



# Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

---

Volume 42  
Issue 2 November/December 2001

Article 5

---

12-1-2001

## Reading Horizons vol. 42, no. 2

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons)

 Part of the Education Commons

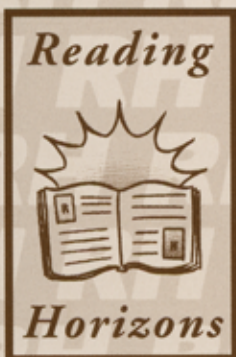
---

### Recommended Citation

(2001). Reading Horizons vol. 42, no. 2. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 42 (2). Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons/vol42/iss2/5](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol42/iss2/5)

This Complete Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).





ISSN 0034-052

2001

Volume 42, No. 2

WESTERN  
MICHIGAN  
UNIVERSITY



Dorothy J. McGinnis Reading Center and Clinic  
College of Education  
Western Michigan University





## **Reading Horizons**

A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

*Published by the College of Education  
and  
Dorothy J. McGinnis Reading Center and Clinic  
Western Michigan University*

|                             |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Editor:</i>              | Karen F. Thomas |
| <i>Associate Editor:</i>    | Gayle Ahleman   |
| <i>Editorial Assistant:</i> | Yolanda Mihalko |

*Volume 42  
Number 2*

November/December 2001



## 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.

*Submitting Manuscripts:* Manuscripts should be mailed to Editor Karen F. Thomas ; 3514 Sangren Hall; Western Michigan University; Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5197. Please send four copies of the manuscript which then become the property of the journal. Authors' manuscripts will be acknowledged within two weeks of their receipt and the editors will then determine if the manuscript will go out for review. Manuscripts must follow the fifth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA). Manuscripts not written in this style can be returned without review.

*Editorial Policies:* After determination of a review process, manuscripts will be sent to three reviewers for a blind review, and results should be known within two to three months. Criteria used for evaluating and reviewing manuscripts are significance of their contribution to literacy/language arts research and instruction, clarity of writing, and sound methodological processes used.

*Author Copies:* Authors will receive three copies of the journal in which their articles appear.

*Reading Horizons* (ISSN 0034-0502) is published quarterly by the Dorothy J. McGinnis Reading Center and Clinic in the College of Education at Western Michigan University. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Reading Horizons*, WMU, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5197.

*Subscriptions:* Please see back page for subscription information.

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
DOROTHY J. MCGINNIS READING CENTER AND CLINIC  
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN

## Editorial Advisory Board

- Jennifer Altieri, Department of Educational Studies  
Saint Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri
- Ariel Anderson, College of Education  
Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan
- Mary Alice Barksdale, College of Human Resource and Education  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia
- Rita Bean, College of Education  
University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- Linda M. Clary, Reading Coordinator  
Augusta College, Augusta, Georgia
- Martha Combs, College of Education  
University of Nevada, Reno, Nevada
- Kathleen Crawford, College of Education  
Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois
- Pamela J. Farris, Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois
- Alan Flurkey, Literacy Studies Department  
Hofstra University, Long Island, New York
- Michael French, Reading Center  
Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio
- Mary Jane Gray, Professor Emerita  
Loyola University of Chicago, Illinois
- Holly Johnson, College of Education  
Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas
- Kathryn Kinnucan-Welsch, Department of Teacher Education  
University of Dayton, Ohio
- Dorothy J McGinnis, Editor Emerita, *Reading Horizons*, Professor Emerita  
Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan
- James Muchmore, Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership  
Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan
- Michael F. Opitz, Department of Reading  
University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colorado
- Diana Quatroche, Elementary & Early Childhood Education  
Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana
- Steven Rinehart, Department of Curriculum & Instruction  
West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia
- Jon Shapiro, Department of Language Education  
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia
- Darren J. Smith, Department of Teacher Education  
Arkansas State University, Jonesboro, Arkansas
- Katherine D. Wiesendanger, Graduate Reading Program  
Alfred University, Alfred New York
- Terrell Young, Teaching & Learning  
Washington State University, Richland, Washington



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

**READING HORIZONS**

**Volume 42, Number 2**

**ARTICLES**

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| Establishing Guidelines for Using Readers<br>Theater with Less-Skilled Readers<br><i>Steven D. Rinehart</i>                   | 65  |
| Picture Book Soldiers: Men and Messages<br><i>Christina M. Desai</i>  | 77  |
| Spanish-English Code Switching in a Bilingual<br>Academic Context<br><i>Ruth R. Becker</i>                                    | 99  |
| Investigating Inferences: Constructing Meaning<br>from Expository Texts<br><i>Mary C. McMackin</i><br><i>Suenita Lawrence</i> | 117 |

COPYRIGHT 2001  
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
KALAMAZOO MI 49008







## **Establishing Guidelines For Using Readers Theater With Less-Skilled Readers**

Steven D. Rinehart  
West Virginia University

*The author reviews recent research findings concerning the benefits of readers theater for building oral reading accuracy and fluency and then identifies key guidelines for instructional implementation. Recommendations and conclusions place the focus on guidelines for classroom teachers who might want to experiment with readers theater as they work with children who face reading difficulties.*

LIKE A NUMBER OF OTHER reading teachers, I have witnessed first hand some of the classroom benefits of readers theater. I have seen students gain fluency on practiced text and excitement for the chance to read aloud before others. Past support for taking valuable instructional time for readers theater activities has rested mostly on anecdotal evidence, tangential research, or what some might feel is common sense. However, several studies have recently presented more empirical reasons for why readers theater is good practice for all readers, including those who are struggling. The intent of this paper is to highlight these findings and clarify key instructional principles. In addition, the emphasis will be placed particularly on the importance of these guidelines for teachers who might want to experiment with readers theater as they work with children who are facing reading difficulties.

### *Opportunities for successful reading*

To improve, struggling readers need ample opportunities for successful reading (Allington, 1983, 2001; Clay, 2002). Like all readers, they need a chance to read text that contains words that they have come to know or are in the process of learning, to experience fluency with many books, and to even reach a level of independence with some examples. Such opportunities are important because engaged and sustained reading leads to improved word recognition, gains in fluency, and hopefully a burgeoning of confidence. From an anecdotal viewpoint, one gets better by doing, and poor readers need a chance *to do*. And from a theoretical viewpoint, readers need to gain automaticity with orthographic processes and familiarity and repeated readings may enhance these kinds of gains (Dowhower, 1987; Rasinski, 1990; Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1993; Samuels, 1979). This concept underlies in some respect what has been called the "Matthew effect" (Stanovich, 1986). In this Biblical analogy the rich get *richer*. That is, the good readers get better because their continued success in literacy activities not only sustains but also generates its own improvements and growth. But the poor get *poorer*. That is, poor readers fall even farther behind because, in part, the difficulty itself becomes an impediment for practice. Thus, their gains are slower overall. It is ironic indeed that in some school contexts those readers who need so much more practice may be the very children who have fewer chances to succeed (Allington & Walmsley, 1995).

Motivation and confidence are also important factors in this equation (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). Struggling readers often fear the frequent mistakes that seem to accompany their reading efforts and they may become ever more reluctant to take risks when reading. Chronic failure and frustration have diminished their reading self-concept, patience, and initiative. Conversely, chances for sustained and successful reading increase the likelihood that poor readers may develop more patience with reading, gain some confidence with their own attempts, and tap into some interest to bolster continued initiatives. When children are motivated and when they feel supported in their efforts, they are more likely to engage in greater reading challenges.

Then what children with reading difficulties need will involve more successful opportunities to read, not fewer -- and part of what today's reading teachers seek out are additional, effective, and meaningful ways to integrate such advantages into the instruction. Recent studies have indicated that readers theater activities may offer some promise for this kind of additional practice for less-skilled readers. As many teachers are aware, readers theater basically involves choosing or preparing scripted text, practicing to read that text aloud, and then interpreting the text for an audience. The instructional intent of readers theater involvement is to not only enhance accurate oral reading but to also model and encourage effective phrasing and reading expression. The readers theater performance offers a potential, at least, to bring dialogue and characters to life through combinations of verbal and visual expression (Sloyer, 1982).

Attempts to include readers theater experiences can be seen commonly in elementary classrooms, and sometimes in special instructional contexts like Title I or special education. As stated previously, several recent studies have shared evidence concerning its potential benefits. The purpose of this article is to briefly review those findings and then identify and discuss some instructional guidelines for teachers to consider. Experienced teachers may want to use such guidelines as a means to reflect on their own approaches to readers theater, while teachers who have not used readers theater previously with struggling readers but want to experiment may want to begin with these guidelines and suggestions.

*Research support*

Three recent studies have explored the usefulness of readers theater activities. Although the instructional contexts differ in interesting ways, all three studies report positive influences from readers theater involvement. I will briefly describe the results of each study and then highlight some common benefits and issues from across the studies.

Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1999) integrated 30 minutes of readers theater instruction into the daily plans for two second-grade classrooms. As part of their literacy instruction over a 10-week period, the children in these classrooms practiced and performed story scripts adapted from trade books. Data for the children participating in the readers theater activities were compared to data for children in a control group. The authors report apparently greater gains in reading rate (words per minute) for readers theater participants on unrehearsed stories from the same or similar series used in the practice groups. There were also pre-post gains in reading levels on an informal reading inventory. More children in the readers theater activities made instructional level gains on the inventory than did children in the control group. The researchers also used a 5-point scale to rate student's oral reading fluidity, phrasing, and expressiveness. Their analysis documented more likely improvement for children in the readers theater group.

I was a more direct witness of two additional investigations. The first study (Rinehart, 1999) took place in a university-based clinical tutorial intended for children facing reading difficulties. Graduate students in an M.A. Reading Specialist program completed a capstone, supervised practicum as part of their program requirements. Each graduate student took responsibility for the instruction of an elementary student. Completed during the summer, the tutoring took place four mornings per week for 5 weeks and involved individual tutoring, as well as small group and daily whole group instruction, during 1 1/2 hours of allotted time. The primary purpose of the study was to see if readers theater could be included successfully in a tutorial and what benefits might emerge. Findings demonstrated that readers theater could be incorporated successfully into a multi-faceted tutorial. Teachers were able to integrate readers theater practice and other instructional activities.

For example, the potential text for readers theater came from previous guided and recreational reading activities. Repeated reading activities, such as echo reading and the like, could be incorporated for some of the practice essential for readers theater. Students and teachers alike soon came to value the activities. The tutors and observers particularly emphasized the benefits to gains in reading accuracy and dialogue expression on targeted text and to reader participation and motivation.

In a related study, readers theater served as the major instructional method for increasing reading ability during Title I instruction (Millen and Rinehart, 1999). For 9 weeks, second-grade Title I students practiced reading and performing scripted stories, focusing on one per week. Additional instruction involving word recognition, fluency, and comprehension was integrated each week, using the same material. Children who participated in the readers theater activities made relatively greater gains than did children in a control group on measures of oral reading accuracy and comprehension from a common reading inventory, with the less-skilled readers finding the greatest gains. Like the children described in the two studies above, these children became enthusiastic about practice and performance. Their classroom teachers also observed that they made gains in reading ability and motivation that transferred to regular classroom literacy activities.

### *Benefits across the studies*

Each of the three studies presents unique support for readers theater involvement. However, several important findings cut across these three studies. Of overall importance, readers theater did emerge as an effective method for involving children in meaningful reading activities. These robust benefits were seen for children with a range of reading proficiency in a multi-subject elementary classroom, as well as for struggling readers in Title I and clinical contexts. Likewise, the effectiveness of the method endured noticeable variations in material and classroom context and was documented through both quantitative and qualitative support.

There was also evidence of skill transfer. Improvements in oral reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension were seen on both

targeted (practiced and performed) material and on new material. Enthusiasm, patience, and interest also appeared to transfer generally to other reading activities.

It was possible to include readers theater with few additional expenses or disruptions. No special material was necessary, as trade books were successfully scripted and used for the instruction in all three studies. In addition, readers theater pursuits complemented other classroom goals and activities, an important point of advantage for a method bound to consume a share of classroom time.

Finally, teachers and children alike came to value readers theater and the opportunity to read aloud to others. Teachers appeared to value it because they saw the benefits to reading performance and attitude, and children appeared to value it because they found it to be enjoyable and because they were able to read in front of their peers.

The findings from these studies can serve to illustrate particular teaching guidelines for others who may want to experiment with readers theater. Again, the intent is to keep the struggling readers in mind as I identify some points of instruction.

### *Readers theater and struggling readers*

*Adapting trade books and integrating activities.* In all three studies children read scripts successfully adapted from trade books. In the classroom-based study, for example, researchers selected trade books from series of books by the same authors. In the other two studies, the scripts were adapted from a wider sample. The clinic-based text was particularly diverse, with examples ranging from controlled, beginning reading stories to Shel Silverstein's poetry to children-created stories. Regardless, no purchases of "special" material were necessary in any of the scenarios. Thus, one basic principle is that a teacher who wants to include readers theater does not have to obtain specially prepared material to have the appropriate text but can choose text that emerges from the life of the classroom.

With the books already present in the activities of classroom, the first step would be to choose possible stories or parts of stories that could be scripted. Of course some story features would facilitate the adaptation. Stories with straightforward plots and interesting dialogue would be helpful to the revision and to the performance. Some stories, on the other hand, that call for more action than dialogue may not be the best choices, since the practice and performance will emphasize oral reading accuracy and expression, rather than drama and props.

The incorporation of *known* books will be particularly advantageous for teachers working with struggling readers. Children might eventually be in a position to help choose or suggest likely sources for future readers theater texts. Furthermore, a book recycled from previous experiences arrives with the embedded familiarity that benefits the confidence and prior knowledge of the struggling reader.

In the clinic-based and Title I studies, teachers particularly were able to integrate the readers theater material within a broad array of other reading and writing activities. For example, support activities such as shared book experiences, guided reading, and echo reading all presented ways to support and practice readers theater text. Even recreational reading and language experience offered sources for readers theater ideas.

