999), susceptible to an underdeveloped sense of how to teach against such violence. Understanding this bias further illustrates the ways "isms"—those institutionalized social, cultural, political, and economic constructs like racism and sexism—manifest through spoken words. RELA teacher leaders are uniquely qualified and positioned to address this hindrance.

The general ideas one has about what happens in the world outside oneself and the ways people are categorized, labeled, or conceptualized are not unilaterally realized by external events.

Watch What Is Said: Helping Students Identify Linguistic Violence in Popular Culture Media

As a female African American RELA teacher leader and researcher, I have thought about ways to attend to instances of linguistic violence in popular culture media, particularly with regard to women. Based on years of work with "disengaged"[2] African American urban adolescent readers and writers, both in and out of schools, I have found that several activities support awareness of linguistic violence. Activities that can be thought of as native to RELA classrooms—responsive discussions, free writing, round-robins, mapping, journaling, and critical questioning—can all be used to study word meaning and usage. For instance, with my African American urban adolescent students, I have read and listened to Don Imus and Mike McGuirk's April 2007 comments about the Rutgers University women's basketball team and discussed the denotations of their words. We have also read and listened to Snoop Dogg's "Break a Bitch Till I Die!" or "Can You Control Yo Hoe?" song lyrics, then identified and defined each adverse word and phrase. In addition, I have worked with my students to read, discuss, and write responsively to radio talk show host Michael Savage's derogatory comments about Diane Sawyer as a "lying whore" or Barbara Walters as a "double-talking slut."

For an international perspective, my students and I have engaged and responded to excerpts from the October 2006 compilation report issued by the United Nations (see http://www.violencestudy.org/r25 for sample reports). It is a composite of many studies of bride burnings, honor killings, female infanticide, sex trafficking, mass rape as a weapon of war, and other hideous forms of violence against women. Of course, the type of language that makes this type of sadism possible is also discussed in the document. A more specific example of this type of linguistic violence can be found in the review of reported discourse before and during the Rwandan massacres of the 1990s. With regard to the ways politically and socially powerful individuals can "exploit the power of social patterns" with language, Mark Buchanan (2007) of *The New York Times* writes that the word "subhuman" was used to describe the Tutsi tribe in the months prior to the Rwandan genocide. The implication was that this word, among others that wound, bore a direct correlation to compliance with hate mongering, war crimes, and a type of irrationally justified acquiescence to participa-

tion in torture and murder.

While reading, writing, and discussion activities offer points of entry to conversations about linguistic violence, I initially found that they frequently leave something to be desired. The kind of outrage and action that I longed for as a classroom teacher leader was often missing. These absences were due to the fact that, often, students did not know what to *do* with these words. Feeling shocked, uncomfortable, and even angry about them was commonsensical. Determining that something should be done in protest was reasonable. However, an understanding of what that "something" was frequently remained underdeveloped and with it, the move to action. This was the case because RELA activities that center linguistic violence need an accompanying attitude, one that bears a framework for movement. The compounded identity I discuss with my students has afforded an attitude with this attribute; I call it the Agitator Identity Trait.

"How does that hurt?": A Framework for Confronting Linguistic Violence

My Agitator identity developed while I was a teacher and doctoral candidate. It emerged in competition with an antithetical attitude, one that shies away from appropriating and interrogating wounding words because of intimidation or a wrongfully perceived sense of helplessness. The complacent attitude is a consequence of the Koon identity trait. In tandem with my thoughts on linguistic violence in popular culture media, my reference to kooning emerges from Spike Lee's 2000 film *Bamboozled*, a satire of the African American presence in mass media. In the movie, Lee indicts the status quo for its tendency to require a degree of buffoonery from black actors and actresses. He also indicts African Americans for their compliance with this expectation. Throughout the movie, Lee explores some historic and contemporary power structures that maintain the tenuous relationships between African Americans and European Americans. In addition, he portrays a series of common scenarios and language adversities African Americans face in industry settings. These scenarios depict the daunting choice one must make between the roles of Koon and Agitator.

The choice is daunting and stark. A Koon is an individual who assists the perpetuation and standardization of a particular group as superior by: not actively resisting wounding words and images, assuaging inflated egos, accommodating self-centered attempts at introspection, shunning self-reflexivity, and disregarding Afro-centric and other inclusive epistemologies and practices in one's personal, professional, and academic lives. An Agitator is an individual who repels censorship of self and "others" by critically questioning wounding words, images, and practices that are rendered valid by senses of superiority, twisted humor, or titillation. An Agitator openly and frequently indicts the white social and capitalist establishment and other domineering structures in societies, political arenas, and economies. This denunciation is accomplished by provoking critical consciousness and advocating social justice work in one's personal, professional, and academic lives. These identities have no racial alignments. Teacher leaders of any identity or group affiliations can assume either trait.

