Abstract

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From the Editor

Fifty years. Five decades. Half a century. Half a lifetime. However you look at it, fifty years is a long time. Fifty years of literacy research is what is contained in the archives of *Reading Horizons*. Hundreds of authors, studies, abstracts, methodologies, implications, and conclusions all centered around literacy — reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing. These fifty volumes contain a wealth of knowledge accumulated from around the world, voices of researchers and teachers all focused on understanding literacy theory and improving literacy practice. What a treasure.

This two hundredth issue of *Reading Horizons* continues this fine tradition of presenting literacy research and practice in an easily accessible format as we present three articles and another book review by our avid readers, Terry Young and Barbara Ward. This issue begins with a review of the last fifty years of research and practice in guided reading as Michael Ford and Michael Opitz define and analyze this vibrant, ever-changing reading strategy. A reprint of a chapter in the book *Guided Reading: Then and Now* (2008), the authors do an excellent job of discussing how guided reading evolved to become a common practice in classrooms around the world. As they discuss their own perspectives on guided reading, they remind us of some fundamental understandings that we need to remember. For example, *all* children have the ability to become literate and the fact that guided reading is but *one* component of an effective reading program.

Sara Helfrich and Rita Bean describe their study in what really matters in preparing pre-service teachers to be teachers of reading as they asked their students to identify which components of their education — coursework, field experience, or collaboration — had the most impact on their feelings of preparedness to teach reading. In a fascinating discussion on the importance of collaboration, the authors stress that the relationship between teacher candidate, collaborating teacher, and university supervisor must be made explicit as our pre-service teachers must know that they have support from many quarters. As has been seen over the past half-century (and well before that), teaching reading is a complex, time intensive process that, as Helfrich and Bean assert, demands that we prepare our future teachers through expert instruction and relevant hands-on experiences in classrooms.

Jane Kelley and Janine Darragh present us with a harsh reality that, unfortunately, has been with us for far more than fifty years — poverty. The authors analyzed 58 realistic fiction children’s picture books that portray people living in poverty using
recent U.S. Census Bureau data. Living in a time of economic crisis makes this research all the more pertinent as our classrooms fill with children living in poverty who need support. This article maintains that support can come through reading relevant picture books that show correct portrayals of their lives. Ending with an extensive list of picture books, this article is an important resource for educators and researchers.

Barbara Ward and Terry Young keep us abreast of the latest in literature at all levels and, keeping in our tradition, they treat us to examples of Graphic Novels, demonstrating one of the ways that literature has changed over the past fifty years. From Spiegelman’s (1987) *Maus* to Yang’s (2008) *American Born Chinese*, the genre has evolved from Archie comic books to full-blown novels and non-fiction research, becoming a staple of reading for students of all ages. Readers will surely find something interesting to read and revel in the stunning visual images contained in these Graphic Novels.

Fifty years certainly may seem like a lifetime but when it comes to the field of reading, it is but a brief moment in time. Who knows what tomorrow might bring? Reading is ever-changing as new formats, genres, and topics are always just beyond the horizon. So here’s to the next fifty years of *Reading Horizons* — may we read and learn more everyday and may our readers continue to wonder and ask questions that will lead to new understandings in our remarkable profession.

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Kalamazoo, MI

There is no more crucial or basic skill in all of education than reading.
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Guided reading is used in classrooms across the country and, while it is fairly new, it is anything but revolutionary. In this article, and in honor of the 50th volume of Reading Horizons, the authors take a look back at the 50-year history of this practice, provide a definition of guided reading, analyze what caused the practice to change, and discuss their own perspectives and predict the future of guided reading.

Introduction

Guided reading is perhaps one of the most common elements of today’s reading programs as most descriptions of comprehensive literacy programs now include guided reading as one of the essential components (Cunningham, Hall, & Cunningham, 2000; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Although there is a tendency to view it as a fairly new practice, it is anything but revolutionary. This is not to say that guided reading has remained exactly the same over the years, that it was used for the same reasons, or that it was used with the same intensity. All three have fluctuated throughout time. In this article, we take a 50-year look at guided reading through representative influential writers of the time whose textbooks were used to teach teachers how to teach reading. Several of these authors were also authors of the commercial materials (i.e., basal readers) that were mass-produced and used in classrooms so the ideas they set forth in their textbooks found their way into the materials that teachers used to teach children.

There is no question that guided reading was more prevalent in some decades (e.g., 1940-1970, late 1990s-present) over others (e.g., 1980, early 1990s). However, we couch this prevalence in terms of how much it was emphasized in the professional
literature and in courses of study such as university courses and professional development courses designed to educate teachers on the latest teaching techniques. That being said, the popularity of guided reading (or any reading topic for that matter) in the professional literature may or may not play out in individual teachers’ classrooms. Our own teaching experiences as well as working with numerous teachers have helped us to see that teachers use what they see working with their students regardless of how “hot” or not the technique might be. To accomplish our purpose, this article is divided into four parts: What is Guided Reading?, What Caused It to Change?, What is Our Perspective?, and Where Do We See It Headed?

What is Guided Reading?

Harris and Hodges (1995) offer the following definition of guided reading in The Literacy Dictionary: “reading instruction in which the teacher provides the structure and purpose for reading and for responding to the material read. Note: Most basal reading programs have guided reading lessons. See also directed reading activity.”

Their definition takes us back 50 years to the 1940s when Emmett Betts, a prominent reading educator of the time, put forth the directed reading activity. In his now classic text, Foundations of Reading Instruction (1946), Betts elaborated on the importance of providing students with direction in order to best help them learn how to read. Guided reading was the second of four basic principles of the directed reading activity.

Table 1. Betts’ Directed Reading Activity (1946, pp. 430-431)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Prepare students for reading the selection. | • To ascertain students’ background for the given text.  
• To help students build background for the text if none or little exists.  
• To help students relate their backgrounds to the story at hand thereby creating interest and reading for meaning.  
• To help children make connections with previous stories.  
• To help children with any unique words they might encounter.  
• To establish a purpose for reading. |
| 2. Silent reading of the selection precedes oral reading. | • To get the “wholeness” of the story.  
• To help students learn to apply what they know to decode unknown words and to apply comprehension skills asking for help when necessary. |
3. Rereading, either silent or oral, for new purposes. • To promote fluency, foster rhythmical reading, and to relate details to the big idea.

4. Follow-up activities to meet the needs and interests of students • To develop organization skills and promote efficient study habits.

In their book *Teaching Children to Read, 2nd Ed.* (1957), Lillian Gray and Dora Reese echoed Betts’ view and went so far as to use the term *guided reading* in their explanation of how to conduct a reading lesson. As with Betts, their explanation is grounded in the basal readers being used at the time. In their words,

Teachers should follow the four lesson steps in the manuals to help their children extract all the values possible from a given story. These steps include preparation for the story, *guided reading* (emphasis added) of the story skills and drills for word analyses and vocabulary, and follow-up activities for applying new ideas. (p. 155)

More specifically, they delineate exactly what should happen during guided reading, the second step.

**Table 2. Step 2. Guided Reading. Based on Gray & Reese, (1957, p. 156)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Procedure</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Ask the major motivating question.</td>
<td>• Helps children see a reason or purpose for reading.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| B. Ask other questions to guide the children through the story. | • Helps children have a purpose for reading a given part of the story.  
• Depending on question, helps children to read silently, to visualize character, scene and action.  
• Helps build self-reliance because the children rely on themselves to find answers to questions.  
• When asked to read answers to questions, helps children to satisfy their need to achieve and to share. |
| C. Answer the major motivating question. | • Meets children’s need to resolve tension by finding the answer to a question. |

Nearly 10 years later, Bond and Wagner (1966) also called attention to guided reading in their nine-step daily reading lesson plan. Here’s what they have to say about their fourth step, Guiding the Silent Reading:

Now the children should read independently the selection for the purposes that have been established. If adequate preparation for read-
ing the selection has been made, the children will be able to read with comfort and in a way to fulfill the established purposes... Any child who gets into difficulty should be allowed to ask the teacher for help so that he may proceed. (p. 124)

George and Evelyn Spache were two reading authorities in the 1980s who carried on the ideas previously set forth about guided reading. In their book, *Reading in the Elementary School, 5th Ed.* (1986), they outlined five steps as part of a typical basal primary reading lesson: introduction of vocabulary, silent reading, oral reading, skill building, and supplementary activities. The second step focuses on guided reading.

**Table 3. Step 2: Silent Reading (Guided Reading, Guiding Interpretation, Developing Pupil Purposes) of a Basal Reading Lesson (Spache & Spache, 1986, p. 58-61)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Procedure</th>
<th>Suggested Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Create prereading practice.</td>
<td>• Help children locate information such as where the story begins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Help children to draw inferences about the story by looking at the introductory picture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Set the purpose for reading by raising questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Have students read the story.</td>
<td>• Either in segments or by the whole, have students read the story to themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• While they read, provide assistance as needed encouraging students to apply what they know about decoding, using picture clues, or using context clues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Guided reading caught our attention once again in the early 1990s when Margaret Mooney addressed it in her book *Reading To, With, and By Students* (1990). Mooney argued that guided reading was a way to read with students meeting instructional needs that could not be accomplished when teachers read aloud to students or when students were reading by themselves. With the 1996 publication of Fountas and Pinnell’s book *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Students*, guided reading began to shift from being an instructional technique to use with small groups to a way of defining small group instruction. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) identified the following essential elements of guided reading:

- Teacher works with children in small groups who are similar in their development and are able to read about the same level of text.
• Teacher introduces the stories and assists children’s reading in ways that help to develop reading strategies so children can reach the goal of being able to read independently and silently.

• Each child reads whole texts with an emphasis on reading increasingly challenging books over time.

• Children are grouped and regrouped in a dynamic process that involves ongoing observation and assessment.

Since then, many others have defined essential elements of guided reading (Booth, 1998; Calkins, 2000; Cunningham & Hall, 2000; Opitz & Ford, 2001; Routman, 2000). Regardless of decade or author, all agree that guided reading is planned, intentional, focused instruction where the teacher helps students, usually in small group settings, learn more about the reading process.

What Caused Guided Reading to Change?

The history of guided reading has been significantly impacted by the role and nature of small group instruction in elementary reading programs. Small group reading instruction organized with homogenous ability groups was the predominant feature of elementary reading programs during most of the past 50 years (Caldwell & Ford, 2002). The infamous three reading groups — high, middle, and low — with not so subtle names — bluebirds, robins, and crows — were pervasive in reading classrooms. Research, however, revealed that grouping children by ability was fraught with problems (Barr, 1995; Opitz, 1998). Research-based concerns documenting arbitrary selection standards, inequitable access to quality meaning-based instruction, and long-lasting negative social stigma, however, did little to derail this questionable practice.

Again the problems with this practice had less to do with the actual grouping format and more to with the nature of instruction during the small groups. The type of guided instruction we documented advocated by Betts (1946) and others rarely captured the typical instruction in ability groups. This was true even when teachers were using the basal materials these experts were involved in designing. In her classic study, Durkin (1979) observed that small group instruction was basal-driven and that teacher-directed round-robin oral reading followed by literal-level questions was more often than not the type of instruction found. There was very little guided reading taking place in these groups.
While Durkin’s (1979) study started to raise concerns, it was the publication of *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (BANOR) (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985) that finally became the catalyst for change. Summarizing the overwhelming negative research on ability grouping, BANOR reported that some scholars suggested that the reading group in which a child was initially placed had more to do with his or her reading achievement than his or her actual ability. Concluding that educators needed to explore other options than ability grouping, many basal publishers and educators moved toward more flexible grouping formats. Unfortunately, whole group instruction seemed to dominate these formats. While this did address concerns about ability grouping, it simply substituted one set of major concerns for another as the exclusive use of whole group instruction with little differentiation meant that many students were spending very little time with appropriate instructional materials. Some educators tried to help teachers by developing models for differentiating within whole class models (Paratore, 1990). These models tried to integrate guided reading within whole class instruction (Caldwell & Ford, 2002), but most classroom instruction failed to achieve this end goal. Within a few years, most educators were back looking for alternatives to yet another flawed grouping practice.

The pendulum swung back. After struggling with how to accommodate individual differences in whole group instruction, teachers rediscovered the value of using small groups to differentiate instruction in their reading programs. Now the challenge was how to return to small group reading instruction without returning to all the problems that caused people to move away from the practice in the first place. Conceiving of small group reading instruction as guided reading seemed to provide that needed new direction. Clearly influenced by the work that was being accomplished in individual and small group intervention programs, Fountas and Pinnell (1996) suggested guided reading as a classroom-based practice that would provide good first teaching for all children. They proposed that this might reduce the number of children who would need intervention programs away from the classrooms.

So how is guided reading different from the homogenous small group reading instruction of the past? Some changes, such as the change in materials, are fairly obvious. In the past basal readers were the primary reading sources for teaching children to read and most often authors wrote stories for the basal using a given number of words per story. But, while basal readers continued to be the mainstay of the reading material used to teach reading, the content became quite
Looking Back to Move Forward with Guided Reading

... different as some included children’s literature, either the entire book or a chapter from the book. As guided reading gained popularity, basal reading programs included separately packaged sets of leveled readers specifically designed for this aspect of reading programs.

