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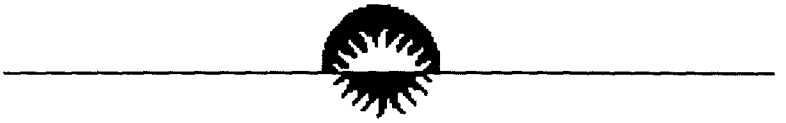

Fathers' and Mothers' Book Selection Preferences for Their Four Year Old Children Abstract

Jim Anderson
University of British Columbia

Ann Anderson
University of British Columbia

Jon Shapiro
University of British Columbia

Jacqueline Lynch
University of British Columbia

Abstract

Twelve fathers and 12 mothers of four year olds were presented with 14 children's books representing various genres and were asked to select the five books they would read to their children in the coming week and to give reasons for their selections. They were then asked to identify those books they would not select and to provide reasons. There were some differences between mothers'/fathers' book selection and some differences between selecting for sons/daughters. Similar differences were noted in terms of those books which parents would not select.

It's a Thursday afternoon at the local library and I'm browsing in the children's area. I hear a voice whisper, "Honey we can't take ALL of these home! Let's choose a few of them." I follow the voice to see a young child, arms full of books he has pulled from the surrounding shelves. The young boy and his mother find a quiet spot on the carpet and proceed to look through the pile of books. I can't help but eavesdrop as the mother negotiates, "That one looks interesting. This one's too long for you. Oh that's one of your favorites."

Almost forty years of research findings tell us that reading to young children on a regular basis has a positive effect on their development as readers (Durkin, 1966; Clark, 1976; Adams, 1990). Aside from the affective benefits of reading to children to foster positive feelings toward literacy, storybook reading focuses the young child on many of the conventions of print literacy such as directionality, the construction of meaning, and letter/word recognition. However, most of the studies have been retrospective accounts by "parent academics" (Heath & Thomas, 1984) and therefore generalizing from the results of these studies could be questioned. While it is believed that "storied environments" (Lancy, 1994) are common to middle-class homes, we have previously argued that in reality little is known about storybook interactions and, in fact, there is a great deal of diversity in the way middle-class parents read to their young children (Shapiro, Anderson & Anderson, 1997). If storybook reading is, as Pelligrini (1991) contends, "the literacy event par excellence" (p. 380), then surely book selection is an important consideration. We know (e.g., Jipson & Paley, 1991) that in the area of formal schooling, teachers' book selection is guided by their own knowledge of children's books, by teacher-librarians, through the special projects of organizations such as the International Reading Association's and Children's Book Council's Children's Choices and through journals that highlight children's book reviews. However, while there are some guides available to parents (e.g., McGovern, 1994; Thomas, 1992), surprisingly little is known about what types of books parents purchase or borrow and their reasons for doing so despite the fact that many parents purchase books or borrow them from libraries on a regular basis (Shapiro et. al., 1996).

Previous Research

Limited research examining the types of books parents choose to share with their children has shown a tendency for parents to select narratives with 4-year-olds. Dickinson, De Temple, Hirschler and Smith (1992) found that about one-third of the books read to 4-year-olds were children's narratives (a fictional story for children). Twenty-six percent of the parents in that study used didactic non-narratives or information books with their 4-year-olds. Other books shared less often by mothers in their study included didactic narratives (designed to entertain as well as instruct), fairy/folk tales, nursery rhymes, and rhyming/predictable narratives. To reiterate, children's narratives were the dominant choice of parents in this study. In a study of first graders and their parents, Owens (1992) found that 97.9 percent of parents reported they read narratives compared to only fifty-eight percent of parents saying that they used nonfiction. In that study, there appeared to be a relationship to parents' level of education in that the use of non-fiction was more common with the mothers having a higher level of education.

There has also been limited research completed on parents' reasons for selecting a book to read to their child. Robinson (1983) found that parents most often select a book for their young children based on the needs and interests of the children. The second most frequent reason parents gave for selecting a book for their child was based on the book's complexity (i.e., some challenge in vocabulary). Owens (1992) reported that most of the parents in his study had high school education and half had at least a college degree. When these parents were asked what they looked for when choosing a book for their children, the predominant response was children's interest in or understanding of topics. Other important reasons given by these parents involved the illustrations of the book and the specific values that the book presented. In another study by Dzama & Gilstrap (1985), parents who were asked how they prepare their children for a formal reading program reported being influenced by pictures and illustrations as well as their own childhood favorites when selecting a book for their child.

The studies reported above tended to show that children's interests, parents' own favorite stories, and the illustrations of a book are the main

reasons why parents select a particular book for their child. However, most of this limited research is more than a decade old and society has continued to change in its complexity since then. Further, little interest has been seen regarding the influence of gender on book selection. In this report, we focus on the role of gender in book selection in addition to examining the types of books middle class parents choose for their four-year-old children and their explanations for their choices. Furthermore, we also asked parents to identify books they would not select and their explanations for doing so.

Method

The parents of four-year-old children attending day cares or preschools in a large metropolitan area who were also participating in a large study of parent/child storybook reading were asked to assist us in this study. The sample was primarily middle-class. While we would have preferred a more diverse sample, our efforts to secure a wider range of subjects were not successful. However, we concluded from our previous research (Shapiro et. al., 1997) that there is sufficient diversity amongst middle-class parents that generalizing one method of storybook reading is inappropriate. Also since storybook reading is often a predominant feature of many middle-class homes we were encouraged to proceed.

Immediately after 12 mothers and 12 fathers representing 24 families shared two books (a narrative and an informational book) with their children, they were asked to select books they would choose for their child and those that they would not choose. Each parent viewed the same array of 14 children's books that were selected by the researchers in consultation with an expert in children's literature as being appropriate for four-year-olds (neither of the two books they had just read were included in the 14 books presented to them). The books represented various genres including informational books, narratives, poetry, rhymes, instruction (e.g., alphabet and counting), and a fairy tale (see Appendix for the complete list). In addition, we asked an assistant manager of a local children's bookstore if our selection represented books that were being purchased by parents. These books represented a minimum number that would provide some choice of each genre. We also tried to ensure that male and female characters were equally represented. They were

arranged in alphabetical order by author's last name. Parents had an opportunity to leaf through each of the books and then we asked each of them individually to "Please choose the five books you would read to your child over the next week or so if you had these books in your home." They were provided with as much time as they needed to make their selection and our observations suggested that what parents did was similar to what they would do in selecting books in a bookstore or at the library. Parents were then asked, "Why did you select these books?" After they provided this information they were asked if there were any books they would not choose to read and why they would not read them to their children. The responses were examined for book selection preferences of parents, including the relationship of parents and children's gender, and the reasons related to choosing or not choosing a particular book.

Results

In this section, we first report some general trends in book selection. We then examine book selection (and non-selection) in terms of parent's and children's gender. To conclude this section, we share the reasons, grouped according to themes, that parents provided for choosing the books they did, as well as the reasons why they would not select particular books. Given the lack of randomization in the sample selection and the relatively small sample size, the reader is reminded to interpret these results cautiously.

General Trends

As shown in Table 1, parents were fairly eclectic in their book selection in that no book was selected by all of the parents and each of the books was selected by at least five parents. The Berenstain Bears (14 parents) was most frequently selected. Since we included this book because of the popularity of this series and the prevalence of these books in supermarkets, drug stores, doctors' offices and the like, this result is predictable. Trouble with Trolls (13 parents) was the second most frequently chosen book. Interestingly, two information books, A Dandelion's Life (12 parents) and Me and My Place in Space (12 parents) were each selected by one-half the parents. As reported earlier,

previous research (e.g. Dickinson, De Temple, Hirschler and Smith, 1992) indicates that parents tend to select narrative texts to share with young children; here informational texts were selected nearly as frequently as were narrative texts. We speculate that this apparent change may be attributable to the fact that there has been a significant increase in the number of high quality information books written for children over the last decade or so and parents are becoming more familiar with this genre.

We predicted that because their children would be commencing school in less than a year, most of these parents would select texts that focused on letters and numbers so as to prepare their children for school. That relatively few parents selected Black and White Rabbits ABC (9) and The Cheerios Counting Book (5) was thus unexpected. As will be discussed later, some parents objected to The Cheerios Counting Book because of its connection with a commercial product and it is possible that these particular parents might have chosen a different "counting" or "numbers" book.

So far we have presented the results regarding parents' book selection. We now turn to the question in which we asked parents to identify those books that they would not select for their children. It should be remembered that we asked parents to select the 5 books out of 14, which they would select. But when we asked them which books they would not select, no specific number was indicated. Seven parents reported that there were none of these books that they would not select for their child, other parents identified only a single book, and four parents identified at least five books.

There's a Nightmare in my Closet was the book most frequently identified by parents (11) as one they would not choose. Eight parents indicated they would not select The Cheerios Counting Book, a somewhat surprising finding given that, as was mentioned earlier, we selected the book based on the finding from the pilot study of this book's perceived educational value for four-year-olds. Two other books, Building Machines and What They Do (6) and The Frog Princess (7), were identified as inappropriate by a relatively high number of parents. Jessica was the only book which none of the parents identified as one

that they would not select.

Table 1. Overall Selections

Book Title	F-D[1]	F-S	Fs[2]	M-D	M-S	Ms	Total
The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey	5	2	7	4	3	7	14
The Frog Princess	2	0	2	3	0	3	5
Jessica	4	0	4	4	1	5	9
Trouble with Trolls	4	3	7	3	3	6	13
There's a Nightmare in my Closet	4	1	5	0	1	1	6
The Secret Short Cut	3	1	4	2	1	3	7
A Dandelion's Life	4	3	7	2	3	5	12
What is a Cat?	3	1	4	5	0	5	9
Building Machines and What They Do	2	4	6	0	4	4	10
Me and my Place in Space	2	2	4	4	4	8	12
The Cheerios Counting Book	1	2	3	0	2	2	5
Black and White Rabbits ABC	3	1	4	3	2	5	9
The Ice Cream Store	1	3	4	4	0	4	8
Hop on Pop	2	2	4	1	1	2	6

[1]F-D, fathers selecting for daughters; F-S, fathers selecting for sons, etc.
[2]Fs, total for Fathers selecting, Ms, total for Mothers selecting

Book Selection and Parents' Gender

When we examine fathers' book selection (See Table 1), no trends other than those just reported in overall book selection were apparent. However, it is noteworthy that only one mother selected There's a Nightmare in My Closet in comparison to five fathers. On the other hand, the mothers account for the majority (8 of 12) of the selections of Me and My Place in Space.

Table 2. Overall Not Selections

Book Title	F-D	F-S	Fs	M-D	M-S	Ms	Total
The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
The Frog Princess	3	0	3	1	3	4	7
Jessica	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trouble with Trolls	2	0	2	1	2	3	5
There's a Nightmare in my Closet	4	2	6	3	2	5	11
The Secret Short Cut	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
A Dandelion's Life	0	1	1	0	0	0	1
What is a Cat?	2	1	3	0	0	0	3
Building Machines and What They Do	3	1	4	2	0	2	6
Me and my Place in Space	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
The Cheerios Counting Book	3	0	3	4	1	5	8
Black and White Rabbits ABC	2	0	2	1	1	2	4
The Ice Cream Store	1	1	2	0	0	0	2
Hop on Pop	1	0	1	1	1	2	3

There were only two books, Jessica and The Secret Shortcut, that none of the fathers identified as books they would not choose (See Table 2). There's a Nightmare in my Closet (6) was the book most frequently identified by fathers in this category. Interestingly, four fathers said that they would not select Building Machines and What They Do, a book that we predicted fathers would select since the subject matter would stereotypically be considered "masculine." There were six books which none of the mothers indicated were inappropriate. Three of these were information books. Five mothers rejected both The Cheerios Counting Book and There's a Nightmare in my Closet, indicating that the latter appears to be of concern to parents of both sexes.