An Agitator openly and frequently indicts the white social and capitalist establishment and other domineering structures in societies, political arenas, and economies.

In the past, I used the word kooning to describe some of my behavior in graduate school and teacher preparation. I did so because, at times, I enacted the former trait over the latter in order to move through the system of academia and certification. I contend that all people of color (or otherwise marginalized individuals) who live or travel to any degree in white, middle class, heterosexist, monolinguistic, male-centered America, koon at some time or another. My work now concentrates on processes that eliminate the kooning identity trait, as it inevitably compromises intellectual work[3]. It also leads to a drastic, intergenerational erosion of character, loss of credible substances of being, and collusion in the degradation of all people. I excise kooning by encouraging RELA teacher leaders to confront linguistic violence, particularly in popular culture media.

This confrontation is possible because the Agitator is moved to act. Agitators confront and eliminate wounding words systematically. Supporting RELA teacher leaders' assumption of the role of Agitator begins with consideration of RELA activities that work to counter the results of linguistic violence. This means:

- assuming new words to describe the meaning and implications of demeaning ones;
- placing oneself inside controversial scenarios and commentaries; making words personal and more effecting; fueling empathy;
- generating critical "why" questions that explicate the insinuations of words and their impact on individuals and groups;
- drawing attention to the social, historical and political impetuses of depreciating words;
- "outing" the delusions and contempt that fester as a result of wounding words;

- writing and broadcasting "counter narratives" that speak directly to words and word usage (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001);
- planning a means for private and public action that exposes, documents, educates, and perpetuates knowledge about the effects of these words; and
- holding other Agitators accountable to resolutions for action, implementation of plans for action (rallies, publications, demonstrations, plays, press releases, concerts, lectures, fundraisers, shifts in familial dialogues and individual language choices, etc.), and reflection toward improvement of actions.

Conclusion

When indoctrinated as real aspects of classroom cultures and rooted in pedagogical expectations, these practices can produce powerful individual voices of resistance in RELA teacher leadership. Over time, they can result in orchestras of collective voices that rise up against meta-narratives of ignorance and division in popular culture media. With developmentally appropriate iterations, the application of these practices can become expectations for all teacher leaders and our students. That is, with endorsement by leaders of Reading/English/Language Arts education programs, the Agitator Identity Trait can become a tool for intervention and sociopolitical change, one that emerges from elementary, middle, and high school classrooms and carries over to adulthood. It is imperative that we remember, as Bakhtin (1981) explained, "language, even at the level of individual words, serves as an arena where opposing ideologies of identity and exclusion play themselves out" (p. 18). With this notion in place, we can take for granted that RELA teachers and our students need the social and cognitive practices to centralize these media oppositions and deconstruct them for the betterment of democracy, inclusion, respect, and genuine appreciation of individuals and groups deemed "different" from them. ●

With endorsement by leaders of Reading/English/Language Arts education programs, the Agitator Identity Trait can become a tool for intervention and sociopolitical change.

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[1]I define critical consciousness as sense-making employed to deconstruct the parameters and problematize the enactments of various implicit and explicit social structures (i.e. cultural, linguistic, spatial, economic, religious, and sexual) used to subjugate, repress, empower, or authorize individuals, groups, and/or ideologies.

[2]"Disengaged" means that my students resisted individual and collaborative interactions with texts (including conventional methods of reading and writing), participation in conversations with others about information found in texts, and producing works pertaining to, or answering questions about, what they did or did not understand about information within texts.

[3]Intellectual work is the synergy of socially situated literacy practices and culturally situated knowledge produced at the intersection of adolescent literacies and popular culture narratives. This phenomenon is "intellectual" because it is inspired by the complexities of local knowledge. It is "work" because it is exerted through tensions within and among activities that couch the meanings and messages of various types of texts. Intellectual work is manifested when people are motivated to engage with texts and nurture a positive self-efficacy in relationship to activities that are meaningful to them. The results of sustained intellectual work are often evidenced by production of layered understandings and critical consciousness among individuals and/or groups.

Rescuing LGBT Issues from "No Child Left Behind," Standardization, and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"

Howard M. Miller, Mercy College, New York, New York

Over the past decade, I have worked closely with preservice and inservice teachers to convince them that issues of sexual orientation and gender identity need to be included in the curriculum. It is probably not a great revelation when I note that many teachers are very uncomfortable with raising such issues in their classrooms. Whether it is due to their own squeamishness, or out of concern with the possibility of stirring up controversy, a policy of "don't ask, don't tell" seems like a good idea.

