

# “A Lifelong Aversion to Writing”: What If Writing Courses Emphasized Motivation?

> Patrick Sullivan

There has been a great deal of groundbreaking research done on motivation during the last twenty-five years, and all of it points to the importance of intrinsic motivation. This research has very significant ramifications for teachers of English.

With all due respect to the many excellent scholars working in the field of composition, I would suggest that the single most important sentence in the last twenty-five years of composition scholarship occurs in Linda Brodkey’s essay “Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only”:

While it appears to take longer in some cases than in others, composition instruction appears to have succeeded best at establishing a life-long aversion to writing in most people, who have learned to associate a desire to write with a set of punishing exercises called writing in school: printing, penmanship, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary in nearly all cases; grammar lessons, thesis sentences, paragraphs, themes, book reports, and library research papers in college preparatory or advanced placement courses. (220)

These are disturbing words, indeed—but important ones, too, it seems to me. In this essay, I engage the issue of “aversion” that Brodkey raises and address it in relation to the growing body of scholarship related to intrinsic motivation and my own experience in the composition classroom.

Before turning to intrinsic motivation, I want to consider the validity of Brodkey’s claim: Is it true that we encounter significant levels of “aversion” to reading and writing in our typical high school English classes, in our basic writing classrooms, in our first-year composition courses? Let us answer this question with as much candor and courage as we dare. Personally, I have taught composition at an open admissions institution now for over twenty years, and I have encountered my fair share of aversion to writing, especially in my basic writing classes. I have also worked with a number of area high school English teachers over the last several years, and I have heard plenty about student aversion to writing from them as well. Is it possible that the most lasting and significant learning outcome many students take away from English classes is a life-long aversion to writing? Alas, I think it may be.

Another way to begin understanding the scope and significance of this problem is to ask a corollary question: How many students do we routinely encounter in high school and college English classes who are curious about ideas, who enjoy reading and have done a lot of it, and who are enthusiastically committed to becoming better writers? Not nearly as many as there should be, it seems to me, given how much time students spend in English classes, K–12.

Furthermore, I believe that at least part of our current national “college readiness” crisis stems directly from this “aversion” problem. In *The Condition of College and Career Readiness*, for example, the American College Testing Association (ACT) reports that only 66 percent of all ACT-tested high school graduates met the English College Readiness Benchmark for writing in 2010, which tests usage, mechanics, and rhetorical skills (8). An even smaller number (52 percent) met this benchmark for reading (8). In broad terms, these numbers indicate that roughly half of all high school graduates who took the ACT are not ready to be successful college-level readers, writers, or thinkers. These data are drawn from tests taken by 1.57 million students, approximately 47 percent of all 2010 high school graduates in the nation. The National Center for Education Statistics reports, moreover, that 37.6 percent of all students “took a remedial course” in college in the 2007–08 academic year, the most recent year for which data is available (United States, *Profile*). The number for students attending public two-year public institutions, the vast majority of which are open admissions institutions, was 44.5 percent (*Profile*).

There is justifiable concern, of course, about this poor performance. It is expensive and, in the long run, dangerous in terms of the nation’s economic vitality, global competitiveness, and national security—for all the obvious reasons. In 1998, for example, Breneman and Haarlow estimated that “remedial education costs the nation’s public colleges and universities about \$1 billion annually” (2; see also Saxon and Boylan). The Strong American Schools organization notes in its 2008 report with the chilling title, *Diploma to Nowhere*, that the number of “remedial” students in American colleges now exceeds 1 million (1,305,480), incurring an estimated cost to taxpayers of over two billion dollars (3). A number of recent high-profile reports have attempted to engage and address this problem, including the U.S. Department of Education’s *A Test of Leadership*, the American Association of Colleges and University’s *College Learning for the New Global Century*, Achieve’s *Closing the Expectations Gap 2007*, and Stanford University’s Bridge Project report, *Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected K–12 and Postsecondary Education Systems Undermine Student Aspirations* (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio). I do not want to put too fine a point on this, other than to note that there is a great deal at stake here.

I believe that our national “remediation problem” is directly related to our “aversion” problem. After all, two of the three most important gateway college readiness skills are taught primarily by English teachers—reading and writing (the other gateway skill, of course, is math). My argument here is a simple one: we must attend carefully and systematically to issues related to motivation because students who are motivated typically do not underachieve. Recent research has provided a compelling theoretical argument for this focus on motivation. This work suggests

that intrinsic motivation is a prerequisite for any kind of significant learning or achievement. I think it is essential that English teachers begin to engage this research carefully and begin developing curriculum designed specifically to promote and nurture motivation.

### **“Intrinsic” versus “Extrinsic” Motivation**

The first step I believe we need to take as we begin engaging our “lifelong aversion” problem is to think carefully about student motivation and how we attempt to nurture and promote student engagement in English classes. There are many different ways that we might theorize even the general purpose of education, for example, that will make important differences in how we develop writing assignments, classroom activities, and curriculum for our students. For me, no one gets it better than Yeats: “Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire.” The presence or absence of this “fire,” of course, affects everything students experience in our classrooms, usually in profound ways. As we know, students who are engaged and motivated learn almost effortlessly. Those who are not almost always struggle, resist, and often fail. Unmotivated students also often become disruptive and troublesome influences in our classrooms.

What Yeats is talking about here is “intrinsic” motivation, the kind of passion for a subject that leads to deep and significant student learning. As Alfie Kohn notes,

Psychologists typically distinguish between “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” motivation, depending upon whether one sees a task as valuable in its own right or merely a means to an end. . . . Adults who consistently do excellent work, and students whose learning is most impressive, are usually those who love what they do, not those who see what they do as a way to escape a punishment. (*Case 22*)

I think as a profession we need to do a much better job creating activities, learning environments, and writing projects for students that target this kind of intrinsic motivation. In fact, I would like this to become one of our primary goals as English teachers, across institutional boundaries and at all grade levels. If we can inspire sincere student interest in reading, writing, and thinking, everything else, it seems to me, will take care of itself, without us having to lecture, harangue, prod, threaten, test, quiz, or plead. We all try to do this to some extent, of course. I am proposing that we make it one of the *primary guiding principles of our profession*, in an attempt to reverse the production of life-long aversion to writing in students. To do this, of course, will require creativity, patience, and perhaps even courage.

