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Western Michigan University



This Issue of *Reading Horizons* is dedicated to Ken Vander Meulen in appreciation and gratefulness for his love and commitment to preparing literacy teachers and our journal *Reading Horizons* at Western Michigan University. We lost Ken this past February after a long illness.

Ken was for many years the editor of *Reading Horizons* and worked selflessly and tirelessly to meet deadlines and to edit the many fine articles *Reading Horizons* published. The current staff of *Reading Horizons* is grateful and honored to keep up the fine work that Ken helped to establish. He will be missed.

The Dorothy J. McGinnis Reading Center and Clinic staff gratefully acknowledges the many contributions made in Ken's name at the request of the Vander Meulen family.



Reading Horizons

A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

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There is no more crucial or basic skill in all of education than reading.



Reading Horizons

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

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Family Members as Partners in an After-School and Summer Literacy Program

Teresa B. Jayroe
Mississippi State
University

Devon Brenner
Mississippi State
University

If educators expect more children to be successful in literacy experiences at school, then they must strive to form lasting partnerships with parents (Fried, 2001). The educators working with the after-school and summer literacy program actively sought to form partnerships with family members at a small rural elementary school in a southern state. By collaborating with mothers and relatives of children at this low-income, African-American school we learned about the commitment and caring of families. Family members participating in the program explained they began to spend more time on literacy activities at home and were excited about reading with their children. These family members became better at (a) asking open-ended response questions, (b) encouraging children to tell what they think, and (c) reading with expression.

TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, policy makers, and the public tend to blame families for children's low achievement, believing that parents do not care about or are unable to support children's learning. It is not unfamiliar to hear that children have trouble in school because their parents do not read to them or just do not care. The following quote from Wyatt Emmerich (2003), a newspaper editor and owner, reflects what many believe:

We ought to give education priority. But let's face it, the problem of illiteracy is not children lacking schoolbooks. The problem is children lacking committed parents. . . . Any properly motivated parent and child in Mississippi today will meet with great success with just diligence and hard work. It's the motivation and attitude that is [sic] lacking. (p. 4)

The tendency to blame parents and caregivers of children with low achievement is not uncommon. Unfortunately, when teachers and schools blame families for students' low performance, families' strengths and characteristics become increasingly invisible (Payne, 2002). In a spiraling cycle, the invisibility of these families of children with low achievement often contributes to the failure of their children in school systems.

From federal reform efforts such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* and the *Even Start* program to local family literacy centers, it is easy to find programs that aim to improve literacy by "fixing" parents, teaching them typically middle class and school based literacy practices. The structure and design of most family literacy programs are founded on the belief that the way to improve children's achievement is to improve the literacy and parenting skills of the parents (Nueman, Caperelli, & Kee, 1998).

In a challenge to this model, researchers such as Edwards & Pleasants (1999), Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001), and Paratore, Melzi, and Krol-Sinclair (1999) have demonstrated that successful family literacy programs can be constructed when school personnel work to know, understand, and value the cultures, strengths,

and characteristics of families. Researchers such as these have begun to address what Auerbach (1995) described as a pervasive gap in our knowledge base about family literacy.

There are widely diverging perspectives on parental roles, effective practice, measures of assessment, and program models. Most importantly, the voices of the participants themselves have largely been absent in any discussions about program development, quality, or evaluation. The voices of the participants should be a critical component if programs are to be designed to accommodate family needs and life goals. Data from working with family members in an after school and summer literacy program may assist educators in understanding the potential of collaborating with family members by sharing family members' comments, literacy practices, and perspectives.

Program and Participants

For two and a half years, beginning in the spring of 2001, the authors collaborated with families to provide an after school and summer literacy program. Davis Elementary is a small, low-income school long plagued by poor performance, high teacher turnover, little parental involvement, and dilapidated facilities. Students at Davis Elementary live in several small, rural communities located from within walking distance to 20 miles from the school building. All of Davis Elementary School's 240 students (K-6) are African-American, and over 97 percent receive free lunch. Surveys indicate that 25 percent of families are unemployed, and nearly 50 percent are single parent households.

The after school and summer literacy program, a tutorial assistance program funded by the Reading Excellence Act (REA), provided tutoring and reading assistance to struggling pre-K-3 readers and writers at the school site using a literature based approach. The program provided tutoring and instruction during the school year and summer, serving 80-90 pre-kindergarten through third graders at a time. During the school year, the program operated three days a week for 75 minutes after the end of the school day. Each summer the program operated for 5 hours, five days a week, for 4 weeks.

The staff, which consisted of professors from the local university and classroom teachers, worked to increase student achievement by supporting family involvement in the school and actively recruiting family members throughout the course of the program. Family members were invited to come to school to assist in planning and operating the program, and to read, write, play, talk, and interact with children. Family members were paid a small stipend to assist with transportation costs and childcare.

The 16 family members working with the program in the third year of fall 2003, included one grandmother, one aunt, and fourteen mothers. Of those 16 family members, nine had earned high school diplomas, one had earned a GED, and six had attended or were currently attending community college. None of the family members had taken courses at a four-year college. Nine of the family members worked at service jobs, such as nursing home attendant, fast food worker, and hotel housekeeper. The other family members were unemployed.

When the after school and summer tutorial program began at Davis Elementary, the school experienced low family involvement at PTA meetings, parent-teacher conference days, and family information nights. Teachers generally blamed parents for students' poor performance. Several teachers told us stories about parents who did not come to school, did not answer phone calls, and refused to make children do homework. The teachers and administrators did not trust the family members. The principal even stated that family members should not be invited to help supervise the unloading and loading of buses at the beginning of the school year, because conflicts were likely to arise and he did not trust family members to deal fairly with students.

Family members, professors, and teachers working in the after-school and summer program met weekly to plan and reflect on the success of the teaching and learning experiences and to plan for the upcoming week. In addition, the staff met bi-weekly for professional development sessions. At these professional development sessions, professors or teachers would share teaching strategies such as techniques for reading aloud, using invented spelling, or asking open-ended

questions. Family members and teachers were also asked to critique the curriculum.

In the program, teachers and family members worked and planned together to implement small groups and centers that allowed children to engage in a variety of literacy experiences. A typical day in the after-school program began with a read-aloud. The children would then move to small groups and centers that were led by family members and teachers where they wrote in response journals, reread a selection, worked on comprehension skills, created art projects, or worked on phonemic awareness and phonics.

Data Collection

The findings from this qualitative study focus on "meanings in context" (Noblitt & Hare, 1988). The family members in this study are typical examples of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2002). The variety of data collected allowed for triangulation, and led to thick descriptions of family members' participation (Babbie, 1995).

We, the researchers in this study, were participant-observers. Data collected included:

- semi-structured interviews with family members and school personnel;
- field notes and observations describing the program;
- family members' journals describing their activities and their perceptions of the program; and
- audiotapes and videotapes of selected class sessions and interviews.

In order to ascertain if the data gathered reflected the family members' perceptions and beliefs, participating family members checked the data. The descriptions of family members' interactions at school were generated, along with tentative explanations, and then shared with family members, who made suggestions for revising and reinterpreting the data. The data collected give credence to the voices of family member participants.

Findings

Recruiting parents. Initially, family members were recruited by sending letters home with children participating in the program. During the first year of our program, 80 children came to our after school and summer programs, but only four family members applied and worked with us. Like many school programs, the after school program was fairly invisible to the family members sending students to school. Family members did not understand that they were being truly invited to participate at the school, and did not sense they had a legitimate role to play in the program.

Over time, word of mouth from participating family members about the quality of the program helped recruit the rest of the staff. By the start of the third year, 16 family members related to over half of the students, applied and were hired. As Sherice, the mother, sister, and aunt of children in the program said,

My cousin, Janet, she was working in the program and she was telling me about all the things they were trying to do to help the kids learn reading, a lot of different activities, and so I said I want to try it out.

Other family members joined us when they saw how much their children were learning. As Florence said, "[My child] was in the program during the summer, and I used to come out there and just pay attention to the things that they was doing, and it was really interesting, some of the things that they was learning." She found the program so interesting, she decided to apply to work. By the end of its first year, the program had earned a reputation as a positive way to become involved at the school.

Family members' descriptions of their reasons for working with the program belie the traditional assumptions that family members of poor, rural, and minority children simply do not care. Family members worked in the program because they believed they could help their own children, and because they wanted to help other children at the school. Janet explained why she decided to work with the program, by saying,

I became interested when I found out that my son, he was having problems with reading, and I heard about the program through the school, so I decided to come out here, just cause by me being here, showing him that I'm interested in the work he doing, might help him improve his work.

Her primary reason for working with the program was a belief that her presence would support and enhance her son's learning.

Since the community was plagued with a high unemployment rate, the after school program provided meaningful work for women in the community unable to locate other positions. Laura told us,

It has helped me, at first I was just sitting around at home and wasn't doing anything, and I like doing things, and, I, like I say, I love working with children, and I just say this is a good opportunity for me to get out and do something, something that I would really enjoy.

The stipend that family members received was important. The approximately \$50.00 a week family members earned as teachers/tutors made a real difference in some of their lives. Family members talked about using their paychecks to help with phone bills, to buy groceries, to replace worn out backpacks, to go shopping. But the stipend was not the main reason they came to school. For most family members, the stipend barely offset the cost of transportation across the county, with drives from 20-45 minutes long, one way, childcare for younger siblings, or the treats and prizes family members brought the children. As Angie told us,

To me this is not about the money, this is about the kids getting an education, that's the way I feel about it.

What the stipend did was communicate the value placed on parental involvement. Because they were paid workers, family members understood they played a clear, important role in the program. They felt ownership. The fact that over half of the students had family members who became tutors/teachers at some point in our program spoke loudly

about family members' commitment to, and interest in, their children's education.

Becoming better at working with children. From the beginning, family members worked directly with children. Family members helped with art projects, listened to children read aloud, read to children, supported children as they wrote stories and responses to books, and played games, among dozens of other things. Over time, many family members became more confident and more able to help children with the literacy tasks assigned during the program. Christie, one family member, recognized her own growing ability. Christie told us,

At first when I first started for the summer, I'm like, I don't know nothing about teaching, but once I got in and got to doing what I was told to do and I did it, and now it's just, like I already, you know, like it's just come natural since I've been in it before.

After working in the program for nearly two years, Sherice told us that she was becoming a better teacher, someone who could adjust her teaching to the needs of her students. She said:

One of the things I've learned from this program is to be patient, with the kids, because at first I wasn't, I was like, I know you know this and I know you can do it, and I learned that there are some kids that are, you know, that are a little slower than the others that won't get it the first time around, and it takes time, you can't pressure them into learning things.

Family members felt responsible for helping students learn, and therefore responsible for understanding "what they were supposed to do." Tomeka described her role in this way: "I'm working with the program, and what we are doing is helping children that need, that's lacking reading, we're helping them with their reading and different activities, and writing." This sense of responsibility translated into a sense of skill at working with children. Tomeka told us,

We sit down and discuss what we have to do for the whole week and pick out children that we think, that want to be in our group and try to help them Miss Ann [the teacher] loves me to read with the kids, cause I read with excitement and they be so tickled, and I be reading, I say that's how you supposed to be reading, with excitement.

Over time, family members were given increased responsibility for selecting appropriate literature, and even coming up with activities for their small groups. For example, when Miss Ann's second grade classroom finished reading the first book in the *Horrible Harry* series by Suzy Kline, Donna decided that her group of second graders would enjoy reading the second book. She took the book home, read it, and prepared a variety of questions, writing prompts, and art activities for her students to complete.

Learning translates to home. Most family members could be very specific about strategies, skills, and content they were learning and immediately applying in the classroom and at home. Tomeka, for example, described learning phonic rules and punctuation, telling us,

I'm learning a lot, like, well, I say like just the vowels, and sounding out the words cause /k/could be used as /c/ or /k/, and I learned that, you know, different little vowels and consonants, and what's the name, of all, like the period and exclamation point and what they are named, cause I get them mixed up. Punctuation.

Tomeka applied what she was learning at home. She described reading with her three children, and emphasizing punctuation, saying: "When they bring a book home they have to read, I tell them they have like different punctuation, they have to make it sound exciting, or if it have a question mark it's asking a question that you have to answer."

Family members also explained that as they participated in the program, they began to spend more time at home on literacy activities. Florence, for example, stated,

Reading, we spend more time reading, and, I used to have to ask him [her son], now he come home and he say momma let's read this, or that, and he enjoys it more."

Marcy, who has been working since the program started stated,

I am still learning that the more they read and the more they write the better they get and the better they get, and I have a daughter and she's in the program and she's an excellent reader.

As she worked with the program, Marcy made a conscious effort to do more reading and writing with her own daughter.

Working in the program also helped some family members with their own learning. During the summer program, Donna was thrilled to be learning about other countries during the third graders' explorations of France and Egypt. She kept a notebook of all the resources and gave presentations to students about different countries. She also worked on her own language skills. Christie told us,

I'm learning how to be, how do you say it, I'm learning how to, um, some of the kids are not using correct English, (laughs) and, I'm learning that, you know. I'm learning a lot about using correct English.

Family members were concerned about teaching skills or concepts they did not think that they fully understood. One family member who came to work with us had not finished high school, and described herself "weak" in reading and writing. Sam asked to work mostly at the art table, so that children would not know that she could barely write. She cared about children's perceptions of her own literacy skills.

Tomeka talked about her increasing willingness and ability to read with her children at home. Not only had she become a better listener and reader, she realized that she enjoyed the books her children were being asked to read. She explained:

Like, at first, when they used to bring a book home from school, I'd be like "Oh, go and read it." I'd look at the book, I'd say to myself, "That book ain't exciting." But since I been working with the children and I've been reading to them and I take books home and read to my kids, and they enjoy that, or sometimes they'll say, "Oh we read that a book already, we know what's going to happen," and I'll say, "Well, listen again, cause I like the book myself!"

Borrowing literacy materials. During the time period that the program operated at Davis Elementary, the school had two small parent centers, one funded by the REA grant, which was being developed, and the second one, operated by the school district with few supplies. Both parent centers were rarely visited, and few family members came to check out materials. On the other hand, all of the family members borrowed (or asked to keep) materials from the program. Some family members took books home to read for themselves; while others borrowed big books to read to their children, marker boards, and flash cards to use to practice writing skills and phonics. Family members took home paper and pencils to write with their children and markers to create illustrations.

Donna borrowed books to prepare for her role as a teacher/tutor. She took them home and read them with her third grade son. Based on his responses and reactions and questions, she came up with things to ask the second graders she would work with the next week. Christie said that she would make copies of the activities she did as a teacher/tutor with first graders, borrow the books, and do the same activities at home with her kindergarten son. Shekela talked repeatedly about how she used what she learned working with the second graders in the program with her third grade son and grandsons. Each week, she borrowed a second grade book and took it home to read while she took care of the boys over the weekend. Shekela said:

I read it, instead of us sitting there watching the Power Rangers, little cartoons or anything . . . I bring books home over the weekend, I read to my grandchildren, my

son, we act out, we switch roles. I have fun with my grand kids. The older I have gotten the more fun I've had with them. We don't argue as much as we used to, since I've been here with this program. It's a lot of fun; it's a lot of fun.

Family members borrowed, kept, and used materials from the program because they had experiences using these materials as teachers/tutors. They were familiar with the books, papers, games, and manipulatives. In contrast, the materials at formal parent centers remained unfamiliar and relatively unused.

Learning from one another. Family members learned as they participated in day-to-day activities and collaborated with teachers and professors to plan and implement lessons. They also learned from the modeling provided by the teachers and professors. But perhaps most crucially, family members learned from each other. Family members talked with each other formally at weekly professional development sessions and informally as they collaborated to teach the children. These opportunities for family members to talk with each other about children, the program, and the curriculum were invaluable learning experiences for them as well as the other staff members.

