



# Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

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*READING HORIZONS:*  
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James Flood  
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# **READING HORIZONS**

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# **Off to the Write Start: A Parent-Teacher-Child Story**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article describes a parent involvement program for pre-school, kindergarten, and first grade children. During the school year, students at each grade level come to the school for three evenings, with the goal of creating their own book in a different format at each session. Benefits of the program include: increased interaction between students and parents or other significant adults; teacher modeling of literacy support strategies; improved home-school communication; books written (and available for reading) at child's independent reading level; and increased familiarity of students and parents with teachers.

Welcome to Write Night, a parent involvement project created by Diane Jensen, preschool teacher; Sue Swinford, kindergarten teacher; and Wanda Bloom, first grade teacher at Jefferson Elementary School in Conception Junction, Missouri. Jefferson Elementary is a consolidated, public elementary school in rural northwest Missouri. It serves pre-kindergarten through grade six students, and has an enrollment of 94. Twenty-seven percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The authors are literacy professors who were privileged to view this



program in action on several occasions and who interviewed participants with the goal of sharing this program with their pre-service teachers.

Imagine you have just walked into a school library at 6:30 in the evening. You notice that each pre-school, kindergarten or first grade student and his or her mom, dad, grandparent, or adult friend is deeply engrossed in conversation while working on a book-making project for one and one-half hours with limited time off-task.

You overhear the following conversations:

**Dad to child:** "Before you start writing, why don't you say what you're going to write?"

**Child to Mom:** "This is a picture of me working on the computer."

**Child to Grandpa:** "Look! This is a picture of Jacob and me reading."

**Mom to child:** "What are you going to write here?"

**Dad to child:** "What kinds of things do you see on grandpa's farm?"

**Grandpa to child:** "See how you're doing such a good job? I'm so proud of you!"

Welcome to the sounds of Write Night at Jefferson Elementary School! Although these exchanges are more typically heard between teachers and students in classrooms, you are actually eavesdropping on parents and children who are sharing an exciting literacy experience.

### **What is Write Night?**

Write Night is a parent involvement program that consists of parents and their pre-school, kindergarten, or first grade children coming to school three evenings during the school year to work together for one

and one-half hours to write a book that is completed in one evening. The pre-school, kindergarten and first grade teachers actively assist with all nine Write Night Sessions, three sessions for each grade level. At the session, the children are assigned for that evening to one of three centers where a particular type of book is made. By attending all three sessions, each child completes all three types of books. The children and their parents or other adult friends diligently work at the center to write the book. Next, copies of the book are made, the pages are laminated and cut, the book is bound, and finally the finished book is taken home.

### **How the Write Night Parent Involvement Program began**

Jensen, Swinford, and Bloom collaborated to write an Incentives for School Excellence Program state grant funded through the Missouri State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. By working together, they felt that an effective parent involvement program could be established at their school. They used the grant money to purchase a computer, computer scanner, color printers, bookmaking software, laminating film, stamps, ink pads, markers, colored pencils and crayons, and to provide a small stipend for the teachers' time at the nine Write Night sessions. The result was an effective parental involvement program that is currently in its third year of operation and has been successfully replicated by neighboring school districts that also sing its praises.

A major objective of the program was to involve 85% of the parents as active participants in their children's reading and writing development as evidenced by their attendance at two of three Write Night sessions held for their child's grade level during the school year. A total of nine sessions, three for each grade level, are held during the year and all three teachers attend every session. If a parent and child have to miss Write Night because the parent works at night, the teachers offer a day-time opportunity for the parent to come to school to make the book with his or her child. If a child or parent is ill and has to miss a Write Night session, they are given the opportunity to attend another grade level's session. As a result of the parental excitement and support for this program, there has been 100% parental involvement during Year 1 and Year 2 at all three grade levels. That statistic alone supports the value of this program. An

additional benefit is increased communication among the teachers as they plan, then work together at each Write Night session.

### **Parental involvement in the writing process**

We know that typically parents are their children's first, and most significant, teachers (Clay, 1975; Rasinski, 1989; Calkins & Harwayne, 1991). Children's first demonstrations of language are often patterned from their parents and other adult caregivers according to Reutzel & Fawson, (1990, p. 222). If parents, grandparents, and adult friends demonstrate their excitement and involvement in the writing process, the attainment of this critical skill will become important to their children. In fact, Rasinski and Fredericks (1991) noted that children learn behaviors that are modeled by significant people in their lives. The Write Night teachers share that if parents are unable to attend their special night, they ask friends or relatives to substitute for them, rather than have the child miss this literacy opportunity. Bissex (1980) and Calkins (1983) note that the valuing of writing is learned from parents and caregivers. The opportunity for progress is increased when a wide range of support is available to learners (Hansen, 1987). Indeed, it does seem to take an entire caring community to raise a literate child.

Fields and Spangler (1995) write that the desire to learn more about spelling, punctuation, and conventional print is motivated by a child's desire to have others read what they write. As children begin to take ownership of their writing, their use of developmental spelling and basic punctuation becomes a valued means of standard communication. The children participating in Write Night have stories to tell and they want to share them with the important people in their lives. As the children reread their own words on each page and share their completed books with their families and friends, confidence in reading and writing is enhanced. According to Graves (1983), "The child's marks say, 'I am'" (p. 3).

During one Write Night session, a child asked his father how to spell "Stegosaurus." The father was uncertain himself, so he casually asked, "Mrs. Jensen, how do you spell 'Stegosaurus'?" The teacher quietly replied by spelling the word and the father and son continued the

book. What a wonderful example of open communication and trust between teacher and parent! Parents and friends provide positive modeling and motivation that results in children's growth in skill and confidence in a setting where there are positive interactions between teachers and parents. Enz (1995) believes that parents gain insight into their children's development as readers and writers when they are involved in the emergent literacy process. Most importantly, through involvement in the literacy process, parents begin to see their own children as writers (Hanson, 1994). They are able to observe teachers who model successful learning strategies with their children. A sense of trust and camaraderie is built through the informal exchanges among teachers, parents and children as they seek a common goal -- the "publication" of a book.

One mother commented that at first it was difficult to help her son write a story. She said, "We hadn't ever done anything like that before and it was hard work to get it down on paper. He didn't really enjoy the first Write Night, but now I can't keep him from attending. One day he was sick, and the first words out of his mouth when he awoke were, 'I have to go to school because I can't miss Write Night!'" Writing is now an enjoyable activity that he anxiously anticipates.

### **Informing parents**

At the beginning of the year, a Write Night Note that lists the three session dates for each class is sent to all parents. The teachers encourage parents to carefully mark these dates on the family calendar. The day before a Write Night session, the classroom teacher sends a reminder note home with each child. On the day of the session, the teacher wears a special "Write Night" T-shirt to school. Diane Jensen shared, "The students become very excited when they see what their teacher is wearing, because they know that their special night is that evening." All three teachers wear the special Write Night T-shirts to each session.

### **Write Night format**

Write Nights are held in the school's library three times a year for each grade level (pre-school, kindergarten, and first grade). Prior to the

first Write Night, the teachers determine the three different types of books that the students will construct with their parents or adult friends. Due to the limited number of computers and scanners, when the children arrive at Write Night they are assigned to one of the three book-making stations that is supported by one of the three teachers. The children rotate to their next book format on the following Write Night. During the year, the children make a book in each of the three formats. The following chart shows the types of books made during the first two years during the Write Night sessions.

At the computer book station, a teacher provides initial instructions for use of the computer program and printer. An easy-to-read, parent-friendly computer direction sheet devised by one of the teachers is also given to each parent or adult friend as a reference. The parents and children start to work immediately, creating and printing their own book with a title page, several story pages, and an "About the Author" page.

Children and parents at the ABC book station find pre-stapled booklets with blank paper ready for their own ABC book creation. A variety of stamps, ink pads, magic markers, colored pencils and crayons motivate the children in their writing. The children discuss each page with their parents, and together they decide what words or sentences will be written on that page. Some parents provide writing scaffolds for their children, by using dotted letter formations that the children trace. Each letter sound is emphasized as the child writes the letter. Prompts such as, "What does that word begin with?" or "What sound do you hear at the end of that word?" are heard frequently at this center.