Book Selection and Children's Gender

Several trends emerge when the child's gender is considered in terms of book selection. The most frequently selected books for sons were Building Machines and What They Do (8) and A Dandelions Life,

(6) Me and My Place in Space, (6) and Trouble with Trolls (6). It should be noted that three of these texts were information books. It is also interesting that the latter text is a narrative with a female protagonist. None of the parents selected The Frog Princess for their sons and only one parent chose Jessica and What is a Cat? To reiterate, at least half of the parents selected three of the four information books when selecting for their sons whereas only one of the four narratives was chosen by at least half the parents for sons.

Table 3. Selecting by Gender of Child

Book Title	F-D	M-D	Ds	F-S	M-S	Ss
The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey	5	4	9	2	3	5
The Frog Princess	2	3	5	0	0	0
Jessica	4	4	8	0	1	1
Trouble with Trolls	4	3	7	3	3	6
There's a Nightmare in my Closet	4	0	0	1	1	2
The Secret Short Cut	3	2	5	1	1	2
A Dandelion's Life	4	2	6	3	3	6
What is a Cat?	3	5	8	1	0	1
Building Machines and What They Do	2	0	2	4	4	8
Me and my Place in Space	2	4	6	2	4	6
The Cheerios Counting Book	1	0	1	2	2	4
Black and White Rabbits ABC	3	3	6	1	2	3
The Ice Cream Store	1	4	5	3	0	3
Hop on Pop	2	1	3	2	1	3

Parents did not appear to favor narrative or informational texts when selecting for their daughters although two parents, both fathers, selected the informational text, Building Machines and What They Do. On the other hand, 8 of 15 parents selected What is A Cat? for their daughters, a book selected by only one out of nine parents for their sons. Five parents chose The Frog Princess for their daughters, while as was indicated earlier, none of the parents selected this book for their sons.

Three books were not identified by any of the parents as ones they would not select for their sons. But as can be seen in Table 4, there were seven books which only one parent would not choose for their sons, indicating that for the most part parent choices of books they would not select were rather idiosyncratic. Although the numbers are relatively low, there appears to be a trend toward not selecting narratives for sons. There were also three books that were not identified by any of the parents as ones they would not select for their daughters. Seven parents would not choose The Cheerios Counting Book for daughters but only one parent would not select this book for his or her son. As was predicted, a number of parents said they would not select Building Machines and What They Do (5) for their daughters. This contrasts with the fact that Me and My Place in Space would not be selected by only one of the parents.

Some educators (e.g., Barrs, 2000; Schneider, 2001) contend that literacy is gendered in that boys and girls have different preferences in literacy and engage in literacy in markedly different ways. For example, one of the reasons that Doiron (1994) enjoins teachers to read more informational texts aloud to students is that boys prefer such texts to narratives, the genre dominant in many primary/elementary classrooms. We interpret the results reported here as suggesting that through book selection, some of the parents are setting gender role expectations for their children. That is, informational books are more appropriate for boys and indeed, some informational books more appropriate for boys than others. Furthermore, some narratives, (e.g. those with a scary title and plot line such as Trouble with Trolls) are suitable for boys while others (e.g. The Frog Princess) are appropriate for girls. It seems that, in general, these parents are influenced by the child's gender when choosing books and what has traditionally been held to be suitable for children in terms of "gendered" interests has not changed as much as perhaps would be expected, given the general societal concern with gender issues over the last two decades or so.

So far we have presented some overall trends in terms of book selection. The reader is reminded that after parents selected the five books, they were asked, "Why did you select these books?" Similarly, after parents had identified any books they would not choose, they were

asked to explain why. We now examine and share some of the explanations parents provided as to their choices. These are categorized according to themes that emerged as we analyzed the data.

Table 4. Not Selecting by Gender of Child

Book Title	F-D	M-D	Ds	F-S	M-S	Ss
The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey	1	0	1	0	0	0
The Frog Princess	3	1	4	0	3	3
Jessica	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trouble with Trolls	2	1	3	0	2	2
There's a Nightmare in my Closet	4	3	7	2	2	4
The Secret Short Cut	0	0	0	0	2	2
A Dandelion's Life	0	0	0	1	0	1
What is a Cat?	2	0	2	1	0	1
Building Machines and What They Do	3	2	5	1	0	1
Me and my Place in Space	1	0	1	0	0	0
The Cheerios Counting Book	3	4	7	0	1	1
Black and White Rabbits ABC	2	1	3	0	1	1
The Ice Cream Store	1	0	1	1	0	1
Hop on Pop	1	1	2	0	1	1

Subject Matter-Content

In providing reasons why they chose particular books, the most prominent category was Subject Matter/Content and in their comments, parents made mention of the content of the book being referred to. For example, one parent referring to his selection of The Trouble with Trolls for his son commented, "[It] looks like a book about relationships", evidently, thinking it an important concept for children to learn about. Another parent, in reference to What is a Cat? said "It describes what cats do" and indicated that this was a subject that would appeal to the child. Parents also referred to what they perceived as the appropriateness of content in relation to their child's gender as was the case of a mother who, in selecting Jessica for her daughter, remarked, "[It] looks like a

little girl's book." Other parents noted the engaging nature of the content, such as one father's remark about Black and White Rabbit's ABC, "Fun to read and we could make all sorts of fun noises while reading it."

Subject matter/content was again the most frequent category when parents explained why they would not select particular books. In reference to the content of There's a Nightmare in My Closet, a parent stated "It's emphasizing scary things." Another parent opined that The Frog Princess was unacceptable because it is "not realistic-the princess ends up marrying the prince." Given the universal appeal of Dr. Seuss books, it was somewhat surprising that one parent indicated that she would not select Hop on Pop because " it's really silly, doesn't make sense." Gender was also a factor in parents' reasons not to select certain books. For example, a father stated that he would not choose Building Machines and What They Do for his daughter because the book is "for boys."

Children's Interests

The second most frequent category in terms of reasons for selecting books was Children's Interests. This finding is consistent with other research (e.g., Robinson, 1993) that found that parents select books based on the child's interests. Here, parents tended to focus on the general interests of the child. For example, a mother choosing The Trouble with Trolls for her son commented, "[My] child is interested in fairy tales, trolls and monsters." Similarly, in reference to Building Machines and What they Do, a father commented, "N's [his son] big interest – trucks and diggers." Some parents connected their child's interest with the text genre, as was the case with a parent who commented, "She's very much into rhymes right now," in relation to her selection of The Ice Cream Store. It is noteworthy that while mothers and fathers contributed almost equally to the reasons pertaining to subject matter, mothers provided almost three quarters of the references to children's interests.

Parents also cited children's interests as a reason for not selecting particular books, although less frequently than when identifying reasons for selecting specific books. Here parents tended to make general comments such as "Not an interest of hers." Interestingly, many of the

comments in this category referred to Building Machines and What They Do and most of them pertained to daughters.

Aesthetics

Parents also explained that they choose certain books because of their aesthetic qualities and this was the next most frequent category of reasons for selecting books. The majority of the comments here pertained to the illustrations as in the example of the father who commented, "The illustrations are wonderful," in explaining why he would choose A Dandelion's Life for his daughter. Some parents were more specific in commenting on the illustrations, a case in point being the parent who suggested, "The pictures are whimsical and surreal" in The Secret Shortcut. Some parents also referred to the appeal of the cover of the book. Typical of such responses was the parent who commented, "The cover struck me" in selecting A Dandelions Life. One parent commented on the aesthetics of the language in The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey, remarking, "Child-like rhymes-not poetry like R. L. Stevenson poetry but still poetry." Interestingly, almost two thirds of the comments in the "Aesthetics" category came from the fathers.

Somewhat surprisingly, some parents found the "Aesthetics" of particular books as reasons for not selecting them. Pointing to the illustrations in The Trouble with Trolls, one parent said "Trolls are not very good looking." And one mother found that "the graphics [in Hop on Pop] never really appeal to me."

Familiarity

Parents also indicated that they selected a particular book because they were familiar with it or its author. Here some parents focused on the child's familiarity with the particular book. For example, when selecting The Ice Cream Store, a mother stated, "A big time favorite." Other parents alluded to the child's familiarity with the author or the series, rather than to the specific book in question. An example of such an explanation was a father's comment about Trouble with Trolls, "We have the companion book at home." Some parents indicated their own familiarity with the book informed their choice as was the case with the

father who said, "Used to read this one with my other daughter" in explaining his selection of Hop on Pop. Again, about two-thirds of the comments here are attributable to fathers.

Some of the parents also indicated that because their children were already familiar with some of the books, they would not choose them at this time. For example, referring to The Frog Princess, one parent explained, "Has read several different versions of it-read it so many times in different ways."

Educational

Some parents referred to the educational value of books in explaining their choices, although as was explained earlier, less frequently than we predicted when commencing the study. Here, parents referred to teaching or learning or described a particular book as educational. For example, one father, in referring to his selection of The Cheerios Counting Book for his daughter, commented, "[It is] educational-she can learn her numbers." Referring to Me and My Place in Space, a mother allowed, "[My daughter] would learn about the environment and science." While many parents spoke of the specific knowledge or learning which could result from sharing the book, other parents alluded to the general educational potential of a book as with the mother who stated that Black and White Rabbit's ABC "is educational." Interestingly, one parent alluded to a different type of learning when she felt that There's a Nightmare in My Closet "would help him [her son] come to terms with being scared of the dark."

As might be expected, no parents cited the educational value of books as reasons for not selecting books.

Difficulty

The relative difficulty of the book was the sixth most frequent category of explanation. Parents appeared to use developmental appropriateness as a criterion in selecting books. For example, one parent said of Me and My Place in Space, "It has the right amount of words." Another parent commented that she would select Me and My Place in

Space because it has "short sentences." Likewise, a father suggested that A Dandelion's Life contained "easy to recognize words, nice big text, would recognize words easier." In commenting on The Trouble with Trolls, a father noted, "Sufficient story with lots to talk about." Some parents also considered the length of the book as was the case with the father who felt that The Frog Princess was "a long story-could read in possibly two or three episodes."

Perhaps as expected, parents' concern with the relative difficulty of the text was the second most frequent category of reasons for not selecting particular books. One parent commented that his daughter was "not ready" for The Cheerios Counting Book, that it was "beyond her at this time." Another parent felt that The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey contained "too much text and she would get bored." A mother stated that The Trouble with Trolls contained "too many difficult words" when explaining why she would not select it for her son. Some parents saw some of the books as being too easy for their children. For example, commenting on Black and White Rabbit's ABC, a parent indicated that his daughter was "past that stage-knows her numbers and letters."

Parents' Interests

Interestingly, parents' own interests also informed their reasons for selecting books. In explaining his choosing of Me and My Place in Space, one father reported, "As a child I was always interested in space and astronomy." One mother, in explaining how her own interests influenced her choice of A Dandelions Life commented, "When I read, it has to interest me as well."

Similar to reasons for selecting, parents' own interests played a role in the decision not to select books. Typical of this type of response was the father who, when explicating his reason for not selecting What is a Cat?, claimed "things about cats are not very interesting."

While these parents might be criticized for putting their own interests ahead of those of their children, we speculate that these parents are telling us something important here. Those of us who have seen a parent (or teacher) painfully struggle through a book that they do not like

have witnessed the negativity associated with such an event. We think these parents are aware of how they can unconsciously send negative message about sharing a text that they find uninteresting with their child and so want to share those texts that they will share in an exciting and engaging manner.

Values

A new category also emerged from the analysis of the explanations for not choosing particular books that we labeled "values." Dzama & Gilstrap (1985) also found that parents considered the values inherent in the books to be shared with their children.

For example, several parents had concerns with The Cheerios Counting Book as did the parent who said, "[I] don't really like the idea that it is advertising." Commenting on the same book, another parent remarked, "It's a name brand-product promotion." And in elaborating on why he would not select The Frog Princess for his daughter, one parent opined "Inappropriate. Looks like one of these old style princess books."

