The Researcher on his own Route: Supported Autonomy and the Disengaged Student

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> *Whoever looks always finds. He doesn't necessarily find what he was looking for and even less what he was supposed to find. But he finds something new to relate to the thing that he already knows. What is essential is the* **continuous vigilance...***The master is he who keeps the researcher on his own route, the one that he alone is following and keeps following.*
>
> Ranciere*, The Ignorant Schoolmaster* 33

Each one of us has, at one time or another, been faced with a text so boring we feel it might put us to sleep. The ticking clock doesn't seem to move; in the next room the television drones ever louder. We start the reading over and over, but find we can't make sense of the words. For many college students, especially those placed in remediated reading and writing tracks, these experiences are all too commonplace. As a basic skills and composition instructor, I am often faced with students who are intelligent and able to decode text but who do not or will not engage with the readings they're given. When I ask them why, they often respond that the text is boring or, quite frequently, that the act of reading *itself* is boring.

For a human experience which is nearly universal, "boredom" has proven surprisingly difficult to define. There is no unequivocal definition of the word in psychology, philosophy, education, or sociology. Though neuroscientists provide some evidence that damage to the frontal cortex results in increased complaints of boredom, they have no clear idea what happens in the brain when a subject experiences

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the emotion (Danckert 1). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, even the origins of the word are not clear. The dictionary suggests that the verb "to bore" in this context either derives from the German word *drillen*, as in "to bore holes" or the French word *bourrer*, meaning "to stuff, to satiate"(Simpson et al. 160). In fact, this dichotomy may be the closest we can get to a clear definition of the term— to be bored is to be at once force-fed and hollowed out, or perhaps more accurately, to be stuffed full of nothing.

Despite the problems with definition, we see common threads—the violence, hopelessness and helplessness of receiving this force-feeding—throughout descriptions of the boredom experience. Schopenhauer calls ennui a "lifeless yearning without a definite object, a deadening languor" (85). The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis defines boredom as "not simply a lack of movement but a pointless stagnation, to which is added an enduring hatred of time" (Mijolla). Artificial Intelligence engineers Martinez-Miranda & Aldea, in determining the *purposes* of emotions in order to imbue robots with human characteristics, describe boredom as: "a mechanism to stop inefficient behaviour that does not contribute to satisfy any of the creature's needs" (11). Here, boredom is a defense. The "creature" (robot or student) finds their situation useless and shuts down. This can take many forms: a student may sit in the back of the classroom with arms crossed, sighing loudly; a student may flat-out refuse to do the assignment at hand, skip class, or drop out of college completely. On the other hand, the student's defense can be more subtle: he may do just what he thinks the professor wants and nothing more, never finding or looking for his own route.

Unfortunately, there has been little research done on the subject of boredom in postsecondary education. However, the handful of studies that have been done, along with the literature on boredom from other fields, strongly suggest that boredom arises from a lack of purpose (Bargdill; Larson and

Richards; Mann and Robinson; Pekrun et al.) There is also strong evidence that one's sense of purpose, and therefore, one's feelings of boredom, are mutable (Bargdill; Pekrun et al). This argues for research into a pedagogy of "supported autonomy,"[1] which begins to disrupt the mechanism of boredom by promoting student agency and purpose. This paper aims to explain the theory behind such a pedagogy and uses, as one concrete example of how supported autonomy can work, a unit designed primarily for a first-year transfer level composition class at either the community college or university level. While it is designed with the basic skills student in mind, this unit can be used at many different levels of academia.[2] Its purpose is to promote self-directed investigation and clear, purposeful communication of that investigation both inside and outside of the classroom, goals from which almost any student (or professor) could benefit.