For example, when the staff met to discuss the program, Tomeka was really struggling with Terence, a second grader being treated for ADHD. Tomeka was resistant to try any of the open-ended literacy activities. Tomeka had a hard time getting Terence to "pay attention," and wished aloud at the staff meeting that she could "whip him." Tomeka's struggles with Terence led the group to talk about ways to discipline children at school and at home.

Some family members agreed that corporal punishment might be the best choice. When Brenna started working with the program, she explained that her daughter acted up a lot, but that a good whipping would make her behave. Brenna believed that teachers should expect children to behave and provide firm consequences if they did not. Wilma, the mother of a first grader, disagreed. Wilma, a shy woman, who rarely spoke during large group meetings, spoke up about her son

and the period when his behavior was out of control. Wilma and her son had been going to family counseling, and learning new ways of interacting. She told the group that she had learned that children give back what they are taught. "Why should a child respect you, if you don't respect them?" she asked the group. Wilma talked about ways she had learned to manage her son's behavior without yelling and hitting. She was learning to give clear, specific directions and to talk respectfully to her son, and to match the consequences to the behavior. She said her house was more peaceful than it had ever been, and that her child's behavior at school was improving.

Wilma's challenge of the cultural practice of spanking and yelling at misbehaving children caused family members to think in new ways about their own parenting practices. Later Florence, another family member, said that the one thing she had learned most [while working with the program] was how to deal with her children. Four months later, Florence confirmed the impact of conversations like these, saying that she was, learning "just different things, like how to talk to him to get him to do things without hollering at him."

The impact of family members' interactions with one another was long reaching. A year later, Brenna, who had outspokenly supported corporal punishment previously explained, "I told her [my daughter] that her teacher better not paddle her." She then told school officials not to paddle her child.

The conversations about teaching, learning, and discipline, which continued over time, empowered the family members. They began to value each other's opinions and to voice their own opinions more readily. They became active participants and problem solvers in the program and the school community.

Learning that the school is not doing very well. Family members who worked with the program were surprised to learn about students' poor achievement. Generally, they knew that their own children were struggling with reading or writing, but did not realize reading difficulties were a pervasive problem at Davis Elementary.

As family members learned about the school's performance, they also realized they knew how to help make a difference. Laura told us, "Some of the children, I really feel like they should be better readers . . . it's good that we do a lot of reading with them, because a lot of words they may come across that they don't know, we can help them with those words. . . . So I really think this is a good program for some of the children, as well as the parents."

Florence spoke about this issue. She stated,

A lot of children who really needs the program, cause it's a lot of children who don't take the time to read and put their words together, I have really learned a lot with working with the program, and just paying attention to the different students and things that some of them know.

Florence's concern for struggling readers carried over to a commitment to keep working at the school even after the program ended.

Increasing family involvement at school. Janet explained that before she began working with the program, she never came to school. "I didn't even come out here to check on my child until I started working in this program." She could not really explain why she had not come to school. "I just hadn't taken an interest, I guess." She commented about assuming things were okay at school, trusting teachers to communicate with her, and allowing herself to be invisible to the school faculty. She explained she did not even realize her son was struggling with reading until his first grade teacher sent home a note recommending him for the program.

Once she realized that her son was having trouble and she could participate in a program designed to help him, she began coming to school. She explained,

Even the days that I don't come work here, I come and check on his work and check on see how he's progressing in class.

The classroom teacher stated that Janet had become a regular presence at the school. She was clearly becoming visible to the school faculty.

Janet was not alone. In fact, most of the family members who worked with the program had never or rarely been to the school. Once they became a member of the school community their involvement continued. Working with the program assisted family members in understanding schooling practices. Family members reported feeling more welcome at and familiar with the school, and this familiarity supported parental involvement. Family members who worked with the program started coming to the school before the program started to check on their children. They stopped by the classrooms to offer assistance and support.

Classroom teachers noticed this increased involvement. A third grade teacher told us, "I have noticed that the parents who are involved with the program are a lot more involved in my classroom. I'm very pleased with the carry over from the program and the additional parental involvement."

Family members often discussed what they would do at the school once the after school and summer program ended. Many of the family members expressed a commitment to continue their involvement with Davis Elementary. Laura, a mother and a grandmother, explained that she would "really enjoy coming, just sitting in and working with the school program." Tomeka expressed a willingness to keep coming to the school and working with children, "if they let me." She would like to come for reading time, or story time, but she was not sure if the classroom teacher would allow her to continue this kind of involvement.

Janet felt working with the program and other family members helped prepare her to be a classroom volunteer. She said at first she had only been around her own son, and not other children but that,

After I started working with the Promising Readers, I know that I really like kids and I like being around them, and I know that, you know, that I can help them. Because it's a lot of children who need one-on one help

and teachers don't really have a chance to help them one-on-one cause they have a lot of children to deal with, so I would, if there's a child that needs help and their parents may not have time to teach them, I would really like that cause a lot of children just need someone to be there.

Marcy explained that participating in the program led to greater involvement, saying, "It make me come out to more meetings, PTA meetings and little activities and stuff, because, I mean, I have a child out here and I am concerned, in order for it to get better we have to be a part of it."

Becoming members of the school community. The inclusion of family members into the school community did take time. However, over time teachers and administrators at Davis Elementary did see the family members as active members and participants of the school community. As the family members continued to come to Davis Elementary, the school community began to accept them. One family member was even hired as a paraprofessional at Davis Elementary. As family members talked to students and joked and teased them, the students came to see them as members of their learning community.

Conclusion and Discussion

Typically, when family members volunteer at school, they do work separate from the teaching and learning that takes place in the classroom. Family members might be asked to sit in the hall and listen to children read, hang bulletin boards, run copies, grade papers, or drill children on flash cards. While family members can assist in raising funds for the PTA or running copies for teachers, these types of activities do little to help the family members become viable members of the school community (Moll & Greenberg, 1990).

The staff of the after school and summer literacy program did not try to "fix" family members by asking them to come in and learn typically middle class and school based literary practices. Instead, the staff worked hard to listen and understand the culture, strengths, and

characteristics of family members. From the beginning, the aim of the program was to create a space where family members could be valued as teachers and colleagues, not just helpers, to facilitate the construction of knowledge about literacy teaching and learning. As teacher/tutors, family members had a concrete reason to understand the curriculum because they were the ones in charge of the teaching and learning of students in small groups.

The findings do not indicate nor do the researchers try to say that all 16 of the family members became adept literacy teachers. Indeed, most possessed limited facility with written language themselves. Tasks and assignments were divided to take advantage of the strengths of all the adults working in the program. While the classroom teacher or professor in each room taught comprehension lessons or guided writing activities, family members generally listened to children read aloud, read to children, supervised journal writing, or led children in art activities. These tasks took advantage of family members' abilities, and paralleled literacy activities family members are often expected to engage in at home—listening to children read aloud, supervising homework, reading to their children.

Family members who stayed in the program for at least a year tended to improve their skills in working with children. Family members became better at (a) asking open-ended response questions, (b) encouraging students to tell what they think, and (c) reading with expression. When they began working with the program, most family members generally supplied words whenever readers got stuck. Over time, as they observed the teachers and other family members and talked about reading strategies during professional developments, many parents developed a repertoire of prompts to use. Family members began to remind students to use context clues, think about the meaning of the sentence, look for familiar word chunks such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words, and to use illustrations, as well as "sound it out" during a read-aloud. Family members talked about how they were learning and growing throughout the program.

Another significant area of growth was in interactions between students and family members. The design of the program established:

- family members as peers and colleagues;
- working together to grapple with difficult issues of management;
- teaching; and
- learning.

Conversations allowed family members to talk with one another about teaching children, which often led to conversations about raising children. Family members were able to support one another, reinforce decisions that worked to support children, and provide new perspectives on all kinds of issues related to children's growth, development, and learning.

Family members learned that Davis Elementary was not doing very well. This knowledge led to concern for the struggling readers at Davis Elementary. The family members felt a commitment to the students with whom they had been working, and family involvement at Davis Elementary increased. Even classroom teachers commented on the increased family involvement.

As family members assumed more and more roles in the program, it quickly became apparent that they felt welcome and appreciated the opportunities to share and learn with students, teachers, and administrators. There were conflicts at times. However, the learning, understanding, and teaching for family members and for us as researchers were tremendous and powerful. Family members engaged us in critical inquiry about literacy issues and about their empowerment in the school community as they became members of the school community.

Key features of the program facilitated our success of developing partnerships with families. Family members took on specific meaningful roles; they felt a sense of responsibility for students' achievement. Regular reflection, discussion, and professional development, along with the stipend, communicated the importance of family members' roles in the program.

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Teresa B. Jayroe and Devon Brenner are faculty members at Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS.



Collaborative Storybook Reading: Bring Parents and At-Risk Kindergarten Students Together

Linda Smetana
California State
University, Hayward

Many students lack early literacy skills because they have not had opportunities to listen to or talk about stories, engage in word play, read with family members, or view literacy behaviors modeled in the home. The Collaborative Storybook Reading Program presents a model for providing interactive reading experiences for at-risk kindergarten students through the use of parent volunteers. The program was designed to increase student interactions with literature, while at the same time increasing the confidence level and literacy skills of the parent-volunteer readers. Program participants demonstrated increased ability to retell stories and participate in whole-class storybook reading sessions.

LEARNING TO READ can be a daunting task. Juel (1998) found that students who are at the bottom of the class in first grade, remain at the bottom of the class in 4th grade. In order to develop programs that will prevent reading and school failure, eight goals were created by the National Education Goals Panel (1990) and approved by Congress in 1994 to guide states and the federal government in the development of educational programs. Three goals are of particular importance to literacy development:

- all children in America will enter school, ready to learn
- every parent will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping their children learn; and
- every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

Often, students come to school without the basic skills necessary for later success. They lack the early literacy skills that have been shown to facilitate learning how to read (Allor & McCathren, 2003). Among the essential skills are:

- the development of both expressive and receptive oral language (Kamhi & Catts, 1999), and
- the understanding that print symbolizes language and holds information (Adams, 1990).

Durkin (1993) cites knowing that speech corresponds to spoken words, we read from left to right and top to bottom, the function of space in establishing word boundaries as essential components of learning to read. When words can be recognized and understood, and connections between the text and the reader are made, comprehension develops. Many students lack these skills because they have not had opportunities to listen to or talk about stories, engage in word play or read with family members or view literacy behaviors modeled in the home.

Parents play a crucial role in the literacy development of their children. According to Cochran-Smith (1986):

Children are not born knowing how to connect their knowledge and experiences in literate ways to printed and pictorial texts. Rather they must learn the strategies for understanding texts just as they must learn the ways of eating and talking that are appropriate to their cultures or social groups (p. 36).

Many students are not having home experiences necessary to develop early literacy skills that the school's expect and therefore are considered "at risk" for failure. In order to assist these students, teachers prepare lessons and activities designed to build specific literacy skills. Parents are encouraged to participate and support their children's learning. Unfortunately many parents fail to do so, not because of lack of love or support for their children, but because they do not believe that they have the knowledge and skills to help their children.

In response to the call for the involvement of parents in the schools, and the need to increase the literacy skills of students, family literacy programs have been developed. Parents have been encouraged to read to their children on a daily basis, talk to their children and to share literacy activities. In fact, most parents participate in these programs because they wish for their child to become successful academically (Brizius & Foster, 1993; Edwards, 1994, 1995). In many cases this means being able to read at a level that includes thinking critically, applying strategies to clarify vocabulary and ideas and to have the motivation to continue reading and learning (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999).

Storybook reading has been touted as a process for parents and children to read together. Many studies indicate that children who are early readers come from families where literacy activities such as reading aloud, and having books are valued and practiced (Morrow, 1983; Teale, 1978; Bus, van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995; Lancy, Draper, & Boyce, 1989). Additional activities that impact children's literacy development include being read to on a consistent basis, interacting with the reader through question and clarification dialogues where they negotiate meaning of the text together.

Yet evidence suggests that simply reading to a child is not enough to build a strong early literacy foundation. Morrow (1990) identifies ten interactive reading behaviors that have a positive impact on children's learning. These include:

- questioning
- scaffolding
- dialogue and responses
- offering praise or positive reinforcement
- giving or extending information
- clarifying information
- restating information
- directing discussion
- sharing personal reactions, and
- relating concepts to life experiences.

To these ten behaviors Hiebert (1981) and Holdoway (1979) add promoting a positive attitude toward reading through enthusiasm, animation and modeling. Thus it is the adult-child interactive behaviors during the reading sessions can scaffold children's literacy development and provide the context for the child to develop concepts about books and print including directionality and book handling (Clay, 1979).

What is apparent is that the process for interactive reading is more complex than simply reading words from a book to a child. Incorporating the behaviors mentioned above can be intimidating. When parents understand how to help their children and develop the necessary skills to do so, they are also improving their own language and literacy skills.

The Collaborative Storybook Reading Program was developed to provide literacy support for kindergarten students who had limited home literacy experiences and to increase the literacy knowledge of parents. Parent volunteer readers were trained to conduct daily interactive storybook reading sessions with "at risk" kindergarten students. This project differs from other interactive storybook reading programs in that the same individual reads the story to the students each day. The parent readers were given a script to focus on specific elements of storybook reading from books not read to the students in the past. At the end of the

week, the parent reader would read the book to the entire class. Students were evaluated through the use of retellings as well as through teacher observation. Parent volunteers completed pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys regarding their literacy knowledge and practices.

Literature Review

Literacy development

The development of literacy skills has been linked to the experiences that children have before they enter school (Snow, 1983). She reported that the amount and quality of literacy activities of the home is one of the variables in the development of a child's school literacy. Children, regardless of socioeconomic level, who have been read to regularly at home from an early age possess an understanding, vocabulary, and interest in storybooks that they use as they make personal connections to new learning (Durkin, 1974/75; Strickland & Taylor, 1989). These storybook reading experiences that children have before their formal literacy instruction supports the ease with which they approach learning to read. Many children actually begin to read before they receive formal literacy instruction (Strickland & Taylor, 1989).

The term "lapreading" is used to describe the interactive experiences that children have at home as they listen to stories, pretend to read a book, and carry on conversations with an adult as they read a story together. According to Klesius and Griffith (1996), the benefits of lapreading have been articulated by many researchers. They include helping children develop a sense of how stories are constructed (Cochran-Smith, 1986; Strickland & Taylor, 1989; Taylor & Strickland, 1986), allowing children to observe and practice the comprehension strategies of expert readers (Snow & Nino, 1986; Strickland & Taylor, 1989), and teaching children that language is symbolic, that the words and pictures are not things but representations of things (Holdaway, 1979; Snow & Ninio, 1986). During lap reading an adult's behavior varies with the child's familiarity with the vocabulary and information. Adults scaffold children's interactions with text through conversation, questioning, and predicating. The lapreading process is flexible,

responding to the age of the age, skills and experiences of the child and the complexity of the text.

However, all children do not enter school with substantive literacy understandings. Adams (1998) acknowledges that there are homes that do not encourage literacy learning. She states "these homes are best identified by neither income social class, parental education, nor race, but by the values and styles of social communities to which they belong" (Adams, 1998, p. 87). Children from these homes miss out on the "literacy coddling" other children experience. Thus, they enter kindergarten with significantly less knowledge than their well-read-to peers. These children may begin kindergarten with limited oral language development, literacy development, knowledge of the world and attentive behaviors. These students struggle when they enter school and are often considered "at risk" for academic failure.

These less-prepared children need quality learning interactions in order to close the literacy gap with their peers. Clay (1998) suggests that kindergarten programs should include additional literacy opportunities for those students who have missed out. These make-up opportunities include: being read to, participating in a talking environment, interactions with adults, and opportunities to repeat the familiar.

Kindergarten teachers face the task of closing the gap between those students entering kindergarten from literacy-rich homes who are able to complete five year old literacy activities and those students with little or no book experience. In order to close this gap, teachers must prepare instructional programs to reflect each student's level of literacy understanding. Clay recognizes the importance of this challenge when she describes students beginning formal education. "Every child who enters school can learn things about literacy, but we must reach into that child's existing ways of learning to discover at what level his or her literacy awareness can be tapped" (p. 205).

Interactive storybook reading is a school-based activity designed to closely replicate the lap reading experience, and which can be integrated into the kindergarten classroom to build the language and literacy understandings that are necessary for the development of effective

reading and writing skills (Kleisus & Griffith, 1996; Morrow & Smith, 1990; Wood & Salvetti, 2001). During the interactive storybook reading program the adult and child draw attention to the information in the illustrations, predict what would happen next, and share experiences related to the text ((Kleisus & Griffith, 1996). As a result, the interactive storybook reading activity provides children with the language and literacy experiences that are necessary for the development of reading, writing, and other literacy skills.

Kleisus and Griffith (1996) have identified the behaviors that structure the interactive storybook process. These behaviors include clarifying information, demonstrating how to read, developing story structure, drawing attention to illustrations, extending vocabulary, informing, metanarrating (text or pictures), praising, pointing out text features and scaffolding strategies of a reader. These behaviors are fluid and respond to the age, skill, and background experiences of the child. When children have opportunities to participate in interactive storybook reading, they gain vital experiences and skills that form the foundation for later literacy development.

Instructional group size

Much of the research on the impact of storybook reading interactions has been devoted to the application and support of lap reading, a one-on-one experience of adult-child reading together where parent and child read and converse about the text and pictures (Kleisus & Griffith, 1996; Martinez & Rosner, 1985; Morrow, 1998; Taylor & Strickland, 1986). However, within the school setting, lap reading is not a realistic option. In classrooms where many students lack emergent literacy skills, one-on-one storybook reading is too time and labor intensive to be a realistic possibility. Small group reading opportunities, a practice much more feasible for school settings has been shown to be an effective practice. Klausmeir, Weirsmas, and Harris (1963) found that groups of two to four students could accomplish some tasks better than students working alone. Morrow (1988) found that children who listened to stories in small groups achieved greater comprehension and engaged in more verbal interchange than students who did not participate in the storybook reading progress. She found that in small group instruction,

students serve as models for other children. In addition, the teacher can keep track of each of the students and encourage participation from those that may seem passive.

The research on the effects of cooperative learning (Buckholdt & Wodarski, 1978) suggest that young children use language and nonverbal signals to communicate. Comments and questions from children in the group serve as catalysts for further discussion. When transcripts of readings to groups of three children were compared to the transcripts of reading to twelve children were compared, Cochran-Smith (1984) found that the discussion was more complex and children participated more in groups of three than in groups of twelve. Morrow and Smith (1990) found that students in a reading group of three children obtained higher comprehension scores when compared to scores from one-on-one or large group settings.

Prior to 1990 there was no published research on an optimum group size for storybook reading. Morrow and Smith (1990) sought to determine the optimum setting for read aloud events through the analysis of read aloud activities conducted in one-one, whole class and small group (three students) instructional settings. Their findings indicate that children exhibited greater comprehension when stories were read in a small group (three students) setting as opposed to the one on one setting. As a result of the research on instructional group size, a group of three students was determined to be optimal for the purposes of the Collaborative Storybook Reading Program.

Parent involvement

The quest to involve parents in their child's education has taken many forms. Parents have been asked to assist their children in mastering academic concepts and preparing them for school assessments. Parents have been invited to school meetings, school activities, and parent-school councils. Two activities focused on increasing parent involvement are encouraging parents to pursue at home reading behaviors that encourage learning, and conducting at-school activities that support the parent-teacher relationship. Research shows when parents are involved in their

children's education, student achievement and attitudes are improved (Henderson & Berla, 1994, Olmstead & Rubin, 1983).

Although parents and other adults have been encouraged to participate in their child's education, many parents hesitate to do so. Parents from diverse cultures may be perceived as being less involved in their children's education. This perception is often due to differences in the ways parents relate to school and what they consider the acceptable levels of development (Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, & Dornbusch, 1993).

In response to this situation, family literacy programs have been developed to improve the literacy skills of adults and children, and encourage adults to practice the reading behaviors in family settings with their children. In turn, these activities will enhance these children's ability to do well in school (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999). Parents are encouraged to practice the reading behaviors with their children during storybook reading sessions at home. As a result, having positive opportunities to learn and practice literacy strategies enables parents to improve their own skills, interact with their children around literacy elements and dispel any of the negative feelings they may retain from their own school experiences.

To increase parent involvement, teachers must be able to create activities in which information can be shared with parents and suggesting ways in which parents can assist their children at home (Rich, 1993). Epstein (1983) found that when teachers were committed to increasing parent involvement, the parents felt that they should help their children at home and understood more about what their children were learning in school. Parental involvement includes activities the parent can do at home to foster student learning and result in academic achievement (Goldenberg, 1987; Scott-Jones, 1987). Sterns and Peterson (1973) found that when parents are able to teach their children, parental self-confidence is increased and results in greater student motivation for learning. When schools develop policies and programs that are sensitive to the community, more parents will become involved in ways that are perceived by the school as being engaged in the in the education process. Therefore, teachers must make the parents be comfortable with the school environment and their role in the school.

Literacy practices within joint storybook reading seem to promote the type of skills in order to ensure success in school. Parents and other adults can provide the additional instruction students need to learn to read.

Parents are a valuable resource for classroom teachers when utilized in a culturally respectful and effective manner (Chavkin & Williams, 1993). When parents participate in activities where they feel valued, the relationship with the school is a positive one. As parents feel more competent in carrying out school-based activities, their self-esteem increases. In turn, children of parents who are involved in school are more motivated to learn and demonstrate higher degrees of achievement.

Storybook readings are an important and daily part of the kindergarten classroom and are especially beneficial to the students with significantly less storybook knowledge than their well-to-read peers. However, a single kindergarten teacher is often unable to provide the elements of an enriched home literacy experience. A collaborative storybook reading program carried out by parent volunteers and shared with the kindergarten class can provide 'at risk students' with vital literacy experiences. Students who read in small group settings of 2-3 students, have multiple opportunities to read the same book and participate in an interactive dialogue that allows each child to be actively involved in the construction and interpretation of the meaning of the story will progress in their literacy development.

The Collaborative Storybook Reading Program

Rationale

The Collaborative Storybook Reading Program was designed by several teachers from a culturally diverse, small urban school. Many students came from families where languages other than English were spoken or where parent education was limited. The teachers wanted to provide essential early literacy experiences to those students who have missed out on such experiences prior to entering school. These teachers found that students in their classes came to their kindergarten with a wide range of pre-kindergarten experiences. Several students were already

reading, and some students knew how to handle a book and could retell a story based on the pictures. Other students seemed to have few literacy experiences. During shared reading time these students did not follow the text, failed to name the letters of the alphabet, and were not able to name favorite books.

Since additional funds were not available to support an intervention program, the teachers determined that intervention would be carried out within the context of a classroom-based program through the classroom teacher and parent volunteers. A master's project by Lorie Hickerson (2002), presenting the development of a site based Storybook Reading Program, served as a resource. In this community, parent involvement was low, yet this low participation rate was not from a lack of interest, but rather from a lack of understanding of the role of parents in the instructional process. In some cases, parents were only familiar with the concept that the teacher is in charge and the parents do not belong in the school setting. Many of these students came from non-western European cultures including Asian, Hispanic, African American and East Indian. Some students came from single parent or low-income families where the task of earning a living consumed most of the adult energy. Other students came from immigrant families who were not acquainted with schools in America and found them quite intimidating.

Although parents had often received information on what to do with their child in order to develop literacy skills, missing was the vital components of how to carry out these tasks and why these tasks are important. The teachers determined that a program where parents would be trained to deliver instruction to students and then participate in the classroom read aloud time could benefit the students by building skills, while providing parents with the skills and confidence to play a greater role in the education of their children. It was assumed that the knowledge received in this program would become a part of the parent's repertoire of behaviors and will be used with other young family members.

The parents in this school community were supportive of the teachers and wanted to help their children to succeed in school. A program where parents would be trained to deliver instruction to students and then participate in the classroom read aloud time could benefit the

students by building skills, while providing parents with the skills and confidence to play a greater role in the education of their children.

The collaborative storybook reading program was constructed to provide quality, small group, and interactive lap reading experiences at school for those students who entered kindergarten without having such experiences. These students were identified as failing to exhibit age appropriate literacy behaviors and are in danger of not meeting the standards for promotion. Parents were given interactive training sessions which provided them with an opportunity to see typical small group interactions and conversations, discuss the role of the adult reader and view the use of the interactive storybook reading plan and the bookmark guide. During this session the teacher reviewed instructional processes such as making predictions, carrying out a picture walk and picture talk, and creating a retelling. The characteristics of the different types of text including folk tale, fable, fantasy, realistic fiction and nonfiction were presented. Participants were introduced to the structure (components) of stories including character, setting, problem, goal, events, and resolution.

Student participants

At the time of the first report card period, early November, kindergarten teachers identified the students who were not meeting the kindergarten benchmarks for the time period. In many cases these students had not mastered letter names or sounds, could not identify the parts of a book, had little knowledge of the purposes of print and rarely chose to read books during activity time. Teacher's observations indicated that during teacher directed shared reading and whole class read aloud time, these students seemed unengaged, did not follow the print as it was read aloud, participate in discussions, respond teacher's questions during or after the read-aloud sessions. Most of these students did not choose to visit the book corner during activity time, could not name a favorite book, or retell a story.

Fifteen boys and twelve girls participated in the program. Of the twenty-seven students, eight came from families where a language other than English was spoken. The family composition of the students varied,

some lived with a single parent, some with two parents and others in extended families with parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Parent volunteers

Parent volunteers were recruited from the kindergarten classrooms as well as the larger school community. Each volunteer had expressed a desire to work with children, an interest in learning about quality children's literature, and a commitment to participate in the project for several weeks. More important was the desire of the volunteers to apply their learning from the project to the implementation of storybook reading at home with their children. Many parents had indicated on their family information sheet that they lacked confidence in assisting their children in the process of learning to read. Others wanted to increase their knowledge of learning how children learn how to read. Seven parents had students in the program; the remaining parents were from the kindergarten and first grade classes.

The teachers determined that a highly structured parent education program was essential to build confidence and skills. The program needed to extend beyond "just reading a book" to a group of students. If storybooks could be used as a means to build students literacy skills, the parents own literacy development would be strengthened as learned how to question, clarify and engage the listener in the storybook reading process. Thus, the training sessions prior to the program were carefully scaffolded to build parent knowledge, allow opportunities for practice and provide a place for parents to discuss their learning.

The key to involving parents is creating an environment in which parental contribution is valued. When the program was introduced to the parents, the teachers emphasized that parents were an integral part of the classroom community as the Friday storybook readers. On Fridays there was time for the parents and the teachers to get together to share insights about the students and any other information necessary. Thus parents were not working in isolation and could see the impact of the collaborative storybook reading program.

Parent preparation

Sessions were created to prepare parent participants for the implementation of the collaborative storybook reading program. Included in the training would be an overview of the literacy process and the role of this program in the development of literacy skills. In addition to how to carry out the program, teachers discussed why the elements in the program assist young students in the development of literacy skills.

Specific parent preparation took place over three sessions prior to the beginning of the Collaborative Storybook Reading Program. Additional sessions were held on Fridays after the shared storybook reading session carried out by each parent in the kindergarten class. Since it was important that the instructional climate developed produce little or no anxiety, parents were welcomed to the training sessions by the kindergarten teachers. The teachers spoke about their literacy program and the desire to assist students who seemed to be struggling. Some teachers shared the struggles that they had learning to read and write. Everyone had the opportunity to raise questions and comment on the project. A variety of multicultural children's books spread throughout the room created a relaxed feeling.

The first meeting of the parents included the participation of several teachers who modeled reading of children's storybooks. Following the reading parents brainstormed a list of their observations. Rather than being passive listeners, the parents became participants in the storybook reading process. Time was left for discussion and questions. It was important that parents have some investment in the processes in addition to assisting the teachers and the identified students. Towards this end, parents set personal literacy goals for themselves. Goals to be accomplished at home included obtaining more books for their children to read, spending more time reading with their children and just talking to their children about the day's activities. Other goals included being on time to their reading session, practicing before reading aloud so as to read the long words correctly and to convey the meaning from the author, and reading aloud with expression to a small group of children.

The second and third sessions highlighted teachers modeling the interactive storybook reading process with a group of kindergarten students. During the modeling session the teacher demonstrated the following strategies: drawing attention to and labeling pictures, demonstrating reading behaviors, making observations, using questions, clarifying information, extending vocabulary and developing story structure. The preparation program incorporated the recommendations from *A Child Becomes a Reader* (Ambruster, Lehr, and Osborne, 2003) for parents to incorporate in the parent child reading sessions:

Make reading a pleasure
Show enthusiasm as you read with your child
Read to your child often
Talk with your child as you read together
Encourage your child to explore books (pp. 14-15)

The interactive sessions gave the parents an opportunity to see typical small group interactions and conversations, discuss the role of the adult reader and view the use of the interactive storybook reading plan and the bookmark guide. During this session the teacher reviewed instructional processes such as making predictions, carrying out a picture walk and picture talk, and creating a retelling. Highlighted were the characteristics of the different types of text including folk tale, fable, fantasy, realistic fiction and nonfiction. Participants were introduced to the structure of stories including character, setting, problem, goal, events, and resolution.

During each session, time was allocated to the viewing of high quality children's literature. Award winning books such as *Tar Beach* (Ringold, 1991), *Make Way for Ducklings* (McCloskey, 1941), *Strega Nona* (dePaola, 1975), *The Keeping Quilt* (Polacco, 1988), *Wolf's Chicken Stew* (Kasza, 1987) from the school and classroom libraries were shared with parents for their perusal. Serving as a resource, the teacher leader was able to show parents elements of story structure, character development, and use of language. Groups of books by well known authors and illustrators were shared. Parents could borrow the books to read with their children at home.

Each Friday, the parent volunteers met to review the week's activities, ask questions and compare experiences. These discussions were participant lead; a teacher remained in the room but was not a party to the discussion unless invited. Over the course of the project, the focus of the discussions moved from how to get certain children involved to using one's voice to help create a visual image of a specific character, asking questions, and showing students how the author uses pictures and words to convey meaning. During the second part of the Friday meeting the teacher presented the book for the following week. Since each storybook to be read was purposely chosen for the project, the lesson plan was updated with specific information about the book to be read.

For the first three weeks a teacher read the book aloud to the volunteers and modeled the components of the Five Day Plan (Hickerson, 2002). Following the modeled lesson, parents had the opportunity to practice reading aloud and participate in a discussion regarding the reading process. As the project progressed, the parents took turns introducing the book for the following week. Volunteers were able to take their book home and practice, thus becoming more familiar with the text as well as their role as a reader. As the project progressed, the parents took on a greater role in the Friday sessions. The parents, rather than the teacher, were selecting the critical attributes of the book to be highlighted during the storybook reading sessions. These sessions became a forum where parents could exchange of ideas and share ways to make the joint storybook sessions work better.

Planning

The Lesson Plan Overview and the Storybook Notes were developed from several sources including Morrow's 1988 study of low SES students in one-on-one storybook reading sessions in school settings. Information on the interactions that take between adults and children in lap or storybook reading activities (Klesius & Griffith, 1996) was added to the data reported by Morrow (1998) and incorporated into the lesson plan, storybook notes, and daily reading plans.

Research has demonstrated that it is not simply the reading of the storybook that increases literacy, but it is the interaction between the

reader, the listener and the text that creates understanding and the development of meaning (Flood, 1977; Heath, 1983; Teale, 1983). Therefore the guidance provided by the adult reader is critical to the development of student's literacy skills. The lesson plan outline shared with, modeled for, and practiced by the parent readers included the elements of questioning, predicting, scaffolding, attention to print, praise, student talk including sharing of personal experiences and imitation of the author's language.

The Lesson Plan Overview, displayed in Table 1, was presented to the parents during the first training session and reviewed in each subsequent session. It was important that the parents see the storybook reading process as in its entirety before breaking the process into daily components. On Fridays, when the parent read the book of the week to the entire kindergarten class, they included many elements of the lesson plan in their read-aloud.

Table 1
Lesson Plan Overview

Getting Ready:

Show of the cover of the book to the children
Encourage predictions
Discuss author and illustrator
Allow children to discuss experiences related to the book
Discuss the type of text (folk tale, fantasy, fable, realistic, fiction, nonfiction)

Read:

Encourage children to react to and comment on the story as they listened to you read
Rephrase text to support understanding
At appropriate points ask the children to predict what will happen next

Revisit the Story:

Review the story components (character, setting, problem, goal, events, solution)
Help students make connections between events in the story and events in their own lives
Encourage "attempted" retellings of the story

In order to structure the Collaborative Storybook Reading Program sessions two additional instructional plans were created. The Five Day Plan (Appendix A) outlined the material that should be covered each day in the 20-30 minute session and included the language that the parents could use in engaging the students. This daily plan was copied onto cardstock and laminated so it could accompany the parent reader. One of the purposes of the project was to prepare parents with the strategies for assisting their children in developing literacy. The Lesson Plan Overview and accompanying lessons plans when used in conjunction with the training sessions would enable the parents to be successful in the reading process.

Knowing that the full lesson plan may be too cumbersome, the essential elements of the plan were placed on a bookmark (Appendix B) and laminated. This bookmark was used to remind the readers of the plan for each day. As the project progressed, the parents found that they had internalized the procedures and referred to the bookmark on a less frequent basis. By the end of the project the students could generate the outline for the daily reading session.

Session implementation

The classroom teacher and the parent volunteer chose the time for the Collaborative Storybook Reading Program. In many cases this took place before or after recess or during independent work time. At the appointed time, the parent would enter the room, gather the students and go to their reserved storybook reading place. The reserved areas were away from distractions, but not isolated. A reserved sign created by the target students was prominently placed so that the area would not be disturbed.

During the collaborative reading session, the parent reader would scaffold students learning through model asking and answering questions in order to obtain meaning. Other times the parent would use a think-aloud protocol to demonstrate to the conversational nature of stories. Pictures often became the focal point for discussions about the story and were used as the basis for the prediction of forthcoming events.

The interactive sessions lasted from 20-30 minutes. At the end of the collaborative storybook reading session, the students were quietly returned to their classroom to resume their activities.

Each day the parent reader completed the daily elements outlined in the lesson plans. On Fridays at least one student from each group was tape recorded as he/she completed an attempted reading. This reading was reviewed for attention to story grammar, use of pictures and the language of the author. After the Friday session, the parent read the book to the entire class. The students in the Collaborative Storybook Reading Program considered themselves special as they had already heard the book before.

Program Assessment

The Collaborative Storybook Reading Program had two foci: the development of emergent literacy skills in kindergarten students and the participating parents' development of storybook reading and other skills to foster emergent literacy development. Twenty-seven students and nine adults participated in the program. Both foci were evaluated.

Retellings

Before the project began, each student participant was audio taped completing a retelling of a story read by the classroom teacher. Since the story had not been presented in the classroom and the student indicated that the story had not been heard before, the student could not rely on prior experience or background information to complete the retelling. This retelling was transcribed and then scored using the picture-governed component of the Rating Scale for Emergent Reading Levels (Sulzby, 1985) (Appendix C). Teacher observations of the students during the whole class shared reading time were recorded; student performance was rated as 1, 2, or 3 (Appendix D).

Classroom assessment data included: letter names, letter sounds, concepts about print, high frequency words and developmental spelling collected for each participant. Teachers also indicated the level of student involvement in other literacy based classroom activities such as writing,

free reading in the library corner, and dramatic play using reading and writing scenarios.

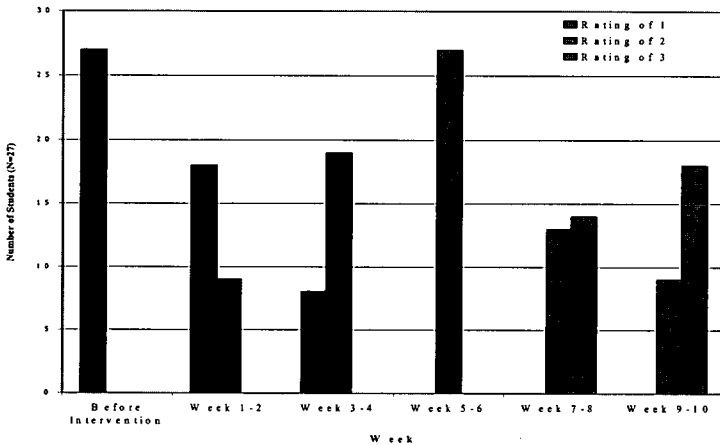
In addition, parent volunteers completed a questionnaire about their experiences with the literacy process (Appendix E). The intent was not to gather specific knowledge about each parent, but to obtain a general sense of the parents' literacy skills and their perception of themselves as literacy facilitators for their children.

Throughout the project the children's comfort with the story, knowledge of story structure and language of story was assessed through retellings. According to Morrow (1987) there is a positive relationship between the amount of exposure a child has had to stories and the quality of their retellings. As children have more experiences, especially those that are structured with opportunities for active engagement of the reader and listeners, there is an increase in the length, accuracy, use of the language of the book and completeness of the retelling.

At the end of each week, one or two students were asked to complete a retelling of the story read during the week. This retelling was recorded and analyzed according to the picture governed attempts section of Sulzby's Rating Scale for Emergent Reading Levels (Appendix C). As the students' exposure to the storybook language structure, and content increased, the retellings became more complete and reflective of the story. Students began to incorporate the language of the author, character attributes and expressions into their retellings. On the average student scores on retellings increased from 1's to 2's and 3's. Although the level of sophistication of the retelling varied among the students, all did gain in their efforts.

Each student participated in an initial retelling, four retellings of stories during the program and a final retelling of a story at the end of the program. The evaluation of the retellings are presented below (See Figure 1).

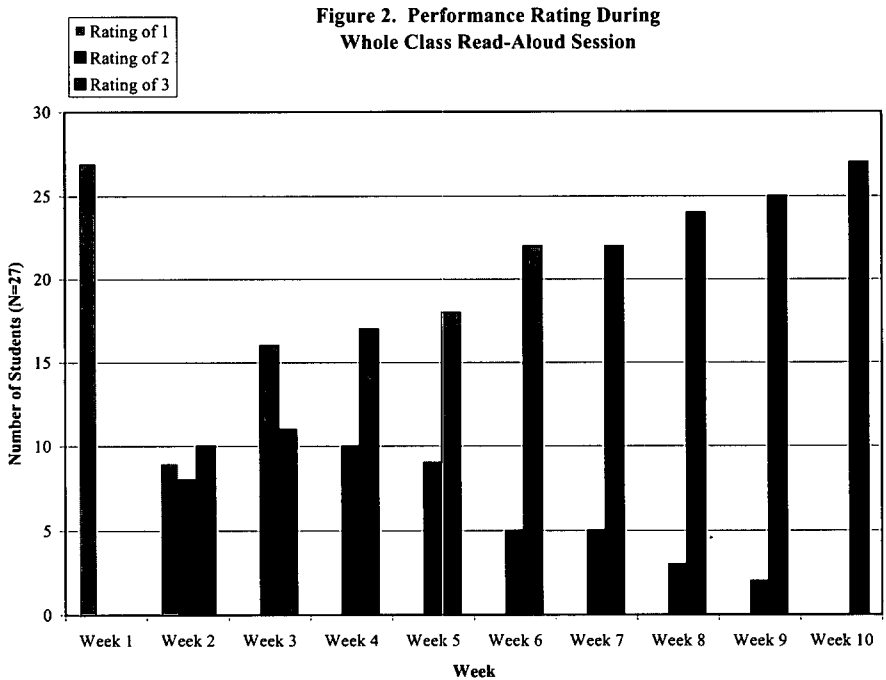
Figure 1. Evaluation of Student Retellings



Teacher Observation

A second area of assessment was of the students' interactions and behaviors during the Friday classroom whole class reading experience. Before the Collaborative Storybook Reading Program began, the target students were observed and rated by the classroom teacher. These students received a "1" rating. Each week during the project, the classroom teacher observed the target students and rated their behaviors on a scale from 1-3. Over the course of the project the student's ratings by their classroom teachers consisted of 2's and 3's (See Figure 2).

Classroom assessment data indicated continued growth in the acquisition of letter names and sounds, concepts of print, and high frequency words and developmental spelling. This project concluded prior to the formal district assessment of these elements. A change in target student's involvement in literacy activities was apparent to the classroom teacher. Some students were choosing to read books from the classroom library; others were recreating the storybook reading process for their classmates.

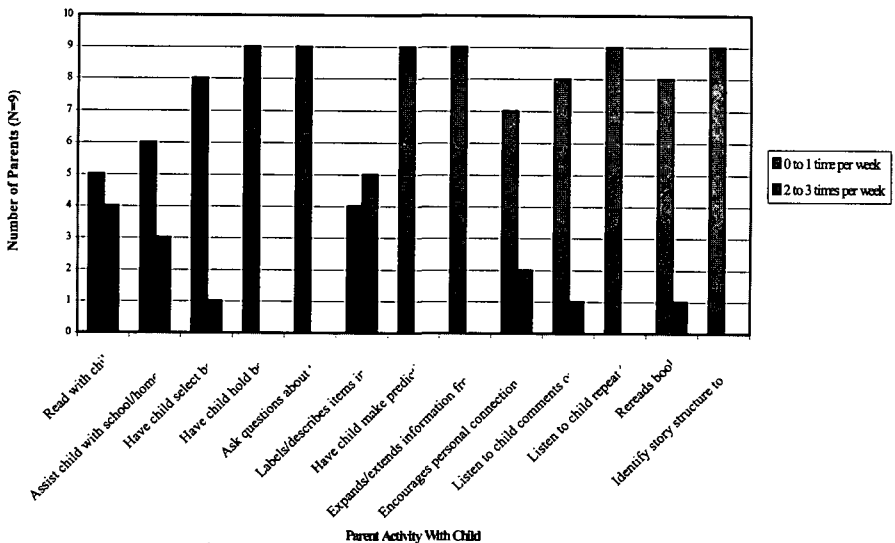


Questionnaire: Self Perception of Parents

Data from the parent questionnaires completed prior to the beginning to the Collaborative Storybook Reading program indicated that of the parents did not read with their children or assist their children with homework very often. In addition they did not feel comfortable assisting their child with schoolwork or with the reading process. Before the program began, over half of the parents indicated that they did not read with their child more than once a week. Most of the parents indicated that they did not employ interactive reading behaviors including questioning, predicting, labeling, linking ideas in the text to themselves, or provide additional information before they began the program (See Figure 3).

One of the most important outcomes of the project was the increased skill and self-confidence exhibited by the parents. Each parent felt that they had learned how to read interactively with their child. The parents learned how to question, predict, identify story components, and create interactive conversations about text. Parents reported that they read to their child more frequently than before the project and engaged in reading strategies to scaffold their child's reading. At the end all of the parents indicated that they used all of the interactive strategies as they read with their child, and all indicated that they were comfortable assisting their children with learning how to read and do school work (See Figure 4).

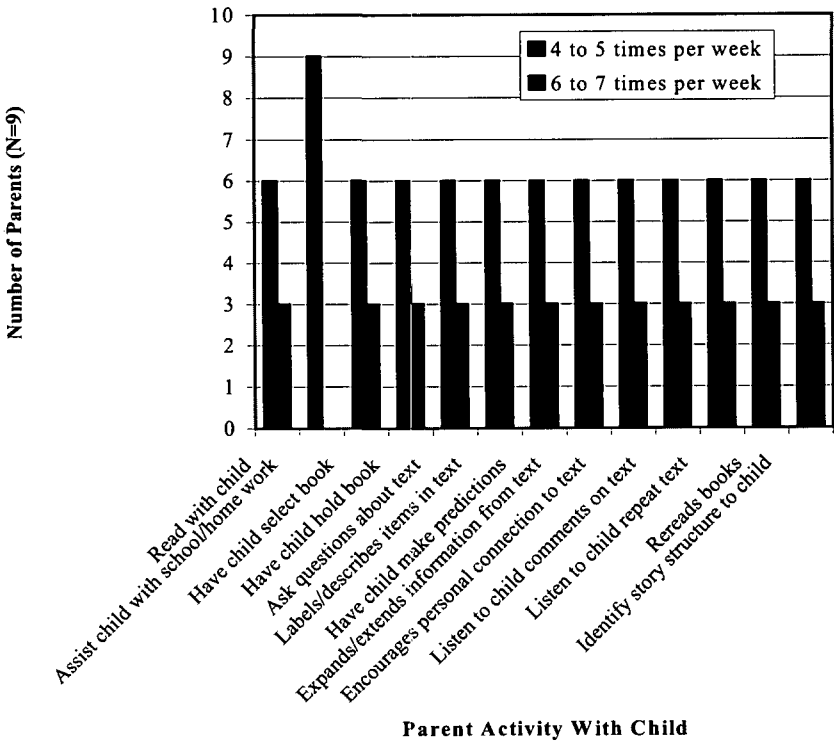
Figure 3. Data From Parent Questionnaires Before Program



Conclusions and Recommendations

To succeed in school, children must be able to read. Reading, in turn, is the product of early literacy skills acquired, at least in part, through skill-building interactions with parents. Children who come to school without the benefit of these early foundations are in danger of falling behind and never climbing on the literacy bandwagon.

Figure 4. Data From Parent Questionnaires After Program



In an effort to keep those at-risk children up with their peers, teachers designed a program, interactive storybook reading, that mimics the lap reading experiences that are an essential part of the skill building process. They enlisted the assistance of, and trained, the parents of those children to assist in the process with the dual goals of giving the parents the skills and confidence to assist their children in school, while giving the students the building blocks missing from their educational foundation.

The interactive storybook reading program resulted in significant improvement in student ability to retell a story. Their interest and attention to stories being read aloud in class increased. The students began to mimic what readers do - predicted story events, understood and discussed story structure, began to repeat text and vocabulary, and began to understand that reading is the process of communicating with the author. The students approached the skill level of those who had early literary experiences.

For the parents, the program provided a strong structure for carrying out the collaborative storybook process. Parents had opportunity to watch the process in action, to practice before they worked with children, and to talk to teachers and to one another. The parents built a support network among themselves, a community of parents. Because the parents brought the stories they were reading into the classroom, the parents became a part of the class.

At the outset, the goal was to develop a program for struggling readers that did not require an infusion of funds or specialized personnel. This program can be replicated in other settings and adapted to fit the needs of the target students. Several factors were instrumental to the success of the program and can serve as the structure for future programs. These factors are presented below:

- Daily read aloud sessions with the same students and reader.
- Opportunity for the reader to read to the target student's class.
- A quiet, comfortable place away from distractions for the collaborative reading session.
- Small groups of 3-4 students for the reading sessions.
- Tape recording of retelling enables students' to hear themselves talk.
- Schedule sessions so as not to interfere with the instructional program.
- Provide students with the opportunity to choose the book to be read.
- Provide opportunities for parents to share with each other.

In the future, I would like to use the collaborative storybook reading program with second language learners and first graders. I would like to follow students who have been in this program for two or three years to see if they retain the gains made here and reach parity with their peers. Further efforts should be undertaken to try the program with a larger group of students with an eye toward instituting a school-wide parent literacy program.

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Linda Smetana is a faculty member at Cailifornia State University, Hayward, in Hayward, CA.

Appendix A

Five Day Reading Plan

Day 1

Discuss the title, author, illustrator and other books.

Identify things known by exploring the cover.

Make predictions about the story.

Read through the book.

Have students make predictions throughout the reading.

Encourage discussion and questions.

Encourage the gathering of information from the illustrations.

Day 2

“Picture Walk and Talk.” Using the pictures, guide the students in retelling the story.

Try to capture the language of the author.

Read the story.

Encourage lots of discussion and clarification.

Use questions whenever possible. Draw information from the students.

Have students label the items in the picture. Can you find ___?

Day 3

Look at the book page-by-page, or two page by two page spread.

Have the students discuss what they know (remember). Then read each page to confirm the parts they remember and to clarify any confusion.

Encourage the students, using questions/comments, to make connections between events in the story and their own life.

Read and enjoy the story.

Day 4

Look at the pictures and discuss story components:

“Who are the characters in the story?”

“What is the setting?”

“Where does this story take place?”

“What is the problem?”

How as the problem solved?”

Encourage the students to do an attempted reading, retelling.

Read and enjoy the story.

Day 5

Tape record one of the students to complete an attempted reading-retelling. Note your observations.

Read "Book of the Week" to the entire class. Teacher will observe the target students.

Place the "Book of the Week" in a special place in the room.

Appendix B

Five Day Plan Bookmark

Day 1

Title of the book, author, illustrator.

Discuss cover and make predictions.

Read story and encourage student comments.

Day2

“Picture walk – picture talk.” Read the story.

Have students discuss that label items in the pictures.

Day 3

Lead students in a page-by-page discussion of the story using the pictures.

Read the text to confirm information shared in picture discussions.

Discuss connections between events in the book and events in students’ lives.

Read and enjoy the story.

Day 4

Using the pictures in the story, define the following story the components: characters, setting, problem, goal, events, and solution.

Invite students to do an attempted reading.

Read and enjoy!

Day 5

Tape-record an attempted reading.

Read story to the entire class.

Place the “book of the week” in a “special place” visible to students.

Appendix C

Rating Scale for Emergent Reading Levels (Elizabeth Sulzby, 1985)

	Picture Governed Attempts
Rating 1	Story not formed. Speech that accompanies each page appears to be in response to a discrete page. Language not tied together for naïve audience to understand. Attends only to pictures and points out specific items by giving names or commenting on them. Gives re-enactment as if action in picture is occurring now.
Rating 2	Story formed/oral language-like. Can understand a complete story, but language is contextualized to the pictures. Story is context dependent. May give dialogue for characters, but does not use dialogue carriers.
Rating 3	Story formed/written language-like. Story created may depart from actual story, but shows a clear sense of audience and contains major portions that are de-contextualized or sufficiently specified to be understood without the pictures. Child creates patterns similar to those in book, language is de-contextualized and intonation is reading-like. Child shows awareness and partial memory for stretches of the text; child shows self-correction behaviors that indicate he/she is trying to retrieve the actual story. Does not attend to print, but may understand that adults read print to tell the story.
	Print Governed Attempts
Rating 4	Refusal.

Refuses to read on the grounds that they know print rather than pictures are read to tell the story.

Rating 5

Aspectual.

Focuses on one or two aspects of print to the exclusion of other aspects such as sounding out words or memory of text.

Rating 6

Holistic/strategies imbalanced.

Tends to omit unknown words, excessively substitutes other words from repertoire, sounds out words excessively, may complain that text is too hard.

Rating 7

Strategies balanced (Independent Reading)

Child may read word-perfectly at times or may make numerous miscues, but makes self-corrections that show wide range of knowledge by skipping over words.

Accurate in reproducing wording and author's intended meaning.

Appendix D

Teacher Observation of Student Performance During Whole Class Read Aloud Session

The classroom teacher evaluated each student during the Friday whole class storybook reading sessions. The students' behaviors were rated according to the scale below.

1. Performance indicates difficulty understanding the story, has difficulty focusing, and appears to lack interest in storybook reading or is unwilling to participate.
2. Performance matches that of other students, listens attentively, and participates when called upon.
3. Strong performance, appears to understand the story structure, makes personal connections, and actively participates.

Appendix E

Parent Questionnaire

Birthplace _____

Grade of student _____

Education _____

Number of times you read with your child each week:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Number of times you assist your child with homework each week:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Indicate your level of comfort in assisting your child learning to read:

not comfortable	barely comfortable
comfortable	very comfortable

Please describe the reasons for your level of comfort:

Indicate how frequently you carry out the following with your child (times/week):

Have your child select the book to read:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Have your child touch/hold the book:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Ask your child questions about what you are reading:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Label items of interest and describe what they are and what they do:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Ask your child to predict what will happen next:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Expand the information in the story or extend the information provided in the text:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Talk about information that relates to the text; make personal connections to the text:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Listen to your child comment on the text:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Listen to your child repeat parts of the text:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Reread books several times:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

I would feel more comfortable helping my child if I was able to.....

I would like to have communications from my child's teacher in the areas of.....



Developing a Sense of Audience: An Examination of One School's Instructional Contexts

Joyce E. Many
Georgia State University

Susan D. Henderson
Coker College

The purpose of this naturalistic study was to extend our understanding of the ways in which consideration of audience may be salient in diverse students' and teachers' approaches to literacy. Data related to literacy interactions in one school were collected from the preschool class and three multiage elementary classrooms. Findings indicated that the school's curriculum was developed through a socio-cultural approach with the students involved in constructing meaning of their world through interaction with others, through dialogue about texts, and through involvement in the arts. Within these experiences, students developed a sense of audience awareness and participated as audience members. In the upper grades, two specific instructional contexts, literature circles and project work, involved students in preparing for and communicating to (or communicating with) an audience.

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT having an audience has an impact on the literacy development and literacy learning of students (Bloodgood, 1995; Dyson, 1991, 2004; Rowe, 1989; Wollman-Bonilla, 2001). Often, students find an audience in the teacher, peers, or other parents/adults in the room. Such individuals can become a source of inspiration and motivation for students' writing (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975; Rowe, 1989) and their reading (Dixon-Krauss, 1995). The importance of developing a sense of audience and providing an audience for students is grounded in the recognition of the role social interactions play in literacy learning. Social interactions are viewed as an integral part of the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978) and thus help define literacy concepts (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Dixon-Krauss, 1995; Rowe, 1989). Through social contexts in which literacy experiences such as reading and writing occur, students develop richer understandings of literacy processes which may be reflected in future reading and writing opportunities.

The importance of helping students develop a sense of audience has been stressed primarily in the area of writing. Britton (1975) and his colleagues define sense of audience as "the manner in which the writer expresses a relationship with the reader in respect to the writer's understanding" (pp.65-66). In order to facilitate students' growth as writers, teachers have been encouraged to insure that students have a specific audience for whom they are writing (Barr & Johnson, 1997; Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995).

The majority of studies focusing on student authors' sense of audience have been at the college and high school levels (Wollman-Bonilla, 2001). However, researchers have begun to turn their attention to the preschool and elementary levels to increase our understanding of children's awareness of or consideration of audience in the early years and to explore instructional approaches which may develop a sense of audience. Research documents that even preschool children can demonstrate audience awareness (Cox, 1994; Rowe, 1989). Rowe's study focusing on 3, 4, and 5-year-olds described various social interactions involving authors and audiences, with students and their teachers assuming both roles. Rowe's work also noted that specific

literacy outcomes are associated with participation in audience/author interactions. Similarly, Wollman-Bonilla's (2001) research found that first-grade students who received authentic responses from their audiences increased their use of rhetorical moves that indicated audience awareness. In addition, in an inquiry examining partner reading experiences, Dixon-Krauss (1995) noted that peer dialogue supported students' reading and writing development and their sense of audience. In these studies, students' social interactions with their immediate audience contributed to their growing sensitivity to and consideration of audience. Research focusing on older children found that some 10- and 11-year-old Scottish students imagined an audience as they researched and wrote both informational reports (Many, Fyfe, Lewis, & Mitchell, 2004) and historical fiction stories (Many & Diehl, 1997). These students planned their reports and/or stories and revised their drafts in light of the implied readers for whom they were writing.

The purpose of this study was to extend our understanding of the ways in which consideration of audience may be salient in diverse students' and teachers' approaches to literacy. Data related to literacy interactions in one small school were collected and analyzed through two naturalistic inquiries. One study focused on the preschool class and the second study concentrated on instructional conversations in the three multiage elementary classrooms. Themes emerged in both data sets related to the importance this school places on the presence of an audience and on developing students' awareness of audience. Consequently, we carried out specific analyses to explore the ways in which audience was salient in the literacy interactions occurring in this school.

Methodology

The context for this study was a small private school in a large urban city in the Southeast. At the time of data collection, the school served approximately 50 pupils, from age 3 to grade 6. An active scholarship program insured the student population was culturally and socio-economically diverse. Approximately 30 percent of the student body received scholarship assistance.

The school was founded on the principles of the importance of student-centered learning and of the integration of the arts into the curriculum. Classes were structured in multi-age groups consisting of a 3- to 5-year-olds class and 1st - 2nd, 3rd - 4th, and 5th - 6th grade classes. The teachers advocated multi-age interactions not only within classes but also through the integration of learning experiences extending across class boundaries (e.g., reading-writing workshops involving multiple classes, weekly school-wide community meetings, sharing of literacy events).

Participants for this study were the teachers and students in all four classes of the school. Pseudonyms have been given to the students. The teachers, who chose to have their actual names used in this article, have been actively involved in formal and informal teacher-research projects. Informal discussions of findings and manuscript drafts were reviewed with all of the teachers. In addition, the preschool teacher and 3rd - 4th grade teacher read and analyzed data from the preschool classroom.

The primary data source for this analysis included fieldnotes and audio and videotapes of classroom discussions. Secondary sources were student and teacher interviews and copies of student artifacts. Data collection and analyses occurred across a period of three years. Research began in the first year with a focus on the literacy interactions in the 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old classroom. Data were collected in this preschool class by author Henderson. Henderson was also the 5th - 6th grade teacher at this school. Data analysis and interpretation proceeded throughout the second year. In the third year, data analysis continued in the preschool context and additional investigation was undertaken by author Many in the 1st - 2nd, 3rd - 4th, and 5th - 6th grade classrooms.

During data collection for both initial studies, working hypotheses had emerged regarding the ways the teachers and students' conversations and/or the instructional contexts underscored a sense of audience. Consequently, the analysis for this inquiry began with the identification of all data excerpts from the preschool classroom and the 1st - 2nd, 3rd - 4th, and 5th - 6th grade classes in which audience was salient. Next, we created data reduction charts (Huberman & Miles, 1993) based on this

data to allow initial categories to be developed. We worked back and forth from the data to the categories emerging on the charts using a constant-comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, we worked to describe and understand the ways in which teachers and students attended to audience, for what purpose, and with what outcomes. The data reduction charts and resulting categories were reviewed by the participating teachers/researchers. Interpretations were verified through triangulation (a) of data collected across time, (b) across data from multiple classrooms, and (c) through comparisons of researchers' and teachers' perspectives.

Results and Discussion

In Table 1 we illustrate the major instructional contexts in this school in which attention to audience was evident. Across all grade levels, the school's curriculum was developed through a socio-cultural approach with the students involved in constructing meaning of their world through interaction with others, through dialogue about texts, and through involvement in the arts. Within these experiences, we identified a variety of ways in which students were developing a sense of audience awareness or were participating as an audience. In the upper grades, two specific instructional contexts, literature circles and project work, were also identified as regularly involving students in preparing for and communicating to (or communicating with) an audience. In the sections that follow, we will describe the ways in which we noted children attending to audience in these instructional contexts and we will work to build a grounded theory of how the experiences in this school developed the students' sense of audience.

Salience Of Audience Throughout The Curriculum

Students at this school participated in experiences grounded in a socio-cultural approach to literacy. The student-centered curriculum involved students in actively constructing meaning of their world through authentic reading, writing, and artistic activities. The multi-age groupings and the focus on collaborative approaches to learning insured ongoing conversations among peers and others. Throughout the grades,

we noted instructional contexts which involved students in developing an awareness of audience or a participation as an audience in the following ways: (a) sharing with an implied audience, (b) sharing with an immediate audience, and (c) choosing to be an audience. While these themes were evident across the grades, the purposes and/or outcomes associated with involvement in these audience-related experiences seemed to vary across the grade levels.

Table 1

Instructional Contexts Involving a Sense of Audience

Contexts	Instructional Approaches	Themes Evident
Across the Curriculum in all Grades	Audience Awareness and Participation through a Socio-cultural Approach	Sharing with an implied audience
		Sharing with an immediate audience
		Choosing to be an audience
Specific Instructional Contexts in the Upper Grades	Literature Circles	Communicating with an audience
		Communicating with an audience
	Project Work	Communicating specific information to an audience

Sharing with an implied audience. In this school, sharing with an implied audience was most evident in the creation and display of artistic artifacts. In the preschool class, as children completed their work, the teacher regularly reminded them to sign the author's/artist's/illustrator's

name. For example, "...H. P. [the preschool teacher] calls Aline back over to read the sentence and explain her illustration. H. P. then says the illustrator's name needs to be on the picture so Aline writes her name" (Fieldnotes, Jan. 31). In another example, "...When Alvia is finished, H. P. asks her, 'Have you signed the artists' name?' When Alvia says, 'No,' H. P. asks her, 'Will you sign the artists' name?' Alvia says, 'Yes' and writes her name on her work" (Fieldnotes, April 14). While the term audience was not explicitly discussed, the teacher's insistence that the children sign the "artist's" name created an early awareness of creating work for sharing with others.

The importance of displaying and sharing texts (both artistic and literary) was woven into the learning environment throughout the grade levels. Children's work was regularly hung on walls, on bulletin boards, and displayed on tables in the school's foyer. In these instances, the audience who would view the work was not specifically identified, but the students did recognize that the pieces would be shared with people coming into the school. For example,

"...Jennifer, [1st - 2nd grade teacher], wants them to draw some scenes from [IMAX movie on climbing Mount Everest] to put on the board. She hands out the paper and asks them to do some scenes that they could use on the room bulletin board. The kids grab paper and begin" (Fieldnotes, Sept. 21).

Teachers across the grades also encouraged such sharing as a way of providing practice and encouraging repeated readings to develop fluency. This was the case in the following excerpt from fieldnotes taken in the 3rd - 4th grade class:

"... Joy [the 3rd - 4th grade teacher] is talking to the group about Sarah, Plain and Tall. She wants each person to go back and reread Sarah, Plain and Tall. She tells them they can read it to another person, to mom and dad, or to someone in Jennifer's [the 1st - 2nd grade teacher's] class" (Fieldnotes, Sept. 28).

As indicated in Joy's encouragement that students read to children in Jennifer's class, visitations to other classrooms for the purpose of sharing with an immediate audience were common in this school. Sharing activities such as this teacher-encouraged event, and the spontaneous ones illustrated in the data excerpts quoted from the fieldnotes below, were daily occurrences.

- "Marie [a 1st - 2nd grade student] comes down from her class to show H. P. her cursive writing. H. P. writes praise on her paper as Walton watches" (Fieldnotes, Feb. 6).
- "Justin [a 3rd - 4th grade student] comes down from Jennifer's class to read his jazz musician report to H. P. Aline, his sister, goes over to stand beside him to listen. H. P. says, 'Wow! That's a wonderful report! Thanks for reading it to me!' Aline hugs Justin. H. P. asks Justin, 'Do you want a star?' H. P. writes on the star, 'Star Reader and Writer' and pins the star on Justin" (Fieldnotes, Feb. 27).
- "Gabriella [a preschool student] finished tracing over her page of the story and H. P. asks her to come over and read with her. Gabriella reads and then H. P. says she can go read to Joy" (Fieldnotes, April 1).
- "At that moment, Richard [a preschool student] comes down from reading for Joy [3rd - 4th grade teacher] and announces, 'She was so proud of me! She said, 'What a great reader you are!' Alex shows H. P. the star on his hand that Joy had drawn" (Fieldnotes, Feb. 6).

In this school, sharing with an immediate audience was not only teacher-initiated as students themselves often searched out others to be an audience for their work. For example, as Henderson (the teacher/researcher who collected data in the preschool class) sat on the floor taking fieldnotes, children often joined her to share their reading, writing, and art-related accomplishments. This was the case surrounding the following notation:

“Alvia comes to read her writing to me [(Henderson)]: ‘Me and Yasmine are playing the cat and the owner. My favorite part was being the cat. By Alvia’ (Fieldnotes, April 14). In addition, Frank walks by and tells me to look at what he has built. I ask him how many blocks he used to build it, and he counts up to 10. (I know that he had been counting with H. P.). He comes over and gives me ‘high five’ and is very happy” (Fieldnotes, April 1).

Students not only chose teachers as their audience; they also sought out each other as audience members. In the upper grades, the 3rd - 4th grade class and 5th - 6th grade class often joined across rooms for reading-writing workshop and independent reading time. During these times, students regularly invited friends to share their excitement about texts. One student’s engagement often drew others into the reading of the same text. For instance:

“... Justin looks over at Leon and asks him a question about an Animorphs book that Justin is holding. Leon rearranges himself so that his head is close to Justin and then Leon takes the book and begins reading. Justin leans over as he reads - Leon begins reading orally...Now Justin is taking a turn reading - Leon scoots close when Justin stumbles over a word and he offers help. Leon follows with his eyes as Justin reads. When Justin is finished with the page he gives the book to Leon as if it is his turn. They flip through the pages making the figure on the corner of the pages ‘morph’ and they grin. Then Leon finds their place and begins reading again” (Fieldnotes, Sept. 28).

In the elementary grades, teachers also involved students in sharing with an immediate audience through sharing written texts. Children were regularly encouraged to collaborate with one another and to use each other as resources for information or ideas. This can be seen in the area

of reading information when researching a specific topic. In the 1st - 2nd grade, the teacher offers advice to two of her students about finding the best articles on their topic: "...Then if you can't decide, you could go to someone else and ask them what they think" (Fieldnotes, Feb. 17). Also, in the 5th - 6th grade class during literature circles, one student is investigating igloos, a subject another student is researching extensively for a separate assignment. The following occurs: "...a student shows a picture of an igloo. Henderson, researcher/author, asks him to share that with Rita because she is studying igloos [for a social studies project]" (Fieldnotes, Oct. 21).

Students often read all other students' stories and responses to literature and commented on each other's work. For instance, in the following excerpts from a 4th-5th- and 6th-grade literature circle activity, students read classmates' written responses. Through this activity, they grew in their understanding of both the story and the ways in which one might respond to a piece of literature:

"... Henderson has the students give their papers to the person on their right - read what that person wrote and make comments...she explains each write a response to what the first person wrote. They all read the papers - the attention on the reading is strong - they are interested in seeing what their friends wrote... As the pages go back to the original person - they begin to laugh and talk. I (Many, researcher/author) can read over Amber's shoulder and the comments on her paper are positive and constructive - they tell her she did a good job but also ask her to tell who she thought has the most courage.... Amber underscores the value of the activity saying, 'Now that I have read other people's papers I could write a decent paper - I didn't know what to write - I just wrote'" (Fieldnotes, Sept 21).

In summary, the activities associated with the category of "sharing with an immediate audience" were often spontaneous and were student-initiated as well as teacher-initiated. In the preschool classroom, this

sharing seemed to be tied closely to a sense of celebration as students were often praised for their accomplishments after sharing. Increasingly across the age of the students, this sharing also served the purpose of providing practice in literacy behaviors (i.e., reading aloud stories to peers) and of sharing information related to processes as well as content.

Choosing to be an audience. A third category of student-initiated behaviors that cut across all grade levels can be described as “choosing to be an audience.” In these instances, students elected to become an audience and to listen to a story, to view an art project, or to read/listen to a student-authored text. For instance:

- Gabriella comes in from playing house to stand beside H. P. to listen to the story (Preschool class, Feb. 21).
- Josh comes in from his class to read. H. P. asks Walton to go over and listen to Josh’s story, so he comes over and listens. Paul and Kofa also come over to listen, but they were not asked by H. P. (Preschool class, Feb. 28).
- Richard wanted to hear Paul read but H. P. told him he had to finish his work first. After finishing, Richard comes over to listen to the story (Preschool class, April 1).
- Joy stops by Clyde and he reads his [student-authored] book to her. As Clyde reads, Joy and the others at the table laugh in response to a number of the things he has included. Joy tells him she likes the way he is editing as he goes (3rd - 4th grade class, Oct. 27).
- June and Rita find a cute picture of lemmings and everyone turns to see it...Dakita turns back to the screen and begins scrolling down - but then she turns around again to the book June and Rita are reading - the girls coo over the pictures of the penguins and other animals (5th - 6th grade class, Sept. 2).

These data indicated that students at this school leave their respective activities and independently choose to become an audience by listening to a story being read by the teacher or another student or by interacting with peers. Often these events were motivated by a desire to become engaged in a story world or an interest in information.

In addition to these instances where audience was salient, in the upper grades, two specific instructional contexts were particularly important in developing students' awareness of audience. These instructional contexts will be discussed below.

Preparing for and Working With an Audience During Literature Circles

In addition to the reading children did during reading/writing workshop and during independent reading with their regular teachers, Henderson (the 5th - 6th grade teacher) called together twelve 4th, 5th, and 6th grade children twice a week for "literature circles." The primary focus of literature circles was preparation for and participation in discussions of novels. The group of twelve students was typically split into two or three smaller groups for the student-led discussions, but whole group activities also provided opportunities for wrap up critiques. Occasionally, at the beginning or the end of literature circle time, Henderson also shared a related novel orally with the children.

Texts for the literature circles were related to the themes under study. At the beginning of the year, all of the children read the same novels. Later, Henderson did book talks on two or three selections and children chose which book they wanted to read. The reading of the novels for the literature discussions was done outside of class. Students typically completed some preparation for the group discussions outside of class as well.

In literature circles, the interaction among participants was typically driven by a different purpose than was seen in the data related to "sharing with an immediate audience" that was described earlier. We called this new category "communicating with an identified audience." In these literacy experiences, a presenter/author/reader had specific

information or a story to be related and audience members were expected to actively participate in constructing meaning. Interaction between the presenter and the audience created a shared understanding. To illustrate how this theme developed, in the sections that follow we share and discuss snippets from various activities that occurred in the literature discussions.

“...On September 28, Henderson took out Baree: The Story of a Wolf Dog [(Curwood, 1990)] and began reading. As she read, the kids quieted down and listened. Most rested their heads on the table and stared into space – seemingly visualizing the story. Occasionally they look up at Henderson. She reads with expression – occasionally glancing up at the students and making eye contact with those who were looking at her. Alexander is sitting and leaning back in his chair – listening attentively. When Henderson gets to the sentence, ‘He had never known what it meant to be really hungry,’ she stops and says, ‘Who does that remind you of?’ Some students make instant connections to the literature circle text, Julie of the Wolves [(George, 1972)]. Alexander also mentions another character in the book. A couple of kids mention themselves – right now. Henderson draws attention to the level of hunger Julie felt – really desperately hungry. Amber notes that it is different when you are hungry but you know that you will be able to eat again. Henderson then goes back to reading the book.”

As shown in this excerpt, oral read alouds in the literature circle time were done with the expectation that audience members were constructing a rich understanding of the story. In read aloud situations, Henderson drew the students into the story with her expressive reading and eye contact. She also facilitated their active meaning making by probing for connections to other literature or to their personal lives or by using a cloze procedure to have students make predictions about key terminology. These oral readings were done frequently during literature

circles at the beginning of the year and seemed to lay the groundwork for the active role expected of audience members during small group literature discussions.

A large focus of the literature circle time centered on preparing for the student-led discussions. Initially, students were expected to prepare for the discussions by crafting questions that might be asked of group members. Students were encouraged to ask questions to which were open-ended and would insure rich discussions. By October, Henderson introduced roles (Daniels, 1994) such as "travel tracer," "vocabulary enricher," and "discussion facilitator." Students who were assigned similar roles met together during class time. Through these in-class opportunities for preparing for the student-led discussions, children considered their work with the prospect of sharing their information and thoughts with the audience of their peers (Fieldnotes: Sept. 14, 28, Oct. 12, 14, 21, Nov. 9, Feb. 1). For instance, on October 12, two girls, who were serving as the vocabulary enrichers for their respective groups, worked together to prepare for their group discussions.

"...Tori [4th grade] and Cassie [5th grade] come in and get a dictionary from Henderson's room and then go back into the computer room. Henderson follows them into the computer room and tells them they might use notepaper and staple it onto the sheet. Henderson comes out and I go into the computer room and sit on the floor. The girls are at the table working on their vocabulary enricher sheets. Cassie is saying what she is writing. Tori explains that she is not writing everything down – she is just putting down the page number. Cassie is unsure about not putting down the complete sentences and the definitions but Tori stresses, 'Don't write the sentence – just tell them where the sentence is and they can read it out of their books' (Fieldnotes, Oct. 12).

This excerpt illustrates that as students prepared for literature circles, they did so with a clear sense that the audience of their work was not solely themselves nor was it their teacher. Instead, they worked with an awareness of the future conversations which would occur within the

student-led discussion groups. In the conversation which occurred as Tori and Cassie discussed how to prepare, Cassie noted that if “you write it down then you don’t have to look it up.” However, Tori continued to think of the assignment in light of their role as facilitating the understanding of the audience members, insisting, “But they will have their books.”

After students had prepared specific information to share, students split in groups of 3-5 members for their literature circle discussions. In these discussions, facilitators and audience members were expected to work together to develop a shared understanding of the story or content being addressed. For instance, while reading the book, Julie of the Wolves (George, 1972), the students had prepared for literature discussions by creating questions to ask each other. The following transcript/fieldnotes excerpt provides a feeling for the collaborative interpretation that resulted from a fourth-grade facilitator’s question.

Tori: Why did she say daylight is spelled ‘A M Y?’

Alexander: Because she was kind of looking at her life as darkness and she was thinking about San Francisco as lightness.

Dakita: Her life was all dark and then when she heard about Amy being her pen pal and she wanted her to go to San Francisco. It was like all light.

(Tori noted that she wanted to say her example.)

Tori: She was like in a dark, dark tunnel and then somebody walks up behind her with a lantern and that was Amy.

Alexander: Oh so it is like a metaphor!

(Someone asks Tori where it said that. Tori had them turn to page 88. She reads a sentence in the letter and the answer where Julie says, ‘...daylight is spelled AMY.’ Tori asks if anyone needs help finding it. Many of the kids look at the passage and reread it) (Fieldnotes, Sept. 2).

Such collaborative interpretation, where presenters and audience members worked together to create a shared understanding, was common in the literature circles. Presenters took their roles seriously and audience members were expected to be actively involved and to be learning during the discussions. This was particularly evident in the following description from the field notes where the 6th grade vocabulary enricher (Rita) worked to insure that her group members understood the vocabulary terms she had chosen to highlight:

“... Rita was vocabulary enricher. The word is semi-arctic. She has them turn to the word, saying they don’t have to circle it but she does want them to find it. I can see that Cassie doesn’t have her book with her – Rita asks her if she does or not. Glenda says she can’t find it and Rita goes to her and helps her find it. Henderson [the teacher] is out of the room for a moment checking on the other group. Rita gives Cassie her [Rita’s] book and tells her to find it although she doesn’t have to circle it. Greg has found it. When everyone has found it Rita says, ‘the meaning is half/arctic.’ Glenda asks what that means. Cassie says, ‘Half arctic and half ...’ She hesitates for a moment – stuck – and doesn’t continue. Rita reads the sentence from the book and substitutes ‘half’ in it. Glenda says she still doesn’t get it. Rita says it is like it is not fully arctic – it is like half arctic night (Fieldnotes, October 26).

As can be seen in the above description, discussions during literature circles were conducted with the expectation that audience members would come away with an understanding of the information shared by the facilitator. Through these experiences, presenters grew in their ability to undertake preparation in light of the needs of an identifiable audience and, as members of the group, all class members developed a rich sense of the active role expected by audience members.

Often Henderson or class members made comments that underscored the expectations of the roles of both presenters and group

members. For instance, on October 12, shortly after the groups had begun to use the role assignments to prepare for their group discussions, a sixth grader, Glenda, asked if they were to write down information in literature circles. The following discussion illustrates the importance placed both on presenting effectively and on learning as an audience member:

“...Henderson said they might write down the words. Glenda says she wants to write it all down. Rita then asks Cassie about the definitions and page number of another word. Alexander and Curtis are not writing but Rita and Glenda are. Glenda asks Cassie about the page and paragraph. She is trying to follow up on the page/paragraph that Cassie is saying where the words are found. Henderson explains to Cassie that she needs to take the role seriously and help people find words as she goes. Rita says she can't hear her and Henderson encourages Rita to ask Cassie questions.”

These expectations of audience members and presenters were further developed through follow-up discussions of the quality of the literature discussions. As shown below, through these discussions Henderson led the students in considering elements that contributed to the success or challenges faced during the circle conversations.

Both groups came back into Henderson's room. Henderson began, 'How did you feel about your Chapter 2 discussion?' Tori said, 'Our group was puny.' Amber agreed adding that was because they only had three people. Alexander countered that he thought three people made it better because there was less noise and everybody focuses on what others are saying.' Amber agreed but noted they didn't have a discussion director. ... Henderson asked if they liked it with small groups better than having one large group with the whole class. ... Cassie said, 'I like two groups because you can pay attention more easily and it doesn't take as long.' She thinks that even five people are too many.

In summary, through the activities associated with literature circles, students learned to prepare information for a specific audience. Both presenters and audience members then learned to collaborate together to develop a shared understanding of story information or of literacy processes. These data suggested that through read aloud activities, the literature discussions, and the follow up critiques, the students developed an understanding that the role of audience members is to actively construct meaning in collaboration with the presenter and that the presenter's/facilitator's role is to insure the audience's understanding. These expectations were further developed through a second instructional context at this school, the use of project work.

Communicating With or To an Audience Through Project Work

The bulk of the curriculum in the elementary grades was focused around project work. Project work involved the in-depth study of a theme or topic through shared readings, multi-age activities, guest speakers, field trips, art projects, and independent or collaborative research. A major component of this approach in the 3rd - 4th grade class and the 5th - 6th grade class involved the preparation of individual and group projects which were presented to both classes and often to members of other classes.

Themes in the data collected during the general project activities were consistent with those associated with the socio-cultural approach used at this school. Students constructed art projects to be displayed and shared with implied audiences of schoolmates and visitors, they shared with immediate audiences of their peers during their study of informational and literary texts related to the topics, and they often chose to listen to each other share information they had found.

The unique emphases that emerged in the data related to the upper elementary grades' project work were related to two categories, "communicating with an identified audience" and "communicating to an identified audience." In both of these categories, an author/presenter was involved in preparing specific information for a known audience. This audience typically included the student's peers in both the 3rd - 4th grade

class and the 5th - 6th grade class. On some occasions, the audience also included students from the 1st - 2nd grade class and parents.

In the sections below, we will illustrate the ways in which teachers provided support as students worked to communicate with audience members about their topic. As can be seen in the fieldnotes, care was taken that audience members developed an understanding of the information presented. When students demonstrated proficiency in providing information that met their audience's needs, less teacher assistance and less audience participation was required. Consequently, proficient students were more likely to be involved in "communicating to" their audience as opposed to jointly constructing meaning with the assistance of their audience.

In the first presentation described below, the 1st - 6th grade students had been involved in a four-week study of pop art, a project that coincided with an exhibit at a local museum. At the conclusion of the unit, the three elementary classes convened in the main upstairs room for project presentations. Two third-grade girls, Carly and Laurie, chose to do a project on Coca-Cola. After a somewhat hesitant beginning, the teacher worked with the presenters to help them convey a sense of what they had learned.

Laurie: 'We're doing a project on Coca-Cola. ... Because I really don't have a reason but I wanted to do it.' 'Do you like Coke?' someone asks. Laurie says 'Yes.' Joy [the 2nd - 3rd grade teacher]: 'What does it have to do with pop art?'

Laurie: 'Because back then they made advertisements for Coke?'

Joy: 'Coke was a popular image with people - people were doing pop art with Coke because everyone knew what it meant. If she didn't have this on there [pointing to the Coke logo] would you know what this is?' The group responds 'yes' and Laurie adds: 'Would you

know what it was if it wasn't round like a Coke can?' (Fieldnotes, Feb. 3).

The two girls then continued their presentation by telling about the process they went through to gather information. Again, Joy used her questions to help the presenters focus on important information they had learned that they could now share with the class:

"... and we put these calendars on and...[Carly hesitates unsure what else to say]. Joy, 'When were these calendars made?' Laurie replied, 'Around 1900.' Joy agreed underscoring, 'around the turn of the century.' Joy asks her when Coke was made and Laurie was not sure. Joy notes that it has been a long time since Laurie researched this information and that it was around the 1880's. Laurie then jumps in and says, '1886!'"

In this way, Joy worked with the two girls to help them remember and then share the information they had learned in preparation of their project. Because the teachers monitored the individual and group research projects on a regular basis throughout the unit, they were well informed about what children had learned and the types of things the students should be able to share during their presentations. Thus, the teachers served as a bridge to insure the information learned by the researchers/presenters was effectively conveyed to the audience members. This was particularly beneficial for the shy and less expressive members of the classes.

While the teacher was there to assist students as needed, discussion with audience members also served to draw out additional information. As in the discussions with literature circles, audience members were encouraged to ask questions of the presenter to insure their own understanding of the information presented. Often when a student's presentation was brief, the follow-up questions and discussions with audience members led to greater elaboration by the presenter. For instance, notice the information that emerged about the sport of cricket

as Leon, a fourth-grader, presented his project from the Caribbean unit and answered questions from children in the upper elementary classes:

"Mary asked, 'Why did you do this?' Leon replied, 'I wanted to do sports in the Caribbean and Joy suggested cricket.' Joy explained that they looked up sports and decided to do something 'that wasn't like one of the sports that you play here so that you would learn something new from his project.' After Leon tells about the cricket paddle and the size of the paddle, the kids begin to ask questions again."

Walton: 'When you get out does the pitcher block the ball?'

Leon: 'The object is for [indistinguishable] to block the ball and hit one of he sticks.'

Gabriella: 'We could play this at school.'

At this point, the kids talk about what they could bring to substitute the equipment they have for the equipment used in cricket.

Henderson: 'Did you find out how long a game or match could last?'

Leon: 'Could last about 2 ½ hours.'

Henderson: 'I heard that they might stop and have tea and come back the next day.'

Leon: 'Yes, because behind the field is a clubhouse.'

Joy: 'If it is played mostly in England, how did it get to the Caribbean?'

Leon wasn't sure and so Joy had him call on other people in the class. As 5-6 kids shared their ideas, the idea that the British had colonized the area and brought it with them was established (Fieldnotes, March 8).

Through presentations such as these, students shared the results of their research, and the classes developed a breadth of knowledge about

the topic understudy. Often, an artistic project was accompanied by an oral discussion of information learned. Sharing information about the process of researching and completing the project was viewed as equally important as the content.

In these presentations, student presenters and audience members collaboratively constructed a shared understanding of information. In contrast, in other presentations, student presenters relayed their information to their audience without assistance from peers or the teacher. We described such an approach as “communicating to a specific audience.” This was evident in the following presentation by 4th-grade Tori. During a two-month unit on pioneers, Tori had read both Sarah, Plain and Tall (MacLachlan, 1985) and the sequel, Skylark (MacLachlan, 1994). For her presentation, she had made a paper-mache version of the house on the prairie and had dressed up as “Anna” (the main character’s stepdaughter) to tell about her journey to visit her stepmother’s home in the East:

...Tori is called to come in and present next. She is dressed in costume and has been pacing in the hall. The group is waiting for her and is anxious to see what she looks like. She seldom wears dresses and she feels funny about coming out. Henderson goes out to get her to come in. When she finally walks in, she has on an old fashioned dress that hangs to her ankles. She has pushed her bonnet back off her head. Curtis exclaims, ‘Oh my god – a dress!’ She goes to stand by Joy who is holding the paper mache house Tori had made. She begins to talk, ‘Hi. I’m Anna and I’m from Sarah, Plain and Tall and Skylark. My mom died when my brother Caleb was born.’ (The group laughs a bit because Tori’s own brother’s name is Kaleb.) ‘You know how most stepmothers are really mean but mine is really nice and I like her. One summer something terrible happened – there was a drought and everyone else was moving away and my papa didn’t want to. My papa went outside and there was a fire and before we had put it out it had

ruined most of the wheat and most of the animals. Sarah said it was dangerous for us to stay so we rode on the train to Maine where her aunt - aunt lives' (she pronounces this "ant" first and then "auunt") (Fieldnotes, Feb. 3).

When Tori finishes, Joy tells the class, "If you have a question for Tori say "Tori," and if you have a question for Anna say "Anna." Dakita asked Tori if she thought she had done a good job and Tori responded, "Yes, but my speech was in my back pack and got torn up and this was off the top of my head." Henderson asked Anna what the sea was like and without hesitation Tori responded about how she (Anna) got seasick. Tori easily alternated from one persona to the other answering questions about the content of the books, how she went about doing her project, and her feelings about her presentation.

As illustrated in Tori's presentation, some students "communicated to" their audience without guidance or assistance. These students seemed to be consciously supplying the information they felt their audience would need to understand their topic. Although such student presentations were always followed by an open discussion, these follow-up discussions were more focused on discussions of the research or artistic processes involved rather than efforts to help the presenter explain the content in a way that better met the audience's needs.

Developing a Sense of Audience

Examination of our data from across the grade levels indicated that developing a sense of audience begins with signing the artist's name, participation as an audience, and sharing with an audience. Like the 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds in Rowe's study (1989), students and teachers alternated roles as presenters and audience members. The teachers within this school valued these interactions. They encouraged students to share with an audience, and as an institution, this school endorsed the practice of spontaneously sharing literacy accomplishments with students across the grade levels. Participation as a presenter in such events encouraged a sense of accomplishment as children celebrated

their budding literacy strategies and artistic endeavors with one another and received praise for their work. Increasingly across the grade levels, sharing with audience members became a more integral part of the curriculum and provided opportunities for practice and language expansion.

In the upper grades, students also began to undertake literacy projects and assignments where they prepared specific information with the notion that their work would then be shared with their peers. Unlike authors who write for an implied reader (Booth, 1961; Iser, 1980), or the students described in previous research who wrote for imagined audiences of particular age levels (Many & Diehl, 1997; Many, Fyfe, Lewis, & Mitchell, 2004) these audience-related literacy experiences focused on communicating with and communicating to identified audiences. More importantly, these activities led to products that were then discussed with the audience members during or after the presentation. The scaffolding that occurred in the conversations among authors (faciliators/presenters) and audience members seem to shape the students' sense of audience.

In light of previous research (Rowe, 1989; Wollman-Bonilla, 2001) and our own data, we suggest that a dialogic stance between authors/presenters and audience members may be a valuable link to helping students learn to consider audience needs. Through working with audience members to construct a shared understanding in the literature circle discussions and project presentations, these students developed an awareness of the types of information, explanations, visual aides, and other content which was typically expected and valued by audience members. Follow-up critiques of the effectiveness of literature discussions and project presentations served to further solidify students' sense of audience. We feel such interactions have the potential to help the writer/reader move learning from inter-psychological to intra-psychological (Bruner, 1986) and ultimately such interactions can assist students in shifting from working for an audience of themselves to consideration of how to meet the needs of an audience of others.

As we analyzed our data, a number of questions for future research emerged. First, we wonder how being part of an audience, where the participant is involved in constructing meaning, may relate to a student's understanding of his/her role while reading an author's text. Certainly these students demonstrated awareness that as audience members they were expected to take an active role in constructing a personal understanding. Similarly, transactional views of the reading process underscore the active role readers take in creating meaning from the marks on the page (Iser, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1978). At the same time, reader-response research indicates that less proficient readers often take a passive role while reading (see Many, 1996). Expecting the text to do the work for them, such readers often leave the reading event dissatisfied (Earthman, 1992; Garrison & Hynds, 1991; Smith, 1992). Further inquiry is warranted to understand how active participation as an audience member in the types of events described at this school may relate to students' views of their roles as readers.

The second question that remains for us relates to how children move from working for an immediate and identifiable audience to writing for an implied reader. In this school, sharing with an implied audience occurred with art projects displayed in the environment. In contrast, students' writing that accompanied literature circles or project work was typically done for an identified audience and was discussed with audience members before or after presenting. On only one occasion in the preschool class and two in the elementary classes (when students wrote letters to identifiable audiences) was dialogue with the audience not a planned follow-up to an audience-related writing activity. Other writing experiences included daily journal writing and the writing of stories, but in both of these occasions, the student himself or herself was typically considered the audience of the writing. More information is needed to understand how students who have developed a sense of audience in the context of oral presentations may draw on these notions as they move to writing for implied readers.

In conclusion, the importance of this study lies in the investigation of the relatively unexplored theme of audience in reading, in oral presentations, and in visual products and of the description of the

importance of dialoguing with an identifiable audience. The outcomes in this study indicate involving students in consideration of audience encourages the students to become thoughtful and appreciative of what they are doing and learning. Through this examination of the literacy interactions of 3-year-olds through 6th graders, we hope to provide a greater understanding of how instruction throughout the preschool and elementary years can help students develop a sense of audience.

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Joyce E. Many is a faculty member at Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA. Susan D. Henderson is faculty member at Coker College, South Carolina.



Print Rich Environments: Our pre-service teachers' report of what they observed in their field experiences

Liqing Tao
College of Staten
Island/CUNY

Helen Robinson
Manhattan Borough of
Community
College/CUNY

This study examined teacher candidates' observations and perceptions of classroom print-rich environments during field observations. The focus is on what the teacher candidates report and believe they have observed in classrooms regarding print-rich environments. The subjects were 35 undergraduate teacher candidates enrolled in two language arts and arts methods classes requiring 36 hours of field observations in an urban setting. Pre-service teacher candidates' weekly reflective journals and semester-end descriptions provided data sources. A qualitative method was used to examine patterns of observations and descriptions concerning print-rich environments. Results revealed that most teacher candidates did not realize and observe the dynamic nature of print-rich environments. Suggestions are offered for future improvement of field observations for pre-service teachers.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS ARE an important component of teacher education programs. Through efforts of professional associations such as American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), Association of Teacher Educators (ATE), as well as mandates by government educational agencies at the state level, requirements for field observations and student teaching have been written into most state teacher certification requirements. Teacher education programs have retained field experiences as an essential component of pre-service teacher educational programs. The International Reading Association's research report (IRA, 2003) also emphasizes the need for apprenticeship models and concludes that excellent modeling in the field would enhance teacher candidates' learning and consequently the quality of teacher education programs.

In New York State, it is now mandated that 100 hours of field observations should be accomplished before beginning student teaching experiences. This is consistent with teacher education programs in other states (Keehn, Martinez, Harmon, Hedrick, Steinmetz, & Perez, 2003). While certain requirements have to be met for these 100 hours, the purposes and activities may vary across institutional and professorial differences in course combinations and content delivery as stated in some early literature (Watts, 1987; Zeichner, 1987)

This study focuses on teacher candidates' field observations and perceptions of a literacy instructional concept we dealt with in our literacy and arts methods classes: a print-rich environment in the classroom. We intended the study to inform us whether our pre-service teacher candidates were able to see the connections between what we taught in our teacher education methods classes and their field observations regarding print-rich classrooms.

Review of literature

Field observation

Field experience literature usually encompasses field observations and student teaching. We are focusing on the former. We firmly believe these two should not be conceptually separated and should be conceived

as naturally continuous in pre-service teacher experiences in teacher education programs. However, we understand that in practice such differentiation can provide for easy operation and smooth coordination of the two experiences. For the purpose of the present study, this differentiation also allows us to focus on the issues we are encountering in our courses and may yield implications for subsequent student teaching experiences.

As an important component of teacher education programs, field experiences have a vital role in teacher candidates' training to become teachers (IRA, 2003). There are consistent reports that teacher candidates claim that they have learned most from their field experiences, even to the extent of excluding the influences of methods classes and foundations classes in teacher education programs (Richardson-Koehler, 1988). The effect of teacher education programs as well as teacher candidates' evaluation of what and where they have learned how to teach can be important input as to where and what teacher education programs should enhance. However, giving consideration to such evaluations does not demand program focus shifts and pedagogical adjustments. In fact, some researchers argue that teacher candidates' perceptions can't be interpreted simply on surface value. They suggest that perceived ineffectiveness by teacher candidates of the foundations and methods classes could be due to two possible causes:

- the inconsistency between the theories in our teacher education classes and the realities that teacher candidates observe in classrooms and
- the heavy classroom management focus in the classes observed.

The noted inconsistency may fly in the face of theories and their usefulness in real classrooms (Copeland, 1986; Gomez, 1996; Haberman & Post, 1992). Regarding the emphasis on classroom management, when bogged down by daily classroom management routines, teacher candidates may be overwhelmed in thinking from moment-to-moment than considering the classroom learning from a sound pedagogical viewpoint (Fuller, 1969; Moore, 2003; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981).

Classroom observation reports confirm that classroom management focus and incompatible teaching behavior issues do exist (Richardson-Koehler, 1988). Some researchers even go so far as to suggest that teacher candidates should not be exposed to inconsistent teaching practices that are contradictory to what they are learning in methods and foundations classes (Copeland, 1986). Using a more proactive approach to such problems, recent research provides evidence that such teaching in the field could enhance teacher candidates' learning and professional growth (IRA, 2003).

Despite the arguments about the causes of and possible solutions to teacher candidates' evaluations of field experiences and methods classes, it is paramount that teacher education programs establish what we expect to achieve in teacher candidates' observations. In addition to the state certification requirements, we need to understand what our teacher candidates actually observe in the field and what gaps might exist between our teacher education program courses and field classrooms. The disparity needs to be examined in order to clarify our expectations based on classroom reality and to enhance our sound theory-building regarding field experiences.

How to effectively guide teacher candidates through foundations and methods classes, field experiences, and student teaching is key in the apprenticeship model. According to Guyton and McIntyre (1990), the apprenticeship model assumes that our teaching in the methods classes would model for our teacher candidates the pedagogically sound practice and ensuing experiences in the classrooms by mentor teachers who should further candidates' understanding of teaching learned from methods classes. This focus on consistency between teacher education program classes and real school experiences originates from Dewey's argument for experiences (Gallego, 2001) and would provide a smooth transition moving pre-service teachers from theories to desired practices. Recent research in reading education echoes the strength of apprenticeship model in preparing reading teachers (IRA, 2003).

In most cases, teacher education programs have very little control of what goes on in school classrooms (Watts, 1987), an important factor often interfering with transition from theory to practice. This is

particularly true for field observation experiences that usually precede culminating student teaching internships usually done out of the courtesy of available local schools. This lack of control could exacerbate inconsistencies between methods classes and field practices. While we acknowledge the limit of exercising control over classroom and teacher selections for candidates' field observations, we could nevertheless try to understand what happens in classrooms so that our instruction could match classroom practices. One way of understanding classroom practice is through teacher candidates' varying reports of the classrooms in which they observe teaching practices.

Print-rich environments

The emergent literacy perspective has provided insightful understanding of the continuing growth in students' literacy abilities (Fields & Spangler, 2000; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Children perceive and develop literacy through exposure to its functional and meaningful uses in their daily contexts (Fields & Spangler, 2000; Goodman & Goodman, 1979; Hall, 1987; Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1982; Sulzby, 1994). For example, long before they come to school, many children have acquired print concepts, story concept, and can identify many signs and print close to their life (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; McGee & Purcell-Gates, 1997; Purcell-Gates, 1996). To nurture beginning readers in literacy growth, the emergent literacy perspective advocates the continuation of functional literacy through print-rich environments in schools (Smith, 1994). Print-rich environments are usually recommended as part of instructional efforts that schools can support for functional literacy for children.

While the nature and degree of its impact on students' literacy development could be debated, print rich environments offer valuable nurturing within an instructional context in primary grades (Bowman, 2003; Roskos & Neuman, 2001; Strickland, Snow, Griffin, Burns, & McNamara, 2002). Most literacy methods textbooks include a section on print rich environments in primary classrooms. Print-rich environments would include all print and writing tools as well as pedagogical use of these. One of the instructional and learning features of print-rich environment is the active participation and use of these tools in the

process of children's education (Gunning, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). In other words, in order for the print rich environments to facilitate students' literacy growth and become a true part of print-rich environments, print materials in classrooms need to be actively used. Teacher candidates are exposed to this pedagogical concept of dynamism in their reading and language arts classes, at least in theory. Such practices in classrooms in which our teacher candidates observe would offer a further and continuous opportunity to consolidate their understanding of instructional use of print-rich environments facilitating children's literacy growth. However, as Copeland (1986) argues, some classroom instructional practices may not always be the ones consistent with what we advocate in teacher education programs.

To make teacher education programs effective, we need to find out what's going on in classrooms where our teacher candidates observe. Consequently, we need to communicate the pedagogical and educational purposes for effective field experiences to the concerned school teachers (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990) and make adjustments in the teacher education programs to meet the needs of the reality in schools. One way of finding out what's happening in field experiences is to probe our teacher candidates' perception of pedagogical issues in the classrooms. We chose the print rich environment as the focus in our reading and language arts classes' field experiences.

We offer the following research question guiding this study: What did our pre-service teacher candidates report as to what they observed in urban elementary school classrooms pertaining to the pedagogical use of print-rich environments fostering students' literacy growth?

Methodology

The present study attempts to look at teacher candidates' observations and perception of print-rich environments in classrooms during field observations. In particular our focus is on what the teacher candidates report and believe they have observed in classrooms regarding print-rich environments.

Methods

The subjects were 35 undergraduate teacher candidates enrolled in two language arts and arts methods classes for an entire semester in urban areas. In these classes, teacher candidates were required to have 36 hours of field observations over six weeks in three Title I local elementary schools. Weekly reflections were required for the instructional procedures of reading and language arts in classrooms, including print-rich environments and their use in the classrooms. To avoid possible bias, we gave only general directions rather than laying out a checklist for their observations. By the end of the 36 hours of observation, teacher candidates were also required to describe their perceptions of print-rich environments in a classroom. Both the weekly reflections and the focused description of a print-rich classroom were used as the data sources for the present study.

We employed an analysis approach to examine teacher candidates' weekly reflections on observations as well as focused descriptions to corroborate their reflection analysis. A constant comparison method was employed to explore patterns of teacher candidates' observations (Merriam, 1988). The first author read both the reflections and the focused descriptions repeatedly for emergent themes and categories. While the emergent themes and categories were consolidated against the data, the second author randomly chose half of the reflections and descriptions to confirm the categories established through repeated examination by the first author. Any discrepancies were resolved through face-to-face conferences.

Results and Discussions

The results are reported in the following section and followed by discussion. Two categories emerged from our teacher candidates' perceptions as to what comprised print-rich environments in classrooms: 1) teacher-made/commercial prints of the environment, and 2) student-created print in the environment. The teacher made/commercial prints included posters, charts, alphabetic list, word walls, books, magazines, calendars, and bulletin boards. The student-

created print encompassed students' writings, story maps/webs, and object labels.

Teacher-made/commercial prints of environment

Teacher-made/commercial materials are usually done with a pre-set concept or meet the standards in subject areas. A typical example would be the following quote from a second grade classroom observation: "several charts encompassing language arts grammar facts were clearly displayed for the children to see daily: pronouns, homophones, irregular nouns, contractions, and 'reading words.' A math chart was also prominently displayed." Some teacher candidates mentioned word walls, libraries in classrooms, bulletin boards. However, some observations were very ambiguous about the print permanence. For example, one observation in a fifth grade classroom stated: " [the teacher] had a chart of what a writer's note book is....there is also a chart which was labeled what's in your heart." We could not be certain whether it was a moveable chart used for the time being or it was to stay on the wall. Given the purpose of such charts, we would assume they would stay in the place for a considerable period of time for students to consolidate their learning and to which they could make quick reference.

Among all the observations about the print-rich environments, there were only two statements that seemed to capture the essence of the pedagogical utility of these printed materials: 1) the dynamic nature of such prints

"she has many wonderful posters and charts that she created to help students learn. After the students read the story, the teacher asked if anyone could tell her why the story was a folktale and not a fairy tale. When some of the students had difficulty with this, she referred them to the chart on the wall that identifies the elements of a folktale,"

and 2) a negative statement, similarly insightful about the non-use of the print in a first grade class

"One portion of the wall was also filled with a word wall. The only problem with this was that the word wall should have been displayed where the children actually did their writing. It was off on the side and they would not be able to see it when they are doing their writing. It would have been more helpful in the reading area if it were in front of the children instead of behind them."

Both statements highlighted the reason why the print rich environments are important to students' literacy learning. The first one focused on the active instructional use of the print. Teachers need to incorporate prints in the environment for instructional processes to use and model using printed materials constantly to gradually move students into strategically using these materials on their own. Students will not become strategic literacy users if not gradually engaged in the value and function of printed materials on the wall. The second statement went directly to the non-use of the printed materials involving students' independent learning for which it was designed. Putting word walls behind students when they need to see them is not effective.

These two contradictory statements made about the pedagogical functions of the print-rich environment raise concerns about our teacher candidates' observations. The majority of the classrooms our pre-service teacher candidates were in did not seem to offer what candidates were taught in the methods class where instructional use of print environments was one of the focal issues. However, due to the nature of observations, it is not clear as to whether this inconsistency is due to absence of print-rich materials or simply a perception of our teacher candidates. Yet, the observations show a gap between what we, teacher educators, intended and what teacher candidates in field placement perceived.

The student-created prints

Most of the reported instances in the category of student-created print involve displaying students' writings. Student' observations in this category are mentioned briefly. An example would be: "Mrs. B uses all four walls to display the children's work." A more lengthy mention would be the following. "The children's numerous, seasonal work was

prominently displayed on every wall in the classroom, serving double duty as wonderful decorations as well as a proud display of their hard work." Yet, our teacher candidates did not seem to go into reflection on the pedagogical reason why they were displayed. For example, how long the work would stay displayed, or how often students and any one else would go and read them was not reported.

Teacher candidates also observed students participating in labeling objects in the classroom. Such active participation by the students was what we hoped the teacher candidates observed and reflected upon. However, only two mentioned the existence of labels and only one mentioned students' participation in labeling objects in the classroom.

Teacher candidates also observed students participating in creating story maps and character webs. For example, one observation reads: "When I arrived in the class, I noticed a new display consisting of two character webs, which spun off key ideas and thoughts about the book's two main characters.... students were now creating their own individual web or map." Though it was not clear whether the students participated in making the displayed character webs, it implied that they made a class web the day before and now were making an individual one.

Students also observed a calendar in the process of being created. "A large, interactive calendar was next to the teacher's chair, and this activity was also done as a group while the children sat on the rug around the teacher. The calendar made effective use of colors, numbers, shapes, and patterns, as it promoted the understanding of concepts such as weeks, days, and months, as well as essential math skills. Following a discussion of patterns, days, and weeks..." Students had to fill in the right order of the dates, days, and months.

The pedagogical function of such displays fostering student learning was obvious here. Students created or participated in print, the displays capture more the dynamic functions of the print-rich environments; they were limited in the observed classrooms in comparison to the teacher-made/commercial prints in classroom environment. At least in our teacher candidates' observations we have analyzed, such observations constituted only a small fraction.

In a related note about the print-rich environment classroom, we noticed that our teacher candidates could list in great detail the needed print-rich materials in their focused descriptions of an ideal classroom. Such detailed items would include morning message board, spelling list, word pattern walls, alphabetic list, class rules, and a plethora of children's books. However, out of 35 focused descriptions, only four of them touched upon the active and dynamic nature of the print-rich environments. While general mention of the active role of the teachers in directing students to the print-rich environment is available in these four descriptions, we found this only constituted a small portion of their descriptions and still needed more elaboration. The following are some examples to illustrate our point. One teacher candidate stated that:

"A word wall is a tool to use, not just display."

Another wrote:

"The word wall is a great resource for teachers to use in their classroom because it helps children to refer to the wall when they need to spell a basic sight word."

Still another said that:

"A teacher creates a word wall by choosing key and/or sight words from the curriculum and writing them, in alphabetical order for younger grades, on paper in a location in the room clearly visible for all students to see.... The word wall is never-ending and can constantly be added to."

"New words from a story can be placed on a wall. Students can refer to the walls for spelling suggestions. New words may be added to the walls every week or changed for a new story."

These quotes from the four focused description offered a glimpse into their understanding of a print-rich environment. Such quotes also implied an active role for teachers in directing students' attention to the

print, making the print accessible, and making print environment part of students' learning experiences in classrooms. However, we would like more elaboration as to how a teacher can use this to enhance students' learning experiences. For example, we are not clear from teacher candidates' descriptions how a teacher can use a word wall as a tool in her instruction. Also, we don't know what role a teacher's modeling use of the word wall played in their descriptions.

In the majority of the focused descriptions by our pre-service teacher candidates, we noticed a similar pattern in their observations and focused descriptions regarding print-rich environments in classrooms. The dynamic nature of instructional use of environmental print was not reported to have happened and was not perceived by our pre-service teacher candidates in their observations, nor presented in their focused descriptions. This pattern was disconcerting for both practical and research reasons. The research concern arises from the possible bias of the teacher candidates' perception that might have colored their observations. In other words, they might have not reported what they did not perceive to be important even though instructional use of print-rich environmental did happen. Practically, it also pointed towards a gap between what was taught in the methods class and the candidates' conceptualization of literacy instruction issues. Apparently, field observations did not channel or help to channel their conceptualization of the instructional use of print-rich environments.

Conclusions and Suggestions

In summary, our study found that teacher candidates did not, on the whole, report print-rich environments as being part of the school atmosphere in which students learn as well as part of instructional structure that makes them functional and useful. Only a very small portion of teacher candidates regarded the dynamic nature of print-rich environments as being a pedagogically important element of the school learning environment. This does not fit with what we intend in our reading and language arts methods classes.

Given what we know about the literacy acquisition process of children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), the findings in the present study can be alarming for teacher educators. We would expect our

teacher candidates to grow conceptually and have a clear understanding of why print-rich environments are important to student learning and teacher instruction. Our teacher candidates should be able to pay attention to the dynamic nature of print-rich use in classrooms, and should consequently be able to reflect on them. Yet, in the present study we have not seen such evidence. While we could not pinpoint why it was not observed in the present study, we speculate that this lack of growth could happen in any of the three key contexts: in methods classes, in school classrooms, or in the inability of students to see the dynamic function of print-rich environments. Our teacher education programs should in theory affect all of the above three key situations. Direct teaching and emphasis on the dynamic nature of print-rich environments should have some impact on teacher candidates' attention to classroom print use when they see it. Successful teacher education classes should also be able to heighten teacher candidates' sensitivity to understand and appreciate the function of print-rich environments in classrooms and be able to reflect on them. Teacher education programs should have direct and indirect impact on classroom instructions when classrooms are staffed with graduates from teacher education programs.

1. The present study, therefore, points to some practical issues and implications for our teacher education programs. Teacher education methods classes would need to help teacher candidates establish connections between what they are taught in methods classes and what they observe in the field. It is not sufficient to merely espouse relevant literacy development theories in teacher education programs. Examples through case studies or other means of demonstrating the theory should be made relevant to the school situations in which teacher candidates observe. Localized cases might help candidates transfer what they have been taught in teacher education classes to what they observe in school classrooms. This is relevant to teacher candidates in urban areas where exemplary teaching and modeling as recommended by IRA's research report (IRA, 2003) is paramount. Helping candidates analyze and understand local cases would provide them with

opportunities to reflect on the principles underlining exemplary teaching.

2. Teacher education programs can also offer opportunities for teacher development through a partnership with local schools. Such professional development opportunities can be both formal and informal. Graduate classes and workshops are examples of formal opportunities. Teacher education department web sites and partnerships with local schools (such as Professional Development Schools) could enhance informal contacts and strengthen trust between the two parties. Professional development opportunities offered through such partnership should provide school teachers continuous exposures to best practices of education and thus bring them more in line with what's going on in the classroom. Consequently, such partnerships through professional development would benefit teacher candidates in their field observations when local school practices are consistent with what's taught in the teacher education classrooms.
3. We need to conceptualize field experience in a more general framework than a single method course the teacher candidates' professional growth. Various core courses in a teacher education program should collate the data collected in students' field experiences as feedback for their courses to further coordination of students' field experiences as recommended (IRA, 2003). We believe the data-driven research would be more important to help construct a general direction of teacher education programs' field observations.

In addition to the practical issues, we see the following implications for future research. First, we need to know what happens in the classrooms in which our teacher candidates observe. Classroom observations together with teacher candidates' interviews and probing might provide some important missing links for our understanding of the classroom reality. We believe research observations in urban classrooms should focus on local practices with an eye for making the connections

with the mission, philosophy, and theories of teacher education programs. We believe the data-driven orientations are more valuable in helping urban teacher educators conceptualize the role of field experiences in teacher candidates' professional development.

Second, research should be able to illustrate the role of the teacher candidates in succeeding or failing during field experiences. The perception of urban teacher candidates may be just as important as the actual achievements during field experiences. Additionally, to understand how to provide a learning environment that validates teacher candidates' perception as well as skills and knowledge will have much to offer in making our teacher education programs more effective.

Third, investigations into what is going on in urban teacher education programs can help to conceptualize field experiences in the framework of urban teacher education. While the purpose should never be to institute uniform instructional procedures, we should be sure that consistency in theory and practice could be in place to ensure that teacher candidates' understandings are reinforced throughout various experiences offered by the program. Currently, we have no way to ensure such consistency except through mission statements, syllabi, and textbooks in university classes. Research in this area should provide us with an understanding as to the factors, processes, and structures of teacher education programs that ensure effective field experiences for teacher candidates.

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Liqing Tao is a faculty member at College of Staten Island/CUNY, Staten Island, NY. Helen Robinson is a faculty member at Borough of Manhattan Community College/CUNY, New York, NY.

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