### **Recent Research on Motivation**

There has been a great deal of groundbreaking work done on motivation during the last twenty-five years or so, and all of it points to the importance of intrinsic motivation. This research has very significant ramifications for teachers of English. As Daniel Pink notes, however, in his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*, there is currently a “mismatch between what science knows” about

motivation and what organizations, educators, and parents do in terms of motivation (145). Anderman and Anderman make exactly the same point in their recent book, *Classroom Motivation* (v).

Edward Deci is perhaps the most important scholar in this field of study, and his published work on intrinsic motivation (much of which he co-authored with Richard M. Ryan) has become foundational. What he has to say about motivation, for example, in his book, *Why We Do What We Do* (which he wrote for a popular audience with the help of *New York Times* science writer Richard Flaste), is something that I think all teachers (as well as principals, superintendents, legislators, advocates for national and statewide testing programs, and citizens concerned about education) should hear:

all the work [Richard M.] Ryan and I have done indicates that *self*-motivation, rather than external motivation, is at the heart of creativity, responsibility, healthy behavior, and lasting change. . . . Because neither compliance nor defiance exemplifies autonomy and authenticity, we have continuously had to confront an extremely important—seemingly paradoxical—question: How can people in one-up positions [i.e., in positions of authority], such as health care providers or teachers, motivate others, such as their patients or students, who are in one-down positions, if the most powerful motivation, leading to the most responsible behavior, must come from within—if it must be internal to the self of the people in the one-down positions? . . . In fact, the answer to this important question can be provided only when the question is reformulated. The proper question is not, “how can people motivate others? but rather “*how can people create the conditions within which others will motivate themselves?*” (9–10; see also Deci and Ryan, *Handbook*; Deci and Ryan, *Intrinsic*).

Deci also laments the loss of motivation that seems to accompany attendance at school:

For young children, learning is a primary occupation; it is what they do naturally and with considerable intensity when they are not preoccupied with satisfying their hunger or dealing with their parents’ demands. But one of the most troubling problems we face in this culture is that as children grow older they suffer a profound loss. In schools, for example, they seem to display so little of the natural curiosity and excitement about learning that was patently evident in those very same children when they were three or four years old. What has happened? (19)

Deci also poses a very important question for teachers, one that I think is vital for all English teachers at all levels of instruction and across institutional boundaries: “Why is it that so many of today’s students are unmotivated, when it could not be more clear that they were born with a natural desire to learn?” (19). The problem Deci and Flaste are describing here, of course, is exactly the problem I am addressing in this essay.

As Ryan and Powelson suggest, it seems imperative that we not “conceive of the central goal of 12 years of mandatory schooling as merely a cognitive outcome” (62). Instead, the goal should be to create learners who are “willing and even enthusiastic about achieving something in school, curious and excited by

learning to the point of seeking out opportunities to follow their interests beyond the boundaries of school” (62). This motivation needs to come from our students’ own natural curiosity, interests, and passions. It should be characterized, as Ryan, Koestner, and Deci note, by “genuine interest, enjoyment and excitement” (189).

Boiled down to its most essential, this body of work suggests that educators need to pay careful attention to motivational factors in the classroom—in terms of course design, general course outcomes, assignment design, and a whole host of “smaller,” less obvious aspects of classroom environment and classroom management strategies.

## **Motivation and Composition Scholarship**

Situating my argument here within the long history of composition scholarship is not difficult, since there has not been a great deal of attention paid to intrinsic motivation in our literature. Part of the reason for this is that much of this research has been conducted outside of our discipline, and, as we know, it sometimes takes many years for work conducted in other disciplines to make its way into our scholarly conversations. This appears to be changing, however. A recent special issue of *English Journal*, for example, was devoted entirely to motivation (Lindblom). There has also been some significant discussion of intrinsic motivation in the scholarship related to reading instruction (in Atwell’s *The Reading Zone* and *In the Middle* and in Smith and Wilhelm’s *Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys*). Again, however, many writing teachers are not familiar with research related to reading development.

Alfie Kohn has also been doing important work on this subject for many years, but he is a bit of an absolutist in terms of classroom applications of intrinsic motivation, and this appears to have contributed to keeping intrinsic motivation on the periphery of our scholarly conversation. His theoretical discussions of intrinsic motivation have obviously been groundbreaking. But his practical classroom suggestions can sometimes strike readers as impractical. Unfortunately, this may be part of the reason why intrinsic motivation is not more widely discussed and implemented in classrooms. Kohn suggests, for example, that we “reduce the number of possible grades to two: A and Incomplete. The theory here is that any work that does not merit an A isn’t finished yet” (*Punished* 208). I personally find this idea very appealing, but it is not an easy idea to operationalize in the classroom. Like Kohn, I believe that any student work that has not earned an A or a B is simply unfinished—and I tell my students this. Nonetheless, like most teachers, I still find myself at the end of the semester reporting final grades other than A and Incomplete.

Kohn also argues against most kinds of “praise” (*Punished* 96–116), and much of what he says about this subject is important. Obviously, certain kinds of praise can damage intrinsic motivation, especially if such praise is perceived as empty, unearned, or used to manipulate or control. But praise doesn’t always have to be damaging as Kohn acknowledges (106–110). Deci, Koestner, and Ryan, for example, have shown in an important study published a few years after Kohn’s famous book, *Punished by Rewards*, that “verbal rewards” (i.e., positive feedback) do not have much

of an effect on children but *do* have a consistently “significant positive impact” on the intrinsic motivation of college students: “verbal rewards—or what is usually labeled positive feedback in the motivation literature—had a significant positive impact on intrinsic motivation, although the effect on free-choice behavior was found for college students but not children” (653). Part of the reason for this, as we will see, is “age effects” and the cognitive sophistication of older students that enables them to distinguish between different kinds of praise.

The subject of motivation is clearly a very complex area of human psychology, as Deci, Koestner, and Ryan demonstrate, for example, in their exhaustive meta-analytic review of 128 research studies examining the effects of extrinsic reward on intrinsic motivation. In this essay I attempt to chart a pragmatic “middle way” for teachers of English—offering our profession a practical, replicable way to begin applying the wisdom of Kohn, Deci, and Ryan in the classroom. My argument here is that we can begin doing this by focusing on three key teaching strategies: *variety*, *choice*, and *disguised repetition*. To show how these three key strategies can be used in a classroom, I share examples from my own teaching practice, using a basic writing course that I teach at my open admissions institution, where issues of motivation come into play every day. I would like to see our profession situate intrinsic motivation at the very heart of what we do in our classrooms.