*Reading levels and manageable text.* Text difficulty will most certainly influence the likelihood of a child's reading success. A book that is too easy does not provide interest, challenge, or practice opportunities that are desired. A book with a reading level that is beyond a child's grasp not only causes frustration but wastes instructional time. The researchers and teachers in these studies attempted to provide reading material that fell within each child's instructional level. Of course, a *range* characterizes the instructional level of each child. Such a range can be stretched somewhat, depending on instruction and purpose. This range commonly referred to as a *zone of proximal development*, underlies an important principle if the teacher intends to involve struggling readers successfully in readers theater opportunities. Like other children, less-skilled readers present a range of ability in their instructional level, but the range can be tempered critically by a number



of factors to remember. Such readers might need more intensive facilitation during the introduction of a book, as well as additional support and practice to reach the oral reading level needed to perform the text. The teacher must weigh the challenge of the text against the time necessary and the accompanying goals for oral reading and student success. The level of the text can be lowered somewhat through script recasting or tempered through assignment of parts, but it would be better to choose a text that fits more dynamically into all of the possible ways to recycle the book. Choosing a book that is not manageable, no matter how much it might be practiced, is not an effective way to launch readers theater. In short, the teacher should choose material, while not necessarily limited to the *traditional* reading level of the student, is still within the reach of the student, with appropriate support. Such a task itself can lead to more assessment about what the student can reach and under what circumstances but teachers will be wise to remember the value of success for students who have already met more than their share of failure.

*Performance incentive.* Readers theater is not complete without a chance to perform the script. The routine from all three studies led to the performance and students and teachers alike came to value the chance. It clearly became a very strong incentive for some children who had been previously reluctant to do any oral reading before their peers.

So often struggling readers do not have a chance to read aloud fluently before other students. Their past episodes may be filled with frustration or embarrassment. In the same regard, a readers theater performance by itself does not ensure that successful reading will take place. The teacher and children must assess their progress and readiness for the event. These findings show that struggling readers benefit from participating in this assessment, monitoring what it means to be "ready" and having some say in when that time has come. Likewise, a post-performance assessment would help teacher and children reflect on how the performance went, how the audience responded, how fluent and expressive they were with their parts, and what they might want to prepare and perform next.

*The role of practice.* One of the major instructional benefits of readers theater came through multiple readings of the text. Teachers and students alike came to the realization that practice was indispensable. Past studies have also pointed to the importance of repeated reading for gains in oral reading proficiency (e.g., Dowhower, 1987), as well as to related skills, such as comprehension, when some of the orthographic stumbling blocks have been removed.

The findings also presented evidence that the opportunity to practice led some children to reconceptualize their definition of *good* reading. As instruction, modeling, and feedback were translated into improvements in accuracy and expression, students gained greater confidence. They also gained insights into what expressive reading involved and that practice and perseverance might end up in a successful performance that others would appreciate. They learned that they too could read well if they prepared, if they practiced. Teachers will wisely remember that one of the basic aims of using readers theater in the first place was to provide their struggling readers with the opportunity for sustained reading practice.

*A chance for success and motivation.* The success that came through the practice and performance heightened the children's interest in reading, their willingness to practice, and their enthusiasm for performance. Such results were clear across all three studies and should be noteworthy for teachers who work with poor readers whose confidence and reading self-concept have been encumbered by the daily difficulties they experience. At the same time, readers theater played a substantial part in the week's schedule for these children. Teachers and children spent time with it: modeling, practicing, and performing. While teachers must actively ensure that success is taking place and that children are aware of their own improvements, chances for success and changes in motivation for struggling readers may not emerge immediately or easily.

### *Conclusions*

Readers theater is, indeed, one way to offer meaningful reading experiences to struggling readers. The results from these studies are convincing and strengthen the credibility of the anecdotal support offered up from our classroom colleagues. While there is probably no *right* way to do readers theater, there are some effective ways to proceed. If we listen to the teachers and children from the studies, the guidelines we have identified previously will offer some form to this support. Readers theater is effective because it motivates and challenges children and provides the potential of reward for reading. Because of the nature of readers theater, children also gain much needed practice reading text. This practice helps them to gain fluency and automaticity in reading and assists them in the first step on the way to becoming more successful readers. As many of us have come to recognize, finding that first motivating step can be a challenge.

### *References*

- Allington, R. L. (1983). Fluency: The neglected goal. *The Reading Teacher, 36*, 556-561.
- Allington, R. L. (2001). *What really matters for struggling readers*, New York: Longman.
- Allington, R.L., & Walmsley, S.A. (1995). Redefining and reforming instructional support programs for at-risk students. In Richard L. Allington & Sean A. Walmsley (Eds.), *No Quick Fix* (pp. 19-44), New York: Teachers College Press.
- Clay, M. M. (2002). *Change over time in children's literacy development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Dowhower, S.L. (1987). Effects of repeated reading on second-grade transitional readers' fluency and comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly, 22*, 389-406.
- Gambrell, L.B., Palmer, B.M., Codling, R. M., & Mazzone, S. A. (1996). Assessing motivation to read. *The Reading Teacher, 49*, 518-533.
- Martinez, M., Roser, N.L., & Strecker, S. (1999). "I never thought I could be a star": Readers Theater ticket to fluency. *The Reading Teacher, 52*, 326-334.

- Millin, S.K., & Rinehart, S.D. (1999). Some of the benefits of readers theater participation for second-grade Title I students. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 39(1), 71-88.
- Rasinski, T.V. (1990). *Investigating measures of reading fluency. Educational Research Quarterly*, 14, 37-44.
- Reutzel, D.R., & Hollingsworth, P.M. (1993). Effects of fluency training on second-graders reading comprehension. *Journal of Educational Research*, 86, 325-331.
- Rinehart, S.D. (1999). "Don't think for a minute that I'm getting up there": Opportunities for readers' theater in a tutorial for children with reading problems. *Journal of Reading Psychology*, 20, 71-89.
- Samuels, S.J. (1979). The method of repeated readings. *The Reading Teacher*, 32, 403-408.
- Sloyer, S. (1982). Readers theare: Story dramatization in the classroom. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Stanovich, K.E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21, 360-406.

***Steven D. Rinehart is a faculty member at West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia.***





## **Picture Book Soldiers: Men And Messages**

Christina M. Desai  
Southern Illinois  
University

*This study examines children's picture books about soldiers and war, including fiction, folktales, and historical fiction, analyzing their implicit and explicit messages about war and the military, and evaluating them for gender stereotyping. The soldiers are found to conform almost uniformly to an exaggerated male stereotype. Different value judgments about war and conflict resolution are found in the fiction vs. the historical fiction and in the historical fiction about earlier vs. later historical periods.*

CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS have historically been used as teaching tools, explicitly and implicitly. Some quite explicitly demonstrate lessons or values the authors hope to instill in their readers. Implicitly this literature reflects the culture and values of the society in which it was created. Sometimes, by the cultural images depicted, children's books teach both intended and unintended lessons. Soldiers have been portrayed in didactic children's books as heroes, as historical figures worthy of respect and imitation. They have also been portrayed in less didactic books as rogues or fools and have appeared in stories that demonstrate the consequences of violence. This study will examine the various images of soldiers found in picture books and the values implicit in them.

Critical writings about children's books containing images of soldiers usually focus on one of two aspects. One concerns the use of such books to enhance children's understanding of historical events or periods (Heiser, 1997; Kornfeld, 1994). The other concerns the issue of war, and discusses such questions as the ethical choices faced by the characters, the violence that children are exposed to through these books and other media, the alternatives to violence taught or not taught by these books, and the historical context or justification for the wars in which the characters are engaged (Bat-Ami, 1994; Jason, 1997; Van Cleaf & Martin, 1986). This study will show that a third perspective on soldier books is called for in addition to the two above. Much has been written about gender stereotyping in children's literature. While the situation has improved somewhat in recent years, gender stereotypes are still quite widespread. They are especially prevalent in books about war. To complicate matters, books dealing with historical events must balance today's values on gender models with accurate portrayal of the values of the era in which the story takes place. Understandably, since the feminist movement has provided the impetus for the current reappraisal of gender stereotypes, female characterization has received most of the attention. The male stereotype receives less scrutiny. Soldiers in children's literature present a classic stereotype whose impact on young readers should be examined along with the concerns about the historical and ethical messages discussed above.

Most of the studies in this area focus on juvenile or young adult literature (Jason, 1997; Everson, 1995), and none integrates analysis of war/peace issues with a gender stereotype perspective. This study will examine the portrayal of soldiers in light of these concerns for gender stereotypes and war/peace issues. It will concentrate on picture books for young children, since attitudes and gender identification are acquired in the early years. Samples of pictures books on war or soldiers were chosen from subject headings in *A to Zoo: Subject Access to Children's Picture Books* (Lima & Lima, 1998), specifically "War" and "Careers—military" and from consultation with children's librarians. They include works of fiction, folktales, and historical fiction. This last category includes retellings of historical events as well as those works focusing on an identifiable historical event, though the characters and story events may be fictional.

### **Fiction**

Images of violence are all around us today, in films, in the news, in video games, in homes, and in literature. Many educators have voiced concern over the amount of violence children witness in the course of daily life. They turn to books to demonstrate the evils of war and show alternative courses of action to resolve disputes (Bat-Ami, 1994; Fassler, 1983; Jason, 1997). Many fiction picture books with images of soldiers contain implicit or very explicit anti-war or anti-violence messages. They portray the generals as pompous and greedy and the soldiers as easily tricked by weaker but either smarter or kinder opponents. Some are ultimately chastened by experience.

In *The Apple Strudel Soldier* (McGowen, 1968) a clever baker is drafted to fight in a war; he wins the enemy over to his side with his delicious strudel and saves the kingdom. The regular army soldiers in boots, braided uniforms, cockades, muskets and swords, are no match for the baker's cleverness. Similarly, a clever baker in *Forri the Baker* (Myers, 1995) defeats well-equipped marauding knights by baking fake weapons. *The Mysterious Giant of Barletta* relates the tale of a giant who defeats by a trick rather than by might the "army of a thousand men" who were "destroying all the towns and cities" (De Paola, 1984. n.p.). Two foolish brothers in Phillips' *The Brothers Wrong and Wrong Again*



(1979) defeat attacking soldiers by befriending their chief weapon, the dragon Gilgatooth. *Frederick Ferdinand Fox* (Miller, 1987), though not expressly anti-war, presents the commander as lavishly dressed, pompous and aloof, his head out of the frame. Cleverness rather than force defeats the army of the rapacious emperor. Pompous, fat, medal-covered retired Major Brunswick wages war on his household mice in Aragon's *The Major and the Mousehole Mice* (1990) till they defeat him with kindness. Cleverness or kindness is repeatedly shown to be more effective than brute force in these tales.

More serious tales explore the consequences of violence. Ridiculously clad, mean-faced stylized soldiers destroy all but nature for no apparent reason in Emberley's *Drummer Hoff* (1967). *The Tale of the Vanishing Rainbow* (Rupprecht, 1989) shows what happens when neighboring communities become suspicious of each other and declare a war to which nobody comes. The opposing armies consist of one bear vs. one wolf, in blue vs. red nineteenth century style uniforms, complete with medals and swords. They are the only clothed characters. The uniforms are shown as enticing, but wisdom prevails. *Bang Bang You're Dead* (Fitzhugh & Scoppettone, 1969) demonstrates the difference between play war and something more serious. Fitzhugh's characters dress in assorted uniforms, one with epaulets, another with feather headdress, one in Wild West boots and holster, another in a sailor suit, but all armed with weapons and a belief that war is fun and "soldiers always win" (Fitzhugh & Scoppettone, 1969, p. 4) till real injury reminds them that sharing is less painful. Bombastic overstuffed generals who make war for the fun of it figure in two anti-war stories, Foreman's *War and Peas* (1974) and Eco and Carmi's *The Bomb and the General* (1989). Eco's general is a bodiless black and gold-braided uniform, but the atoms in the bombs rebel and render the bombs harmless. Foreman's soldiers are fat and stupid, wearing camouflage and fork-topped helmets, defeated because they are too fat to fight. In *The Battle of Sir Cob and Sir Filbert* (McAllister, 1991) two kings greedy for each other's palaces don medieval battle dress and fight till there is nothing left, then decide to be friends. Even more explicit in their anti-war messages are Vigna's *Nobody Wants a Nuclear War* (1986), Seuss's *The Butter Battle Book* (1984), Popov's *Why?* (1996), Fox's *Feathers and Fools* (1996), and Lobel's *Potatoes, Potatoes* (1967). Lobel demonstrates the lure of war,

with its attractive red or blue uniforms, polished swords and shiny medals, but the red and blue approach purple as more blood is shed and the soldiers come to realize that mother was right and war is wrong. While Vigna's story attempts to calm children's fear of war, Seuss's, Popov's, and Fox's stories seem designed to heighten awareness of its dangers, illustrating the spiraling consequences of mistrust, violence, retaliation, and escalation.

What message do children actually take away from such stories? Some studies show that children may not interpret their messages in the way we would expect, i.e., the way adults would interpret them. Van Cleef and Martin report that in a group of six to eleven year olds, none grasped the allegorical allusion to nuclear war in *The Butter Battle Book*, and many, especially the younger children, could not identify any hidden messages in the text (1986, p. 193-4). Their responses were very concrete and based in the children's experiences rather than on understanding of global contexts. Carlsson-Paige and Levin report that the four to six year olds in their study of response to *The Butter Battle Book* "took the bread buttering controversy seriously" (1986, p. 38). The children had definite opinions on how bread should be buttered and they took sides, again thinking in very concrete terms, focusing on the weapons and the bread and butter; few of them saw any application to the world situation. Students in Ray's study (1986) did not distinguish between the attitude of Conrad, the war loving character in *Conrad's War* and the anti-war message of the text as a whole. They felt this book was the most pro-war of all Ray's selections, though it was probably the least. Ray postulates that this is because "the book develops Conrad's love of war in far greater detail than it does his change of attitude toward it" (1986, p. 114) and children focus on the concrete, both in the text and in their experience. These studies confirm findings by Cooper (1965) who studied the development of young children's concept of war and found that the concept begins with an understanding of the physical aspects of war, such as guns and other weapons, then progresses to an identification of war with the fights and war games of their experience. Only later do the international dimensions and serious carnage of war come to be understood by older children. Rodd (1985) also found that young children's images of war are based on its concrete aspects and that they understand global conflict only in terms of their personal experience of

fighting. These findings have implications for parents and educators who may want to use books to counter the prevailing glorification of violence in our society.

### **Historical Picture Books**

The depiction of soldiers in the fiction picture books is almost uniformly negative. They are portrayed as fat, greedy, stupid, or arrogant, and the reasons for the wars in these stories, if any are given at all, include greediness for more land, the glory of conquest, or blind distrust of the other side. Some are variations on the David and Goliath theme of brains over brawn. Historical fiction presents soldiers in a far different light. The values in these stories reflect conventional views on our history: the Revolutionary War, for example, is treated as a necessary war for freedom from foreign tyranny, while stories about later wars are carefully couched so as not to take sides or so as to distinguish between the wars themselves and the people involved. Books published later show more ambivalence toward war than earlier titles. The 1990s saw a small explosion of titles that explore the effects of recent wars on children too young to understand the causes. In these books, war is an inexplicable presence that causes destruction and loss, but sometimes leads to redeeming personal sacrifice; in them soldiers are faceless automatons who obey orders but are often as much victims of war as the children.

