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From Teaching to the Best Seller List: How the Educational System Drives the Publishing Market and Vice Versa

Kai D. Alexander

Seton Hall University, kai.alexander@student.shu.edu

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**From Teaching to the Best Seller List:
How the Educational System Drives the Publishing Market and Vice Versa**

Kai D. Alexander

M. A. Seton Hall University, 2018

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Arts

In

The Department of English

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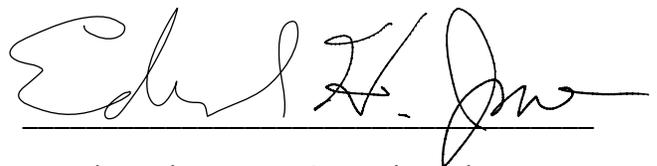
Seton Hall University
Department of English

This Thesis, “From Teaching to the Best Seller List: How the Educational System Drives the Publishing Market and Vice Versa,” by Kai D. Alexander has been approved for submission for the Degree of Master of Arts in English—Writing – by:

Approved by:



Dr. Kelly A. Shea, Thesis Advisor



Dr. Edmund H. Jones, Second Reader

Kai Alexander

Dr. Shea

MA Thesis Abstract

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From Teaching to the Best-Seller List:

How the Educational System Drives the Publishing Market

Certain outdated canonical texts have played a huge part in the oppression of minorities and women (Platt), and within the last 20 years or so, research has shown that these “difficult” texts do nothing to help foster a healthy thirst for knowledge outside of the classroom. My purpose here is to demonstrate how the educational system – in particular, how reading and writing are taught from elementary school up until college – drives the publishing market, and thus, causes texts like *Twilight* to sit alongside the best-seller list with *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. I will argue that there is a psychological and neurological need within millennial readers to buy simpler texts, and that by removing archaic, outdated texts out of the canon and replacing them with books that better reflect the socio-cultural aspects of today will help students develop better critical and analytical thinking skills. Finally, I will also explore the political side of the problem with the canon – meaning, why is it that outdated and non-inclusive texts are still considered “classical” despite numerous evidence that it does nothing to help students learn, and even harms students’ abilities to think beyond the walls of the classroom (Allington and Woodside-Jiron 11). In this way, my solution to the problem of the canon will be three-fold in that it argues for a political, social, and cultural revolution so that millennials and generations to come will not drive a market that is oversexed and oversimplified writing, but rather will relish the validity of complex characters and situations that reflect who they are.

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Kai Alexander

Dr. Shea

Thesis

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From Teaching to the Best Seller List:

How the Educational System Drives the Publishing Market and Vice Versa

How does society perpetuate what we read? How does culture influence how we write? Why do books like *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* sit on the best seller list alongside *Beloved* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*? I postulate that there is a need within millennial readers for simpler texts, and this need is grounded in several psychological and neurological factors that make the millennial generation unique from every other generation before them. These characteristics include: less than half of the population identifying as Caucasian (diversity); growing up with technology (digital nativity); as well as attending and graduating college more than any other generation before them (Graff). All of these characteristics influence how millennials think on a neurological basis, which is mainly a result of technology's influence on their brains; what they value, as a result of growing up with more diverse peers as well as within a digitalized global world, and therefore, less isolating barriers between cultures; and finally, what they buy for pleasure reading outside of the field of academia, thereby answering the questions posed above.

In regards to the neurological factors, millennials' critical thinking skills degenerate the longer and more often they utilize technology, which also causes a decrease in brain plasticity (Cavanaugh et al 379 and 382). In contrast, some research suggests that technology teaches students effective multitasking skills and enables them to learn concepts better (Grandgenett and Topp 44). In regards to the psychological factors, social media plays an important part in

establishing their values, wherein millennials tend to place a high significance on self-disclosure, authenticity, and open-mindedness (Ferchaud et al 88; Utz 8; Vaterlaus et al 596). If millennials value self-disclosure, authenticity and open-mindedness, and are used to simpler language as a result of technology, and their generation comprises an ethnically diverse population wherein most people have attended or graduated from college, then it makes sense that they would buy literature that reflects their neurological, psychological, educational, and cultural backgrounds. The books they buy – like *Beautiful Disaster* by Jamie McGuire and *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell (Wetta) - possess characters and deal with content that reflects their identities. E.D. Hirsch emphasizes the importance of content in learning to read and write well when he argues that “part of language skill is content skill” (167). Hirsch’s assertion came about as a result of his critique on canonical literature, the long-held standard of what has been considered “literary” or worthy of higher education, which traditionally displays characters and authors who are predominantly white and male. If canonical literature only deals with characters who are white and male, and most of the population is non-white and male, then students are only receiving proper instructions for the formal language skill and improper - or at the very least - incomplete instructions for the content skill needed to become good readers and writers. Of course, proponents of the canon, and in particularly one prominent figure by the name of Allan Bloom, argue that inclusivity might dilute the standards of intelligence and philosophical thought (60 and 63).

Yet, millennials tend to read authors who are from more diverse backgrounds and who reflect the psychological values as well as the neurological norm of language simplicity that digital natives are used to. In addition to the lack of inclusivity in what is considered “canonical” within the classroom, the problem of over-testing and teachers’ adherence to the strict curriculum

set by testing authorities (Casserly et al 95 – 99) also perpetuates the disconnect between what is read and written about in class versus what is read outside of the classroom. Though some students do end up developing a love for reading despite the problem of over-testing and inadequate teaching, these cases are not the norm and it is usually because these educators are not over-testing their students and providing more relevant texts to which the students can relate (Gambrell 261).

In short, this paper seeks to add to the growing debate on the canon by emphasizing not only the lack of diversity in these texts, but also by taking into account the globalized digital nativity of millennials and thereby arguing that if academia is the only place wherein these standards are upheld, then test scores will continue to drop and students will continue to experience trouble with reading and writing in school up until the collegiate level. Therefore, it is important to understand that the schism between what is considered “canonical” and what is considered “commercial” should not be taken lightly, because not only does it indicate the current state of the socioeconomic mindset that millennials are in, but also, this schism indicates the possible future generation’s reading and writing problems.

Literature Review

In exploring how the educational system drives the publishing market, this paper seeks to add to the conversation surrounding the canon and its pedagogical value. Furthermore, it will also seek to display how the pedagogy of the canon affects the millennial generation’s perception of text complexity. This literature review will thus outline the main arguments surrounding this issue on all sides, which include: arguments for and against the canon, an exploration of the neurological and psychological factors that make the millennial generation unique from a learning perspective, the formation of a new genre, and a brief overview of trade publishing

versus academic publishing. This literature review will help to explore the disconnect between the best-seller list (i.e. trade publishing) and what we think of as “academic” publishing or writing, which is manifested via the canon and via decisions made regarding school curricula.