## **What Do Students Say about English Classes?**

One way to begin exploring this subject is to ask students themselves what they have enjoyed, valued, and learned in their English classes. I have been doing this recently in my classes, and the results have been fascinating. Here is the simple survey I have been using:

1. Taking into account all of your experiences in English classes throughout your years in school, what kinds of assignments and activities in English classes have inspired you to enjoy reading and writing?
2. What kinds of assignments and activities in English classes have led you to dislike reading and writing?
3. If you could design curriculum to promote enjoyment of reading and writing in, say, a junior high school or senior high school English class, what kinds of activities and assignments would you include and why?

Here is one typical response:

1. Throughout my experiences in English classes I have typically only had very traditional assignments which have included reading either a book, play, or some other reading and then writing a paper on it. I feel these are beneficial to an extent but they tend to become somewhat repetitive rather quickly. One activity that I particularly liked was one involving a movie. We watched *Blood Diamond* in class. We did this after reading a book dealing with child soldiers. We were then asked to pick an aspect of the movie (ie. the symbolism of diamonds, what they represent) and write a paper on it. Although this assignment did involve a paper, it was more enjoyable to me because of

watching a film that so closely paralleled the book we were reading. It made it much more interesting.

2. Like I said above, reading and then writing a paper is beneficial to an extent, but doing the same thing over and over again doesn't, in my opinion, instill a love of reading and writing. I think assignments that tend to involve creativity and different mediums are far more interesting.
3. Creative assignments. Reading more recent literature as it may be easier to relate to. Activities involving more mediums. Perhaps things like, film, music, and theatre.

I think there is important wisdom here that confirms what the research on intrinsic motivation is telling us about student engagement and learning.

I have also recently completed work as one of the editors of the second volume of *What Is "College-Level" Writing?: Assignments, Readings, and Sample Student Writing*, and my work on this book has greatly deepened my appreciation for intrinsic motivation. We included three student-authored essays in this book, inviting these college students to talk about their writing histories and to discuss landmark experiences in their precollege writing careers. To my great surprise, all three of our student contributors singled out creative assignments as crucial to nurturing their interest in English as a subject. These creative assignments appear to have one thing in common—they introduce variety, choice, and disguised repetition into the curriculum. That is, they are assignments that involve reading, writing, and thinking, but they do not present themselves to students as typical English assignments.

Casey Maliszewski is one of our student contributors, and she was home-schooled from kindergarten through twelfth grade. She attended a community college after getting her GED, and she served from 2007–08 as the international president of Phi Theta Kappa, the international honor society for junior, community, and technical colleges. She recently received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Mount Holyoke College (majoring in sociology) and is currently in her second year at Columbia Law School. Creative assignments were crucial to her development as a writer:

My parents' creative approach to English was no formal writing—none. My writing assignments consisted of fiction stories, poems, fables, and journals, just enough to get a handle on basic grammar. I remember marveling when my friends told me of their latest book report due. Asking my mother why I never had to do any book reports, she responded with a shriveled face as if she had just tasted bad milk. "Book reports made me hate reading when I was kid. I do not want to do the same thing to you." I suppose my parents' approach worked because I always was and still am an obsessive reader.

One story assignment comes to mind during my earlier years of high school work. My assignment was to write a fable about why robins are red breasted. First, I had to do research on the computer on what a fable was and what components it consisted of (a brief story that features animals, inanimate objects, and forces of nature to illustrate a moral lesson). Then, I had to find a fable already written to get an example. Last, I had to let my imagination do the rest. Such an

assignment might seem odd, but by this time I was used to these creative assignments from my parents. (257–58)

Casey notes in her essay that completing these creative assignments throughout her high school years kindled in her “a great interest in writing.” Casey is now an active and joyful learner, and despite never having written a formal essay until she was preparing for her GED, she has had a very successful college career.

Lindsay Larsen, one of our other student contributors, reports a similar experience:

One of the best assignments I had in high school was to create a newspaper about Romeo and Juliet, and my friend and I wrote articles about the tragic events in the play, including police reports about the deaths of Romeo, Juliet, Mercutio, and other characters, and an investigative article on apothecaries. In middle school, I had a teacher who had us write creative works for every book or poem we were reading—we created a poem version of Poe’s “The Pit and the Pendulum,” or wrote a creative piece on the Holocaust after reading about Anne Frank. Creative assignments helped open my imagination and helped me grow as a thinker. With creative writing assignments, you are not restricted to a certain form and your ideas are not stifled. The real world is filled with different problems and issues, and dealing with them in creative ways will help you immensely in life. Creative assignments allow for more freedom and less boredom for students. It is important to master all forms of writing, and this in turn will improve a student’s essays. (282–83)

It seems to me there is important wisdom here.

## **A “Captive Audience”**

Obviously, some students we meet in English classes are, indeed, enthusiastic and motivated learners. I think it is also probably fair to say, however, that a large number of students that we meet in English classes (especially K–12 and in basic writing classes) are not. They do not *necessarily* bring a compelling interest in reading, writing, or thinking with them into our classrooms, and they often simply try to “get through” and “survive” English classes.

Think about it for a second: There are millions of students in English classes across the country at this very moment—in primary and secondary schools, in basic writing classes, and also in first-year composition courses—who *do not particularly want to be there*. In some very real ways, they are a “captive audience”—*captive*, of course, accurately suggesting a condition of being unhappily and “forcibly confined or restrained” and “unable to escape.” It is our job to help these students *want* to be in English classes—day after day, year after year. We cannot continue to present as self-evident the value of reading and writing. We need to work every day to help students *discover, experience, and feel* the joys of reading and the magic of written communication. It has become very clear to me that traditional motivational chestnuts like “This class will really help you improve your SAT scores” are not working.



## How “Aversion” Is Created and Nurtured

I believe that there are many factors that help promote aversion to writing in our school systems and classrooms. Some of this aversion appears simply to be the result of our profession not having systematically engaged the issue of intrinsic motivation before. Certainly, some of this aversion is also created by high-stakes local, national, and state-mandated standardized testing programs. Such programs negatively affect motivation in all sorts of ways. One obvious factor, of course, is the proportion of class time available to spend on any activities other than preparing for high-stakes tests, taking such tests, and reviewing the results of these tests. The relief and joy that the students at Tyler Heights Elementary School express in Linda Perlstein’s book, *Tested*, for example, when their state-mandated testing cycle ends and the school is free to move on to different kinds of learning activities suggests what is at stake here in terms of motivation and student success. The change is so significant, in fact, that one young student remarks, “It feels like a different school” (246). A qualitatively different kind of engagement and student learning also begins to take place.

