

## Digital Poetry Practicum: Preservice English Language Arts Teachers' Dispositions of New Literacies

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative study investigated how graduate preservice teachers (PSTs) engaged in a digital practicum experience with a geographically distant secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. The graduate PSTs, enrolled in a Masters of Arts, English Education program at a university in the mid-Atlantic United States, mentored the 9th-grade students in the online spaces of a course wiki and video conferencing. In this portion of a larger study, PSTs mentored the students during a poetry unit organized by the ELA cooperating teacher and housed in the ELA classroom. A goal of this practicum was building PSTs' Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Shulman, 1986) and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Koehler & Mishra, 2009) specific to the use of emerging technologies within the ELA classroom. The findings of this study show that online spaces can develop dispositions of New Literacies (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007) and can bridge theory and practice in teacher preparation programs.

*Keywords:* Teacher education; wikis; New Literacies; poetry; digital literacy; English Language Arts; collaboration

## Introduction

Effectively enhancing classroom literacy instruction with value-added technology can be challenging without models. Even experienced classroom teachers often struggle to lead students with curriculum rather than to lead with technology. This struggle is even greater for the preservice teacher (PST), who lacks curriculum and lesson development experience in addition to lacking models for technology integration. This is then coupled with the challenge teacher preparation programs often have with finding practicum placements for PSTs where they can experiment with a confident teacher who effectively integrates technology. When any theory investigated in the university classroom is not enacted in a classroom experience, PSTs may be less likely to adopt it, and the dispositions of New Literacies (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007) are no different. This could then perpetuate the lack of models of effective integration of digital technology. Furthermore, K-12 online courses are offered in all 50 states; however, less than 2% of responding programs in teacher education address this need for online teaching and learning experiences by providing PSTs with chances to explore teaching with digital tools (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012).

Digital practica can provide PSTs an introduction to teaching students in online spaces and a chance for in-depth mentorship (Nobles, Dredger, & Gerheart, 2012; Townsend, Cheveallier, Browning, & Fink, 2013). The online practicum places PSTs in a position to observe a classroom teacher's curriculum design in digital spaces, as well as to understand how to work closely with students who are physically far away. This study explores the results of implementing a six-week digital practicum for PSTs. The primary goals of this practicum experience were 1) building PSTs' Pedagogical Content Knowledge

(PCK, Howey & Grossman, 1989; Shulman, 1986) and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK, Koehler & Mishra, 2009), specific to the use of emerging technologies within the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom, and 2) supporting high school students in the development of academic confidence through college mentors and peer review. While this larger project impacted both the students and the PSTs, this article articulates the impact on the PSTs.

Local practicum placements for PSTs do not always model pedagogies steeped in effective technology integration. The teacher educators in this study decided to take full advantage of the affordances of digital practicum experiences and placed PSTs with a teacher who was a leader in integrating technology in her school's 1:1 program, even though her school was over 200 miles from the university. The PSTs never physically traveled to their placement. Instead, they logged into the classroom wiki and communicated with their cooperating teacher and her students predominantly asynchronously.

This study investigated how these six PSTs, all preservice ELA teachers, mentored 19 ninth-grade students in poetry interpretation, response, and recitation within the digital collaboration space of a wiki. Shulman's PCK (1986) established the premise that PSTs needed to be not only strong in their content area (ELA in this study) but also in the specific effective pedagogies that are most successful in teaching ELA. PCK implies that teacher preparation programs are most effective when delivered in a context, that math teaching, for example, is distinctively different than the teaching of ELA. Likewise, TPACK implies using technologies specific to the enacting of the ELA curriculum.

The poetry unit, common in high school curriculum, is one in which many teachers lack confidence because of the subjective artistry that can define poetry. This lack of confidence can, in turn, affect student interest. Some argue poetry is the least well-taught genre, at least in part because of this cycle: teachers themselves were not taught poetry well when they were students and therefore lack confidence and/or interest (Dymoke & Hughes, 2009). This cycle can be hard to change without changing people's experiences with poetry.

To attempt to break the cycle, the unit for the high school students was designed around objectives focused on student choice and exploration supported by the PST in the role of mentor. The students were asked:

- To connect with poetry by finding poems they enjoy reading;
- To recite a poem they enjoy by memory and with expression;
- To understand that poetry is different than prose in writing expectations;
- To identify and explain an author's purpose with the support of a mentor;
- To be able to write poetry using literary techniques to intentionally create meaning with the support of a mentor; and
- To submit an original poem for possible publication.

For engagement purposes, the students chose two poems to post on their wiki pages and annotate over the course of several weeks, leading to a final deep analysis of one poem that included an audio recording of the student reciting the poem. The cooperating teacher offered the students a choice of these poems they would study in depth to increase engagement. The students also posted drafts of at least three of their own poems over the six-week period, culminating in posting three final poems and submitting at least one to a

poetry competition. To help her students feel comfortable with sharing all of this work, the cooperating teacher created a wide safety net for her students' explorations of poetry, a net that included herself and the PSTs serving as collaborators and mentors for the students in their poetry analysis and composition in this digital space. This collaboration offered the high school students an expanded set of readers for their poetry writing and recitations, making this work more meaningful (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Gee, 1989).

The unit was designed to offer the PSTs practice with responding to students' poetry interpretations in a smaller group setting to help them develop skills they could then transfer with confidence to their own future classrooms. Objectives from the course that applied directly to the practicum required students to:

- Evaluate and experiment with multiple strategies and a range of content materials and texts, both traditional and alternative and both explicitly and in the context of writing instruction, in order to move toward the goal of reaching *all* students;
- Use multimodal composition and communication technologies to facilitate reflection and instruction; and
- Utilize major components of reader-response theory as a means of enhancing reading within content-area environments.

This practicum was titled "Real World Readers," and the collaboration counted toward 10% of their ELA methods course grade. Following the expectations provided to the students by the cooperating teacher (see Appendix), the PSTs visited their students' wiki pages each time the students posted a new or revised analysis or poem or replied to the comment thread. In this way, the PSTs were a constant presence to their students, supportively encouraging them to develop as thinkers and writers.

As a nationally accredited teacher preparation program, the practice of formally aligning activities with the NCTE/NCATE (now NCTE/CAEP) standards focused this work.