Some changes are more subtle and less obvious. A veteran teacher recently asked, “Weren’t the reading groups we used in the past leveled? How is this any different from what we used to do?” Clearly the difference is not in the size or make-up of the groups. What the teacher was questioning surfaces a concern that we share. If teachers have subscribed to a view of guided reading that emphasizes the use of text levels as the primary way to group children, what we frequently see is a return to ability grouping. Even when teachers go beyond text levels, guided reading groups can become static because when we rely on ability grouping in guided reading, we are apt to create problems. One problem that could resurface is the debilitating effect of labeling. Continual reference to these levels could work to label the group in much the same way the traditional labels (bluebirds, robins, and crows) of years past did.

So how do we prevent the return of these problems? The difference needs to be in the nature of the instruction provided in the small homogenous groups (Hornsby, 2000; Schulman & Payne, 2000). Theoretically we see a significant shift from transmission models of learning to transactional models of learning. Instruction moves from being based on skill-based behaviorism to strategy-based constructivism as the key focus is no longer on covering materials, it is on teaching learners. Assessment is an ongoing process that informs decisions about who to teach, what to teach, what materials to use, and how to teach what is needed. Assessment-informed instruction should mean that small groups in guided reading will be organized in a much more fluid, flexible manner avoiding the static, fixed memberships of the ability groups of the past (The Wright Group, 1996).

The very term guided suggests a type of instruction that would be less about teachers transmitting information and more about teachers coaching students. This difference is especially critical when research reveals that the frequent use of “coaching during reading” may be one of the most significant distinctions between highly effective schools and moderately or less effective schools (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999). In instructional models that advocate a gradual release of responsibility (Au & Raphael, 1998; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Wilhelm, 2001), demonstrations are described as an explicit form of instruction in which the teacher has more
responsibility than the learner. Guided instruction suggests a form of instruction in which the learner shares the responsibility with the teacher.

In guided reading, scaffolding becomes the metaphor for teaching and learning. Scaffolding enables teachers not only to determine where learners are developmentally — but also where they need to be — so that teachers can plan sensitive, responsive instruction that provides a bridge between these two points. Boyle and Peregoy (1998) list five criteria defining the literacy scaffold model; these criteria:

- are applied to reading and writing activities aimed at functional, meaningful communication found in entire texts;
- make use of language and discourse patterns that repeat themselves and are therefore predictable;
- provide a model, offered by the teacher or by peers, for comprehending and providing particular written language patterns;
- support students in comprehending and producing written language at a level slightly beyond their competence in the absence of the scaffold; and
- are temporary and may be dispensed with when the student is ready to work without them. (p. 152)

Clearly the return to the use of small homogenous groups means that teachers and students in guided reading groups should sound, look, and act differently from the way they did in ability groups of the past.

Now that guided reading has been used for over 10 years, several individuals have addressed how guided reading can be adapted to other existing instructional models and formats (Cunningham, Hall, & Cunningham, 2000), how it can be adapted to other grade levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Fawson & Reutzel, 2001), what problems are emerging with the practice (Routman, 2000), and how second generation models might address these concerns (Opitz & Ford, 2001). Some have already suggested that we have reached a time in which we should move beyond guided reading (Mere, 2005).

**What Is Our Perspective on Guided Reading?**

Our 50-year look has helped us identify the following 11 common understandings about guided reading that have stood the test of time.
1. All children have the ability to become literate. Every child is ready to learn something and our job as teachers is to determine what the child already knows, what the child needs to learn, and to design instruction accordingly.

2. All children need to be taught by a skilled teacher in order to maximize their full potential in reading. Good teaching matters every step of the way. This is especially true for those children who need our help the most. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) comment,

   Children who are having difficulty learning to read do not, as a rule, require qualitatively different instruction from children who are “getting it.” Instead, they more often need application of the same principles by someone who can apply them expertly to individual children who are having difficulty for one reason or another. (p. 12)

3. The goal of guided reading is to help children become independent readers. The whole purpose of providing children with guided reading experiences is to help them become independent readers as quickly as possible.

4. Guided reading is but one component of an effective reading program. The purpose of guided reading is to show children how to read and to provide a scaffold (i.e., support) for them as they read. An effective literacy program also includes reading aloud by the teacher, shared reading, and independent reading by students. Elements of the reading program are enhanced by comparable elements in the writing program and the use of content instruction as additional opportunities for reading-writing strategies.

5. Reading for meaning is the primary goal of guided reading. The instruction is designed to help children construct meaning. Betts (1946) noted years ago,

   During the first reading the child is encouraged to ask for any kind of help he needs. To stimulate interest, to enlist effort, and to cause the child to come to grips with the meaning,
this silent reading is guided by suggestions, comments, and questions. (p. 508)

6. *Children learn to read by reading.* They need to do more reading at their independent and instructional levels to become competent readers. There is general agreement that when children read with 95-100% word accuracy and 75-100% comprehension, they are reading at their *independent level.* When children read with 91-94% word accuracy and 60-75% comprehension, they are reading at their *instructional level.* At the same time, we must acknowledge the complexity of variables that intersect when an individual comprehends. A child might very well be reading a book well beyond his or her “level” one day and the next day struggle with an “on level” book. Many factors contribute to the successful reading of a text and some of those factors relate to the text, others to the reader, and still others to the context in which the reading occurs. The interaction of these three variables accounts for the relative success of each particular reading experience (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Leslie & Jett, 1997).

7. *Children need to become metacognitive: knowing what they know; the why and how of reading.* Children need to know what they know. They need to become aware of how reading works and they need to be able to use this knowledge to make the reading process work for them. This is called metacognition (McNeil, 1987). Research shows that when children are aware of their reading behaviors, they make good progress (Brown & Palinscar, 1982; Paris, 1983; Raphael, 1982; Wong & Jones, 1982). Pressley (2005) found that exemplary teachers who had the greatest impact on primary students’ performance and achievement promoted this self-regulation.

8. *Children need to develop a self-extending system in order to be independent readers.* One of the ways to nurture students as independent readers is to question and model specific reading strategies. Guidance leads children to internalize specific strategies they can use independently to successfully read a text. Once internalized, they use the strategy(ies) they feel best fit to
help them solve the problem at hand. Most often, one strategy will not work in all situations; they are able to monitor themselves and choose from a range of strategies because they have developed a “self-extending system” (Clay, 1991, p. 325).

9. **All children need to be exposed to higher level thinking activities.** Learning how to retell story events either orally or in writing; discussing important events in a specific reading selection; listening and responding to others’ views of a given reading selection; rereading text to find evidence to support a point of view — all of these tasks call on students to think about what they have read and to make connections with themselves, their world, and other texts.

10. **Children need to experience joy and delight as a result of the reading experience.** One of our main goals in providing children with different guided reading experiences is to show them that reading can be enjoyable and something they would want to do on their own. We are not only teaching children to read, we are also teaching children to be readers. Obtaining this positive disposition toward reading and writing may be even more critical in sustaining children’s efforts and achievement than the acquisition of the skills of reading (Dahl & Freppon, 1995). As children experience success with specific texts, they most often want to repeat the experience, which provides meaningful, purposeful practice that leads to a favorable view of reading (Cullinan, 1992; Gambrell, 1996; Opitz, 1995; Watson, 1997).

11. **Specific elements characterize the successful guided reading lesson.** It relies on a three-part lesson plan (Before/During/After Reading) with one focal point for the overall lesson and the use of specific teaching strategies at each phase of the lesson. Lessons should help children achieve independence with the teacher assisting and assessing individual children as needed. Recognizing that comprehension is the essence of reading and the importance of making sure that students gain this understanding, teachers should also engage children in a discussion about the texts they read.
Where Do We See Guided Reading Headed?

In addition to what we have learned from doing this brief historical sketch of guided reading, our view of the future of guided reading is shaped from extensive involvement in working with educators as they learned about, implemented, and evaluated their use of guided reading. We have also learned much from analyzing results of a recent national survey asking teachers to discuss issues and ideas related to their practice of guided reading (Ford & Opitz, 2005). While our perspective on guided reading encompasses many of the commonly accepted understandings, we recommend a wider array of guided reading experiences that open up new learning possibilities for teachers and students alike (Opitz & Ford, 2001). Here are some of the most critical problems we propose for further examination related to the future of guided reading:

1. How do we help educators develop a clearer understanding of the purposes of guided reading to avoid returning to the flawed grouping practices of the past?

2. How do we show educators how to foster connections between guided reading and the other components of the literacy program so that it isn’t seen by educators and/or learners as a separate component minimizing its potential impact and transfer of outcomes to other literacy experiences and contexts?

3. How can we explain and demonstrate different ways to integrate responding to texts during guided reading so that instruction moves beyond the micro-level of the text to foster attention on meaning-making at the global level of texts?

4. How do we help educators expand their text selections for use in guided reading to insure that students are working at their instructional levels and being exposed to a better mix of fiction, nonfiction, and alternative texts?

5. How do we develop independent learning opportunities away from the teacher that can rival the power of the guided reading instruction with the teacher (Ford & Opitz, 2004-2005)?

6. How do we help teachers integrate the variety of assessments that are available to them into a manageable system that they
will actually use to inform their thinking and impact during and beyond their guided reading instruction?

We encourage those interested in designing an in-depth staff development program to support teachers with implementing and improving guided reading practices to use some or all of these critical problems as focal points. Addressing these critical problems and documenting how they are addressed promises to contribute to the history of guided reading guaranteeing that the practice will continue to evolve.

Conclusion

While guided reading can be grounded in past theories and practices, it is also clear that current practice has been impacted by what we have learned from our concerns about traditional small-group reading instruction primarily seen in ability groups. We need to stand guard so that the popular return to small group reading instruction conceived as guided reading is not a return to the problematic practices of the past. This means expanding the view of what can happen during guided reading instruction. We must view the many discrete parts of guided reading — the texts, teacher, children, instruction — as a mosaic and understand the ways in which the parts contribute to an overall vision of the guided reading experience. We believe an expanded understanding of guided reading creates an instructional tool that more effectively nurtures and supports both reading and readers. As we look toward the future, we are discovering that there may be more than one way to implement effective guided reading instruction.

References


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**About the Authors:**

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What Matters: Preparing Teachers of Reading

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Abstract

A descriptive study was employed to determine differences in knowledge of literacy instruction and perceived preparedness to teach literacy between two groups of teacher candidates enrolled in two different teacher preparation programs at one university. This study investigated which components — coursework, field experience, and collaboration — candidates perceived as best preparing them to teach literacy while enrolled in their program. Data collection instruments included the Survey of Perceptions and the Knowledge Inventory. Both groups of candidates, regardless of program and amount of time in the field, viewed both coursework and field experience as important. Few significant differences were found between candidates in knowledge of literacy instruction. And, while they perceived themselves as prepared to teach literacy, candidates did identify areas of further instructional need.

Research in the field of teacher education is an issue of current attention and interest; within this research, a focus on literacy is particularly important. In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future (NCTAF) published its report titled What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future. In it, they point out the fragmentation of teacher preparation programs, noting that the “key elements of teacher learning are disconnected from each other. Coursework is separate from practice teaching; professional skills are segmented into separate courses... would-be teachers are left to their own devices to put it all together” (p. 32). Despite this fragmentation, they note that “research in education...sheds new light on ways
to improve student learning and understanding” (p. 32) and that “for new teachers, [improvement] begins with teacher preparation” (p. 31).

Anders, Hoffman, and Duffy (2000) noted that over the past 30 years, the number of studies focusing on pre-service reading education has greatly increased with each successive decade. However, the researchers noted that:

We have continued to struggle with conceptions of teacher knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and habits — how they are formed, how they are affected by programs, and how they impact development over time... and can make few claims from our current research base on what is effective in reading teacher education at the pre-service level. (pp. 725-726)

Anders et al. (2000) believe that more studies that address the literacy components of teacher education, as well as “more longitudinal studies of program effectiveness” (p. 278) are needed in order to better enable teacher educators to prepare teacher candidates.

The authors of this study proposed to continue what Anders et al. (2000) identified during their research as an important reading research opportunity: teacher education. The purpose of this study was twofold. First, the authors wanted to determine which elements of their teacher preparation program — coursework, field experience, and collaboration with others — teacher candidates’ perceived as most useful to their learning how to teach reading. Second, the authors sought to determine candidates’ knowledge of primary reading instruction and assessment. Participants in this study were enrolled in one of two graduate education programs at a large, urban university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do teacher candidates enrolled in two different preparation programs — a Master’s of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program and a Professional Year (PY) program — perceive specific aspects of their program: coursework, field experience, and collaboration with others?

2. How do teacher candidates enrolled in the MAT and PY programs perform on a test that measures knowledge of primary reading instruction?
Review of the Literature

A theme has emerged from a review of recent research regarding teacher preparation programs, showing that the most valuable elements of such programs for helping teacher candidates learn to teach literacy are coursework, including critical content knowledge (International Reading Association [IRA] Task Force, 2004; National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000), an integrated field component (Fang & Ashley, 2004; Levine, 2006; Massey, 2003; Nierstheimer, Hopkins, Dillon, & Schmitt, 2000; Sailors, Keenh, Martinez, & Harmon, 2005), and collaboration among teacher candidates, university instructors, and cooperating teachers (Frazier, Mencer, & Duchein, 1997; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Sailors et al., 2005).