Chalk's rendition of *Yankee Doodle* (1993) is an unabashedly patriotic account of the Revolutionary War. The smartly uniformed British soldiers are shown as more disciplined and better equipped but less determined than the rag-tag American soldiers. The humorous animal characters and song motif make light of the war. A more serious but still approving tone marks the Revolutionary War stories of *The Boy Drummer of Vincennes* (Carmer, 1972), *Sam the Minuteman* (Benchley, 1969), *Six Silver Spoons* (Lowrey, 1971) and *The Boston Coffee Party* (Rappaport, 1988). The long march in *The Boy Drummer of Vincennes* is portrayed as exhilarating and the battle that follows as glorious. The firing of the guns mingles indistinguishably with the sound of the drum, and the difference in the effect of the two noisemakers is not noted. The enemy soldiers in *Sam the Minuteman* are in red, the only color used in

the book except for black, white and brown, thus emphasizing their uniforms and their uniformity. They are identical, therefore scarcely human: "They looked like a bright river of red" (Benchley, 1969, p. 37). The British soldiers in *Six Silver Spoons* (Lowrey, 1971) are again smartly uniformed and arrogant, with one exception, a captain who remembers his own little girl and saves Debby's gift by a clever ruse. Soldiers are an off-stage presence in *The Boston Coffee Party* (Rappaport, 1988). The women of the town dutifully sew shirts for the absent men but also imitate them in a clever variation on the Boston Tea Party. Uniting, they use force to appropriate the coffee a local merchant had been hoarding. Two sisters in Greeson's *An American Army of Two* (1992) also trick toy-like British soldiers and their mean faced, pot-bellied officer. While these stories show women in active roles, avoiding the female stereotypes of the earlier examples, they reproduce the stereotypes of brave American soldiers and mean, aggressive, and undifferentiated enemy soldiers.

Treatments of the Civil War are generally approving of the Northern cause, but acknowledge the pain of division. The story of *Barbara Freitchie*, published in 1965 but based on Whittier's original 1863 story, shows the patriotic courage of an old woman in the face of Stonewall Jackson's hard-faced, identical marching troops (Whittier, 1965). Coblenz's story of *Martin and Abraham Lincoln* (1947), published just after World War II, focuses on the hardships of war and the sadness left by Martin's father's absence. Little Martin must wear his father's uniform in miniature and become the caretaker of his family. Yet there is an unspoken understanding throughout this story that the war is necessary. In *Cecil's Story* (Lyon, 1991) the war inexplicably deprives children of their fathers; the soldiers in their Civil War uniforms are faceless men in the child's imagination. In Ackerman's *The Tin Heart* (1990), the Civil War divides friends, but it can also lead to new friendships, as in Polacco's *Pink and Say* (1994). In these stories war means death and destruction, but the child characters have an inkling that the principle is more important. *Pink and Say* is one of the few stories in which soldiers are main characters in the action. In Bunting's *The Blue and the Gray* (1996) war ends friendships and soldiers become cannon fodder, but again, the cause is seen as just.

More ambivalence in authors' attitudes toward war is apparent in their treatment of later wars, mirroring society's ambivalence. Picture books set during World War II range from the early tale of brave and patriotic soldier Per of D'Aulaire's *Wings for Per* (1944) in which there is no doubt about the rightness of the action, to the account of the horror of nuclear attack as described in Morimoto's *My Hiroshima* (1987), in which the destruction is shown to be too horrid for any justification. Other titles fall somewhere between these extreme attitudes. The theme of soldiers as absent fathers is developed in *All Those Secrets of the World* (Yolen, 1991), in which a father leaves for the war and returns a stranger, and in *When Mama Retires* (Ackerman, 1992), in which the mother takes a job and teaches the children to take over her housekeeping functions while their father is away at war. Personal sacrifice inspired by the hardships of war is the theme of *The Ring and the Window Seat* (Hest, 1990), in which the soldiers, clearly German, are depicted as marching in lockstep while a defiant officer stands, posing arrogantly with his back to the reader. In Mattingley's *The Angel With a Mouth-organ* (1984), war takes fathers away and returns them wounded but does not destroy their love. Several books deal sensitively with the Holocaust, including Adler's *The Number on My Grandfather's Arm* (1987), Wild's *Let the Celebrations Begin!* (1991), Oppenheim's *The Lily Cupboard* (1992), and Hoestlandt's *Star of Fear, Star of Hope* (1995). In Oppenheim's and Hoestlandt's stories, the war is an unseen but threatening presence whereas in Adler's story, Hitler's role and the Nazis' conformity and complicity in the evil are spelled out. Wild's account of life in a concentration camp is also unequivocal in praising the British soldiers as liberators. War from the point of view of the losing side is depicted in two unflinching accounts, *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985) and *Hiroshima No Pika* (Maruki, 1980). Soldiers in *Rose Blanche* are portrayed first as heroes, then as arrogant and threatening, finally as confused victims of war, with torn uniforms and bandages. From the protagonist's point of view, they are nearly indistinguishable from the foreign soldiers who occupy the town in the final pages. In *Hiroshima No Pika*, a soldier is shown riding the bus with other inhabitants, with no special role or attitude. There is no mention of the soldiers who dropped the bomb, but after the explosion, "Soldiers came and took the dead away" (Maruki, 1980, n.p.). They are thus portrayed as little more than civil servants, not as actors in the world drama.

These many stories show attempts in various ways to reconcile the evils of war with the evils of the enemies' intentions and the blamelessness and helplessness of children in wartime. In only a very few of these stories though do the soldiers themselves appear as real characters with speaking parts or actions. They are not shown in battle. Though Per in *Wings for Per* (D'Aulaire, 1944) is shown as a classic hero and the enemy as evil, in the later books the focus shifts to the children. In most cases the soldiers are part of the story's background, either part of war's faceless threat or victims of it.

Books about later wars almost entirely avoid taking sides or giving any reasons for the wars. They focus on the loss of loved ones and security and show how children have coped with war in various ways. In *Sami and the Time of the Troubles* (Heide & Gilliland, 1992) war means hiding out in basement rooms to escape the gunfire in the streets of Lebanon; soldiers fight above unseen, but when fighting stops briefly, boys build forts, play war and dream of peace. The Laotian refugee child in Shea's *The Whispering Cloth* (1995) sees war as loss of home and parents. Soldiers from opposing forces are described as wearing, not uniforms, but "different clothes" (Shea, 1995, n.p.). Some shoot and some beckon without explanation. For the Vietnamese children in *Sweet Dried Apples* (Breckler, 1996) war means an absent father and hardship, followed by firebombs and finally ashes. These stories do an admirable job of showing us war from the children's limited perspective, but in leaving out the soldiers they present war almost as a natural disaster, a random occurrence for which no one is responsible. In *The Wall* (Bunting, 1990) a father takes his son to see the Vietnam Veterans Memorial where the boy's grandfather's name is inscribed. A feeling of loss and absence is conveyed by the offerings of flags and crosses and old photographs along the ground. A veteran in a wheelchair wears, not a uniform, but a "soldier's shirt" (Bunting, 1990, n.p.) with medals. The scene evokes a sense of what the boy and his father have lost, but the loss is tempered with pride. Perhaps it is pride that the grandfather fought for his country, or perhaps just that the dead are remembered and honored on the wall. The reader is left to decide.

From the soldier images in these last examples, all arrogance and swashbuckling is gone. This progression of imagery from the celebratory

patriotism of the American soldiers in *Yankee Doodle* (Chalk, 1993) to the arrogance but ultimate defeat of the German soldiers in the World War II historical fiction to the very human portrayal of the legless veteran in *The Wall* (Bunting, 1990) shows perhaps our psychological distance from the pain of the earlier wars and more recent reluctance to fight in the face of current knowledge of what it means in human terms. In historical fiction about wars later than the Civil War, there is a marked absence of any discussion of causes or justification for war. This may be attributable to the fact that children would not understand the reasons, but the Revolutionary War era books do provide reasons for that war, however simplified, and children are notoriously curious about "why." According to Everson, in adult war literature after World War I, "war itself becomes more futile," marked by a "sense of alienation and ironic perspective" (Everson, 1995, p. 25). Rather than reflect this sense of futility felt after two world wars or the deep division in Americans' views of later wars, historical fiction for young children delivers happy endings, however unlikely, (Everson 1995, p. 337) or concentrates on the immediate experience and consequences of war from the child character's perspective. Even the German soldiers in *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985) are portrayed more as cogs in a great wheel than as knowing perpetrators of the atrocities Rose witnesses. This approach absolves authors from the task of assigning blame or explaining causes, which they may feel to be irrelevant from the child's perspective.

### Tricksters and Toys

Two other incarnations of soldiers in picture books deserve mention: soldiers in folktales and toy soldiers. Anita Lobel in *Soldier, Soldier, Won't You Marry Me* illustrates a folk song about a girl captivated by a passing soldier; her refrain is "Oh, soldier, soldier, won't you marry me/With your musket, fife and drum?" (Langstaff, 1972, n.p.) The clever soldier, as a condition of marriage, tricks the maid into supplying him with one article of clothing after another before confessing gleefully that he already has a wife. Another rogue of a soldier is found in the folk tale *Brave Soldier Janosh* (Ambrus, 1967). In this tale an old veteran of the Napoleonic wars regales simple villagers with stories of how he defeated the conqueror single-handedly. He is a braggart and in his version the enemy soldiers are cowardly bumbler. The tale is told tongue-in-cheek,

with only the presence of a sneezing student to hint that the old soldier's stories may not be 100% accurate (Sneezing denotes disbelief, we are told.). *Stone Soup* (Brown, 1947) is another tale of the cleverness of soldiers in fooling simple villagers. It is significant that all three of these old tales portray soldiers in the archetypal role of tricksters, who take advantage of the simpleness of the villagers. Here as in the fiction, the soldiers are arrogant and uncaring, yet we want them to succeed because they are so clever.

Finally, soldiers appear as toys in picture books. Toys have long been the instruments of children's wish fulfillment and these books cater to the child's wish to be a hero, to have adventures, and to win acclaim. In these stories as in the folktales, the image of the soldier is divorced from the concept of war. The toy soldier is the embodiment of bravery, constancy, and adventure, an exciting alter ego for the child faced with the daily humdrum business of learning to adjust to the strictures of society. The classic is Andersen's *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* (Andersen, 1953; Isadora, 1996). Andersen's soldier's uniform has become the default image of the toy soldier, still sold in toy stores. The nineteenth century costume, in red or blue, with epaulets and feathered headgear make this image an anachronism, totally unconnected with modern methods of warfare. Andersen's soldier is idealized, brave and true, carelessly treated by the boy who owns him, but never relaxing his standards of conduct. Another fantasy involving toy soldiers is *The Battle of Luke and Longnose* (McClintock, 1994). Here the characters in Luke's toy theater come alive during the night. The cowardly soldiers beg Luke to be their general in their fight against the villain Longnose. He agrees and succeeds with the help of his cat in a crucial moment, all in good fun. The secret life of toy soldiers is updated in *The Angel and the Soldier Boy* (Collington, 1987), in which the brave but again anachronistic toy soldier is captured by a pirate, then rescued by the toy angel. This reversal of the sexual stereotypes only partially succeeds, however; for though girl rescues boy in this case, the soldier is inevitably male, the angel inevitably female.



## Soldiers and Gender Stereotyping

Those who are concerned about the violence and values in children's books about war seldom address the gender stereotyping so prevalent in them. Those who do address the gender issues in children's literature focus on calling for more active and more numerous female characters. Myers implies that we need no longer be concerned with gender issues in war stories because "domestic contribution stories for girls on the home front" (2000, p. 328) are no longer being published. But both the issue of conflict resolution and the issue of gender stereotypes would be informed by an examination of the male stereotyping prevalent in picture book images of soldiers. If part of the male stereotype may be characterized as aggressor, surely the soldier stereotype could be characterized as aggressor times two, an exaggerated version of the male stereotype. In children's literature, especially in the fiction, soldiers are shown as anonymous aggressors with weapons, fighting machines who follow orders mindlessly. In the historical fiction they are shown often as cardboard heroes, brave and invincible, or in later examples as part of the background of a violent world, perhaps off-stage but ever threatening and impersonal, like a looming hurricane.

Surprisingly few of the stories examined here contain soldiers as main characters. Few of the soldier characters even have speaking parts. In many of the illustrations they are faceless and identical. In many stories they are part of a backdrop, an element of the scenery. In *The Ring and the Window Seat* (Hest, 1990), for example, the soldiers are shown but hardly mentioned. They are there to create a threatening mood and to orient the reader since the text gives no details on time or place. The soldier type is so well understood it needs no elaboration by the author. The soldiers in *Hiroshima No Pika* (Maruki, 1980) and *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985), though they are the immediate cause of the suffering described, are only minor characters in the plot. Their role is a given; it needs no elaboration. There is no differentiation between the person and the job. When a soldier is the main character, he (never a she) acts completely in character, i.e., according to stereotype as a fighting machine. For example, the faceless general in *The Bomb and the General* (Eco, 1989) loves war for its own sake. The toy theater soldiers in *The Battle of Luke and Longnose* (McClintock, 1994) are helpless without a

leader; it is understood that soldiers follow orders. The soldiers in *War and Peas* (Foreman, 1974) immediately jump into their tanks to attack on the order of the king. The Zooks and Yooks in *The Butter Battle Book* (Seuss, 1984) fight on with ever bigger and better weapons and never a thought, while the few female characters act as cheerleaders. Only the folktales contain soldiers as characters whose actions are not predictable. Yet they are seen only in pre- or post-war situations, not engaged in the business of war.

Interestingly, there are a few stories in which soldiers do appear as true characters; they revolve around American soldiers in postwar occupied Japan. Say's *The Bicycle Man* (1982), Friedman's *How My Parents Learned to Eat* (1984) and Little's *Yoshiko and the Foreigner* (1996) portray them as individual, sensitive characters facing Japanese bias toward foreigners but able to overcome it. In these stories the war is over and soldiers have become people once again.