The Canon

In order to understand the canon, there must be a review of the history surrounding this literature. According to Allan Bloom, one of the leading scholars and proponents for the canon, “until the middle fifties, there was, in a conventional and perhaps formulaic way, agreement about the disciplines that constituted the core of the university...the academic disorders of the sixties evoked reforms intended to conciliate student wishes rather than to serve their needs. And it also became evident that many professors had come to doubt the value of what they taught” (62). This doubt was a result of university intellectuals beginning to criticize the lack of diversity within literature (Hirsch 161). E. D. Hirsch, one of these intellectuals, provides a more comprehensive historical background on how the canon came into being when he writes that “from the 1890s to 1900 we taught in English what amounted to a national core curriculum...then in 1901 the College Entrance Examination Board issues its first ‘uniform lists’ of texts required to be known by students in applying to colleges” (159). Hirsch’s review of canonical literature connects how those in charge of the educational system within the US have, for at least a century, influenced the idea of what is considered “literary” or worthy of higher education within the US. Hirsch further highlights that the debate regarding inclusive literature versus a traditionally mostly white male canon is “chiefly a political question” (167) because “good writing makes very little difference when the content is unfamiliar...part of language skill is content skill” (167). Basically, Hirsch’s point when applied to most of the readers in today’s society is that if a majority of students are no longer white and male, then students are missing an

essential component when they engage with literature. Moreover, in modern times, incorporating more diverse texts within the canon remains a problem for literacy teachers due to not only the enforcement of set curriculum by standardized testing authorities (McCarthy 59), but also the digital nativity that has caused students to learn in a different way than digital immigrants - who are the older generations and have not grown up with technology - have been taught to teach (Grandgenett and Topp 46). Therefore, students' erroneous perceptions concerning reading and writing have been influenced by some or all of these factors, and this paper seeks to explore how these perceptions influence their reading habits.

The Millennial Classroom

Two problems literacy teachers currently face are: 1. Adhering to the curriculum set by standardized testing authority figures, like the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), while still attempting to incorporate more diverse content (McCarthy 59) and 2. Addressing the social, neurological, and psychological challenges that millennials and other digital natives (Grandgenett and Topp 46) face within this society. According to critic William H. Frey, the millennial generation is defined as those born between 1981 and 1997. They are the most diverse adult generation in American history - according to research drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, and the American Community Survey - with less than half of the population identifying as Caucasian (21). Furthermore, more millennials are preparing to attend, are currently attending, and have graduated from college than any other generation before them, according to the Pew Research Center (Graff).

In regards to who millennials are neurologically, meaning how their neurological make-up influences their ability to learn how to read and write within the classroom, the way in which they interact with technology plays a huge part in their brain development. Though some

research suggests that using technology helps students to learn concepts better and teaches them effective multitasking skills (Grandgenett and Topp 44), other research suggests that technology both lessens millennials' ability to think more critically and decreases memory retention, as well as contributes to a decrease in brain plasticity (Cavanaugh et al 379 and 382). In terms of who millennials are psychologically, as stated previously, social media plays a huge part in establishing their values. According to Ferchaud et al, Sonja Utz, and Vaterlaus et al, millennials tend to perceive self-disclosure and authenticity as a cause-and-effect relationship, and genuinely value open-mindedness within their role models (Ferchaud et al 88; Utz 8; Vaterlaus et al 508). Because technology is a definitive factor in the neurological and psychological make-up of the millennial generation, educators face a conundrum regarding the extent to which they integrate technology as learning tools. In order to not only meet the curriculum standards set by authority figures, but also to ensure that students are soaking in as much knowledge as possible, educators are oftentimes walking a fine line when deciding the extent that technology should, or could, play in developing, or lessening, students' ability to learn. Furthermore, the knowledge that students are soaking in outside of the classroom through social media, especially in regards to reading and writing, will be expanded on later.

Academic Publishing

Indeed, digital natives' affinity toward technology has caused more and more teachers to integrate e-textbooks into their lesson plans, which would explain the drive for the digitalized media within the publishing market, thereby emphasizing how these digital texts contribute in helping students learn in the best and most effective way possible. Giacomini et al, authors of "The Current State and Potential Future of E-Textbooks," argue that the principle reasons for this drive in e-textbook sales within higher education are to "save students money, to explore

pedagogical potential and to keep pace with K-12 markets” (Giacomini et al 1). And yet, students’ preferences for either e-textbooks or print textbooks varied on the purpose. For reading comprehension and note-taking, more students preferred the hard copy to the digital version. In contrast, when searching for specific content and collecting quotes for their essays, students preferred e-textbooks (Giacomini et al 5). In terms of text complexity, technology may help students in finding quotes for their research, but it does not help them understand it any better. When comparing Giacomini et al’s overall assertion that students prefer the hard copy to help them learn better to Grandgenett and Topp’s argument that integrating technology within the classroom teaches digital natives better, there arises an inconsistency when integrating technology into the classroom, even e-textbooks. There is much research on every facet of the argument regarding the integration, non-integration, or partial integration of technology within the classroom. This paper argues that whether technology is used or not used is not the issue. Rather, it is up to the educators to ensure that students learn crucial steps in the literacy classroom, such as peer-to-peer engagement and writing as thinking (Moses 5 and Fisher 172 – 173). Though it is true that the digital native brain is unique, one must not underestimate the power of exemplary pedagogical practices. Indeed, pedagogy and technology are separate entities. Though educators and students can choose to make technology an extension of how they learn (and teach) reading and writing to others, the classroom remains at its core the interactions between student and teacher, and especially in literacy classrooms, the content and language presented to them as well as how it is presented.

What has helped and has been proven effective in literacy classrooms are the ways in which literacy educators incorporate their pedagogical practices. Student-to-student and teacher-to-student engagement surrounding reading comprehension and writing as thinking have all

helped mold students into better critical thinkers and create a thirst for knowledge through literature (Moses 5 and Fisher 172 - 173). Yet, a myriad of teachers across the US do not effectively help students engage with reading and writing critical thinking skills because these educators oftentimes face pressure to over-test their students through standardized testing in order to receive funding from authority figures like the NAEP (Casserly et al 95 - 99). Thus, both cost and the effect of learning tools drive the pedagogical practices within the classroom. If students miss these crucial steps, such as peer-to-peer engagement and writing as thinking, then this is when they begin to disconnect from what is taught in the classroom and search for literature that is not only less complex in language, but also more representative of their experiences as millennials and generation Zs, which is the generation after millennials and share the same characteristic of digital nativity.

Trade Publishing

On the trade publishing spectrum, the New Adult [NA] genre came into existence because of the lack of representation of the millennial generation in commercial fiction [Wetta, Cart, Deahl and Rosen). The millennials are an ethnically diverse group, digital natives neurologically, and possess psychological values of authenticity as seen through the lens of social media. The genre came about as a result of a growing readership to focus on the early to late 20s age group within the secondary, post-secondary, or alternative paths following high school (Wetta). Critics of this NA subgenre argue that the creation of this genre is merely a marketing ploy (Cart 10) or a passing trend (Deahl and Rosen 4).

Furthermore, the literature suggests that the definition of the term “New Adult” describes this generation’s aversion to “critical thinking” as defined by some educators. According to publishing experts, who were “worried about losing avid YA readers who are ‘aging out’ of the

genre, and eager to capture adult readers who have been ‘reading down,’ a new subgenre has been born: new adult” (Deahl and Rosen 4). Here, Deahl and Rosen are emphasizing a population of readers who desire to read simpler texts, or “read down” – meaning, readers who are not ready or unable to relate to the character in Isabel Allende’s or Lara Croft’s work due to the language and content. The authors further describe millennials as readers who are “18 to 23, tackling issues, of, well, new adulthood” (4). This creation of the NA genre as a result of a paucity in representation of the millennial age demographic coincides with Frey’s assertion that millennials are those born between 1981 and 1997, as well as with the argument for authenticity in self-disclosure among social media, according to critics Ferchaud et al, Sonja Utz, and Vaterlaus et al.