Discussion/Conclusion

We believe that it is important for educators to listen to what parents have to say about the books they select for their young children. As has been pointed out earlier, parents are their child's first teacher. Parents are also encouraged to read to their children from birth, to visit the library with their children on a regular basis, and to buy books as gifts and on special occasions. Many parents follow these suggestions but relatively little is known about what types of books parents select when doing so and why they select the books they do. According to Hannon (1995), educators have typically imposed on parents what it is they should be doing at home to support literacy development. He suggests that we also begin learning from parents. While this study's snapshot of parents' selection of books for their young children aims to do that, it must be viewed within the context of several limitations. First, the sample was one of convenience and thus did not represent a variety of ethnic and economic groups. However, when differences are found within a "static" group we believe it shows that generalizing to other

groups (e.g., the programs that teach "the way" to read to children) is dangerous. Second, parents were presented with a pre-selected group of books rather than being asked to list or discuss books they actually purchased. This procedure was selected to control the amount of information generated from interviews and to examine similarities across specific books and/or genres. Finally, when identifying books they would choose, parents were limited to five rather than being allowed more choices. Once again this had to do with convenience in limiting the length of the interview sessions since parents had just finished reading to their children and we had to be concerned with child care arrangements.

Our interviews with these parents reveal that there is considerable diversity in the books that a relatively homogenous group of parents select for their young children. However, some books were chosen much more frequently than others. The child's gender influenced the books which some of the parents selected and there were some differences between what mothers and fathers selected. In addition to the child's gender, parents considered various other factors such as subject matter or content or aesthetics of the book, and the child's interests when selecting books for their children. We believe this diversity in book selection is important in that it demonstrates that in different ways, these parents seem to have an intuitive understanding of which books will "work" with their children. That is, these parents are matching their children with particular books, helping to ensure that children will associate positively with the books shared, building on knowledge they already have developed, and developing new knowledge.

Despite the relatively small number of books used, certain books stood out as those that parents would not select. The child's gender appeared to influence parents' decisions not to choose particular books, as did other factors such as content, relative difficulty, and so forth.

We believe that the parents with whom we worked demonstrated considerable sophistication in selecting books and in explaining their choices. Although we have separated parents' reasons for selecting, or not selecting, particular books into descriptive categories, we speculate that a number of factors interact in informing parents' book choices. That is, parents often provided several reasons for particular choices. For

example, they mentioned the child's interests, the content or subject matter when explaining why a particular book was or was not chosen.

Even though we saw parents' relatively sophisticated stances in selecting books, we do have some concerns with the tendency on the part of some of the parents to have rather restrictive views of the gender appropriateness of some of the books. That is, some parents saw some of the books as "boy's books" or "books for girls." We believe it is important for early childhood educators, librarians, and teachers to help parents realize the importance of exposing children to books that challenge traditional gender roles.

Given that these children would be entering kindergarten within a year, we were somewhat surprised that parents appeared not to ascribe too much significance to learning outcomes when selecting books, in that the "Educational" category was fifth of seven in terms of frequency. Given what we perceive as pressure to begin teaching literacy skills earlier and earlier, we were heartened by what we interpret as the parents concern with selecting books that would engage their children, not on what Rosenblatt (1978) would call efferent reading. These parents appear to have an intuitive understanding of developmentally appropriate practice.

Familiarity seems to play an important role in informing parents' choices in that the Berenstain Bears, which of course are very well known, was the most popular choice.

The popularity of the Berenstain Bears might also be attributable to the fact that it is part of a series of books by the same authors. In fact, some of the parents alluded to this feature in relation to some of the other books (e.g., Dr. Seuss). Again, educators might capitalize on this factor and help familiarize parents and children with other series (e.g. the "Spot" series by Eric Hill), especially if parents are able to build upon this feature to engage their children in reading at home.

In addition, subject matter of the books and children's interests seem to be significant influences on parents' book choices. This reminds us of the insight which parents have about their children, which teachers

and librarians can never expect to have given the numbers of children with whom they work. But this also points to the need for educators to establish and maintain strong communication with the home so that we can learn as much as possible about the children with whom we work from them and their parents.

While more parents selected narratives than information books, as was reported earlier, in this study non-fiction was selected with greater frequency than in earlier research. Educators such as Doiron (1994) have called for the inclusion of more non-fiction books in the repertoire of books read aloud to children in school. We believe it is important that we continue to help parents understand the importance of providing non-fictional material for their young children. There is an increasing array of high quality non-fiction books available for young children and we need to insure that parents are aware of these.

And finally, we need to continue to ascertain how parents contribute to children's literacy development. In this regard, work such as described in this article is needed with parents from different socio-cultural groups. The more we can understand what informs parents' book selection and what they see as important, the better we will be able to work collaboratively with parents to support literacy learning at home and in school.

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Dr. James Anderson, Dr. Ann Anderson, Dr. Jon Shapiro, and Jacqueline Lynch are faculty members at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Appendix

Children's Books Used

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Developing Preservice Teachers' Perspectives on Reader Response

Dana L. Grisham
San Diego State University

Abstract

This study examines preservice teachers' developing conceptions of reader response theory, specifically focusing on the importance of aesthetic response to students' engagement with and motivation for reading. Three intact classes over three semesters (N = 78) participated in an intervention through literature discussion circles after reading award-winning and multicultural children's and adolescent literature. They read a cycle of three novels in each class. Preservice teachers chose the books from multiple copies provided and responded in writing to each selection prior to meeting in small, student-run groups for discussion. Participants wrote dialectical journals for the first book, completed role sheets for the second selection, and for the third novel, provided a written response of their choice. Results indicate: that the aesthetic reader stance predominated in students' written responses and discussions; that written response did not influence the quality of the discussion; and that students were more disposed to consider aesthetic stance as important to the reader after their own participation in literature discussion circles. Participants also highly valued book choices and forms of responses allowed. Implications for teaching are critical in sustaining a balanced view of literacy because current reform mandates avoid the mention of issues such as personal response in favor of literary analysis and often prescribe what teachers must teach and assess.

Background

Most elementary teachers use children's literature in the classroom as one component of a balanced literacy program. Teacher candidates should be prepared in ways to know and love children's literature as well as to learn to identify and value different responses that children may make to literature. How could I, as a teacher educator in literacy, effectively teach beginning teachers about reader response theory and the importance of aesthetic responses to literature by young students?

This issue concerns every teacher educator in literacy, particularly in an era when educational reform at the state and national levels is focused tightly on issues of accountability. In states like California, top-down reform movements are resulting in a resurgence of behavioral objectives prescribing what teachers must teach and assess. The California Language Arts Content Standards (1997), lists specific measurable outcomes to be achieved by students. Under literary response, for example, third grade readers must be able to "identify characters, settings, and key events." Such behaviorally prescribed fragments of study are important but incomplete descriptions of reading; they do not embody the engagement, complexity, and joy that constitutes the reading process. The pressure to raise reading achievement scores through the application of behavioral objectives can lead to an instructional scenario devoid of important affect. As Ruddell (1998) put it, "If children's motivation to read is not sustained from the earliest grades, they will not develop proficiency and independence in reading" (p.3).

The questions which framed my research on adult preferences in responding to literature included: (1) Would elementary preservice teachers prefer to respond in writing to children's literature using dialectical journals, role sheets, or a written response mode of their own choosing; (2) How might the method of written response affect the type of response (aesthetic or efferent) made by the students; (3) How might the method of response affect the ensuing small group literature discussion; (4) In what ways might this experience influence the preservice candidates' attitudes towards teaching children's literature, particularly their attitudes toward aesthetic responses?

Responses to Literature

Recent best practice in literacy calls for "grand conversations" (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Eeds & Peterson, 1991; Gambrell & Almasi, 1997; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993) over the literature that elementary students read. Discussion of literature is consonant with social learning theory which suggests that meaning is constructed when the individual interacts with the text and with other individuals (Moll, 1992; Purves, Rogers & Soter, 1995). However, student engagement with text may not be assured by reading alone; nor may meaningful discussions be a natural result of reading. To facilitate the individual's active engagement with the text and with the story world, students are often asked to respond in writing to what they read prior to discussion (Borders & Naylor, 1993; Dudley-Marling & Searle, 1991, McConaghy, 1990). Such strategies are instances of *transmediation* (Siegel, 1995), which is the phenomenon of using one medium, such as writing, to deepen understanding of, elaborate, or extend another medium, such as reading. Using art, drama, or discussion to respond to a text are other examples of transmediation (See, for example, Peck, 1998).

Three important theoretical and pedagogical areas undergird my study. The first is reader response theory. Rosenblatt (1978; 1994) theorizes the reading process as a transaction between the reader, the text, and the context in which the reading occurs. In this scenario, both the reader and the text are sites in which meaning resides. The transaction between the reader and the text is constructed into an individual response that almost certainly differs to some degree from the transaction between the same text and another reader. From the work of Rosenblatt and others (see, Beach, 1993 and Tompkins, 1980 for reviews), "reader response" theory has evolved and has been the subject of many research investigations over the past twenty years.

One of the major distinctions drawn by Rosenblatt and other reader response theorists is that readers' stances to literature may be *aesthetic* or *efferent*. An efferent stance tends toward analytical or critical responses, based on literary elements such as characterization, plot, setting, theme, and so on. These literary elements are highly valued, particularly since they are frequently tested in standardized and other assessments. While

some researchers suggest that students may be guided by the teacher into more meaningful or deeper understanding of the text (Menke & Pressley, 1994), there is a concomitant concern that teacher-directed discussions may revert to the IRE pattern (Mehan, 1979), where procedural interactions dominate the discourse. Efferent responses may be deep and meaningful, but aesthetic responses to literature should be viewed as equally important.

The aesthetic stance, according to Rosenblatt, consists of reader responses to the text based upon personal and intertextual connections. An example of aesthetic response is when persons who have read the same book get together, and their usual first question goes something like, "How did you like the book?" A personal aesthetic response might be one in which the reader compares a situation in the book to his or her own life. An intertextual aesthetic response might consist of comparison of one book with another in a personal vein. The value of aesthetic response is that it deepens the reader's engagement with the text. Rosenblatt (1994) argued that aesthetic response is necessary for the reader's construction of meaning prior to students engaging in efferent types of responses. Almasi (1995) studied participation structures in literature discussion groups and found that when students were allowed time to talk about topics that were meaningful to them, their responses to the literature tended to be more complex than those of students who responded only to the teacher's questions.

Second, journaling as an effective response to literature is represented by a large body of literature (see, for example, Berthoff, 1981; Kamber, 1995; Livdahl, 1993). These works state that journal writing leads the reader to a deeper relationship with the text. Dialectical journals, in particular, have been used as an instructional strategy for various purposes, including response to literature (Ellis, 1997; Meehan, 1998; Newell, 1996).

Finally, Literature Response Circles (LRCs) are an often-used instructional strategy for literature study (Daniels, 1994; Samway & Whang, 1996; Smith, 1996). Literature Response Circles have been successfully utilized for literature study at every grade level from Kindergarten (Souvenir, 1997) to the university level (Peck, 1998). The

variation in the way LRCs are conducted in schools is highlighted by the different structures recommended in the Daniels (1994) and Samway and Whang (1996) books, both of which are well-known texts which teachers read. For Daniels, LRCs are student-led, student-centered temporary groups in which students discuss topics of their own choosing. His use of role sheets to support discussion as students read agreed upon portions of the book is seen to be a scaffolding technique that should be removed as soon as students have gotten the knack of discussing freely.

In contrast, Samway and Whang recommend two sessions for discussion. The first discussion session takes place after students have read the entire book and centers on aesthetic response to the book. The second discussion takes place shortly thereafter and focuses on the efferent responses that provide for a serious literary analysis of the book.

Rosenblatt's transactional theories, the theory of transmediation, and the use of literature circles are all consonant with social constructivism (Fosnot, 1996) in which the learner is actively constructing meaning during interactions with others.