Rodd and others report that even preschool children have a concept of war (Rodd, 1985; Bat-Ami, 1994; p. 85; Everson, 1995, p. 12). Similarly, children form a sense of gender identification (Gerasimova, Trojan, & Zdravomyslova, 1996, p. 71) and use "gender-stereotyped styles of interaction" (Cramer & Skidd, 1992, p. 369) as young as age three or four. Traditional children's literature is full of gender stereotypes: the female characters are far fewer in number, and are more passive, more caring and more in need of protection, often the victims of violence but rarely the cause. Male characters are more often protagonists, active, aggressive, adventurous, often violent, clever, naughty, and victorious. Peterson and Lach (1990) found in their study of gender images in picture books that while traditional gender-based stereotypes have decreased, they are far from gone from children's books. Goss in a similar study found males to predominate as main characters while females were more often secondary characters (1996, p. 6). Goss also found that choices of roles for female characters have increased, but that "Male characters still received more positive consequences for their actions and females still bestowed more negative consequences on themselves" (p. 7). Turner-Bowker (1996) found a significantly greater number of males in the titles and pictures of Caldecott Medal winners and honor books for a recent ten-year period,

and found that the males were described as more active and potent. Just as changing attitudes toward war are reflected in children's literature, so too are changing attitudes toward gender roles. However, the transformation is far from complete and children are exposed to the old as well as new stories. They absorb attitudes from both and it affects their behavior.

This process is evident in their own stories. Clark (1995) reports on a study of stories written by children and found significant differences in the stories of the boys and girls. While girls' stories were concerned with social relationships, and were realistic in form, boys' stories were concerned with violent struggles between good guys and bad guys, often resolved by superheroes, and containing large doses of fantasy and exaggeration. While both use play in their narratives, "Power struggles, rules and the importance of winning is the dimension of play that boys articulate" (Clark, 1995, p. 3). Cramer and Skidd studied the relationship between preschooler self-worth and their use of gender-stereotyped styles of behavior. In their subjects "the use of gender-stereotyped styles of behavior by boys becomes increasingly important with age in relation to their perceived positive self-competence and social acceptance. On the other hand, for preschool girls, the use of feminine-stereotyped styles of behavior appears to become less important with age. . . consistent with the fact that there is more pressure on boys to conform to sex-stereotyped behaviors" (Cramer & Skidd, 1992, p. 388).

Perhaps this lessening of the correlation between girls' use of feminine behavior and their self-worth stems from the increase in behavior choices open to them, but the same broadening of possibilities does not seem to apply to the boys. A study by Arthur and White (1996) asked students to assign gender to animal characters. While the youngest children assigned their own gender to the characters, the older ones more often assigned gender along stereotypic lines, according to the activeness or social behavior of the characters. The authors found that the older boys' character assignments were most strongly correlated to gender stereotypes. In a study of electronic games and gender differences, Funk and Buchman found not only that the games themselves reinforced gender stereotypes, but also that boys' attitudes about playing these games showed less latitude:

Across developmental groupings, gender stereotyping was stronger for boys. The tendency for boys to be more stereotyped in their attitudes about electronic games is consistent with other research suggesting that males are generally less flexible than females in their attitudes toward gender roles. . . This may be due in part to the higher value of masculine activities, which increases pressure on boys to conform to gender stereotypes" (1996, p. 227).

The pressure to conform may lead to more of those "higher value" masculine activities, but it also deprives boys of permission to "show their vulnerability and softer feelings" (Goss, 1996, p. 8). A study of a school's falling male test scores found that stereotyped behavior is so common among the boys that aggressive behavior, lack of verbal and empathic skills, and consequent difficulties with team work had become the norm: "young men are expected to behave badly" (Barker, 1997, p. 225). A study by Ashton (1983) confirms that the presence or absence of stereotypes in children's books affects behavior; children exposed to books containing sex-stereotypes, when offered a choice of stereotypical male, female, and neutral toys, more often chose the stereotypical toys, whereas children exposed to books with non-stereotypic characters more often chose the neutral toys. One study shows how allowing gender-stereotyping behavior leads to permitted violence against women and girls and weaker members of the community in general (Boland, 1995). Several researchers have outlined ways of giving girls more choices and more attention in the curriculum (Goss, 1996; Craft, 1993; Peterson & Lach, 1990) and others have demonstrated ways of using children's books to teach conflict resolution without violence (Fassler, 1983; Carllson-Paige, 1986), but there has been little emphasis on expanding behavior choices for boys in the classroom or examining the implications of those limited male choices on attempts to teach conflict resolution.

It seems logical that if the male stereotype permits, or indeed encourages violence, then chances of reducing violence or achieving an end to war are slim as long as that stereotype is the dominant role model presented to boys in the society. A combination of approaches stressing wider choices of behavior styles for both girls and boys along with

exploration of alternative methods of dispute resolution is called for. Simply giving girls society's permission to act more like boys is not enough. It may be argued that the readers of picture books are too young to understand why wars happen, how they could be avoided, or whether a particular war is justified or not. And authors are not obliged to dwell on such questions; they may prefer to focus on children's experience. In either case, however, these books do present images, both textual and graphic, that inevitably affect young readers and listeners. Since, as we have seen from studies cited above, young children absorb gender stereotypes and react primarily to the physical aspects of a story, rather than to the implied messages or allegorical meanings, stories containing stereotypical soldiers arrayed in bright uniforms, equipped with powerful weapons, and engaged in exciting actions may attract rather than repel young male readers. Similarly, stories in which the actors who initiate and conduct the war are not part of the story's action may foster the attitude that war is an inevitable fact of life, uncaused and unstoppable.

Various approaches to scholarly criticism of children's books have predominated at different times. Earliest examples focused on the moral lessons taught by the stories (Craft, 1993; Hunt, 1993). This didactic model is still evident today. The specific moral lessons taught may have changed, and the lessons are certainly delivered in a less heavy-handed fashion, but the expectation that children's books should instill correct values has not disappeared. Peterson & Lach quote the Council on Interracial Books for Children to that effect: "We propose that children's literature become a tool for the conscious promotion of human values that will help lead to greater human liberation" (1990, p. 191). While using books as didactic tools goes very much against the grain of the literary critic, using them to expand horizons and explore reality is widely accepted. For some, literature should "make people more aware of the way society works" (Dixon, 1977, p. 32). Emphasis on values is especially evident, understandably, in discussions of children's war literature. The child-centered, constructivist approach evident in Ray's study (1986) investigates what lessons or messages the children themselves take from the works by exploring the texts with them, and reveals some surprising discoveries about children's interpretations. Carlsson-Paige describes good and bad examples of using this approach with *The Butter Battle Book*, warning that "When adults make direct

links between the book and the real world, it prevents children from coming to terms with this difficult topic in their own way and according to their own timetable" (1986, p. 40). Through classroom discussion, re-enactment, and role-playing, children come to their own conclusions about the message of the book. They may expand their repertoire of behaviors and their understanding of consequences. Through this active participation, they may come to understand more of the themes and beauties of the texts and a bit more about how society works than if they simply absorbed the stories passively or were "taught" what they mean.

These same techniques may be used to broaden children's understanding of gender stereotypes and may be combined with classroom exploration of conflict resolution. But whereas there are now numerous examples of texts demonstrating the evils of war and what it is like for children to live through one, and many showing female characters in active non-sexist roles, there are very few models of soldiers portrayed as individuals. There are soldiers as fighting fools and braggarts in the fiction books and folktales, and as brave superheroes or as faceless or absent automatons in the historical fiction, but there are very few who act as individual human beings. For young children who may never have encountered any real live soldiers, these images provide little material with which to expand their repertoires of gender behavior and conflict resolution, or to consider when it might be necessary to fight. "Telling" children that *The Butter Battle Book* is about the folly of war may have no meaning for the child whose developmental level does not yet permit understanding of allegorical meanings and whose only models of soldiers are the limiting examples found in picture books and other media. If young children's concept of war is based on their concrete experience of toy guns and playground squabbles, then attempts to expand these concepts through literature must use examples of non-stylized characters, acting unpredictably in and out of conflict situations. Without such examples, children's attitudes are likely to be based solely on the lure of the uniforms, fascination with the weapons, and the fun of the game-like action.

## References

- Arthur, A. G., & White, H. (1996). Children's assignment of gender to animal characters in pictures. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 157(3), 297-301.
- Ashton, E. (1983). Measures of play behavior: The influence of sex-role stereotyped children's books. *Sex Roles*, 9(1), 43-47.
- Barker, B. (1997). Girls' world or anxious times: What's really happening at school in the gender war? *Educational Review*, 49(3), 221-227.
- Bat-Ami, M. (1994). War and peace in the early elementary classroom. *Children's Literature in Education*, 25(2), 83-99.
- Boland, P. (Ed.). (1995). Gender stereotypes: The links to violence. *Equity in Education Series*. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc. ED 387 771.
- Carlsson-Paige, N. & Levin, D. E. (1986). *The Butter Battle Book*: Uses and abuses with young children. *Young Children*, 41(3), 37-42.
- Clark, E. (1995). *Popular culture images of gender as reflected through young children's story*. Paper presented at the Annual Joint Meetings of the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association, Philadelphia PA, April 12-15, 1995. ED 388 966.
- Cooper, P. (1965). The development of the concept of war. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), 1-17.
- Craft, J. (1993). *Sex stereotypes in children's literature*. ED 354 530.
- Cramer, P., & Skidd, J. E. (1992). Correlates of self-worth in preschoolers: The role of gender-stereotyped styles of behavior. *Sex Roles*, 26(9/10), 369-390.
- Dixon, B. (1977). *Catching them young*. London: Pluto Press.
- Everson, S. E. (1995). *A soldier's war, a child's peace: the dialogue of adult and children's war fiction since 1941*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1995). Dissertation Abstracts International, 56-08, A, 3124.
- Fassler, J. & Janis, M. G. (1983). Books, children, and peace. *Young Children*, 38(6), 21-30.
- Funk, J. B. & Buchman, D. D. (1996). Children's perceptions of gender differences in social approval for playing electronic games. *Sex Roles*, 35(3/4), 219-231.

- Gerasimova, K. Troyan, N. & Zdravomyslova, E. E. (1996). Gender stereotypes in pre-school children's literature. In Rotkirch, A., & Haavio-Mannila, E. (Eds.). *Women's voices in Russia today*. Brookfield, VT: Dartmouth.
- Goss, G. (1996). *Weaving girls into the curriculum*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Chicago IL, Feb. 21-24, 1996. ED 394 931.
- Heiser, P. (1997). Reflections of war through historical fiction. *School Library Media Activities Monthly*, 13(8), 11-28.
- Hunt, P. (1990). *Children's literature: the development of criticism*. New York: Routledge.
- Jason, P. K. (1997). Representations of war in ethics education. *Journal of General Education*, 46(2), 96-106.
- Kornfeld, H. J. (1994). Using fiction to teach history: Multicultural and global perspectives of World War II. *Social Education*, 58(5), 281-286.
- Lima, C. W. & Lima, J. A. (Eds.). (1998). *A to zoo: subject access to children's picture books*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New Providence, NJ: R. R. Bowker.
- Myers, Mitzi. (2000). Storying war: A capsule overview. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 24(3), 327-336.
- Peterson, S. B. & Lach, M. A. (1990). Gender stereotypes in children's books: Their prevalence and influence on cognitive and affective development. *Gender and Education*, 2(2), 185-197.
- Ray, R. A. (1986). *Children's response to war literature*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Utah, 1986). Dissertation Abstracts International, 47-10, A, 3689.
- Rodd, J. (1985). Pre-school children's understanding of war. *Early Child Development and Care*, 22(2/3), 109-121.
- Turner-Bowker, D. M. (1996). Gender stereotyped descriptors in children's picture books: Does 'Curious Jane' exist in the literature? *Sex Roles*, 35(7/8), 461-488.
- Van Cleaf, D. W. & Martin, R. J. (1986). Seuss's *Butter Battle Book*: Is there a hidden harm? *Childhood Education*, 62(3), 191-194.



Children's Books Cited

- Ackerman, K. (1990). *The tin heart*. NY: Athencum.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1992). *When mama retires*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Adler, D. A. (1987). *The number on my grandfather's arm*. NY: UAHC Press.
- Ambrus, V. G. (1967). *Brave soldier Janosh*. NY: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Andersen, H. C. (1953). *The steadfast tin soldier*. (M.R. James, Trans.). NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Aragon, J. C. (1990). *The major and the mousehole mice*. NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Benchley, N. (1969). *Sam the Minuteman*. NY: Harper & Row, 1969.
- Breckler, R. (1996). *Sweet dried apples: a vietnamese wartime childhood*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Brown, M. (1947). *Stone soup: an old tale*. NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Bunting, E. (1996). *The Blue and the gray*. NY: Scholastic.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1990). *The wall*. NY: Clarion Books.
- Carmer, C. (1972). *The boy drummer of Vincennes*. Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: Harvey House.
- Chalk, G. (1993). *Yankee doodle*. NY: Dorling Kindersley.
- Coblentz, C. C. (1947). *Martin and Abraham Lincoln: based on a true incident*. Chicago, IL: Children's Press.
- Collington, P. (1987). *The angel and the soldier boy*. NY: A.A. Knopf.
- D'Aulaire, I. (1944). *Wings for Per*. Garden City NY: Doubleday, Doran & Co.
- De Paola, T. (1984). *The mysterious giant of Barletta: an Italian folktale*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Eco, U. & Carmi, E. (1989). *The bomb and the general*. (W. Weaver, Trans.). NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Emberley, B. (adapter). (1967). *Drummer Hoff*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Fitzhugh, L. & Scoppettone, S. (1969). *Bang bang you're dead*. NY: Harper & Row.
- Foreman, M. (1974). *War and peas*. NY: Crowell.
- Fox, M. (1996). *Feathers and fools*. NY: Harcourt, Brace & Co.
- Friedman, I. R. (1984). *How my parents learned to eat*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Greeson, J. (1992). *An American army of two*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books.