One effective approach has been to move issues of sexual orientation and gender identity off the backburner and into general conversations about multiculturalism and diversity. Regardless of where I have worked, most teachers seem to appreciate the importance of recognizing the roles played by diverse racial and ethnic groups, and by both men and women in the fabric of our pluralistic society. Granted, some have a difficult time getting past the "victims and heroes" approach (Miller, 1998), but it's a start, and more and more have come to see how the "gay" issue might fit in, and even how they might broach it with their students without the earth opening beneath them and swallowing them up.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Persons as "Other"

Much that we have worked to build in multicultural education was dealt two mighty blows in the year 2001: the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the unveiling of Public Law 107–110, better known as "No Child Left Behind." The fallout from both of these events is still being played out, and it is challenging to be optimistic on either front. Progressive educators have taken to the trenches, and multicultural education—which was just beginning to take root in many schools across the nation—has been forced into what, at best, could be described as a "holding pattern." The "war on terrorism" has given new life to that always-lurking-beneath-the-surface xenophobia aimed at both "Arab-like" individuals specifically, and at "the other," generally. That latter category, "the other," has usually been where lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) persons have found themselves confined. Certainly, there seems to be no room for "the other" in the wake of the standards movement and high-stakes assessments, "which have put pressure on school districts to standardize and emphasize content at the expense of any other concerns" (Bohn & Sleeter, 2000).

This is a particularly complicated time regarding the "place" of LGBT issues in the United States. Public discourse about homosexuality mirrors the right/left division over the war in Iraq, immigration, universal health care, and how best to educate America's school children. The public generally favors the right of gay couples to enter into some sort of formalized and legal union, even if many balk at applying the term "marriage" to such unions. In popular culture, images of gay relationships are being met with sympathy or as a legitimate subject for mainstream entertainment (e.g., the film *Brokeback Mountain* and television shows *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *The L Word*), and a number of public figures in the fields of entertainment, sports, and politics have "outed" themselves and brought human faces to the "gay acceptance" debate.

On the other hand, and in the name of "protecting" children, gay men and lesbians are suspected of being predatory child molesters. School health education programs, libraries, and literature selections are scrutinized and pounced upon for their inclusion of anything that might "promote the gay agenda." And lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth are still being bullied, are still being denied the support and protection of school administrators, counselors, and teachers, and still face the experience of feeling isolated and singularly different from their peers. Far too often, it requires the intervention of various civil rights or legal organizations to provide support to such individuals who, unfortunately, frequently wind up being made to feel like the rope in a giant game of tug-of-war between the "God Hates Fags" followers of the Rev. Fred Phelps[1] and the American Civil Liberties Union.

It doesn't take mental gymnastics to figure out that LGBT concerns are school issues, regardless of anyone's wish to focus exclusively on the "3

[1]*Editors' Note:* According to the Anti-Defamation League (http://www.adl.org/special_reports/wbc/default.asp), the Reverend Fred Phelps is leader of the "virulently homophobic" Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas. He and his followers have "gained notoriety by picketing the funerals of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan to protest what the group sees as America's acceptance of homosexuality."

Rs." Just recently, for example, the superintendent of Newark, New Jersey, public schools ordered that a photograph of a graduating senior engaging in an affectionate, non-sexual kiss with his boyfriend be expunged with a black marker from every copy of a high school yearbook before the books could be distributed (Fahim, 2007). The official later recanted under pressure from gay rights groups and the negative publicity surrounding the incident, but the damage was already done. Those who supported the blacking out of the photograph could content themselves with the belief that they had simply been defeated by the powers of "Political Correctness," while the message of intolerance remains in the hands of all the graduates who have copies of the yearbooks with the blacked-out photograph.

Much needs to be considered in terms of breaking through the barriers between LGBT students and their public schools. Several years ago, one of the undergraduate students in the teacher education program where I taught wrote of a small-group discussion in which one of the members—also a future teacher—made a vitriolic anti-gay statement. In reporting on the incident, the student expressed less dismay about the hateful remark itself than about her failure and the failure of the other members of the group to respond: "We did nothing. We said nothing. After a short silence, the direction of our discussion changed. But it keeps replaying in my mind. How could we allow something so odious to go unchallenged? What makes all of us so unwilling to speak out against hatred?" (Miller, 1999, p. 632).

This failure to respond amounts to a "silent consent," whether consent is intended or not—something every educator should bear in mind when embracing a "don't ask; don't tell" approach to the inclusion of LGBT issues in the curriculum. Educators should not count on the slow emergence of positive gay images in the entertainment media to think they can, with impunity, brush LGBT concerns under the rug. Findings from the most recent National School Climate Survey, a biannual survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), demonstrates that LGBT students continue to be subjected to bullying and harassment at alarming rates. Three-fourths of the respondents reported hearing frequent comments such as "faggot" or "dyke" at school. Even more (close to 90%) were regularly subjected to hearing the expression "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" as a way of indicating that an individual or an idea is inferior or unworthy of consideration.

LGBT students clearly are among those being left behind, an issue that the No Child Left Behind legislation has chosen to ignore.

An unfortunate number (18.6%) of the more than 1,700 LGBT students between the ages of 13 and 20 represented in the survey reported hearing such homophobic comments coming from the mouths of their teachers and school staff (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, 2005).