Choice

A number of studies show that students report less boredom when they feel the subject matter is of personal importance. Studies by Small et al. and Pekrun et al. entailed interviewing students regarding what made courses interesting or boring. Small et al.'s study focused particularly on which words students associated most directly with interest. The three words most frequently mentioned were "colorful", "effective" and "personal" (Small et al. 721). In Pekrun et al.'s study, students most often reported boredom when the material was "of little relevance to personal identity" (534). The fact that the word "personal" correlates negatively to student boredom is of great importance to the college professor teaching reading. It would be impossible to find one text which is personally relevant to every student in a classroom, but it may be possible to help most students find a text which is personally significant by asking for student input into the reading list. In the book club unit described in Appendix A, students are given a wide range of books to

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choose from, though all the books do share a common theme which is decided by the class (this process is described more in detail in the appendix.) If a student complains that none of the choices spark their interest, the class revises the list until we find some books upon which the class as a whole can agree.

There is a great deal of research that suggests allowing students to choose their own texts will improve their engagement. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a psychologist studying intrinsic motivation, writes of "Flow," which he describes as the experience in which a person is so engaged in a task that they lose track of the world around them. "When a person feels that skills are fully engaged by challenges," Csikszentmihalyi writes, "one enters the state of flow"(128). In this state, the individual's attention is perfectly matched with the task at hand: they have enough attention to do it, but little to spare for other concerns like worrying about an argument they had at home. They are at once lost and engaged. "There is just too much to do," Csikszentmihalyi says, "to worry about failure" (131). According to him, one of the primary conditions necessary for flow is choice. The mountain climber, in his example, chooses to climb the mountain; no one forces the composer to write the sonata. Of course, we must face the uncomfortable fact that "giving" students a choice is a paradox; the giver has the power to take the choice away. Choosing to read *Lolita* over *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is not teaching yourself to play the guitar in your spare time or climbing the Alps on vacation. The professor is an authority, an assigner of grades, and that power structure will not disappear despite a choice in texts. That said, we can still help academically disengaged students become researchers on their own routes by helping them link their existing interests to their work in the classroom, by introducing *some* agency into a situation in which they may feel quite powerless. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that a reader who has chosen a text with which they identify will visualize

the places and events in the book, anticipate the plot, and respond empathetically and critically to both character and author. He claims that, currently, students "tend to have little choice about what they have to read, and the content of the books is usually alien to their past experiences or future concerns" (Csikszentmihalyi 135).

Of course, learning to engage with a text that you originally consider "boring" is an important academic skill that some may feel will be overlooked by this pedagogy, but I argue that supported autonomy is a way to learn such engagement. A student who has rarely (or never) read a book is much more likely to work through a difficult reading if that reading is of personal importance to them. As Ranciere says, the student "finds something new to relate to the thing that he already knows" (33). The student becomes more curious and watches her peers become more curious, sparking new and unexpected interests. Additionally, the very act of choosing increases engagement. In their article, "Engagement and Motivation in Reading," John Guthrie and Allan Wigfield write "choice is motivating because it affords student control. [Students] seek to be in command of their environment, rather than being manipulated by powerful others" (411). Students have often told me that they've never read an assigned book cover to cover before the book club unit. Even if students don't like the text they've chosen, as sometimes happens, they put effort into engaging with it because, as they often remind themselves, "I chose it." They do sometimes regret their choices, wishing they'd read a book that other students seem to be enjoying more fully, but this is no less valuable than a "successful" choice. They learn that choice implies responsibility, the choice belongs to them and that some books resonate more personally than others.

Choice should not be limited only to texts, but to discussion and essay questions as well. One of the purposes of this pedagogy is to incite deep investigation and one of the primary ways to do this is for students to ask their own

questions. According to Guthrie and Wigfield, "students who read...texts to answer their own *personally* formulated questions showed higher comprehension than groups of students who were instructed to memorize the content or to read without direction" (emphasis added 412). To this end, I often use the difficulty paper assignment, which Salvatori and Donahue outline in their book *The Elements (and Pleasures) of Difficulty*. This asks students to reflect upon difficulties they've had with the reading (or sometimes writing) task. It is not enough to simply say what was difficult; the student must pinpoint sites of difficulty, explain what specifically was difficult for them and clarify why. This allows students personal investigation and interpretation into readings. Students are asked to write two informal difficulty papers throughout the book club unit (this is described in further detail in Appendix A.) The difficulty papers are extremely productive for both helping students discover challenging and interesting questions, and for helping them understand that what they are most baffled by is often the heart of a fascinating inquiry, that being baffled is a form of engagement. At the end of the book club project, I often ask the students to devise a question about the text that is still bothering them. They write informally about their question, do a half hour's Internet research on that question, write what they learned from that research and, finally, devise a question explaining what they "still want to know." This "still want to know" question can lead into a more in-depth research project.

Autonomy Support

With choices available to students, especially students unfamiliar with academia, it is extremely important to have structure. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster,* Jacques Ranciere describes the pedagogy of 18th century educator Joseph Jacotot, who, having been exiled to the Netherlands, found himself teaching French to a group of Flemish students,

though he himself spoke no Flemish. From this experience, Jacotot developed a pedagogy of "Universal Teaching," in which an "ignorant schoolmaster" was able to teach subjects about which he knew nothing. But, as Ranciere is careful to point out, with Jacotot, "the students had learned without a master explicator, but not, for all that, without a master" (12). So what does a master look like in this context? Jacotot employed metacognitive strategies, always asking his students "a three-part question: what do you see? What do you think about it? What do you make of it? And so on, to infinity. But that infinity is no longer the master's secret; it is the student's journey" (23). Jacotot's method makes visible what is often invisible about learning, not only asking students what they know, but *how* they know what they know. It is worth noting here that many contemporary instructors employ metacognitive strategies in our classrooms, often asking students to write reflections after they've turned in their papers or some time in the drafting process. Metacognitive reflection was Jacotot's *primary* strategy. He asked those three questions over and over, "to infinity." He said the *sole* role of the ignorant schoolmaster was "to be instructed, not to instruct" (29). In a contemporary university, we can encourage this metacognition and at the same time manage a classroom in which many texts are being discussed at once by asking our students to teach *us* what they've learned. We ask them how they learned it; if they are sure what they've learned is true. If so, how? If not, why not? What remains unanswered? How do they intend to investigate further? Why do they think that's a good strategy? They can discuss their findings with us and with other students and as a class, we can discuss tactics for further investigation and identify questions that pique our interest.

But we are not in the position of Joseph Jacotot, an exiled revolutionary teaching young, often illiterate children. We are college professors, tasked with helping our students achieve university-wide "learning outcomes," and assigning

papers and grades. Consider how disorienting it would be for a community college student hoping to get the GPA he needed to transfer into a four-year college, or a junior at a four-year college hoping to go on to medical school, not to have any idea what was expected of them. "Without a goal," Csikszentmihalyi says, "there cannot be meaningful feedback, and without knowing whether we are doing well or not, it is very difficult to maintain involvement" (129). In a classroom of supported autonomy, students and teachers define goals *together*. If students are writing in a genre with which they are unfamiliar—like, for example, the book reviews assigned at the end of the book club project, the class will read a number of previous student and published book reviews. I ask them: what does a book review look like? What does a book review *do?* Who is the audience of a book review? Which book reviews do you think are successful? Which are not? Why? Together, students and teachers will come up with a list of criteria for a successful review; for example: "tells the audience who should read the book and why" or "backs up claims with quotes and other evidence from the book." It is important that if the professor is looking for something particular in an assignment, he makes this criterion clear. If the university's learning outcomes require that I grade grammar or paragraph organization and students don't choose these as their criteria, it is imperative that I tell them these things will be factored into their grades. We cannot keep our grading standards secret, or students will feel cheated and lied to.

What motivation research tells us about teacher feedback in general and grading in particular is somewhat disturbing. Financial journalist Daniel Pink recently wrote a book entitled *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us,* in which he describes various studies on motivation, one of which was conducted by the Federal Reserve which is not, as Pink points out, a bastion of radical thinking. The study indicates that, while people work more efficiently at jobs at which they are well compensated than at those in which they

are not, offering cash bonuses for "good behavior," behavior like solving a computer bug, actually *decreased* performance (Pink). Because grades are extrinsic rewards in the negative sense outlined by Pink, and because such rewards correlate negatively with engagement, I do have concerns about the damage they may do to the intrinsic motivation garnered by autonomy support. As Csikszentmihalyi writes, "Schools follow very closely [the] prescription of how to disrupt enjoyment. Formal education thrives on external controls, evaluation, competition and self-consciousness" (137). I believe there is need for further investigation into what strategies, aside from student input into grading criteria, might be employed to combat the deleterious effects of grading on motivation and engagement.

Regarding timely feedback, reading and writing are again different from Csikszentmihalyi's other illustrations; the other examples are physical acts with sensory results. The mountain climber sees they are closer to the top of the mountain and the guitarist hears the song, but the reader's and writer's experiences are largely internal. Yes, I'm in my body when I sit down to read, but not a whole lot physically changes by the time I've read through the chapter, and what does change is not proof of my progress; it's more or less the same thing that would happen to my body if I were sitting watching television. And yes, if I'm writing, there are words on the page that weren't there before, but, for whatever reason, this does not seem to be nearly as much of an external artifact as a song or a sketch. Therefore, one of the key ingredients of the flow experience: immediate feedback, seems largely lacking in the reading and writing experience. In an age in which our students encounter countless technologies that give them results in a nanosecond, it's no wonder they often have a difficult time getting into the "flow" of reading. This makes the explication of clear goals more important than ever and also, I believe, calls for further research into the ways in which we can make the results of reading and writing more visible.

Another key ingredient in autonomy support is challenge, which I touched upon in my earlier discussion of the difficulty paper, but which is worthy of further attention. Csikszentmihalyi writes "intense involvement is only possible when a person feels that the opportunities for action in the given activity are more or less in balance with the person's ability to respond to the opportunities" (127-8). In their book, *The Elements (and Pleasures) of Difficulty,* Mariolina Salvatori and Patricia Donahue write, "It is because difficulties are indeed an intrinsic aspect of understanding that they need to be taught" (xii). It is certainly possible that, given endless choices, students may choose the easiest text or task, those which are too facile to be engaging. In a classroom of supported autonomy, it is the role of the instructor to encourage or even to insist upon projects that they deem to be difficult enough to challenge students, texts which will cause students to experience the occasional bafflement and confusion, texts which bear rereading, which is why I devise, after asking students for input on their interests, the original list of book club choices (this process is described in more detail in Appendix A.) I find that having a wide choice of books allows for more difficulty, both in reading level and subject matter, than assigning one book to the whole class would afford. For example, if I had assigned *Lolita* to an entire class of first-year community college students, many of who reported never having read an novel before, it would have been quite difficult to gain student (not to mention administrative) support. But when *Lolita* is a choice among others, many students do choose it. And when they do, they take a great deal of pride in working through it and describing its many difficulties and surprises to their peers.

We must remember that it's our job to help the student find her own route; false agency will not take the place of true inquiry. In "Boredom in the Lecture Theatre," Mann and Robinson investigate which particular tactics evoke most boredom among students. Surprised by the findings

that laboratory activities in science classes neared the top of the list, the researchers questioned students further and found that the laboratory activities to which the students referred were mostly "busywork" in which the outcome of the experiment was highly predictable. In fact, these were not experiments at all, but rehearsals. As professors, we must be willing to be surprised. As described in the appendix, the book club project involves not only a book review, but also a group multimodal project in which groups do a fifteen to twenty minute presentation which adds to the class discussion of the theme and has a visual (non-PowerPoint[3]) component. We discuss what makes presentations interesting or boring and we watch examples of past student work, trying to pinpoint what caught or lost our attention. With these guidelines, students have made a travel video for the World State of *A Brave New World*, engaged the class in a Turing test for Brian Christian's *The Most Human Human* and drawn an historical comic book about President Garfield for Sarah Vowell's *Assassination Vacation.* Students then write metacognitive reflections on their experiences both as audience members and presenters, again trying to pinpoint what was engaging or boring. This reflection helps students learn from even "unsuccessful" presentations. Because I purposefully leave these criteria wide, the project is graded pass/fail, but I have always been impressed by the great deal of time and effort students put into this assignment, the results of which are frequently astounding.

The class presentations are particularly important because supported autonomy is not meant to separate students from one another, but to encourage students to see their personal interests in a larger academic context, and to allow those interests to be sparked by the interests of others. In their essay "Autonomy and Relatedness as Fundamental to Motivation and Education," Richard Ryan and Cynthia Powelson point out that early education "traditionally was nested within personal relationships and activities meaningful within a

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larger community" (50) and that "relatedness needs are not antithetical to either competence or autonomy and in fact often one feels most related to those who are responsive to one's autonomous expressions" (53). Echoing this sentiment, Jacotot writes, "In universal teaching, we believe...man knows that there are other beings who resemble him and to whom he could communicate his feelings, provided that he places them in the circumstances to which he owes his pains and his pleasures" (Ranciere 67). A pedagogy of supported autonomy asks students to express their interests and experiences so that they can be heard by other students and so that they may listen to, and have new curiosities awakened by other students as well. This is why we choose a larger class context for the book club project, why we read some common texts, why students work in groups, and why students create class presentations meant to engage and inform their fellow students. Another way to encourage communication would be to do the book club project twice in a row with the same books, allowing students to use their peers' reviews to help them decide which book they ought to read next.

Some may worry that this pedagogy creates more work than the professor can handle. It is true that supported autonomy requires flexibility on the part of the instructor. Of our classroom, we must constantly ask ourselves Jacotot's three questions: "What do you see? What do you think about it? What do you make of it?" and we must be willing to work with students to reassess their goals if they find them too facile or unattainable. But I've personally found that the more input students have, the less energy I spend on student "buy-in," and the more interesting, and therefore the more akin to a flow experience the class is for *me*. The fact is, professors get bored too. This pedagogy aims to help the students teach the teacher, to arouse the curiosity of instructors as well as of students.

Unit Plan

What follows is a five-week unit plan for a transfer level first-year composition class which meets for two and a half hours three times a week during the course of an eleven-week quarter. For the purpose of discussion, I've outlined it in as much detail as I can, but I should point out that in my classroom, I'm open to a great many changes. If I see interest waning, I might ask the students why and what we might do to improve the situation. I don't mean to suggest that my class is a free-for-all. We set some hard and fast deadlines and we stick to them, but within that structure, our activities and assignments are fluid. In fact, students suggested many of the ingredients of the book club project, such as the multimodal presentations, the in-class writings and the follow up research paper.

Some may question why I've chosen the book review as the final paper for this unit, as it doesn't directly relate to the class theme and students aren't writing their own essay prompts. I do often use the book clubs as a bridge to different types of essays and by no means do I suggest that the book review is superior to student-written prompts. In my own teaching, though, I've found that asking students to explore and express what their reading experience was drives home the idea of agency. The book review makes obvious that the student is both writer and audience and that their reading experience is valuable and interesting. I do find that class discussions of the theme inform the work students do in their reviews, but my point in choosing a theme is not so that the students will solve or even clarify some overarching problem, but so that they will understand how multifaceted such a theme can be. Therefore, I do not ask that their final essay be based on that theme.

Preparing for the unit

Approximately three weeks before the unit officially begins, the class must develop a topic and choose books. The

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aim is to find related books of interest to every student that will allow for book groups of four to five students in each group (if I have a class of twenty-five students, for example, I aim to have five to seven groups.) To do this, I ask the students to write answers to the following questions:

- What is the last book you enjoyed? Why?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- What are you interested in?
- What are you interested in reading for this class?

It is important to explain to students that we are genuinely interested in their responses to the questions, that their answers need not be limited to topics or texts they think are "academic." From the course requirements and answers to the questions, I come up with three or four themes that I think might be broad enough to contain books that engage all the students. As a class, we vote on those themes. Past themes have included: the American dream, why people kill, what makes us human, race in America and the trauma narrative.

From the theme, and again taking students' survey results into consideration, I develop a list of books of approximately the same length (usually around 300 pages) and difficult enough to engage and sometimes frustrate students—I want students to struggle, to ask for help, to talk about difficulties with their peers. I choose about twice as many books as we will need (if I aim to have four to five book groups, I will choose at least ten appropriate books) from which students may make their decision.[4] As a class, we look at the introductory paragraphs of these books, usually in the context of a discussion of what makes a good introduction, which allows for students to consider what hooked them and why. Students write down their top three choices and to put a star next to their first choice if they're dead set on reading that book. I put students into groups, giving people their first choice whenever possible (that is to say, whenever I can make a group of between three and five). If it is very difficult to put students cleanly into groups, I cut the lowest scoring books

and ask students to vote again on a new, shorter list. Once, when the topic was "banned books," a student complained that she didn't want to read anything on the list. I allowed her to pitch her suggestion (*Tropic of Cancer)* to the class and she was able to sway three other people to read the book with her.

I assign a completion date for the book and groups meet to exchange contact information and to devise reading schedules. I assign book groups at least two to three weeks before the unit begins so that students can have ample time to get started on reading before we begin spending class time on the unit. The deadline for finishing is about two weeks after in-class work on the unit begins, but there are a few other homework assignments during that time, so students must plan to have a good start.

Day One

Once the unit begins, I assign an essay or essays that will serve as a common starting point for the unit. For the American Dream unit, for example, we read a Horatio Alger story and Harlon L. Dalton's "Horatio Alger," which analyzes the myth at play in contemporary American society. When the class theme was "what makes us human?" we read an excerpt from Nietzsche's *Human, all too Human* as well as primatologist Robert Sapolsky's "A Natural History of War," which looks at similarities between human and ape behavior. Because these readings are (by design) usually difficult, students write difficulty papers on the texts. In class, book groups discuss their difficulties as well as what these readings might contribute to the class discussion. As a class, we discuss questions decided upon by the groups.

If a text is particularly challenging, we often discuss factors contributing to its difficulty as well as strategies for dealing with that difficulty. In class, students devise a plan for rereading. Their homework is to read the text a second time and write a two-page reflection about what they learned from their second go at the text.

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Day Two

Groups meet and discuss both what they've learned from rereading and questions they may be having with their own books. We work together to develop two types of questions to keep in mind while they continue their reading: questions that they think will be answered by the text (what happens next, etc...) and larger questions that the text may elucidate or problematize, but probably will not "answer" (what effect does Humbert Humbert's charm have on the reader, for example.) As a class, we discuss what makes effective questions and look at particular questions for ways they could be both deepened and broadened.

I also introduce and show previous examples of the multimodal presentation, the guidelines for which are as follows: "Your group will design a 15-20 minute group presentation about your book that adds to the discussion of the class topic and has a visual (non-PowerPoint) component." We discuss the assignment as a class, trying to pinpoint which of the examples we liked and why. Groups are given some time to start brainstorming ideas for their own projects.

Day Three

We begin discussion of the book review genre, so that students may know what they're looking for while they read. We watch Siskel and Ebert discussing movie reviews and read some past student reviews and recently published reviews of books. Then, together, we look at the following questions:
- What do Siskel and Ebert suggest? Do you agree or disagree?
- What is the purpose of a book review?
- Who is the audience of a book review?
- Who, more specifically, would you like to be the audience of *your* book review? Where would you like it to be published?
- What is the general format of a book review?

• What makes a book review good or bad?

Together, we develop guidelines for the book review project, which I type up and post on the class website. I always add my two cents to these guidelines stressing, as Siskel and Ebert point out, that a book review is not about what happened in the book, it's about what happened to *you* when you read the book. Homework that evening is to not only continue reading but also to bring in at least two reviews of the book they're reading.

Day Four

Students spend 20-25 minutes in class writing a difficulty paper on their book so far. Groups meet and discuss their difficulty papers, searching in them for good questions, to explore in that day's discussion, as they continue reading and possibly in their final papers. They also discuss the published reviews of their books. The remainder of class is spent in groups planning for the multimodal projects.

Day Five

Students must be finished reading. In class, we read Anne Lamott's "Shitty First Drafts," briefly discuss the procedure for writing such a draft, and then students write for 20-30 minutes. The immediacy of this in-class writing is meant to alleviate some of the procrastination and perfectionism that occurs with first drafting. After they are finished, students read over their drafts, turn them face down on their desks and walk around the class telling at least four people (two in their group and two not) what they're writing. I've found that this "cocktail party" articulates the fact that writing is communication and helps students clarify vague ideas they may be having. After the "party," students spend five minutes jotting down any ideas they may have gotten during the exercise.

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Day Six

Students are given the entire class period to work on their multimodal projects.

Day Seven

Students present their multimodal projects. Depending on the size and length of the class, this may take two or more class periods. It is important that we have some time at the end to discuss how the presentations have affected our perception of the class theme. Homework is a rough draft of the book review.

Day Eight

I ask students what they want to know about their drafts and we devise class questions for peer review. Additionally, students write 1-2 questions specific to their own paper. Students must have at least one person in their group and one person outside of their group comment on their book review.

Day Nine

Final drafts due. Students write a reflection on the book club unit: What did they do well? What could they have done better? What did they learn? What do they still want to learn? How could I have organized the unit better?

If I want the book club unit to lead into a research unit, I ask students to write about what topics were raised in their books that they still have questions about. For homework, they'll do 30 minutes of Internet research on the question, write about what they've learned and then write what they still want to know. This helps them get from a surface question to a deeper question, one that cannot simply be answered by a half hour's Internet research. This tactic has led from *Lolita* to a particularly compelling research paper about causes of pedophilia and from *Snow Crash* to research on the effects that spending copious amounts of time in a virtual world had on gamers' real lives.

Unit Grid

Before unit begins:
- Student survey of reading interest
- Class votes on class-wide theme
- Instructor chooses twice as many books as needed
- Students vote for top three choices
- Instructor assigns groups and names deadline for finishing book
- Students meet to exchange contact information and develop reading schedule

Week	Monday	Wednesday
1	- Class discussion of topic. - Groups discuss their book so far, check in on reading schedule - HW: read class-wide text and write difficulty paper	- Group discussion of difficulty papers. - Development of discussion questions - Class-wide discussion of questions - Strategies for rereading - Intro to multimodal project - HW: reread and write reflection.

2	• Groups meet to discuss books. • Development of reading questions • Begin class discussion of book/ movie review guidelines • HW: Read and bring in published reviews of your books	• In-class difficulty paper writing. • Group discussion of difficulty and development of questions • Book/ movie review discussion. • Class develops guidelines for book review assignment
3	• DEADLINE FOR FINISHING BOOKS • In-class "S*&^y First Draft" of book review • Essay "cocktail party" • Groups meet to plan projects.	• Entire class dedicated to student work on projects
4	• Presentation of projects • HW: rough draft	• Peer Review • HW: write final draft
5	• FINAL DRAFTS DUE • Metacognitive reflection • *Beginning of research paper assignment*	

Endnotes

1. This term was originally coined by Deci and Ryan to describe dispositions of teachers, who they grouped into either "autonomy supportive" or "behavior controlling" categories. Guthrie and Wigfield broaden the use of the term in their chapter in the *Handbook of Reading Research*, Vol. 3 titled "Engagement and Motivation in Reading," using "supported autonomy" to describe tactics for teachers in primary and secondary schools to provide structure while still encouraging student choice. This is the way I use the term here.

2. To date, professors have used this particular book club unit in basic skills reading and writing classes, transfer-level composition classes, upper-level English classes and introductory data sciences and environmental sciences classes.

3. According to Mann and Robinson's study, "The most important teaching factor contributing to student boredom is the use of PowerPoint slides" (245).

4. I usually have read at least half of the books on the original list of books I choose. I will read one or two of the final selections during or before the unit and will occasionally listen to one or two as an audio books.

Works Cited

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