Preparation for the third station begins several weeks prior to Write Night when children are loaned an instamatic camera for the weekend. The children plan four pictures that show their involvement in favorite activities or with important people in their lives. Then, these four pictures are returned to school with the camera, and are scanned onto book pages. When the children arrive at this station, they find the prepared pages with lines below each picture for their "All About Me" books. Their first task is to design a cover for their books. Pre-cut construction paper shapes are ready for their cover creation and a cover model is provided. Children write a title on the cover. After the cover is

complete, the children decide what sentence or sentences they will write beneath each picture. Preschool children write one or two words in the blanks on each page. Lively conversation between parent and child ensues during this process. The task of putting the child's ideas into one or two sentences is quite a challenge; however, it is impressive to see the many ways that the parents aid this concept formation.

| <b>Book Formats for Year 1</b><br>Each child completes one format at each session | <b>Book Formats for Year 2</b><br>Each child completes one format at each session           |
|---|---|
| Book designed on Storybook Maker Deluxe computer software                         | Book designed on Paint, Write and Play computer software                                    |
| ABC Book<br>Using stamps, ink pads, markers, crayons, ect.                        | Number Book<br>Using stamps, ink pads, markers, crayons, ect.                               |
| "All About Me" Book<br>Pictures brought from home are scanned onto book pages     | "_____ 's Day" Book<br>Pictures taken with an instamatic camera are scanned onto book pages |

As a book is completed, the child proudly takes it to the teacher at the copy machine. The teacher makes two copies of each page, while the child anxiously waits, watches, and collects the pages. The child takes the pages back to his or her work area, and puts them in the correct order. The copied pages are stapled into books that are then placed in the school library collection and in the child's classroom library. The child takes the original book to another teacher who runs the laminating machine. The cover and each page of the book is laminated as the child waits to carry his or her laminated strip back to the work area where the child and parent carefully cut around each individual page, then put the pages in order. It brings a warm-hearted feeling to watch one child and Dad stand quietly holding hands waiting for the pages of their book to go through the laminator. The third teacher helps the child and parent punch holes, and puts a plastic binding on the finished book. With a wide smile of pride, each child clutches his or her book tightly, the ending of another successful Write Night experience!

## **Benefits of Write Night**

The authors' observations suggest that the benefits resulting from this program are numerous. Preschool, kindergarten and first grade students interact with their parents, grandparents, or other significant adults in a delightful exchange of language as they write and illustrate their own books. Wanda Bloom, first grade teacher, shared that, "The child and parent working together to create something that they can keep is one of the greatest benefits of Write Night." Active two-way dialogues continue non-stop for over an hour during each Write Night session.

When asked, "What do you think is the benefit of Write Night?", one mother commented, "It is the undivided attention I am able to give my daughter without being interrupted by the phone, television, laundry, or other children."

Sue Swinford commented that she felt one of the greatest benefits of Write Night was the parent/child connection. "When I first started teaching, I had eighteen students. One student's mother worked full-time and one student's mother worked part-time; the rest of the mothers stayed at home. This year I had thirteen students, and only one mother stayed at home full-time," noted Sue Swinford. This changing family structure, along with the increase in single parent families, can result in less time spent with each child. When one considers that the average amount of time a parent spends in conversation with a child is extremely limited, one and one-half hours of uninterrupted time between parent and child is truly remarkable. Parents are often actively involved with and cheer for their children at sporting events; however, Mrs. Bloom, noted that "Write Nights provide an opportunity for parents to give positive recognition to their children for something related to academics."

In the initial stages of Write Night, the teachers model brief examples of scaffolding strategies that support student writing, such as: "What have you written so far?" "Tell me what you're going to write next." "What sound do you hear at the beginning of the word?" "Would you like me to print that letter so you can trace over it?" These strategies are frequently used by parents to help children develop stories.

Sue Swinford commented that, "Write Night gives parents a clue of how to help students in the reading and writing processes."

"Do you want me to trace the letters for the sentence?" asked one Mom. One dad cautioned, "Let's think about what you're going to say before you start writing." These are excellent examples of family literacy. Nickse (1989) noted the benefits gleaned by parents and children when they work as a learning unit through shared literacy activities. Her study inspired Carl Smith (1991, p. 700) to define family literacy in the broader sense as, ". . . families working together to promote mutual learning." Write Night facilitates literacy education for the parents, as well as for the children.

Advanced literacy development for the children is a benefit noted Diane Jensen. She feels that this program helps children develop concepts of print, concepts of literature, and writing fluency. Students who participated in Write Night activities were more likely to pick up a book and "pretend read" than students in previous classes. She also commented that her students showed great ownership and excitement in their own books.

Sue Swinford feels that students' and parents' increased comfort with computer technology is another benefit of Write Nights. Most students appeared comfortable with computer technology while designing books at Write Night. The use of computers outside of the school setting was highlighted when the Jefferson School District added a Write Night photo to their kindergarten web page. Sue Swinford mailed a letter encouraging her students to check out the picture if they had access to a computer. She was amazed at the number of students and parents who stopped her in the grocery store, at the ball park, and around town to let her know that they had seen the photo. Several had gone to the library to look at the web page.

An additional benefit of Write Night is increased home-school communication. Teachers note that these exchanges provide valuable insight into a variety of family situations. The comfort level of parents interacting with teachers also increases with each Write Night session and establishes an easy camaraderie with a common goal, the literacy



development of the children. It is exciting to watch a child begin to write and it is easy for the teacher to provide positive encouragement for the efforts of both children and parents. "The research is clear: Given proper guidance and support, parents can supplement, in powerful fashion, learning that takes place in the school," (Rasinski & Fredericks, 1989, p. 84). Write Night is an effective vehicle to accomplish the goal of parental involvement.

Books written during Write Night are on the children's independent reading level and this expands readable materials in the classroom library. Wanda Bloom shared that early in the year during first grade, it is often difficult for children to locate appropriate books for free reading because their reading vocabulary is limited. She noted, "The books written by the children are frequently read and reread, because they contain familiar text and the books are written by their peers."

The final benefit noted by the teachers, was students' and parents' increased familiarity with the other teachers. Children are often fearful when entering kindergarten or first grade because they do not know the new teacher. However, the teachers at Jefferson School have noticed that the children and parents are comfortable and free of fear at the beginning of school because they have already interacted with the other teachers during Write Nights. In the hall, Diane Jensen's preschoolers frequently say "Hello" to Sue Swinford and Wanda Bloom because of their shared experiences in book writing.

### **Technology and emergent writing development**

When used as effective tools, computers encourage exploration and experimentation with language and at the same time facilitate communication (Clements, 1987). For little hands, writing an entire story can be a daunting task. The use of the computer, with a willing parent, grandparent, or adult friend to help with typing when needed, can free children to use their imaginations to convey their views of the world. Leu, Karchmer, & Leu (1999) coined a new term, "envisionment," to describe the thinking process that results from new uses of technology related to the reading and writing process. "Envisionments take place when teachers and children imagine new possibilities for literacy and

learning, transform existing technologies to construct this vision, and then share their work with others," (Leu, et. al., 1999, p. 636). The colorful pictures in the software programs captivate the children's interest by allowing them to quickly add illustrations to their stories. A number of the children compose pattern stories relying upon the pictures to help them organize their thoughts into a meaningful sequence. Eisenwine & Hunt (2000) note that the computer propels emergent readers and writers on their literacy journey. It may be necessary to make modifications of the Write Night program to fit diverse school settings.

### **Some possible modifications to Write Night for any school**

To accommodate a larger student population, the Write Night program could be organized by grade level teachers and trained volunteers. Each teacher could be responsible for developing one type of book, and the students and parents could select the type of book they prefer. Also, the number of Write Night sessions per year could be decreased to one or two. This change would be less time-demanding for the teachers. If a grant is not feasible, modifications will also be needed. If computer scanner availability is limited, students could bring their own pictures from home and glue them directly on the book pages. At Write Night, the students could add the sentence descriptions in their books. Students could also make books in other formats, such as "My Collection," or "My Favorite Pet," rather than using computer software programs. It is a luxury, not a necessity, to copy all of the students' books. Therefore, students could share their books with their classmates on the next school day, and then take them home. The materials to make the books do not need to be expensive; outdated wallpaper sample books are often free and can be used for book covers, while staples can be used for binding. Limited funding might be available through the school's parent-teacher organization. With a little creativity, other modifications could make Write Night successful in a variety of school settings.

## The happy ending of the Write Night story

Write Night provides numerous "come-in" benefits to children, parents, and teachers. As a result of these positive literacy experiences, it is as if these children and parents are responding to Shel Silverstein's poem (1974, p. 9), "Invitation," when they come to Write Night to read and write.