Coursework requiring participation in a field experience, with components such as small- or whole-group instruction or tutoring, is an effective learning tool that allows teacher candidates to apply the knowledge they acquire in the university classroom to work in the elementary or secondary classroom (Cox, Fang, Carriveau, Dillon, Hopkins, & Nierstheimer, 1998; Hedrick, McGee, & Mittag, 2000; Linek, Nelson, Sampson, Zeek, Mohr, & Hughes, 1999; Massey, 2003). Having the opportunity to practice these newly acquired skills helps boost teacher candidates’ confidence as teachers of literacy (Commeyeas, Reinking, Heubach, & Pagnucco, 1993; Duffy & Atkinson, 2001; Fang & Ashley, 2004) and also helps to positively change preconceived attitudes toward struggling readers (Hollingsworth & Burnett, 1993; Nierstheimer et al., 2000). Levine (2006) calls for curricular balance stating “the curriculum integrates the theory and practice of teaching, balancing study in university classrooms and work in schools with successful practitioners” (p. 20).

Cochran-Smith and Powers (2010) take the notion of an integrated field experience a step further by asserting that mentored teaching experiences should be at the center of teacher preparation programs; Ball and Forzano (2009) agree, referring to this as a practice-focused curriculum, in which the emphasis would be on “repeated opportunities for [teacher candidates] to practice carrying out the interactive work of teaching and not just to talk about that work” (p. 503). Wold, Farnan, Grisham, and Lenski (2008) state, in their analysis of research on literacy teacher education, that,

Quality teacher preparation requires the development of a strong literacy knowledge base coupled with practical literacy teaching opportunities. This balance of research-based teaching and practice generates knowledgeable teachers who know literacy, can explain how to engage students effectively, and are secure in what they know and are able to do. (p. 14)
Further, recent research and theory have led various groups to specific concepts and ideas about the content knowledge teacher candidates need to know in order to become effective literacy teachers. An IRA Task Force (2004) developed standards, based on professional expertise and research in literacy instruction, that have been set forth strongly suggesting all teacher candidates know and demonstrate their understanding of foundational knowledge, instructional strategies, curriculum materials, and assessment, among other areas. The NRP (2000) identified, through extensive research, five critical areas of knowledge for instructing students—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Certainly teacher preparation programs must, at a minimum, include theory and practice in these five areas.

Another essential component of a comprehensive teacher preparation program is the relationship between teacher candidates, university instructors, and cooperating teachers—all members of the field experience triad (Frazier et al., 1997). Collaboration among all three members helps create an excellent environment in which teacher candidates can learn and work (Frazier et al., 1997; Harlin, 1999). But there must also be careful oversight of student teaching experiences (National Academy of Education, 2009) as university instructors need to strive for congruence between coursework and the field placement (Levine, 2006), or in the very least, help teacher candidates cope with a possible disparity (Dowhower, 1990). He and Levin (2008) contend that if matches or mismatches in beliefs among teacher educators, cooperating teachers, and teacher candidates could be identified, all parties could better understand each other’s perspectives and be better able to work together to maximize learning for everyone. In addition, collaboration between teacher candidates and cooperating teachers needs to increase (Bean, 2001; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Sturtevant & Spor, 1990; Wham, 1993), as there is much that can be learned by both partners in this relationship. Likewise, teacher candidates must be encouraged to talk with each other and share their experiences (Nierstheimer et al., 2000; Wedman, Kuhlman, & Guenther, 1996).

Although recent research supports each of these three elements—coursework, field experience, and collaboration—there are limitations in these areas. Risko, Roller, Cummins, Bean, Block, Anders, and Flood (2008), in their analysis of 82 studies focused on reading teacher education, found that while recent research supports the implementation of coursework with an integrated field component, it also brings to mind some questions. They found that when analyzing findings from the 36 studies focused on teacher candidates’ knowledge development, “prolonged engagement with [students] in field-placements is viewed as the catalyst for
reconstructing prior beliefs and refining pedagogical knowledge” (p. 267); however in some cases, teacher candidates “expressed a need for additional professional development in teaching methods associated with identified areas where they felt less knowledgeable” (p. 270). The authors found that teacher candidates were taught specific skills in their coursework and in the field, but they were unable to determine:

what knowledge about teaching [itself] was constructed during this instruction. [Were teacher candidates] learning a technical view of teaching over one that emphasizes decision-making and problem solving and that allows for different applications of the pedagogical knowledge they were developing? (Risko et al., 2008, p. 273)

While, in general, research shows that teacher candidates gain knowledge through coursework and use the field component to practice their newly acquired skills, not all studies show that teacher candidates’ beliefs change (Morgan, Gustafson, Hudson, & Salzberg, 1992; Worthy & Patterson, 2001).

While recent research supports the inclusion of field placements and close collaboration between teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, and university instructors, the research also points to possible discontinuity in these relationships. For example, teacher candidates may learn a reading strategy in the university classroom, but because it is not supported or is unfamiliar to their cooperating teacher, they will not use it in their work in the elementary classroom (Bean, 2001; Dowhower, 1990; Sturtevant & Spor, 1990). Bean (2001) found that teacher candidates’ use of reading strategies was most influenced by their cooperating teachers and was “regulated and sometimes minimized by [their] perceived understanding of their cooperating teachers’ desires” (pp. 161-162). Dowhower (1990) determined that there exists a discrepancy between what is taught in the university classroom and what teacher candidates experience in the field. To alleviate this program-to-field inconsistency, she suggests that university instructors can: explore cooperating teacher constraints; prepare teacher candidates for the dilemmas they may encounter in the classroom and give them alternatives to inappropriate literacy practices; and provide models within methods courses.

Framework of the Study

This study was framed using research that has been identified as crucial to the development of a successful teacher preparation program: coursework (content knowledge); field experiences closely related to coursework and content knowledge; and collaboration among members of the “triad” (Frazier et al., 1997) — teacher candidate, university supervisor or instructor, and cooperating teacher. This overall
construct of teacher preparation and reading education frames this research study. Figure 1 illustrates this concept portraying the relationship among the areas.

![Diagram of Teacher Preparation Program]

**Figure 1.** A comprehensive teacher preparation program.

In this article, the authors concentrate on an examination of two teacher preparation programs at one university, focusing on the literacy component of the programs and analyzing (a) differences in teacher candidates’ perceptions of aspects of their specific program upon completion of the program and (b) differences in the primary literacy knowledge base of teacher candidates in both programs.

**Method**

**Sample**

Teacher candidates from two graduate programs at a large, urban university were asked to participate in this study: 53 from the Master’s of Arts in Teaching (MAT) and 50 from the Professional Year (PY) programs (N=103). Candidates in both programs are new to teaching; that is, none have previously obtained their teaching license or taught in a classroom. These programs differ primarily in length of time spent both in the university classroom and in the field working with K-6 students, as well as with the final degree candidates obtain upon completion of their
studies. While all graduates, regardless of program, receive their teaching license, only those candidates in the MAT program receive their master’s degree. Given the time commitment of the MAT program, the PY program may serve as a good option for those that want to become certified to teach but are not yet ready to pursue a master’s degree. Graduates of the PY program may, however, use a portion of their credits toward the pursuit of a master’s degree at a later date, if they so choose.

Teacher candidates enrolled in both programs were predominantly female (72.8%) and Caucasian (91.5%), but they differed in background, specifically in age, previous education, and program entry requirements such as undergraduate grade point average and PRAXIS reading and writing scores. MAT teacher candidates were typically older than their PY peers (27.4 years versus 23.4 years; range for MAT, 21-39; range for PY, 20-49). While all teacher candidates in both programs had obtained their bachelor’s degree, three PY teacher candidates held Master’s degrees in non-education related fields. Teacher candidates from the MAT program had, on average, a higher undergraduate GPA than those enrolled in the PY program. Conversely, PY teacher candidates had a higher average score on both the PRAXIS Reading and PRAXIS Writing exams than their MAT peers (see Table 1). It should be noted that the findings are not based on the complete group because data were not available for all candidates.

Table 1. Comparison of MAT and PY Teacher Candidates’ Program Education Entry Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry Requirement</th>
<th>MAT (n = 50)</th>
<th></th>
<th>PY (n = 26)</th>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean SD</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate GPA</td>
<td>3.34 0.34</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.19 0.33</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.813</td>
<td>0.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRAXIS Reading</td>
<td>180.92 3.76</td>
<td></td>
<td>181.15 3.09</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.268</td>
<td>0.789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRAXIS Writing</td>
<td>177.32 3.46</td>
<td></td>
<td>177.19 3.41</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.156</td>
<td>0.876</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05

Programs

The admission process for both the MAT and PY programs are similar as all prospective candidates apply to their chosen program by submitting their academic transcripts illustrating a minimum undergraduate GPA of 3.0, PRAXIS test scores, and a completed application. They were also required to submit three letters of recommendation, a resume highlighting their work with school-age children, and a personal goal statement. Each prospective candidate’s file was then reviewed
by a member of the program faculty and rated on an overall scale of one (poor) to four (excellent).

Upon acceptance to the university, MAT teacher candidates spent one calendar year enrolled in courses and working in the field while PY teacher candidates spent an academic year (two 16-week semesters plus one intense mid-year three-week session) enrolled in courses plus working in the field. Upon completion of the MAT program, graduates would have both a Master’s degree and be certified to teach in grades K-6, while PY graduates would be certified to teach in grades K-6.

While, due to program length, the course sequence was different across the two programs, course content was identical. All 103 teacher candidates completed two literacy-related courses: one focused on teaching reading and writing in the primary grades and the other on teaching reading and writing at the intermediate level. Both programs had the same instructors and textbooks, and completed the same assignments. Aside from time spent to complete the programs, the major difference was the amount of fieldwork assigned. MAT teacher candidates spent 4½ days per week in an elementary classroom from August through June. PY teacher candidates followed a more traditional internship/student teaching schedule, spending one day per week in an elementary classroom during the first 1½ semesters of their program, then moving into full-time student teaching (five days per week) for the second half of the second semester. In other words, the average MAT student spent 1,200 hours in the field during his or her program, whereas the average PY student spent only 400 hours. Teacher candidates from each program worked in urban, suburban, and private schools in the neighborhoods surrounding the university and at least one teacher candidate from each program was placed at each grade level (K-6). Teacher candidates were observed in the field at least twice by their university supervisor and mentor teacher collaborated to evaluate them at midterm and again at the end of the semester.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred at the time of program completion when teacher candidates responded to the Survey of Perceptions and a Knowledge Inventory. Fifty MAT and 45 PY teacher candidates completed the Survey of Perceptions; 50 MAT and 43 PY teacher candidates completed the Knowledge Inventory. This discrepancy in PY candidate participation was due to incomplete or incorrectly coded data on the survey instruments.
Survey of Perceptions

The Survey of Perceptions was developed by the first author and reviewed by three experts in the field of reading at the participating university. Items in the survey were based on the components of reading teacher education that research pointed to as necessary for the development of effective teachers of reading (Fang & Ashley, 2004; Fazio, 2000; Frazier et al., 1997; Hedrick et al., 2000; IRA Task Force, 2004; Massey, 2003; NRP, 2000; Nierstheimer et al., 2000) as well as components that this university established as important in the teaching of reading. The survey consisted of several Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions that were organized into three major categories: coursework, field placement, and collaboration with others.

Coursework

In the area of coursework, teacher candidates were first asked to indicate on a four-point scale (0-3) their perceived level of preparedness to deliver a specified form of literacy instruction or assessment. Topics addressed in this area included: elements of reading; conducting lessons, discussions, and activities from basal reading programs and trade books; administering assessments; differentiating instruction based on assessment data; and motivating students to read.

Field placement

Likert-scale questions in this section of the survey were labeled with descriptors such as extremely useful, somewhat useful, or not at all useful. Questions included the following: Looking specifically at instruction in literacy, how closely related were your experiences in the field to what you were learning in class? When you learned something in one of your literacy courses, were you able to directly apply it to your field experience? Were your cooperating teacher’s beliefs about literacy instruction and approaches to teaching literacy closely related to those of your university literacy instructors? Overall, how useful was your field experience as related to teaching literacy?

Collaboration with others

Questions regarding their collaboration with their university supervisor and cooperating teacher were included in this section of the survey. They were asked to indicate the frequency with which they were observed by their university supervisor (two or more times, at least once, never) and how often they spoke with their
cooperating teacher specifically about literacy instruction (daily, weekly, monthly, never). Candidates were also asked if their cooperating teacher ever clarified or demonstrated teaching concepts about literacy instruction the candidate was struggling to master and if they, their cooperating teacher, and university supervisor ever met as a group; candidates were to respond to these questions with yes or no answers.

Knowledge Inventory

The Knowledge Inventory is a 50-question multiple-choice test created by and used with the permission of researchers at the Florida Center for Reading Research. This measure was originally designed to assess the knowledge of K-3 teachers that attended a four-day Just Read, Florida! Reading First Teacher Academy in July 2005 in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, literacy instruction, and assessment. A technical analysis of the Knowledge Inventory based on pre- and post-academy data indicated that the assessment was valid and well grounded. Questions from each of these seven topical areas were presented in random order; each question had four answer choices and was formatted so that respondents either answered a direct question or gave a response based on information presented in a brief scenario.