The digital practicum supported Standard 2, 3.1, and 3.7:

- Standard 2. Through modeling, advisement, instruction, field experiences, assessment of performance, and involvement in professional organizations, candidates adopt and strengthen professional attitudes needed by ELA teachers.
- Standard 3.1: Candidates demonstrate knowledge of and skills in the use of the English language.
- Standard 3.7: Candidates demonstrate knowledge of research theory and findings in ELA. (NCTE/NCATE Program Standards, 2003)

This digital practicum housed within the poetry unit served these standards. Additionally, self-efficacy in teaching was developed as PSTs worked alongside an experienced teacher.

Finally, this digital practicum gave PSTs a needed opportunity to work with a tech-savvy English teacher (Hicks, 2016; Kajder, 2010; Kist, 2005). TPACK makes a similar argument to PCK about the critical importance of context. Technology integration courses in teacher preparation programs should not be siloed, divorced from the content. Instead, effective teaching with technology can be effectively embedded in content-specific teacher preparation courses. The digital tools and strategies can be leveraged thoughtfully to enhance student learning in each content area. This practicum offered the PSTs a model for effective content and technology integration within a secondary ELA poetry unit through its careful design to meet the needs of each learner by leveraging the digital space for increased individual student support. The cooperating teacher modeled instructional

practices that integrated technology in support of curricular goals, as well as supported a different approach to poetry. And the PSTs practiced their professional responsibilities of both PCK and TPACK in a safe, instructive environment with support from a university supervisor and in collaboration with a master teacher. This practicum provided the PSTs a rich digital learning model of how a traditionally nondigital ELA unit can be amplified with a digital connection.

### **Classroom Innovation Using Wikis**

This poetry unit was housed in a wiki. A wiki is a dynamic internet composition space in which multiple users can add, change, and revise, either collaboratively or individually. Users can also store documents and multimodal artifacts in the wiki space and track a revision history to see the collaborative process in action. This revision history served as a record of accumulated knowledge creation.

As a metaphor, the wiki is a digital three-ring binder. Imagine a binder so large that students, year after year if needed, can share notes and insights on the concepts covered in a course. Then imagine that student notes in this binder could include multimedia perspectives of the skills and content of the class and that all of this knowledge could be accessed electronically. This notebook metaphor (Nobles, Dredger, & Gerheart, 2012) or “knowledge platform” (Parker & Chao, 2007, p. 58) has been used to describe the power of a course wiki. Course wikis can include notes and perspectives from each student, and teachers may organize the space by student name, much like files in a filing cabinet or tabbed dividers in a notebook. Teachers may also set up the wiki with tabs delineated for course objectives or themes. Furthermore, wikis can be stored indefinitely so that the



accumulated knowledge can live year to year or can be confined to specific units of learning.

What makes the wiki much improved over the binder is the ease of sharing both the creation of knowledge and the knowledge created. Wikis privilege authentic collaboration, an important skill today's students need to learn (Dredger, 2014; Dymoke & Hughes, 2009; Edmonson, 2012; Kajder, 2010; Wake & Modla, 2012). Teachers who believe that "everyone together is smarter than anyone alone" (Richardson, 2009, p. 57) find that wikis encourage students to work more efficiently while co-constructing knowledge. The word "wiki," derived from the Hawaiian language, means "fast," and 21st-century learners have the opportunity with wikis to access and evaluate digital information critically and quickly and to "engage in the purposeful work of negotiating and creating truth" (Stevenson, 2010, p. 57) using multiple perspectives.

Users of these tools espouse their ease of navigation and the power of the collaborative space. Even though wikis are deemed by research as supportive in helping teachers develop students' online competencies in a networked age, they are used with students less than 1% of the time for the intended collaborative purpose (Reich, Murnane, & Willet, 2012). That said, educators who are wary of new technologies that swirl like fads through in-service presentations and practitioner websites are wise. Classroom teachers who are trying to use the power of Web 2.0 and 3.0 (mobile) technologies to meet students in learning spaces that are familiar to them, such as social networking spaces (Abbitt, 2011; Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, & York, 2007), also can struggle with the lack of models guiding them in effective academic integration of digital tools. Empirical research that helps teachers understand the questions of what works, when, and why with technology

integration should be used to inform classroom practice. In addition to studying the impact of digital practica, this study also hopes to provide a research-based examination of the impact of thoughtfully integrating wikis into the classroom.

### **Anchoring the Curriculum**

For this four-week unit, the ninth-grade students studied poems and poetry writing in their traditional classroom with their regular teacher, Ms. King (a pseudonym). Meanwhile, PSTs read poems and discussed in their traditional methods classroom ways to respond to students' poetic attempts and to student observations and analysis of poetry that served as mentor texts within the composition process. The wiki then offered a shared classroom space where the students and the PSTs could collaborate and test their learning. The students posted their analyses of poems as well as their own poems and poetry recitation audio recording on the wiki, and the PSTs, using the discussion tab, commented on student work. The students then responded both in the discussion as well through revisions to their poems and recitations.

This unit and subsequently this research study aligned with the Common Core Initiative (National Governors Association, 2010). The students worked within "a deep and flexible understanding" (CCSSO, 2011, p. 8) of poetry as a genre. Specifically, students:

- Cited strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text ([CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1](#));
- Showed their ability to "determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it

emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; [and] provide[d] an objective summary of the text” ([CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2](#));

- Determined “the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; [and] analyzed the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone)” ([CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4](#)); and
- Drew “evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research” ([CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9](#)).

While students also read poetry as suggested by the CCSS, it is inappropriate to suggest whether they were reading within CCSS grade level bands because poetry is not appropriately analyzed with a readability score (Mesmer, 2007). CCSSs also do not suggest that student writing of poetry is an essential skill in ninth grade ELA classrooms. This study shows the value of the practice.

### **Research Question**

What began as a partnership between an independent secondary school and a university in 2008 became a formalized research study in the fall of 2011. After experiencing this symbiotic partnership, the authors determined that pursuing this project as a research study would highlight the nature of the discourse between the learning groups involved, uncovering the effects of both the digital practica and the participation in a wiki.