Some of this aversion is also probably our own fault. We have relied perhaps too much on traditional kinds of assignments, traditional classroom strategies, and readings drawn from what Lynn Bloom calls the “essentially conservative” essay canon (417), which results in a few “classic” essays and readings getting assigned over and over again. Most high school reading lists focus on a very narrow list of traditional titles which dominate reading assignments year after year. Furthermore, as Smith and Wilhelm note, teachers canonize (and have students write about) certain kinds of texts—especially those that allow readers to provide nuanced interpretations (195)—at the expense of others. Smith and Wilhelm’s interviews with male students in middle school and high school provide compelling evidence for broadening the variety of readings we assign, teach, and invite students to write about. One of the students Smith and Wilhelm interview, in fact, addresses this issue—and speaks to our aversion problem—with devastating effect: “I will read books that other people tell me I should read—except for my English teachers” (143).

Aversion is also created in structural and systematic ways by national and statewide curriculum requirements and by less than helpful or sympathetic superintendents, principals, deans, department chairs, and parents. There is much working against us here.

### Balance

I am not arguing here that we should abandon “rigor” and “high standards.” We obviously need to continue to design curriculum that provides traditional kinds of challenges for students as readers, writers, and thinkers. That being said, however, I believe that the typical K–12, basic writing, and first-year composition (FYC) English classes clearly need to achieve a richer, more diverse blend of reading and writing activities.

Proportionately, it seems to me that we should probably devote approximately 20 percent of our class time to this important endeavor, with the remainder

dedicated to traditional kinds of assignments and activities. This is the approximate percentage of time that I devote to this kind of work in my classes, and the results have been encouraging. (I provide specific examples from my own teaching practice below.) Practically speaking, I do not think we necessarily even need to see immediate positive results from this work with all students in every class. I think we need to think longitudinally and in the long term across the entire span of students' academic experience in English classes. Somewhere along the line, and hopefully before they come to college, we want that "fire" to be lit. And we will no doubt need to be patient. It may take years and many positive experiences in English classrooms for some students to finally enjoy reading, writing, and thinking.

I think it makes sense to look at this kind of curriculum development as a long-term, low-risk, high-yield investment strategy, one that has the potential to pay extraordinary dividends over the course of a student's academic career. It also has the potential to generate great value for students after they leave school, potentially producing adults in great numbers who will become thoughtful, passionate, lifelong learners. There is also no more important gift that we can hope to give to our nation and to our democracy than this: citizens who like to read, write, and think.

### **Not All Students Are Resistant Learners**

Before moving forward with a discussion of practical classroom strategies, I would like to state for the record that I do not believe that all students are resistant writers and learners. In my twenty-five years of teaching English, I have certainly had the pleasure of working with many enthusiastic, fully engaged students. But I must also say, in terms of full disclosure, that I have also worked with many students who have not been particularly engaged.

I also do not wish to diminish or dismiss the literacies that students possess or to suggest that what I define here as reading, writing, and thinking is the only type of reading, writing, and thinking that is worth doing. That being said, I do seek to situate my argument here in the important and ongoing national conversation about "college readiness" and preparing students to be successful college-level readers, writers, and thinkers. I believe attention to intrinsic motivation has the potential to dramatically improve students' ability to be successful in college.

### **Practical Classroom Applications**

There are probably a million different ways to nurture intrinsic motivation in the English classroom, and this in itself should make this enterprise fascinating and enjoyable for teachers. In the remainder of this essay, I describe how I have targeted intrinsic motivation and blended this element of my teaching practice with more traditional kinds of assignments and activities in one of the classes that I teach, English 93, the final course in the three-course basic writing sequence that we offer at my open admissions institution. For purposes of illustrating a general pedagogical strategy, I believe this course is a good choice to discuss here because it likely resembles writing courses taught at many other colleges and in many high schools

as well. I also think this class is a good choice because it is a site where I routinely encounter strong “aversion to writing.” Obviously, students cannot be considered “ready for college” if they do not like to read, write, or think (Sullivan, “Open” 6–9). So the stakes are high here in terms of our national conversation related to articulation, “college readiness,” and alignment across institutional boundaries.

### Three Major Essays with Challenging, College-Level Readings

The core of my English 93 class is built around three major essays, and these assignments are traditional and challenging. English 93 is designed to help students transition from basic writing to college-level reading, writing, and thinking, and I take this learning outcome very seriously. I seek to assign college-level readings and have students engage college-level ideas and issues. I have discussed assignments for this class elsewhere (Sullivan, “What”), but for the purposes of this essay, I would like to provide specific examples of the type of readings that I ask students to respond to so that readers can get a sense of the broader pedagogical ecology of this classroom. Here are the readings from the three major assignments that I used in the fall 2010 semester:

1. Listening: James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues”
2. Cultural Critique
  - a. Ruth Benedict, from *Patterns of Culture* (chapter 1: “The Science of Custom”)
  - b. Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, from *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood before Marriage* (introduction, chapters 1, 2, 6, and conclusion)
3. Intelligence
  - a. Alfred W. Munzert, Kim Munzert, and Alfred Munzert, *Test Your IQ* (a timed self-scoring IQ test)
  - b. Howard Gardner, from *Frames of Mind* (excerpts) and *Multiple Intelligences*, chapter 1 (pages 3–24) and chapter 4 (pages 53–62)
  - c. Daniel Goleman, from *Emotional Intelligence* (chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, and 12; pages 33–90 and pages 189–99)

As we work on these units as a class, I do most things English teachers typically do: I assign journal writing for each of these readings; I discuss the readings in class with my students; I have students develop rough drafts of their essays in response to these readings; and I meet with each student individually to talk about and assess the progress of their drafts. I also require students to meet with a tutor at our Writing Center. So this is serious, focused work.

These three major writing projects, along with other traditional kinds of activities that I have designed for this class take up roughly 80 percent of my class time (this includes introducing students to important research and theory related to reading, writing, and thinking as well as work related to motivation).