It should be noted that this assessment included a larger number of phonemic awareness and phonics questions than questions relating to comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, instruction, and assessment; however, because of the importance of knowledge of primary reading instruction for all elementary teacher candidates, we decided to use this instrument as a means of determining their understanding of this aspect of reading instruction. It should also be noted that the Knowledge Inventory was administered to the participating teacher candidates upon completion of their respective programs; a pre-test of knowledge was not administered to the teacher candidates prior to the start of their academic program. Given this, there was no way of knowing or comparing what the teacher candidates knew about teaching reading prior to the administration of this assessment.

Findings

Survey of Perceptions

What follows are the results from the Survey of Perceptions, highlighting findings from each of the three sections: coursework, field experience, and collaboration with others.
The coursework component of the Survey of Perceptions included topics in several areas: elements of reading; conducting lessons, discussions, and activities from basal reading programs and trade books; administering assessments; differentiating instruction based on assessment data; and motivating students to read. Using a four-point Likert scale, teacher candidates indicated their perceived level of preparedness by giving themselves a score ranging from zero (I am definitely not prepared) to three (I am definitely prepared). A paired sample t test was conducted on these data, indicating that MAT candidates perceived themselves as being more prepared than their PY peers in all but three areas — vocabulary instruction; delivering a sequence of lessons from a basal reader; and conducting activities related to a trade book, chapter book, or novel — with statistically significant results indicating that MAT candidates perceived themselves as being more prepared than their PY peers to administer formal assessments and differentiate instruction based on assessment data (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of Survey of Perceptions Self-Scores Regarding Preparedness to Teach Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Instruction</th>
<th>MAT (n=50)</th>
<th>PY (n=45)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic Awareness</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequence of lessons from a basal reader</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion about a story from a basal reader</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion related to a trade/chapter book or novel</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities related to a trade/chapter book or novel</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal assessments</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>0.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal assessments</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiating instruction based on assessment data</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating students to read</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05
Field Experience

Questions in this category of the survey were analyzed; the percentage of candidates responding in each of the Likert-scale categories (extremely, somewhat, or not at all) were recorded and analyzed. Despite the difference in amount of time spent in the field among those enrolled in the MAT and PY program, teacher candidates from each program, in general, valued their time spent in the field and believed it helped them to practice what they had learned in the university literacy classroom. Ninety percent of all teacher candidates responded that their field experience was somewhat or extremely useful as it related to teaching reading. Eighty percent of all candidates indicated there was a positive relationship between what was learned in the university classroom and what they saw in the field, and 95% responded that their cooperating teacher’s beliefs were somewhat or extremely related to those of their university reading instructors. Regardless of amount of time in the field, both groups of candidates believed that the field experience was important as a means of helping them understand how to teach reading.

Collaboration

As with the questions from the field experience category, questions in this category of the survey were analyzed; the percentage of candidates responding in each of the Likert-scale categories (extremely, somewhat, or not at all), as well as to yes/no questions, were recorded and analyzed. Eighty percent of all teacher candidates responded that they were observed in the field two or more times by their university supervisor. Teacher candidates responded that they had various opportunities to collaborate with their mentor teachers; 80% of all teacher candidates stated that they met on a daily or weekly basis to discuss reading instruction. Fifty-one percent of teacher candidates from both programs also responded that they collaborated with their university mentor to discuss and review literacy instruction. The majority (95%) of teacher candidates indicated that they met with both their cooperating teacher and university supervisor as a group; however, candidates noted that the value of these types of collaborative relationships was seen as existing purely out of necessity with little instructional or educational value, serving as “housekeeping” sessions in which introductions were made or midterm or final evaluations were conducted.

Knowledge Inventory

On the 50-question Knowledge Inventory, teacher candidates enrolled in the MAT program obtained an average score of 30.24 (s = 5.29), while those enrolled in
the PY program obtained a similar average score of 29.05 (s = 6.78). Thus, regardless of program, teacher candidates demonstrated approximately equal understanding of the material; however, the scores also indicate that candidates could correctly answer, on average, 60% of the questions asked. There was no one area within the test — phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, instruction, or assessment — in which the differences between MAT and PY scores were statistically significant (p<0.05) (see Table 3). In fact, the teacher candidates’ scores were similar to those obtained by the in-service teachers participating in the Just Read, Florida! Teacher Academies, for whom the assessment was originally developed. Researchers at the Florida Center for Reading Research found that, prior to the academy, teachers scored an average of 27.21 points (s = 5.92); after completing the academy, the average score was 35.03 (s = 5.86). Looking specifically at the questions included in the Knowledge Inventory, while there were no categories in which all respondents answered each question correctly, all questions in the vocabulary, fluency, and assessment categories were answered correctly by over half of all candidates. Several questions in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and instruction were answered correctly by 40% or fewer of all MAT and PY respondents; these are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations and t Tests Comparing MAT and PY Teacher Candidates on the Knowledge Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtest</th>
<th>N of Item</th>
<th>MAT (n=50)</th>
<th></th>
<th>PY (n=43)</th>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic Awareness</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.37</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>1.672</td>
<td>0.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.20</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>-0.027</td>
<td>0.979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.031</td>
<td>0.305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>-0.447</td>
<td>0.656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>0.459</td>
<td>0.647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.340</td>
<td>0.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-0.463</td>
<td>0.644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30.25</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>29.00</td>
<td>6.93</td>
<td>0.994</td>
<td>0.323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05*

**Phonemic awareness**

When asked to define the term phonological awareness, 12% of MAT candidates and 28% of PY candidates were able to correctly do so. Several questions addressed phonemes and many candidates struggled with this linguistic concept.
Forty percent of both MAT and PY candidates correctly identified words with the same beginning phoneme. In another question, 38% of MAT and 26% of PY candidates correctly identified four-phoneme word pairs. Finally, 26% of PY candidates correctly identified the number of phonemes in a given word. There were a total of thirteen phonemic awareness questions on the Knowledge Inventory; the remaining questions in this section were answered correctly by 41% to 96% of teacher candidates.

**Phonics**

Two questions on the Knowledge Inventory addressed reading level (independent, instructional, and frustration). On the first question, 18% of MAT and 30% of PY candidates correctly identified a student’s reading level; on the second question, 30% of MAT candidates correctly identified a student’s instructional reading level when provided with the percentage of words read accurately. Fourteen percent of both MAT and PY candidates correctly identified the definition of the alphabetic principle. Finally, 38% of MAT candidates correctly identified specific words as sight words, while 40% of PY candidates correctly identified phonics and word study instruction given an instructional scenario. There were a total of fourteen phonics questions on the Knowledge Inventory; the remaining questions in this section were answered correctly by 42% to 74% of teacher candidates.

**Comprehension**

Forty percent of MAT candidates correctly answered a question about read-aloud discussions. Thirty-three percent of PY candidates correctly identified the primary use of the KWL comprehension strategy (Ogle, 1986). There were a total of ten comprehension questions on the Knowledge Inventory; the remaining questions in this section were answered correctly by 42% to 92% of teacher candidates.

**Instruction**

Thirty-eight percent of PY candidates correctly answered a question about a student’s need for systematic instruction in word reading skills, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies to become a good reader by third grade. There were two instruction questions on the Knowledge Inventory; the remaining question in this section was answered correctly by 56% of MAT and 44% of PY teacher candidates.

Many of the questions that 40% or fewer of all MAT and PY teacher candidates answered correctly on the Knowledge Inventory were factual in nature. These questions asked respondents to define, identify, or apply a common literacy term
(i.e., alphabetic principle, reading level) or strategy (i.e., KWL, read-alouds); in other words, these questions did not call for teacher candidates to apply their knowledge of reading instruction to answer a scenario-based question. Some of these questions, however, focused on linguistics; teacher candidates in both groups had difficulty identifying the number of phonemes in words.

It is important to note that 12 of the 50 questions on the Knowledge Inventory were answered correctly by 40% or fewer MAT and/or PY candidates. When looking at all of the questions within each category, a higher percentage of correct responses was recorded. For example, though many MAT and PY candidates struggled with some of the questions related to phonemic awareness, many of the questions in this category were answered correctly by a high percentage of candidates in both programs. In general, candidates from both programs answered 60% of the phonemic awareness questions correctly. Candidates from both programs were able to answer correctly a similar percentage of questions within each topic area, as illustrated in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Average Percentage of Correctly Answered Questions by Candidate Group and Topic Area](image-url)
Discussion

Value of Coursework and Field Experience

Our findings from the Survey of Perceptions indicate that both the coursework and field experience appeared to be critical elements of teacher preparation programs, allowing teacher candidates to gain knowledge of concepts and put into practice what they have learned, thus helping to prepare them to teach reading. This is supported by findings from research conducted by Cox et al. (1998), Hedrick et al. (2000), Linek et al. (1999), and Massey (2003). Teacher candidates must be able to put into practice in the field what they have learned in the university classroom. Through these experiences, teacher candidates are able to realize that the skills and strategies they are learning work with real readers, helping them gain confidence in their skills as future literacy teachers. Teacher candidates enrolled in the MAT program perceived themselves as being generally better prepared than their PY peers to teach reading, which one could infer to mean they perceived themselves as being more knowledgeable of the critical areas of literacy instruction, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Since coursework was the same for MAT and PY candidates, the MAT candidates’ higher perceived level of preparedness — and thus perceived knowledge level — could be attributed to their extended time spent in the field working with students in the classroom alongside an experienced classroom teacher. This is certainly a strength of a program like the MAT; however, it is important to remember that it is the candidates’ perception of preparedness and not a measure of their actual performance in the field. Though the MAT candidates perceived themselves as being better prepared to teach reading than their PY peers, scores on the Knowledge Inventory indicate that candidates gained similar literacy knowledge during the course of their respective programs.

It appears critical that the literacy strand of teacher education programs rely equally on both coursework and field experience, and perhaps look for ways to bridge what is happening across these two components. Regardless of time spent in the field and the nature of the program, teacher candidates valued the field experience. They believed it helped them gain insight into the process of teaching reading; these hands-on experiences were integral components of their professional development.

Importance of Collaboration

Though collaboration among members of Frazier et al.’s (1997) triad — teacher candidate, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor — may exist, perceived usefulness of this experience may be varied.
As indicated by our findings from the Survey of Perceptions, teacher candidates did not always see the value in the collaborative relationship that existed among themselves, their cooperating teacher, and university supervisor. Consequently, this relationship must be made explicit and teacher candidates must know that there is a support system in place to help them put theory into practice (Bean, 2001; Harlin, 1999; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Sturtevant & Spor, 1990; Wham, 1993). Likewise, collaboration must occur on both a formal and an informal basis. While it may be necessary to get formative information from all members of the triad at midterm (and again at the end of the program), it may be equally important to establish this relationship as a partnership with all members playing a critical role. Informal meetings and written communication are necessary on a regular basis so that daily concerns and questions can be addressed. If teacher candidates have positive, valuable experiences working collaboratively in a controlled environment such as student teaching, they can learn and practice new teaching strategies (Nierstheimer et al., 2000) and gain general knowledge regarding literacy instruction (Wedman et al., 1996) above and beyond what they could accomplish on their own.

**Performance on the Knowledge Inventory**

Overall, there was very little difference between scores on the Knowledge Inventory obtained by teacher candidates from the two programs (refer to Table 3). Teacher candidates in the MAT program obtained an average score on the Knowledge Inventory of 30.24; teacher candidates in the PY program obtained an average score of 29.05. This would seem to indicate that teacher candidates, regardless of time spent in the field, internalized knowledge of reading instruction and assessment at roughly the same rate. This knowledge of the five essential components of reading instruction — phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension — is important for candidates’ future work in the elementary classroom, as evidenced by the increased amount of time teachers spend delivering instruction in these areas in first and second grade classrooms as reported by Gamse, Bloom, Kemple, and Jacob (2008) in the recent Reading First Impact Study: Interim Report.

As mentioned previously, however, teacher candidates, regardless of program, had difficulties on similar items. Participants in this study seemed to have difficulty with some of the terminology, especially that which was related to basic linguistic underpinnings of the reading process. However, given the brevity of this assessment, we acknowledge that the scores on this pencil-paper measure provide a limited view of what candidates understand about language, especially as related to teaching reading.
If teacher candidates cannot use reading-specific terminology correctly in their own learning and assessment, it cannot be expected that they would be able to use it correctly in their teaching. This supports Moats’ (1999) belief that beginning teachers must have an understanding of the terminology used in reading instruction — phonemes, morphemes, etc. — if they are to teach effectively. She states that “few teachers are sufficiently well prepared to carry out such instruction because their preparation programs...have not asked them to understand language with any depth or specificity” (p. 20). Pearson (2001), while agreeing that there is a need for teacher candidates to have knowledge of such linguistic elements, asserts that this knowledge is more useful for understanding how the use of these elements affects students’ learning. Additionally, Pearson (2001) believes that, by focusing on linguistics, language “has a static feel...as if it were a set of objects out there that one could accumulate” (p. 14). Rather, language should be thought of as being dynamic; when teaching, teachers should consider that language is learned within a social context of interacting with others, and that it is used to “achieve other ends — to inform, persuade, direct, entertain, control, subvert” (p. 16).