- Heide, F. and Gilliland, J. H. (1992). *Sam and the time of the troubles*. NY: Clarion Books.
- Hest, A. (1990). *The ring and the window seat*. NY: Scholastic.
- Hoestlandt, J. (1995). *Star of fear, star of hope*. NY: Walker.
- Innocenti, R. (1985). *Rose Blanche*. Mankato: Creative Education.
- Isadora, R. (1996). *The steadfast tin soldier*. NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Langstaff, J. (compiler). (1972). *Soldier, soldier, won't you marry me?* Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Little, M. O. (1997). *Yoshiko and the foreigner*. NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Lobel, A. (1967). *Potatoes, potatoes*. NY: Harper & Row.
- Lowrey, J. S. (1971). *Six silver spoons*. NY: Harper & Row.
- Lyon, G. E. (1991). *Cecil's story*. NY: Orchard Books.
- Maruki, T. (1980). *Hiroshima no pika*. NY: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books.
- Mattingley, C. (1984). *The angel with a mouth-organ*. NY: Holiday House.
- McAllister, A. (1991). *The battle of Sir Cob and Sir Filbert*. NY: Clarkson N. Potter.
- McClintock, B. (1994). *The battle of Luke and Longnose*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- McGowen, T. (1968). *The apple strudel soldier*. Chicago: Follett.
- Miller, E. (1987). *Frederick Ferdinand Fox*. NY: Crown.
- Morimoto, J. (1987). *My Hiroshima*. NY: Viking.
- Myers, E. (1995). *Forri the baker*. NY: Dial.
- Oppenheim, S. L. (1992). *The lily cupboard*. NY: HarperCollins.
- Phillips, I. (1979). *The brothers wrong and wrong again*. NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Polacco, P. (1994). *Pink and Say*. NY: Philomel Books.
- Popov, N. (1996). *Why?* NY: North-South Books.
- Rappaport, D. (1988). *The Boston coffee party*. NY: Harper & Row.
- Rupprecht, S. P. (1989). *The tale of the vanishing rainbow*. (N. Lewis, Trans.). NY: North-South Books.
- Say, A. (1982). *The bicycle man*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Seuss, Dr. (1984). *The butter battle book*. NY: Random House.
- Shea, P. D. (1995). *The whispering cloth: a refugee's story*. Honesdale, PA: Caroline House.

- Vigna, J. (1986). *Nobody wants a nuclear war*. Niles, IL: Albert Whitman.
- Whittier, J. G. (1965). *Barbara Frietchie*. NY: Crowell.
- Wild, M. (1991). *Let the celebrations begin!* NY: Orchard Books.
- Yolen, J. (1991). *All those secrets of the world*. Boston: Little, Brown.

*Christina M. Desai is a reference librarian at Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.*



## **Spanish-English Code Switching In A Bilingual Academic Context**

Ruth R. Becker  
University of Wisconsin-  
Parkside

*This study investigates the Spanish-English code switching of 60 elementary Mexican-American students in a story retelling activity. The students' story retellings were examined according to Becker's (1997) model of code switching: structural linguistic, internal psycholinguistic, and external social factors. Results suggest there is a positive relationship between code-switched story retelling, oral language usage, and enhanced narrative skills. Implications suggest that teachers explore the use of code switching in a story retelling activity as a practical way to enhance bilingual elementary students' verbal skills and reading development.*

CODE SWITCHING, OFTEN DISPARAGED as a mongrel mixture of languages, entails a complex rule-governed use of language (Scotton, 1993) that "offers a unique opportunity for studying some of the more complicated aspects of bilingual speech" (Dearholt & Valdes-Fallis, 1978, p. 411). Although the phenomenon of code switching has been investigated in terms of its linguistic and social dimensions (Aguirre, 1985; Gumperz, 1976; Jacobson, 1990), elementary children's use of code switching in school settings has been little investigated (Olmedo-Williams, 1981). Furthermore, bilingual children's code switching for specifically academic purposes has received even less attention (de Mejía, 1998).

Prior research has established a positive relationship between story telling and reading comprehension for bilingual Hispanic adolescents (Goldstein, Harris, & Klein, 1993) and between story construction, language proficiency and academic performance for elementary bilingual students (Jax, 1988). While this research supports the relationship between storytelling and literacy development for Hispanic bilingual students, it has not addressed the role and merits of code switching.

The aim of this study, therefore, was to investigate Mexican-American students' use of code switching in an academic activity. The guiding question was: What patterns of English-Spanish language alternation did the bilingual speakers exhibit in an academic activity, specifically storytelling? The specific questions were:

- 1) Do students appear to use code switching as an additive academic strategy in a story retelling activity: in terms of narrative skills to develop colorful dialogue, colorful language/vocabulary, plot, and story structure?
- 2) Are patterns in the frequency of code switching related to language proficiency, i.e., English language proficiency, Spanish language proficiency, or both English and Spanish language proficiency?
- 3) Are patterns in the frequency of code switching related to fluency/word usage?

This code-switching study of story retelling may provide data relevant to educational practice. Results suggest that code-switched story retelling may be a practical way to enhance narrative skills and, hence, literacy development.

### Theoretical Framework

Code switching is a phenomenon that has linguistic, psycholinguistic, and social-situational dimensions. It manifests itself intrasententially, involving the use of two languages within the same sentence, and intersententially, involving the use of alternate languages across sentences. Rather than focusing on one aspect of code-switching, Becker (1997) has proposed a syncretic model for Spanish/English bilingual code-switching based on Zentella's (1990) categories. This model calls for examining three factors simultaneously: a) structural linguistic factors, "out of the mouth," which stipulate that the "bilingual speaker's two monolingual grammars must be structurally compatible in order for code-switching to occur" (p. 4), b) internal psycholinguistic factors, "in the head," which concern shifting for stylistic meaning and communicative intentions, and c) external social factors, "on the spot," which involve items such as the respective social roles of the addresser and addressee, their language preferences and competencies, and the setting. Becker's model appears to have considerable robustness and will provide the theoretical perspective for this study.

With respect to code switching, questions about the bilingual speaker's language proficiency in each of the two monolingual language systems have led to research in this area. Aguirre (1985) questioned balanced bilinguals (speakers with equal proficiency in both Spanish and English), dominant Spanish, and dominant English speakers to determine the acceptability of grammatical and non-grammatical code-switched sentences. He found that balanced bilinguals were more accurate in their acceptability responses for grammatical items than the language-dominant speakers. He concluded that "code alternation is a verbal strategy available only to fairly proficient bilinguals" (p. 75). On the other hand, Shin and Milroy (2000) argue against the value and validity of notions such as the "ideal bilingual" and "balanced bilingualism." They maintain that "such thinking appears to derive from political and

cultural ideology rather than from linguistic evidence” and “it often develops into full fledged theories which have serious practical consequences” (p. 352). Questions regarding the relative language proficiency of elementary children who code switch in the classroom remain open to investigation.

Two recent classroom studies have addressed code switching and story telling. De Mejía (1998) investigated two Colombian preschool teachers’ use of code switching in storytelling sessions. She found that “dramatic effects can be further heightened by the skillful combining of narrative monologue, character dialogue and interactive teacher-pupil sequences, and change of language, or code switching, in the case of bilingual contexts” (p. 5). Her research suggests that preschool teachers’ code-switched story telling with student interaction can facilitate comprehension and narrative skill development that are critical to school-related activities associated with literacy development.

Shin and Milroy (2000) investigated code switching as a contextual cue in the sequential development of conversational interaction among elementary Korean-English children in classroom activities including story telling. Their research suggests that the students’ use of code switching, frequently misperceived as a deficit, appeared to be an additional resource to achieve particular linguistic goals: to accommodate other participants’ language competencies and preferences, for example, or to organize conversational tasks such as turn-taking, emphasis marking, and clarification.

Additional areas of interest that motivated this study were the relationships of narrative skills and vocabulary skills to literacy development, specifically, reading proficiency. Roth and Speece (1996) found strong support for a correlation between students’ ability to use narrative discourse and early reading; however, only limited research studies met their standards for rigorous research. “With respect to the relation between narrative discourse and reading, the available evidence is convincing but limited. Only three studies were identified, but it may be that our requirement that studies measure a reading variable limited our search” (p. 2). In the area of vocabulary skills and reading, Spanish-English bilingual students’ English reading performance was

significantly related to knowledge of the word in Spanish (Nagy, Garcia, Durgunoglu, Hancin-Bhatt, 1993). Their findings suggest “that Hispanic bilingual, biliterate students can transfer vocabulary knowledge gained in Spanish to their English reading when they know the Spanish word and recognize the English word as a cognate” (p. 254).

This study will explore the merits of elementary bilingual students’ use of code switching in the academic activity of story retelling and the issue of dual language proficiency in code switching.

### Method

#### Participants and Setting

There were 60 Mexican-American participants in this study who were selected from a bilingual program in a year-round elementary school in southeastern Wisconsin. The participants, 24 females and 36 males, ranged in age from 6 to 11. Four groups of 15 students were chosen based on their composite Oral/Reading/Writing fall scores on the English Language Assessment Scales (LAS). The LAS (De Avila & Duncan, 1994) are the standard assessment tools used by the school district to determine language proficiency. The groups were: 1) low English proficiency/1st-2nd graders, 2) intermediate English proficiency/1st-2nd graders, 3) low English proficiency/3rd-5th graders, and 4) intermediate English proficiency/3rd-5th graders.

The participants were enrolled in a transitional bilingual program whose language policy is to encourage students to speak English as quickly as possible. At the beginning of the year, the classroom teachers, who can speak both English and Spanish, provide some instruction in Spanish. As the year progresses most of the instruction is in English. Throughout the year, the Mexican-American bilingual aide provides instruction in Spanish when considered beneficial for the students. Students are permitted to speak Spanish when talking in small groups.

For this study, each student was examined on an individual basis in a small room that was apart from the classroom. Students were encouraged to feel comfortable when providing their responses. The



students were told that they were helping with a project and that there were no right or wrong answers. Generally, the students waved their hands enthusiastically to volunteer to participate in the project when a research assistant came to the classroom. If a student expressed reluctance in participating, he/she was not included in the project.

### Instruments and Procedures

English and Spanish LAS were administered to the participants during the spring-summer session to determine their current oral English and Spanish language proficiency. The Oral component was administered to all 60 participants, and the Reading and Writing components, intended for students in grades 2nd-5th, were administered to the 2nd-5th grade participants. The English LAS were conducted by Native-English speakers and the Spanish LAS were conducted by bilingual Mexican-American speakers.

The English and Spanish Oral and Reading-Writing LAS were assessed on a 5-point scale by the bilingual evaluator for the school district and by the researcher according to the LAS scoring manual (De Avila & Duncan, 1994). The English and Spanish Oral LAS tests are an index of students' skills in vocabulary, listening comprehension, and story retelling, while the English and Spanish Reading and Writing LAS tests are an index of students' skills in reading comprehension and writing. For this study, the participants' English and Spanish Oral LAS scores will be referred to as their English Language Proficiency (ELP) and Spanish Language Proficiency (SLP). Low scores range from 1-2, intermediate scores range from 3-4, and 5 is a high score.

The major part of the study involved the Story Retellings. The story selected for the retelling is a Mexican folktale in the trickster tradition. A little lamb, the *borreguita*, tricks the coyote into thinking that cheese is better to eat than lamb. She entices the coyote to a pond where she encourages the coyote to swim to the cheese. The coyote, almost drowning, realizes that the cheese is the reflection of the moon on the water and that the lamb has tricked him. He goes away, leaving the lamb in peace.

Individual participants listened to a taped version of *Borreguita and the Coyote* (Aardema, 1991) narrated in English and *Borreguita y el coyote* (Aardema, 1993) narrated in Spanish by the researcher and native-English and bilingual assistants. In both narrations, one of the characters (the lamb or the coyote) spoke in English and one in Spanish. Thus, the tapes modeled the use of language switching. The students looked at the illustrations while listening to the story. Then, the students were given directions in both English and Spanish about story retelling. They were told to retell the story in English, in Spanish, or in both English and Spanish, whatever the student preferred. The students were allowed to turn the pages and look at the illustrations as a visual aid while retelling the story. Each child's retelling of the *Borreguita and the Coyote* was recorded.

The story retellings were administered by a bilingual Mexican-American speaker who used English-Spanish code-switched speech while accompanying students to and from the classroom, giving directions for the story retelling, and providing simple prompts during students' pauses, such as "yes," "sí," or "What happened next?" "Y que más?"

The students' audiotapes of the story retellings of the *Borreguita and the Coyote* were transcribed. The story retellings were examined according to Becker's (1997) categories of structural linguistic, psycholinguistic, and external social factors in Spanish/English bilingual code switching and in terms of narrative elements.

The students' audiotapes of the story retellings of the *Borreguita and the Coyote* were analyzed for structural linguistic data according to the number of Switches from language to language, the total number of Words, the number of Spanish Words, and the number of English Words. Data were entered for the students' grade level, and ELP and SLP as determined by their Oral LAS scores. These measures are indicators of the amount of switches, the student's grade level, ELP, SLP, the students' fluency in the retelling, and the language dominance in the retelling.

Additionally, code switching patterns in the story retellings were examined, when applicable, in terms of psycholinguistic factors. Some of the psycholinguistic factors upon which code switching choices may be based include: a) frequency of exposure, that is, some terms are more familiar in a particular language; b) cultural untranslatability, certain expressions have no direct translation; c) emphasis, changing to another language as a “signal issued by the speaker to the hearer to search for additional meaning” (Fina, 1989, 120); d) mode/topic shift, bilingual code switching can be used as a strategy to indicate a shift in discourse modes, for example, from dialogue to description; e) personalization/objectivization, Spanish tends to be the “we” personal code and English the “they” more objective code, thus the speaker may code switch to signal personalization or objectivization of the message.

External social factors, the third component of Becker’s model, were also considered as factors in the study design in order to elicit code switching. The following characteristics of the setting and participants contribute to an environment conducive to code switching: the physical characteristics of the addressee, the language proficiency and preference of the addressee, the speaker’s role relative to addressee, a sequential response to prior code switching, and an atmosphere where code switching is encouraged (Becker, 1997). Keeping these factors in mind, bilingual Mexican-American research assistants conducted the Spanish LAS and the story retellings because of their physical and linguistic resemblance to the participants. In other words, they spoke a similar Mexican dialect and appeared non-threatening, thus encouraging an informal code-switched interchange with a non-authority figure. Moreover, although the school classrooms had an English-dominant orientation, the small room allocated for this study allowed the student to choose in what language(s) to retell the story.