"If you are a dreamer, come in,  
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,  
A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer...  
If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire  
For we have some flax-golden tales to spin.  
Come in! Come in!" Shel Silverstein

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## **Do Students Effectively Monitor Their Comprehension?**

**Brenda K. Bradshaw**  
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### **ABSTRACT**

This research is a preliminary investigation of students' awareness of their performance on comprehension tasks at reconstructive and constructive levels. After comprehension instruction, students were asked reconstructive and constructive level comprehension questions and asked to rate their performance on each level of questions. Students rated their performance higher than they actually performed on both levels of questions. They also rated their performance the same on the two levels of questions, although their performance on reconstructive questions was higher than on constructive questions. There was almost no relationship between students' actual performance and students' self-evaluation of performance on constructive level questions. Further research is needed to discover effective instructional techniques which develop more congruence between actual performance and self-awareness on both levels of questions.

Research indicates that successful readers are those who have higher ability to monitor their comprehension (August, Flavell, & Clift, 1984; Baker & Brown, 1984; Brown, Armbruster, & Baker, 1986; Garner, 1987; Paris, Lipson & Wixson, 1983; Paris & Meyers, 1981; Wagoner, 1983). Some researchers believe that effective readers must be aware whether or not comprehension is occurring, and consciously apply strategies (Baumann, Jones, and Seifert-Kessell, 1993). This process of

thinking about one's own learning and employing self-corrective strategies is metacognition, which is considered an important element of higher-order literacy.

At about the fourth grade level, instruction begins to focus increasingly on reading comprehension and reading materials become more complex and vary more in format (Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin, 1990). Most teachers in the upper grades expect students to be able to read their texts without assistance, but are finding that students are not able to effectively read the texts nor monitor their comprehension. More information is needed to understand what we can expect of students in the upper grades in regard to metacognition, and how to facilitate instruction which promotes the development of these important processes.

Additionally, reading teachers and specialists are currently defining literacy as being able to reconstruct the author's intended meaning (factual/literal and inferential understanding), and to also construct their own meaning (applied and critical/creative understanding) from text (Manzo, Manzo, and McKenna, 1995). The push toward performance-based assessment in reading is a logical result of evidence that intrinsic motivation to continue learning to read has been found in the ability to construct one's own meaning from text, a higher-order literacy task.

Few dispute the need for teaching reconstructive and constructive levels of thinking and reading. However, assessment and instruction continue to emphasize reconstructive processes. This is probably due to the common belief that the basic skills must be developed prerequisite to the higher-level abilities. More probable, however, is the likelihood of the simultaneous development of reconstructive and constructive comprehension. Manzo and Manzo (1993) noted that "higher-order literacy does *not* appear to be simply an upward extension of reading comprehension" (p.429). In fact, higher-order literacy disorders are found in both remedial readers and proficient readers (Casale, 1982, Manzo & Manzo, 1990).

Ruddell (1990) discovered that students whose teachers asked more higher-order questions performed better on reconstructive

comprehension reading tasks as well as higher-level tasks. This supports the research of Cooter & Flynt (1986), who found that when students are asked only inferential questions (higher level than factual questions), they provided factual information in the process of answering the inferential questions, thus, there may be no need to even directly ask factual questions. They called this the Cognitive Caboose Theory, in which higher-order questions are the engine that pulls along the caboose (lower-level information).

Despite existing research pointing toward the need for a different type of instruction and assessment emphasizing higher-order literacy, information about students' performance on constructive level comprehension and implementation of measurement instruments which assess higher-order literacy skills is paradoxically lacking. Also, little is known about students' ability to monitor their comprehension at both reconstructive and constructive levels. This research was conducted as a preliminary investigation into (1) how effectively students monitor their comprehension at two levels of comprehension (reconstructive and constructive), and (2) the degree of relationship between students' actual performance and metacognitive awareness on reconstructive and constructive level questions.

### Participants

The students in this study were selected because they had participated in a program called Project SUCCESS (Cooper, Boschken, Pistochini, & McWilliams; 1997), which emphasizes the role of metacognitive processes in the improvement of reading comprehension. Project SUCCESS is a program designed for upper elementary and middle grades and includes small-group, daily, fast-paced, literature-based instruction; reciprocal teaching; and response activities. The program introduces specific strategies for comprehension of text: summarizing, clarifying, questioning, and predicting. The strategies are taught through the reciprocal teaching approach, as developed by Palincsar and Brown (1984). In reciprocal teaching, the teacher teaches comprehension strategies within the lessons, and the teacher and students participate in modeling and practicing the strategies. Then the teacher gradually releases the responsibility of modeling and questioning to the



students, thereby teaching them metacognitive control (Duffy, Roehler, & Herrmann, 1988), or consciously directing their reasoning processes.

Project SUCCESS was implemented as a Title I reading intervention program for grades three through five. Children participated in grade level groups for daily, forty minute lessons. Although increasing metacognitive awareness was not the primary aim of implementing the program, this effect is possibly due to the program design. The lessons are structured and somewhat scripted, providing prompts for discussion, and examples for teacher modeling of mental processes. For example, in the third grade manual, the teacher is instructed to model the "clarify" strategy, and the exact words to say are provided: *"I can read the last word on page 23 by breaking it into the words over and joy and then adding the ending -ed. I get overjoyed, which must mean 'very joyful.'"* This emphasis on teacher modeling of effective comprehension strategies, with scaffolded instruction would seem to provide a basis for students to develop metacognitive awareness, or to think about how they are processing what they read. A possible weakness of the program, however, was that the metacognitive processes modeled were primarily at the reconstructive level. Students were asked higher-order thinking questions as after-reading response/reflection activities, but teachers did not model these answers.

Thirty students from each grade three, four, and five for a total of ninety were randomly selected from 307 Title I students. All participated in Project SUCCESS instruction for approximately 17 weeks. Thirty third-grade students, 28 fourth-grade students, and 29 fifth-grade students (Total=87) of those selected were available for testing.

### Materials and Methods

After instruction, students were administered the Informal Reading-Thinking Inventory (IR-TI) (Manzo, Manzo, and McKenna, 1995) as a measure of reconstructive and constructive reading comprehension performance and metacognition. Informal reading inventories are generally administered to determine students' independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels in word recognition and comprehension at the reconstructive level. According to Burns' and Roe's (1993),

Informal Reading Inventory (IRI), the IRI contains six types of comprehension questions which address reconstructive level comprehension (p.4):

- (1) Main idea: asks for the central theme of the selection.
- (2) Detail: asks for bits of information directly stated in the material.
- (3) Inference: asks for information that is implied, but not directly stated, in the passage.
- (4) Sequence: requires knowledge of events in their order of occurrence.
- (5) Cause-and-effect: names a cause and asks for its effect, or mentions an effect and asks for its cause.
- (6) Vocabulary: asks for the meaning of a word or phrase used in the selection.

Manzo and Manzo (1993) noted that one of the “fundamental problems that stands in the way of launching a full scale effort to improve higher-order literacy...is a set of agreed upon measures to stimulate teacher explorations and attention to such needs “ (p.465). The IR-TI attempts to “assess the thinking, or meaning-making, aspects of reading that are emphasized in current views of the reading process” (p.iii). The IR-TI addresses not only reconstructive comprehension, but also constructive level comprehension. It was developed with the goal in mind to gather additional information about a student’s reading processes than a traditional IRI would provide. In addition to the information that can be gathered from an IRI, the IR-TI can produce the following pieces of information relevant to this research (Manzo, Manzo & McKenna, 1995, p.10):

1. Measurement of two dimensions of comprehension:  
reconstructive (literal plus inferential comprehension)  
constructive (critical and creative comprehension)

2. The extent of metacognition, as inferred from observations of self-monitoring and from quantitative counts of self-evaluations of accuracy in answering questions

The IR-TI is an individually administered test consisting of graded word lists and passages. For this research, students were only administered the passages portion of the IR-TI. Administrators began with the passage at the student's highest independent level on the IRI, as determined by the school district in their regular post-testing procedures for Title I services. For example, if a student read the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade passages of the IRI at his independent level, the administrator began the IR-TI with the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade passage.

Passages were read silently and comprehension questions were asked. The IR-TI has two types of comprehension questions for each passage: reconstructive and constructive. Students received separate scores calculated as percentages of questions correct for each type of question. For example, a student may answer 100% of the reconstructive questions correctly, but answer only 50% of the constructive questions correctly. The two resulting scores can be compared to see if differences exist between a student's reconstructive and constructive level comprehension.

### Results and Discussion

Central to this study was the self-evaluative (metacognitive) subcategory of the IR-TI. After the reconstructive portion of the test, the student was asked to rate his performance on a scale of 1 to 5 (1-poorly, 2-not well, 3-half & half, 4-well, 5-very well) on those questions. After the constructive portion of the test, the student is asked to rate his performance on that section according to the same scale. This information can be compared with the student's actual performance on each level of questions, and a determination can be made as to the effectiveness of the student's self-monitoring processes. The actual performance was converted to a rating scale similar to the student self-rating scale as shown in Figure 1.

|             | Performance<br>(% correct) | Performance<br>Rating |
|-------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Very Well   | 90-100                     | 5                     |
| Well        | 80-89                      | 4                     |
| Half & Half | 70-79                      | 3                     |
| Not Well    | 51-69                      | 2                     |
| Poorly      | 50↓                        | 1                     |

Figure 1. IR-TI actual performance rating conversion chart.