**Limitations**

As noted earlier, one limitation of this study was that a pre-test using the Knowledge Inventory was not administered to the teacher candidates prior to the start of their academic programs. Given this, there was no way of knowing what the teacher candidates knew about teaching reading prior to the administration of the Knowledge Inventory compared to what they knew upon completion of their coursework. Moreover, we acknowledge the limitations of using only one measure of teacher knowledge about teaching reading. A second limitation of the study is its focus on only two teacher preparation programs. Though important to the overall understanding of the reading component of teacher preparation programs, this study illustrates knowledge of reading instruction and assessment and perceived readiness to teach reading of only two relatively small groups of teacher candidates from one university. Interpretations of the data and implications of this study, while valuable, should be viewed in this light.

**Implications**

**Implications for Teacher Educators**

To better help those they work with, teacher educators must determine their teacher candidates’ perceptions regarding their readiness to teach reading. How well prepared to teach reading do candidates perceive themselves to be? Teacher
educators should build their instruction around these perceptions by building on the areas candidates perceive as strengths while improving upon those areas candidates indicate as weak. Using an instrument such as the one in this study would provide those who implement teacher education programs with a means of discerning what their candidates believe about the program and its components.

Likewise, the use of a knowledge test, given pre- and post-instruction, would help teacher educators plan for, implement, and evaluate their programs. The work in this study revealed the limitations of the Knowledge Inventory and suggested that additional work must be done to develop reliable and valid instruments to measure knowledge of teacher education candidates. Phelps’ and Schilling’s (2004) work toward creating a scenario-based assessment measure used to study teachers’ content knowledge and the effects of that knowledge on not only instruction but on student learning as well will certainly contribute to this effort.

Teacher educators also need to perform long-term evaluations of their teaching, as well as of their existing teacher education programs. After one semester of coursework, teacher candidates should not be expected to know everything they need to about reading instruction; expectations can be high, but should ultimately be realistic. After candidates complete all reading coursework, their understanding of reading instruction and perceived readiness to teach reading should be markedly higher. By evaluating the preparation program as a whole, teacher educators may better draw conclusions as to the overall effectiveness of their instruction and program components, and make adjustments where necessary. One possible way of assessing candidate achievement and change in perception over time that could help teacher educators evaluate their own instruction and the preparation program in general is through portfolios. While tests and questionnaires give only a snapshot of what the candidate knows or is feeling at a certain point in time, portfolios can paint a picture of the candidate’s development over time.

Also, it is critical that teacher educators examine candidates’ perceptions over time, spanning well past the time spent at the university and into their time as teachers in their own classrooms. What teacher candidates identify as areas of strength and weakness during or immediately after completing a teacher education program may be very different than what they identify as areas of strength and weakness after teaching in their own classrooms for an extended period of time.

**Implications for Further Research**

Incorporating observations of candidates’ teaching in the field would help to clarify what knowledge they do, in fact, possess, and what skills they can
execute in the classroom. Teacher candidates may perceive themselves as being prepared to teach reading, but we have little knowledge about how they are able to use what they have learned when they work in the classroom with students. By conducting field observations, researchers would be able to identify a link between what teacher candidates think they can do and what they actually do regarding reading instruction.

Additionally, more longitudinal studies must be conducted in order to determine the long-term effectiveness of teacher preparation programs in regards to preparing candidates to teach reading. Only then will we know if what candidates learn at the university-level is having an effect in the elementary classroom. Further research on this topic must be conducted and it is critical that the findings be used to improve teacher preparation programs already in existence.

References
Florida Center for Reading Research. (2005). *Pre-Teacher Knowledge of Reading*. Tallahassee, FL; Florida Center for Reading Research.


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Depictions and Gaps: Portrayal of U.S. Poverty in Realistic Fiction Children’s Picture Books

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Abstract
Researchers conducted a critical multicultural analysis of 58 realistic fiction children’s picture books that portray people living in poverty and compared these depictions to recent statistics from the United States Census Bureau. The picture books were examined for the following qualities: main character, geographic locale and time era, focal poor character (gender, age, and race), who demonstrated action, and the type of action (individual, community, systemic) demonstrated. Results of the analysis showed that while in some areas the books accurately reflect the reality in the United States today, there are other areas in which poverty is misrepresented. For example, while the attribute of gender was found to be accurately reflected in the literature, depictions of contemporary rural poverty as well as action performed at the systemic level are seemingly absent. The analysis concludes with implications for teaching as well as recommended books to consider for inclusion in a classroom library.

Introduction
In light of the recent economic crisis in the United States, poverty and homelessness are at the forefront of many people’s minds as it is nearly impossible not to be personally affected or to know someone affected by monetary hardships. According to the 2009 poverty guidelines provided by the Federal Register of the United States Department of Health, poverty is defined as a single person with an income of less than $10,830; for a family of four, the poverty line is $22,050 (Federal
Register, 2009). Today, virtually one in five American children lives in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau [USCB], 2006-2008), and there are more homeless families with children than any other time since the Great Depression. Meanwhile, many company executives earn nearly 400 times what their factory workers earn (a statistic up from 42 times in 1980), resulting in the fact that the top one percent of the United States’ population possesses one-third of the nation’s wealth (American Human Development Project, 2009).

As with any struggle the issues of poverty and homelessness filter into the classroom, and teachers must find ways to address and educate their students about these delicate situations. Picture books can provide a forum for children to learn about and understand others, yet what messages do these books about poverty and homelessness depict? In this critical multicultural analysis, we examine realistic fiction children’s picture books juxtaposed to recent statistical information about poverty. Since it is possible that teachers may need to help their students cope with family financial struggles, this study specifically highlights embedded messages in books about poverty. Additionally, recommendations are made for how to share books with children and how to incorporate them into a classroom library. The article ends with a bibliography of children’s books depicting poverty.

**Depictions of Poverty in Children’s Literature**

It is distressing to find that while the topic of poverty may be in the forefront of the minds of the media, government leaders, and the American people, we, like Chafel, Fitzgibbons, Cutter, and Burke-Weiner (1997), found a dearth of current research regarding depictions of poverty in children’s books. Moreover, among the research found, the information was conflicting, with statistics and claims often contradicting each other.

**Representations**

Many years ago, Dixon (1977) found that working class children did not appear at all in picture books and that children were not be able to find themselves, nor the world in which they lived, in their reading. Chafel et al. (1997) and Fitzgibbons and Tilley (1999) found the number of portrayals of poor White families in children’s literature to be a more accurate representation of American society, while at the same time identifying a limited number of books representing poor African Americans and no depictions of poor Asian Americans. Additionally, Chafel et al. (1997) determined that poor Hispanic people were underrepresented in literature as well, and Lamme (2000) claimed that picture books rarely portrayed
children living in poverty and when they do, they are often stereotypical in nature. More recently, Jones (2008) found that while there were several picture books depicting African American and Latino families that are poor, there was also an underrepresentation of White working class and poor families in children’s literature. She continued by explaining that in 2006, Non-Hispanic Whites comprised more than half of all Americans living in poverty, and the underrepresentation of poor White families in children’s literature may further perpetuate negative stereotypical views that race and class are intertwined. Clearly there is a lack of consensus among scholarly research regarding the representations of people living in poverty, though these discrepancies may be due in part to the time of the research and researchers having different selection criteria for the books analyzed.

Themes
Chafel et al., (1997) identified nine categories for coding and analyzing realistic fiction books about poverty published between 1968 and 1993: occupation, income, employment, unemployment, race, ethnicity, geographic locale, education, and family structure. They found that while some of the books digressed from demographic trends, most of them portrayed poverty accurately. Fitzgibbons and Tilley (1999) also identified two recurring themes, homelessness and violence, that emerged from the 20 books they analyzed. In addition, they analyzed the illustrations, noting the recurring images, such as health and nutrition, sanitation, and money. In looking beyond the representation of characters, Lamme (2000) identified themes and images of poverty in picture books with international settings. These themes included luck, resiliency, interdependence, and resourcefulness and could be found among the six recurring categories that emerged: fathers who leave home for work, child laborers, transportation, housing, children who lack material goods, and the barter system. These issues seemed to be evident in both books specifically about poverty and books in which the characters happen to be poor. Similarly, Kelley, Rosenberger, and Botelho (2005) identified seven recurring themes that emerged from an analysis of children’s literature about poverty. In this study, each book analyzed contained at least three of the following themes: luck, invisibility, alienation, interdependence, resourcefulness, resiliency, and activism. Lastly, Jones (2008) identified two common phenomena emerging from children’s picture books about class: representations and reinventions. She posited that a variety of contradictory depictions of people living in poverty and those in the working class sector can confuse young readers. In addition, Jones (2008) was concerned at the apparent lack of representation in children’s literature of those of lower
socioeconomic classes, as this invisibility solidified the notion that middle and upper socioeconomic classes are the norm and therefore are more desirable.

Voices Heard, Voices Silenced

While of grave concern is the sheer lack of representation of poverty in children’s picture books, equally disturbing are the portrayals that are evident in some of the books that do exist, as well as the stories that are not told. Dixon (1977) notes that children’s literature “has the overall effect, whether conscious or not, either on the part of the writer or on that of the reader, of indoctrinating children with a capitalistic ideology” (p. 70). He goes on to identify recurring patterns that emerge in children’s literature that serve to:

- Bolster up feudalism: the small and the powerless, plus cleverness, equals victory over the large and powerful; poor people, plus kindness, equals wealth; poor girls, plus beauty, equals marrying the prince; poor boys, plus success in trials or tasks, equals marrying the princess; law-abiding equals reward. (p. 71)

These often inaccurate and unrealistic portrayals may give children false perceptions of the world. For example, in choosing 15 nonfiction children’s books about economics in the United States and money management, Goodman (1985) found that all of those identified gave inaccurate information, perpetuated stereotypes, and were obviously pro-capitalism. Children reading these books may gain the misunderstanding that middle- and upper-class families are the norm, and that all people who are poor do not know how to manage their money.

Moreover, many picture books that have characters who are poor fail to identify the various causes of poverty, such as job loss and low minimum wage. Overstreet (2001) found that what was lacking in the literature was a discussion of “the inherent injustices of capitalism, class structure, and the belief in social and economic Darwinism” (p. 65). Also found to be lacking is the structure of the American economic system including social institutions, education, and business (Kelley, Rosenberger, Botelho, 2005) as well as how these structures can perpetuate generational poverty.

Methodology

Utilizing a critical multicultural analysis (Botelho & Rudman, 2009), this study analyzes children’s picture books that portray people living in poverty and compares these depictions to recent statistics from the United States Census Bureau.
“Critical multicultural analysis examines texts against a sociopolitical lens” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 121). In order to unveil the dominant ideologies presented in children’s picture books portraying poverty, we addressed four guiding questions: (a) Who is the main character of the book? (b) What is the time era and geographic locale of the story? (c) What are the gender, age, and race of the focal poor character? (d) Who demonstrates action, and what type of action is demonstrated? Specifically, we identify which characters demonstrate action, such as the character who is poor. In regards to the type of action, we identify if the action is done on the individual, community, or systemic level. For example, an action such as giving someone a new pair of shoes might be categorized as an individual action while a community action might be someone working in a soup kitchen and a systemic action might be someone participating in an organized strike.

**Book Selection**

A comprehensive search was conducted to locate the children’s picture books published from 1990 to the present that have poverty as the central theme. Books were identified using the search terms *poverty, socioeconomic status, poor, homelessness, children’s literature,* and *picture books* utilizing the library catalog, web searches, amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, and recommendations from librarians, children’s literature professors, and speakers at professional development opportunities and conferences. We reviewed over 100 books, and ultimately selected children’s books that share the following criteria: (a) realistic fiction, (b) illustrated picture book, (c) poverty as a central theme, (d) published after 1990, and (e) takes place or appears to take place in the United States.