## Variety, Choice, and Disguised Repetitions

I devote the remainder of my available time to activities designed to promote and nurture intrinsic motivation. My focus here is on adding variety, choice, and disguised repetitions to my curriculum. By design, this turns out to be about 20 percent of my total class time. Some of the days I use for these activities I consider “gimmees.” I have found, for example, that students are usually incapable of doing much new work on days when major essays are due, so I can use these days however I wish without feeling like I might be “wasting” class time. For the remainder, I use what I think of as “good work days,” valuable teaching days when students are likely to be mentally fresh and willing to work hard. I could, of course, be using this class time to do more traditional kinds of work or having students engage in more repetitions of traditional work (which until recently I have always done), but I have come to believe that the time I spend in class on activities designed to nurture intrinsic motivation is very worthwhile. These activities, regardless of when they are scheduled, really do make a significant positive difference in the way students think about my class and about “English.” They also nurture a positive long-term attitude toward reading and writing. For the remainder of this essay, I would like to share with readers how I attempt to realize this in my classroom.

### Variety

#### Writing about Art on Campus

In calling for introducing more variety into our curriculum, I am following the work of composition scholars like Curtis and Herrington and their important research on writing development in the college years. In their 2003 essay in *College Composition and Communication*, Curtis and Herrington call for broadening the types of writing students are required to do (86–88). (As Lunsford and Lunsford have shown, there does not appear to be much variety in the English curriculum. Most of the writing assigned in FYC, for example, is either argument or close analysis [793].) I am also following the advice of Alfredo Lujan, who suggests that students should have to “write and write often in multigenres: stories, personal essays, critical essays, parodies, poems, freewrites, letters to teachers, journals, jingles, reader responses, lists” (56). I am also following Kohn, who likewise supports bringing more variety into our classrooms (*Punished* 220). I am also responding here to the testimony of Casey Malszewski and Lindsay Larsen, the two student contributors to *What Is “College-Level Writing”* (Vol. 2) that I cited earlier, both of whom argue persuasively, it seems to me, for bringing more variety into our curriculum. I believe variety is one very important way we can nurture intrinsic motivation. Variety can serve to deepen students’ understanding and appreciation of writing, and it can make the classroom experience more diverse and interesting. It also allows different kinds of learners to encounter different kinds of challenges, provides pacing and rhythm over the course of the semester, and disguises repetitions.

One example of how I introduce variety into my English 93 class is writing about art on campus. Here I am following the work of Elliot Eisner, who argues persuasively in *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, in favor of curricular diversity as well as for the value of incorporating art and aesthetics into our curriculum. As he suggests, “Meaning is not limited to what words can express” (280). We are blessed to have a campus extraordinarily rich in artwork (we have student and professional art on many walls and public places on campus, and we have a gallery). The assignment I describe here is designed to diversify our class’s writing activities and to have students engage art and aesthetics. This assignment also helps students work on their concentration and observational skills. Good writers, I tell them, are good observers, and they are able to sustain focus and concentration. This activity also provides me with an excellent opportunity to talk about audience and to highlight the difference between reader-based and writer-based prose (Flower). This assignment requires students to imagine an audience that is unfamiliar with their work of art and then write for it. This helps my basic writing students begin to make the crucial cognitive transition from writing for themselves (writer-based) to writing for others (reader-based), a key transition point for developing writers. Finally, I also like to do some things with my classes during the semester that get my students up and moving in order to show them that writers do more than just sit in front of computers all day and write.

For this assignment, we tour the campus looking at art. I ask students to select a work they like and then return to it and study it carefully. Students then write about the work they select. Here is the assignment:

### **Writing about Art on Campus**

Today, we will tour the campus looking at the art on display. Your job will be to find a piece of art that you really like. Once you have found a work you like, I would like you to write a response to the piece you’ve selected. I will be collecting these at our next class meeting, and you will be presenting the work you chose to the class in a short speech. Word count: 350 word minimum!

Here’s how our day will go:

- We will spend 30 minutes touring campus and taking notes.
- I would like you to select a work that you want to write about and then return to it to sit in front of it. Please spend some time looking at it carefully. I’d like you to take notes and begin a preliminary draft of your response (at least 15 minutes).
- Take a picture of the work you’ve chosen so you can show it to the class. Convert it to a .jpeg at home and bring it to class on your flash drive.
- We will all return to class during the final 10 minutes of class to finish up this activity and begin writing our responses.

Here’s what I would like you to do in each paragraph:

**Paragraph 1:** Please describe the piece of art that you have selected as carefully and fully as you can. Please assume that the audience you are writing for has not seen the work you have selected. Readers will only be able to “see” your work of art from your written description, so make it full and strong!

What is it? (A painting? A sculpture? Pottery?)  
What is it made of? (Paint? Wood? Steel? Something else?)  
What colors or textures or patterns does it feature that you find interesting or appealing?

**Paragraph 2:** Think carefully about the piece you've selected.

What does it make you feel?  
What does it make you think?  
Does it recall or remind you of anything?  
Why do you like this piece of art?  
Why did you select it?

This kind of assignment adds a very welcome element of variety to the semester, and most students find the assignment fascinating and enjoyable, regardless of how much exposure they have had to art before. Many students develop a proprietary sense of ownership toward the work they have chosen, and for this reason they usually look forward to writing and speaking about it. All of this helps nurture intrinsic motivation for writing, and students are still required to “read” their piece of art carefully, think about why the piece moves them, and then write an effective description and response. I feel we have much to gain from making variety a hallmark of our curriculum development.

## **Choice**

### **Reading for Pleasure**

Choice is something that everyone interested in motivation and teaching agrees is important. It is one of Kohn's three major curricular recommendations for teachers, along with richer, more meaningful content and more opportunities for students to collaborate (*Punished* 213–26). It is foundational to Atwell's approach to teaching reading (*Middle* 37–39; *Reading* 26–35). It is supported by many other reading scholars as well, including DeBenedictus, Manning and Manning, and Worthy, Turner, and Moorman. Deci and Flaste also consider it essential in the classroom because it helps promote intrinsic motivation and autonomy (34–36, 144–49). My own journey toward providing students with choice has been a long one. I highlight one assignment here that resulted from this important journey.

I have always wanted my English 93 students to love reading, but I was never willing to devote any class time to this important learning outcome. I also believed until recently that this was something students should really be able to get to on their own. For many years, I would simply tell students that they should love reading, and I thought that they would. Like most teachers, I felt as if I already had enough material to cover, and I would always think, “I just can't spare the time.”

I have recently changed my mind about this, though, and as a result I have developed an assignment that targets this learning outcome specifically—getting students to enjoy reading. My thinking now is this: “If I really believe this is an important outcome for my courses—if I really want students to read on their own

for pleasure—I ought to have an assignment that specifically targets that outcome.” So learning how to “read for pleasure” and seeing reading as enjoyable are the two major things I am after here. I also want students to begin to see the library for the miraculous and amazing place it is. So in response to this thinking, I developed the following book review activity, with the goal of designing a “book report” assignment that even Casey’s Mom could love:

### **Essay #3: Book Review!**

For this assignment, I am asking you select a book from the library about a subject that interests you. It can be fiction, poetry, biography, a graphic novel, a book about art or food or national parks—anything that you are interested in. Once you have done this, I would like you to write a review of the book that will include the following:

1. An interesting and creative introduction that will get readers interested in reading your review.
2. Author, title, publication date, and subject.
3. Why you selected this book.
4. What you found interesting in this book.
5. What you enjoyed in this book.
6. What you learned from this book.
7. Please include at least two quotes from your book and discuss why you found these quotations important or interesting.
8. Your overall assessment of the book.

The guidelines are as follows:

1. The book cannot be one you are reading for another class.
2. The book cannot be one that you’ve read before.
3. I would like this book to be one you’ve always wanted to read or about a subject you’ve always wanted to know more about.
4. You may also purchase a book at a bookstore or borrow it from your home library or a friend.

Your focus here should be on enjoyment! Have some fun! You can organize your review however you want—but I want you to think creatively and remember that you are writing for an audience, as we will be posting these reviews on our class website. Reviews should be approximately 750 words in length.

Each student will also be presenting a 2-minute speech on the book they have chosen to read.

To prepare for this assignment, about a week before we begin this activity I survey my students about their reading practices and what subjects interest them. I then personalize my feedback to them as we look around the library. Here are some comments my students made last semester about the subjects they wanted to read about:

- > Society, psychological issues, urban life, political issues, other cultures, their beliefs and way of life.

- > I would like to read about a true story, nothing fiction.
- > I would like to read about something exciting or a bio on someone.
- > I want to read more, but not sure what I want to read about.
- > I like to read about the military.
- > I do not like books, books make me tired and bored. I hate books so I do not want to read any book.

Once we are in the library, I meet with students individually and help them find a book they are happy with. Some students choose urban fiction, some choose books about sports, some choose popular novels, and some surprise me with what they pick. I let students choose anything they want. If I can see a spark of interest and enthusiasm, then I know they have the right book.

This activity is also designed to address our national “aversion to reading” problem, a problem linked in many important ways to our “aversion to writing” problem. As Worthy, Turner, and Moorman suggest, research related to student reading is not encouraging:

While most children begin their school careers with positive attitudes toward reading, many show a steady decline in reading attitudes and voluntary reading as they progress through school (Allington, 1975; McKenna, Ellsworth, & Kerr, 1995; Shapiro & White, 1991). Negative attitudes become especially prevalent beginning in middle and high school years (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; Cline & Kretke, 1980). In fact, according to a report from the California Department of Education (cited in Morrow, 1991), 70% of the over 200,000 sixth graders surveyed almost never read for pleasure. Other researchers paint similarly bleak pictures of students’ leisure reading. (296)

I think it is imperative that we design and implement curriculum to reverse this unfortunate trend.

I am also attempting with this assignment simply to plant seeds that may flower later in students’ lives or careers, even if they do not bear the immediate fruit of turning students instantly into voracious readers.

Following this activity, I do a satisfaction survey to see what students like about this assignment and what they learned from it. Most really enjoy it. Here is a representative sampling of this feedback:

- > I enjoyed reading what I wanted.
- > I learned books are different than movies.
- > I enjoyed the assignment because it was a nice break from all the hardcore college books. It was fun.
- > I learned that everyone has a different preference in what they like to read for fun. Each was unique in its own way.
- > Yes, I liked my book.
- > Yes, I liked it because we got to pick whatever we wanted to read. It was nice to have a little freedom.
- > Yes, I enjoyed the opportunity to read what I chose.
- > I learned that there are lots of books in the library that I would like to read.



In terms of course design and the overall rhythm and trajectory of this class, I place this assignment immediately after the most challenging assignment of the semester, as a kind of palate cleanser and enjoyable interlude before we begin the intense final weeks of the semester. As one of the comments above suggest, students are very aware of pacing and rhythm issues in classes (“I enjoyed the assignment because it was a nice break from all the hardcore college books. It was fun.”). I find that this break allows students to concentrate more fully and with more engagement on the final writing projects to come.

## **Disguising Repetitions**

### **The Bonnie Awards**

I believe the testimony from our student contributors to volume 2 of *What Is “College-Level” Writing?* tells us a great deal about the value of disguising repetitions. They have shown us how powerfully these kinds of creative assignments can affect student engagement, motivation, and learning. I think there is a great deal we have to gain from thinking creatively and designing activities that “disguise repetitions” in our classrooms—that is, developing assignments that require students to read, write, and think, but that do so in ways that are creative and nontraditional. I would like to see us make this a central part of curriculum development at all levels of English instruction.

One of the ways that I disguise repetitions in my English 93 class is a playful awards ceremony I have developed called the Bonnie Awards (named after my daughter). I have found this activity does a great deal to nurture intrinsic motivation.

Before I describe this activity, it would be useful to first discuss what we know about “rewards,” a subject which Kohn has written about extensively. I think it is important for teachers interested in nurturing intrinsic motivation to have a clear understanding of what the current research says about rewards, as this is a subject that routinely comes into play in all sorts of ways in our classrooms and schools (the honor roll, the National Honor Society, Phi Theta Kappa, the dean’s list, the president’s list). As the title of his best-known book suggests, Kohn has argued famously that students are “punished by rewards” because “rewards undermine interest” (140). Again, I believe that Kohn makes a very important point here. Reward systems that seek to “bribe” students into controlling or improving behavior and performance will be effective only in the short term—and they will often actually do more damage than good to long-term motivation and learning. And this kind of incentivization can never be as powerful or as transformative as intrinsic motivation in terms of a student’s long-term success. But as with the issue of “praise,” more recent research related to rewards has complicated our understanding of how students respond to rewards. Research has shown, for example, that certain kinds of rewards can be worthwhile and can nurture intrinsic motivation. There are a number of variables that come into play here, as Deci, Koestner, and Ryan suggest, including the age of the student and how a student perceives the intention of a reward:

For more than 25 years, we have argued that predictions about the effects of rewards necessitate a differentiated analysis of how the rewards are likely to be interpreted by the recipients based on a consideration on the type of rewards (Deci, 1971, 1975), the type of contingency [i.e., what kind of performance or behavior is required to earn the reward] (Ryan et al., 1983), the type of participants (Deci et al., 1975), and the type of interpersonal climate within which the rewards are administered (Deci, Nexlek, et al., 1981; Ryan et al., 1983). (658)

Rewards can function in different ways, and this is particularly dependent on how students perceive the intention of these rewards—their “functional significance” (Deci, Koestner, and Ryan 628). Rewards that are perceived to control or influence behavior and self-determination will have a negative effect on intrinsic motivation. Rewards that are “positively informational”—that is, rewards that are used as “indicators of competence” (628)—can be positive motivators: “where rewards are positively informational, they are predicted to provide satisfaction of the need for competence and thus to enhance motivation” (628; see also Ryan, Mims, and Koestner).

The Bonnie Awards were designed with these kinds of variables in mind, and this activity has been designed in a way that is consistent with what research tells us about nurturing intrinsic motivation. After students submit their work for one of my major assignments (usually my second major assignment, around midterm), essays that have earned a B+ or better are presented to the class as our Bonnie Award nominees. I copy these essays and distribute them to students along with a Bonnie Award ballot. Everyone in class is asked to submit votes in five categories:

1. Best Overall Performance by a Writer in an English 93 Class
2. Best Engagement of the Big Ideas in the Readings
3. Best Use of Readings
4. Best Introduction
5. Most Fun to Read

I continue to be impressed each semester by how well this activity works. Intrinsic motivation for reading, writing, and thinking surges once students realize that someone other than me will read their work and that their work on this essay will have some meaning beyond “learning how to write.” Students also are usually eager to read the work of their peers. I am always surprised how much I am able to gain simply by framing a rather standard peer writing activity in this way.

In terms of the variables Deci, Koestner, and Ryan discuss related to rewards, this assignment has been designed to maximize impact on intrinsic motivation:

**The type of rewards:** These awards are symbolic and playful, and students clearly recognize this (and enjoy it).

**The type of contingency:** Students receive a letter grade for their essay independent of the Bonnie Awards. These awards are, in some important ways, simply extensions of grades they have already earned. Winners are selected by their classmates (not by me).

**The type of participants:** These are college students, and as Deci, Koestner, and Ryan note about “age effects,” “college students have greater cognitive capacity for separating the informational and controlling aspects of rewards” (656). My students clearly understand that this activity has been designed to motivate them to do their best writing, to reward excellent work, and to help them learn from other writers in the class.

**The interpersonal climate:** Again, the climate is playful, friendly, and supportive, and students understand and appreciate this.

This activity works in many positive ways. It provides me with an opportunity to recognize publicly excellent work in my class. It also provides students with an opportunity to read strong writing produced by their classmates. And it has proved to be an especially powerful learning activity for my less accomplished writers because they get to see how other students—some sitting right next to them—have responded successfully to the same assignment they struggled with. For many students, these essays often speak more eloquently and powerfully about good writing than anything I can say in class about it. It has proved to be a very powerful learning and teaching tool.

After students have read each of the essays and submitted their ballots, we discuss the essays together as a class. I ask students to identify the qualities that they liked about the essays they chose as winners, and we develop a rubric for “good writing” that comes out of this student work. Here is one such rubric that we developed from one of these discussions:

#### **Qualities You Liked about the Bonnie Award Essays**

1. Depth. Personal engagement.
2. Engaged readings effectively.
3. Used personal experience well (related to the readings; used experience to explore and discuss ideas in readings).
4. Used quotes from the readings. Then explained the quotes. Then discussed the quote and the meaning.
5. Good intro! Got my attention!
6. Flow! Stayed on topic. Good transitions. I got involved with reading it!
7. Juicy details! (“el concondido”/“Merengue and Bachata/palm trees, sunny beaches, colorful cement houses”).
8. Engaged me as a reader.
9. The writing is alive.
10. Good paragraphs and good grammar.
11. Rhythm.
12. Interesting to read.
13. The writer appears to care that the writing is interesting!

This is a pretty impressive rubric coming from basic writing students.

I complete this project with an Academy Award–style ceremony that I conduct to announce the winners in each category. I present Bonnie Awards that

I make myself to the winners. I've had students tell me with a smile long after a particular semester has ended that they still keep their Bonnie Awards proudly displayed in their homes. This activity orients student writers in a very positive way toward their work and toward each other. It is also simply a creative way to disguise repetitions—a way that invites students to read student writing and then talk about the components of good writing in ways that engage their attention and interest.

## **Conclusion**

Speaking about American high schools and the discouraging news coming from ACT about college readiness, Jack Jennings, president of the Center on Education Policy in Washington, D.C., recently touched on precisely this issue of intrinsic motivation: “We haven’t figured out how to improve them [high schools] on a broad scope and if our kids aren’t dropping out physically, they are dropping out mentally” (Banchemo). That’s very well said, it seems to me. The key phrase here, it seems to me, is “dropping out mentally.” As I argue in this essay, and as current research suggests, unless students are engaged, interested, and intrinsically motivated, the best curriculum in the world will not make much difference in terms of learning. Furthermore, if our goal is to create active and engaged life-long learners and to build a strong democracy full of thoughtful, curious, intellectually vibrant, and well-read adults, a great deal is at stake here in terms of what goes on in English classes. After all, this is the primary place where Americans learn to read, write, and think.

Since I have begun targeting intrinsic motivation in this way, I have noticed improved student engagement and performance. The pacing of my classes is different, and many students appear to be able to make it to the end of the class and still stay engaged. Students are also very perceptive and recognize the efforts I am making on their behalf in this regard. They have communicated to me in all sorts of ways how much they appreciate the nontraditional, “creative” curricular elements I have built into my classes, even as they recognize the value and importance of the more traditional work we do together.

I think there is probably less urgency to concern ourselves with intrinsic motivation in upper-level and advanced placement classes, as the students who have made it to these curricular levels have already demonstrated some degree of motivation and can be assumed to be ready to focus on serious business—although I personally think it is important to target intrinsic motivation at all curricular levels. (I do so in all my courses, including the upper-level college courses I teach.) But for students in basic writing classes in college, for students in high school English classes, and for all those students in K–8 English classes, I think it is very clear that there is much we need to do in terms of nurturing intrinsic motivation.

As English teachers, we have in our care the most potent of all human creations—written language. We need to provide opportunities for students to experience for themselves the joy of reading and the power of language to move, transform, and inspire. It is a privilege to be given this task. Let us begin finding ways to light this “fire”—so that reading and writing become an essential and beloved part of our students’ lives.

## Works Cited

- Achieve, Inc. *Closing the Expectations Gap 2007: An Annual 50-State Progress Report on the Alignment of High School Policies with the Demands of College and Work*. 2007. Web. 8 May 2009.
- American Association of Colleges and Universities. *College Learning for the New Global Century*. Washington: AACU, 2007. Print.
- American College Testing Program [ACT]. *The Condition of College and Career Readiness 2010*. 2010. Web. 27 Nov. 2010.
- Anderman, Eric M., and Lynley Hicks Anderman. *Classroom Motivation*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2009. Print.
- Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle*. 2nd ed. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1998. Print.
- . *The Reading Zone*. New York: Scholastic, 2007. Print.
- Banchero, Stephanie. "Scores Stagnate at High Schools." *Wall Street Journal* 16 Aug. 2010. Web. 26 Nov. 26 2010.
- Bloom, Lynn Z. "The Essay Canon." *College English* 61.4 (1999): 401–30. Print.
- Breneman, D. W., and W. N. Haarlow. "Remediation in Higher Education: A Symposium Featuring Remedial Education: Costs and Consequences." *Fordham Report* 2.9 (1998): 1–22. Print.
- Brodkey, Linda. "Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only." *Higher Education under Fire*. Ed. Michael Berube and Cary Nelson. New York: Routledge, 1995. 214–37. Print.
- Curtis, Marcia, and Anne Herrington. "Writing Development in the College Years: By Whose Definition?" *College Composition and Communication* 55.1 (2003): 69–90. Print.
- DeBenedictus, Deb. "Sustained Silent Reading: Making Adaptations." *Voices from the Middle* 14.3 (2007): 29–37. Print.
- Deci, Edward L., and Richard Flaste. *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*. New York: Penguin, 1996. Print.
- Deci, Edward L., Richard Koestner, and Richard M. Ryan. "A Meta-Analytic Review of Experiments Examining the Effects of Extrinsic Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation." *Psychological Bulletin* 125.6 (1999): 627–68.
- Deci, Edward L., and Richard M Ryan, eds. *Handbook of Self-Determination Research*. Rochester: U of Rochester P, 2002. Print.
- . *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. New York: Plenum, 1985. Print.
- Eisner, Elliot W. *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2004. Print.

- Flower, Linda. "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing." *College English* 41.1 (1979): 19–37. Print.
- Kohn, Alfie. *The Case against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000. Print.
- . *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993. Print.
- Larsen, Lindsay. "Disappearing into the World of Books." Sullivan, Tinberg, and Blau 280–92. Print.
- Lindblom, Ken, ed. *Motivating Students*. Spec. issue of *English Journal* 100.1 (2010). Print.
- Lujan, Alfredo. "The Salem Witch Trials: Voice(s)." *What Is "College-Level" Writing?* Sullivan, Tinberg, and Blau 41–57. Print.
- Lunsford, Andrea, and Karen Lunsford. "'Mistakes Are a Fact of Life': A National Comparative Study." *College Composition and Communication* 59.4 (2008): 781–806. Print.
- Maliszewski, Casey. "Home Schooled." Sullivan, Tinberg, and Blau 257–66. Print.
- Manning, G. L., and M. Manning. "What Models of Recreational Reading Make a Difference?" *Reading World* 23.4 (1984): 375–80. Print.
- Perlstein, Linda. *Tested: One American School Struggles to Make the Grade*. New York: Holt, 2007. Print.
- Pink, Daniel. *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*. New York: Riverhead, 2009. Print.
- Ryan, Richard M., Richard Koestner, and Edward Deci. "Ego-Involved Persistence: When Free-Choice Behavior Is Not Intrinsically Motivated." *Motivation and Emotion* 15 (1991): 185–205. Print.
- Ryan, Richard M., Valerie Mims, and Richard Koestner. "Relation of Reward Contingency and Interpersonal Context to Intrinsic Motivation: A Review and Test Using Cognitive Evaluation Theory." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45.4 (1983): 736–50. Print.
- Ryan, Richard M., and Cynthia L. Powelson. "Autonomy and Relatedness as Fundamental to Motivation and Education." *Journal of Experimental Education* 60 (1991): 49–66. Print.
- Saxon, D. Patrick, and Hunter R. Boylan. "The Cost of Remedial Education in Higher Education." *Journal of Developmental Education* 25.2 (2001): 2–8. Print.
- Smith, Michael W., and Jeffery D. Wilhelm. *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys: Literacy in the Lives of Young Men*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002. Print.
- Strong American Schools. *Diploma to Nowhere*. Washington: Strong American Schools, 2008. Print.

- Sullivan, Patrick. "An Open Letter to Ninth Graders." *Academe* January/February 2009: 6–10. Print.
- . "What Can We Learn about 'College-Level' Writing from Basic Writing Students? The Importance of Reading." Sullivan, Tinberg, and Blau 233–53. Print.
- Sullivan, Patrick, Howard Tinberg, and Sheridan Blau, eds. *What Is "College-Level" Writing?* Vol. 2: *Assignments, Readings, and Sample Student Writing*. Urbana: NCTE, 2010. Print.
- United States. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Profile of Undergraduate Students: 2007–08*. Table 6.2: Percentage of first- and second-year undergraduates who reported ever taking a remedial course after high school graduation. 2010. Web. 27 Nov. 2010.
- . *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*. Washington: U.S. Department of Education, 2006. Web.
- Venezia, Andrea, Michael Kirst, and Anthony Antonio. *Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected K–12 and Postsecondary Education Systems Undermine Student Aspirations*. Final Policy Report from Stanford University's Bridge Project, 2003. Web.
- Worthy, Jo, Margo Turner, and Megan Moorman. "The Precarious Place of Self-Selected Reading." *Language Arts* 75.4 (1998): 296–304. Print.

---

Patrick Sullivan teaches English at Manchester Community College in Manchester, Connecticut.