Most of the literary instruction in schools falls into the efferent category. In an earlier study (Grisham, 1997) elementary teachers involved in a project to implement literature circles were torn between their goal of making educational experiences more learner-centered and their concomitant anxiety over what they interpreted as wasted time or off-task behavior when children were in charge of their own learning. An illustration of this dilemma occurred during student-run literature discussion groups, when teachers who briefly visited the "student-run" groups tended to direct students away from discussions involving aesthetic responses to literature and toward more analytic (efferent) responses. These teachers, who had participated in study groups on literature circles, perceived the value of aesthetic responses by children in a theoretical sense, but struggled with their implementation. Teachers in the study could not seem to prevent themselves from steering the groups into traditional teacher-directed literary discussions centering on character, plot, setting, and theme, all of which met the mandates for accountability rather than the need to engage students more deeply with literature.

Method

I focused on ways to engage adult readers, graduate level preservice teachers, with children's literature such that they might better internalize the significance of aesthetic response. In teacher preparation, the use of Literature Response Circles (LRCs) or Book Clubs in the literacy methods course appeared to be a productive way to model the responses or discussions teachers seek to have with children involving both aesthetic and efferent responses to literature. Preservice students are generally positive about the opportunity to read and respond to such award-winning children's books as The Giver, by Lois Lowry.

Three sources were critical to the formation of the literacy intervention described here. The first, Harvey Daniels' (1994) Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom, provided the primary impetus for organizing of my literature circles in the preservice classroom, and provided for one of the methods of written response: role sheets. From Samway & Whang (1996), I took the idea of reading the entire book before discussion. From the third source; Lapp, et. al. (1995), I took the idea of Book Club for teachers. The study took place during the 1997-98 academic year at a large California university.

Participants

Participants were three intact classes of graduate students in a fifth-year (graduate) teacher education program to earn the multiple subjects (K-8) teaching credential. During the first semester, students focused primarily on early literacy learning. The second of the two-class sequence focused on literacy learning in grades 4 to 8. Three intact classes of students (N = 78) participated in the study. Students in these classes were part of the teacher education program, primarily white and female (See Table 1).

Table 1. Participants in the study

Class	Semester	Number of Students	Number of Females	Number of Males
Class "A"	Fall 1997	26	23	3
Class "B"	Spring 1998	30	24	6
Class "C"	Summer 1998	22	21	1

Instructional Sequence

The element that I added consisted of three literature discussion cycles in each intact class. Each three-book cycle was organized in the same way. I first provided information about literature circles based on the model set forth in Daniels (1994), and provided sets of children's literature to be read and discussed. The literature included either award winning or multicultural children's literature for children or young adolescents. I selected award-winning literature for content and interest level and multicultural literature as part of my commitment to diversity. A list of books used is included in Appendix A.

To form literature circles, students were directed to list their names and their first, second, and third choices from books I offered. I then formed the groups, usually in the presence of the students, balancing choice with availability. Students who did not get their first choice in one cycle were assured of getting their first choice in the second or third cycle.

Newly formed literature circles of four to six students met immediately to discuss a set of "get-acquainted" questions prior to reading the book. Students then had one week until the next class meeting in which to read and respond to the literature.

Responding Using the Dialectical Journal

In each class, the first written response method required was the Dialectical Journal or split page journal. An example of the dialectical journal format from the course syllabus is shown below:

Quotation from Text	Response to Quotation
"He was a sloppy eater." (p. 6)	I can remember how hard it was for me to eat chicken with a knife and fork. It slid all over the plate.

I encouraged students to choose any quotation from the book that was meaningful to them and then respond to it in any authentic manner they desired. I placed no limit on the number of entries they might make; one entry per chapter of the book was required. I modeled examples of both aesthetic and efferent responses for the students.

Responding Using Role Sheets

The second required written response method consisted of "role sheets" (Daniels, 1994). Six roles were used: Discussion Director, Illustrator, Summarizer, Vocabulary Enricher, Connector, and Literary Luminary. Students decided who in the group would take each role. We varied from the Daniels (1994) book in that students completed their role sheets after reading the complete novel rather than after agreed-upon segments of the book as young students would do.

According to Daniels, role sheets give purpose and focus for the reading. They act as an organizer for discussion. For example, the Discussion Director (the only required role) is charged with formulating a list of questions that the group might want to discuss about the part of the book being read. In our literature circle, the list of questions was for the entire book. Sample questions are provided (e.g., What are one or two of the most important ideas? or Did today's reading remind you of any real-life experiences?) to give the student an idea of where to start.

After reading the book, students responded on the role sheets. Since the maximum size of a group was six, there was a role for everyone. Occasionally, groups were smaller so not all roles were filled. Students'

responses varied; in some cases students confined their written responses to the photocopied handout, while in other cases students augmented the role sheets with additional written text, often voluminous. Illustrator projects were often quite elaborate and creative.

Responding Using a Written Product of the Student's Choosing

The third written response method involved student choice. Students could elect to reprise previous methods of written response, or they could choose to do any other written response they preferred.

While I taught several response types over all three classes (see, for example, Yopp and Yopp, 1996), I also used student suggested literature in my courses and initiated various responses to these. For example, in one class students were asked to construct a storyboard to respond to each chapter in my read-aloud of The Midwife's Apprentice (Cushman, 1995). Thus, each semester, there was some variation in the types of responses I taught directly. In addition, students brought in several other techniques that they had learned elsewhere in other teacher education classes or in their field placements. I made no effort to control these choices and each class seemed to have varying preferences. I allowed complete choice.

Literature Discussion Circles

After students read each book and responded in the appropriate written method, they discussed the books. Class time was set aside for small group discussions ranging from 20 minutes to over half an hour. I observed discussion sessions and took field notes. Book discussions took place simultaneously in small groups placed around the classroom. They were entirely student-run, since I wanted students to experience self-directed discussions. I circulated throughout the room, listening to discussions, making notes about them, and occasionally participating if students wanted me to comment and to facilitate group process. A short whole class period would follow in which I would query each group about the effectiveness of the discussion and take general comments about the LRC process.

Student groups then cooperatively planned a presentation to "share" their book with the rest of the class. Presentations were made during the class meeting following discussions and used a number of presentational styles. For example, one group that had read Catherine, Called Birdy (Cushman, 1994) wrote letters from different characters' perspectives which they read aloud in character. Another group reading the same book, made hand puppets and put on a puppet show to highlight certain key vignettes in the book.

Data Collection

First, all dialectical journals and all role sheets were collected with students' permission for use in this study. Selected "choice" written projects were collected, although some were constructions which didn't lend themselves to collection, such as the "triarama."

At the end of the semester, I asked Class "A" (Fall 1997) students to write a narrative response to me about their preferences concerning the three types of written response, indicating which led to the richest discussion, and talking about their choice activity. The questions were listed on an overhead but not all students gave complete answers to the posed questions, thus for Class "B" and Class "C" a data collection form (Appendix B) was used which was much more effective in capturing the desired data.

Following the completion of the Literature Circles in Class "C," I interviewed four students who volunteered. During the last class period I asked for volunteers to be interviewed by passing around a sign-up sheet. From this list of 13 students, I randomly selected four to interview about their experiences. The interviews took place either on or off campus at a place and time convenient to each student. I asked each person the same set of questions (Appendix C) regarding the nature of response to literature and how they might structure their classrooms to use literature in the teaching of reading. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Analysis of quantitative data involved the compilation of descriptive statistics and construction of figures to reflect the data (Spatz & Johnston, 1989). These figures and comments are presented in the findings section of this paper.

Analysis of qualitative data involved the coding of themes for the research questions from the field notes, written responses, and transcribed interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). On the narrative letters (Class "A") and data collection sheet (Classes "B" and "C"), I read and re-read the students' comments. After I had listed the themes that emerged from the comments, I read again to confirm or disconfirm my categories. Some categories were eventually combined. An example of a category that was eliminated is "group composition made the difference in quality of discussion." I eliminated it as a finding due to insufficient data after reviewing book choices, discussion notes, and responses to books. I triangulated data throughout the study.

I analyzed dialectical journals, role sheets, and projects for the type of response to the literature. The dialectical journal entries were read and categorized by type of response (aesthetic, mixed or efferent) as shown in Appendix D using the same process of triangulation. I also examined choices and entries by gender.

Findings

Quantitative data provide one portrait of student responses to the literature. I calculated student preferences on specific questions (from the narrative data and the data collection sheets) which gave an overall picture of the types of responses made and preferences per class. The same was done with the question regarding which mode of response led to the most productive discussion.

Preferred Written Response

The data for preferred written response mode are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Preferred Written Response

Preferred Response	Class "A" N=26	Class "B" N=30	Class "C" N=22	Summary
Dialectical Journals	17 (66%)	16 (53%)	16 (73%)	49 (63%)
Role Sheets	8 (31%)	13 (43%)	6 (27%)	27 (35%)
No Preference	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	0	2 (2%)

Class "A" data indicate that 17 students (66 percent) selected the Dialectical Journal as the preferred choice of written response to the literature, while 8 students (31 percent) preferred the role sheets. One student expressed no preference. When it came to choosing a written response for the choice cycle, Class "A" chose the following in order of quantity: character map (4), dialectical journal (3), regular journal (3), story frame (3), summary (2), timeline with pictures (1), role sheet (1), triarama (1), freewrite (1), acrostic poem (1), Literary Report Card (1), ABC poem (1). Four students neglected to specify their choice for the third response (See Table 3).

Class "B" data indicate that 16 students (53 percent) preferred the dialectical journal while 13 students (43 percent) preferred role sheets. As with Class "A," one student expressed no preference. With regard to choice activities, Class "B" chose the following in order of quantity: dialectical journal (11), poetry (8), regular journal (4), character map (2), folded book (1), Webbing (1), Role Sheet (1), Song (1), illustrated limerick (1), and not specified (1).

Class "C" data indicate that 16 (73 percent) preferred the Dialectical Journal while 6 (27 percent) preferred role sheets. With regard to the choice activity, Class "C" chose the following in order of quantity: Role sheets (7), Literary Report Card (4), Venn diagram (4), Dialectical Journal (4), Polar Opposites (2), regular journal (1).

For the question involving favorite written response type, no student chose any alternative to the dialectical journal or the role sheets.

Preferred Choice Responses

I used Yopp & Yopp (1996) as the primary resource for teaching literature responses, but augmented those variably over each semester. Thus there appears to be no clear pattern in the choice responses. However, those written response types which appear in the Yopp textbook are starred. These data are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Choice Activities in Written Response

Choice Responses	Class "A" N=26	Class "B" N=30	Class "C" N=22	Summary
Dialectical Journals*	3	11	4	18 (23%)
Poetry	2	8	0	10(12.8%)
Role Sheets	1	1	7	9 (11.5%)
Regular Journal*	3	4	1	8 (10%)
Character Map*	4	2	0	6 (8%)
Literary* Report Card	1	0	4	5 (6.4%)
Venn Diagram *	0	0	4	4 (5%)
Story Frame	3	0	0	3 (3.8%)
Polar Opposites *	0	0	2	2 (2.5%)
Assorted (1 each of response)	5	4	0	9 (10%)
Missing	4	0	0	4 (6.4%)
Totals	26	30	22	78(99+%)

Thirty-four percent of the students chose either the dialectical journal or the role sheets for their choice written response in each of the

three classes. Analysis of choice project dialectical journals and role sheets reflect a similar tendency to respond aesthetically. The second largest category of choice response was poetry, which is entirely an aesthetic response.

Most Productive Discussion

Students were almost evenly split over whether dialectical journals or role sheets provided the basis for more "productive" discussion. Unfortunately, in Fall 1997 (Class "A"), some students did not attend directly to this question in their narrative responses to my questions and data were unusable. Table 4 summarizes the quantitative data on best discussion.

Table 4. Responses to the question, "Which was your best discussion?"