Summary

The New Adult genre seeks to close this gap in elitist literature to reflect the masses. This pursuit is possibly because many students experience a disconnect between who they are as individuals versus who they are as students. Furthermore, the culture of America is changing to become more diverse and technological, which means that educators need to stop over-testing students and limit their teaching of literature that reflects the archaic canonical standard of white and male, as these practices only serve to undermine the authenticity students search for on social media and IN NA literature. To reference literary scholar E.D. Hirsch again, “part of language skill is content skill” (164), and currently, there is a disconnect between the standard of language skill and the standard of content skill – thereby creating a detachment between what is taught in the classroom and what drives trade publishing. In short, when connecting what Hirsch is saying with today’s generation, the content that they need to be exposed to should be representative of who they are as millennials – ethnically diverse and dealing with life after high

school, during college, and post-secondary education. Educators of literature need to be mindful of the relationship between language and content at all times, and once this mindfulness is reflected within the classroom, then the schism between what is considered “canonical” and what is considered “commercial” will lessen.

How Are Reading and Writing Taught?

In order to fully understand the disconnect among the ways that reading and writing are taught, the books that are taught within the classroom, and the books that people from the younger generation buy, these skills and how they are taught to be examined, and that is detailed in the following sections. Since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 sought to close the achievement gap between minority and urban-schooled students, the over-testing within America has really become an issue (McCarthy et al 59 and 85) as a result of the well-meaning, though unrealistically implemented, standards set by this program. Examples of the unrealistic standards are the literacy tests given to elementary school children, thus setting the precedent for over-testing and insufficient literacy teachings for years to come.

Elementary Education

The ages wherein reading and writing are taught from kindergarten until the sixth grade are crucial stages in developing a solid basis for children’s literacy development. Lindsey Moses, author of “Perceptions about ‘Good Readers’: Analyzing Curricular, Linguistic, and Socioeconomic Differences,” asserts in her study that children’s perceptions of reading are negatively affected by how it is taught in the classroom, and she draws on support from numerous studies and researchers that stretch back to the 1970s until 2013 (5 – 7). She posits that students are “‘learning to read’ before they are ‘reading to learn’” which in turn “places an emphasis on decontextualized decoding skills with an implication that there is little to no focus

on learning from reading during the first three years of elementary school” (6). Moses argues that this emphasis on “learning to read,” or decoding, is a result of mandatory state testing and a district curriculum. She uses one example to explain that:

When prevalently used assessments like Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) emphasize words correct per minute, this influences teacher instruction. When these are the skills that are being assessed and reported, this also sends a message to students that reading as many words per minute as possible is the most valued aspect of reading. (12)

Here, teachers’ emphasis on “learning to read” in order to get their students to pass assessment tests might translate to students’ erroneous perceptions of reading that it is “knowing a lot of words” and being able “to sound out” the meaning of words (12). Their lessons are based on a “scripted core curriculum” that “requires the use of an anthology, worksheets, teacher instruction (including specific dialogue) and instructional pacing that is established based on the commercial program recommendations” (5). This scripted core curriculum negatively affects how students look at literature in higher grades because then when it is time to engage with the text more fully and make complex connections, students will have the mentality that they are just supposed to “know” the words instead of the underlying context. Indeed, understanding the underlying context is also pertinent for small children, teenagers and young adults later on in life when they engage in “pleasure reading” outside of the classroom (“Children, Teens, and Reading” 14 - 15).

Furthermore, Moses’ study, which draws on previous literature and research from other pedagogical critics, found that mandatory state testing provides specific “scripts” for teachers to teach with, regardless of their specific students’ learning styles. This scripted curriculum also further reduces student engagement, with worksheets and preapproved instructional pacing and

dialogue as the replacement for a teacher-student relationship. Moses, as well as numerous other pedagogical critics, argue that engaging more students in interactions with their peers about the lessons helps to foster a greater interest in reading outside of the classroom (10). This study suggests that teachers who incorporate peer-to-peer discussion into their curricula usually teach students of a high socioeconomic status and native-English speakers. These students who are discussing the lessons with their peers in the classroom have better perceptions of what good readers do, as they say that they “ask questions” and “make predictions about the text” (9). These perceptions of good readers are more effective at fostering a thirst for knowledge and pleasure through reading because it requires metacognitive reading comprehension skills that prepare them for more advanced critical thinking skills in middle and high school. These better perceptions of what good readers do, and the subsequent way in which these viewpoints perpetuate a thirst for knowledge, can be seen as the first step in causing future consumers to not only buy “commercial” literature, or books of the NA genre, but also to identify with and buy books that are considered “canonical”.

In contrast to this perception of good readers, children who have an incorrect viewpoint of who good readers are usually believe that the best readers are those who can read as many words as possible per minute. Furthermore, these students with more erroneous perceptions are usually ESL students and of a lower socioeconomic status (Moses 12 - 13). Their teachers, whose school districts usually rely on funding from testing authorities like the NAEP, “have less choice in curricular materials;” therefore, they tend to stick to the scripted curriculum provided to them by the mandatory state testing authorities and do not adapt the lessons to fit their students’ needs (McCarthy et al 59). McCarthy et al also found that another reason that these teachers tend to stick to the curriculum is because they are not provided as many professional

development opportunities as those who teach in areas of higher socioeconomic backgrounds, opportunities that enable educators to share and engage in innovative pedagogical activities to take back with them to the classroom (85). In short, the pedagogical situation within the underfunded elementary school system, which relies on national, state, and district testing authorities to provide funding, is a situation that has established a foundation of disengagement for literacy students through educators' pedagogical situation of standardized testing and scripted curriculum. Students are being taught that reading is about speed and accuracy, a product of curriculum-based teaching, instead of for comprehension and a genuine engagement with the text. These erroneous perceptions developed in elementary school do not prepare them for the metacognitive and critical thinking skills needed when "reading to learn" (Moses 6), and subsequently causes future consumers to develop a preference for only commercial literature. In this way, the educational system – as seen through the foundation at the elementary level - has driven, and will continue to feed, the trade publishing market, despite the fact that canonical literature is what is being taught in schools.

Middle Education

On the middle school level, this curriculum-based teaching method is further intensified, as this is the moment when students are required to take a myriad of mandatory standardized tests. The National Assessment for Educational Progress, for example, is the only nationally recognized assessment test that measures the potential of every student according to the standards set by the US Department of Education ("NAEP Overview"). It was started as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act ("Important Aspects of *No Child Left Behind* Relevant to NAEP"). The test is administered in 4th grade and 8th grade, and the results oftentimes determine students' placement in high school, as in whether they will be placed into honors programs,

college prep programs, or regular classes that are not as intellectually challenging or intensive (Moller and Stearns 1026). Furthermore, depending on how well, or badly, a school does overall determines the amount of grants and funding allocated to them by this federal program (“Important Aspects of *No Child Left Behind* Relevant to NAEP”). Unfortunately for the students, the NAEP is oftentimes not the only test students are required to take, as states and districts also have their own standardized assessments, with individual funding awarded to the schools based on performance. The middle school years are a pivotal time in a student’s life because teachers are under more pressure to ensure that their students do well on these tests as a result of administrators wishing to secure, or continue, a high amount of funding for their respective schools (Casserly et al 95 - 99). For instance, according to Casserly et al, “the average student takes about 112 mandated standardized tests between pre-kindergarten and 12th grade” (83). Eighth graders are at the worst disadvantaged, with students spending an average of 25 hours taking tests (Casserly et al 28). This disadvantage is a continuation of the practices from elementary school literacy teachings, and thereby, perpetuates the erroneous viewpoint that reading is more so about test-taking than about relating to the text. As stated previously, being able to relate to the text is a key component for NA genre within the millennial generation (Wetta and Deal and Rosen 4), whereas test-taking just enhances a disconnect wherein students are unable to relate to the readings unless they have to take a test for them.