Because the primary focus of this study was to examine code switching in an academic context, the story retellings were analyzed according to their narrative elements. The narrative elements coding scheme was adapted from story telling coding schemes developed by Goldstein, Harris, and Klein (1993) and Jax (1988). The narrative categories included: Colorful Dialogue, Colorful Language, Plot, Story Structure, and Fluency. The story retellings were coded by the

researcher and a Spanish-speaking authority on code switching according to the five narrative categories along a 4-point scale. (See Table 1)

Table 1. Narrative Elements

| <u>Score Value</u> | <u>Colorful Dialogue</u>  | <u>Colorful Language</u><br>[CL]  | <u>Plot</u>   | <u>Story Structure</u><br>Beginning<br>Middle<br>End<br>(BME) | <u>Fluency Words</u>                     |
|--------------------|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1                  | No quotes   | No CL   | Trick not explained                                       | No BME  | 0-100                                    |
| 2                  | Quotes both characters/<br>identifies characters                                      | Colorful Adjectives,<br>Verbs—<br>gritar<br>[shout]                       | Explain trick, water-cheese, give several episodes        | B-señor, both characters<br>No Middle Ending                  | 100-172                                  |
| 3                  | "Auuu", growl<br>Vivid vocabulary in dialogue<br>Interchange @ cheese                 | Emotions<br>Descriptive phrases   | Explain trick: moon substitute for cheese, Build suspense | Set scene-B<br>Middle marker<br>Ending                        | 172-272<br>(172 is mean number of words) |
| 4                  | Drama of characters<br>Use Switch for drama<br>Much colorful dialogue/<br>interchange | Sounds- [of water] Use voice<br>Many descriptive vivid phrases, metaphors | Build suspense toward climax, ending                      | B, M, E<br>Develop multiple scenes                            | 272+                                     |

The Colorful Dialogue category ranged from low--no use of quotation and dialogue—to high, where the characters' dialogue was dramatic, often with characteristic phrasing for each character, lively

interchange between characters developed through the dialogue, and code switching to emphasize a switch between characters. The Colorful Language category ranged from bland phrases or sentences with no use of adjectives or adverbs to vivid phrases, metaphors, and descriptive elements such as sound effects (i.e., water swishing).

The Plot category ranged from not explaining the pivotal motif of the plot, that is, not explaining the lamb's trick on the coyote, to building suspense toward the climax where the coyote realized he had been tricked and the ending where the coyote went away. In the Story Structure category, the range varied from no beginning, middle, or ending in the retelling to fully developed beginning, middle marker, and ending with multiple scenes. The Fluency category consisted of a low of 0-100 words in the retelling, to a high of 272+ words, with category 3 as the mean level.

### Examples

Two story retellings will be presented to illustrate a student's effective story retelling with multiple code switches and a student's less effective story retelling with few code switches. Carlos' effective narrative had 8 language switches which he used to develop colorful dialogue, colorful language, plot, and story structure, see Carlos' transcript. He is a 2nd grade student who exhibits intermediate ELP 3/SLP 4. His story retelling had 203 words (rated as 3), with 132 Spanish and 71 English words.

---

Carlos' retelling of *Borreguita and the coyote*

Había un farmero que tenía una borreguita and he called it a lamb. He tied him up in a stick y después vino un coyote y dijo "Grrrrr! Borreguita estas bien rica!"

"No me comes! No me comes!" (high voice)

"Por que no?"

"No estoy gordita, debo de comer todo ya. Esta mañana me ves," (high voice).

"OK. Grrrrr! Mañana te veo." Híjole como se va a poner gordita esa "Grrrrr!"

Y dice “No me comas! No me comas! Mi jefe siempre come el queso en sus tacos.”

“But where I’m going to get the cheese?”

“Aquí en un laguito.”

“I’ll meet you there.”

“I’ll meet you there,” (high voice)

“When?”

“When the moon is high. Don’t you see the cheese?” (high voice)

“Sí, Sí, sí. No me hagas un truco esta vez.” Y se iba nadando y nadó y nadó y la luna se fue más y más. Then he opened his wide mouth. Shhh! Whoosh! It was a lot of water and he drank a lot of water. When he came back, the borreguita was gone. “Auuuu! auuuu!”

Y el coyote nunca la va a venir a agarrar, la dejó en paz y la borreguita estaba feliz.

---

Carlos employed language switches as he developed colorful dialogue. He opened the story in Spanish and then switched to English to explain the term “borreguita.” The next switch [to Spanish] appears to be a topic shift where he emphasizes the beginning of the plot—a coyote came up to the lamb and growled at him. In the ensuing dialogue between the lamb and coyote, Carlos adopts a low snarling voice for the coyote and a high squeaky voice for the little lamb.

Carlos next switches to English to emphasize a topic shift and plot development. This section of the story involves the trick where the borreguita is going to entice the coyote to the lake in hopes of eating cheese (which is actually the reflection of the moon on the water). The coyote here questions in English while the borreguita answers in Spanish. The code switches are used for stylistic purposes to develop colorful dialogue. He is using language switches for characterization; the switches are part of the drama.

Carlos again switches to Spanish for stylistic purposes to signal plot development and characterization. The characters are now at the lake and the coyote warns the lamb not to play a trick on him again, “No me hagas un truco esta vez.” Carlos again switches to English to emphasize a key point in the plot: the coyote opens his mouth and instead of

cheese, he has a lot of water. Carlos switches to Spanish to signal the ending of the story.

Carlos used code switching to develop colorful language throughout the narrative. He used the rhythm and phrasing of each language for literary effect. He used parallel construction in Spanish in the following examples, “y nadó y nadó,” and “más y más,” to emphasize the rhythm. His phrase in English, “When the moon is high,” has a melodic cadence. He also used code switching for phrases of cultural untranslatability, for example, “bien rica,” (meaning tasty rather than rich) “híjole,” (a contemporary Mexican phrase). Rather than using code switching as a deficit to retrieve an unknown lexical item, Carlos showed dual language proficiency by switching between English and Spanish vocabulary, for example, “cheese” and “queso,” “borreguita” and “lamb,” “moon” and “la luna.”

Carlos employed code switching as an additive resource in discourse marking, that is, emphasizing the structural organization of the discourse, and narrative construction. The code switching appeared to be a stylistic device that he used to develop characterization in the dialogue, colorful language, plot, and story structure. Overall, Carlos appeared to use code switching to give zest in his retelling, that is, for emphasis and to cue the listener to search for additional nuance (Fina, 1989).

In his less effective story retelling, Kevin code switched infrequently, three switches, and utilized code switching for limited purposes, that is, highlighting the story structure, see Kevin’s transcript. He is a 2nd grade student who exhibits intermediate ELP 4/low SLP 2. His story retelling had 229 words (rated as 3), with 219 Spanish and 10 English words.

---

Kevin’s retelling of *Borreguita and the coyote*

Había unos muchachos que tenían una borreguita y vivían en una casa chiquita y luego el muchacho puso la amarraron la borreguita en.

Y luego vino un coyote y dijo, “Y te voy a comer.” Luego la borreguita dijo que, “No me puedes comer todavía. Déjame comer todo

el zacate que hay aquí y luego ya me puedo dejar comer.” Y luego el coyote dijo, “Está bien, regreso cuando estés más gordita.”

Then la borreguita dijo, el coyote dijo que “Ya estás más gorda ya te voy a comer ahora mismo.”

Y luego el coyote se fue, nadó y mordió el queso y le puso agua primero en toda su boca llena y luego se andaba ahogando y luego se fue pa’afuera y luego se secó y luego dijo que la borreguita lo trickó. When he reached it, the little lamb was gone. Y luego el dijo, “Auuuu!”

---

As can be seen in Kevin’s retelling, his narrative is flat, mainly listing the events in a sequential fashion. The narrative does not develop colorful dialogue or use colorful language. Though he uses code switching sparingly, he does not appear to use it haphazardly. Rather, Kevin appears to use code switching as a discourse element to signal story structure. He opens the story in Spanish, switches to English for one word, and then switches back to Spanish. He introduces the middle part of the narrative with “Then,” emphasizing that this is the point where the coyote comes back to eat the borreguita.

Near the end of the narrative, he switches to English for one sentence, and then switches back to Spanish. He precedes the sentence with trickó, the word stem “trick” in English and the Spanish marker for past tense “ó,” thus, using word play with both languages for emphasis. The code-switched English sentence marks the turning point in the plot where the coyote realizes he has been tricked. The coyote arrives at the shore, and the little lamb has gone.

### Data Analysis

Pearson  $r$  coefficients were used to determine the relationship between the following variables: 1) the number of Switches from language to language, 2) the Grade level, 3) ELP, 4) SLP, 5) the total number of Words, 6) the number of Spanish Words, 7) the number of English Words, and the Narrative Elements in the story retellings, 8) Colorful Dialogue, 9) Colorful Language, 10) Plot, 11) Story Structure, and 12) Fluency.



## Results

The results of the study indicated that code switches (English-Spanish, Spanish-English) in the 60 students' story retellings are positively correlated with variables related to enhanced narrative skills, that is, Colorful Dialogue ( $r = .38, p < .01$ ), Colorful Language ( $r = .43, p < .001$ ), Plot Development ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ), Story Structure ( $r = .43, p < .001$ ), and Words ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ). These results indicate that the use of language switches was associated with verbal fluency and literary skills.

Code switching did not appear to be related to ELP, SLP, or both the English and Spanish language proficiency of the 60 elementary Mexican-American bilingual participants. Furthermore, code switching did not appear to be related to grade level or by group: low and intermediate English proficiency 1st-2nd graders, low and intermediate English proficiency 3rd-5th graders.

The mean number of switches was 8 and the range was from 0-34. At the low end of the range with 0 switches, a grade 1 male student with ELP 3/SLP 4 produced his story retelling all in English, and a grade 1 female student with ELP 3/SLP 1 produced her story retelling all in Spanish. The high end of the range was 34 switches produced by a grade 4-5 male student with ELP 4/SLP 5. Three students in grade 2 with similar ELP/SLP exhibited different frequencies of switches: a female student with ELP 1/SLP 5 produced 4 switches, a male student ELP 1/SLP 5 produced 33 switches, and a female student ELP 1/SLP 5 produced 14 switches. Overall, there did not appear to be any pattern of bilingual proficiency that related to amount of code switching. Moreover, balanced bilinguals did not produce any particular patterns of code switching.

## Conclusion and Discussion

Although prior code-switching studies have examined syntactic processes and communicative functions, this study focused on children's use of code switching for academic purposes. By understanding students' use of code switching in an academic context, we may be able to enhance their linguistic diversity and literacy development. Academic

areas in which this knowledge plays an important role are English-Spanish vocabulary development and reading comprehension (García, 1998; Nagy, García, Durgunoglu, & Hancitt-Bhatt, 1993). Reading comprehension research for second language learners suggests that children who have a large vocabulary possess multiple meanings for a vocabulary item, and when they encounter a word in a context, they are then able to select the appropriate meaning (Qian, 1999). Students, thus, have greater possibility of higher reading comprehension than students who do not have access to multiple word meanings. Using code switching might provide students with strategies to access multiple meanings for lexical items across both languages.

Results from this study suggest that there is a positive relationship between code-switched story retelling, oral language usage, and enhanced narrative skills. The narrative skills that oral story retelling provides are consistent with attributes of written text, discourse structure awareness, characterization, and thematic development. Code-switched story retelling, moreover, provides students the opportunity to gain experience with the linguistic, psycholinguistic, and social-communicative aspects of two languages and to signal meaning by shifts in language. Code-switched story retelling appears to be an untapped resource. Teachers should perhaps consider code switching as a viable academic phenomenon and explore ways for bilingual students to use this activity to enhance verbal skills and reading development.

### References

- Aardema, V. (1991). *Borreguita and the coyote: A tale from Ayutla, Mexico*. [Translated and retold from *Tales from Jalisco, Mexico*, Vol. XXXV by Howard T. Wheeler, published by The American Folklore society, 1943.] New York: Dragonfly Books. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Aardema, V. (1993). *Borreguita y el coyote: Un cuento de Ayutla, México*. New York: Scholastic.
- Aguirre, A. (1985). An experimental study of code alternation. *International journal of the sociology of language*, 59, 59-82.

- Becker, K. R. (1997). Spanish/English bilingual code-switching: A syncretic model. *Bilingual Review*, 22 (1), 3-31.
- Dearholt, D. W., & Valdes-Fallis, G. (1978) Toward a probabilistic automata model of some aspects of code-switching. *Language in Society*, 7, 411-420.
- DeAvila, E. A., & Duncan, S. E. (1994) *Language assessment scales, English, Spanish*. Monterey, CA: CTB Macmillan/McGraw Hill.
- DeAvila, E. A., & Duncan, S. E. (1994) *Language assessment scales: Scoring and interpretation manual, English, Spanish*. Monterey, CA: CTB Macmillan/McGraw Hill.
- De Mejía, A. (1998). Bilingual storytelling, code switching, discourse control, and learning opportunities. *TESOL Journal*, 7(6), 4-10.
- Fina, A. (1989). Code switching: Grammatical and functional explanations. *Rassegna italiana di linguistica applicata*, 21: 107-140.
- García, G. E. (1998). Mexican-American bilingual students' metacognitive reading strategies: What's transferred, unique, problematic? *National Reading Conference Yearbook*, 47, 253-263.
- Goldstein, B. C.; Harris, K. C.; Klein, M. D. (1993) Assessment of Oral Storytelling Abilities of Latino Junior High School Students with Learning handicaps. READING comprehension-United States; STORYTELLING-United States: MEXICAN American students. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, Feb 93, Vol. 26 Issue 2.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1976). The sociolinguistic significance of conversational codeswitching. In J. Cook-Gumperz & H. J. Gumperz (Eds). *Papers on language and context* (pp. 1-46). Berkeley: University of California.
- Jacobson, R. (1990). Socioeconomic status as a factor in the selection of encoding strategies in mixed discourse. In R. Jacobson (Ed.), *Codeswitching as a worldwide phenomenon* (pp. 111-139). New York: Peter Lang.
- Jax, V. A. (1988). Understanding school language proficiency through the assessment of story construction. *Schools and the culturally diverse exceptional student: Promising practices and future directions*. Paper presented at the Ethnic and Multicultural Symposium, Dallas, TX.
- Nagy, W. E., Garcia, G. E., Durgunoglu, A., Hancin-Bhatt, B. (1993). Spanish-English bilingual children's use and recognition of

- cognates in English reading. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 25, 241-259.
- Olmedo-Williams, I. (1981). *Functions of code-switching in a Spanish/English bilingual classroom*. Paper presented at the first Delaware Symposium on Language Studies.
- Qian, D. D. (1999). Assessing the roles of depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 56(2), 282-307.
- Roth, F. P., & Speece, D. L. (1996). Unresolved mysteries: How do metalinguistic and narrative skills connect with early reading? *Journal of Special Education*, 30(3).
- Scotton, C. M. (1993). Common and uncommon ground: Social and structural factors in code-switching. *Language in Society*, 22, 475-503.
- Shin, S. J., & Milroy, L. (2000). Conversational codeswitching among Korean-English bilingual children. *The International Journal of Bilingualism*, 4(3), 351-383.
- Zentella, A. C. (1990). Integrating qualitative and quantitative methods in the study of bilingual code switching. In E. H. Bendix (Ed.), *The use of linguistics*, vol. 583, (75-92). New York: New York Academy of Sciences.