*Research Question #1: How effectively do students monitor their comprehension at reconstructive and constructive levels of comprehension?*

At all three grade levels, means for self-evaluation of performance were much higher than for actual performance on both reconstructive and constructive level questions. Means for the IR-TI for each grade level are provided in Table 1. Self-evaluation of performance scores ranged from 3.4 to 4.0, whereas actual performance scores ranged from 1.1 to 2.7. If students perceive themselves as performing well when they have performed poorly, there may be no motivation to improve. Possible remedies for student performance over-rating are to receive systematic, appropriate, accurate, specific feedback from their teachers through systematic use of strategies such as reciprocal teaching, and to participate in self-evaluation activities which require the students to practice self-monitoring. More research needs to be conducted to determine if over-rating is a widespread occurrence, and if so, why students tend to over-rate their performance, and which types of instruction develop more congruence between actual performance and self-evaluation.

**Table 1**

IR-TI Means for 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade (N=30), 4<sup>th</sup> Grade (N=28), and 5<sup>th</sup> Grade (N=29)

|   | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Mean | 4 <sup>th</sup> Mean | 5 <sup>th</sup> Mean |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Reconstructive Actual Performance             | 2.5                  | 2.2                  | 2.7                  |
| Constructive Actual Performance               | 1.7                  | 1.6                  | 1.1                  |
| Reconstructive Self-evaluation of Performance | 3.9                  | 3.8                  | 3.5                  |
| Constructive Self-evaluation of Performance   | 4.0                  | 3.6                  | 3.4                  |

According to the means, students appear to rate their performance the same on reconstructive and constructive level questions, even though their actual performance on reconstructive questions was higher than on constructive questions. Table 1 outlines mean performances on each level of questions. Mean reconstructive actual performance was 2.5, whereas mean constructive actual performance was 1.7. Neither level fared well on the conversion chart (2.5 is between “Not Well” and “Half & Half”, and 1.7 is between “Poorly” and “Not Well”). The means for reconstructive and constructive self-evaluation of performance were 3.7 (between “Half & Half” and “Well”). Therefore, although they rated themselves as doing fairly well on both types of questions, their actual performance was not well.

*Research Question #2: What is the degree of relationship between students' actual performance and self-evaluation of performance on reconstructive and constructive level questions?*

IR-TI actual performance and self-evaluation of performance scores for reconstructive and constructive level questions were analyzed using a partial correlation controlling for grade level (See Table 2). The correlation between actual performance on reconstructive level questions and self-evaluation of performance on reconstructive level questions was positive ( $r = .26$ ) and statistically significant at the .01 level. This

indicates that there was some (albeit low) congruence between students' actual performance and self-evaluations on reconstructive level questions. This could be because most reading instruction tends to emphasize this level of comprehension, and because Project SUCCESS specifically taught strategies and modeled mental processes for the reconstructive level. Perhaps students would benefit from a longer duration of metacognitive strategy instruction than the 17 weeks in this program, along with continued practice and application after the program.

The correlation between constructive level actual performance and constructive self-evaluation of performance was positive ( $r = .05$ ) and was not statistically significant. There was almost no relationship between students' actual and perceived performance on constructive level questions, which seems to indicate that students are not aware of how well they are doing on these questions. This result may indicate a need for more instruction and feedback from teachers at the constructive level such as that suggested by Cooter and Flynt (1986) and Ruddell (1990). The Project SUCCESS instruction provided to the students in this study did not emphasize constructive level metacognitive processes.

The correlation between self-evaluation of performance on reconstructive level questions and self-evaluation of performance on constructive level questions was positive ( $r = .37$ ) and was statistically significant at the .001 level. This low to moderate correlation between students' self-evaluation at the two levels of comprehension indicates students rate their performance similarly for the two types of questions. As indicated earlier, the means also indicate these similar ratings.

Why do students rate themselves similarly on both levels of questions when their performance varied so greatly? It is possible that the students do not make a distinction between the two levels of questions. If this is the case, a possible remedy for this situation is to directly teach students the different types of questions that can be asked and answered, and that some questions are either explicitly stated or implicitly suggested in the text and other questions require them to apply the information in the text to other situations. Direct teaching about various question types may develop the awareness in the students to

make the distinction and hence, assist them in rating themselves more accurately at each level.

**Table 2**

Correlational analysis for IR-TI actual performance and self-evaluation of performance on reconstructive and constructive level questions (N =87)

| Variables  | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| 1. Reconstructive Actual Performance             | 1.00 | .18  | .26  | .05  |
| 2. Constructive Actual lPerformance              |      | 1.00 | .06  | .05  |
| 3. Reconstructive Self-evaluation of Performance |      |      | 1.00 | .37  |
| 4. Constructive Self-evaluation of Performance   |      |      |      | 1.00 |

In summary, this research provides preliminary information into the investigation of an important aspect of literacy: metacognition. Students in this study had very little awareness of their comprehension performance on either reconstructive or constructive level questions. There was almost no relationship between students’ actual performance and students’ self-evaluation of performance on constructive level questions. Students yielded better self-awareness scores for reconstructive level comprehension than on constructive level comprehension, perhaps indicating that metacognitive awareness can be taught with programs such as Project SUCCESS, but with greater emphasis on teaching self-awareness at both levels of comprehension. Students may also benefit from more long-term instruction beyond the 17 weeks of Project SUCCESS. Further research is needed to determine why students tend to over-rate their performance, and to discover effective instructional techniques which develop more congruence between actual performance and self-evaluation of performance.

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# **The Effects of an Early Intervention Program with Preservice Teachers as Tutors on the Reading Achievement of Primary Grade At Risk Children**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article presents quantitative data from an experimental research study investigating the effects of an early intervention tutorial program on at risk children's reading achievement. Preservice teachers in an emergent literacy course served as tutors for at risk first, second, and third graders. The *t*-tests for independent samples revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the vowels subtest and on total reading score at the first grade level. No statistically significant differences were found in grades two and three.

In recent years there has been a number of research studies focusing on the emergent reader and the importance of quality literacy instruction in the early school years to assure success for all children (Clay, 1979, 1985; Johnson & Allington, 1990; Lundberg, 1984). It has been well-documented that children who continue to struggle with reading after grade three will often develop negative attitudes toward reading, may suffer from low self-esteem, and will be likely to internalize faulty literacy habits. Chapter One research (Carter, 1984; Kennedy, Birman, & Demaline, 1986) has affirmed that remediation of reading problems after the early years is generally ineffective and costly.

Volunteer tutoring has often been touted as one of the most effective strategies to provide assistance for struggling readers to enable them to acquire the necessary literate behaviors while in the primary grades (Juel, 1996; Shanahan, 1998). Cohen, Kulik, & Kulik (1982) in a meta-analysis of 52 studies involving tutoring found that tutored students surpassed their non-tutored classmates. In a study comparing one-on-one Reading Recovery tutoring to small group Reading Recovery tutoring, Pinnell et al. (1994) reported more powerful effects with the one-on-one instruction. Wasik & Slavin (1993) did an extensive analysis of one-on-one adult-delivered instruction for at risk children, discussing precise models of delivery, which have been successful. Morris, Shaw, and Perney (1990) outlined an effective volunteer tutorial program that targeted children in grades two and three.

Cassidy and Wenrich (1999) and Cassidy and Cassidy (2000) have listed volunteer tutoring as a key topic in literacy research and practice for the past two years. One-on-one instruction has received renewed attention and has been the focus of national and state political agendas. A majority of the studies published to date investigating volunteer tutorial programs has followed a tutorial agenda similar to the one advocated by Morrow and Walker (1997) in The Reading Team: A Handbook for Volunteer Tutors, K-3 published by IRA. This agenda has been used in many America Reads Programs and involves reading familiar books with the child, reading aloud instructional level texts, writing in journals in response to books read, tutor and tutee reading and discussing books, and involving the child in word study. Other studies involving early intervention programs have incorporated phonological awareness activities as a part of the tutorial agenda (Juel, 1996). Wasik (1998) discussed the importance of consistency and intensity in tutoring programs for young children. Vendell, Humow, and Posner (1997) similarly have identified the positive, caring relationship between child and tutor/caregiver as the most critical factor in success of supplementary programs. Although there is much discussion in the research literature with respect to the components of a successful tutoring program, there is no consensus with respect to the optimum tutorial session agenda that indicates a need for continued research into models of tutorial programs.