Just one example of the pressure teachers have in regards to administering state testing is in Boston, Massachusetts. Even though students “are not...required by federal law to be tested, the Boston Public Schools” mandates that teachers administer assessments “at least three times a year” (Layton). According to a report from the Center for American Progress, the authors found that several factors contribute to this over-testing problem within the US. The report argues that

“students take as many as 20 standardized assessments per year and an average of 10 tests in grades 3 – 8” (Lazarin 3). Moreover, the report found that this over-testing is especially prevalent in low-income, urban areas, and that in “grades 6 – 8, students...spend approximately 80 percent and 73 percent more time, respectively, taking district-mandated standardized tests than their suburban peers. (Lazarin 21). Indeed, federal, school, and district-level authorities incentivize school administrators from pre-K up until the 12th grade to pressure teachers to arrange their pedagogical practices around the assessments of standardized tests instead of around the needs of the students. These practices centered on standardized testing seems to lead students to develop a dislike for reading outside of the classroom. For instance, according to a 2013 by the National Center for Education Statistics, there has been a substantial drop in how often children “read for fun,” especially for 13 – 17 year-olds in the past 30 years (14 – 15).

They posit that:

In 1984, 8% of 13-year-olds and 9% of 17-year-olds said they never or hardly ever read for fun; today those rates have roughly tripled, to 22% and 27% respectively. At the same time, the percent who report reading almost every day has dropped, from 35% to 27% among 13-year-olds and from 31% to 19% among 17-year-olds. (“Children, Teens, and Reading” 14).

Here, the data shows that there is an increase in students who have little to no interest in reading for pleasure and a decrease in students who read for fun almost every day. The data detailing these teenagers’ and young adults’ reading habits suggest that the publishing market has already begun to suffer as a result of the big business of education. Basically, the two businesses of trade publishing and academic publishing collide when the same students who must suffer from years of over-testing become the consumers when they are older. It goes without saying that though

current standardized testing began as initiatives like the No Child Left Behind Act and those designed to make it easier on college admissions counselors to assess who gets into their schools and why (as with the SAT and the ACT), the reality is that states spend collectively over 1.7 billion dollars annually on standardized testing (Chingos 20). In short, the pedagogical situation within the US has turned into a casualty of the big business of education, with teachers and students at all levels of the United States suffering to keep up with the erroneous standards of these assessments that undermine the classroom. This undermining of the classroom is seen most definitively when students choose texts - in the form of NA literature and trade publishing - that go against the standards of academic canon. As stated previously, trade publishing - and NA literature in particular - is primarily thought of to be “simplistic” in language but rich in content because it deals with issues relevant to millennial readers (Deahl and Rosen 4). Thus, the over-testing problem within the US can be seen as one of the many causes within the educational system that contributes to the disconnect between what is taught in the classroom in contrast to what is read and written outside of the walls of academia.

In addition to this problem of over-testing, there is a huge jump from the content of what is read in elementary school to middle school. Gina Biancarosa and Catherine E. Snow, authors of “Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and Secondary Schools,” emphasize the consequences of this jump in their study when they argue that:

Ensuring adequate ongoing literacy development for all students in the middle and high school years is a more challenging task than ensuring excellent reading education in the primary grades, for two reasons: first, secondary school literacy skills are more complex, more embedded in subject matters, and more multiply determined; second, adolescents

are not as universally motivated to read better or as interested in school-based reading as kindergarteners. (2)

With these reasons in mind, it is no wonder that students begin to lose interest in reading once they reach the higher grade levels, as this is also the age wherein teachers are preparing them to become over-tested again in high school for the SAT, ACT, NAEP, and AP exams (Casserly et al 16). Furthermore, scripted curriculum, as Moses puts it, undermines student-to-student and teacher-to-student engagement, which is essential in forming the skills needed not only in reading for comprehension, but also in reading to learn (Moses 5). Basically, learning to engage with the text and not just decode it at an early age is essential in establishing a pleasure for reading. When students are not taught this skill early in life, they develop little to no interest in reading (“Children, Teens, and Reading” 14) because they have been trained that the practice is more so about test-taking than exercising their brains.

In addition to the problems of continued scripted curriculum in the middle school years, this is the time wherein writing should be used to help further metacognitive and transference literacy skills that can be used in other subjects besides English class. Biancarosa and Snow argue that there is a disconnect between how reading and writing are taught in a way that undermines the tools needed to create effective readers. They assert that erroneous pedagogy is especially detrimental to students on the middle to high school levels:

Too often reading and writing instruction focuses solely on literature and does not promote the transfer of the skills into the context of content-area materials. Furthermore, learning from reading in content-area texts requires skills that are different than the skills needed to comprehend literature. Language arts teachers need to expand their instruction

to include approaches and texts that will facilitate not only comprehension but also learning from texts. (15).

Here, the authors are showcasing the downfall of the assessment tests. Most assessment tests that students are required to take in the middle grades, like the NAEP, do not require a writing component, just a reading and mathematics component. And yet, this is also the age group that begins reading YA literature, or Young Adult fiction. As the earlier literature review shows, New Adult literature resulted from millennials' desire for texts to be in the language of this simple YA literature format (Deahl and Rosen 4), but instead of dealing with adolescent issues such as are found in, say, *Catcher in the Rye*, it should deal with college-life, post-college life, and post-high school life, like *Beautiful Disaster*, an NA novel (Wetta). Because these novels deal with more adult issues, the NA genre comes to mirror what E. D. Hirsch asserts about cultural literacy, "Words are not purely formal counters of language; they represent large underlying domains of content. Part of language skill is content skill" (164). When applying Hirsch's argument to the appeal of the NA genre to millennials, it is apparent how the lack of content has contributed to a desire for more relatable texts, ones that are perhaps not just simpler in language, but similar in the millennial identity as well.

Secondary Education

This desire for more relatable texts is also seen on the secondary education level. When looking at high school students in suburban school areas with the majority of the pupils Caucasian and of the middle-class, Douglass Fisher, in "The Use of Instructional Time in the Typical High School Classroom," reports that he found that though students did engage in more discussion-based learning, writing was significantly underdeveloped in the curriculum (172 – 173). The writing that was assigned to students in class was "summative in nature, meaning that

they were asked to summarize something from class (a reading, lecture or film) and not to critique, persuade, or inform a reader” (172). Fisher also found a lack of metacognitive comprehension instruction from the teacher and no time was given for students to pick and choose what they want to read outside of “grade-level texts or textbooks” (174). Here, one sees the same pattern of a lack in critical thinking skills seen since elementary school and middle school, except now, the students are older, more mature, and are expected to be able to establish healthier reading patterns, but they do not.