**Data Coding**

Both authors individually read each book several times, recorded comments, came together to discuss the books, and completed a data collection chart for each book identified, documenting the following information: (a) author and title, (b) identifies if main character is poor, (c) time era and geographical locale, (d) social identities of the character who is poor (i.e., gender, age, and race), and (e) identifies the person who demonstrates action and the type of action performed (see Table 1). Data was charted and analyzed to see what common trends, themes, and patterns emerged. All percentages were rounded to the nearest tenth. Additionally, data from the 2006-2008 United States Census Bureau was used to compare what is being depicted in children’s books to what is actually happening in America today.
Table 1. Matrix for data of 58 picture books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author &amp; Title</th>
<th>Poor/ Main Same</th>
<th>Time Era &amp; Geo Locale</th>
<th>Focal Poor Character</th>
<th>Action (Who/Type)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altman, 1993 Amelia’s Road</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present rural</td>
<td>female child, parents, Latino</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andersen, 1999 The Little Match Girl</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>early 1900s urban</td>
<td>female child, family unclear</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbour, 1991 Mr. Bow Tie</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male adult White</td>
<td>other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartone, 1993 Peppe the Lamplighter</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>pre-1900s urban</td>
<td>male child, male adult, family White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baylor, 1994 The Table Where Rich People Sit</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present rural</td>
<td>female child, parents, family White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boelts, 2007 Those Shoes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male child, female adult African American</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunting, 1991 Fly Away Home</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male child, male adult White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunting, 1994 A Day’s Work</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male child, male adult Latino</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunting, 1996 Going Home</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present rural</td>
<td>male child, parents, family Latino</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunting, 1996 Train to Somewhere</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>late 1800s rural</td>
<td>female child White</td>
<td>other community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmi, 2003 A Circle of Friends</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male adult White</td>
<td>other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinn, 1995 Sam and the Lucky Money</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male adult Asian</td>
<td>other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohn, 2002 ¡Sí, Se Puede!: Yes, We Can</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male child, female adult Latino</td>
<td>poor &amp; other systemic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper, 1998 Gettin’ Through Thursday</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male child, female adult African American</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiCamillo, 2007 Great Joy</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>mid-1990s urban</td>
<td>adult male White</td>
<td>other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiSalvo, 1994 City Green</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>female child African American</td>
<td>poor community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiSalvo, 2001 A Castle on Viola Street</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male child, parents, family uncler</td>
<td>poor &amp; other community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiSalvo-Ryan, 1991 Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>multiple</td>
<td>poor &amp; other community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author &amp; Title</td>
<td>Poor/Main Same</td>
<td>Time Era &amp; Geo Locale</td>
<td>Focal Poor Character</td>
<td>Action (Who/Type)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernlund, 2007 The Magic Beads</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>female child, female adult White</td>
<td>poor individual &amp; community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friedrich, 1990 Leah’s Pony</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>mid-1900s rural</td>
<td>female child, parents White</td>
<td>poor &amp; other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunning, 2004 A Shelter in Our Car</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>female child, female adult African American</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harper, 2005 Finding Daddy</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>mid-1900s rural</td>
<td>female child, parents White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hathorn, 1994 Way Home</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male child White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herrera, 1995 Calling the Doves</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present rural</td>
<td>male child, parents Latino</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hesse, 2008 Spuds</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>mid-1990s rural</td>
<td>female child, male child (2), adult female White</td>
<td>other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hubbard, 2004 The Lady in the Box</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>female adult White</td>
<td>poor &amp; other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy, 2004 The Pickles Patch Bathtub</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>early 1900s rural</td>
<td>female child, parents, family White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketteman, 2001 Mama’s Way</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>female child, female adult White</td>
<td>poor &amp; other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidd, 1996 Building Friends</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male child, parents White</td>
<td>poor &amp; other community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambert, 1995 Joey’s Birthday Wish</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>female child, male adult White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levitin, 2007 Junk Man’s Daughter</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>mid-1900s urban</td>
<td>female child, parents, family White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lied, 1997 Potato</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>mid-1900s rural</td>
<td>female child, parents White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyon, 2009 You and Me and Home Sweet Home</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>female child, female adult African American</td>
<td>poor &amp; other individual &amp; community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin, 1996 Rosie: The Shopping Cart Lady</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>adult female White</td>
<td>other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maslac, 1996 Finding a Job for Daddy</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>female child White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCourt, 1998 Chicken Soup for Little Souls: The Braids Girl</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>female child, female adult White</td>
<td>poor &amp; other individual &amp; community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCully, 1996 The Bobbin Girl</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1830s urban</td>
<td>female child, female adult White</td>
<td>poor systemic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author &amp; Title</td>
<td>Poor/ Main Same</td>
<td>Time Era &amp; Geo Locale</td>
<td>Focal Poor Character</td>
<td>Action (Who/Type)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGovern, 1997 <em>The Lady in the Box</em></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>female adult White</td>
<td>other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McPhail, 2002 <em>The Teddy Bear</em></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male adult White</td>
<td>other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medina, 2001 <em>Christmas Makes Me Think</em></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>multiple</td>
<td>no action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller, 1997 <em>A House by the River</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>rural</td>
<td>female child, female adult African American</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mills, 1991 <em>The Rag Coat</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>pre-1900s rural</td>
<td>female child, female adult White</td>
<td>poor &amp; other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell, 1993 <em>Uncle Jed’s Barbershop</em></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1930s rural</td>
<td>male adult African American</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noble, 2007 <em>The Orange Shoes</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>mid-1900s rural</td>
<td>female child, parents, family White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parton, 1994 <em>Coat of Many Colors</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present rural</td>
<td>female child, family White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partridge, 2001 <em>Oranges on Golden Mountain</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1894 Gold Rush urban</td>
<td>male child, female adult Asian</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pérez, 2000 <em>My Very Own Room</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present unclear</td>
<td>female child, parents, family Latino</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seskin &amp; Shamblin, 2006 <em>A Chance to Shine</em></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male adult White</td>
<td>poor &amp; other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spohn, 1994 <em>Broken Umbrellas</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>female adult White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taback, 1999 <em>Joseph Had a Little Overcoat</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>pre-1900s rural</td>
<td>male adult White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testa, 1996 <em>Someplace to Go</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male child, female adult, family White</td>
<td>poor community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trottier, 1996 <em>The Tiny Kite of Eddie Wing</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male child Asian</td>
<td>other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunnell, 1997 <em>Mailing May</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1913 rural</td>
<td>female child, parents White</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upjohn, 2007 <em>Lily and the Paper Man</em></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>adult male White</td>
<td>other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild, 1992 <em>Space Travellers</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>male child, female adult White</td>
<td>poor &amp; other individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author &amp; Title</td>
<td>Poor/Main Same</td>
<td>Time Era &amp; Geo Locale</td>
<td>Focal Poor Character</td>
<td>Action (Who/Type)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams, 1992 Working Cotton</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present rural</td>
<td>female child, parents, family</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>African American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams, 2001 Amber Was Brave,</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present unclear</td>
<td>female child (2), female adult</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essie Was Smart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyeth, 1998 Something Beautiful</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>present urban</td>
<td>female child</td>
<td>poor individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>African American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

When comparing our results to those of other studies on this topic, much complexity emerges. For example, we did not include nonfiction texts, as Goodman (1985) did, nor chapter books, as did Fitzgibbons and Tilley (1999). Additionally, we did not focus on a specific group, such as Overstreet’s (2001) article on labor unions and mill workers, and we utilized different criteria when compared to other studies. In looking critically at picture books portraying poverty published from 1990 to the present and comparing them to recent United States poverty statistics, the following trends emerged.

**Focal Character Who is Poor**

In some of the books reviewed the main character is poor, whereas in other books, the main character is not poor but interacts with or observes a person in poverty. Often times it was easy to identify the focal poor character because he or she is the main character, and the other characters who are poor are clearly secondary in the story. Because these books are written for children, there are many main focal characters who are children; however, there are also poor adult characters who, although not the main character, do play an integral part of the storyline. For example, in *Fly Away Home* (Bunting, 1991), the story is narrated by the young boy; however, the father is present throughout the majority of the story, and the boy refers to his father and how the two of them survive living in an airport. In this case, we identified both the father and the son as focal poor characters.

**Voices Heard**

In 43 (72.41%) of the 58 books, the main character is the person who is poor (see Table 2). On one hand, this is promising, as it is good that the people who are poor are given voice and tell their story. Yet it is often indeterminable which authors write from personal experiences making the book more authentic. In this case, we
relied on author bios, notes from the author, and information from the book jacket to verify stories. As such, we could discern only that eight books were written from or alluded to an insider, unbiased perspective. For example, on the jacket cover of *Calling the Doves*, Herrera (1995) tells of his “migrant farmworker childhood.” Similarly, *The Pickle Patch Bathtub* (Kennedy & Aldridge, 2004) concludes with an authors’ note and photographs describing how the “Philip children grew cucumbers [and]... With the money they earned they purchased a claw-footed bathtub.” Although other books may have been based on the authors’ lived experiences, they did not specifically indicate this in the book or the book jacket, and therefore the reader does not know if the portrayal is authentic or not.

Table 2. Main Character & Poor Character

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main/poor</th>
<th># Books</th>
<th>% Books</th>
<th># Books with Author’s own experience</th>
<th>% Books with Author’s own experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27.59</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>84.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>72.41</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, a story told from a character who is not living in poverty can act as a focalizer and help the reader consider a different point of view. For example, in *Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen* (DiSalvo, 1991), the boy learns from his Uncle Willie the importance of helping those in need, and realizes that people living in poverty deserve to be treated with respect.

**Gender Representation**

Our analysis of gender representations of the focal poor character in all books found that the representations of gender and poverty closely match the breakdown of poverty by gender in the United States. Further, we disaggregated the books that depict adults, and found that 20 (60.61%) of the books portray adult females versus 13 (39.39%) books that portray adult males (see Table 3). In actuality, 56.23% of the nation’s poor are adult females, and 43.77% of the nation’s poor are adult males showing that gender is nearly accurately represented. Finally, we looked at the depiction of adult characters who are homeless in the books. Of the 58 books, 17 books depict characters who are homeless: nine adult females, eight adult males, one book depicts parents, and one book has multiple character representations. Of the nine books depicting adult females, four books tell stories about single moms who are homeless. *A Shelter in Our Car* (Gunning, 2004), shares the story of Zettie and her Mama who are living in their car. Papa has died, and Mama is both working and going to community college. Likewise, *The Magic Beads* (Nielsen-Fernlund, 2007)
shares the story of Lillian, a girl who is concerned about her turn for Show and Tell because she lives in a shelter. “They’d moved into the shelter because he [the father] had a bad temper, and sometimes he hit her [the mother]. They’d left all their things behind including Lillian’s toys” (p. 9). Although these stories depict sad situations, they do represent reality for many homeless children in American schools today.

Table 3. Gender of Focal Poor Character

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender - Focal Poor Character</th>
<th># Books</th>
<th>% Books</th>
<th>% of US pop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female adults</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60.61</td>
<td>56.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male adults</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39.39</td>
<td>43.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Geographic Locale

Of the people living below the poverty level in the United States, 44% live in rural areas, and approximately 56% live in urban/suburban locales (USCB, 2006-2008). However, in the books we analyzed, there was a huge discrepancy. Two of the books had an unclear setting and were disregarded. Of the remaining 56 books, 18 (32.14%) take place in a rural setting, while 38 (67.86%) of the books are set in urban or suburban locations. If we disaggregate the books set in the past from the books set in the present, 82.05% have a present urban/suburban setting, while only 17.95% take place in a present rural setting (see Table 4). In this case, contemporary rural poverty is virtually being ignored.

Table 4. Geographic Locale & Time Era

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Locale</th>
<th># Books</th>
<th>% Books</th>
<th># Books (Present)</th>
<th>% Books (Present)</th>
<th>% of US population below poverty level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>65.52</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>78.05</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31.03</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.07</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the contemporary stories depict characters in urban and suburban settings where people are living on the streets, in shelters, in their cars, or in apartments and homes. For example, *Someplace to Go* (Testa, 1996) chronicles a day in the life of a boy whose family lives in the local shelter. As the shelter does not open until eight o’clock p.m., and needing to occupy his time after school, he goes to the market and library, as well as tries to avoid people selling drugs on the street. Another contemporary portrayal is seen in *Mama’s Way* (Ketteman, 2001) which has a more suburban setting and shares how Sarah’s mother cannot afford to buy
her the new dress she desires for graduation from the local dress shop. One of the few examples depicting contemporary rural poverty is *A House by the River* (Miller, 1997). In this book, Belinda and her mother worry each time the rains come because their house is built in the low lands. The story implies that the family cannot afford to move into town where the houses are safe, having been built on hilltops.

**Race/Ethnicity**

An analysis of the portrayal of race is very complicated. In looking at sheer numbers, the United States Census Bureau (2006-2008) shows that there are more White people living in poverty in the United States than any other racial group. However, if one looks at the percentage of people living below the poverty line within racial groups, the statistics change (see Table 5). For instance, of the total number of poor people living in the United States, 46.06% are White; however, of all of the White people living in the United States, only 9.2% are poor. Also, while only 1.5% of the poor people living in the United States are Native Americans, within that population, 25.3% are living in poverty. In other words, one out of 10 White people live in poverty versus one out of four Native Americans living in poverty.

**Table 5. Race of Focal Poor Character vs. US Population Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focal Poor Character</th>
<th># Books</th>
<th>% Books</th>
<th>% of US pop</th>
<th>% within group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native Americans</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>25.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.567</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>22.68</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>24.48</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (not Latino)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>46.06</td>
<td>9.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our findings regarding representation of race differed from previous publications located on this topic for several reasons. After eliminating three books because the race was unclear, some of the more substantial differences found are as follows. While Fitzgibbons and Tilley (1999) found no portrayals of Asian Americans who are poor in children’s picture books, we located three such representations, totaling 5.56% of the books analyzed. As only 3.56% of the nation’s poor are Asian American (USCB, 2006-2008), it would seem that in actuality, this group is somewhat over-represented in children’s literature.
Similarly contradictory, Jones (2008) found that most of the children’s books about working class and poor children depict African Americans and Latino families, and she posits that the underrepresentation of poor White characters in children’s books perpetuates the stereotype of race being related to socioeconomic status. However, we found 36 (66.67%) of the books portraying the poor character as White, non-Hispanic, which is disproportionately over-representative of the actual 46.06% of the Caucasian poor among our nation’s population (USCB, 2006-2008). Conversely, African Americans were slightly underrepresented, with nine (16.67%) of the picture books displaying African American poor compared to 22.68% of the actual total in society today (USCB, 2006-2008). With regards to the Latino population, we found six (11.11%) books, which is below the 24.48% of White-Hispanic people currently living below the poverty level (USCB, 2006-2008). We did not find any books with poverty as a central theme that depicted Native Americans. Arguably, since only 1.53% of the people living in poverty are Native Americans (USCB, 2006-2008), it could be justified that they are not represented in children’s books. We suggest that on one hand, when one out of four Native Americans lives in poverty, this presents a gap in representation. But, on the other hand, many Native American authors strive to create literature that presents positive portrayals of their culture and community thus they may choose not to portray that statistic.