Joining the discussion about the use of classroom wikis and about mentorship in areas of PCK (Shulman, 1986) and TPACK (Koehler & Mishra, 2009), the authors wanted to

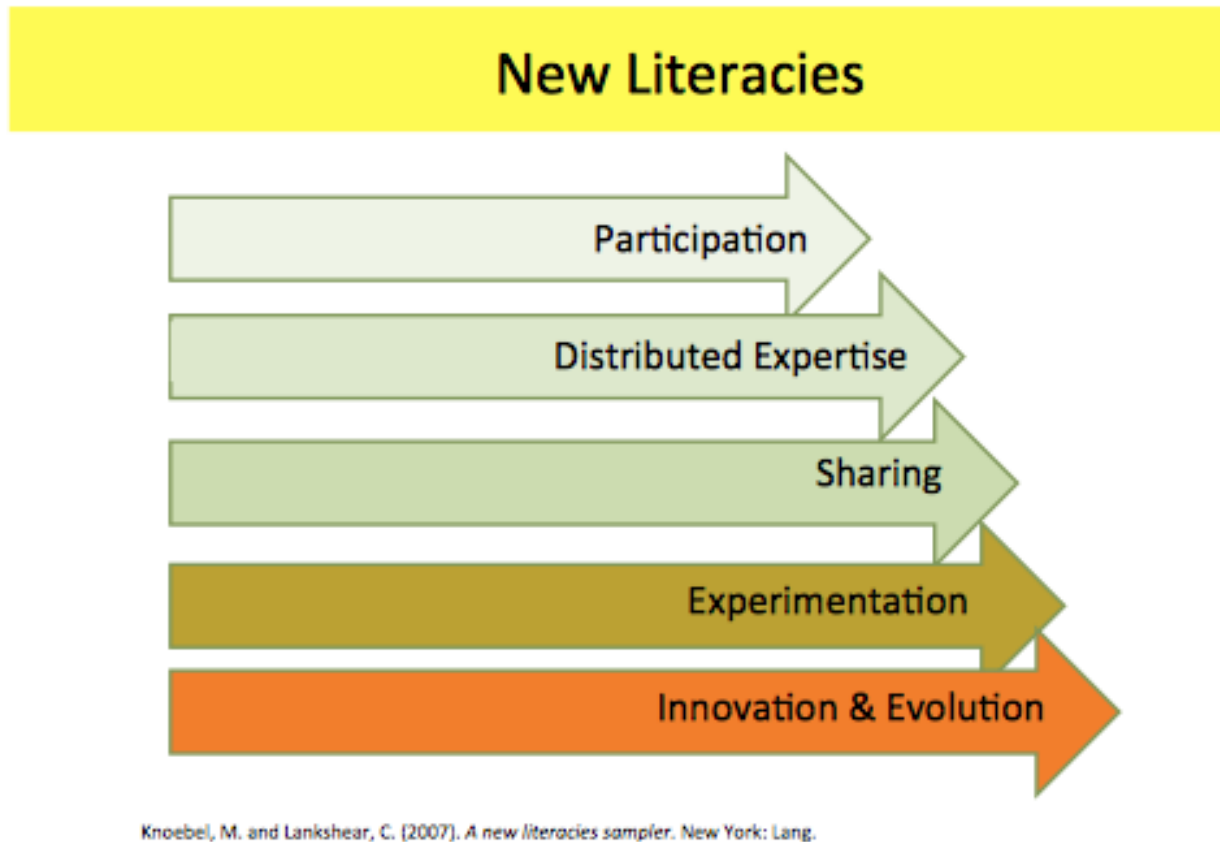
know whether perceptions of quality interactions bore out under rigorous discourse analysis viewed from a New Literacies lens (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Lankshear, & Knobel, 2011). The research question of this study was, “What is the nature of the online discourse between PSTs and ninth graders interacting from geographically distant places?”

### **Theoretical Framework**

The examination of the discourse of the PSTs and the students within the space of a course wiki offers insight into English educators’ responsibility to prepare future teachers to negotiate the demands and affordances offered by technology integration. New Literacies and Cognitive Flexibility Theory, defined below, come together to frame this study.

#### *New Literacies*

For the purposes of this study, we refer to New Literacies as Knobel and Lankshear (2007) define them in *A New Literacies Sampler*. This theoretical framework informed our purpose in that teaching digitally will always mean that the available tools will change but that an attitude of reflective implementation when enacting curricula with emerging technology will always be important. What might be called “Old Literacies” valued the dispositions of centralized expertise, ownership, normalization, and fixidity. New Literacy practices value participation, distributed expertise, sharing, experimentation, and evolution (see Figure 1). New Literacies is a term that has been coined in light of the influx of tools that have flooded our existence. How we use these tools in the ELA classroom requires reflective practitioners. New Literacies provide the opportunity to use technology in a transactional way.



*Figure 1: Moving toward dispositions of New Literacies (Concept synthesized in Dredger, Woods, Beach, & Sagstetter, 2010).*

Analysis of New Literacies (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014) requires that researchers examine how participants use tools and practices in order to inform teaching and learning (p. 97).

### *Cognitive Flexibility Theory*

Cognitive Flexibility Theory (CFT, Spiro, Coulson, Feltovich, & Anderson, 2004) states that advanced knowledge acquisition happens in classrooms that avoid oversimplification. For example, this type of knowledge acquisition would be evidenced in the highlighting of exceptions in a body of knowledge. CFT can be applied to teaching with

technology, as technology-rich classrooms are also information-rich and therefore must focus on managing all the available knowledge without simplifying it.

CFT is also applicable in the teaching of poetry, an intricately robust genre. The following themes of CFT map strongly with developing a deep understanding of poetry.

- *Multiple Representations:* In poetry texts, the amount and type of diversified examples lead to complex thinking about how concepts manifest themselves.
- *Case Studies:* CFT requires that classrooms look at actual occurrences of phenomena, referred to in the medical community as “cases.” Hence, case study has been deemed an effective way to study complex issues. The cooperating teacher in this study planned the instruction within this wiki to explore multiple poetic texts, or “cases,” to honor multiple ways of looking at a poem.
- *Flexible Schema:* In classrooms that are honing flexible schemas, patterns are disrupted. Fixed knowledge is devalued, and potential knowledge is privileged. The cooperating teacher in this study used this concept by creating a culture where there were not singular, “correct” interpretations of poetry.
- *Multiple-Connectedness:* CFT classrooms are marked by an effort to see similarities and differences across representations. Thus, students and teachers in an ELA classroom may point out how poems relate to other poems, other texts, to history, or to personal experience.
- *Mentor Support:* CFT suggests that the learning of complex concepts cannot just be handed to the student. Instead, guidance, offered in myriad ways,

should support knowledge acquisition. The combination of the cooperating teacher and the PSTs as mentors created strong support for the students in this study as they embraced the complexity of poetic texts.