Other key findings: A vast majority of LGBT students reported feeling unsafe at school (64.3%), due specifically to their sexual orientation, and many of those who reported being verbally harassed or physically assaulted said they either felt they had no adult at school they could turn to for support, or that they failed to receive help when they sought it.

These findings are consistent with data culled from a variety of sources over many years. Recently, however, more consideration has been given to the impact on a student's academic success in school of being ostracized or harassed over one's sexual orientation/identity, or of a perceived need to hide one's identify in order to "fit in." The same 2005 GLSEN survey, when compared with other general school population surveys, found that the likelihood of LGBT students skipping school or classes was five times higher than that of the general population, and LGBT students were twice as likely to say they were not going to finish high school or go on to higher education. Grade point averages of LGBT students who frequently met with physical harassment are a half a grade lower than those of their peers. LGBT students clearly are among those being left behind, an issue that the No Child Left Behind legislation has chosen to ignore.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), with its purported purpose of closing the achievement gap, specifically targets many groups of students on the basis of their cultural identities and their history of falling on the wrong side of the gap. Native Indian, native Hawaiian, native Alaskan, immigrants, children of migrant working families, and English language learners (referred to in NCLB as limited English proficient students) are among those targeted by the legislation, and the scores from the ubiquitous mandated standardized tests are required to be disaggregated and reported out by the categories of gender, race, ethnic identity, English proficiency status, migrant status, disability status, and economic status. NCLB also requires that any program funded under the act not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, or disability. Among all of this specificity, sexual identify is not mentioned, leaving open the very real possibility of that "silent consent" to permit the continuation of gaybashing and discrimination against LGBT persons.

With the failure of NCLB to include LGBT students as a targeted area for increased academic support, along with its failure to include "sexual orientation" as a protected category in its antidiscrimination policy, it remains up to the schools to do so. Certainly one way to get the attention of the nation's educational institutions is through the legal system, and, indeed, a number of lawsuits have been filed on behalf

GSEA: LGBT @ NCTE

Paula Ressler and Becca Chase, Illinois State University

We were happy to read articles by Howard Miller and Jeanine Staples for this issue of *English Leadership Quarterly*. Miller's article takes on the complexity of addressing LGBT-related social and academic themes in a contradictory time when positive cultural images of LGBT people appear more frequently, but prevailing conservative agendas in schools and society make people more afraid to take real and imagined risks. Publishing Miller's article in the *Quarterly* is one way NCTE is demonstrating its commitment to support the resolution passed at the 2007 convention to "Strengthen Teacher Knowledge about LGBT Issues."

Staples's article on linguistic violence, although not directly addressing homophobic and genderphobic language, which is pervasive, contextualizes hurtful and violent language as being particularly harmful to those who are "not white, middle class, or heterosexual." Her recommendation that RELA leaders help their students deconstruct negative media images through creating "orchestras of collective voices that rise up against meta-narratives of ignorance and division in popular culture media" is inspiring.

The LGBT resolution mentioned above was sponsored by the Gay Straight Educators Alliance (GSEA), which is an NCTE assembly. The GSEA is a forum for engaging in discussion about LGBTQ students, teachers, issues, and academic materials related to the teaching of English at all instructional levels. The assembly recommends texts about LGBTQ people and themes; raises awareness of the needs of LGBTQ people in English language arts classrooms; promotes research and scholarship; addresses heterosexism, homophobia, and genderphobia in academic settings; supports lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender-variant students and teachers; and promotes a broad understanding of cultural diversity.

The GSEA is a forum for engaging in discussion about LGBTQ students, teachers, issues, and academic materials related to the teaching of English at all instructional levels.

Members of the GSEA serve three-year terms on the LGBT Issues in Academic Studies Advisory Committee (LGBT Advisory Committee). This committee reports to the NCTE Executive Committee; advises how to make the annual convention a safe and welcoming place for LGBT people; promotes inquiry and dialogue at the annual convention about sexual orientation and gender identity and expression; and assists NCTE to develop high-quality LGBT-related materials and professional resources.

The GSEA is currently involved in several projects:

- The "Resolution to Strengthen Teacher Knowledge about LGBT issues," which passed unanimously at the NCTE Business Meeting in 2007, includes a directive to provide professional development opportunities for NCTE members. We will be exploring ideas for such opportunities at the convention in San Antonio.
- GSEA members Paula Ressler and Becca Chase are coediting an issue of *English Journal* on "Sexual Orientation and Gender Variance," which will be published in March 2009.
- The GSEA hosts a Web page (http://www.geocities.com/gsea_ncte), which we periodically update with membership information and teaching resources.

The GSEA also engages in several ongoing convention-related activities:

We solicit and review proposals for LGBT Strand sessions, arranging sessions for most time slots.