Action

An action is “doing something; or something done especially for a particular purpose” (Procter, 1995). For this study, we further disseminated this definition to identify both who is doing the action as well as what kind of action and for what purpose the action is being done. Of the 58 books, 34 (59.65%) of the focal characters who are poor demonstrate some type of action (see Table 6). At first glance this may seem admirable in that the characters are represented as resourceful and self-reliant. However, it is important to examine action at a deeper level as in the case of poverty, action can take place on three levels: the individual, community level, and systemic, and may range from simple day-to-day survival to making changes in the way businesses are structured.

Table 6. Who Demonstrates the Action?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action (Who)</th>
<th># Books</th>
<th>% Books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other and Poor</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>59.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Action</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the books we analyzed, most of the action (80.7%) was done at the individual level, with only two (3.51%) of the books (one taking place in the past and one in the present) displaying action at the systemic level (see Table 7). One book, *Christmas Makes Me Think* (Medina, 2001), suggests actions that the individual and community members could take; however, these are just some of the many thoughts the main character has at Christmas time. “Christmas makes me think that I should share my presents with kids that don’t have any. And get my friends to share too” (p. 19). In this case, we coded the book as “no action” in the category of action and we did not include the book in the overall statistics for that category.

**Table 7. Type of Action Demonstrated**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action (Type)</th>
<th># Books</th>
<th>% Books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>80.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual and community</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No action</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When individual action was disaggregated by who performs it (the individual who is poor or an outside person), there were 29 (52.3%) books in which the character who is poor individually performs actions to sustain or obtain basic necessities, education, employment, and/or improvement of his or her surroundings (see Table 8).

**Table 8. Who Demonstrates the Action? & Type of Action Demonstrated**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action (Type)</th>
<th># Books</th>
<th>% Books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor/individual</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor/community</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor/individual/community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor/systemic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/individual</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/systemic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor/other/individual</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor/other/community</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor/other/systemic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor/other/individual/community</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Action</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While it is good to see portrayals of individuals enacting change, this does have potential for being problematic as it can reinforce the notion that people can pull themselves up by their bootstraps, and that poverty is an individual problem that can be solved with some effort by individuals, rather than that poverty is a national, structural, and systemic problem.

When analyzing for action at the community level, a total of nine (15.79%) books show individuals working within their communities to assist those in poverty. Working at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter, working with Habitat for Humanity, and community beautification projects are a few of the community actions represented in these books. One such example is in *Something Beautiful* (Wyeth, 1998). In this book, a little girl is able to enact change in her own surroundings by cleaning up the courtyard by her house.

I go upstairs and get a broom and a sponge and some water. I pick up the trash. I sweep up the glass. I scrub the door very hard. When Die disappears, I feel powerful. Someday I’ll plant flowers in my courtyard. I’ll invite all my friends to see. (p. 25)

Similarly, in *City Green*, DiSalvo-Ryan (1994) shows the theme of one child enacting change in her community through a beautification project.

I walk him past the hollyhocks, the daisies, the peppers, the rows of lettuce. I show him the strawberries that I planted. When Old Man Hammer sees his little garden bed, his sour grapes turn sweet. “Marcy, child.” He shakes his head. “This lot was good for nothin’. Now it’s nothin’ but good,” he says. (p. 26)

These depictions send children the message that they can enact change, and that even a small action can make a difference.

Only two (3.51%) of the books demonstrated action taking place at the systemic level. *The Bobbin Girl* (McCully, 1996) is one book that demonstrates the need for and attempts to create systemic change. Taking place in the Industrial Age and telling the story of working factory girls, *The Bobbin Girl* shows a failed attempt to get fair wages.

“The turnout failed,” Judith said. ”There are too many girls like Huldah who feel they must work. I’m going to find a position in another town.” Rebecca gasped. It was as if she’d been hit by a flying shuttle. Judith had led her into battle, and now she was deserting! Judith saw her expression and said gently, “We are not defeated, Rebecca. We showed we can stand up for what is right. Next time, or the time after, we will win.” (p.29)
Despite the failure to enact the change, the story shows the bravery and strength of the women who fought for their rights as well as the relentless pursuit of change for the betterment of the group. The actions of these women in the past paved the way for future successful strikes and became a source of hope and a model for future working class people. Showing a failed attempt, *The Bobbin Girl* illustrates that change at the systemic level often takes time, patience, and persistence.

Written in both English and Spanish, and inspired by events in Los Angeles in 2000 when 8,000 janitors went on strike and successfully established a contract that provided a living wage, *¡Si, Se Puede!: Yes, We Can!* (Cohn, 2002) is another book that demonstrates action at a systemic level. This book focuses on the power of Latina immigrant women working alongside other members of the Los Angeles community, affecting change for both themselves and their neighbors.

On the sidewalk, people rooted for all of us marchers on the street. There were thousands of people all around me! I held on tight to Miss Lopez’ hand. “Carlos,” she said, “this is a celebration of courage.” After three long weeks, the strike was over. My mama and the janitors finally got the respect and the pay raises they deserved. (p. 23)

Both books show that change at a more systemic level can happen. The difference between the two books is that *¡Si Se Puede!: Yes, We Can!* demonstrates collective action, people who are poor working with others to enact change, whereas in *The Bobbin Girl* it is only the working women who are trying to enact change for themselves.

**Implications & Recommendations**

Although teachers may feel hesitant to teach about poverty, Chafel (1997) reminds us that young children “are cognizant of social and economic inequality” (p. 368). In today’s economic crisis, teachers may want to be more explicit in teaching about poverty and homelessness, and we contend that it is never too early to start. For example, Chafel, Flint, Hammel, and Pomroy (2007) share four personal accounts about classroom teachers who incorporated literature about poverty as a springboard for critical literacy discussions and artwork in primary grades. The authors provide a few general suggestions such as, “Ask children to bring in or represent images of poverty in their drawings. Use these images as conversation starters” (p. 80). Similarly, Dutro (2009) details how literature about poverty can be used as a vehicle for students to write and share about their own lived experiences and understandings of “hard times” (p.89). Children’s literature about poverty can also be used as a springboard for thoughts and discussions about social justice. Finally,
there are numerous resources which offer suggestions for curriculum implementa-
tions (e.g., Project Hope, 2006 and Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).

Additionally, when creating a classroom library, it is important that teachers
intentionally choose and include books that accurately represent both the diffusion
of poverty in the United States and the diversity within his or her classroom. Children who live in poverty need to have opportunities to see themselves reflected in classroom literature, and children who are not poor need to read these books to gain empathy and recognize that poverty exists in society today. To these means, books that have both male and female focal poor characters and that represent a variety of races and both urban and rural geographic locations should be included. In addition to sharing books which represent different social identities, it is important to find books that present different perspectives on poverty. For example, *The Table Where Rich People Sit* (Baylor, 1994) shows individual action through poverty as a choice as the characters in this book have chosen jobs that result in a life of poverty because they view “wealth” as having the opportunity to work outside rather than to have monetary wealth.

While selections that depict individual action are good to show students that
they can personally make positive changes in their own lives and in the lives of oth-
ers, we strongly believe that books which address the need for systemic change or that show such change in action (e.g. *¡Si Se Puede!: Yes, We Can!* should be included in every classroom library. Also, though we did not include works of nonfiction in our analysis, factual works can also be paired with picture books to more fully develop both the reality of poverty and the lives it often affects. Finally, as books are being published every day, it is important that teachers continually look for new releases that portray issues of poverty and homelessness.

This study is clearly just one small way of looking at representations of pov-
ergy in children’s picture books. Further studies should be conducted that look at
different types of picture books (e.g. nonfiction, those that contain supernatural
elements) from those we targeted. Also, children’s chapter books and young adult
literature should also be analyzed. Comparisons among the different types of litera-
ture can give more insight into the current representations and trends that exist in literature about poverty that is written for children and young adults.

**Conclusion**

With 18.2% (U.S. Census, 2006-2008) of all children in the United States living below the poverty level, it is increasingly important that teachers include literature about poverty in the classroom. While it is heartening to see that there
are multiple books on the topic that accurately and realistically depict the current economic state of many in our nation, there are still many gaps that need to be filled. Specifically, more books that depict contemporary rural poverty and those that address systemic change need to be written. And while several books show individuals making a difference in their own homes and communities, social acts such as boycotting, union organizing, restructuring business (Kelley et al., 2005), and working together at a community level to enact change are rarely offered to children as means by which to make a difference in their world. We strongly believe that presenting students with the truth about today’s economic crisis using children’s picture books is one small step teachers can take in educating tomorrow’s leaders of the need for acceptable living standards and opportunities for all people.

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Hidden passions, comic books and graphic novels were once read in secret, smuggled under desks or masked behind textbooks. In the past, their fans were typically adolescent males who would descend on the local comic shops on a weekly or monthly basis to sort through the latest offerings and ponder the fate of their favorite superheroes — but no more. Times have changed in the comics industry. While males still dominate the readership, and superheroes such as the Hulk, Spider-Man, the X-Men, and Teen Titans still attract readers, comics have moved into the mainstream with many publishers adding comics and graphic novels to their catalogue offerings as they seek to appeal to female teen readers as well as those in the primary and middle grades. Today’s savvy teachers recognize that these visually appealing reading materials are not only excellent choices to hook reluctant readers, but they also may prove useful in reviving the flagging interests of once avid readers. These reading materials require different reading skills, necessitating readers to move across panels and pay attention to illustrations as well as text.

Teachers often feel confused by the use of the different terms associated with these forms of visual literacy; for instance, some are unable to distinguish between comic books and graphic novels. There are some differences between the two, but the lines continue to blur as more graphic novels fill bookstore shelves. Typically, comic books have been characterized by their size and their format as they are usually 28 pages in length and look similar to a magazine, only stapled, and they feature text and graphics that are enclosed in panels. The term “comic book” describes “any format that uses a combination of frames, words, and pictures to convey meaning and to tell a story. While all graphic novels are comics, not all comic books are graphic novels,” (McTaggart, 2008, p. 31). In general, once a comic book has passed the 50-page mark and is bound in soft or hard cover rather than being stapled, it is considered a graphic novel. However, it can still also be considered a comic book.

Although comic books have been read for decades, the term “graphic novel” is itself a fairly recent coinage, first used with Art Spiegelman’s masterful
examination of the Holocaust in *Maus* (1987) and *Maus II* (1992). The fact that *Maus II* received the 1992 Pulitzer Prize for Special Awards & Citations — Letters helped legitimize comics and graphic novels. And many industry insiders claim the comic world was never the same once the possible topics for graphic novels were expanded. Primarily because of *Maus*’s unique characteristics, graphic novels came to be associated with publications that were organized in a comic book format in a soft-covered book.

Because their storylines are generally action-oriented, graphic novels and comics are particularly effective in keeping student interest high. According to McTaggart (2008), “Even a comic’s ‘slow’ times keep the kid’s interest because the action is visual” as “a student reads the words, sees the action, comprehends the meaning, and is motivated to read more” (p. 29). Young readers are attracted to the timeliness of comic books as their monthly publication allows their creators to react more swiftly to social and cultural changes than is possible for films or trade books. Thus, readers often feel as though what they are reading is cutting edge, making them cognizant of popular culture. McTaggart (2008) offers as an example the swiftness with which comics were able to address the destruction of New York City’s Twin Towers while books on the topic took much longer to be published. Fans of graphic novels and comics maintain that there is an immediacy about these genres that most trade books cannot deliver.

Whatever they are called, comic books or graphic novels, these visual treats for the eyes entice kids to read. Many literacy experts (Carter, 2007; Frey & Fisher, 2008; Monin, 2009; Stafford, 2010) extol their value in making reading a pleasurable activity rather than work. McTaggart (2008) maintains that reading graphic novels “promotes better reading skills, improves comprehension, and complements many areas of the curriculum” (p. 33). In addition,

The reduced amount of text and attention-grabbing graphics help ELL and struggling readers infer, predict, and reflect on what they read. Their skills improve as they read more, improved skills lead to greater comprehension, and enhanced comprehension creates a desire to read more. (McTaggart, 2008, p. 33)

No less an expert than read-aloud expert Jim Trelease touts the value of visual literacy when working with struggling readers. “I would go so far as to say if you have a child who is struggling with reading, connect him or her with comics” (Trelease, 2006, p. 99). Trelease (2006) acknowledges that inexperienced readers often need to be taught how to read a comic book or “how a comic ‘works’: the
sequence of the panels, how to tell when a character is thinking and when he is speaking; the meaning of stars, question marks and exclamation points” (p. 99). But the time spent in honing the skills needed to comprehend comic books and graphic novels reaps benefits for readers who develop critical literacy skills along with a keener sense of observation and enhanced prediction skills while literally learning to read between the lines.

Below are some of the latest graphic novels that caught our eyes and kept us reading.

**Grades K-2**


As soon as they hear that their Cousin Bo is coming, Benny and Penny hide all of their toys because he often breaks them. Benny and Penny try to avoid playing with Bo, but things come to a climax when Bo tugs too hard on Penny’s monkey and a leg is ripped off. Eventually, all is forgiven as the young mice resolve their differences and play a game that cannot be ruined and Cousin Bo redeems himself by creating a get well card for Penny’s beloved monkey.