Class	Dialectic Journal	Role Sheets	Choice	No Pref.
"A" N = 26	*Not Avail	*Not Avail	*Not Avail	*Not Avail
"B" N = 31	12	14	1	4
"C" N = 22	10	7	3	2

In Spring 1998, although Class "B" students preferred responding in dialectical journals (16) over role sheets (13), the data reflected that role sheets provided for best discussions. Students indicated that the best discussions occurred when role sheets (14) were used, as contrasted with dialectical journals (12), choice (1), and no preference (4). In Summer 1998, students chose the dialectical journal (10) over the role sheets (7) and choice (3). Two students had no preference. There were no gender differences evident in the data set.

Data for Class "A" were partial perhaps because students felt that the structured responses led to the best discussions. This was interesting in view of the fact that students tended to comment favorably about choice.

I analyzed data collection sheets for the last two classes to see if the book selections themselves were influential in which discussion was preferred. No patterns were apparent to suggest that the book was more significant than the response/discussion type in creating a "best" discussion. For example, Class "B" favorite books were split: Children of the Dust Bowl (5), Children of the River (4), The House on Mango Street and Walk Two Moons (each 3), Freak the Mighty (2), and Catherine, Called Birdy, Number the Stars, Yolanda's Genius, and Maniac Magee (each 1). Books not named as favorites were Hatchet, Year of Impossible Goodbyes, and Bridge to Terabithia. Response types and favorite discussions were spread along unrelated lines.

Aesthetic v. Efferent Responses in the Dialectical Journals

From the 78 dialectical journals from all three preservice classes, 89 percent of the entries were aesthetic in nature. Qualitative data provides an intriguing look at the way student teachers think about and respond to literature. Here are two of the numerous examples of aesthetic responses students made to the literature in the dialectical journals.

From Number the Stars

P. 4 The soldier reached down and stroked her little sister's tangled curls. Stand still Kirsti, Annemarie ordered silently, praying that somehow the obstinate five-year-old would receive the message.	I thought about the scary position the children were in with the soldiers. How vulnerable and helpless Annemarie felt at that moment with her little sister.

From Bridge to Terabithia

We need a place, she said, just for us. It would be so secret that we would never tell anyone in the whole world about it. (p. 38)	As a kid, my secret places I had with my friends were so cool. They built a special bond between that group of friends because it was something that was just ours. This is a wonderful feeling.

This was coded aesthetic because it relates the reader's personal experiences.

Mixed responses are exemplified by the following:

From Hatchet

Ch. 16 "Brian jumped on it and grabbed it and slammed it against the ground once, sharply, to kill it."	It's hard to believe that this is the same boy that was in the plane crash. He was so squeamish to touch the dead pilot and now he seems so confident in touching "death," in fact, doing the killing. Obvious indication of how Brian has changed.

Coded mixed because there's a personal tone to the event, but it is described efferently.

The efferent responses are represented by the following:

From Children of the River

"Cambodians think it's bad to touch a little kid's head." (p. 109)	Ravy explains Cambodian belief to Jonathan, as a way of the author to introduce cultural differences.

Coded efferent because reader relates to literary device.

Dialectical journal entries tended to be either efferent or aesthetic. Students rarely combine response types. A journal tended to be almost all aesthetic or almost all efferent. Mixed responses were not common.

Qualitative Data on Written Responses to Literature

Students who preferred the dialectical journal stated that this mode of response helped them to reflect about the book more deeply and personally. They related the book to their experiences in their lives. Students mentioned that they also learned more about each other when they compared quotations because the dialectical journal "forced" them

to select what was really moving and important to them personally. Students mentioned that the dialectical journal response encouraged them to become "attached" to the text. Some students also mentioned that the dialectical journals led to group discussions that were personal and thereby more meaningful than other discussions. One student commented that she would "never forget the book she read because of the dialectical journal."

When students chose role sheets over dialectical journals as a response type, the most frequently stated reasons were (1) reduced amount of writing required and (2) disliked having to stop during reading to do the dialectical journal.

Students who named role sheets as their favored response type frequently stated that structure provided comfort or the role itself provided a frame or perspective through which to view the literary work. They enjoyed being the "expert" and having their own time to speak during small group discussion. Students commented on the "balance" of areas covered through the role sheets and also appreciated that every group member had to participate. Students who commented negatively about role sheets generally called them "boring."

Many students commented that they loved having been provided choice in the selection of the literature and the selection of the response types. Those who expressed no preference in response mode often lamented that it was too hard to choose because all the discussions had been rich.

Student Interviews

Through the student interviews (Class "C" only) I attempted to determine what effect responding to children's literature in their preservice class might mean to the individual's attitude about using literature groups their own classrooms. I also wanted to determine whether participation in literature discussion groups might have influenced the way that student teachers valued the aesthetic stance toward literature and aesthetic response. Student interviews occurred after classes had ended and grades had been turned in so that students

would have no reason to "please" the instructor with their responses to the questions.

Three of the four students interviewed were easily able to define efferent and aesthetic responses more than two weeks after class had ended. Here is Olivia's definition: "Aesthetic response to me means the way literature makes you feel, the way it effects your taste, if it seems good or not in a very general and personal way. Efferent I'm less sure about, but I would assume, in opposition to aesthetic, that it means more the information that you gain, the specific facts that you derive from the literature, and not how you feel about it." The fourth student remembered both terms after being prompted.

Transcripts of the interviews disclosed that literature discussions were largely personal rather than professional in nature. Students reported that they did not spend any significant amount of time talking about how to "teach" the novels they were reading. These data were consistent with my field notes and the written responses to support the predominantly aesthetic nature of the responses that the students made to the literature.

Students reported that the most prevalent "professional" response was, "Would you use this book in your classroom? If so, what grade?" (Melissa, August 1998). Students did discuss literary elements of the books during literature discussions, and these discussions tended to be woven among more personal and intertextual connections students made to the novels, demonstrating that all types of responses to literature were valued and mirrored the complexity found in children's responses by Almasi (1995).

As for the value of aesthetic response, all four interviews provide evidence that students had been reflective about its significance. Zoe expressed it well, "I think that if you connect with a piece of literature on an aesthetic level, that tends to be with some feeling or experience you had, and if you do that with a piece of literature, it makes it relevant to you and it makes it something that you care about. If you care about it, you are likely to remember more of the elements of the story, so if you

grab the student's interest in the piece of literature then I think you have them."

Discussion

Students were split on their decision regarding response-type preference: dialectical journals, role sheets, or own choice. While dialectical journals command a clear numerical majority, a number of students preferred role sheets. All three response-types led to valued discussions during literature response circles and all three were well-received written response modes. Yet it was choice itself which students said positively impacted them. An important question then follows: will these teacher candidates afford their students choices? This seems a likely follow-up study once these students have been teaching for a while.

The preponderance of personal or aesthetic responses (89 percent) to the novels surprised me. Students tended as a whole across all three groups to respond in a personal vein to the children's novels. *When given choice*, students responded personally across all three cohorts, supporting the assertion that aesthetic response is both desirable and necessary. While efferent responses are no less important, I maintain that it is the aesthetic stance that needs the conscious support of teachers.

In a study of veteran teachers, Grisham, (1997) found a bias in favor of efferent responses over aesthetic responses. Participants in this study, however, are student teachers not yet fully socialized into the profession. Communities that surround our schools may see aesthetic responses as frivolous. This, I believe, is a valid concern. If we accept that aesthetic response is a desirable precursor to efferent response (Daniels, 1994; Rosenblatt, 1994; Samway and Whang, 1996), then educators have a responsibility to effectively communicate this to parents. We should be able to use the research to convince parents and other community members of how critical aesthetic response can be to the student's motivation and engagement with text so critical to the depth and meaning of efferent response to literature and other texts.

There is no clear evidence for the superiority of either response-type affecting literature discussion. Students were evenly divided in attributing the most meaningful discussions to either dialectical journals or role sheets. Students reported enjoying all the discussions.

Some evidence for the *quality* of the discussions came from the interview group. Two of four students interviewed indicated that they felt the books and/or the composition of the groups had an effect on discussions. I could find no other data to support this. Lack of evidence for what transpired during discussions is a limitation of the study. Although this one study contains limitations such as data and findings based on three separate groups of teacher education candidates from one institution, this study represents the "tests of truthfulness" of qualitative data as set forth by Franklin & Jordan (1995).

This whole study in literature response experience positively influenced preservice candidates' attitudes towards teaching children's literature, particularly their attitudes toward aesthetic responses. Written data reflect a high level of confidence among participants about using literature groups in their future classrooms and all four students interviewed reflected positively on the nature of aesthetic response. These limited data are encouraging.

In conclusion, virtually all students tell me through the data collection sheets, their course evaluations, or personally, that they "love" reading the children's literature, even though it is "extra" reading. They "love" responding in various written modes to the literature, discussing in small groups, and giving presentations to the whole class. For example, "This was my favorite part of our class this semester because it was fun and different from anything else we've done. Thanks, it was great!" While many students tell me they "will" use literature response groups if they get jobs in upper grades, they also say they will rely on the basal programs. When I asked one student what place she envisioned literature having in her literacy instruction, she replied with a question. "Did I consider the stories from the basal as part of literature instruction?" In good professorial fashion, I asked her what she thought. "See, I would say yes. And in that case, I'm sure I'll use the basal quite a bit. And I mean I would definitely like to do a few novels, but I can't

imagine novels ever replacing the basal in the elementary school classroom for the whole year." I believe that intelligent students such as this one need the experience of aesthetic response to literature in their preservice classes to balance the pressure they may receive in their student teaching placements to use the basal program.

These data strengthen my belief that literary discussion should always make room for aesthetic response despite the pressure we all feel for accountability. It is true that students need to be able to analyze a literary work, but the *enjoyment* or "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1995) of interacting with a literary work is also critical to the development of readers. It is the deep engagement of the student with the text that makes the literary analysis more than an exercise to demonstrate a skill. Indeed, the intellectual and emotional gifts we must develop for a true quality of life outside of our profession demands that we do more to acknowledge this critical part of reading pedagogy.

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Dana L. Grisham is a faculty member at San Diego State University in San Diego, CA.

Appendix A

List of Children's Literature

Choi, Sook Nyul (1991). *Year of impossible goodbyes.* NewYork: Bantam.

Cisneros, S. (1984). *The house on Mango Street.* New York: Random House.

Creech, S. (1994). *Walk two moons.* New York: Random House.

Crew, L. (1992). *Children of the river.* New York: Bantam.

Cushman, K. (1994). *Catherine, called Birdy.* New York: Harper/Collins.

Dorris, M. (1992). *Morning girl.* New York: Bantam.

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Appendix B

Data Collection Form

Name (optional) _____Class, Semester

Please list the three books you read and how you responded in writing to #3.

1. _____ (Dialectical Journal)

2. _____(Role Sheet) Your Role: _____

3. _____Response: _____

Use the rest of this paper and the back if you'd like to respond to the following issues:

1. What was your favorite book?

2. What was your favorite written response type?

3. Which was your best discussion?

4. What effect did the response type have on the discussion?

5. What is your confidence level about using LRGs in your own class?

6. How did you feel about each of the response types?

7. What else should I know?

Mark: _____Male _____Female

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

1. If you remember back to our class you know that there are different kinds of responses to literature. One kind is aesthetic response and the other is called efferent response. If you remember them, could you put into your own words what they mean to you.

2. In your responses to the literature we read in class, what kind of written responses did you make? Would you characterize them as aesthetic or efferent?

3. In the literature discussions, do you recall what kinds of talk happened about the literature?

   Prompt: Would you characterize them as mostly aesthetic or mostly efferent?

4. In the book discussions, how much of them had to do with professional issues, such as how you might teach the book, or if you would teach the book?

5. What part do you think literature is going to have in your teaching of reading language arts? When you get your class next fall?

   Prompt: What types of literature do you envision using in your classroom?

   Prompt: What about the basal? What part do you see the basal playing?

6. What effect, if any, has participating in LRG's had on your attitude about teaching literature to children?

7. My last question is, we learned so much about aesthetic response during the literature discussions, how do you see the value or the importance of literature response as far as children are concerned?

Appendix D

Coding for Aesthetic/Efferent Dialectical Journal Entries

Aesthetic: *(focuses on personal connections to text or character; links to emotions/values or life experiences)*

Example from Walk Two Moons:

My father looked uncomfortable. "No," he said. "I tried--but she doesn't want to know." care,(p. 10)	When my parents split up, I remember overhearing my father's conversation with his new friend. He thought we didn't but we did want to get to know her. Thank the Lord my parents reconciled.

Mixed: *(focuses partly on connections to self, but may use a more detached voice, or may focus on literary elements, such as character, or professional concerns, in a more personal way)*

Example from Catherine, Called Birdy:

"You want me to pay you to take that girl?" (p. 69)	All through the novel, the father (the beast) constantly haggles for the best deal in trade for his daughter. This is another example of a suitor she thwarted.

Efferent: *(focuses on literary elements, or professional elements--how to teach--of the book)*

Example from Maniac Magee:

There he was, passing Red Hill, a book in his hand. (p.21)	Here again early in the book the author demonstrates how Jeffrey is always running, apparently for the sheer joy of it, yet continuing to show respect for the book and the person to whom it belongs.

Listen to Their Teachers' Voices: Effective Reading Instruction for Fourth Grade African American Students

J. Helen Perkins
Southern Methodist University

Abstract

This study identifies effective teaching methods that can enhance the reading skills of fourth grade African American students. Focus group interviews were conducted with 21 teachers. The teachers identified independent reading and writing, phonics and vocabulary, teacher modeling, the use of multicultural materials, engagement of parental involvement, incorporating prior knowledge, and cooperative learning as the methods they believed were most effective with this group of African American fourth grade students. This study provides a voice for educators. These findings also offer support for prior research, which has suggested that these methods are significant to enhance the reading skills of African American students.

Though much has been learned about the ways to enhance literacy, we have often failed to make these methods available to African American students, especially those in the inner cities (Dougherty, 1997). In the United States, too many "struggling readers" are African American students and other students of color (Hoover & Fabian, 2000). According to data from the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 4.5 million fourth grade African American students read below the basic level. Strickland (1994) explained that many at-risk students are African American and live in poverty. She added that education cannot solve all the African American students' problems, but education is an effective weapon against poverty and crime. To reach these students, educators must expand their repertoire of instructional methods to encompass the various approaches these students use to learn. Many of the effective methods needed by these students are derived from their African heritage, explains Kuykendall (1992). Improving the quality of classroom instruction is the best and most cost-effective means of improving overall student achievement and preventing at-risk students from falling behind (Slavin & Fashola, 1998, p. 33). Researchers should continue to identify pedagogy that enhances the reading skills of these students (Dilworth, 1992).

Unfortunately, some researchers seldom involve classroom teachers as a source of guidance and their voices are too often ignored. Teachers, according to Delpit (1995), particularly believe that their voices are not heard concerning the education of African American students. For many years classroom teachers have known intuitively what creates successful classroom experiences. Now there is a growing body of research that supports their intuitive knowledge, and many teachers who know the research are able to articulate why they do what they do (Sierra – Perry, 1996, p. xii). In this research project, I decided to listen to the voices of a select group of classroom teachers concerning the enhancement of reading skills for African American students and offer their pedagogical insights.

Purpose and Research Question

My purpose was to identify effective teaching methods, as identified by selected elementary school teachers, which enhanced the

reading abilities of African American fourth grade students. I was also interested in determining the validity of certain methods identified through a review of the research and where appropriate encourage their use by teachers of African American fourth grade students. The following research question guided this study: What are the effective teaching methods which enhance the literacy of African American students in fourth grade as perceived by fourth grade elementary teachers?

Procedures Used to Collect and Analyze the Data

Schools and Participants

I chose schools located in northeast Texas which have a significant number of African American students who are experiencing success in reading regardless of background; this district consists of 52.1% African American students. Based on the state test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), and the district's Benchmarks, there is documentation that African American students in this district are experiencing success in reading. The African American fourth grade students score above 80% on the reading section of TAAS. Twenty-one fourth grade teachers from four elementary schools, from diverse backgrounds, participated in this study. Teachers, identified by their principals, were chosen because of their experience and success educating fourth grade students. Based on student academic engagement and classroom reading performances, these teachers were chosen and their instruction analyzed. The teachers had an average of nine years of teaching experience.

Research Method and Analyzing the Data

I selected a qualitative, naturalistic research design for this study. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), qualitative research methods are becoming important methods of inquiry for certain fields of study such as the field of education. Better understanding of complex human interactions is gained through this alternate research process. Further qualitative inquiry permits the researcher to enter the field with little advance conceptualization (Patton, 1990).

Focus group interviews of teachers were selected as the primary source of data because they are open-ended interviews with groups of five to eight people on specifically targeted issues (Patton, 1990). Focus groups bring together people of similar experiences to participate in a group interview about a major issue that affects them. Patton acknowledged that group interviews provide a way to accumulate the individual knowledge of their members. They provide insights into the individual and personal experience of each educator participating in the study. Probes provided the elaborate depth needed, facts, interest, and clarification as noted by Rubin and Rubin (1995). Evidence probes provide the source of the interviewee's knowledge and steering probes assisted in keeping the interview on the right track (Rubin & Rubin).

Teachers initially participated in focus group interviews on four elementary campuses. All fourth grade teachers were invited to participate on each of the elementary campuses. The teachers were asked by the researcher, at the beginning of each of the four interviews to reflect and identify methods that they used on a consistent basis that they believed enhanced the reading skills of their African American students. They were also encouraged to expound on their statements. Participants in the focus groups listened to each other's responses and made comments, which allowed for flexibility, the exploration of issues, and shared impressions during discussion (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Obtaining high-quality data in a social context was the object of the focus group interviews. These interviews were recorded via audiotape over the course of two months; interviews were transcribed and analyzed for emerging themes and concepts. Analyses during data collection also employed the coding of data according to emerging categories of behaviors. Overarching themes were developed to link individual parts together and patterns emerged from the analysis of previous data. Recurring methods were tallied according to their frequency of discussion. Instructional methods had to be discussed at least six times to be included in this study. There were a few methods that were discussed by one teacher but were not included in this study. Patterns emerged leading to the use of the criterion number of 6; this number was the apparent point of differentiation (see Table 1). The table below lists the methods and the frequency of discussion by teachers in this study

who found them to be of value. All 21 teachers shared that they used all the methods listed in the table.

Table 1. Effective Reading Methods

Methods	Frequency of Discussion by Teachers
Independent reading & Writing	39
Phonics & Vocabulary	20
Modeling	11
Multicultural Education	9
Parental Involvement	8
Prior Knowledge/Schema	7
Cooperative Learning	6

Characteristics of Effective Reading Instruction

Introduction

Each of the methods discussed below were identified both by teachers in this study and in my review of research as effective methods for enhancing the reading ability of fourth grade African American students. The 21 teachers in this study have attended staff development/training on the methods they discussed in this study; these methods are used daily and integrated into the curriculum. Also, materials to support the implementation of the methods are purchased for each of the four schools.

Independent Reading and Writing Experiences

Independent Reading and Writing were the most frequently discussed methods during the interviews. Clay (p. 6, 1991) defines reading as a "message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practiced." During independent reading and writing, students are in charge of their own reading and writing; they choose what to read and what topics they will write about.

Reading achievement is positively enhanced by the amount of time spent reading a book (Howard, 1993; Paul, 1996; Routman, 1996; Allington, 1996; and Gillet & Temple, 1994). O'Masta and Wolf (1991), found that scores on a standard test of reading competence were improved when students increased their amount of independent reading time. Teachers perceive that these two methods are very important in enhancing the reading of African American fourth graders since the independent reader and writer develops control over the reading and writing processes (Reutzel and Cooter, 1999). Students enhance their reading and writing by being provided time to practice reading and writing. Students can also practice their thinking silently when reading during practice time (Gordon, 1990). Teachers should include independent reading and writing times in their daily lesson plans and provide the books and writing materials (Hoover & Fabian, 2000). Below, the voices of classroom teachers testify to the importance of independent reading and writing experiences:

> I think that if they have a lot of opportunities to put their hands on books that will really allow them to learn a lot.

> We do have 30 minutes of silent reading every day.

> We have DEAR time, which is drop everything and read. This is a silent reading time when they have all distractions eliminated and everybody is expected to read.

Writing activities can be effective with at–risk students because they involve the encoding and decoding of language (Reutzel & Cooter, 1999). The more students write, the more they engage the elements of successful reading such as context clues and sounds in words. The teachers provide insight:

> The last thing I have is Writer's Workshop, which gives the students the opportunity to express themselves where they're allowed to choose what they want to write about.

> One assignment we had in our journals in my classroom, we write down idioms and figures of speech that helps to make a story look more colorful.

I observed that teachers in this study used a variety of motivational programs to encourage their students to read and write independently. According to Hoover and Fabian (2000), their students write every day for a purpose such as creating books for younger students. This motivated the students to write. Listen to the teachers' voices on this important point:

> We did the Emmit Smith Reading Program. A little boy on our campus won a football. You could have won a visit from Emmit Smith (Dallas Cowboy Football Player).

> Another motivational thing that we use is the 600 Minute Club and they get a free ticket to Six Flags. They work really hard to get their free ticket.

> One of the new strategies we started using last year with our classes is Readers Workshop in which children read books of their choosing at their own level.

Teacher Modeling

Teacher modeling, a form of scaffolding and gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), is a way of demonstrating to students how to approach a task. During modeling, the teacher thinks aloud while talking and revealing her mental strategies in solving reading problems. Teachers should model how to analyze, to think in a logical manner, and to process ideas (Gordon, 1990 & Hill, 1989). The Reading Recovery teachers in this school work with the 4th grade teachers coaching them on effective modeling strategies. Cunningham and Allington (1994) noted that fourth grade teachers should model reading by reading to their students. These authors continued to explain that if a teacher multiplies the five or six times she models reading for her students by 180 school days, she has modeled that reading is a source of

information, pleasure, and humor over 1000 times for that school year. Our teachers spoke quite plainly about the importance of modeling:

> When I started reading it I started modeling for her what I was gaining from it and then she started getting what she needed to get from it because she saw what I was doing.

> We model as we've discussed before the voice and intonation in reading.

> Oral daily reading by the teacher will give life experiences and present examples; this helps build vocabulary in students.

Cooperative Learning

Social interaction has a significant role in developing students' cognitive growth. This is extremely relevant to current trends in reading instruction. Cooperative learning groups help students to synthesize information in a collaborative way. Slavin (1991) found that students' achievement, self-concept, and social skills were enhanced when they participated in cooperative learning groups. Research on cooperative learning practices reveals that students achieve more when working in groups rather than working individually or in competitive situations (Dilworth, 1992 & Kuykendall, 1992). Each of the teachers who participated in Ladson–Billings (1994) study used some type of cooperative learning technique in their classrooms. The teachers participating in the study encouraged their students to work within a collective study. According to Irvine (1989), there is significant evidence in the literature that African American students achieve better when they work together rather than alone. Here are just two of the teachers' voices that advocate cooperative learning for African American students:

> I even let them do their questions together and discuss them for a few minutes.

> It was because they have that one-on-one with someone that was their peer. They weren't threatened; they felt very comfortable in the situation.

Prior Knowledge (Schema)

Reutzel and Cooter (1996, p. 38) defined schema (prior knowledge) as packages of related concepts, events, or experiences such as reading the word furniture, readers activate their knowledge related to furniture. A schema can be considered an abstract, flexible, and growing cognitive framework with slots that can be filled in by the reader's personal and vicarious experiences (Piaget, 1955). Rumelhart (1980) explains that schemas are the basic foundation of cognitive development. It has been determined by researchers that when students know a great amount about a subject they tend to accurately recall more of the information from reading than do students with little or no background knowledge (Carr & Thompson, 1996).

The background knowledge of African American students can be quite varied. These teachers used literature to assist their students in the enhancement of their background knowledge. Comprehension can be hindered if students lack the schema concerning a particular topic (Pearson, Hansen, & Gordon, 1979). The teachers in our study said this about enhancing background knowledge in their students:

> They build background from the literature.

> Connectors are what they need.

> In the direct teach method, I know discovery and all those kinds of things are fun and I'm not saying that you don't do that but the best way or what works best is if you do the direct teach, to give them the background.

Multicultural Education / Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Harris (1997) is convinced that the reading achievement of African American students would improve if they could see themselves and other

people of color and their experiences, history, and culture reflected in the books they read. Efforts are emerging to bring people together and not apart. Multicultural education is bridging the gap between all people and can potentially offer a better understanding of the people who live in this world. Conversely, the absence of multicultural education in the curriculum implicitly suggests that African Americans' culture and history are irrelevant and inferior (Wyman, 1993). Multicultural literature strengthens the development of self-esteem and enhances the school achievement of these students (Harris, 1997).

Involving students on a regular basis with books that reflect the perspectives of different members of our American culture helps students to value different voices (Sierra-Perry, 1996, p. 90). The teachers in this study have also chosen to integrate their multicultural literature throughout the curriculum:

> My students have a variety of books.
>
> I buy books that discuss different people and cultures.
>
> Our Social Studies and Science is primarily based on literature with Trade books. We use a lot of multicultural literature. As we study the history of Texas, we include the literature that discusses the different ethnic groups in Texas and how they came to be.

Culturally relevant pedagogy involves students in the knowledge - construction process; they must have a sense of ownership of their knowledge, empowering and liberating (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ladson-Billings explained that this pedagogy uses the students' culture to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture. She also noted that culturally relevant pedagogy utilizes a variety of teaching methods, such as phonics, cooperative learning, and independent reading to assist all students in developing their literacy abilities without being ridiculed or embarrassed and it provides a link between classroom experiences and the students' everyday lives.

Phonics Instruction

To become skilled readers, students must be able to identify words quickly and accurately. Students must be proficient at decoding words; decoding words involves converting the printed word into spoken language. Adams (1990) described phonics instruction as a teacher working with a group of students to initiate them directly into written language by revealing its code. Learning phonics helps students to understand the relationship between letters and sounds and to "break the code" that links the words they hear with the words they see in print (U. S. Department of Education, 1986). Collins (1992), who has experienced great success with African American students, places great emphasis on phonics as part of her teaching approach. One of the teachers, in a study conducted by Ladson-Billings (1994), has experienced success with fourth grade African American students using phonics instruction. Songs, chants, rhymes, stories, and plays are used to enhance the students' abilities to listen to, manipulate, and discuss the sounds they hear (Hoover & Fabian, 2000). Strickland (1994) stressed that sound/symbol relationship (phonics) should be taught during the reading of interesting, predictable texts and during writing. The teachers in the study use a program of explicit instruction equated with direct instruction, an intense systematic phonics program. These teachers shared insight concerning phonics instruction:

> We can't assume that they have the process (phonics), you have to give them a process by which to figure words out and then pretty much they do okay.
>
> What are the similarities in those words? What are some of the rules that you could apply to those words? We really do make boxes on our notebook paper and put letters together and come up with a rule of why they're together.
>
> If they don't have phonics, they need it. I have been doing quite a bit with phonics, particularly suffixes, prefixes, and syllables.

> We have them make their own words like automobile – cut the letters – and tell them to make words that have 'au' in them.

Vocabulary

According to Nagy (1988) and Stanovich (1986), vocabulary is a highly reliable correlate of reading ability. These teachers carefully considered methods of modifying the curriculum so that all students could acquire strong listening, speaking, and reading vocabularies. Encouraging students to read is an important way for teachers to promote their students' vocabulary growth (Nagy, 1988). Enhancing vocabulary through content area topics such as Social Studies and Science was a natural and connected way to learn new words and explore their various meanings in the classroom. Good readers have larger vocabularies than poor readers do (McKeown, 1985). The teachers clarified their perspective using these words:

> We define words and they use the language of context clues.

> To understand the passages on the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills), it is very crucial to understand the vocabulary.

Parental Involvement

Parents and families are the first and most important teachers. If families teach a love of learning, it can make all the difference in the world in our children (Richard Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education). It is important for parents to form a partnership with the schools. When parents were not involved, according to a study by the United States Department of Education (1986), fourth grade average reading scores were 46 points below the national average, when parents were involved scores were 28 points above the national average.

The parents and community can assist the school in establishing equitable and respectful learning environments especially for this minority population. A partnership between schools and the community

can improve school effectiveness (Kuykendall, 1992). She suggests that schools form a partnership with the powerful African American churches; this relationship would assist in the development of the students' minds. The members of the churches could serve as tutors and mentors.

Parents should be available to help their children with their homework and volunteer as tutors at school. Bryant and Jones (1993) recommend that schools provide a telephone homework hot line to assist parents with their homework. The classroom teachers provide their insight:

> We try to get moms and dads involved. The parents have to sign when the students read. This helps the parents to be more aware.

> That's what I tell my parents when they come in. You will have to read for 15 to 20 minutes a day and I don't care what they read, just as long as they're reading something that they are interested in. You are going to see a difference in these kids.

Implications for Teacher Education Programs

It seems clear from this study that how we prepare teachers to teach African American students must continue to be explored. Among the most important systemic issues to consider is how universities prepare preservice teachers to teach in a culturally diverse environment. For example, courses should be designed to encourage teachers to look more carefully at the communication and behaviors of African American students. Student teachers should be given ample opportunity to acquire experience with students from backgrounds different from their own. During this type of experience, teachers should also examine their own behaviors and beliefs concerning African American students. Two excellent resources used by many teachers in our study were the books From Rage to Hope: Strategies for Reclaiming Black and Hispanic Students by Crystal Kuykendall and The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children by Gloria Ladson-Billings. This

type of course for teachers could assist teachers in doing a better job of educating African American students. Teacher education programs must continue to seek more substantive and research-based ways of including cultural diversity and multicultural education concepts as components of their programs.

Conclusion

The methods discussed in this study should not be considered as an exhaustive list. These represent a few identified effective methods in a wider effort to enhance the reading of African American 4th graders. Students must be literate if they are to cope in our highly technological society and to participate meaningfully in the democratic process (Hoover, Politzer, & Taylor, 1987). President Clinton's America Reads Challenge calls for all students to read independently by the end of third grade. What will happen to those fourth grade students who do not meet the President's challenge? The methods proposed throughout this article are not suggested as definitive cures to the educational problems African American students experience in today's schools, but are simply the voices of a very special group of teachers whose recommendations are supported by research.

Teachers are encouraged to approach their students in an innovative manner and to be willing to try a variety of methods in the fight against illiteracy. This study attempted to continue the quest for improved educational practices and instructional methods that can provide high quality and effective education for African American fourth grade students. However, much work remains to be done. Research is needed in such areas as fluency and small group instruction. Hopefully conclusions derived from this investigation may be used to provide a better education for African American students.

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Dr. J. Helen Perkins is a faculty member at Southern Methodist University in Texas.

A Quantitative Description of the Content Reading Practices of Beginning Teachers

Mary W. Spor
University of Alabama in Huntsville

Barbara Kane Schneider
Grand Valley State University

Abstract

It is reasonable to assume that today's college literacy instruction addresses a variety of strategies for classroom reading instruction with preservice teachers. This paper describes the classroom practices of 92 K-12 beginning teachers with five or fewer years of teaching experience. We surveyed these 92 teachers relative to their knowledge of, use of, and interest in learning content reading strategies; their sources of information regarding reading strategies, and their confidences and concerns about preparing lessons.

"Teachers play a critical role in helping students to learn with text." (Vacca & Vacca, 1996, p. 3) Therefore, it is important to understand the practices and needs of today's beginning teachers relative to their teaching content. To do this, it is necessary to describe the practices of beginning teachers who have completed college reading methods courses and entered their own classrooms. Do they use the reading strategies discussed in these methods courses and in their reading methods textbooks? What do these beginning teachers still want to know about content reading strategies?

This study describes reading strategies that beginning teachers know, use, and want to learn; their sources of knowledge regarding these strategies; and their confidences and concerns in preparing lessons. For the purpose of this study, participants are defined as teachers having five or fewer years of teaching experience.

During the last 20 years, reading educators have moved from teaching reading as a transmission process, where reading is thought of as a skill used for the purpose of transmitting knowledge from text to passive reader, to a construction or process model involving the active participation of the reader (Kamil, 1984, Ruddell & Unrau, 1994). Because the concept of the active reader has become central to this model, it becomes necessary to describe the cognitive processes of reading that eventually evolve into schema theory and motivational factors internal to the reader (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). The proportion of research studies with a dominant focus on interactive and transactive cognitive processes grew from 51% to 70% from 1975 to 1984 (Crismore, 1985). This shift in emphasis is significant for the profession. In addition to all of its other educational implications, this shift supports the notion that instructional strategies which actively engage the student in reading are important for comprehension and have a place in the content area classroom.

Reading professionals have come to view the inclusion of numerous comprehension strategies as essential for best practice.

> This means that any credible model for the genuine refreshment of American schools had better start with a solid

> plan for teaching reading. Although the field of reading certainly has been subject to its own passionate internal controversies over the years, the basic professional consensus about state-of-the-art reading instruction is stronger and clearer then ever today. Reading is no longer such a mystery: the experts now understand quite well how it works and agree, at least 95 percent, about how to teach it to the vast majority of children. (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998, p. 27)

In discussing the "qualities of best practice in teaching reading," Zemelman, et al., (1998), state, "*reading is a process.* Reading is a meaning-making process: an active, constructive, creative, higher-order thinking activity that involves distinctive cognitive strategies before, during, and after reading" (p. 30). Some of these strategies include the following: What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned (KWL), Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA), Language Experience Approach (LEA), webbing/mapping, ReQuest, journaling, Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R), Guided Reading Procedure (GRP), outlining, and study guides.

All of these strategies emphasize the importance of active student engagement with text. The KWL (Carr & Ogle, 1987) is designed to activate prior knowledge and to help children formulate questions and focus on getting the answers to their own questions. The DRTA, like the KWL, activates prior knowledge and encourages students' interaction and can be used for both efferent and aesthetic reading (Haggard, 1985, 1989). It involves prediction, verification, judgment and extension of ideas. LEA emphasizes the use of children's personalized stories and meaningful text in order to activate prior knowledge. Webbing, sometimes called mapping, encourages students to create a logical visual representation of relationships. ReQuest, or re-questioning between students and/or students and teacher (Manzo, 1969), helps students develop the ability to create questions, build comprehension, and monitor their own learning. The SQ3R (Robinson, 1946) is a study system, sometimes taught as a formula, designed to help students approach text in a structured way. GRP emphasizes close reading and the organization of facts around important ideas in an attempt to accurately understand the

author's intended meaning and to develop a common reference from which to draw implications (Manzo & Manzo, 1990).

Durkin (1979, 1974-75) studied the amount of time spent and the types of comprehension activities found in reading classes. She found that once elementary school students were able to read, teachers spent most of the reading period assigning students selections to read with testing afterwards to assess comprehension. While most teachers indicated that they valued and included comprehension instruction, they predominantly used literal and teacher generated questions, assigning and checking of practice sheets often in workbooks and on ditto sheets with the emphasis on the literal or the rote. Durkin suggested that testing for literal understanding and teaching children to "construct" meaning are different. She observed little instruction of "deeper" comprehension strategies. Although her findings brought criticism to the profession and prompted some classroom intervention studies (Pearson & Dole, 1987), nevertheless there still seemed to be a disparity between what research would indicate was good practice and what was actually occurring.

Pressley, Gaskins, Wile, Cunicelli, & Sheridan (1991) studied strategy instruction at Benchmark School (Media, PA) where teaching focused on the coordinated use of strategies and where flexible and adaptive use of cognitive strategies was a long-term commitment of the program. Some of the conclusions reached by Pressley et al. from studies at Benchmark offering effective strategy instruction follow:

1. Such teaching is long term.
2. Explanations and teacher modeling of one or more strategies occurs in every class.
3. Teacher guidance is the most prominent mode of instruction.
4. Teachers discuss, endorse, and model flexible strategy use.
5. Acquisition of repertoires of effective and complementary strategies is the ideal.
6. Teachers consistently send the message that thought processes are what count rather than getting a specific "correct" answer.
7. Strategies instruction is integrated with content instruction. (1991, p. 226)

Over twenty years after Durkin's (1979) study and nine years after Pressley et al. (1991), we surveyed beginning teachers to describe their classroom practices relative to content area reading strategies.

METHOD

Purpose

This study is a descriptive analysis of 92 beginning K-12 public school teachers':

- knowledge of, use of, and interest in learning content reading strategies;
- sources of information regarding reading strategies; and
- concerns and confidences about preparing lessons.

Participants

Ninety-two teachers, with one to five years of experience, who teach in one southeastern and two midwestern American states responded to a written survey administered during faculty meetings. School district size ranged from less than 500 students to more than 10,000 with 45 percent in the 1000-5000 range.

Respondents included the following distribution of classroom teachers: grades K-3, (8 percent); grades 4-6, (13 percent); grades 7-9, (39 percent); and grades 10-12, (40 percent). Forty percent of the teachers had bachelors degrees; 28 percent, bachelors degree plus; 19 percent, a masters degree; 12 percent, a masters plus; and 1 percent, a doctorate.

When asked to respond to the statement, "The last post-baccalaureate course that I took was...." the following results were obtained: 42 indicated that they had taken a course within the last 12 months; 30 from one to three years ago, and 13 from four to six years ago. Seven did not respond.

Description of the Measure

Multiple choice survey questions were designed to elicit quantitative data about these K-12 classroom teachers and their practices related to content reading strategies, sources of information about these strategies, and their confidences and concerns in preparing lessons. The written survey, included in the Appendix, was administered by the researcher/authors or by educators whom we selected. Surveys were distributed, completed, and collected at faculty meetings; all response sheets were computer scored.

Ten reading related strategies used in the survey were taken from professional reading journals and 17 college level reading methods textbooks published within the past five years. Items included: What I Know, Want to Know, Have Learned (KWL); Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA); Language Experience Approach (LEA); webbing/mapping; ReQuest; journals/logs; Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R); Guided Reading Procedure (GRP); outlining; and study guides. In the survey, the full names of the strategies rather than abbreviations are used.

Frequency distributions depict the number of times each score was obtained (McMillan, 1996). Results of this survey are presented in frequency tables. A comparison of results provides insight into actual classroom teachers' practices relative to content reading strategies.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to describe to what extent beginning teachers use content reading strategies to actively engage students with text to build reading comprehension. Responses by 92 K-12 classroom teachers to survey questions described their (1) knowledge of, use of, and interest in learning content reading strategies, (2) sources of information regarding reading strategies, and (3) concerns and confidences about preparing lessons.

Familiarity with, use of, and interest in learning content reading strategies

These findings describe the strategies being used in classrooms in comparison to the strategies with which teachers say they are familiar. Three of the written prompts on the survey follow.

> "I am **familiar** with the following strategies: (Mark as many as may apply.)"
>
> "I **use** the following strategies: (Mark as many as may apply.)"
>
> "I would be **interested in** learning how to use the following content reading strategies in my classroom: (Mark as many as may apply.)

Results of participants' responses are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Responses for Familiarity, Use, and Interest in Learning

Strategy	Familiar With	Actually Use	Interested In
KWL	40.2%	28.3%	34.8%
DRTA	48.9%	37%	38%
LEA	35.9%	20.7%	32.6%
Webbing	59.8%	48.9%	18.5%
ReQuest	14.1%	5.4%	53.3%
Journals/ Logs	67.4%	39.1%	16.3%
SQ3R	58.7%	20.7%	40.2%
GRP	33.7%	14.1%	40.2%
Outline	71.7%	35.9%	30.4%
Study Guides	75%	52.2%	22.8%

Sources of Information

In response to the prompt "I am familiar with these strategies because of," with the exception of three teachers who did not respond, the beginning teachers indicated the following:

Table 2. How Teachers Became Familiar with Strategies (N=92)

In-service provided by my school district	9.8%
Workshop I attended because I was sent by my school district	7.6%
Workshop that I attended on my own	4.3%
University course in reading/language arts	69.5%
Reading about them in professional journals and magazines related to teaching	6.5%

Confidences and Concerns

When asked "In preparing lessons, I am most confident about," teachers responded as follows:

Table 3. Most Confident About When Planning Lessons (N=92)

My personal knowledge of content	40.2%
Motivating students	20.7%
Having access to suitable materials	6.5%
Developing activities that involve and interest students	19.6%
Meeting curricular expectations	13%

When asked, "In preparing lessons, my greatest concern is," the teachers responded:

Table 4. Least Confident About When Planning Lessons (N=92)

My personal knowledge of the content areas	6.5%
Motivating students	34.7%
Having access to suitable materials	14.1%
Developing activities that involve and interest students	28.2%
Meeting curricular expectations	17.4%

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to describe to what extent beginning teachers use content reading strategies to actively engage students with text to build reading comprehension. Responses by 92 K-12 classroom teachers to survey questions described their (1) knowledge of, use of, and interest in learning content reading strategies, (2) sources of information regarding reading strategies, and (3) concerns and confidences about preparing lessons.

Results indicate that many beginning teachers are not familiar with these surveyed strategies. Of those who are familiar with these strategies, in many cases, less than half actually use them. This indicates a discrepancy between knowledge of strategies and actual classroom practice. The mean of 47 for familiarity with strategies when compared with the mean of 28 for actual use of strategies indicates that what beginning teachers have knowledge of and what they use in their classrooms differ. What are some reasons for the existence of this gap?

Familiarity with strategies (Table 1) varied from 75 percent for study guides to 14 percent for ReQuest. Frequency of use varied from a

high of 52 percent for study guides to five percent for ReQuest. The two strategies with which teachers are most familiar, study guides and outlining, are strategies which they probably have used during their own K-12 and college education to learn content. Prior personal experience with using reading strategies as a student may affect teaching practices. Therefore, if a teacher is not accustomed to using a strategy, it is not likely to become a part of his/her classroom practices. Further study should investigate the role that prior experience with using reading strategies as a student at the K-12 or college levels plays in individual teaching practices.

Additionally, sizable numbers of these beginning teachers state that they are interested in learning how to use these strategies in their classrooms. Of these, about 70 percent (Table 2) of these beginning teachers indicate that they are familiar with reading strategies because of college/university reading/language arts classes, and 45 percent of the beginning teachers have taken a college/university class within the last year. The gap that exists between reading/language arts methods course instruction and subsequent K-12 classroom practice will need to be narrowed or closed if strategy-based instruction is to be used to build reading comprehension in the content area classroom.

While 40 percent of these beginning teachers expressed confidence in their personal knowledge of content, their concerns focused on developing activities that involve and interest students, 28 percent, and motivating students, 35 percent (Tables 3 & 4). Therefore, the use of content reading strategies in combination with the teachers' knowledge of content would help to address these concerns. Connecting concepts to be taught to students' prior knowledge and interactive learning through the use of various reading strategies could serve to develop interest in content to be taught and serve as motivating factors for learning. Content reading strategies have been shown to actively engage students with content through active involvement and connection with prior knowledge and interests. "Active, engaged learners are strategic in their interactions with a text." (Vacca & Vacca, 1996, p. xvi)

The results of this study indicate that reading educators and schools of education (for preservice teachers) and that school districts (for

practicing teachers) should facilitate the process of moving teachers from "familiar with" to implementers of content reading strategies. This would help to actively engage K-12 students in learning and thus promote the development of reading comprehension. Teachers need opportunities to internalize the connection between strategy use and the construction of meaning through teacher modeling and student use of reading strategies that facilitate learning in the content areas. Teachers must feel confident about modeling and monitoring student use of strategies in their classrooms. Change might begin at the preservice level taking the form of:

- offering more reading methods courses over the course of the undergraduate students' college program;
- establishing reading practicum where students are required to model and implement reading strategies in real classroom settings;
- providing mentoring opportunities in K-12 settings;
- actively supporting professional reading organizations;
- working with school/government administrators to promote ongoing reading support programs with college/universities;
- involving parents in providing support and reinforcement for student use of content reading strategies.

Isolated professional development presentations, which lack ongoing support for implementation of strategies presented, are not the answer. Preservice and practicing teachers need opportunities to personally construct their knowledge of content reading strategies and to realize their impact on reading comprehension resulting in active, involved student learning. This personal construction of meaning might narrow the gap between knowledge of and use of strategies, and address the greatest concerns of beginning teachers when planning lessons.

Further study should consider that surveys as a self-reporting instrument were used for this investigation. Future research could

incorporate classroom observations and structured interviews with teachers in addition to the surveys in order to describe content reading practices of beginning teachers in more depth.

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Dr. Mary W. Spor is a faculty member at the University of Alabama in Huntsville and Dr. Barbara Kane Schneider is a faculty member of Grand Valley State University.

Appendix
Survey Questions

1. In the district in which I teach the student population K-12 is
   a. Less than 500
   b. 500-1000
   c. 1000-5000
   d. 5000-10,000
   e. More than 10,000

2. I teach
   a. K-3
   b. Grade 4-6
   c. Grade 7-9
   d. Grade 10-12

3. The highest degree which I obtained is a
   a. Bachelors
   b. Bachelors plus
   c. Masters
   d. Masters plus
   e. Doctorate

4. The last post-baccalaureate course that I took was
   a. Within the last 12 months
   b. 1-3 years ago
   c. 4-6 years ago
   d. 7-10 years ago
   e. 10 or more years ago

5. I am familiar with the following content reading strategies: (Mark as many as may apply).

   a. What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned (KWL)
   b. Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA)
   c. Language Experience Approach (LEA)
   d. Webbing/mapping
   e. ReQuest

6. I am also familiar with the following content reading strategies: (Mark as many as may apply).

   a. Journals/logs
   b. Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R)
   c. Guided Reading Procedure (GRP)
   d. Outlining
   e. Study guides

7. I am familiar with these content reading strategies because of
   a. In-service provided by my school district.
   b. A workshop that I attended because I was sent by my school district.
   c. A workshop that I attended on my own.
   d. A university course in reading/language arts.
   e. Reading about them in professional journals and magazines related to teaching.

8. I use the following content reading strategies and find them to be effective: (Mark as many as may apply).

   a. What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned (KWL)
   b. Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA)
   c. Language Experience Approach (LEA)
   d. Webbing/mapping
   e. ReQuest

9. I also use the following content reading strategies and find them to be effective: (Mark as many as may apply).

   a. Journals/logs
   b Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R)
   c. Guided Reading Procedure (GRP)
   d. Outlining
   e. Study guides

10. I would be interested in learning how to use the following content reading strategies in my classroom: (Mark as many as may apply).

    a. What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned (KWL)
    b. Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA)
    c. Language Experience Approach (LEA)
    d. Webbing/mapping
    e. ReQuest

11. I also would be interested in learning how to use the following content reading strategies in my classroom: (Mark as many as may apply).

    a. Journals/logs
    b. Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R)
    c. Guided Reading Procedure (GRP)
    d. Outlining
    e. Study guides

12. In preparing lessons I am most confident about which one of the following:

    a. My personal knowledge of the content area(s).
    b. Motivating students.
    c. Having access to suitable materials.
    d. Developing activities that involve and interest students.
    e. Meeting curricular expectations.

13. In preparing lessons I am least confident about which one of the following:

    a. My personal knowledge of the content area (s).
    b. Motivating students.
    c. Having access to suitable materials.
    d. Developing activities that involve and interest students.
    e. Meeting curricular expectations.

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