GSEA members staff a table in the exhibit hall, where browsers can view gay-themed literature, pick up bibliographies and other handouts, and join friendly and informative discussions.

The GSEA business meeting occurs during the last session on Saturday afternoon, followed by the GSEA social in the evening.

We welcome CEL members to attend our sessions, meetings, and social, and to visit us at our table. Also check out our website at: http://www.geocities.com/gsea_ncte. Thanks to the editors of *ELQ* for the opportunity to introduce CEL members to the GSEA. Please come to see us in San Antonio!

of LGBT students against schools, school districts, and individual administrators. A common theme in these lawsuits is that of school administrators and teachers casting a blind eye on incidents involving harassment of LGBT students. Perhaps the most well-known case was that of Jamie Nabozny (*The St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 1996), a gay student who accepted a settlement of close to a million dollars after enduring years of physical and verbal abuse tied to his sexual orientation when he was a junior high and high school student in a northern Wisconsin school district. The American Civil Liberties Union identifies a number of other such cases over the years: a $440,000 settlement paid to a teenager in Kansas who suffered from four years of anti-gay taunting by his peers; a $300,000 jury award to two California high school students who were repeatedly threatened and subjected to physical abuse by their peers; $1.1 million in attorneys' fees and damages on behalf of six California students who had been harassed due to their sexual orientation, and many others (American Civil Liberties Union, undated). Additional lawsuits have been filed over issues of LGBT students' freedom of expression—the wearing of t-shirts with pro-gay messages, for example (Essex, 2005). Still, as the GLSEN student surveys demonstrate, LGBT students remain the targets of both their peers, through verbal and physical abuse and ostracizing, and their teachers and administrators, who are neglecting rather than protecting them.

What Teachers Can Do

There are many avenues open to educators who wish to take on the twin issues facing LGBT youth in the public schools: their victimization and the marked exclusion of LGBT topics in the curriculum. The victimization piece can be addressed, at least in part, by including "sexual orientation" as a protected category in antidiscrimination policies, and by engaging school administrators, teachers, counselors, and other personnel in open discussions about why they should be concerned and what they can do about it. It wouldn't hurt for school districts' legal counsel and school board members to be involved in these discussions, as the specter of potential lawsuits has a way of gaining the attention of such individuals. Teachers, too, need to be trained in how to respond to and openly address LGBT issues in the classroom; that training should emphasize being supportive of individual students (Kittle, 2004), being just as unaccepting of homophobic remarks as they (hopefully) are of racist ones, and finding ways to include LGBT topics in the context of the content they are teaching.

> ***There are no English language arts standards that could not be addressed by including LGBT topics, despite the strictures of No Child Left Behind.***

None of this is particularly easy. "Don't ask; don't tell" is not necessarily an overtly homophobic policy when it comes to the public schools. Like silent consent, it stems from a self-protective desire to remain detached and to avoid the risks inherent in sticking one's neck out on behalf of others. This doesn't mean we should accept such a stance, but we need to recognize that many professionals in the field—teachers, counselors, administrators, and school psychologists—are reluctant to discuss sexuality with students because of their own biases, lack of knowledge, and concern about what parents may say or do, "despite the evidence of anti-gay harassment" (Pollock, 2006). It does take a few willing persons to get the conversation going among the adults.

Organizations such as the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-Flag) offer excellent informational resources through their websites (www.glsen.org and www.pflag.org, respectively). In addition, the 10-year-old (but still relevant) video *It's Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in School* (Chassnoff & Cohen, 1996) could serve to initiate the conversation. It is important that some set of understandings among the educational personnel be reached in order for LGBT issues to become curricular issues throughout the school, as opposed to part of the quiet agenda of individual teachers who are committed to teaching for social justice. Teachers who include LGBT topics in their classroom should be made neither into heroes nor martyrs; LGBT issues should be incorporated into the routine business of teaching, the selection of materials for the classroom library and the school media center, the options in lit circles or read-alouds, the teaching about the history of intolerance, and the promotion of multicultural understanding. There are no English language arts standards that could not be addressed by including LGBT topics, despite the strictures of No Child Left Behind. Not yet, at least. ●

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Call for Nominees for the 2009 CEL Exemplary Leader Award

The CEL Award for Exemplary Leadership is given annually to an NCTE member who is an outstanding English language arts educator and leader. Please nominate an exceptional leader who has had an impact on the profession through one or more of the following:

- work that has focused on exceptional teaching and/or leadership practices (e.g., building an effective department, grade level, or building team; developing curricula or processes for practicing English language arts educators; or mentoring)
- contributions to the profession through involvement at both the local and national levels
- publications that have had a major impact

Your award nominee submission must include a nomination letter, the nominee's curriculum vitae, and additional letters of support (no more than three) from various colleagues. Submission deadline is **February 1, 2009, to** Deborah Smith-McCullar, 1502 S. Wolcott, Casper, WY 82601.