This article will describe one early intervention tutorial program implemented in the primary grades of a culturally diverse elementary school and will report the effects of the program on children's reading achievement. The pilot program followed a research-based agenda incorporating phonological awareness activities and instruction in comprehension strategies using manipulatives (small toys) and puppets with at risk children in grades one through three.

## **Method**

Two research questions guided the investigation: (1) Can an early intervention literacy program, research-based with respect to the essential elements of successful tutorial projects and incorporating hands-on, multisensory activities, be effective with children when tutors are preservice teachers who are encountering diverse cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and languages for the first time? (2) What will be the effect of a research-based early intervention tutorial program on the reading achievement of at-risk first, second, and third graders?

## **Setting**

Two elementary schools with diverse student populations served as the sites for the early intervention tutorial project. Both schools were professional development school partners of the researcher's university, with the professor serving as site coordinator for the schools. At the time of the study, School A had a student population of 600 students in grades PK-5, with 75% of the children classified as economically disadvantaged and 26% classified as limited English proficient. School B had a student population of 620 students in grades K-5 with 33% of the children in School B classified as economically disadvantaged. Both schools were located within five miles of two universities in primarily low socioeconomic (SES) residential areas in a mid-sized college city (See Table 1 for demographic information with respect to schools).

## **Participants**

The children. Sixty children, thirty from each elementary school, were identified by their teachers and respective principals as the

lowest performing students in each grade, one through three. Thirty students, fifteen per school, were randomly assigned to an experimental

**Table 1**

Demographic information for participating elementary schools

|          |                          |                    |                   |                |               |
|----------|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|
| School A | African American<br>25%  | Caucasian<br>47%   | Hispanic<br>27%   | Other<br>1%    |               |
| School B | African American<br>9.5% | Caucasian<br>76.3% | Hispanic<br>10.1% | Kuwaiti<br>.1% | Other<br>4.0% |

group that would receive tutoring while the other thirty, designated as the control group, remained in their regular classrooms receiving literacy instruction in that setting only. (One female student from the control group moved in late November, leaving 29 total at the time of post testing; thirty experimental group children were post tested for a total N of 59). Twenty students in the research project were female; forty were male. Of the children 16% were Hispanic, 15% were African American, 25% were Caucasian, and 3% were Kuwaiti. All were economically disadvantaged and qualified for free lunch. All of the first graders had limited opportunities for literacy experiences in their homes, and many of the Hispanic parents spoke no English. The Kuwaiti and Hispanic children spoke limited English.

The tutors. Thirty preservice teachers, enrolled in the researcher's early literacy course, were required to travel out to the elementary schools to tutor the at risk children as part of the class requirements in lieu of a final exam. The tutors were all majoring in education and planned to teach in elementary or middle school settings. Twenty-nine tutors were Caucasian; one was Hispanic. Twenty-eight tutors were female, and two were male. Most of the tutors were encountering children of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds for the first time. Few of the tutors spoke any Spanish, and none spoke Arabic. For the majority of preservice teachers who were in their junior year, this was also their first opportunity to encounter a high-risk

teaching environment and to interact with children growing up in poverty.

## **Procedure**

Each preservice teacher tutored one child for 45 minutes, twice weekly for ten weeks. The average number of sessions was twenty. Tutoring occurred outside the classroom door at carrels in the hallways or in an empty classroom. Times for tutoring were determined by classroom teachers in accordance with the school policy of avoiding children being pulled from reading, math, recess, music, art or physical education classes. Tutoring took place between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Tutoring began in mid-September and ended in early December.

Children were pretested and post tested with the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test, Level R, (grade one), Level 1 (grade two), and Level 2 (grade three) using Form K in September and Form L in December. Informal assessment was also used throughout the semester including running records, informal reading inventories, and informal writing assessment for instructional planning.

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test was selected because of its standardized test type format yielding national norms, which the principals of the respective school valued. In a state climate which strongly emphasized accountability as measured by state standardized tests, the principals were interested in seeing if the tutorial intervention program would significantly impact the children's reading achievement scores on a group assessment measure rather than on informal, individual measures.

The classroom reading instructional program at the respective schools included guided reading groups, leveled readers, home reading folders that were sent to parents each afternoon, writing in journals, and explicit phonics instruction.

In addition to the tutoring, university students were required to attend class for three hours per week and to write a one-page reflective journal entry after each tutorial session. The tutors were also required to

submit lesson plans for review, which included their instructional objectives, procedures, materials to be used, and evaluation of each session's activities. The instructor reviewed journal entries weekly and conducted conferences with those students who had concerns or who needed guidance in lesson planning. Tutors were also encouraged to talk frequently with the child's classroom teacher for guidance in instructional planning and were advised that the coordination of supplementary instruction with regular classroom instruction had proved to be an essential feature of a successful tutorial program (Wasik, 1998).

### **Classroom Instruction: Theory and Practice Combined**

The reading professor implemented a constructivist approach to encourage creativity and individualistic thinking in the planning of tutorial sessions. The emergent literacy course followed an instructional plan that focused on theory in conjunction with the use of hands-on activities and cooperative learning strategies to illustrate the application of theory into practice. The preservice teachers were introduced to the nature of language and language acquisition, emergent reading and writing behaviors, developmentally appropriate practice, guided reading and shared reading. The group participated in literacy routines using big books and predictable books, nursery rhymes, poems, songs, and jingles. They taught mini-lessons to their peers using experience charts and pocket charts to demonstrate masking, framing, and cloze procedures. The students constructed pizza box storytelling kits and used them in their tutoring sessions to explore the value of this activity for oral language enhancement. The tutors investigated various media for writing including dialogue journaling, shape books, pop-up books, and alphabet books in classroom activities. They learned the importance of children's literature, particularly culturally relevant books, as the foundation of a quality early childhood literacy program for children at risk. The tutors were frequently reminded that these class activities and strategies would be very appropriate for the emergent readers they were tutoring.

A research-based framework was provided and effective assessment strategies were included in the class syllabus. The suggested framework was based on an agenda suggested by Mitchell (1994) and included essential elements from several well-established, effective tutoring

programs: reading familiar texts, word analysis, writing, and reading new texts at instructional level (Bear, Invernizzi, & Templeton, 1996; Morris, 1982; Wasik & Madden, 1996). Rationale for the tutorial session framework was discussed, and tutors were asked to follow it, adding their own ideas:

|  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Opening activity</b>                            | 4 min. (Building rapport/ice-breaker) |
| <b>Instructional goal 1</b>                        | 15 min. (Reading)                     |
| <b>Instructional goal 2</b>                        | 15 min. (Writing)                     |
| <b>Oral reading activity<br/>or shared reading</b> | 8 min.                                |
| <b>Closing activity</b>                            | 3 min.                                |

Although tutors had been exposed to a variety of instructional strategies in their university class and were doing outside readings in several textbooks, they were required to apply their own understandings of the reading process to their particular child's unique strengths and needs. They learned to develop lessons to enhance their student's literacy achievement. They were given support and direction from the instructor but were encouraged to be independent thinkers in the application of knowledge gained.

### **Tutoring Components**

The research project was funded by a faculty research grant, which provided funds for materials. Each tutor was provided with a canvas tutoring bag containing a dry erase board, marker and eraser, small animal finger puppet, writing tablet, pencils, and a small comprehension kit which contained the manipulatives for the strategies lessons. For example, a pair of small doll eyeglasses was used to demonstrate the LOOK strategy before reading. A small toy car was used to illustrate the READ ON and REREAD strategy while reading for meaning. Children were encouraged to explore the manipulatives, to play with them, and to guess what reading strategy each might represent. While reading orally, if a student appeared to be unsure of a word she encountered, the tutor might pull out the car and ask the child to remember that a good strategy is to read on and see if the rest of the sentence provides a clue to the meaning of that particular word. Many of the tutors reported that the



comprehension strategy lessons using the small toys, as manipulatives were the children's favorite part of the tutoring sessions.

In addition, puppets and small plastic tubs containing manipulatives for phonological awareness games were available for checkout as well as foam letters, small tiles and trays for word games, and leveled emergent readers, which included multicultural titles, narrative and expository texts. A wealth of children's books was also available for checkout through the university Reading Center resource library.

A typical tutoring session would include a phonological awareness game using manipulatives and focusing on rimes and onsets, a comprehension strategy lesson, echo reading from an instructional level text, independent reading from a familiar book of the student's choice followed by a retelling, and writing on tablets in response to books read or creating a published book to share with the child's teacher and classmates. The tutors also created sight vocabulary, comprehension, and phonics activities by adapting popular board games such as Hi-Ho Cherry-O and Candyland as they were expected to incorporate play at every opportunity. Tutors were also encouraged to develop themes for their sessions, selecting books based on the child's interests and at an appropriate instructional level.