The high-level thinking tasks that engaged both the secondary students and PSTs required more than connecting. CFT, with its focus on application, multiple representations, diverse interpretations, multiple connections, and mentor support, better suited the genre of poetry within this collaboration.

From this we use the term affordances, explained by Beach and O'Brien (2012) as “both those literacy practices which the [technologies] are designed to foster as well as those literacy practices you are inviting students to employ” (italics in original, loc. 133). This explanation is grounded in Gibson’s (1977) suggestion that humans alter the world (in this case in their use of tools) to serve an emerging purpose. Hence the use of the tool supports both the teacher-identified outcomes and the unexpected but appropriate learning that emerges from the practice. As such, students **doing**, in this case creating, reflecting, sharing, and revising poetic works, with the tools available frame the enduring understanding of the unit of learning.

### *Intersections of Frameworks*

New Literacies and CFT converge in a logical place when studying the affordances of a new tool like a closed course wiki used to create a learning space for different sets of learners with different learning goals. While our PSTs were being challenged within this space to consider the learner, the content, the instruction, and their own professional dispositions (CCSSO, 2011), the secondary students were concurrently being asked to (a) refine their academic thinking within multiple perspectives; (b) create original poetry; (c)

think critically about the aspects of poetry that include figurative language, polysemous words, appeals to emotions, author's style, economy of language, narrative arc, rhythm, tone, speaker, and purpose.

New Literacies moves both secondary students and graduate students to a place of experimentation and innovation, privileging sharing and distributed expertise. The paradigm of New Literacies and the affordance of the tools supports students in their development of cognitive flexibility, with the intended consequence of developing critical thinking in students. The unit was based in complicated discussion around poetry, and New Literacies supported the academic discourse that resulted.

### **Literature Review**

The body of literature about the use of wikis in the classroom has depth, breadth, and longevity. Richardson's (2006) first edition of *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms* and Kajder's (2003) *The Tech-Savvy English Teacher* are early examples of practitioner texts that examined these issues. Both authors are pioneers of technological integration in secondary ELA classrooms.

Preparing students for 21st Century Literacies (Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996) means modeling ways that geographically distant colleagues can collaboratively construct knowledge and course design in digital ways. Secondary teachers have shared that students are engaged when New Literacies offer them spaces to collaborate and create to meet individual learning needs (Kajder, 2010; Kist, 2005; Richardson, 2009).

Differentiated classrooms (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008; Tomlinson, 2001) allow for individualized learning environments that create both familiar learning spaces (Dredger,



Woods, Beach, & Sagstetter, 2010; Moll & Greenberg, 1990) and move students in new directions for essential growth in content skills.

The research on teaching poetry through digital means shows that multimodality, larger audiences, and performance enhance the teaching of poetry (Dymoke & Hughes, 2011). This study found that some PSTs resist teaching poetry at times because they dislike the genre. They may think that poetry is only for the elite, is inaccessible and too difficult to assess, is not as important as other genres; and is not a collaborative creative space (Dymoke & Hughes, 2011). Teacher educators, armed with the findings of such research, can start to support PSTs in breaking down these notions. Dymoke and Hughes (2011) discuss ways that, pedagogically speaking, ELA PSTs need mentorship in the art and science of teaching such creative composition. This specifically speaks to some of the more recent scholarship on the importance of content knowledge development in teacher education (Forzani, 2014; Gitomer & Zisk, 2015; Lowenberg-Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008). Additional literature in the use of digital tools in the ELA classroom has focused on the use of digital literacies to support the accessing and sharing of knowledge, the collaborative power of gaining conceptual understandings, and the ways that new technologies can support reflection on learning (Beach, 2012). Poetry pedagogy, particularly in digital contexts, has been explored in terms of implications and restraints of the tools (Carlin-Menter, 2013; Dymoke & Hughes, 2009; Li, Snow, & White, 2015).

Teacher educators need to continue to find ways to “keep the pace” (Alvermann, 2011) as digital technologies offer opportunities for engagement in specific disciplines. In sum, this work follows the lead of these above research studies in examining specifically the ways that PSTs are guided in the thoughtful integration of technology in the ELA

classroom. As new tools move into classrooms, teachers need to be trained in their implementation and the ways that they can amplify learning the enduring understandings of the discipline.

### **Methodology**

The three researchers, education professionals with nearly forty years combined experience teaching in secondary ELA classrooms, formalized this qualitative study two years into a six-year partnership between a secondary classroom and a university classroom, specifically in a teacher preparation course. The researchers used discourse analysis to analyze the anonymized collection of all written interactions, collected on the course wiki, between the students and the PSTs within the course of one unit. The research team defined discourse as Goldman and Wiley (2004) do. Discourse analysis of written text describes the “ideas and the relations among the ideas present in a text” (p. 64). This is especially important in a text such as a wiki and in a geographically distant mentoring environment where the main interaction between the adolescent classroom students and their mentors is in text, not in verbal dialogue. Goldman and Wiley propose that written text is a window into the “mental model” (p. 74) of the learner and that these learner-produced texts give researchers sound data for subjectively but not arbitrarily furthering understanding of student learning.

The 19 ninth-grade student participants were predominantly white (20% were non-Caucasian) students at a college-preparatory, independent PK-12 school located 220 miles away from the university. Twelve were boys and seven girls. The students owned or leased from the school laptops that they used in the classroom each day as well as brought home. All of the students had internet access at home in addition to the access they had at school.

In addition to their English class, each student was enrolled in four other academic classes and at least one elective class.

The participants in this study included six PSTs in a Masters of Arts in Education teacher preparation program in English Education in a large research university in a mid-Atlantic state. The PSTs were all Caucasian, and five were females in their early twenties working toward teacher licensure. The one male participant was in his mid-thirties and had chosen a career change to pursue teaching. All of the PSTs owned laptop computers with internet access and also had access to university computers when needed. While participating in this project, PSTs were concurrently enrolled in at least three other master's level education courses, including a fall field practicum experience in a local secondary school two days a week. The examples in the analysis and discussion sections are taken from five PSTs and 10 students. The pseudonyms for these participants are shown in Table 1.

*Table 1*

Study participants

Cooperating Classroom Teacher	Preservice Teacher (PST) Mentor	Corresponding Student Mentee
Ms. King	Ms. Aldich	Prekan
	Ms. Reznik	Jake
		Alice
		Erika
	Ms. Dean	Camille

		Colton
		Kobe
	Ms. Wilkins	Aaron
	Ms. Atkins	Peyton

Because the course wiki and the written comments that were shared between student and PST were preserved in an online document, this work is well-suited to written discourse analysis. This study is especially informative in that the participants only exchanged verbal conversations twice: short introductions at the beginning of the unit and poetry recitations via Skype as a culminating activity. The dialogue that exists on the wiki is essentially the entirety of the interaction between each student and their PST mentor. Thus, a third space (Bhabha, 1990; Soja, 1996) apart from the secondary classroom and the university classroom was created through the power of Web 2.0 technologies that in turn created a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) for all of the community's participants.

The research team coded the data using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Cobin, 1994). First, each researcher separately read and reread each interaction recorded on the course wiki, including posts, uploads, and comments. The researchers each coded these digital interactions of the secondary students and the PSTs using these initial codes:

- Social niceties
- Expert language

- Expert thinking
- Complex communication (e.g. a probing question or dialogue)
- Integration of complex communication and expert thinking

The researchers then reread the data together. After collaboration and deliberation, the original codes were meshed and situated within the theoretical frameworks of our research. For example, the term “expert thinking” emerged as important to what the students and PSTs were displaying. The research team chose to explain that within a broader theme of “expertise” then “distributed expertise” over centralized expertise to show the changing face of what literacy means and how the digital tool offers affordances to share the knowledge and classroom learning. The final codes were:

- Participation
- Distributed expertise
- Sharing
- Experimentation
- Innovation
- Evolution

The theoretical framing of these codes into a New Literacies framework, organized hierarchically, informed our findings, discussed below.

### **Findings**

In this community of practice, four distinct findings emerged. The discourses of the PSTs showed developing dispositions in tenets of New Literacies (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007), specifically in the following:

- the support of student participation;
- the distribution of expertise to the students;
- the encouragement of sharing knowledge over owning it; and
- the spirit of experimentation, both for the PSTs in their practicum classroom and in their own pedagogical choices.

As a team, we organized these findings hierarchically, suggesting that learners must first participate to be seen as a knowledgeable expert. Then we suggest that sharing comes from respect in the learning community to support others' knowledge growth. Finally, we want to see ways that learners are empowered to try new things as they apply knowledge to new situations, effectively experimenting in a safe environment.

*Finding #1: Participation Over Publishing*

The New Literacies paradigm of participation over publication was evident throughout this digital collaboration. One of the affordances of a wiki is the ease of the creative process. The revision history of the wiki shows that a final product is not produced upon a first, or even second and third, draft of any composition. For example, Erika's (all names are pseudonyms; see Table 1) wiki page showed 26 revisions. Erika clearly understood that composition is a process and that the product may not be as important as this process.

The power of the wiki to enhance creative collaboration within the focus on participation was shown in the dialogue that developed between each student and their PST mentor. Each of the 19 students was assigned a PST. The PSTs prompted each of their

mentees through inquiry, helping them both learn and encouraging participation. For example, Ms. Aldich probed her student mentee, Prekan:

I'd like to hear more about your process. Did you write what you wanted the poem to say, then go back and match it to the acrostic, or did you keep it in mind while you were writing? How did you decide on the subject of a salsa maker?

The PSTs were encouraged to engage through thoughtful questioning, honoring the learning process and respecting the personal nature of artistic creation.

Participation over publication also was shown in the thinking processes of the students, as evidenced in their comments. For example, Camille explained to her mentor, Ms. Dean, "I put line breaks in this poem so people would take pauses to slow down the poem and make the reader stop for a moment and think about what they are reading." This example showed a developing author attending to her future audience, one that was not just her teacher. She referred to "people" with the confidence that she would have readers. Her current audience, the assigned PST Ms. Dean, served as a sounding board within her process.

The private wiki also gave a safe space for students to participate. Participating in an online environment can be intimidating initially, but the data showed students and PSTs mentoring each other to participate, even when reluctant. PST Ms. Atkins, seeing that Peyton was not participating often or fully, commented to him,

I'm starting to see that you aren't a poetry fan :) [sic] That's fine, there are plenty of people who don't like poetry. Maybe you don't like writing it? Maybe you've just read some bad poems over the years that make no sense? I don't know, but I hope you never give up on the genre! There's a poet for everybody. :) I really like this

poem by Wilfred Owens. I think it is very poignant, and I like that it is written by a young man in his early twenties, reflecting on the horrors of war. Like others of Owens' poems, this one does a good job of expressing sadness and anger and giving readers honest thoughts on war. Good choice!

This demonstrated the affordance of the wiki as a digital space where Peyton was able to get individual support to help him overcome his reluctance to participate.

The PSTs, too, showed some concern in the process of engaging in digital interaction. Ms. Reznik, for example, failed to respond initially to Jake's posts. University faculty clarified expectations and encouraged prompt participation. Ms. Reznik gave pointed, positive feedback and wrote:

I also wanted to write a short message to apologize for not commenting on your wiki posts earlier. I was very confused; I was looking for your posts in the wrong spot and thought that you just hadn't posted yet! Thank you for being patient with me; I enjoyed reading your wiki posts and hope that you find my comments helpful.

Jake responded, "Also, by the way, it's okay for the delay in comments. I didn't exactly understand how the Wikis worked either, but as you probably know I was delayed in posting a second, original poem I wrote." Students and PSTs, through the supportive nature of the wiki, overcame any initial reluctance and embraced the participatory, collaborative nature of a wiki. In doing so, the students practiced being true writers who know that writing is never done, and the PSTs practiced supporting students as they made this sometimes intimidating step into this community of writers.

*Finding #2: Distributed Expertise*



A second affordance of using the educational space of the wiki technology is the shifting roles we saw in the teachers and the students. As illustrated in the aforementioned example of Ms. Reznik and Jake, the PSTs showed that they were learning with the students, and the students at times took a nurturing response.

This distributed expertise reflects a paradigm shift from the teacher providing information to the students to an environment where the teacher models learning and the students are valued holders of information as well. In this authentic learning process, expertise is shared among all parties. When Ms. Reznik acknowledged Erika's expertise in using imagery, for example, she showed Erika a strength in her writing that she may not have been aware of before the practicum experience. After Ms. Reznik pointed out her strengths, Erika said, "I appreciate your thoughts and have noticed that my strongest areas in poetry are using strong imagery and words." Erika had clearly developed a sense of her own expertise as a writer.

It takes time to read and comment on the strengths and areas for growth for each student, and the digital practicum afforded more one-on-one attention than a single classroom teacher can give. Because of this, distributed expertise is much more challenging to achieve in a traditional classroom. In the third space of the wiki, the classroom teacher had the assistance of the PSTs to acknowledge all students' expertise and encourage them in ways they excelled in writing. None of this would have happened without the high school English teacher letting go so that her students could be mentored by growing professionals in the field of English Education. That is, none of this expertise would have been distributed without the teacher being open to the affordances of the wiki and she and the university

supervisor trusting the students and PSTs to work professionally. Distributed expertise came with letting go, while maintaining a thumb on the pulse of the interactions.

As the example above showed, encouraging shared expertise helped the students gain confidence. What was even more powerful was when students became confident enough to note their own strengths and explain the choices they made in writings. Colton explained some of his poetic choices to Ms. Dean:

I thought the tone or message might just be to live through the day. I thought it might be calming to the reader. I really just chose to use a bat to show this because it's easy to rhyme. I decided to take out the alliteration in some parts because I didn't like how it changed the flow.

Colton's confidence in his decision to take out alliteration because it seemed forced and "changed the flow" showed his emerging expertise in experimenting with figurative language.

The Web 2.0 tools used in this collaborative poetry unit fostered a space for these higher-level thinking skills that were invited through inquiry and a place to think and respond. Kobe showed this reflection when he explained some of the choices he made to his assigned PST Ms. Dean, "I really tried to make it feel as though even though getting over a fear is scary, life or death situations really help you out." While the expertise shown here was not involving figurative language or specific poetic devices, Kobe was showing confidence in his writing choices, an area where he saw himself as an expert. Beyond reflecting on his own writing, Kobe noted a poet's use of repetition:

Repetition- this really helped for this poem because it explains how important it was for these men to be 'free' from their lives that they had supposedly been unhappy in

previously. It also really forces the reader to memorize this statement making it stick to the reader.

It is powerful for writers to use mentor texts (published poems) as they gain expertise. Similarly, significant support from a mentor, in this case PSTs, can help learners gain confidence.

The structure of the digital practicum kept students from feeling unsupported. When Ms. Wilkins, a PST, suggested to Aaron that he end a poem with a stanza he had used previously, he responded, "Well the reason i [sic] didn't was because the format of this poem did not have that i will ask Ms. King if i can do that. Thanks!" There was a sense of needing to return to the classroom teacher for the expertise that fit her role, but that expertise was not limited to her.

Similarly, the PSTs noted learning from the students. Ms. Reznik wrote to Alice:

I really enjoyed your poem. I love that so much of it is comprised of two-word sentences...those are hard to come by in literature, and I love them. I think that they emphasize the power of words, and in your poem, they show the power of a state of being and help your reader to stay tuned into your human experience. I think you had a nice use of repetition throughout your poem-- it seemed to emphasize what was most important to you. I think it shows that as humans we tend to have a root issue that shows up in our lives in various way. In this case, you touched on an issue that almost everyone deals with at some point: worry. I liked how honest you were in this poem...I am not a talented poet, and I appreciate anyone who can express such honesty in so few words. Thank you for sharing!

The students may learn from the teacher, but ultimately, distributed expertise means students learning from students, from technology, from experience, and from problem-solving, and the teachers learning from the students as well.

*Finding #3: Sharing Over Ownership*

A third tenet of New Literacies that emerged from the data went beyond simply putting one's work online to be read. In New Literacies, sharing is being willing to put one's work online for others to use, that is to borrow, remix, and excerpt. The ethos of new media is one of open access.

The discourse between the PSTs and students showed that both parties could practice this tenet of sharing via the wiki. One of the PSTs' roles was to suggest new poems for the students to read based on the types of poems the student had shared on the wiki. While some of the PSTs simply suggested a title and author, others linked to websites that freely provided their chosen author's poetry. For example, Ms. Reznik wrote to Jake, "I'd like to suggest that you read 'Free River' by Patrick Dumas. I wanted to suggest another poem about a river because you chose to write a personal poem about a river. Here's a link to the poem: <http://poemhunter.com/poem/free-river/>." Ms. Reznik was relying on the open ethos of existing websites to provide a poem that Jake could easily access. The website *Poem Hunter* ([www.poemhunter.com](http://www.poemhunter.com)) is a free site for authors to publish their poems. The site's copyright notice explains that poets still hold their own copyrights, so the poems cannot necessarily be published elsewhere. So, Ms. Reznik supported Jake by sending him to the site where the poet himself had chosen to share his poem, and Jake, like most people, was much more likely to read this suggested poem because he could access it

immediately and for free. A wiki makes it easy to take advantage of the open source possibilities of the digital world.

This type of sharing (linking to work put on the Internet by other authors) has been embraced by many. This project pushed the PSTs and students, particularly the students who were sharing their own poems, much further into the New Literacy of sharing by having them agree to have their work be part of the open access archive of the Internet. Ms. Dean approached Camille's poem with a similar disposition: if it is accessible on the Internet, then it is available for sharing. She wrote to Camille, "I'm going to be completely honest, I teared up when reading 'Tides.' I called my Mom and read it to her, it moved me so much. (I didn't give your name or anything like that obviously. I hope you don't mind.)" Her explanation to Camille showed that only after the fact did she consider that Camille might not have fully embraced the new literacy of sharing. Ms. Dean's discourse, even as she realized this somewhat too late, showed how this level of sharing is something people must learn and practice.

Camille's response then showed that, not only was she willing to have her poem shared, this sharing was a positive experience for her as a writer: "Thank you so much and I am glad you liked it enough to share it." The PST's choice to share the poem, which was made possible by the collaborative affordances of the wiki, ultimately became a powerful moment of feedback for Camille. It was not Camille's one classroom teacher who had read and appreciated her poem; it was a PST two hundred miles away and her mother.

#### *Finding #4: Experimentation Over Normalization*

At the highest level of our suggested hierarchy is experimentation. This tenet of New Literacies was exemplified in this data as the choice to try something beyond the expected

or established. Just as New Literacy sharing becomes sharing with anyone in the world, the New Literacy of experimentation holds much wider possibilities through the affordances of digital tools. For example, audio and images can be readily created, borrowed, and remixed. The discourse from this project exhibited experimentation in three ways: the PST experimenting with her role as teacher; the student experimenting with ways to present her ideas; and the PST and the student exploring experimentation together.

Ms. Atkins performed what was expected of all PSTs on the wiki. She responded to Peyton's poems by exploring techniques she saw him using. Yet through her discourse, it became clear that she was intuiting a resistance to poetry in Peyton. Peyton wrote nothing directly about his feelings about poetry, but Ms. Atkins decided to experiment with her role on the wiki. Excerpted from what the longer segment we quoted earlier, she wrote,

I'm starting to see that you aren't a poetry fan :) [sic] That's fine, there are plenty of people who don't like poetry. Maybe you don't like writing it? Maybe you've just read some bad poems over the years that make no sense? I don't know, but I hope you never give up on the genre!

Ms. Atkins took this risk of writing to Peyton about something she was sensing, albeit without face-to-face contact with the youth. This careful attention to the nuances of one's student's discourse is an important aspect of being an effective teacher. The wiki afforded Ms. Atkins the chance to explore and grow as a teacher.

Camille also demonstrated self-exploration through the wiki. As a student, she was assigned to post an image with one of her chosen poems; however, Camille decided to experiment as a poet with how visuals contributed to her poems' meanings. She chose images for all her poems, something made easy by the image uploading capabilities of the

wiki. She then decided to explain one of her image choices: “My picture is also kind of like a Metaphor [sic] because it is in the ground and then grows and find [sic] out what light is and keeps growing without question. This is like how if you don't know what love is u [sic] fall in love without question even thought [sic] it might be a bumpy road” (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3:* Creative commons licensed photograph included in wiki, <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en>, Photo by [KuniakiIGARASHI](#).

Camille applied her knowledge of poetic techniques, specifically the metaphor, by experimenting with images, showing even more deeply how much she understood what a metaphor is.

Ms. Reznik and Alice discussed about experimentation in writing. Ms. Reznik first wrote, "Your 'I Am' and Pantoum poems seem to be very personal; I like the way you used refrains in your Pantoum to emphasize the realization you've had about how you live life." Ms. Reznik was asking Alice to think about the experimentation Alice was doing with her writing: being autobiographical. It was Alice's response that showed the true level of her experimentation:

Thank you so much! I glad you liked all of my poems and comments. As for my "I Am" and Pantoum poems, I wrote them to make it seem as though it was personal but in reality its [sic] not all entirely true. :) I just really enjoy writing about real things that don't happen to me or never have, its [sic] fun!

Alice was pushing herself as a writer, something that can certainly happen in a traditional classroom. However, the first part of what she wrote alludes to the fact that having a responsive audience on the wiki made this experimentation even more worthwhile.

### **Discussion**

This research details the ways that PSTs and students worked with one another in this digital literacy practicum through written correspondence on a course wiki. The data showed a willingness on the parts of all the participants to experiment with emerging technologies. The student writers sought feedback and made connections with their PST mentors, and these relationships helped the students feel like full members of a writing community. In turn, the PSTs practiced applying the content knowledge and theoretical digital pedagogy they were studying in a practicum that was unavailable in local placements.



It matters that this interaction happened between PSTs and ninth-grade students. Peers within a ninth-grade classroom may not situate themselves to encourage others but instead want to show academic knowledge that they feel right. The tendency may not be to be quiet and listen to other students. In the third space of the wiki, no student dominated the conversations. Every student had time to think about their work, and as evidenced by the content on their individual pages, students participated much more equally than in traditional classroom discussions.

This time and space for reflection also helped students grow in their comfort as readers and writers of poetry. For many ninth graders, even those who have an English teacher trying to change the cycle of poetry anxiety, the genre does not lend itself to experimentation. Ninth graders want the poem to rhyme and to mean something clear. This wiki collaboration offered places for PSTs to be additional voices to the classroom teacher to show students that real poets experiment. This unit, because of the affordances of space and time of the embedded digital practicum, made more of the students feel like poets than we had ever seen before in our combined years of teaching.

Poetry is complex. Polysemous vocabulary, sophisticated subject matter, nuanced tone, elusive speakers, and nontraditional syntax vex adolescents as they are challenged to construct meaning from these varied texts. An ELA classroom committed to advanced knowledge acquisition has even more opportunities for complex thinking and communication to develop with the mentors offered by this digital practicum. The PSTs served as learning mentors who helped students embrace versus simplify the complexities of poetry. For example, one of the considerations that Dymoke and Hughes (2011) caution against is the mistake of assuming that poetic voice is necessarily equated with the author.

We saw students grappling with this complexity in discussions with their mentors. One student tried on an identity as a speaker in her poetry writing that did not reflect her as a person, and the PST encouraged her to talk about this choice and how writing from a different speaker perspective felt. Success for students comes in “offering many opportunities to discuss in a safe and collaborative environment [by tapping] into new communicative spaces, such as wikis” (Dymoke & Hughes, p. 55). The wiki in this practicum and the audience of the mentors provided this expanded, safe, communicative space, and the data showed experimentation that welcomed specific feedback and increased discussions beyond the traditional classroom.

As a research group, we pushed deeper into this concept of authentic audience within this project. We asked ourselves whether commenting on art is authentic. While we imagine that leaving a theatre and discussing a play or commenting on a piece in an art museum is authentic conversation about art, there is some performative nature in modeling the discussion of poetry for neophyte poets and neophyte teachers. What we found to work as a shared experience for us, the researchers, was a comparison to the peer-review process. We recognized that there is a language and an art to thinking critically about written poetry and prose in the academic world. This is the forum that we saw created by this digital network. Students were encouraged to think and create with a larger audience than just their classmates and the teacher in mind, an audience that modeled the academic discourse of poetry analysis. The ninth-grade students showed some nerves and saw this for the challenging learning environment it was. But they also grew into confident thinkers and writers who could clearly articulate their understanding of the choices that writers make.

PSTs also had an authentic audience of students and therefore had the opportunity to practice their developing teacher voice within the discourse of the wiki. They worked on being encouraging but also constructively critical, and this balance was difficult for these neophytes. Encouraging stances in comments to student poetry are a challenge, even for seasoned educators, and this invited space for interaction seemed to make the PSTs want to do well. Revision and reflection served a purpose, beyond the classroom teacher; this additional audience seemed to make a difference.

In addition to working with students, the PSTs were mentored in an ELA classroom where New Literacies was practiced for the skills that could be nurtured instead of just as a fascination with emerging tools. In this way, the PSTs were offered a bridge between theory and practice. PSTs saw innovative teaching practices with technology, and the cooperating teacher's classroom became a mentor text that PSTs could "read" to conceptualize their future classroom. Too often, cooperating teachers are encouraging of technology but may not be particularly innovative, or may even be reluctant because of past negative experiences. If a teacher preparation program wants to teach New Literacies, they need to offer practicum experiences in real classrooms that are technologically rich. Those placements may not be nearby.

This digital practicum also offered a place where PSTs (moving to the other side of the desk) could begin to see themselves as the teacher in a classroom. The nature of the collaborative space of the wiki made it clear that there were many experts in this space, from the cooperating teacher to the fellow PSTs to the students themselves as they developed their distributed expertise. The practicum invited the PSTs to practice teaching within these shifting roles by conveying themselves as not knowing everything. Ultimately,

this created a space that encouraged possibility versus a space to control. This notion of distributed expertise is especially important when considering emerging tools in the ELA classroom. When PSTs are mentored in distributed expertise, they can begin to see that they will never be expert in all content or in the tools that they will teach. They can take confidence as a learning coach as opposed to an all-knowing sage, continually learning with their students.

Classroom management, often a struggle for PSTs, was taken out of the equation with the wiki, giving them even more space to explore their roles as fellow experts with students. PSTs could focus on honing pedagogical skills instead of the management ones they need to master in face-to-face practicum experiences. As an introductory practicum, this experience proved dynamic even though a student was on the other side of the screen and the PST never left their university classroom and never dealt with classroom management issues. The PSTs could focus on constructive responses/feedback that promoted critical thinking.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, this was a Deweyan experience for the PSTs in the sense that they were doing, while interacting with real students who were reading and writing while using technology (Dewey, 1938). Because of the affordances of technology, the lines are blurred in regards to the limits of not leaving the university world of theory and discussion. Online spaces can bridge the gap between theory and practice that is often lamented in teacher preparation programs (Perrow, 2013). In 2009, 21% of teachers surveyed reported requiring students to contribute to class learning via blogs or wikis (Gray, Thomas, & Lewis, Tice, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Wikis may be the educational

Web 2.0 tool that best harnesses the ease and power of collaborative publishing. Richardson (2009) acknowledges that the idea that “anyone can edit anything on the site any time that they want” (p. 56) may be daunting to teachers from the management perspective, but it need not be. Just as a traveler in a new town feels a bit disconcerted at first, frequenting the site and experimenting with the navigation options brings familiarity. The controls on the wiki that require visitors to gain permission to access the site may help mitigate some of the concerns of initial wiki usage as well as mini lessons and classroom rules on acceptable use. Ultimately, we are living in new times when it comes to creating, collaborating, and interacting in the world, and the innovators with the dispositions of New Literacies will thrive (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2014). Teacher education can create spaces for these practices.

This study has limitations. While this analysis is of one semester of a six-year partnership, it chronicles a small group of students and PSTs and is not meant to be generalizable. We see ways that further research could explore longer interactions and could study achievement data and student and PST perceptions of such practicum experiences. We see ways that the dynamics of this particular classroom teacher could have made for a particularly positive experience when another may not have. We recognize the importance of developing in PSTs a critical stance with emerging technologies; we do not claim that our PSTs continued to take this stance into their own classrooms. This is ripe for further research.

While not without these limitations, this study has implications in the teacher education classroom. Hughes and Dymoke (2011) caution PSTs to “evaluate the poem, not the student” (p. 55). The wiki afforded this, as the PSTs working asynchronously were able

to focus on the words in each poem. The lack of face-to-face contact actually afforded this focus on the poetic devices versus a focus on the person who wrote the poem. While social connections were forged, equating the poem with the person did not occur.

Richardson (2009) reminds us, "As we continue to move toward a world where everyone has access to ideas and where collaboration is the expectation rather than the exception, wikis can go a long way to teaching our students some very useful skills for their future" (p. 59). Mentors using technology learn quickly that the mentorship goes two ways, that we are always learning new skills, hacks, and remixes when it comes to literacies, technology use, and practical applications. This close examination of one semester of interactions exemplifies some of these expectations in a time of shifting dispositions towards literacies and technologies in the classroom.

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## **Appendix**

### **Poetry Practicum Expectations in ELA Methods Course**

#### *Expectations of Preservice Teachers*

Wednesday, Oct. 15:

- Get familiar with wiki site
- Comment on introduction page on students' wiki pages
- Research what Poetry Out Loud (POL) is

Wednesday, Oct. 22:

- Comment on POL page:
  - their poem choice, the image they chose to represent a spot in the poem, and techniques students have explained
  - What do you see happening in the poem to help students understand it?
- Comment on the introduction page:
  - Respond to student comments back to you

Wednesday, Oct. 29:

- Comment on the POL page:
  - Respond to students' new reflection
  - What tone(s) do you think the student evoke when reciting this poem?
  - Listen to their audio recordings (on the bottom of the POL page) and give feedback for reflection or improvement
- Comment on the new page original poetry page:
  - Give feedback on this first poem students chose to share with you

Wednesday, Nov. 5:

- Comment on the POL page:
  - Respond to their reflection on student recitation
  - Suggest a new poem the student might want to read
- Comment on original poetry page(s):
  - Give feedback on poem draft(s) looking specifically at how they are trying to use poetic techniques

Wednesday, Nov. 12:

- Read the final project guidelines (posted on wiki):
  - Be sure to click on full assignment and exemplar
  - You can view other examples on Past Readers and Writers/Poetry Pages from past Classes (linked at bottom of page list on left)
- Comment on the students' final project page:
  - What thoughts do you have on their poem choice and how they might make their final analysis and recitation for it?
- Comment on original poetry page(s):
  - Students will have posted revised poem(s) or new poem(s)

Friday, Nov. 14 - Sunday, Nov. 16:

- Comment on original poetry page(s):
  - Students will have posted revised poems for your final feedback, revision ideas, etc.

Wednesday, Nov. 19:

- Comment on original poetry page(s)
  - Students will have posted 3 or more finalized poems for your final comments.

Wednesday, Nov. 26:

- Comment on final project page:
  - Watch final project and give feedback
  - Suggest one last poem for the students to explore