August 2009 *ELQ* Call: Writing Instruction

College teachers of introductory-level writing courses want incoming freshmen to be prepared to do rhetorical analyses of texts, think critically, and write persuasively, often lamenting that students graduating from high school can't do any of the three. High school teachers, meanwhile, complain that high-stakes testing has turned the focus of secondary writing instruction into preparation for timed writing tests—tests that don't respect the writing process and that reward only a writer's attention to formula, not necessarily ideas. For our August 2009 issue, we want to hear your take on writing instruction. What success stories can you share? What is a writing activity you do every year that your students love? If your students take standardized writing tests, how do you balance test preparation with instruction that develops fluency and, perhaps more important, the joy of writing? What writers do you admire and teach every year? What professional development activities have helped you develop as a teacher of writing? A writer yourself? How do you encourage students to pay attention to authors' ways with words? What do you wish administrators, curriculum coordinators, and policy makers knew—or would take into account—when mandating secondary writing instruction and assessment? **(Deadline: May 15, 2009)**

Book Review

Cultural Practices of Literacy: Case Studies of Language, Literacy, Social Practice, and Power

Victoria Purcell-Gates (Ed.). 2007. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. ISBN 978-0-8058-5492-3. Paperback. 256 pp. US $27.50.
Reviewed by Charles H. Golden, University of Kansas/Blue Valley Northwest High School

> *Too often, policymakers operate out of hypothesized networks of assumptions about the outcomes of education and the effects on the lives of people once they "attain literacy." Greater knowledge and insight into the reality of the actual practices of literacies can only benefit future policy and its implementation. (p. ix)*

Educational theorists have rapidly moved from a simple understanding of literacy as mere reading and writing to one that takes into account the embeddedness of these skills within powerful social, cultural, and political contexts. In fact, *literacy* as a singular entity has become something of a misnomer, since there are indeed many literacies beyond those that pertain to school and its tasks. Yet despite such theoretical insights, academic literacy continues to enjoy a privileged position—in part because it is "intricately linked to state dictates, composed by the powerful and enfranchised, who decide which literacy is to be valued, taught, and assessed" (Purcell-Gates, 2007, p. 4). One consequence of this hegemony is the continued marginalization of those students whose nonacademic, vernacular practices diverge most severely from the valorized norm.

Some theorists have responded to this asymmetry by arguing for educators to de-privilege academic literacy, "leading to equal acceptance and privileging of vernacular literacies that reflect the lived lives of students" (Purcell-Gates, 2007, p. 9). Others argue that a more appropriate response is to retain the preeminence of academic literacy while incorporating students' "vernacular literacy practices and abilities . . . into the classroom as foundations for learning" (p. 9). Still others believe that we should cultivate students' awareness of academic literacy as "one of the literacies of power," with the express purpose of enabling them to obtain power through its mastery so that they might then "reveal and confront classism, racism, and other forces of marginalization" (p. 10).

In fact,* literacy *as a singular entity has become something of a misnomer, since there are indeed many literacies beyond those that pertain to school and its tasks.

Not surprisingly, Purcell-Gates and her *Cultural Practices of Literacy* coauthors are in agreement with claims that literacy instruction must change to better serve marginalized students. But it is their approach to determining what changes are necessary that makes *Case Studies of Language, Literacy, Social Practice, and Power* a worthwhile read. In a collection of ten studies—ranging from interviews with Puerto Rican farmers and Botswanan immigrants to observations of ELL and "at-risk" students in American classrooms—the authors have pursued a line of research that provides insights about the connections between academic skills and real-life practices. Specifically, each author has taken on an "active participant role" (p. 18) so as to focus upon individuals or small groups navigating the boundaries between academic and nonacademic literacy practices.

Some of these boundaries are quite fluid, as evidenced in the case of a recent Cuban immigrant who reads and writes heavily in English for business purposes, but who reverts to Spanish for recreational reading and writing whenever possible. Other boundaries are more distinct, as with several Sudanese refugees for whom the mastery of academic literacy is important primarily as the means of establishing credentials for admission into various sociocultural marketplaces. Still other boundaries are quite problematic, as when students feel academic tasks require participation in discourses they consider inauthentic, uncomfortable, or even oppressive.

Purcell-Gates characterizes her colleagues' research as "quasiethnographic," with each study revealing a microcosmic "small whole" (p. 16). Its strength lies in a context-rich understanding of each researcher's subject as the intersection of many competing literacies. That said, Purcell-Gates cautions readers that this collection provides merely a first step in collecting the data necessary "for real and comprehensive change to the way we do literacy instruction in our schools" (p. 215).

First step or not, by refusing to engage in generalists' theorizing about problems that are always contextualized, the authors have provided a nuanced work that is likely to provide valuable insights for university researchers and classroom practitioners alike. ●

2008 CEL Election Slate

Candidates for Associate Chair

Jeffrey N. Golub, Associate Professor Emeritus of English Education, University of South Florida, Tampa; member, NCTE Editorial Board, NCTE Consulting Network. **Formerly:** Junior and senior high school English teacher; Representative-at-large, NCTE Executive Committee; program co-chair for NCTE Spring conferences in Phoenix (1986) and Boston (1996); member, CEL and CEE Executive Boards, NCTE Secondary Section Steering Committee, Commission on the English Curriculum. **Member:** NCTE; CEL, CEE; Washington State, Oregon, California, Florida English Councils; ASCD; Phi Delta Kappa. **Publications:** Author, *Activities for an Interactive Classroom* and *Making Learning Happen*; editor, *More Ways to Handle the Paper Load*. Articles in *English Journal*, *English Leadership Quarterly*, others. **Awards:** USF Teaching Excellence Award; State Farm award for innovative teaching; NCTE's *English Journal* writing award with Louann Reid, coauthor (1989). **Program Participant:** NCTE; CEL; national/international workshops, institutes, other professional development sessions.

Position Statement: Let's make CEL more visible and available to those who most need our help: colleagues who are struggling to teach with integrity; new department chairs who need mentoring with specific problems; beginning teachers who need our networking, insights, and resources to stay alive in the classroom and profession; and the policymakers who need to hear our voices in their decision-making conversations that affect us all.

Pat Monahan, adjunct professor, Grand Valley State University. **Formerly:** English department chair, Community High School South, Downers Grove, IL; CEL Member-at-Large and 2005 Convention Program Chair; IATE Executive Committee, Chair of Intellectual Freedom; Illinois Writing Project Trainer. **Member:** CEL, NCTE, NEA. **Publications:** articles in *English Journal, English Leadership Quarterly, Assessment in the Learning Organization* (ASCD), *Focus on Reflection* (NCTE). **Awards:** ISU John Heissler Award 1998. **Program Participant:** NCTE, CEL, ASCD, HISED, ALA.

Position Statement: I enter this election with a sense of optimism and a belief that professional organizations have the capacity to influence school decision makers. CEL must be more of an organization of leaders FOR leaders. How? By finding more ways to communicate with our members, helping them to synthesize their understandings of literacy education and learn the practical skills, structures and resources that can focus and transform their schools. My vision means changing some of the ways that we operate, rethinking when and how we meet, expanding our use of technology, and maximizing the talents of our elected members. I will look for ways to invigorate our organization, not by relying on our reputation for camaraderie, but by becoming a place where leaders come to be nurtured and sometimes even born or reborn.

Candidates for Member-at-Large

Diane M. Peterson, Education Specialist, Region 4 Education Service Center, Houston, TX; doctoral student, Texas A&M University, College Station. **Formerly:** English teacher (8 years), department chair, curriculum specialist, Co-director East Texas Writing Project. **Member:** CEL, NCTE, TCTELA, Coalition of Reading and English Supervisors of Texas (CREST). **Publications:** Several manuals and assessments for classroom use via Region 4 ESC, article in *English in Texas*. **Awards:** NEH We the People Grant. **Program Participant:** CEL, NCTE, TCTELA, TSRA, Texas ASCD, TASA/TASB.

Position Statement: Albert Einstein once wrote, "The education of the individual aspires to revive an ideal that is geared toward the service of our fellow man." CEL's 40 years have shown this organization to be the "ideal" place for English leaders to grow in excellence. In the midst of our researchers, practitioners, luminaries, first-year attendees, administrators, and students, I continue to grow, and I would welcome the opportunity to facilitate growth for other emerging leaders and to encourage revitalization for established professionals. The collaborative environment of CEL fosters our commonality in "the service of our fellow man," and I would be honored to contribute to this kind of professional service.

Elizabeth Virginia Primas, Director of Advanced Programs, DCPS, Washington, DC; Adjunct Professor, George Washington University; DC Director of Education and Technology, PGHA, MD. **Formerly:** Director of Literacy, DCPS; Teacher-In-Residence, Educational Testing Service; National Board Certification, Literacy: Reading/ELA E/MS teachers; Change Facilitator/ Reading Specialist/teacher, DCPS; **Member:** NCTE, CEL, Commission on Children's Literature, ASCELA, IRA, Co-chair Urban Diversity Committee; ASCD; NABSE. **Publications:** *The Graying of Historically Black Colleges;*

2008 CEL Ballot

The CEL bylaws permit members to vote either by mail or at the CEL business session of the NCTE Annual Convention. Each member mailing a ballot should mark it and mail it in an envelope with a **return name and address** to: Bruce Emra, CEL Ballots, 21 W. Crescent Ave., Ramsey, NJ 07446-2205.

Ballots must be postmarked **no later than November 1, 2008.** Members who prefer to vote at the Convention will be given a ballot and an envelope at the business session of CEL. An institution with membership may designate one individual as the representative to vote on its behalf. Please list the institution's name and address on the outside of the envelope.

Associate Chair
(vote for one)

- ❑ Jeffrey N. Golub
- ❑ Pat Monahan
- ❑ _____ (write-in candidate)

Member-at-Large
(vote for two)

- ❑ Diane M. Peterson
- ❑ Elizabeth Virginia Primas
- ❑ Heather Rocco
- ❑ Rebecca Bowers Sipe
- ❑ _____ (write-in candidate)

The Grass Is Greener in Public Housing. **Awards:** DC Teacher of the Year 2000; Agnes Meyer Outstanding Teacher, DC 1999; Masonic Scottish Rites Outstanding Educator, DC 1998. **Program Participant: S**essions at both NCTE and IRA on literacy; presented before Congress on the importance of quality reading instruction; moderator for a satellite teleconference for IRA.

Position Statement: When I could not read, I did not know what I was missing. Now that I know how to read, I could not survive without reading. The impact of learning to read is life altering, and not learning is life threatening. As an educator, I believe that I have no greater tasks or goals than to ensure that I continue to assist others in learning how to read, for reading is the portal through which all other subjects must pass to gain knowledge.

Heather Rocco, Interim Supervisor of Language Arts K–2, Westfield School District, NJ. **Formerly:** English Department Chair, Westfield High School; high school English teacher. **Member:** NCTE, IRA, New Jersey Council of Teachers of English, New Jersey Language Arts Leadership Association. **Awards:** Council Member of the Year, Hofstra University Alumni Organization. **Program Participant:** CEL 2008 (Differentiating Professional Development); NCTE 2007 (Using Harvey Daniels's Literature Circles with Poetry); NJCTE 2005 (What Works – Poetry Instruction).

Position Statement: For me, CEL is the best place to pose my toughest questions and the best resource to discuss new ideas. As Member-at-Large, I would encourage CEL to extend these conversations beyond conferences and newsletters. CEL members can participate in active discussions on message boards and blogs. In addition, when I attended my first CEL conference, I met several people who became wonderful mentors. I would like CEL to establish a formal mentor program that partners new literacy leaders with CEL volunteers who can help them navigate their first years. A CEL mentor could provide a confidential sounding board and honest advice.

Over the last five years, CEL has provided me unwavering support. As Member-at-Large, I will listen, learn, and lead so others have the positive CEL experience that I have had.

Rebecca Bowers Sipe, English Department Head, Eastern Michigan University. **Formerly:** Secondary teacher, department chair, ELA Coordinator, Anchorage, AK; Chair/member, NCTE Secondary Section; NCTE

Executive Committee; President Alaska Council; NCTE Curriculum Commission; Chair, CEE Commission on Curriculum/Supervision; Chair, NCTE Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing; Chair, Michigan High School Standards; Director, Anchorage Writing Project, Co-Director, EMWP. **Member:** NCTE, NWP, MCTE, CEL, IRA, CELT, others. **Publications:** *Purposeful Writing* and *They Still Can't Spell?* (Heinemann); *Strategies for Writers, K–8* (Zaner-Bloser); chapters (NCTE, IRA, Heinemann); articles in *English Journal, Voices from the Middle, English Leadership Quarterly*, others. **Awards:** Michigan Professor of the Year; Distinguished Teaching Award (EMU); NCTE Research Grant; CEL Best Article; Distinguished Service, ACTE. **Program Participant:** NCTE; MCTE, CEL; IRA; NASSP; NMSA.

Position Statement: At this critical juncture in our profession, we need to reach out to every educator, helping each one to develop their own leadership capacity. Long before I thought of myself as a teacher leader, CEL reached out and helped me begin shaping that identity for myself. I believe every single member of our profession can be a leader, and if elected, I'll dedicate myself to building that sense of leadership capacity for others through CEL.

Call for Manuscripts/ Future Issues

The *English Leadership Quarterly*, a publication of the NCTE Conference on English Leadership (CEL), seeks articles of 500–5,000 words on topics of interest to those in positions of leadership in departments (elementary, secondary, or college) where English is taught. Informal, first-hand accounts of successful research, teaching, and learning activities related to themes of upcoming issues, are encouraged. Themes of upcoming issues include:

April 2009 (deadline December 15, 2008)
Young Adult Literature in Today's Classroom

August 2009 (deadline May 15, 2009)
Writing Instruction
(see call, p. 11)

Manuscripts should follow APA 5th edition guidelines and be sent via email as a Microsoft Word file. A decision about a manuscript will be reached within two months of submission. *ELQ* typically publishes one out of ten manuscripts it receives each year. Please send inquiries and manuscripts to Lisa Scherff at lscherff@bamaed.ua.edu *and* Susan Groenke at sgroenke@utk.edu; phone: (205) 348-5872. ●

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