## **Findings**

Means and standard deviations were calculated on children's performance on the pretest and posttest measures. The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test for the second and third grade children yielded two subtest scores, vocabulary (GVOC) and reading comprehension (GCOMP) and a full-scale reading total score (GRAT). The form of the test used for the first grade children yielded four subtest scores: initial consonants and consonant clusters (GRER 1), final consonants and consonant clusters (GRER 2), vowels (GRER 3), use of sentence context (GRER 4), and a total reading score (GRAT). Because the tests at each grade level were constructed in different ways with varying learning tasks totaling unequal numbers of items, it was necessary for statistical comparisons between experimental and control group at each grade level to be analyzed separately.

Gains in the reading achievement scores of the children in the research project from September to December were analyzed quantitatively for experimental and control group children using the *t*-test for independent samples (2-tailed). In the present study the two groups, experimental and control group, for first grade, second grade, and third grade children, respectively, were drawn independently from the population of lowest performing children in each grade (below grade level performance according to teacher judgment) without any pairing or relationship between the two groups. SPSS was used for data analysis revealing that the December scores were significantly higher for the first grade experimental group on the vowels subtest score  $t(1,17) = .049, p < .05$  and on the total full-scale reading score  $t(1,17) = .027, p < .05$  (See Table 2 for findings from first grade testing).

Data analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in the reading achievement gains scores between the experimental group, receiving tutoring, and control group receiving only regular classroom instruction for grade two (See Table 3 for findings from second grade testing). Likewise, no statistically significant differences were found between the comparison groups in reading achievement gains scores for the third grade (See Table 4 for findings from third grade testing).

## **Discussion of Results**

The tutorial model implemented in this study incorporating play and phonological awareness activities using puppets and comprehension strategy instruction using manipulatives appeared to have merit with respect to improved reading achievement for children at the first grade level. It was based on the latest and most sound research base and was well communicated to the preservice teachers. Yet, the tutorial program did not prove to be as effective for the children in second and third grades since participation in the program did not result in significant reading achievement differences between the experimental and control group children at those grade levels. Although children in all grades appeared to enjoy the session formats and made frequent positive comments such as, "this is fun," "did you bring that puppet back this time?" or "I like it when we play with the toys in the box," the older

primary grade children did not appear to benefit as much from the unique tutorial model as did the younger children.

There are many possible explanations; however, from the data, it would be difficult to ascertain specifically the reasons for these results. Cloer (1997) stated from personal experiences with pilot programs using undergraduate students to tutor high-risk primary grade children and from close analysis of research studies with such intervention projects that several general problems may emerge. He stated that undergraduate students' schedules often prevent them from being able to honor their appointed times each week, and children in the early grades often miss their sessions due to illness, unexcused absences, or other competing pullout programs.

Of note in the present research study, several of the second and third grade students who were in the experimental group were children who were repeating a grade. This fact appeared to place them at greater risk for achieving full benefit from the tutorial intervention program because of significant behavior problems, negative attitudes toward school, and inconsistent attendance. Some of the third grade students spent several days in in-school suspension and missed their scheduled tutoring sessions. The first grade children had the best attendance record of the three grade level groups and appeared to be the most excited about the tutorial sessions with their tutors; consequently, they also had the most improved reading scores.

Low SES populations, as with Schools A and B in the present research project, have often been cited as a factor which may impact the success of a tutorial intervention program. Schools with a majority of students growing up in poverty can pose significant barriers to literacy success when tutorial intervention programs are implemented, and particularly when tutors are untrained volunteers or when tutors are encountering these situations for the first time. Barriers to tutoring success that may occur in low SES school populations include again the problematic issue of children being frequently absent from school or suspended from school for behavior problems. In one particular child's case in the present study, he (an experimental tutoring child) was living with his grandparents while his mother was in Mexico with other

younger siblings. He frequently warned his tutor that he would not be back next time because he would be going to see his mother. He did make two trips back and forth to Mexico during the course of the ten-week project.

The brief length of time for the intervention could also have been a factor influencing the effect of the tutorial program. Goldenberg (1994) and Hiebert (1994) have suggested that one year of intervention may be insufficient for some children, particularly when the tutoring does not occur every day or when it occurs for a relatively brief period of time at each session. Certainly, it appeared from exit interviews with the preservice teacher-tutors that they believed the factor of brief length of each session's instructional time and the short ten-week semester were factors that impacted the children's progress.

The tutors also mentioned their lack of prior experience, and their limited knowledge of the diverse cultures, languages, as well as the impact of poverty as critical factors that influenced the success of the tutorial program. The preservice teachers felt the tutoring experience was highly beneficial, but this recurring theme of overwhelming feelings of inadequacy also frequently appeared in their reflective journal entries. They often reiterated how their lack of prior knowledge and background experiences seriously affected the degree to which they were able to relate to at risk children and to plan culturally relevant lessons for effective intervention.

The preservice teachers/tutors received extensive training in literacy strategies and emergent literacy concepts. The tutors did not, however, receive in-depth information about teaching to children of diverse cultures and languages. Their university teacher-training program included a course in teaching in multicultural settings, but that course is normally taught during the senior year student teaching semester. The tutors recognized this as a weakness in their course sequence and pointed to the need for tutors to have information of this nature before tutoring/teaching in high-risk elementary school settings.

**Table 2**

Independent samples t test results for reading achievement test

First grade experimental group tutored children and control group non-tutored children

|   | <b>t</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>sig.(2 tailed)</b> | <b>mean difference</b> |
|---|----------|-----------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| <b>GRER1</b><br>Equal<br>variances<br>Assumed | .705     | 17        | .490                  | 1.0222                 |
| <b>GRER2</b><br>Equal<br>variances<br>Assumed | 1.576    | 17        | .134                  | 2.0333                 |
| <b>GRER3</b><br>Equal<br>variances<br>Assumed | 2.123    | 17        | .049 *                | 3.0222                 |
| <b>GRER4</b><br>Equal<br>variances<br>Assumed | .550     | 17        | .590                  | .6778                  |
| <b>GRAT</b><br>Equal<br>variances<br>Assumed  | 2.416    | 17        | .027 *                | 6.7556                 |

\* $p < .05$

One tutor related the following incident, which illustrates the impact that lack of experience may have had on tutor perceptions of success in meeting the challenges of a diverse teaching setting. In her reflective journal writing the tutor discussed a session early in the fall, which was her tutee's birthday:

A. was really happy that we were able to celebrate her birthday together. She didn't have any plans for a birthday party outside of school... I planned a lesson centering on birthday parties. She enjoyed the gifts, card, and

candy I brought. It seemed she almost didn't know how to react ... I got the feeling that A. wasn't going to get a birthday party. She said that they were too much trouble. I didn't know a little kid that would say that!! It made me sad to hear a seven year old talk in that way. It was a reality check for me. I was so mad at myself. I couldn't believe I was so insensitive. All my life I've lived in this sheltered world where poverty isn't a reality. Yet when I look in the sweet innocent eyes of A. I can tell that, for her, poverty is reality. I feel ashamed that I did not realize that this angel-of-a-child might not be able to have a birthday party. Lesson for me: Don't be naïve, be sensitive, be alert, be aware. I was trying to create a lesson that I thought would be motivating, but for many kids like A., my lesson would be just an unwanted reminder...

**Table 3**

Independent samples t test results for reading achievement test

Second grade experimental group tutored children and control group

non-tutored children

|                                     | <u>t</u> | <u>df</u> | <u>sig.(2 tailed)</u> | <u>mean difference</u> |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| GVOC<br>Equal variances<br>Assumed  | -.245    | 19        | .809                  | -.4167                 |
| GCOMP<br>Equal variances<br>Assumed | -.510    | 19        | .616                  | -1.1944                |
| GRAT<br>Equal variances<br>Assumed  | -.507    | 19        | .618                  | -1.16111               |

**Table 4**

Independent samples t test results for reading achievement test

Third grade experimental group tutored children and control group non-tutored children

|  | <b>t</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>sig. (2 tailed)</b> | <b>mean difference</b> |
|--|----------|-----------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>GVOC</b><br>Equal variances<br>assumed  | .756     | 17        | .460                   | 1.3111                 |
| <b>GCOMP</b><br>Equal variances<br>assumed | -1.169   | 17        | .258                   | -5.2778                |
| <b>GRAT</b><br>Equal variances<br>assumed  | -.407    | 17        | .689                   | -1.7444                |

The findings in this study raise questions about the impact of the tutors' lack of experience on the tutored children's success, particularly in grades two and three. While most reading educators would agree that there is a need for more exposure to diverse student populations early in the university course sequence and for preservice teacher training that includes multicultural awareness, there is no assurance that increased opportunities for interacting with children from diverse cultures and more courses addressing multicultural issues would have resulted in higher reading achievement gains for the children in the program. It is a well-documented fact in the research literature that there are other significant problems in an intervention program such as the one in the present study and that improving the reading achievement of high-risk primary grade children is a complex and multidimensional problem.

While this study points to a continued need for tutors and classroom teachers to have direct knowledge of and opportunities to interact with children whose cultures are different from that of the teacher and to understand the unique needs of children growing up in poverty, if tutors are to be successful in literacy instruction in high risk settings, there may be other formidable challenges for university reading

instructors also. Perhaps even more critical, the findings in the present study underscore the need for reading educators to continue the quest for effective instructional strategies to help children in diverse school settings to succeed and to demonstrate these strategies effectively to prospective preservice teachers. It is the direct responsibility of university reading educators to adequately prepare the new classroom teachers of reading for the unique challenges they will soon face in an increasingly diverse society. There is a continued need for preservice teachers to receive the highest quality of instruction at the university level, delving into the complexities of the reading process and understanding the many different paths that children take on their road to literacy. This quality instruction at the university level is essential to assure that teachers are prepared to be accountable for all children's success. Good instruction for all children should be the ultimate goal for every reading educator and every classroom teacher.

### **Limitations**

The small sample size was a major limitation that diminished the power of the statistical test and may have accounted for the fact that there were no statistically significant differences in the reading achievement gains between experimental and control groups in the second and third grades. Although thirty students in the experimental group did provide an acceptably large sample, the differing test constructions at each grade level necessitated that data be analyzed in three smaller subgroups forcing the study to consist of three small samples (first grade experimental group  $n = 9$ ; second grade experimental group  $n = 12$ , third grade experimental group  $n = 9$ ; total experimental group  $N = thirty$ ). Ferguson & Takane (1989) state that in these instances of small sample size, a substantial, perhaps important difference will often not be recognized due to the size of sample factor. Subsequent studies should include larger numbers of children at each grade level. In the present pilot study, teachers felt that equal numbers of first, second, and third graders should be included in the study. It would have been more desirable to have thirty children from one grade level tutored, thereby eliminating the small sample size as a limiting factor since all children could then have been assessed with the same form of the test, increasing the sample size to thirty. The different forms of the



test prevented comparisons across grade levels due to the differing subtest tasks.

Given the needs of the children in these low SES schools, an intervention program of two full years would have been more beneficial. Ten weeks was a comparatively brief period in which to impact reading achievement scores, and this may have also affected significance.

### **Future Directions/Conclusions**

More research is needed into alternative intervention tutorial programs that are successful with at risk children. Most reading educators continue to support strongly the premise that the trained classroom teacher is the key to success for children in diverse classroom settings. It would seem feasible, then, that one possible tutorial model might be to use tutors/preservice teachers as instructional aides, working under the direction of the trained classroom teacher, to assist small groups or individuals. Using this model, the classroom teacher maintains the control over the primary literacy instruction and is able to utilize the talents and time of the less experienced tutors in ways that will benefit the children since the tutorial instruction will be closely aligned with the classroom instruction. A tutorial model, structured in this way, may also have a more positive affect on children's attitudes toward reading and self-esteem since there would be no pullout of the lower achieving children from the classroom setting. Some teachers strongly oppose tutorial intervention programs for this reason and have pointed to the value of having at risk children remain in the regular classroom setting for the full instructional program. Teachers often feel that untrained and/or inexperienced tutors are not as effective as the trained professional who is the child's primary instructor. A parallel model using the tutors within the classroom setting as contrasted with a typical pullout-tutoring model would address these concerns. Future tutorial research projects might compare the effects of this type of structure on children's literacy achievement as contrasted with the more traditional pullout program.

Good intentions and sincere desires to help often are not sufficient to make a significant impact on the reading achievement of children at

risk. The first graders in this study benefited from the research-based tutorial program. However, data analysis of the second and third graders' reading achievement gains revealed no statistically significant differences in the tutored children and the non-tutored children. Tutoring programs may be beneficial for some at risk children, but more than a few hours a week of supplementary instruction will be needed to break the cycle of discouragement, low self esteem, and failure which often begins as early as grade two. The regular classroom teacher needs to be knowledgeable and sensitive to the barriers to success, understand the diverse cultures of the students, and work collaboratively with any volunteer tutors who may be assigned to the school to develop the most efficient tutorial program models. Equally important, university reading educators must seek to offer the highest quality instruction and guidance for preservice teachers entering the profession so that they will be confident and well equipped to provide appropriate literacy instruction for every child, enabling each child to claim his/her inalienable right to read.

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# **A Model for Using Television and Video to Motivate Writing**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Three university consultants developed a model to explore the effectiveness of using television and video to motivate writing. Following a series of motivational and brainstorming sessions using television, video, and popular literature, twenty-three fifth grade students were assigned to cooperative groups where they wrote and videotaped dramatizations of short “teaser” scripts. Observations derived from the completed model reveal the compelling influence of television and video on the lives of children.

Research indicates that by the time young children begin school, they have been exposed to 5,000 hours of television (Considine & Haley, 1992). The use of television and video can be an instrumental resource for integrating imagery into literacy instruction at the listening

level as well as motivation for script development (reading, writing, dramatization). According to Considine & Haley (1992)

Teachers need to be aware of how much their students watch television and what they watch. Drawing on these existing viewing patterns and behaviors provides a valuable insight into our students' lives beyond the classroom. It provides a common reference source that can be a potential teaching tool, enabling us to integrate the living room into the classroom...By emphasizing the process, not simply the programs, teachers can begin to develop both critical thinking and critical viewing skills... (p. 44-45)

Visual literacy research suggests that the integration of imagery into instruction can result in the promotion of writing and the improvement of student comprehension (Considine & Haley, 1992). Sticht, Beck, Hauke, Kleiman, and James (cited in Sticht & James, 1984) found that 10 out of 12 studies reported the successful transfer of comprehension skills when training in various auding tasks took place prior to subsequent reading-task performances. Reading, writing, and dramatizing scripts enhances language use and reading comprehension by requiring group cooperation and engaging affective as well as cognitive processes through a variety of literacy interactions (Hanson-Smith, 1997; Hoyt, 1992).

Research by W. Collins (cited in Considine & Haley, 1992) showed improvement in elementary students' ability to comprehend narratives presented in movies, television, and other audiovisual formats. Television was also used successfully to illustrate socially appropriate language for secondary ESOL students (Lincoln-Porter & Washburn, 1997). A research study using a favorite television program to improve attitudes toward reading demonstrated significant positive changes in attitude on several attitude scale items such as reading trade books in class and writing scripts. The use of trade books emphasizing television programs and production seemed to motivate the reading of other trade books (Bristor & Ransom, 1997). Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) advocate that teachers recognize "the expertise that students

bring to the learning environment, the pleasures that popular culture produce for students, and the multiple readings that students produce from popular culture” (p. 28).

Based on the review of previous studies, three university consultants developed a model to explore the effectiveness of using television and video to motivate writing. The purpose of this paper is to describe the implementation of that model, share reflections, and make recommendations for further applications.

### Description of the Model

Fifth-grade students from an urban elementary school, their classroom teacher, and three university consultants participated in the implementation of the model. Following a series of motivational and brainstorming sessions using television, video, and popular literature, the students were assigned to cooperative groups where they wrote “teaser” scripts, short opening scenes used to capture viewer attention.

The topics selected and developed into scripts by the students were varied and were characterized by events at home, on the school bus, and the shopping mall. The edited example below describes the opening scene of such a script.

Plot: Stephanie finds a puppy at the bus stop, but mom won’t let her keep it.

Characters: Narrator, Bus Driver, Puppy, Mom, and Stephanie

Setting: Bus stop

Puppy: “Bark, bark” (in the book bag)

Stephanie: I’m going to sneak you into my room.

The students segued from script writing to rehearsal and finally to videotaped dramatizations. Field notes recorded by the consultants



during these phases reveal the compelling influence of media on the lives of young children and suggest the motivational benefits of script writing aspects of television and video performances for impacting literacy.

### Procedures for Implementing the Model

The twenty-three fifth-grade students and their teacher met with the university consultants for 45 minutes during the scheduled language arts block, 9:30 a.m. to 10:15 a.m., each week for a period of eight weeks. During any given session, one to three of the university consultants were present, each rotating roles as principal facilitator. The students engaged in cooperative group work, script writing, and videotaping of dramatizations.

The first session began with a viewing of a Star Trek video segment of The Bionic Bunny Show (Brown & Brown, 1984; Weiner, 1983). The ensuing discussion focused on developing television shows, creating special effects, reading scripts, rehearsing, memorizing lines, using prompts, filming, and editing. Each subsequent session began with a review of the previous week's activities.

During the second session the students discussed and compared the process of filming shows from scripts written specially for television and those adapted from books. The university facilitator read orally to the students from the book Ramona: Behind the Scenes of a Television Show (Scott, 1988) to underscore the salient features of adapting literature to television. The students discovered that the elements of story structure (characters, traits, settings, and plot) were important considerations in scripts as well as in narrative text. Following another oral reading, this time from the book Ramona Quimby, Age 8 (Cleary, 1981), and a whole group class discussion, the session culminated with the completion of a chart of characters and elements of story structure (See Appendices B and C).

The students continued their study of creating television shows during the third session. The university facilitator continued to orally

read selected portions from each book, Ramona: Behind The Scenes of a Television Show (Scott, 1998) and Ramona Quimby, Age 8 (Cleary, 1981). The class discussed special effects, props, and particular job responsibilities associated creating television shows. They also developed a chart, which focused on special effects and props necessary to recreate the scenes on video (See Appendix D).

The fourth session marked the beginning of students working in groups to write their own “teaser” scripts. Based on the classroom teacher’s recommendations, cooperative groups of three to four students were formed. Each member was randomly given a necklace to identify his/her particular role in the writing project as narrator, scriptwriter, director, or editor (See Appendix A). The classroom teacher was designated as “sponsor” and the facilitators as “producers.” The groups used a storyboard for developing their own plots, characters, settings, and events. The students were encouraged to continue their discussions and their work during the intervening days between sessions with the university facilitators.

During the fifth session, one of the three consultants who had visited a television studio, observed actual filming, and met television personalities and production crew members, shared a “picture album” of her experiences. The students were able to see pictures of real-life examples related to earlier topics of discussion. This sharing session was videotaped to familiarize the student with the camera and establish a level of comfort during filming.

The sixth and seventh sessions were devoted to writing the “teasers” and rehearsing them. Two of the facilitators circulated among groups as they worked and shared ideas with them. The students briefly rehearsed their completed work during the eighth session which culminated with videotaping of the dramatizations (See Appendices E).

### Reflections

The level of enthusiasm with which the students participated in the project was inspiring. At the onset of each session they greeted the

university facilitators with bright smiles and eager dispositions. Their guarded participation in the cooperative group was readily overcome, and soon they could be heard chatting, discussing, negotiating and deliberating. Occasional rowdiness was easily subsided as the class responded well to both verbal and nonverbal cues. Some groups were more productive as natural leadership emerged from self-starting students. Other groups that lacked such leadership tended to vacillate among topics and found it more difficult to focus on the task at hand.

The group process of selecting themes for each script revealed some compelling insights into the students and their fascination with violence. On several occasions, the university facilitators had to guide the groups from stories about “grizzly” occurrences to more sedate day-to-day issues related to home, school, and community. Humor became a predominant factor as writing moved from intensity to levity.

Selecting late spring semester, a time of year relatively free of stress and interruption, was critical to the effective implementation of this model. End-of-the-year calendars are replete with testing mandates and the preparatory preamble associated with standardized assessment. The relaxed atmosphere in the classroom may have been due to students’ reactions to earlier, more intensive, test preparation; it appeared to provide a catalyst for unconstrained engagement.

### Recommendations

Suggestions for future implementation may include:

- a. Extend the project to several weeks so that students can write complete scripts and dramatize them in their totality.
- b. Allow students to write scripts on word processors so that they can easily proof, edit, and create multiple copies for rehearsals.
- c. Enhance the project by allowing students to create costumes, develop sets, and create special effects.
- d. Expand script writing and dramatization into a study of

careers related to television. Several students were particularly interested in special jobs and were heard to comment about their future career goals in television and film.

### Conclusion

Television and video were popular media and served as potent motivators for the students' participation in the scriptwriting model. According to Considine & Haley (1992), a video adaptation of a story is "...a powerful instructional ally..." for enhancing both recall and comprehension. (p. 56)

The enthusiasm of the students participating in this model appears to be consistent with the research findings which suggest that using cooperative groups to write and dramatize scripts promotes language use and reading comprehension (Considine & Haley, 1992; Hanson-Smith, 1997; Hoyt, 1992). Focusing on a popular character from children's literature such as "Ramona" (Cleary, 1981), supported the notion that teachers capitalize on the "popular culture" that children bring with them to school (Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood, 1999, p. 28).

Television is a significant part of children's lives (Considine & Haley, 1992), and educators should consider using television as an instruction tool to enhance literacy curricula. Television programming can foster reader-response approaches to understanding and interpreting literature, facilitate the development of contemporary communication skills, and enhance second language instruction (Flood & Lapp, 1995).

Students who are empowered to draw upon their cultural experiences in risk-free cooperative group settings will develop their writing and literacy skills through meaningful applications. Educators who are cognizant of the potency of television and video as motivators, will open the doors for their students to new horizons of learning.

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Appendix A  
Cooperative Group Assignments

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Narrator                    | Narrates story during filming                        |
| Script Writer/Screen Writer | Writes down dialogue as the group develops the story |
| **Editor/Producer           | Checks for accuracy of all details                   |
| Director                    | Directs acting during rehearsal and filming          |

\*\* Groups with more than four people will have separate roles

Appendix B  
Data from Charts Made From Class Discussions  
(Session #2)

Characters

|             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| Ramona      | Mr. Quimby  |
| Beezus      | Mrs. Quimby |
| Picky Picky |             |

Descriptions of the Characters based on Class Discussion  
Following Daily Shared Reading

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <u>Beezus:</u>      | Sleepy because she stayed up too late with her friends last night at the spend the night party.  |
| <u>Ramona:</u>      | Upset with her Mom because her Mom put a raw egg instead of a boiled egg in her lunch.   |
| <u>Mrs. Quimby:</u> | Tired of cooking and upset with Ramona because of “egg incident.” Mrs. Quimby tried to explain it was a mistake.                               |
| <u>Mr. Quimby:</u>  | Frustrated because he can’t draw his foot. He works at a “Santa’s helper” warehouse where it is very cold. He’s studying to be an art teacher. |
| <u>Picky Picky:</u> | The cat who eats everything that others don’t want.  |

Appendix C  
Chart of Elements of Story Structure  
(Session# 2)

| <u>Character</u>  | <u>Character Description</u>   |
|---|--|
| Beezus (She stayed up too late with her friends)                | sleepy   |
| Ramona  | upset with her Mom for putting a raw egg in her lunch  |
| Mrs. Quimby   | tired of cooking   |
| Mr. Quimby  | frustrated about his drawing   |
| Picky Picky (cat)   | eating what other don't want   |
| <u>Setting</u>  | <u>Problem</u>   |
| Ramona's house:<br>Kitchen, dinning room,<br>living room, couch | Beezus is grumpy   |
|   | Girls don't like tongue  |
|   | Ramona's frustrated with Mom   |
|   | Mr. Quimby's mad because he can't draw his foot  |
|   | Mrs. Quimby's mad because Ramona is still upset about the raw egg mother put in Ramona's lunch |
|   | The girls have to cook dinner  |



Appendix D  
Special Effects/Props  
(Session #3)

Kitchen furniture: refrigerator, tables, chairs

Living room furniture: couch, wall hangings, wallpaper for all  
rooms

Fireplace

Toys for Ramona

Yard equipment, hoses, etc.

Noise makers for rain and thunder

Appendix E  
Sample Script: The Puppy

Plot: Stephanie finds a puppy at the bus stop, but mom won't let her keep it.  
Characters: Narrator, Bus driver, puppy, Mom, and Stephanie  
Setting: Bus stop, house  
Narrator: In this scene, Stephanie finds a puppy at the bus stop, and she takes it home.

Bus driver: Go find a seat so you can go home.

Puppy: "Bark, bark" (in the book bag)

Puppy: "Woof, woof"

Stephanie: I'm going to sneak you into my room.

Bus driver: Next time, keep the dog off the bus.

Stephanie: Nothing mom!

Narrator: Stephanie's mom comes out of the kitchen.

Mom: Get that dog out of my house!

Narrator: Just then, the dog chews on Dad's \$125 shoes.

Mom: Get rid of that dog. You're grounded

Stephanie: But mom,

Mom: No but's, just do it.

Stephanie: Okay. mom.

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