With the pink palette that typifies this graphic novel series and makes it appealing to young female readers, Babymouse takes on school fundraising and dreams of becoming the tycoon of all cupcake sales. Her heart may not be in the right place — she just wants to win the grand prize, no matter what she must do — but her mistakes leave readers laughing at her personality, her antics, and the clever writing that accompanies everything Babymouse does.

Young readers join Silly Lilly as she tries out a new job for each day of the week. Silly Lilly playfully considers the traditional jobs such as cook, musician, and teacher before eventually taking on such roles as city planner and even vampire.


Readers will enjoy watching Little Mouse get dressed so he can go to the barn with his mother and siblings. He meticulously puts on each item of clothing and is surprised after he finishes the last of the snaps and buttons. Children will giggle when his mother reminds him that mice do not wear clothes.

**Grades 3-4**


Children will laugh out loud while reading this outrageous graphic novel. Uncle Murray tends Kitty and Puppy while their owners are away and hilarity ensues. Kitty is always poised for the attack while Uncle Murray shares a plethora of cat facts. In the end, Uncle Murray considers pet-sitting fish rather than the pesky felines with whom he is stuck.

Geeky Julian Calendar tries to hide his affinity for gadgets and science when he moves to a new school, but his scientific predilection doesn’t remain secret for very long. Before too long, two unlikely classmates join him in their shared geekiness and passion for cool inventions. Much to Julian’s surprise, despite their outward coolness, they too are science geeks and have a lab where they concoct all sorts of gadgets. Inviting Julian to join them, they use several of those nifty gadgets to thwart the efforts of a corrupt scientist who steals their top-secret notebook filled with field notes and ideas for inventions.


In the second book in the Guinea Pig Pet Shop Private Eye series, Hamisher the hamster once again seeks the help of Sasspants the reluctant private investigator in solving the mystery when four mice mysteriously disappear from the pet shop. Sasspants, a guinea pig who would much rather read books, finally agrees to help when tensions rise because the suspect is thought to be a ghost. The clueless pet store owner, Mr. Venezi, adds humor to the story as he cannot tell hermit crabs from tractors, or mice from alligators, leading to much confusion and false leads.

**Grades 5-7**


This is not your average adventure story with knights and damsels in distress. Instead, it’s the story of one girl’s determination and quest of a sort. Eleven-year-old Mirka Hirschberg has little interest in learning how to knit, how to find the right husband, or how to keep herself safe from danger by never taking risks. Although she loves her Orthodox Jewish family, she dreams of someday fighting dragons with...
a sword. Although there is no sword in her house, she hears of one guarded by a troll, and Mirka is determined to have it. Mirka’s journey will take her past a witch, a relentless pig, and into the forest as well as into the path of two bullies who harass her brother. When this tale has ended, Mirka will see the point of the lessons, both in knitting and in debate, that she received from her stepmother Fruma. The graphic novel’s panels are drawn through Photoshop and with an interactive pen-on-screen tool.


Fifth graders Lydia Goldblatt and Julie Graham-Chang have been best friends for years, and they’ve decided to team together to climb the ladder of popularity. Lydia lives with her mother and sister while Julie lives with her two dads and one cat. Using the scientific method, they observe their more popular classmates, perform experiments, and try to find the key to popularity. Based on their observation of the changes from elementary to junior high in Melody, Lydia’s older sister who goes from happy, flute-playing blonde to all-black garbed, black-hair dyed, and cranky teen, they are sure that they can’t miss. Lydia keeps a record of their observations in a notebook illustrated by Julie and Lydia is also the one who will do the experiment. But even the best plans of best friends can go awry when it comes to popularity, and the two friends find themselves moving in different directions. Readers will laugh at many of the girls’ mishaps and may even recognize themselves in some of the problems they encounter; for instance, neither could have predicted that they would end up on opposite sides in the class election. In the end, of course, both girls realize that popularity may not be all it’s cracked up to be, and being true to yourself and those you can really count on is what’s important. The author uses ink, colored pencil, colored marker, yarn, and digital materials to create the book’s illustrations and to show how the relationship between the girls deteriorates.
Greg has looked forward to growing up. Now with showers after gym class, parental expectations for greater responsibility, boy-girl parties, and boys-only health classes, he isn’t so sure he is ready. Plus the fact that he and Rowley are no longer friends makes Greg unsure if he can make it through middle school as he is now on his own. Fans of the Wimpy Kid series will gobble this one up, laughing at Greg’s cluelessness while seeing their own experiences mirrored within the book’s pages.

Eleven-year-old Jack Clark is a shy boy who wants nothing more than to please his father. But Kansas in 1937, where the story is set, is not a place suited to family bonding since the men and women of the farm community are more concerned with the weather. As crops fail and dust seeps into the houses and lungs of Jack’s ailing sister Dorothy, tempers rise and the town’s citizens turn to superstition and cruelty to try to bring rain from the sky. While plagued by the town bullies, Jack finds solace in the stories told by an adult friend. Somehow convinced that the Storm king is in a nearby barn, Jack faces him down, and the rains fall. The pencil, ink, and watercolor illustrations allow a feeling of depression to settle over the pages, and during the jackrabbit drive a red haze fills the pages, dissipating as the men’s anger does. Jack finds solace in his sister’s oral reading of the *Wizard of Oz* stories of L. Frank Baum and his mother’s description of a lush, fertile Kansas before all the hope had dried up.

The geeky, pudgy, mild, and meek Walker Bean is an unlikely hero, but he readily takes on the challenge when his grandfather suffers from an ancient curse. Walker’s quest includes returning a pearl skull to the witches who created it and his swashbuckling adventures will subject him to great danger as he encounters pirates, ancient lore, and magical machines.


When Jimmy must decide between two enticing flavors of ice cream — vanilla or chocolate — it’s just the first of many choices he must make in this unusual book. Rather than reading panels from left to right, readers must follow color-coded tubes that move in all directions, from right to left, left to right, up to down, down to up, and move backwards rather than forwards on the pages. It’s a whole new way of reading — and experiencing — a graphic novel. Jimmy somehow ends up in the laboratory of an eccentric scientist who allows him to play around with three inventions — a mind reader, a time machine, and a Killitron. Each action results in different realities and almost infinite parallel universes.

On her 1928 transatlantic flight, the famous aviator is forced to stop in a small Canadian town to refuel. A teenage girl in the town is intrigued by Earhart and her adventures and vows to interview her while she is stuck in the remote area because of bad weather conditions. Revealing another side to Earhart and her crew, the book contains excellent endnotes, and highlights the changing role of women.


In this autobiographical tale from the author’s own dental experiences, life is fairly normal for sixth grader Raina until the day she falls and loses her two front teeth. Things never return to normal as Raina embarks on a series of dental adventures including surgery, implants, false teeth, tooth rearrangement, braces, and the social awkwardness that accompanies each of these changes. Plagued by a body that refuses to grow breasts and teeth that are decidedly different from her peers, Raina finds adolescence a tough experience. When her friends are not as supportive as might be expected, she must find other friends, gaining courage through her adversities. As she learns to speak up against peers who do not have her best interest at heart, Raina also finds solace in her artistic talents. The full color artwork does justice to the positive-thinking Raina and those who surround her.
Grades 7-10


Fifteen-year-old Yancy Aparicio receives a journal from his parents for his birthday, and he uses it to record his thoughts when he is forced to leave his California home on his beloved horse Shy. The family has been held hostage emotionally by his older brother Will who had a conduct disorder and is becoming increasingly violent, threatening Yancy’s horse and sending them on the run. While his mother meditates and his father tries to manage the situation, things go from bad to worse. On his journey, Yancy meets some caring individuals, ends up on a ranch, and finds himself and courage. While fending off the advances of the sultry daughter of a ranch owner, the artistic teen dreams of summoning the courage to reveal his crush on schoolmate Christi while living free from fear at home. As he records his thoughts over the course of 24 days, Yancy faces some harsh truths about his family and himself. Comic strips and illustrations are scattered throughout the journal, making it clear how Yancy sees himself as largely invisible in a family whose focus remains on his troubled brother.


The author sorts through the personal effects of his grandmother Blanche Womack after her death and discovers that she had a life filled with secrets and adventure. As he reads her letters to his parents, he realizes that Blanche was a woman ahead of her times and she wasn’t merely a piano teacher who helped little girls learn how to press the black and white keys at all. Geary includes three adventures from the life of Blanche, each one making the reader long to hear her stories. Blanche’s first adventure happened back in 1907 when the intrepid explorer left her Kansas home for the excitement and bustle of New York City in order to study piano with a master. Each night she was awakened by a sound in the walls, and finally followed it through a series of underground tunnels where she found another universe. Somehow, she ended up being kidnapped after her piano recital, survived a leap from the Brooklyn Bridge as she and a partner ran from the bad guys, and ended up posing for a nude portrait. In her second and third adventures,
Blanche went to Hollywood in 1915, ended up flying in a hot air balloon, and was saved from flying off above the Pacific by using herself as an anchor to a tree. She finally found herself in Paris in 1921 where her adventure culminated in a rapid ascent to the Eiffel Tower.


This sequel to the appealing *Rapunzel’s Revenge* (Bloomsbury, 2008) follows the adventures of Jack and Rapunzel as they return to the city of Jack’s birth. As a boy in Shyport, Jack wasn’t always the most honest or trustworthy boy, and he and his sidekick Pru who loves hats of all kinds became embroiled in various escapades. When one of his plans goes awry, his mother banishes him, and Jack leaves town with his goose tucked under his arm. The story begins where *Rapunzel’s Revenge* leaves off. All the appealing elements of the first story are included in this one, and those familiar with the infamous beanstalk from fairy tales will have a good idea about how this story will turn out. What’s exceptionally enticing is the budding romance between Jack and Rapunzel as his burgeoning jealousy when Rapunzel attracts the attention of another suitor is pitch perfect as are many of the exchanges between the characters. The artwork is vivid and appealing, bringing these beloved characters to life and prompting fans to clamor for more from this team.


As Jeroen looks in his grandmother’s attic for something to sell at the Queen’s Day flea market he discovers an old scrapbook. The scrapbook brings back a flood of memories for his grandmother and she recounts what it was like to live in the Netherlands during the Nazi occupation. Grandmother tells Jeroen about her father who worked for the Dutch Nazi Party, a brother who wanted to join the Nazis, another who secretly participated in the Resistance, and a friend who was a Jewish refugee from Germany. Jeroen learns that even his Nazi-leaning relatives did good and noble things, and the actions of those in the Resistance sometimes did things that were less than honorable. This book was originally published in Dutch by the Anne Frank House in cooperation with the Jewish Historical Museum of Amsterdam. Heuvel collaborated with Ruud.


Life changes quickly for Paul and his sister Marie after the Nazis invade their French village. First, the Nazis take their father and then they must hide their Jewish friend, Henri, after his parents disappear. Eventually they seek out the French resistance and learn that it is not always easy to determine who is on which side. Paul and Marie utilize Paul’s artistic talents to complete their first task for the Resistance and are eventually given a mission to transport information to Paris and enable Henri to reunite with his parents. Will their mission succeed? This book is a perfect companion to Carla Killough McClafferty’s *In Defiance of Hitler: The Secret Mission of Varian Fry* (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2008), a nonfiction book about an American’s involvement with the French Resistance.


Two stories come together in this intriguing tale of the greed and darkness that often lie hidden within many of us. In the first story, set in 1859, lovely but obedient Josey Fraser, the daughter of a Nova Scotian farmer whose land contains gold, falls for a mysterious stranger who claims he has the ability to find that gold. Josey’s kindly father trusts Asa Curry, the mysterious stranger but her mother does not. Josey herself can only see good in Asa, but it turns out her mother is right as Asa cannot be trusted and betrays those around him. One hundred and fifty years later, in the same town, French Hill, teen Tara Fraser is dealing with the loss of her house. When her aunt gives her a pendant once belonging to her mother, Tara discovers that the pendant has powers. How the two stories weave together is interesting and affords the reader insight into the past and its effects on the future.

Life is made barely tolerable for Aliera Carstairs because of her fencing prowess as she keeps to a strict training routine and defeats much older competitors in her matches. She also stays to herself, content to be a loner. When a new guy at school asks her out, she goes, taking her fencing equipment along. As she dons her fencing mask in Grand Central Station, Aliera sees all sorts of creatures that shouldn’t exist and when her lost foil is returned, it comes with the revelation that she is the protector of a world called Helfdon. The illustrations are particularly effective for this unique story, filled with color when Aliera encounters a fantasy world.

**References**


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History and Mission of Reading Horizons

Reading Horizons began in 1960 as a local newsletter and has developed into an international journal serving major colleges, universities, and individual subscribers across the United States and Canada as well as a host of other countries. The journal serves as a forum for ideas from many schools of thought dedicated to building upon the knowledge base of literacy through research, theoretical essays, opinion pieces, policy studies, and syntheses of best practices. Reading Horizons seeks to bring together school professionals, literacy researchers, teacher educators, parents, and community leaders as they work collaboratively to widen the horizons of literacy and the language arts.

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After in-house review by the editor, and if accepted for review, manuscripts will be sent to two members of our Editorial Advisory Board for blind review. Author(s) will be informed of our decision within four to five months of submission. Criteria used for evaluating and reviewing manuscripts are significance of the contribution to literacy/language arts research and instruction, clarity of writing, and sound methodology process used.
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