***Ruth R. Becker is a faculty member at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Kenosha, Wisconsin.***





## **Investigating Inferences: Constructing Meaning From Expository Texts**

Mary C.  
McMackin  
Lesley  
University

Suenita  
Lawrence  
Newton  
Public Schools

*Generating inferences during and after reading is a complex task; yet, one that is essential for complete understanding of texts. This report highlights the types of inferences four students in grades 2-5 drew while constructing meaning from expository passages. An analysis of their think alouds and recommendations for comprehension instruction are included.*

IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE CONFERENCING with students who are reading a text about mountain gorillas. The third paragraph in the text begins, "Mountain gorillas live in groups" (Thompson, 1998, p. 4). At this point, you stop and ask each student to tell what s/he is thinking about while reading this sentence. Since you are conducting individual conferences, none of the children hears what the others are saying. Here are the students' responses:

*George responds: "That's kind of making me think about whales because whales always are in groups called pods."*

*Lee reflects: "Now I'm thinking how many are in a group?"*

*Michelle answers: "So there's like the black group of the—a black group, a brown, a white, a tan."*

*Keith states: "All the mountain gorillas live together."*

What do these responses reveal about how the students interact with texts to construct meaning? George went well beyond the author's words and combined information from his own knowledge base with information in the text to make text-to-world connections. Lee posed a question. Michelle listed the types of gorillas there could be, although the book gave no indication that these exist. Keith's responded with words that were close to the words used by the author. He maintained the author's original meaning. Yet, George, Lee and Michelle went beyond the author's intended meaning. They put pieces together to create a richer understanding of the text. When readers supply implicit information, they generate inferences.

Inferences occur, according to Van Den Broek, Fletcher and Risen (1993) "when the reader activates information that is evoked by, yet goes beyond, the information that is provided explicitly in the text" (p. 170). Put in a slightly different way, Devine (1987), quoting a middle school teacher, described inferences as, "things the writer didn't say but which we know are probably true" (p. 116). Notably, Keene and Zimmermann (1997) added another dimension to this understanding. They noted that the inferences readers make are "circumscribed" by the

reader's background knowledge and the words the author uses. They remind us that the words carry with them "constraints," which limit the range of possible/plausible responses to any one piece of writing. In sum, readers make inferences by blending their background knowledge and experience with information from the text. They must "read between the lines" and go beyond the literal meaning. Furthermore, they must keep in mind their responsibility to maintain the author's intended message, by balancing their prior knowledge with explicit information in the text. It is this balance that leads to appropriate inferencing.

### **What Factors Contribute to Successful Inferencing?**

We know that generating inferences during or after reading is a complex task; yet, one that is essential for complete understanding of texts. Students are expected to demonstrate their ability to make inferences not only in authentic reading situations but also on high stakes standardized tests. Students are unlikely to do well on these tests unless they can make inferences: predict, draw conclusions, elaborate, explain, make analogies, and so forth.

Over the past several years, a number of empirical studies have provided us with information about this process. Trabasso and Magliano (1996), for example, conducted a study with eight college students and found that the vast majority of inferences made by these accomplished readers were explanations, as opposed to predictions, elaborations, or associations. Although it was generally thought that reading was a predictive activity, it now appears that this is not usually the case. Accomplished readers tend to construct meaning by actively interpreting the meaning and putting it into their own words.

Cote (1994) reported on another study by Trabasso and Magliano (1994) in which they found that readers used background knowledge and information from earlier parts of the text to explain and understand what was just read. Most of us would probably expect that to happen. Interestingly, however, McCormick (1992) noted that students who bring too much of their background knowledge and experience to the reading situation may use this prior knowledge rather than the information provided in the text to construct meaning. In doing so, they may move



further away from the author's intended meaning rather than closer to it. She cautions that either "underutilization" or "over reliance" on prior knowledge can be problematic. Tierney and Pearson (1981) identify these types of responses as "too text based" and "too reader based," respectively.

Not only do students need to balance information in the text with their prior knowledge, they need to integrate these ideas effectively. Yuill and Oakhill, (1991) found that "the skilled children seemed to integrate ideas and construct a coherent mental model, whereas the less-skilled comprehenders tended to generate a representation closer to the verbatim text" (p. 111). It appears, then, from the body of existing research, more accomplished and less accomplished readers rely on different strategies while trying to comprehend texts.

### **Developing a Common Vocabulary**

It is clear that there are many different types of inferences that readers rely upon to construct meaning from text. In this section of the paper, we will highlight some of the strategies the students used, provide a definition for each, and give an example of how students used these strategies. When teaching comprehension skills, especially inferencing skills, it may be helpful for teachers and students to speak a common language – to share a terminology. Having a familiar language can make some of the abstract strategies more concrete.

As indicated in the introduction, George, Lee, Michelle, and Keith had very different responses to the same sentence: "Mountain gorillas live in groups" (Thompson, 1998, p. 4). Each student used a distinct strategy to make sense of the text.

George responded, "That's kind of making me think about whales because whales always are in groups called pods." In this example, George made a *text-to-world connection* by linking new information about gorillas to his prior knowledge about whales. Lee responded, "Now I'm thinking how many are in a group?" In this case, Lee *asked a question*, a strategy that helped him to process the new information. Michelle responded, "So there's like the black group of the—a black



Sentence: "Then he decided to be a painter," (Vázquez, 1998, p. 10).

Response: Maybe once he decided he wanted to be – he wanted to be a painter he probably would start taking classes and then he got really good at it so he became famous.

***Draw conclusions:*** to provide a rationale for something; sometimes signaled by "so," "because," "since," or "therefore."

Sentence: "They made a fire to keep warm and to use for cooking," (Glasscock, 1998, p. 6).

Response: That's telling me that they didn't have stuff like stoves and stuff to cook stuff and they had to do it by fire.

***Paraphrase:*** to rephrase the sentence, using similar words, but preserving the author's intended meaning.

Sentence: "They made a fire to keep warm and to use for cooking," (Glasscock, 1998, p. 6).

Response: It's just telling that they made a fire to keep warm and they used the fire to cook, too.

***Elaborate:*** to add new information to what is presented in the text.

Sentence: "Some die because of pollution," (Thompson, 1998, p. 3).

Response: Some die of pollution because they might eat it and it might be toxic and they might die.

***Make text-to-self connections:*** to link an idea in the text to personal experiences.

Sentence: “Many people go on whale watches to see them,” (Thompson, 1998, p. 7).

Response: Cause like a couple years ago when I went to Martha’s Vineyard my grandpa, ma and my mom went on a whale watch...

***Make text-to-text connections:*** to link an idea in the text to idea(s) in other text (from the same book, or a different text.)

Sentence: “They made a fire to keep warm and to use for cooking,” (Glasscock, 1998, p. 6).

Response: They made a fire to keep warm and to cook food that their father hunted. The student connected information in sentence 20 with information from sentence 11: “He farmed and hunted for food to feed his family,” Glasscock, 1998, p. 4).

***Make text-to-world connections:*** to link an idea in the text with background knowledge.

Sentence: “Others die because they are losing the habitat they live in,” (Thompson, 1998, p. 3).

Response: Because people are putting more new homes in a new town and so the animals don’t have places to live.

***Affective connections:*** to link an idea in the text with personal feelings about that idea.

Sentence: “They were hunted for their skins,” (Thompson, 1998, p. 4).

Response: And I think of how nice their skins would be and how nice it would look.

In the remainder of this article, we will explore some of the strategies four students in grades 2-5 used to construct meaning from print. In order to do this, we will begin by providing a context for this investigation.

## Subjects

The four students we will highlight in this article were participants in a larger study of twelve students (three each from grades 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th). The original study investigated the types of inferences students made while orally reading expository texts. Students were chosen for this study if they met the following two criteria: they were reading on a low fourth grade level according to the *Informal Reading-Thinking Inventory* (Yuill and Oakhill, 1995), and their teachers confirmed that this was an accurate determination. Having everyone read on the same level allowed us to examine responses from more accomplished second graders, from students who were reading “on or about grade level,” and from slightly less accomplished fifth graders. Six boys and six girls participated in the original study.

## Materials

Van Den Broek, Fletcher, and Risdén (1993) noted that longer passages tend to invoke more inferences than shorter passages. In addition, they acknowledged the results from studies in which “experimenter generated” texts were used and suggested that these studies may not “generalize to normal reading situations” (p. 173). In order to provide students with the optimum materials for creating inferences, we decided to have them read passages from longer, authentic texts. For this study, we used four *Pair-It Books™*: *Gail Devers: A Runner's Dream*; *Laura Ingalls Wilder: An Author's Story*; *Animals In Danger*; and *Diego Rivera: An Artist's Life*. Each passage ranged from 41 to 48 sentences in length, with the average length of 45 sentences.

Following a procedure used by Hansen (1981) and McCormick (1992), literal and inferential comprehension questions were presented to the participants at the end of each session. There were three literal and three inferential questions. Each question was written on a separate index card.

## **Data Collection**

After spending time modeling the procedures that would be used in this study, one of the researchers met with each student once a week for four weeks. For the past two years, this researcher spent one day a week working in the building on a grant-based project, so the students were familiar with her.

During each session, students read aloud approximately 45 sentences from the beginning of each book. The children had not read the books before. Using a think aloud format similar to one used by Trabasso and Magliano (1996), the children read each sentence and then stopped to tell what they were thinking.

Running records were kept to ensure that comprehension and decoding skills were not confounded. In other words, we wanted to be certain that poor decoding skills would not adversely affect the think alouds (Cromer, 1970 as cited in Yuill, 1991, p. 29). In addition, no time limits were given. This was done to encourage deeper processing of ideas and “to increase the likelihood of inference generation” (Van Den Broek, Fletcher, and Riden, 1993, p. 175). Each session was tape-recorded and protocols were transcribed.

## **Taking a Closer Look**

It was interesting to discover the range of strategies the students used both within and across texts and the impact these strategies had on comprehension. Although twelve students were involved in the original study, we will focus on four students in this article. We chose to highlight the protocols of these students because their think alouds proved to be fairly consistent within and across texts and because each one approached the texts in unique ways. We will begin with George. (All names are pseudonyms).

## George

George was a quiet, serious, reflective third grader who was able to integrate ideas from different texts. He also integrated text ideas with his experience and prior knowledge. He flexibly used *many* effective comprehension strategies including text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections (Keene and Zimmermann, 1997; Harvey, 1998).

Notice how George used *visualization* in the following verbal protocol, using the book *Animals in Danger* (Thompson, 1998). Sentence 10 reads, “Long ago, there were many mountain gorillas,” (p. 4). George responded, “Right there I had a picture in my head of gorillas like on mountains and stuff.” He knew that he should have a “picture in his head” while reading.

It is interesting to see how George used multiple strategies within and across texts. He pondered, drew conclusions, confirmed predictions, made relevant connections, explained what he was reading in his own words and often integrated several of these strategies at one time. His ability to integrate experiences, knowledge, and text information was evident in the following examples: (S = sentence number from text; G = George’s think aloud)

### **Pondered: (while reading about Diego Rivera)**

S# 1: “Diego Rivera was born in 1886 in a town called Guanajuato,” (Vázquez, 1998, p. 3).

G: I was thinking what his life was like back in 1886.

### **Drew a conclusion: (while reading about Gail Devers)**

S# 40: “Coach Kersee told Gail to watch the United States women’s track team carefully,” (Mead, 1998, p. 10).

G: Like she could watch them so she could learn more.

**Confirmed a prediction: (while reading about Diego Rivera)**

S# 19: “He drew on the chairs, on the walls, on the floor, or on paper,” (Vázquez, 1998, p. 6).

G: That’s telling me my prediction was right.

**Made text-to-world connections: (*Animals in Danger*)**

S# 17: “Mountain gorillas live in groups,” (Thompson, 1998, p. 4).

G: That’s kind of making me think about whales because whales always are in groups called pods.

**Made a text-to-text connection: (*Animals in Danger*)**

S# 28 & 29: “New laws were passed to keep the whales safe, but some people have not obeyed those laws. That is why there are few Beluga whales left today,” (Thompson, 1998, p. 7).

S# 40: “Laws were made to try to stop the hunters from killing elephants,” (Thompson, 1998, p. 8).

G: That’s going to be like Beluga whales because they’re endangered too. [He remembered and integrated the information from sentences 28 and 29 to construct a rich mental model at this point in the reading.]

**Explained a sentence and made a text-to-self connection: (*Laura Ingalls Wilder*)**

S# 40: “It [their dugout house] was built into the side of a hill by a creek,” (Glasscock, 1998, p. 11).

G: That’s saying it wasn’t underground but in a hill. There might have been like a doorway and then they dug



out part of the hill and that's where they lived – but I don't think that I'd like it in there because part of the hill might collapse on you.

Consistent with other studies, George relied heavily on explanations as a way to construct meaning. In addition, he seemed to make what we termed “*affective connections*” while reading. For example, after reading, “In 1906, some of his [Diego Rivera] paintings were put in an art show,” (Vázquez, 1998, p. 12) George responded, “That’s making me think that how good it might make him feel.” One of our favorite responses came when George read, “His [Diego Rivera] parents were very happy when the twins were born,” (Vázquez, 1998, p. 3). George responded, “Right there I was thinking who wouldn’t be happy?” He easily connected emotions and responded personally to what he read. On the comprehension questions, George correctly answered 8.5 of the 12 factual questions and 11 of the 12 inference questions (81.3 percent accuracy). It may be that his ability to apply various strategies enhanced his comprehension of the text, especially when higher-order thinking was required.

## Lee

Lee was a curious fourth grader. His responses to the text were generally in the form of questions. Many think-alouds started with “Now I’m wondering...” or “Now I’m thinking if...”

Lee possessed a great deal of background knowledge about three out of the four book topics. Prior to reading *Animals in Danger* (Thompson, 1998), each student was asked, “What do you know about mammals?” Lee responded, “They’re warm blooded animals and, well, they give birth to mammals alive.” When asked if he knew the meaning of “habitat,” he answered, “Yeah, habitats are like places where they live that like it’s well a good habitat would be like a place where they don’t have enemies.”