Furthermore, when discerning the metacognition of students’ reading and writing habits, one must also look at the mode in which they are reading the material, particularly whether it is print or digital copy. As stated before, authors Giacomini et al found in their study that most students prefer e-textbooks for finding information and for cost-related reasons. In contrast, they preferred print textbooks for metacognitive strategies like note-taking and reading comprehension. The following graphs highlight these key differences in preference:

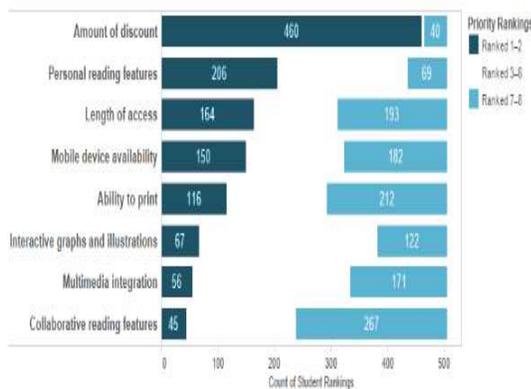


Figure 4. Student Rankings for E-Textbook Features

Figure 1 (Giacomini et al)

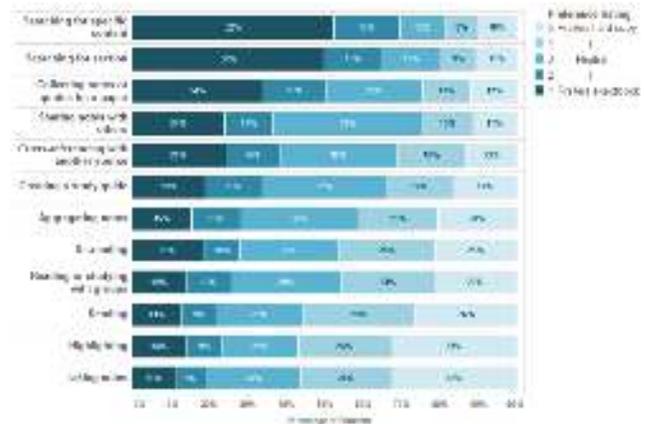


Figure 5. Students' Preferences for Comparing Various Tasks with an E-Textbook or Hard Copy

Figure 2 (Giacomini et al)

The graphs here highlight that cost is the “top priority” for students when choosing e-textbooks over print textbooks (4). The second and third highest factors for selecting e-textbooks, which were “collaborative reading features” and “ability to print” the online materials into hard copies,

were still no match for the factor of cost in selecting e-textbooks (Giacomini Figure 4). When cost was not a factor, over 50% of students ranked print copies as a 4 or a 5 in preference when “reading,” “highlighting,” and “taking notes.” Conversely, e-textbooks were the preference, with a ranking of a 4 or a 5, for over 50% of students when “searching for content” or “searching for a section” (Giacomini Figure 6). The data here indicates that students prefer taking less time to search for the material that they need to read, which is in alliance with what Cavanaugh et al and Grandgenett and Topp argue when they discuss the digital natives’ “short attention span” (46 and 378). To highlight an earlier point, millennials are more likely to skim over information they deem “irrelevant” (Grandgenett and Topp 46), and this point coincides with why they would prefer e-textbooks for finding what they need to read instead of attempting to skim the print copy. Still, the fact remains that students prefer print copies over electronic texts, which seems to indicate that the mode in which knowledge is presented is irrelevant. As stated before, millennials tend to buy texts with simpler language and that deal with representations of their identities (Deahl and Rosen 4). That being said, one can assert that digital nativity has caused students’ search, or pursuit, of knowledge to become more lackadaisical. The easier it is to find what one is looking for, the faster the author gets to the point and avoids complex language, the more likely millennials are to buy, and enjoy, the text they are reading.

Thus, as seen with Giacomini et al, using technology, in particularly in regards to e-textbooks, to teach reading and writing only supports the short attention span of the millennial brain. Progressively, as seen with NA critics and publishing experts Deahl and Rosen and Wetta, the simpler the language, the more relevant the characters are to students’ experiences, the more likely they will willingly engage with the text. In short, educators should not overestimate the pull of technology and underestimate how effectively they engage with the content they present

to students and how they teach it alongside language skills. This underestimation has essentially contributed to erroneous pedagogical practices on every level of the US educational system, wherein over-testing has become a substitute for good teaching skills.

Besides the lack of proper instruction in developing students' critical-thinking AND reading and writing skills from elementary school up until high school, 9th graders – 12th graders are also at an age wherein their peers heavily influence the types of literature that they engage with outside of the classroom. Wendy Luttrell and Caroline Parker discuss the psychological mentality of high schoolers in regards to reading and writing. They argue that:

One perception that seemed to be held by both girls and boys was that athletes are not readers. Even self-described athletes made such statements, even though they went on to list quite a bit of 'sports' reading. Another widely-held idea was that readers are 'nerds' or that they are 'dorky,'...Students' interests motivate their reading and writing practices. What they are interested in reading about in some degree defines them socially....In other words, their social relationship to reading outside of the classroom is the inverse of that same relationship inside the classroom: in the classroom, social relationships determine their interest; outside the classroom, interest determines their social relationships (238).

Luttrell and Parker highlight how students' perception of reading and writing is essentially defined by the influences around them. The authors are basically arguing that students' peers seem to have more influence on how they view literature. Furthermore, this influence imposes a somewhat negative perception onto students, such as when they report that high schoolers view reading as "dorky" or "nerdy." Indeed, coupled with erroneous pedagogical practices surrounding reading and writing as well as the importance of their influential peers, it almost

seems like high schoolers are set up to view academic skills negatively. And yet, the question remains why reading is considered “dorky” and what influences might authority figures have on this perception. Indeed, if reading has been defined since elementary school as a way to pass a test rather than a pleasurable experience, then one can see how this erroneous perception of reading and writing follows students all the way to high school. Luttrell and Parker assert that this is especially problematic for males, and data from the Pew Research Center also supports the argument that males are less likely to read for pleasure outside of the classroom (Perrin). This argument might also explain why NA novelists and English majors are mostly female rather than male. The pressures on English teachers to give students standardized tests further influences the negative perception of reading and writing.

Still, one must take into account the fact that some students do develop a love for reading and writing despite the pressures of peers and standardized testing. Critic Linda B. Gambrell, author of “Getting Students Hooked on the Reading Habit,” draws on support from a national study by Scholastic Inc., when she argues that the structure of the classroom and the texts that are read play a huge role in getting students to enjoy reading, especially for students in low income homes (261 – 262). Gambrell’s article showcases the importance of good pedagogical practices in fostering a love for reading and a thirst for knowledge. Though Gambrell’s study highlights that good pedagogy is possible for fostering a love for reading, it is not the norm and even she advocates that allowing students the freedom to choose books that are representative of their identities is important, much as NA literature does.

In comparison to the language surrounding reading and writing, the language concerning sports is more positive. As of now, there is only one nationally recognized fitness education program, and that is the Presidential Youth Fitness Program. As physical education teachers are

looking for ways to implement the curriculum, the PYFP provides a guide for them to use. The language surrounding this guide is on the students' overall health and well-being (Presidential Youth Fitness Program). It also provides scientifically supported data about why physical fitness is important. Terms like "individuals," (8 times) "self," (7 times) "empower," (6 times) "themselves," (2 times) and "personal" (25 times) appear throughout this document. Phrases and terms like "self-assess" "evaluate" "analyze" and "develop" are all language surrounding the methods towards metacognitive strategies in reading and writing. Moreover, the creators of this guide encourage physical education teachers to use their own methods in helping students reach a certain standard of fitness goals – basically, a non-scripted curriculum. In contrast, the documents surrounding how to teach and implement the curriculum for the NAEP is more apathetic and competition-driven. Furthermore, as stated previously, teachers' performances are oftentimes based on how well their students do on these tests (Casserly et al 95 – 99). The guidelines for the Reading assessment says that students should be able to "locate and recall," "interpret and integrate," "critique and evaluate," and should have effective comprehension skills in order to "interpret words as they are used in a passage" ("What Does the NAEP Reading Assessment Measure?") Similarly, the language surrounding the guidelines for the writing assessment argues that students should be able to "convey, persuade, or explain," which the assessment says is "typical" of "many writing situations" ("What Does the NAEP Writing Assessment Measure?"). These guidelines do not mention that it is important to explain to students the cognitive and life-long benefits reading comprehension can bring, or why exploring oneself is important for personal growth and how writing can help achieve this. And yet, the positive language surrounding the pedagogy of physical education is excessively apparent. Schools and educators are essentially branding negative language into the minds of our students

concerning not just reading and writing, but around the entire sphere of academia, and then wondering why students find reading and writing “difficult,” “boring,” and “only for adults.”

The time when students begin to learn that reading can be a process of self-exploration and even a way to learn new concepts and ideas should be developed in middle school. And yet, as we have seen, schools forego allowing students to pick and choose what they want to read, do not teach metacognitive strategies so that they may be able to comprehend on their own, and do not show how writing is a way to think as much as it is a way to learn from what one reads. In contrast, thinking about fitness goals as one is achieving – and reassessing them – is a key teaching point for physical education teachers. The world of academia, and in particular, literacy instructors from pre-K – 12th grade, could stand to learn a lot from how physical education teaches students the benefits of what they are learning, both inside and outside the classroom, the workforce, and their future careers.

Summary

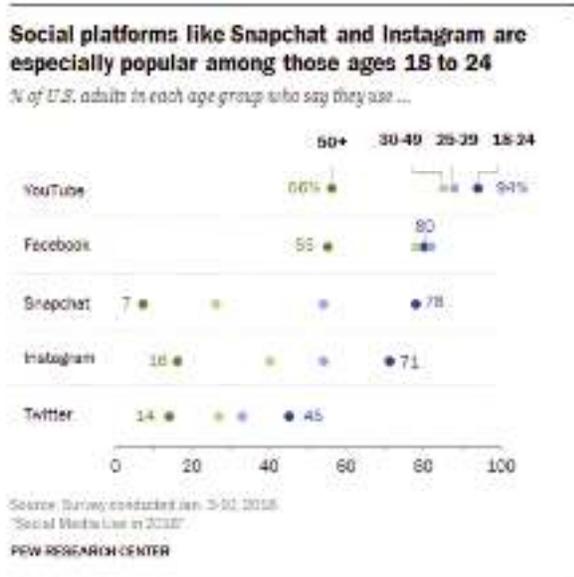
In short, understanding how reading and writing are taught within the elementary, middle, and secondary educational levels is important to fully understand the gap between the commercial literature that they eventually buy when given a choice. Standardized testing plays a huge role on all levels of education in enforcing students’ negative perception of reading and writing within the classroom. In addition to this, technology should not be overestimated in getting students to engage with literature, as pedagogical practices like writing as thinking and peer-to-peer discussion can be implemented with or without technology. Furthermore, the data regarding students’ perceptions of technology in the English classroom prefer print for learning and the digital for researching. In this way, students are taught to dislike reading and writing from an early age because of the over-testing problem and erroneous pedagogical practices, and

this dislike is true whether technology is used as extension of pedagogy or not. Though some students do end up enjoying canonical, or academic, literature as much as commercial literature, this is usually because these students are the products of good pedagogy that takes into account the complex relationship between content and language skill. If educators keep in mind the importance of this relationship and how its implemented within the classroom, then one can ascertain that the negative perception that contributes to the disconnect between academic publishing and trade publishing will lessen.

Social Media Language as Education Outside of the Classroom

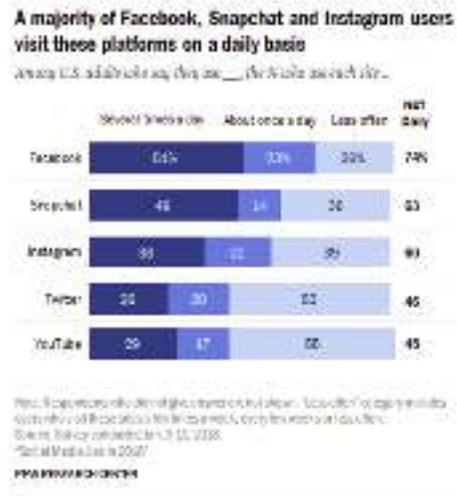
Though the current public educational systems, especially those serving students of a lower socioeconomic status and ESL students, foster a dislike for reading and writing at a young age as a result of a non-inclusive and archaic (Moses 5 – 7) pedagogical district curriculum – there is one aspect which unites all students across the nation, regardless of socioeconomic background, and that is technology. The ways in which technology influences not only the human brain, but also the millennial psychological values as seen with Cavanaugh et al, Grandgenett and Topp, has caused major negative and positive consequences regarding how technology is incorporated into the pedagogy that is taught within the physical classroom. What, or how, are students learning outside of the classroom, including YouTube, microblogging, and podcasts? What effects do these self-teaching modes of reading and writing have on students' perceptions of the physical classroom setting? How do these modes cause students to buy and read literature that is very much outside the sphere of academia?

According to a recent 2018 Pew Research Center study, 74% of all adults in America use Facebook on a daily basis, a 6% increase since this study was done in 2016 (“Social Media Use in 2018”). The following graphs helps to illustrate the most recent findings regarding adults and social media use:



(“Social Media Use in 2018”)

A majority of Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram users visit these platforms on a daily basis



(“Social Media Use in 2018”)

The graphs show that more than 74% of users report visiting Facebook daily, with 51% of all users on this website several times a day. Snapchat and Instagram are close seconds, with 63% percent of users reporting that they go on these websites at least once on a daily basis. And yet, YouTube ranks highest in popularity among the millennial generation, with 94% of people in this age group within the US reporting that they use this video blogging website. Facebook is more popular across a range of generations, with 80% of US adults ages 18 – 49 year-olds reporting that they use this social media website. Millennials outstrip every other age demographic in regards to Snapchat as well, with 78% of US adults ages 18 – 24 reporting that they use this app, which allows users to send and receive disappearing pictures and videos. Thus,

millennials appear to use the social media websites - YouTube, Facebook, and Snapchat – the most. Users can post podcasts, videos, pictures, and some form of written statuses on each of these platforms.

Currently, there is a growing literature on the homogenous identity of the millennial generation as presented on these websites. Each website presents language in a way that is unique to their respective platforms. YouTube’s language is presented through speech rather than the traditional form of literature. In regards to Facebook, the nature of microblogging is the way in which social media users experience language. For Snapchat, the text-image hybrid mode of communication is reflective of the millennial desire for privacy in an age wherein nothing is ever really private anymore.

YouTube

YouTube is one of the most prolific ways of self-publishing and exemplifies a road to fame and fortune that reconstructs conventional ideals of the “self-made man.” It is now a multi-billion dollar corporation, as it has played a key part in revolutionizing how we buy, watch, and engage with television, digital storytelling, and the new media. What’s more, revenue is entirely fan-based, and as one industry-expert put it in an article in *Variety* magazine:

“The viewer is the new boss,” said Will Keenan, president of Endemol Beyond USA, the TV production giant’s domestic digital arm. “We can’t force content on people anymore.” Traditional media companies know this all too well. That’s why there’s been a rash of deals like Disney buying Maker Studios, a large YouTube multichannel network, in a deal upwards of \$950 million dollars; and DreamWorks Animation snapping up AwesomenessTV last year for up to \$117 million. (Spangler)

The data here indicates how the digitalized world has become a reflection of a capitalist society. Depending on how many subscribers and viewers a professional YouTuber possesses, YouTube Inc. will pay that person to keep posting videos in order to draw in viewers. Once the YouTuber has developed a plethora of faithful viewers and subscribers, she or he is approached by all types of businesses looking to use the online platforms as a way to advertise their products. These companies include HBO, Pepsi, Virgin Mobile and many more (Spangler). Coupled with the payments from YouTube and these endorsements, YouTube celebrities can make a fortune. Not only are these YouTube celebrities drawing in a plethora of viewers, but they are also defining and perpetuating values of authenticity that are unique to the millennial generation.

One example of this is Felix Kjellberg, whose YouTube celebrity personality is named PewDiePie and who also earned an estimated \$15 million in 2016 (Ferchaud et al 88).

“Parasocial attributes and YouTube personalities: Exploring content trends across the most subscribed YouTube channels,” by Ferchaud et al, sheds some light on the motivation of this consumer culture when they say that it is a combination of utilizing production techniques to perpetuate “performance strategies that mimic face-to-face interactions” and “self-disclosure” (90). Both of these factors were consistent across the 10 major most subscribed YouTube channels, which deal with topics such as “gaming videos, tutorials, product reviews, sketches, vlogs, music videos, and podcasts” (92). These factors help YouTube celebrities appear “more authentic, approachable, and influential than mainstream celebrities” (Ferchaud et al 88 and Spangler). This concept of self-disclosure is a key factor in influencing authenticity within the YouTube persona:

Self-disclosure is present across videos from the top YouTube channels, even among genres that might be perceived to be very different from each other. This is key since

scholars suggest that self-disclosure is key to developing relationships (Utz, 2015). In other words, when YouTube personalities engaged in self-disclosure, they were also more authentic. While Greene et al. (2006) contends that negative self-disclosure is undesirable in an interpersonal relationship, this study's findings suggest even negative self-disclosure might be a strategy used to encourage a parasocial relationship, or at the very least, negative self-disclosure leads to greater authenticity. (Ferchaud et al 93).

Here, Ferchaud emphasizes the desire for authenticity within the millennial and generation Z age groups, thereby also highlighting the psychological neuroticism within this generation. Coyne et al, authors of "Emerging in a digital world: A Decade Review of Media Use, Effects, and Gratifications in Emerging Adulthood," further sheds light on the subconscious millennial desire for more meaningful forms of social interaction. They argue that "96% of college students have a cell phone, and on average they spend nearly 45 min per day texting or making phone calls" (126). They also posit that "emerging adults spend 3 and a half hours per day on the Internet, with most time being spent on e-mail/social networking, entertainment, and school/work," and approximately 52 min on Social Networking Sites every day, with the majority of that time on Facebook (126). And yet, most of the content that digital natives consume crave is "authenticity," as seen in one of the main factors influencing the fame of YouTube's biggest celebrities. This authenticity is similar to the desire in millennials for characters that best represent their college, post-college, and post-high school lives. Indeed, just as students engage in pleasure reading at times of certain types of novels (like NA), they also view content on social media that reflects their interests as well as their identities.

Facebook

Facebook scholars also touch upon the underlying psychological and social implications through the users' microblogging format. Users of this Social Networking Site (SNS) can either make their pages private or public, and most choose the former in order to retain privacy. If a users' account is public, then anyone, whether they are a Facebook "friend" or not, can view their statuses, pictures, and personal information. In contrast, a private account only allows another Facebook user to view a private person's information if they are "friends." Because most people prefer private accounts, obtaining a large enough sample of information to analyze how people use language on Facebook is difficult. As seen in the way the platform is set up, it is primarily a space wherein people use informal language. This is primarily a good aspect, as it helps to preserve minority languages. Honeycutt and Cunliffe emphasize the importance of preserving these minority languages in their article, "The Use of the Welsh Language on Facebook," wherein they argue with support from researchers that "there is an urgent need for smaller languages to establish themselves in the whole range of modern communication media used to support social networks (Honeycutt and Cunliffe 244). Thus, the authors highlight the desire for social media to reflect societal conventions and culture. In the digital sphere, minority languages are one of the ways in which people maintain the authenticity and uniqueness of their respective cultures. In a similar way, as previously stated, students not only lose interest in reading because of the over-testing problem, but also because the books that they read oftentimes don't reflect their values. In this way, social media reinforces the importance of their respective cultures in a way that the literature, and the pedagogy surrounding it, does not.

Furthermore, the issue surrounding language has been a major critique when discussing implementation of Facebook as a place to drive classroom engagement. Liping Deng and Nicole Judith Tavares, authors of "From Moodle to Facebook: Exploring students' motivation and

experiences in online communities,” highlight this critique when they argue that although students are more likely to engage in “peer interactions” when classroom discussion was held on the school-based forum of Moodle, they were nevertheless more careful in composing “messages with solid content, references and in an academic style” (174). In contrast, once on Facebook, “students on the whole felt more at ease posting in conversational and casual styles and on any topics of interest to them” (Deng and Taveres 174). In a similar way, authors Craig Gamble and Michael Wilkins, authors of “Students Attitudes and Perceptions of Using Facebook for Language Learning,” argue for the importance of the teacher establishing classroom rules while using Facebook (65). Both authors emphasize that students prefer to keep their Facebook personae and their classroom personae separate. This preference indicates the desire for individuality outside of the classroom, as well as the need to retain a certain higher level of discourse within the classroom. Socializing is important in all facets of life, but the data here implies that students go to school for the purpose of learning and not to superficially mimic their lives outside of the classroom. Educators should keep in mind that students’ respect and appreciation for the classroom lies in the pedagogical practices within the sphere of academia and not necessarily the fusion of their social media personae and their identities as students.

In further analysis, author Jenny Lewin-Jones, who wrote “Humor with a Purpose: Creativity With Language in Facebook Status Updates,” argues that people not only employ “linguistic creativity” when crafting status updates, but she also argues that:

The Facebook users in this study most frequently post about themselves and their own lives, prominently using humorous tones, and particularly self-deprecation. On the face of it, this merely shows their ability to laugh at life’s absurdities, and not take themselves seriously. However, the purpose of this performance... [invites] solidarity and a

sympathetic view of themselves and their lives, in ways their audience can identify with. (83).

Here, Lewin-Jones highlights a similar concept seen in Ferchaud et al's analysis of what drives the consumer psychology of millennials and YouTube. In regards to Facebook, people's statuses are seen as a way in which to evoke sympathy through the comedy of "self-deprecation." Furthermore, because users are intrinsically motivated to seek authenticity and relatability, and therefore create a "performance of identity" (Lewin-Jones 83) as seen in the similar way that YouTube personalities foster their new media personae. Furthermore, Lewin-Jones also argues that Facebook language is "playful" and though it does have an underlying, more intrinsic purpose, she is still supporting this concept of the way social media language helps to construct the formation of identity and community with like-minded individuals instead of a disengagement with language as a result of over-testing (Casserly et al 94). In summary, though students do go on Facebook in order to socialize, they have unconsciously been processing language within the academic sphere for their entire educated lives as a burdensome entity. In this way, students are taught to devalue how reading and writing are taught within the classroom and overvalue the supposed "authenticity" of social media.

Snapchat

Snapchat is most popular amongst millennials, except it builds and maintains seemingly "authentic" relationships in a different way than Facebook does. For one, it functions differently than Facebook does. Users of this app send photos and videos that disappear after the receiver opens them. They can also write text onto the photos and videos, like captions, thus forming a hybrid "text-image" (Vaterlaus et al 508). Finally, the app has a feature called Stories, wherein after users take photos or make short videos of themselves, he or she can post it to the Story,

wherein this collage of the user's creation is available for 24 hours to all of the users "friends." According to J. Mitchell Vaterlaus et al, authors of "'Snapchat is more personal': An exploratory study on Snapchat behaviors and young adult interpersonal relationships," who analyzed the content of what is being posted to their Stories and by whom. They draw on research from previous studies and state that 98% of the time, young adults mostly sent "funny things," 85% of the time, they sent selfies, 85% of the time, they sent snaps or videos of what they were currently doing and 13% of the time, they used the app for sexting, which is sending sexual photos through social media or text messages (595). This is very different from Facebook, as Utz said, wherein most users private message each other to maintain interpersonal relationships. Snapchat allows for a "snapshot" of a person's life in a single moment, whereas Facebook acts as more of keeper of a person's social media interactions. Furthermore, a person's photos and statuses stay on Facebook presumably forever, whereas the purpose behind Snapchat is to go against this notion of permanently reviewing over and over again one's networking on social media.

Vaterlaus et al echo a similar theme of how the "hybrid text-image" capitalizes on quick and easy social interaction as opposed to more thoughtful and ongoing progressive interactions on Facebook. They argue, "Young adults revealed that they used [Snapchat] in their relationships when they were bored, needed to convey a quick message, or as a tool to make plans" (599). In this way, Snapchat's major appeal is brevity and temporality, which goes against the main point of traditional social media. In this way, the search for authenticity within the digital sphere by millennials is manifested in the way Snapchat allows its users to communicate with one another.

In contrast, NA literature, confessional microblogging, like on Facebook, and self-disclosure on YouTube, are all traditionally permanent – meaning, the creators can choose to either delete their posts or pull their books from the shelves. This means that though the stories

within these spheres of literature and media deal with the socioeconomic factors of the newer generations, the modes in which communication, and thereby language, is digested and processed within their brains and psyche can be seen as non-authentic. This dearth of authenticity would explain what Cavanaugh et al said when they posit that, “We fear the flighty ‘continuous partial attention’ typifying digitally rewired millennial brains...lacks the cognitive velocity to escape the ‘shallow’ orbits that so concern thoughtful observers like Maryanne Wolf (2007) and Nicholans Carr (2008a)” (384). The authors’ concerns about the rewiring of millennial brains that contribute to their short attention span are well-founded, particularly because the millennials themselves are aware, or at least partially aware, that digital media exhausts the brain’s cognitive abilities to have meaningful interactions in this globalized online world. This lack of meaningful interactions is also connected with the appeal of NA literature, as both modes of publishing deal with issues specifically regarding the millennial generation. In this way, interactions with social media teach students two aspects of language and identity simultaneously. While it reinforces the desire for authentic portrayals of issues surrounding the millennial generation like in commercial literature, it also supports the ideal that genuine social interactions occur outside of the classroom (Deng and Taveres 174; Gamble and Wilkins 65). Thus, it appears that students are engaging with language and content that deals more similarly with their lives than academic texts – and the insincerity of standardized testing on the culture of the classroom – within the sphere of social media.

In short, educators should keep in mind that students are investing their time in social media not just because they grew up with technology as digital natives, but also because the platform, like commercial literature, engages with values and issues that are important to the millennial generation, like authenticity, diversity, mental illness, college life, and much more. If

educators keep in mind that neither technology nor over-testing should be substitutes for good pedagogical practices surrounding the powerful relationship between content and language at all times, then the disconnect between what is read and written inside the classroom versus outside of the classroom will lessen. Students will no longer perceive canonical literature as something that is too difficult for their minds geared towards short attention span and simplicity of language; rather, they will perceive it as different and more of a preference rather than a disconnected, entirely “other” entity.

Conclusion

The educational system perpetuates what is read and what is written in a number of ways. A lack of accurate portrayals of millennials and generation Zs - groups that retain identities grounded in socioeconomic, psychological, neurological factors rooted in digital nativity (Grandgenett and Topp), ethnicity, and the choice of college (Graff) – has led these groups to turn to commercial literature (Wetta; Deahl and Rosen) and a form of self-teaching through social media. Neurologically, millennials’ experience a decrease in brain plasticity and critical thinking skills as a result of technology (Cavanaugh et al 379 and 382). Technology’s double-edged sword regarding the brain is further intensified when some studies shows that it can teach students effective multitasking skills and enable them to learn concepts quicker (Grandgenett and Topp 44). Social media plays an important part psychologically, as it establishes their values of self-disclosure, authenticity, and open-mindedness (Ferchaud et al 88; Utz 8; Vaterlaus et al 508 and 596).

On the academic publishing side, or canonical literature, there has historically been a lack of inclusivity of different groups besides mostly white and male because educators undervalue content over language (Hirsch). Proponents of the canon, who argue that incorporating more

inclusive content dilutes the standards of intelligence (Bloom), must take into account the socioeconomic factors surrounding the newer generations. These factors influence how students learn reading and writing on every level of the education system, from the primary to the post-secondary. On the primary level, students are erroneously taught that reading is about the number of words one reads per minute versus making valuable connections to the world around them. On the middle school level, students are forced to take on average of 10 standardized tests a year instead of building up critical thinking skills to make deeper connections. On the high school level, students must take more exams like the SATs and ACTs with the burden of entering good universities on their shoulders. Despite these contributing factors within the sphere of academia, some students do end up developing a love for reading, though this is usually because of better pedagogical practices that are not nationally implemented (Gambrell 261).

This paper has sought to add to the growing debate on the canon by comparing the appeal of commercial literature to students' underlying neurological and psychological needs. These needs are seen in the way millennials and generation Zs engage with social media, which possess the same appeals of authenticity and simplicity as seen in trade publishing. Educators should keep in mind to not make over testing, or the integration of technology, a substitute for effective pedagogy within the literacy classroom. Students' desire to learn is not analogous to the implementation of technology, but rather, their thirst for knowledge is fostered by a number of factors that have historically been the casualty of the big business of education. At the core of this disconnect is the belief that millennials and generation Zs are incapable of intellectually engaging with academic texts. In truth, the solution to this problem may lay with educators – and the testing authorities of the business of education – lack of understanding all of the factors that contribute to the problems behind how reading and writing are taught within the 21st century

classroom. Ultimately, when implementing pedagogical practices that foster a thirst for knowledge through reading and writing, a genuine desire to engage students' experiences as millennials should be kept at the forefront of the classroom.

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