Lee’s strategy of asking questions throughout the think-alouds was at times helpful, and at times ineffective. In *Gail Devers* (Mead, 1998, p. 6), sentence 27 reads, “She was still training on her own, without a

coach.” Lee responded, “I’m thinking did she become the best without a coach?” In this case, Lee recalled information from earlier in the passage (sentence 4) and combined it with information from sentence 27. Sentence 4 reads, “This is the story of a woman who has always wanted to be the best,” (p. 3). His question reflects an understanding that there is a connection between these sentences.

At times, Lee asked irrelevant questions that took him away from the authors’ intended meaning. For example, in *Diego Rivera* (Vázquez, 1998), sentence 29 reads, “When Diego was ten years old, he started using paints to add colors to his drawings” (p. 10). Lee responded, “Now I’m thinking how did they make paint?” Lee became concerned with a tangential issue, which is a diversion from the author’s intended point – that Diego Rivera primarily drew as a child, but then began to paint at age ten.

Unlike the other students, Lee consistently asked questions and pondered about the vast majority of sentences in the texts. This was by far Lee’s most often used strategy. He used it almost to the exclusion of other strategies.

Lee was successful at answering the literal comprehension questions that followed the reading of each book. He scored 87.5 percent accuracy on these questions. He was less successful with the inference questions; he scored 62.5 percent accuracy. This suggests to us that his questions may have distracted him from seeing the authors’ intended inferences in some cases. It may be helpful for Lee to understand that asking questions is only one of many available strategies to use to construct meaning from texts. He also needs to focus his questions so that they are always enriching the mental model that he is constructing.

## **Michelle**

Michelle was a gregarious second grader who loved to talk and to express her ideas. She was a very active reader who asked questions and made predictions. She sometimes drew conclusions (accurately and inaccurately) and connected ideas from one part of the text with current ideas. She seldom paraphrased while reading. Strikingly, she relied

heavily on her experiences and background knowledge. In many instances, her overreliance on schema pulled her away from the author's intended meaning, rather than drawing her deeper into the information in the text (McCormick, 1992).

As noted in the introductory paragraph, Michelle read about the mountain gorillas living in groups and then responded that she was thinking there would be all different groups of gorillas: "a black group, a brown, a white, a tan group." An illustration in the book showed a group of black gorillas, but there is no indication anywhere (text or illustrations) that gorillas may be anything but black. Her reliance on her own ideas may have distracted her from the real content of the book. She seemed to add her own interpretation to the text fairly consistently, as the following example from *Animals in Danger* (Thompson, 1998) illustrates:

S# 14: "These gorillas live high up in the mountains of central Africa" (p. 4).

M: Cause they usually just live in Africa cause it was hot and they [live] – I think maybe – Asia and maybe some in Japan – I don't know.

There isn't anything in the book (illustrations or print) to suggest that it was hot high in the mountains of central Africa, nor did the text refer to other countries in any way.

It was interesting to notice that Michelle's imagination also influenced her response to the comprehension questions. In one case, she read about Gail Devers, an Olympian track athlete (Mead, 1998). After reading, Michelle was asked the following question:

Why couldn't Gail train with other classmates when she was in high school? Readers could piece together the correct answer from the following two sentences:

S# 15: "Gail's high school didn't have a track team" (p. 4).

S#16: “There was no one to teach her about running and winning races” (p. 4).

Michelle, however, answered the comprehension question in this rather unique way:

because they didn’t want to and because some people really, really didn’t like her at all cause maybe she was – maybe they were mean to her and maybe she had glasses...

Again, there was no evidence in the text to support the idea that Gail wore glasses or that she was not liked.

You may have noticed that Michelle often included “because,” “cause,” or “so” in her verbal protocols. The transcription of the fourth (last) session of this study indicated that Michelle used these words in 24 of the 48 think alouds. It may be that she was trying to understand the text by drawing conclusions and attaching a reason (or cause) to what was happening. Although Michelle was able to offer reasonable explanations and drew appropriate conclusions in many cases, attaching reasons or making personal connections seemed in many cases to force her to come up with explanations that sometimes relied more heavily on her experience or imagination than on evidence from the text. Answers to the comprehension questions revealed that Michelle correctly answered seven of the twelve factual questions and four of the twelve inference questions (45.8 percent accuracy).

## **Keith**

Keith was an active reader who attempted to make sense of the text by using a number of strategies.

In the following example, Keith provided an explanation for the sentence and integrated this with his background knowledge. Sentence 37 of *Animals in Danger* (Thompson, 1998) reads, “African elephants used to be hunted for their ivory tusks” (p. 8). Keith responded with, “So I think their ivory tusks might could be used for spears or something –

like the Indians would kill – like the Native Americans would kill them to get this stuff.”

He drew conclusions in the following example from *Animals in Danger* (Thompson, 1998). The text about mountain gorillas reads as follows:

S# 19: “Each group has a male leader” (p. 4).

S# 20: “He tells the group where to go and what to do” (p. 4).

S# 21: “He also protects them” (p. 4).

K: So he’s probably the stronger one and the most wise one I think.

Keith was successful in putting together the information gleaned from these three sentences and drawing a logical conclusion.

Not only did Keith draw conclusions, he also elaborated to construct a clear mental model for himself. This is evident in the following example. Sentence 22 from *Diego Rivera* (Vázquez, 1998) reads, “Sometimes he drew on the walls of his bedroom” (p. 8). Keith’s think aloud was, “So he might draw – instead of wallpaper he could draw on his walls to make it look like wallpaper.” In this example, Keith communicated an idea that was an elaboration of the idea presented in the text.

Many of Keith’s responses revealed that he was aware of the new information he was taking in. For example, in sentence 7 of *Laura Ingalls Wilder* (Glasscock, 1998), the text states, “On February 7, 1867, Laura Ingalls was born in the big woods of Wisconsin” (p. 4). Keith reflected, “So now I know she lived in Wisconsin.” Sentence 8 goes on to read, “Life there was hard” (p. 4). Keith responded, “...so now I know she’s been working a lot – she must have worked a lot.”

Keith's use of a variety of strategies seemed to have helped with his comprehension. He answered both the literal questions and the inference questions with 91 percent accuracy, correctly answering 11 of the 12 literal questions and 11 of the 12 inferential questions.

### **Defining "Reading"**

At the end of the study, the students were given a short survey. The last item on the survey was designed to see if the students' use of strategies matched what they thought good readers did while reading. In a sense, we were trying to determine how the students defined "reading." The survey item looked like this:

*Directions:* Below are some strategies that readers use while reading. Decide which strategy would be most important for students to use to help them understand what they are reading. Place #1 on the line before this strategy. Look for the next most important strategy. Place #2 before this strategy. Keep going until you put #5 in front of the least important strategy to use.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask yourself questions about what you are reading.

\_\_\_\_\_ Think about how the information in the book is similar to or different from information you already know.

\_\_\_\_\_ Refer to the book, remember the language the author uses and try to remember exactly what the author wrote.

\_\_\_\_\_ Make predictions, using your own experiences and information from the book.

\_\_\_\_\_ Supply a reason, purpose or cause for what happened in the book.

Lee selected the first strategy as being the most important: *Ask yourself questions about what you are reading* and the second one as

least effective: *Think about how the information in the book is similar to or different from information you already know*. Interestingly, the strategy Lee employed most often was the one he identified as being most important to readers (asking questions).

Michelle identified the third strategy as most important: *Refer to the book, remember the language the author uses and try to remember exactly what the author wrote*. The least effective, according to Michelle was the first one on the list: *Ask yourself questions about what you're are reading*. Michelle, who often went beyond the literal meaning of the text, thought that good readers worked hard at remembering the exact language of the author (the third statement, which she rated "most important"). Moreover, even though she frequently assigned a cause in her think alouds, she identified this as the next to least important strategy.

George thought the most important strategy was the fourth one on the list: *Make predictions, using your own experiences and information from the book*. According to George, the least effective strategy was the last one: *Supply a reason, purpose or cause for what happened in the book*. Keith agreed with George on the most and least effective strategies, although they varied slightly on the potential value of the others, as Figure 1 indicates. Although they felt that supplying a reason was the least effective strategy, they often used this strategy in their think alouds. George thought that remembering the author's language was the second most important strategy. However, he rarely paraphrased in this think alouds.

It was interesting for us to note that in most cases, the students did not use the strategies that they thought good readers employ while reading.

| George | Lee | Michelle | Keith |
|--------|-----|----------|-------|
| 3      | 1   | 5        | 2     |
| 4      | 5   | 2        | 3     |
| 2      | 2   | 1        | 4     |
| 1      | 3   | 3        | 1     |
| 5      | 4   | 4        | 5     |

Figure 1. Students' Responses to Final Survey Question

Where does all this information lead us? How can we use the information gleaned in this inquiry project to inform our instruction? What implications can be drawn? Based on this study and empirical studies from the recent past, it seems reasonable to offer the following ideas for consideration:

- Engage in teacher and student think alouds, where the teacher or student models his/her thoughts and strategies.
- Label each strategy so that all students and teachers speak a common language. In other words, if you are modeling “drawing conclusions,” let the students know you are drawing conclusions.
- Introduce the Question Answer Relationship (QAR) model designed by Taffy Raphael (1986) to help readers understand that there are four different levels of questions, from literal to creative: “Right There,” “Think and Search,” “Author and You,” and “On Your Own.”
- Activate background knowledge, but also emphasize the role that background knowledge plays in comprehension. Although we may often assume that students are not successful because they do not have adequate background knowledge or that schema they do have has not been activated, McCormick (1992) demonstrated that an over reliance on background knowledge may be equally problematic.
- Encourage students to visualize what is happening while they are reading.
- Let students know that you expect them to go beyond the literal words on the page and model how you do this. Research by Yuill and Oakhill (1991) suggested that less skilled readers can make inferences, but they need to understand why it is important to do so (p. 74). Relying on information explicitly presented in texts may leave students with “inert knowledge,” which cannot be actively applied in reasoning or problem-solving situations (Cote, 1994).
- Model each strategy with students over an extended period of time.
- Remember that not all strategies are appropriate for all sentences. On a case-by-case basis, choose a strategy that will help students to process the text and then encourage students to



monitor their own comprehension by gradually applying the strategies independently.

### **Final Thoughts**

Although this study revealed some interesting findings, they are certainly not conclusive in nature. The number of students and the number of protocols in this study were small. In addition, the findings in the study were based primarily on how the students responded in the think aloud situation and are somewhat limited by this feature. Long and Bourg (1996), for example, stated that “the need to provide a verbal report may lead readers to process the text more elaboratively than they would otherwise” (p. 330). Although it is important to recognize these limitations, the protocols shed new light on the range of strategies elementary grade students use to construct meaning. By making these strategies known to students, perhaps we can help enhance comprehension of expository texts.

### **References**

- Cote, N. et al (1995). Children’s use of prior knowledge and experience in making sense of informational text. ERIC ED 385 395.
- Cromer, W. (1970). The difference model: A new explanation for some reading difficulties. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 61, 471-483.
- Devine, T.G. (1987). *Teaching study skills* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc. (p. 116).
- Glasscock, S. (1998). *Laura Ingalls Wilder: An author’s story*. Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughn.
- Hansen, J. (1981). The effects of inference training and practice on young children’s reading comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 16(3), 391-416.
- Harvey, S. (1998). *Nonfiction matters: Reading, writing, and research in grades 3-8*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Keene, E.O., & Zimmermann, S. (1997). *Mosaic of thought: Teaching comprehension in a reader’s workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Long, D.L., & Bourg, T. (1996). Thinking aloud: Telling a story about a story. *Discourse Processes*, 21, 329-339.
- McCormick, S. (1992). Disabled readers' erroneous responses to inferential comprehension questions: Description and analysis. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 27(1), 55-77.
- Mead, K. (1998). *Gail Devers: A runner's dream*. Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughn.
- Raphael, T. (1986). Teaching question answer relationships. *The Reading Teacher*, 39, 516-520.
- Tierney, R.J., & Pearson, P.D. (1981). Learning to learn from text: A framework for improving classroom practices. In E.Dishner, J. Readence, & T. Bean (Eds.), *Reading in the content area: Improving classroom instruction* (pp. 50-65). New York: Kendall Hunt.
- Thompson, G. (1998). *Animals in danger*. Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughn Company.
- Trabasso, T., & Magliano, J.P. (1996). Conscious understanding during comprehension. *Discourse Processes*, 21, 255-287.
- Van Den Broek, P., Fletcher, C.R., & Ridsen, K. (1993). Investigations of inferential processes in reading: A theoretical and methodological integration. *Discourse Processes*, 16, 169-180.
- Vázquez, S. (1998). *Diego Rivera: An artist's life*. Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughn.
- Yuill, N., & Oakhill, J. (1991) *Children's problems in text comprehension: An experimental investigation*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1995). *Informal reading-thinking inventory: An informal reading inventory (IRI) with options for assessment*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace.

**Mary C. McMackin is a faculty member at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. Suenita Lawrence is a teacher at Newton Public Schools in Newton, MA.**

BACK ISSUES: While available, back issues may be purchased from *Reading Horizons* at \$5.00 per copy. Microfilm copies are available from University Microfilm International, 300 Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor MI 48108.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: *Reading Horizons* is a quarterly journal of the College of Education at Western Michigan University. The journal depends on subscriptions for its operation, and has maintained a moderately priced individual rate over many years. The individual yearly rate is \$20, with reductions for multi-year subscriptions. The institutional rate is \$25 per year. To cover shipping and handling costs, Canadian subscriptions are an additional \$5 per year, while other international subscriptions are an additional \$10 per year. We invite your subscription and your support. Please subscribe -- and encourage your colleagues and library to subscribe -- by copying this page and sending to Circulation Manager, *Reading Horizons*, WMU, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5197. Please make your check payable to *Reading Horizons*.

TYPE OF SUBSCRIPTION

Individual     \_\_\_ \$20 (1 yr)   \_\_\_ \$38 (2 yrs)   \_\_\_ \$55 (3 yrs)

Sub-total     \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional   \_\_\_ \$25 (1 yr)   \_\_\_ \$50 (2 yrs)   \_\_\_ \$75 (3 yrs)

Sub-total     \_\_\_\_\_

Shipping & Handling

Canadian     \_\_\_ \$5.00

International     \_\_\_\_\_ \$10.00

Total     \_\_\_\_\_

Name:

Address:

City/State/Province:

Country/Postal Code:

