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Reading




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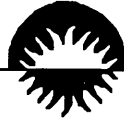
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Reading
Horizons

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



READING HORIZONS:
A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

Editors: Karen F. Thomas & Paul T. Wilson
Executive Assistant: Susan Standish

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

READING HORIZONS

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Process of change in reading instruction: A model of transition

Beth Hurst

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine closely the processes, both theoretical and enacted, a teacher undergoes when making changes in methods of reading instruction. A case study using qualitative research methods chronicled a teacher who after 19 years of teaching strictly by the basal began changing toward a balanced literature approach. A model of transition demonstrating this teacher's processes of change is included.

What does a veteran teacher, who for years has taught children to read strictly by the basals, do when she learns there may be more effective ways to teach reading? That was the guiding question for this study. The purpose of this study was to examine closely the processes, both theoretical and enacted, a teacher undergoes when making changes in the methods of reading instruction. Another aspect of the change process also examined the teacher's feelings regarding the changes she has made. Martens (1992) found that even when teachers see a change as desirable, they can still experience ambivalent feelings toward the change because they may feel a loss of control over an area where they felt competent. Gann and Friel (1993) believe that "acknowledging those feelings is an important part of the change process" (p. 286). They believe that "too often little awareness is evident that change entails developmental growth both in feelings and in skills" (p. 286). Radencich (1995) believes that "it is not so much the product but the process of change that is important" (p. 88).

Many teachers in the area of reading often make changes in their teaching methods, materials, or curriculum. As a result, they are constantly engaged in the change process. Gann and Friel (1993) contend

that “change is a process, not an event” (p. 286). Newman (1990) states that the “process of changing from a traditional transmission way of teaching to creating an open, learner-directed environment is complex” (p. 2). In his book, *Supervision of Literacy Programs: Teachers as Grass-Roots Change Agents*, Erickson (1995) stated that “teachers are becoming recognized as active and powerful change agents who, acting individually and collectively, change the teaching of reading and writing in school and community” (p. 1).

When teachers see problems in their classrooms and set out to find solutions to those problems — looking for ways to change — they can be thought of as teacher-researchers. Routman (1996) believes teacher research “involves wondering, posing questions, problem solving, trying out new procedures, working out our thoughts through writing, and ultimately acting on our new insights by changing our practices” (p. 167). The teachers become change agents in their own classrooms. Duffy-Hester (1999) contends that “teachers should be decision makers, using their practical, personal, and theoretical knowledge to inform their reading instruction” (p. 489). According to McCutcheon (1992), teachers “select and enact every teaching practice rationally because they are engaged in intentional, purposive action to create optimum conditions for learning to occur” (p. 193). She believes teachers choose these practices by “reflecting upon and interpreting their experiences” (p. 193).

Debate still exists among reading educators concerning the best approach to reading instruction. The current movement is toward a balanced literature approach (Baumann and Ivey, 1997; Johns and Elish-Piper, 1997; Leu and Kinzer, 1999; McIntyre and Pressley, 1996; Reutzel, 1996). Newman (1990) believes that teachers “have to explore the implementation of these research insights in their own classrooms based on what they’ve discovered about the needs, interests, instructional history, and proficiency of individual students” (p. 2). Because teachers are often in the process of change, it is important to look at those processes to see how and why teachers make the decisions to change the way they teach.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Thorndike (in Gredler, 1992) contends that “man’s power to change himself, that is, to learn, is perhaps the most impressive things about him” (p. 3). For many people, change is not easy. Mayher (1990) states that “nothing is harder than to put on new theoretical lenses that may help us to see that the tried was not always true” (p. xv). According to

Gann and Friel (1993), the purpose of change is to "improve instruction and learning" (p. 286). Teachers are often trying new approaches in their classroom. Ohanian (1992) believes that teachers should always be trying out new practices because this is how they learn what works the best for them and their students. According to Watson and Stevenson (1989), "teachers who are going through professional changes (whether the changes are described as moderate or transforming) also are going through personal changes" (p. 121). Gann and Friel purport that "change is a highly personal experience for the individuals involved in the process" (p. 296). Ayers (1990) contends that teachers often feel that teaching is not merely what one does, but who one is.

According to Gann and Friel (1993), the process of change involves three levels: 1) initiation phase, 2) the implementation phase, and 3) the institutionalization phase. During the initiation phase, "teachers are learning about a new practice or program" (p. 420). Gann and Friel believe that "a strong support system furnished through workshops, demonstrations, observations, and on-site support is needed" (p. 420). The implementation phase is where the teacher is trying out a new practice for the first time. During this phase especially, a teacher is apt to give up "if appropriate assistance and encouragement are not available" (p. 420). The final stage, the institutionalization stage, is when a new practice becomes "part of the fabric of the school" (p. 420). Progression through these stages takes time.

Martens (1992) conducted a case study in which she examined the experiences of a teacher making transitions from teaching directly from a science textbook to teaching science using a problem-solving approach. The study began with observations and interviews of the teacher during a seven-day workshop conducted by the researcher concerning implementing a problem-solving approach in the classroom for teaching science. Following the workshops, the researcher observed and interviewed the teacher in her classroom once a week for 45 minutes during a six-week period to study how and/or if she incorporated the problem-solving approach she had learned in the workshops. Martens concluded from her research that although the teacher did use some of the techniques she learned from the workshops, she did not change her beliefs about teaching. Martens stated that the teacher incorporated "pre-planned problem-solving activities into her teaching in ways that allow her to remain in control" (p. 155). She was unable or unwilling to let go of the structured control of the classroom to allow the students to gain some control in problem-solving. Martens concluded that "current reward systems of schools... maintain and encourage the kind of

teaching that makes it possible to incorporate new materials and teaching strategies without changing one's teaching beliefs" (p. 155). She found that the individual teacher determines "the extent to which any innovation occurs" (p. 150).

Ramirez-Smith (1995) also found this to be true in her study of a school under change in which "teacher morale was low, and students' rates of failure were at an all time high" (p. 14). The change began for the school when district administrators were looking for a school that would be willing to make some changes. They began by forming a team made up of volunteer teachers and others within the school system. They first had to deal with a lack of communication in the school and an absence of staff development. Ramirez-Smith found that teachers are often threatened by the idea of having to change their teaching styles, and that "personal struggles accompanied the change process" (p. 18). These teachers felt it was risky to attend staff development meetings and converse with other teachers in the school but they chose to do so anyway because of the "promise of fewer discipline problems and greater student engagement in learning" (p. 18). In the end (although perhaps there is no end when it comes to change and growth), the teachers found that as they changed their old habits and adopted new ones, the "results were dramatic" (p. 18).

Keller (1995) examined changes made at the Thomas Edison Elementary School in California and found that "while the changes seem dramatic in retrospect, staff members are quick to point out that change has been neither sudden nor without resistance" (p. 11). Before the school began to make changes, decisions usually came from the administrators down to the teachers, and teachers usually worked in isolation. The change in the school came from a movement away from traditional approaches to becoming part of the Stanford Accelerated Schools Project which advocates a constructivist view of education. In this school, teachers began working together and observing each other teach. The excitement grew and they became eager to incorporate changes in their teaching beliefs and practices. Keller found that "the resulting collaboration and camaraderie created a more trusting and supportive environment" (p. 12).

Sadker and Sadker (1994) stated "when teachers change, so do their students" (p. 5). If teachers want their students to be learning and growing, then teachers themselves must also be learning and growing. Mayher (1990) stresses the importance of looking at the "processes of learning and teaching" (p. xiv). He found that "strong voices" emerged from "the classroom and from the teacher education community" in which

they looked “afresh at the processes of learning and teaching” (p. xiv). Erickson (1995) believes that “true and lasting change occurs when teachers, bolstered by their moral purpose of making a difference in their students lives, act as change agents both individually and collectively” (p. 17).

In order to understand one teacher’s quest for a different method of teaching reading, it is beneficial to first explore those methods in question regarding reading instruction. Two basic approaches to reading instruction lead the discussion of the most effective method by which to teach children to read. Those approaches include the traditional approach and a balanced literature approach. Transition refers to a movement from the traditional approach to the balanced literature approach. Teachers who are in transition are said to be moving away from the traditional method of reading instruction and making changes toward incorporating more methods of a balanced literature approach in their reading instruction.

The traditional approach to reading instruction has been defined by Reutzel and Cooter (1992) as a method of reading instruction which “relies heavily on teacher-directed instruction usually in conjunction with basal reader textbooks” (p. 3). According to Ruddell and Ruddell (1995), the basal reader is the “most widely used instructional approach for literacy development in the United States” (p. 610). The philosophy behind basal readers is that instruction needs to be systematic, to have sequence of skills, and to offer selections for students to read, followed by practice activities. Advocates of basal readers believe the basals have tremendous value in that they have been successful in teaching students to read. This success has been shown in “standardized tests, competency tests, and other measures of reading achievement commonly used in most school systems” (Reutzel and Cooter, p. 3). Another advantage of the basal readers is that they are often easier for the teacher to use because they are very structured and systematic. Beginning teachers, especially, find them easy to use because everything included in a reading lesson has been described in detail for the teacher including pre-reading activities; building background; activating prior knowledge; vocabulary building; guided reading suggestions; discussion questions before, during, and after reading; comprehension questions; assessment measures; and enrichment activities. However, it is this structure that some teachers find a disadvantage because they see basals as boring and focusing too much on isolated skills and worksheets (Routman, 1988).

Literature-based instruction, a balanced approach, is when “teachers use children’s literature as the basis for teaching students to read and to

enjoy reading" (Au, Mason, and Scheu, 1995, p. 77). Teachers also "attempt to integrate the four language modes of listening, speaking, reading, and writing across all curriculum areas" (Reutzel and Cooter, 1992, p. 3). Reutzel (1996) states that "An effective reading program requires a variety of approaches — carefully selected and balanced to ensure that children are regularly exposed to literature, a variety of reading materials, rich language experiences, and systematic instruction" (p. 6). According to Leu and Kinzer (1999), "Children learn best when teachers take a balanced approach, using a range of strategies to teach reading" (p. 11).

Because teachers are becoming aware of the balanced literature approach and its success, many are beginning to slowly try to incorporate some of the balanced literature ideas in their own classrooms. This process does not happen at once. It is a gradual change from one belief about teaching to another. This gradual change is referred to as a transition. Radencich (1995) states that "making the transition from traditional approaches to holistic instruction is a time-consuming process" (p. 79).

Reutzel and Cooter (1992) define transitions as a "philosophical position that encourages teachers to initiate changes in reading beliefs and practices by building bridges, not walls, between traditional and holistic approaches" (p. 5). They contend that transition means movement for teachers from "where they are and progressing to where they want to be" (p. 5). Routman (1988) writes that teachers who are in transition from a traditional approach to a more holistic approach may make changes in their classrooms a little at a time and that it could take a sizable amount of time to change. Radencich (1995) states that "it is important to take one step at a time" (p. 80). In other words, most changes from traditional to balanced literature do not happen overnight. Change does not come quickly or easily. Routman (1991) also believes that change is a continuous process that is always evolving and getting better, but she is not certain that we ever get there totally. Routman states

Typically, I notice that teachers feel comfortable adding one new component to their program each year — perhaps shared book experience the first year, journal writing the next year, and independent reading program the following year, shared decision making about rules and curriculum the next year, and integrating spelling after four or five years. The thoughtful, slow change that is occurring may not always be visible, but it is a change of the highest order—stemming from a

greater understanding of the philosophy and of the literacy model of learning and teaching. (pp. 23-24).

While the literature reveals varying opinions and research findings regarding the different approaches to reading instruction, one theme that does not seem to vary, is the idea that change is a process which evolves and develops over time and that change comes from within. Regardless of the area under change, the process of change takes time and is generally ongoing.

METHOD

In order to best answer the question regarding the processes a teacher undergoes when making changes in reading instruction, the following questions guided this research study: 1) Why did this teacher change her method of reading instruction? 2) What processes did she undergo as she made changes in the way she teaches reading? 3) How does she feel about the changes she made?

A case study provides a careful examination of the processes a teacher undergoes when making changes in reading instruction. The primary research technique of data triangulation includes observation, interviewing, and document collecting (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992).

In looking at the processes a teacher undergoes when making changes in the way reading is taught, I chose a teacher who was in the process of making changes in reading instruction, specifically from a traditional method to the balanced literature philosophy. Patton (1990) refers to this as purposeful sampling. The specific type of purposeful sampling chosen for this study was criterion sampling based on the theories and constructs of balanced literature reading instruction. Patton states that theory-based sampling occurs when the researcher chooses samples on "the basis of their potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs" (p. 177) like the theories underpinning balanced literature reading instruction. According to Patton, the sample becomes "representative of the phenomenon of interest" (p. 177).

For this study, a teacher of a split third and fourth grade classroom, who will henceforth be referred to as Ms. Wilson, was chosen to participate in the study. She has taught school for 19 years, and was beginning her 20th year (the year of this study) by changing from a traditional manner of teaching reading to the use of balanced literature instruction (or was in a state of transition from one to the other) which qualified her as a representative sample.

Before the year of study, she taught reading strictly from reading basals. Included in this method was adherence to the basal reading program which included materials such as a teacher's manual, student reading texts, student workbooks, student skills books, and teacher resource materials such as charts, scope and sequence, copy masters, and testing materials.

In keeping with the basal approach, she grouped her students according to grade level and ability. She met with the groups individually in a reading circle in which they would read "round robin" style. Also in these groups she gave instruction in vocabulary and other skills, as well as led them in discussions of the material read based on questions in the teacher's manual. Following the group work, students were assigned worksheets to do at their desks. Worksheets generally consisted of a page or two in their workbook which asked comprehension types of questions based on the story. Other workbook pages consisted of skills which may or not have been related to the story. These workbook pages or worksheets were completed individually by the students and turned in at a designated area in the room. The teacher then graded all of these worksheets and recorded the grades in her grade book. These worksheets formed the basis for the students' grade in reading at the end of each quarter. After assigned seatwork, these students would return to their desks and the process would begin again with the next group of students.

Since the purpose of this study was to examine teacher change, the main focus was on the behavior, language, and interactions of the teacher. I observed carefully how she approached reading instruction and compared it to how she had taught it in the past. Through the use of interviewing, observing, and document collecting, I was able to conclude some differences in her methods of reading instruction as well as some similarities of past and present methods.

I also looked at the students' interactions with the teacher, and their responses, to see if how they were reacting to the methods of reading instruction matched the way the teacher felt they were responding. I was constantly comparing what the teacher was saying with what was going on with the students.

The way Ms. Wilson currently teaches reading was demonstrated and recorded through the means of observation and documentation. Through the use of teacher interviews, I discovered how and why she made these changes, as well as the teacher's feelings regarding those changes.

To ensure trustworthiness of the study, several qualitative research techniques were employed. Those techniques included data

triangulation, prolonged engagement and persistent observation, member checks, peer debriefing, and an audit trail.

The data collection stage was divided into three stages as explained by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The first stage, phase one, they term the "orientation and overview" phase (p. 235). During this stage, which can take anywhere from "a few days to many months," the researcher's goal is to become oriented in the field and to get a good overview. During stage one, I focused on extensive observation of what was going on in the classroom as a passive participant. My focus began with the surroundings in the room such as the layout of the room, what was on the walls, how many students were in each grade, what was the reading instruction like, how did the students react to the reading instruction, and how did the teacher present reading. My purpose was to get a feel for the classroom, the teacher, and the students. Also during this stage, I formally interviewed Ms. Wilson with a standardized open-ended interview, and I began to collect documents as supporting evidence of the changes she was making in reading instruction. Documentation collected included both past and present lesson plans, student work, teacher records, state guidelines, notes from International Reading Association meetings, and notes from inservice professional development sessions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to phase two as the "focused exploration" phase (p. 235). During this stage the researcher obtains "information in depth about those elements determined to be salient" (p. 235). The constant-comparative method, developed by Glaser and Strauss, "provides for alternate phases of data collection and analysis" (Parker and McDaniel, 1992, p. 101). With the constant-comparative method "newly collected data are constantly compared to categories and hypotheses that emerged in earlier rounds of analysis, and those categories and hypotheses are refined and elaborated or abandoned in light of the new data" (Parker and McDaniel, p. 101). Stage two was the stage in which I was brought in as an active participant in the classroom. During this stage I began looking for patterns in what was going on in reading instruction. I was also making comparisons between what the teacher was saying and what she was doing. Informal interviews took place throughout this stage as well as the following stage three. Lincoln and Guba state that it is important to allow time between phases one and two for the data to be analyzed, and time allowed between phases two and three to analyze and develop a report.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), phase three is the "member check" phase. They refer to a member check as when "data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of

those stake-holding groups from whom the data were originally collected" (p. 314). They believe that "if we take seriously the proposition that context is all important in assigning meaning to data, it is useful to carry that assigned meaning back into the context for verification" (p. 212). During this stage, the member checks increased through the means of many informal interviews. At least some informal interviews took place every day I was in the classroom. Further comparisons were made between what was learned from the informal interviews with the teacher and what was observed in the classroom. During this stage I also made comparisons of her reading instruction practices now as compared to how she taught before. These comparisons came from informal interviews and documentation of how she taught before, such as lesson plans. The conclusions drawn were checked and rechecked to make certain they were correct. Lincoln and Guba state that "the provisional report (case) is taken back to the site and subjected to the scrutiny of the persons who provided the information" (p. 236).

One method used to look at and interpret data was the paradigm model which helps us "link subcategories to a category in a set of relationships denoting causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action/interactional strategies, and consequences" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 99). The paradigm model for this study began with a description of the causal condition or the events that lead to the occurrence of the teacher changing her methods of reading instruction. This condition became clearly evident through the interviews between the teacher and the researcher. This particular teacher had been dissatisfied for some time with "the way things were occurring" in her classroom regarding reading instruction. The phenomenon, or the idea under investigation, was the process of change which formed the basis for this study. Context for this study involved the teacher in question, her classroom, and the activities of both the teacher and her students concerning reading instruction.

The intervening conditions would be those conditions which caused this teacher to change the way she taught reading. The cause has been established as a dissatisfaction with her current methods of reading instruction. The intervening conditions were the ideas, strategies, and philosophies she learned at meetings of the International Reading Association. She stated,

Like going to the meetings, and going to the workshops, and different things and seeing the way people are doing things and that gives me ideas that I can carry over into the classroom. But I'm not

good at brainstorming myself and saying 'Oh, let's do this and let's do this'. You see people and they're so excited and they want to do these things and I think, well, great, let's try it and see what happens. And it kind of falls into place. You start doing it and [it] kind of chains together. I don't know how to describe it to you but you start with an idea and as that idea starts it kind of snowballs and moves into a new idea and you just keep going and it falls into place. You didn't realize it was going to until you start it and it's fun. I like it.

The action/interactional strategies, strategies Ms. Wilson used to make changes in her methods of reading instruction, included using literature books in place of the basal series, not using workbooks for reading, language, or spelling, and incorporating more writing activities into the curriculum.

The consequences of this teacher's changes in reading instruction impacted both her students and a sense of herself as a teacher and change agent. She believes that she has reached a goal in that her students are finally excited about reading. Consequently, Ms. Wilson reported that she has not been experiencing feelings of burnout as she had in the past.

RESULTS

Ms. Wilson taught reading for 19 years with the aid of a basal instructional program. She decided before her 20th year of teaching to make changes in her methods of reading instruction. Those changes included aspects of the balanced literature approach such as using literature books to teach reading rather than the basals, focusing on themes, focusing on certain authors of children's literature, incorporating more writing, incorporating the use of journals, and the absence of basal workbooks in reading, spelling, and language.

Answers to the first question of the study, why did this teacher change her method of reading instruction, became clearly evident from the data, shown in the following excerpt of an interview.

The reason I changed is because when I was doing basals and I was doing reading groups, I had one group at the table and they would sit there and they were so bored and they weren't there and they didn't want to participate. It wasn't active involvement at all. And the other group, you'd give them seatwork but you couldn't really monitor them because you were doing readings. So I just didn't like the way it was occurring. I didn't like the feel, and I

didn't think they were getting enough interaction and enough actual active learning.

Ms. Wilson began the change process because of a dissatisfaction with the way she was teaching reading because her students were not responding to reading the way she wanted them to. She wanted them "to be really excited about reading because there's nothing better to me." Since she was already dissatisfied with what was going on in her classroom, she was very interested in hearing new ideas for teaching reading. These new ideas were what she was learning at meetings of the International Reading Association which she had been attending regularly the last four or five years previous to this study. At these meetings, both at the local level and at state conferences, she heard speakers and teachers talk about different ways of teaching reading, and she saw their excitement about what was going on in their classrooms. Ms. Wilson made the following comments concerning the IRA meetings.

If I see something I like and I want to try it then I'll go for it, but I'm not very good at making up my own new directions. Like going to the meetings, and going to the workshops and different things and seeing the way people are doing things, and that gives me ideas that I can carry over into the classroom. But I'm not good at just brainstorming myself.

Ms. Wilson had been wanting to change the way she taught reading and had learned new ideas that she was interested in implementing; therefore, after dialoguing with other teachers in her district and learning that they felt the same way she did, she became an active part of the process of making the decision for the district to change the way they taught reading. The year of this study, not only was Ms. Wilson changing her methods of reading instruction, but so were a few other teachers in her district. Ms. Wilson stated that while the reason she changed the way she teaches reading was for her students, it has also been good for her.

The second guiding research question, what process did she undergo as she made changes in reading instruction, was documented in the transition from basals to literature books. Instead of using the basals, Ms. Wilson began her reading program by focusing on themes, focusing on certain authors of children's literature, incorporating more writing, incorporating the use of journals, and no longer using basal workbooks in reading, spelling, and language. She stated that she wanted to use

literature so that the students would be reading “real books” instead of reading out of a basal.

Ms. Wilson commented during interviews that she felt that her strong background with the basal helped her teach reading using literature books.

I think if I hadn't have taught before it would have been harder. If I didn't have the background and know what each level would be doing. I use the basal to go back and look and see what skills they're doing, or what we would have been doing if we would have been using the basal, so I can try to pull them [the skills] out.

Ms. Wilson stated that she still teaches the skills but she now teaches them in context of real literature rather than in isolation which is commonly done with basal readers.

After careful analysis of the body of data, the processes Ms. Wilson underwent as she made changes in her method of reading instruction can be summarized as follows:

1. Identification of a problem. She was unhappy with her current method of reading instruction.
2. Search for solutions — She began attending meetings of the International Reading Association in search of new ideas.
3. Upon learning new ideas for teaching reading, she began dialogue with others teachers regarding those solutions to her reading dilemma and formulated a plan of action.
4. She put her reading plan of action into effect — one idea at a time.
5. While she was working her plan she constantly evaluated and re-worked her plan.

The third guiding question, how does she feel about the changes she has made, was answered through interviews. Ms. Wilson stated that she feels good about the changes she has made in reading instruction. She said she is a lot more enthusiastic about reading because she sees her students are a lot more enthusiastic. She also stated that she is enjoying school a lot more now.

Although Ms. Wilson is excited about the changes she is making in reading instruction, she also gets discouraged sometimes. Her overall feelings from reveal satisfaction with what she is doing this year. One aspect she stated that helps her is the support she receives from the district reading specialist and another teacher in her building. They attend the meetings of the International Reading Association together and share

ideas concerning reading instruction. Ms. Wilson also stated that she receives a lot of support from her principal who is behind her efforts to improve reading instruction in her classroom. She appreciates the support and ideas from other teachers.

Ms. Wilson seems to be in a constant process of evaluating the changes she is making in her classroom. She stated during one interview: "I'll analyze and reevaluate in the spring and see what I need to do differently. I've written down things I want to do differently next time." After each new method she analyzes how she felt it went and thinks about how she could do it next time.

CONCLUSIONS

As described previously in the literature review concerning change, when a teacher makes the decision to change her methods of reading instruction, moving from a traditional method for teaching reading in favor of the balanced literature philosophy, it is not a sudden change as in just changing a textbook. It is a long process which happens little by little, year by year. As Routman (1991) explained, transitions happen slowly as teachers often change one thing in their classrooms at a time. Routman also believes that early changes in the process of transition are often superficial ones. This seemed to be evident in this particular case study. Ms. Wilson's first change was to discontinue use of the basals by replacing them with literature books. Yet while she abandoned the workbooks with the basal, she created her own worksheets to use with the literature sets. Perhaps in subsequent years, if she continues making changes in the direction of balanced literature, she will begin phasing out the use of worksheets. What is evident, is that Ms. Wilson is indeed in the process of transition.

Data collected through interviews observations, and documentation show that Ms. Wilson is in the beginning stages of change. The processes Ms. Wilson underwent while changing methods of reading instruction seem to closely resemble the steps of the scientific model as explained by Heimler (1989): 1) identify the problem; 2) collect information about the problem through observation, experimentation, or by reading recorded information; 3) form a hypothesis or "suggested solution to a problem" (p. 10); 4) test the hypothesis; 5) accept or reject the hypothesis; and 6) report the results.

A comparison between these steps in the scientific model and the process of change undergone by Ms. Wilson indicate that they both began with identification of a problem. Ms. Wilson identified her problem

as a dissatisfaction with the way she was teaching reading, and her search for solutions began by her attending meetings of the International Reading Association. She also was searching for solutions by reading resource books for teachers such as Routman's books and by talking to other teachers such as the district reading specialist.

Ms. Wilson, in effect, formed her hypothesis when she decided that she would try the balanced literature approach in her classroom. She believed that the balanced literature philosophy would better serve her needs of not only teaching her students how to read, but also teaching them to love reading. Ms. Wilson tested her hypothesis this year as she began incorporating some aspects of the balanced literature philosophy in her classroom. The entire year of this study was a testing of her hypothesis.

In accepting or rejecting the hypothesis, Ms. Wilson expressed that she is happy with the changes she has made in her classroom, and she plans to continue in the direction she is headed. This would seem to indicate that she has accepted her hypothesis. She has tested it by incorporating the methods and has evaluated them positively enough that she thinks they are successful.

For the final step in the scientific model, personal record keeping, Ms. Wilson has not done any type of recording of the results of her efforts this year. Early in the study I asked her if she would be willing to keep some type of journal. She said she was very willing and agreed to do so. Although she was interested in keeping a journal and believed it would be beneficial to her, as time went by, she found that she was unable to find the time.

Ms. Wilson went through a model of transition which demonstrates how a teacher in transition progresses through stages of change. The model of transition reflects the gradual upward progression of change beginning at the point of a traditional approach moving, one new method at a time, to the balanced literature approach. The steps involved in incorporating these individual changes closely resemble those in the scientific model as described by Heimler (1989). Once the teacher has formed her hypothesis (decided what method believes will work best), tested her hypothesis (actually put the practice into effect), and then accepted or rejected her hypothesis (evaluated the change to see if it has worked to her satisfaction), then she begins the process all over again by adding yet another new method. For example, this year Ms. Wilson incorporated the use of literature books in her classroom. Next year she wants to try another new method which will involve adding creative writing to her

reading program. With each new method she incorporates in her classroom, she repeats the same basic steps.

Figure 1 is a model of transition as it was developed based on this study. The numbers within the spiral represent the steps involved in the process of change.

Figure 1. Model of transition.

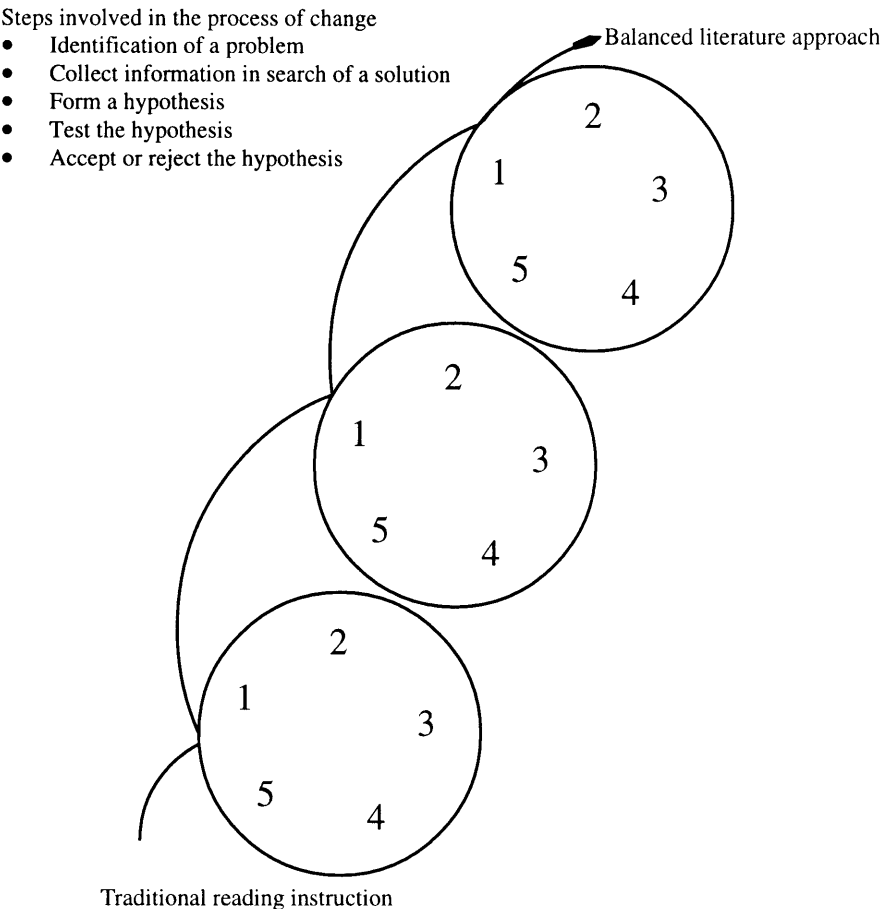


Figure 1. The model of transition demonstrates the processes involved in changing approaches in reading instruction based on the case study teacher's stages of transition.

This study began with a broad question of what processes a teacher undergoes as she makes changes in reading instruction from a traditional

approach to reading instruction to a balanced literature approach. A major conclusion is that the phrasing of this question in itself might be misleading. It seems to imply that one makes a one-time change from one approach to teaching to another. I discovered through data analysis and interpretation that changing from a traditional approach to a balanced literature approach is a very long process.

During another follow-up interview with Ms. Wilson, I asked her how her belief system has changed or if it changed prior to her transition toward the balanced literature approach to reading instruction. After some thought, Ms. Wilson expressed that she did not think her beliefs had changed because she has always believed very strongly that part of her goal was to teach children not only to read, but to enjoy reading. So this was not a new goal or belief system. The reason she changed her methods of reading instruction was not because her beliefs had changed, but because she thought she had finally found a method by which to reach her goal of teaching children to love to read. She stated that she "put two and two together and thought this was a better way to go."

I believe that this study can impact all teachers who are interested in changing the way they teach. The model based on this particular case study offers a picture of how teachers can become change agents in their own classrooms by evaluating how they teach and by changing one thing at a time. When following the outlined process of change, change does not have to be scary or daunting. Teachers who might feel overwhelmed with all of the new research and literature about teaching reading can be encouraged that they may begin the process of change one idea at a time, one day at a time.

In closing, I leave the reader with the words of a teacher who has impacted the lives of so many other teachers who are wanting more for themselves and their students. Routman (1991) said:

I believe we need to be kind to ourselves and accept and acknowledge that the kind of deep change we want to make takes time, lots of time. We need to go slowly, let ourselves make mistakes, and, most of all, give ourselves credit for what we are doing well and for the risks we are taking. (p. 24)

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The development of one teacher's skills at instructional conversation

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ABSTRACT

This study examined one teacher's learning and implementing instructional conversations (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988). She received assistance through opportunities to: 1) observe effective examples of instructional conversations; 2) practice skills and get immediate feedback through conversation; 3) read and discuss articles about instructional conversations and questioning techniques; and 4) read and comment on transcripts of lessons and follow-up conversations. Participant-observation, unstructured conversations, and interviews comprised the data, which included transcripts of audio-taped lessons, follow-up conversations, and interviews. There was a gradual shift in the teacher's practices from recitation to instructional conversation. Action, reflection, and collaborative talk became the process of change in her practice and thinking. Additionally, data revealed that students gave longer responses, initiated conversation, and participated in responsive conversation in which they contributed to, challenged, and extended each others' statements. Implications for teachers' professional development are discussed.

Teachers make decisions every minute about the instruction and support that happens in their classrooms (Cunningham and Allington, 1994; Yinger, 1979). To provide instruction and support, Tharp and Gallimore (1988) believe teachers need to learn the professional skill of assisting performance and teaching the child in his or her zone of proximal development, the area of cognitive development where the child cannot do a particular task alone, but may succeed with support to accomplish the task. A particular kind of activity, instructional conversation (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988), can be used to promote these learning opportunities for students. Instructional conversations are

challenging conversations between a teacher and a group of students about ideas relevant to the students (Goldenberg, 1993). Knowledge and higher thinking skills are gained as students interact with each other (Wells, 1994). This article describes a three month study in which one teacher's learning and implementation of instructional conversation was assisted through opportunities to read about, observe, and discuss effective instructional conversation. Practicing the techniques with feedback through conversation and reading transcripts of lessons and follow-up conversations also assisted this learning. The focus of this article is on the teacher's growth in conducting instructional conversations and the impact of action, reflection, and collaborative talk.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Traditional reading instruction stressed a set of skills to be mastered. For comprehension assessment, students were asked questions and wrote answers in workbooks with the main concern for students' right or wrong answers. These questions asked were primarily literal with the belief that the ability to read and answer questions was evidence of reading comprehension. Recitation, the prevalent form of questioning in classrooms, was also mainly concerned with assessment. The teacher Initiated questions, the student Responded, and the teacher Evaluated the response (IRE), (Cazden, 1988) with teachers doing most of the talking. Students were observed doing little more than responding with some recall information and rarely did they start a conversation. Very little of the teachers' statements were made in reaction to a students' statements (Durkin, 1978-1979; Palinscar, 1986; Pearson, 1986).

Today, many educators believe that learning to read is not a simple transfer of knowledge from the text to student, but a process in which students' construct meaning by interacting with a text. This process has recast the students as meaning maker (Goldenberg, 1993; Leal, 1992; Michaels, 1984; Palinscar, 1986; Pearson, Roehler, Dole and Duffy, 1992; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988; Wells, 1990; 1994). The student is expected to actively construct his or her knowledge and understanding, making connections from mental schemata and developing new concepts, rather than receiving knowledge from the teacher (Goldenberg, 1993). The understanding of a text depends on the reader's background, memories, and associations brought up by reading. The reader uses prior knowledge, prediction techniques, and text structure to comprehend text (Anderson, 1994).

Current views are also based on social constructivism theory's emphasis on learning as a social process (Davidson, 1986; Raphael and McMahon, 1994). Higher cognitive and linguistic skills first appear in social context between people. A child's growth actually occurs in their zone of proximal development, the area of cognitive development where the child cannot do a particular task alone, but may succeed and indeed learn with support to accomplish the task (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, the cognitive process necessary for learning develop when the child interacts and cooperates with people in their environment through participation in meaningful joint activities in which performance is assisted and guided by more competent members (Eeds and Wells, 1989; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988; Wells, 1990).

Conversation is a key factor in this learning process as it provides experiences for students to verbally share their interpretations, listen to other perspectives, and alter or develop new knowledge from the interaction (Golden, 1986; Palinscar, 1986; Wells, 1994). When the conversation is about a text and comments and explanations are offered that relate the text to personal experiences, students see what is involved in engaging with text. With the teacher's guidance and the use of text and talk, students collaborate with each other, achieve understanding, and communicate that understanding to others (Wells, 1990, p. 16). Talk provides such a rich source of information about how students negotiate meaning that the teacher can use that information to provide support (Leal, 1992).

Instructional conversations, as one form of classroom talk, help students use their knowledge and experiences to explore important ideas as they develop a deeper understanding of issues. When instructional conversations take place in the student's zone of proximal development, students' understandings and interpretations are developed through collaboration between the student and teacher and between student and student (Goldenberg, 1993; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988; 1989). Talking, asking questions, and sharing ideas and knowledge affect students' cognitive processes and assist them in using language to explain their interpretations. Answering questions and using language in this way become practice in formulating and expressing complex thoughts which in turn affect students' construction of knowledge (Au, 1979). Language becomes the primary vehicle for learning, as a tool for both communicating and helping students deepen their understanding (Goldenberg, 1993; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988; 1989).

There are four characteristics of instructional conversations: 1) highly informal, mutual, voluntary contributions by teacher and student,

with instant feedback, lack of penalty for wrong answers and undue domination by any one person, particularly the teacher; 2) sequences in which students first discuss Experiences or knowledge they have that is related to the story in some way, students read short parts of the Text and discuss questions the teacher asks that draw Relationships (ETR) for students between the content of the story and their personal experiences and knowledge; 3) conversations that rely heavily on questioning, extending from recall of specific detail through higher order critical thinking; and 4) instruction that is responsive to students' comments. So instead of having a traditional recitation, students actually talk with one another to challenge and expand each other's statements (Au, 1979; Goldenberg, 1991; 1993; Saunders, Goldenberg, and Hamann, 1992; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988).

Key to the success of instructional conversation is the interaction with the teacher and the teacher's willingness to let the child's past experiences be an integral part of the reading lesson (Au, 1979; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988). Teachers "weave" the students' prior knowledge, experiences and comments with the ideas and concepts of the lesson, thereby expanding the students' understanding and knowledge (Goldenberg, 1993). Teachers, as skillful questioners, lead children not to the correct answer, but to talk about their answers. Teachers formulate questions and comments on the basis of students' responses (Au, 1979; Gallimore, Dalton, and Tharp, 1986; Gallimore and Tharp, 1990). Teachers present challenging ideas, ask students to clarify comments, instruct, or keep quiet at the appropriate time. Students try out their understanding in their own words, and teachers hear evidence of students' thinking, understanding, and interpretive strategies. Teachers can guide immediately or wait and design the next lesson (Dillon, 1981; Golden, 1986; Wells and Wells, 1984). Most important is the student participation, both individually and collectively, as well as the teacher's facilitation of the discussions (Goldenberg, 1991; Goldenberg, 1993; Goldenberg and Gallimore, 1991, Thomas-MacKinnon, 1992).

Instructional conversations are professionally and intellectually demanding, and do not come easily or naturally to teachers (Goldenberg, 1993), so it is important to examine what happens to teachers and students as they grapple with instructional conversation as a method of instruction. The questions this study asks are: How can instructional conversation become routine in classrooms? What effect will action, reflection and collaborative talk have on teachers' thinking and practices? What will happen when students are given opportunities to engage in instructional conversation?

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study investigated one teacher's process in learning to conduct instructional conversations. The method of gathering data was participation in the setting, direct observation, and unstructured conversations and interviews.

Subjects

This study involved one elementary teacher, Susan (pseudonym), her students, and myself, Becky, a resource person for the public schools and doctoral student at a university. I used conversation first in my classroom with 4th and 5th graders and for the last three years in my role as a staff developer and teacher support person where I go into classrooms to model literature conversations. This was Susan's first year back as a self-contained classroom teacher after two years as a resource teacher. She felt she needed more materials and ideas for her students. She had taught a total of 25 years in three different states with second, third and fourth graders, gifted, regular, and at-risk students. She regularly attended conferences and involved herself in projects at the local university.

Susan had initially requested that I conduct community building lessons and class meetings with her students while she observed them. After several months of these lessons, I talked to Susan about participating in this study. I felt comfortable with Susan and her students. Susan knew of my interest in conversations about stories because of some staff development I conducted. Susan saw a need with her class of transition students to work on reading, their weakest area. All of her eighteen students were being retained for a fifth year in a four-year primary program and did not know each other. She wanted to "force herself" (her words) to look at different literature books and teacher guides and a literature/economic unit she had. She also wanted to watch someone else teach so she would have time to observe her students more closely. Susan agreed with my design of the study, except for keeping a journal. She had tried that before and didn't keep up with it.

Materials

I used trade books specifically selected because of the relevant and engaging issues they presented. Susan used a literature/economic unit with introductory activities, text questions and follow-up activities that had an economic theme. We shared the books and guides we used with

each other. Susan and I read and discussed several articles during the study.

Procedures

I started in late December with an interview of Susan and an initial observation of a literature lesson led by Susan. Questions for the interview were: Why did you feel comfortable having someone come into your classroom to model lessons? Why did you agree to do this study? Tell about your teaching background and philosophy of teaching. As a follow-up to the last question, I asked: What made you change schools, subjects, and the grade levels you've taught?

Starting in January and on a weekly basis for three months, Susan and I alternately conducted lessons (in the transcripts referred to respectively as teacher and modeling lessons). Both read aloud a story to all students so that everyone could participate in the conversation about the story. I followed the instructional conversation model described in this literature review. Susan started with the traditional IRE lesson format. Immediately following each lesson, we met to discuss the lessons. The follow-up conversations were unstructured with the goal to have Susan and I share in a conversation about the class conversations around the stories. All lessons, follow-up conversations, and interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by me. All the transcripts were given to Susan to read and make comments or changes. After a few lessons, I asked Susan to read an article on instructional conversation. A conversation was held that focused on that document. On her own, Susan began to tally which of her students participated during my lessons and some of the specific things I said. During my next modeling lesson, I requested that Susan record who talked, students' responses to initial and probing questions, and what students did with wait time. After requesting more information and techniques, I gave Susan an article on questioning techniques. At the end of the three months, I conducted a culminating interview to discuss the three research questions: How can instructional conversations become routine in classrooms? What effect will action, reflection, and collaborative talk have on teachers' thinking and practices? What will happen when students are given opportunities to engage in instructional conversations?

Analysis

The data for this study included tape-recorded conversations of Susan my literature lessons, our follow-up conversations after each lesson, and an initial and culminating teacher interview. I began data analysis as

I read through each lesson and follow-up conversation that I had just transcribed. After reading each literature lesson, I wrote what I noticed, e.g., the format of the lesson, how the teacher read the book, the teacher's questions and the students' responses. After each follow-up conversation, I wrote the things Susan talked about, e.g., her students' thinking and comments and her plans, ideas, and questions. I also wrote my questions about the data, e.g., what is different in the teacher and modeling lessons and should I count the students' responses? I also wrote about what I might do differently during the next modeling lesson or follow-up conversation. The recurring topics during the teachers' conversations were Susan watching her students and the modeling, and Susan's analysis and reflection of her ideas, actions, and plans.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To begin the study, I observed one of Susan's literature lessons. The lesson included vocabulary review and discussion of the story in the teacher initiation, student's response and teacher evaluation sequence, (IRE), (Cazden, 1988). The teacher read a story aloud and stopped after each page to ask recitation-like questions. Susan had the attention of all her students during the lesson. Some students participated and some not at all. Susan called on some students not participating and got answers from them.

My first lesson modeled for Susan was on January 16. I read the book, *Uncle Jed's Barbershop*, and started the conversation with an open-ended question to hear what the students were thinking about the story:

- T2 *What do you think?*
 S8 *I liked it, it was good.*
 S2 *It reminded me of Dr. King. He had a dream for the future, blacks and whites together going to the same schools together.*
 S5 *They both died.*

The conversation moved to the topic of segregation.

- S2 *What was that called?*
 T2 *Segregation. Are we still segregated?*
 Ss *No.*
 T2 *Are there places you go now where there are only black and white people?*

One student says yes quietly and talks directly to Susan about his neighborhood having no white people. A different student looks at Becky and says yes there are white people in the neighborhood because he lives in the same neighborhood. The first boy repeats his statement and adds that there is a barbershop in his neighborhood where there are only black people. The second boy nods his head in agreement.

In the follow-up conversation, Susan noticed what I did different and what her students said. Susan asked, "You didn't start with a conversation about what happened in the story?" I explained, "I didn't come with my agenda, I wanted to see where the students took the conversation. I've found they go to some pretty good places." Susan continued to talk about how her students identified with the seriousness of the story and that they really paid attention. "I really liked the boy who defended himself and didn't give in as he talked about his neighborhood."

Susan's first teacher lesson was the next week. Students heard *Helga's Dowry: A Troll Love Story*. Susan started this lesson with vocabulary and concept development, e.g., services, goods, bartering and dowry. She stopped at every page to ask questions. Student's responses were mainly short phrases. Susan responded to all her students by elaborating and giving more information. During our follow-up conversation she was concerned about what she did and if it matched what I needed for the study. I explained the study had two parts, instructional conversations during literature lessons, and our collaborative conversation about the discussions. Susan talked a lot about her students' lack of vocabulary and writing skills. She mentioned my comment last week about going with what the students said. "I wasn't getting anywhere with the question about candy so I dropped it and went with the question, what did you like about the book? I liked that, but original questions are important to come back to at a later time."

I modeled a second lesson a week later. While I taught, Susan decided to watch and keep a tally of students who were listening and participating. At the follow-up conversation, she noticed all the students were listening to the story and many were discussing, including some who usually do not. Also on her list were things I said during the lesson, like "tell me more." She noticed the visual passage I used as an introduction to the book. "It let students think before hearing the story... I like to watch you do the work and have all the plans and materials. It gives me time to watch for other things in the lesson and from the students." This is an excerpt from that lesson after the students heard a story from *The Stories Julian Tells*. As I indicated to Susan during our

last follow-up conversation, I wanted to give students the opportunity to respond and build on what each other are saying without the teacher talking after every student. I wanted to lead the students through the conversation, but let them put their ideas in their own words.

- T2 *What do you think?*
 S3 *I liked the part where the boys are under the bed.*
 S6 *I liked the boys sticking their fingers in the pudding and then their whole hand.*
 S5 *I liked the part when the father was mad.*
 S6 *I liked the part where the boys are under the bed. The boys were pressing against the wall.*
 T2 *What's that mean?*
 S6 *They were moving back against the wall not wanting to be found by father, they were scared.*
 S10 *The boys said they went outside and when they came back the pudding was gone.*
 T2 *What do you think about that?*
 S10 *They lied.*
 T2 *Why?*
 S8 *Didn't want to get into trouble.*
 S10 *They shouldn't have lied, they needed to tell the truth and not lie to their father.*
 S3 *It's wrong to lie.*

The following week, Susan read *The Goat in the Rug*. Susan read the story one page at a time, showing the pictures, and asking questions. She stressed vocabulary, sequencing, and noting details. During this conversation, students were beginning to share information and initiate questions.

- T1 *How many can see window rock? How did it get that way?*
 S2 *Weather.*
 S6 *Wind.*
 S4 *Ice.*
 S1 *Snow.*
 T1 *This is a desert, what weather is in the desert? Will we have ice?*
 Ss *No.*
 T1 *No, it's too warm, you have wind and rain.*

She read on.

S2 *This is an Indian story.*

T1 *Yes, it's a Navajo story.*

She finished the book where the goat said she couldn't wait to have her hair cut again.

S11 *I knew it, I knew she'd do it again.*

T1 *This is a true story of a weaver and her goat.*

S7 *It's true?*

T1 *Yes, at a Navajo nation at Little Rock, Arizona.*

S7 *The goat really sat next to her?*

T1 *Yes, the goat stayed with her just like a dog.*

During the next week, Susan read and discussed the article on instructional conversation. We talked about the difference between instructional conversations and what Susan does and the teacher's role as the facilitator. Susan started our conversation with a statement and a question; "I'm asking too many questions and getting too quick answers instead of deep thinking answers. Am I giving students the opportunity to get longer answers? I thought of these questions after reading the article on instructional conversations and I'm also connecting that with what I read in the transcripts. {Susan read from the article}:

Many traditional forms of teaching; recitation, direct instruction, assume that the teacher's role is to help students learn what the teacher already knows. The teacher identifies learning goals for students, then systematically designs and employs lessons to reach them. This type of instruction essentially consisted of having students acquire the goals through the teacher's skillful use of, for example, modeling, step-by-step instructions, practice, and checking for understanding. The teacher generally looks for particular answers and expects little or no discussion (Voght and Schaub, 1992).

"I see myself that way. I feel that way, that's me. Now the facilitator, the next paragraph, {Susan continued to read}:

The teacher plays the less directive, but no less deliberate role of the facilitator. An instructional conversation teacher does not provide step-by-step instruction designed to produce right answers or correct performance. Rather, the teacher encourages expression of students' own ideas, builds on the information students provide and generally guides students (Voght and Schaub, 1992).

That's what you do and I'm sure it took time."

Susan also discussed that many of her students talk during conversations and she liked her students taking turns without raising their hands. "This year I have my own class, I can do more, so I am ready now to do this and you're giving me actual lessons and modeling to do it with. I understand more about instructional conversations from the article; it gave me two comparisons. But does it make a difference? Is it since students know we're going to talk about something, they'll listen more, so they can talk too? Could we use literature and conversation to get better writing?"

I also wondered about how to make instructional conversations routine? What are the differences in what Susan and I do? What is it specifically that teachers do during conversations? What do the students do that is different? I decided, during my third modeling lesson, to ask Susan to record who talked, the students' responses to initial and probing questions, and what students did with wait time. The following excerpt was from my next modeling lesson and a conversation about thunderstorms before reading *Storm in the Night*:

T2 *What do you like about thunderstorms?*

S1 *Rain.*

T2 *Why?*

S1 *(no reply)*

S2 *I don't like the rain, it messed up the crops.*

T2 *How?*

S3 *Too much rain.*

S4 *Too hot.*

T2 *I thought you meant, I have wood chips around my rose bushes and when it rains they all wash away and I have to go and push them back around the roses.*

- S7 *They make the clouds dark and me and my sister can pretend we're playing a scary game.*
- S6 *I like it when I can walk around in the dark and hit stuff.*
- S8 *I like everything about thunderstorms.*
- S2 *I like the rain (hesitates) weathering.*
- T2 *Tell me about weathering.*
- S2 *The changes (hesitates) like cracks and holes.*
- T2 *Even this year without a lot of snow there's pot-holes in the roads.*
- S1 *I like rain because we can put a bucket out and get the rain and drink the water.*
- T2 *Do you drink the rain water?*
- Ss *No.*
- S3 *Rain hitting the cars and when it dries it's dirty.*
- S8 *The car is dirty and the rain is clean, it goes down on the car and cleans the car.*
- S7 *I hate the rain, it gets my dog cold so he shivers and I think he'll have to go to the hospital.*
- S5 *But my dog gets scared and they hide.*
- S2 *I have two dogs, one of them stays out in the rain, and the little one, when it thunders he dives under the sink.*
- S4 *I hate the rain because it cancels my basketball games.*
- S5 *I like the rain because when I sleep I like hearing it hit the windows.*

In our follow-up conversation, Susan noticed that everyone talked, there were personal connections, and lots of thinking and content covered. From the question about wait time, Susan thought some of her students were thinking, getting ideas from each other, and forming opinions. She especially noticed that they were listening to each other and adding on to what each other said.

"You're getting answers from even the busy ones. It seems to me you were getting more, more personal stories, sharing, more about each other, and students talking to each other. That's a first. It seems like you had a goal to get to that part, that there would actually be discussion. So there's a lot of talking and sharing among themselves. I'm seeing

more come out of it, just the fact to give them a chance to talk.” Susan still wondered, however, “Is it the questions or is it because they have more knowledge because they have more prior knowledge, and what can they learn by it afterwards?”

Susan began her third lesson in a very different manner by telling her students what she wanted them to do.

“You know that we’ve come together for a literature circle and in our literature circle we try to be able to talk better about what we read. When we talk, I’m trying to work to get more than just an answer that says yes, no, or I don’t think so. I’m looking for what happened last week where we were thinking. Robert said something and then he disagreed with someone and someone else said, I think this, too. [We want] to get a conversation going and that’s what we’re trying for today.”

This excerpt is from teacher lesson #3 after the students heard *Something Special for Me*.

- T1 Rosa had a problem. Tell me what it was.*
- S9 She went to the store and wanted to buy those things and couldn’t wait.*
- T1 She wanted them really bad. She knew exactly what she’d do with them.*
- S10 She thought that she had seen all kinds of things, but it wasn’t worth it to spend that big jar of money.*
- T1 That big jar of money was sitting there, but they had saved a long time. I agree.*
- S9 She went to the dress shop and put on a dress and said wait.*
- T1 Can you see yourself trying to make that decision? Janice, what was the next thing she started to buy?*
- S11 Accordion.*
- T1 Not yet.*
- S7 She didn’t want to spend all of her money on something she can’t keep forever.*
- T1 Okay.*

- S7 She wanted to keep it forever and [do] a lot of things with it and she could get an accordion so she gets to keep it wherever she takes it. She could do what she wants. She likes it causes it had wonderful music. She could do things and keep it and she won't have to waste it [money] for stupid things.*
- T1 Why is it so stupid?*
- S7 Because with clothes, all you gotta do, you gotta wear other clothes and you couldn't wear it all the time and you spend a lot of money on clothes and you grow out of them and they get old and you have to wash them everyday and you can't wear them every day.*
- T1 What do you think of the idea that the accordion lasts longer?*
- S2 Clothes are okay.*
- S3 The accordion can break.*
- T1 The accordion can break, but not if you're careful with it. Let's go back to what Eddie said to agree or disagree and why.*
- S10 I agree.*
- T1 Why?*
- S10 Because clothes can get ripped and dirty.*
- S9 I disagree.*
- T1 Why? (Wait time) Why is an accordion a bad idea? (Wait time) I'll come back. Think for a minute, there's one more thing she looked at.*
- S3 They went to the tent place where they had tents and stuff.*
- T1 They actually said what it would be like to be camping. That's a pretty neat idea, you can use camping equipment over and over.*
- S3 I would have got it.*
- T1 You would? Why?*
- S3 I could sleep in that bed.*

Susan achieved the goal she stated at the beginning of the lesson and modeled exactly what she said she wanted, responsive conversation. She read the entire story first and then started the discussion with an open-ended question instead of literal questions. She accepted her students' ideas and commented on and agreed with them. She used "not

yet” and “okay” as prompts for her students to continue thinking. She asked “why?” in an effort to get students to elaborate. She posed questions, rephrased and elaborated. She followed the students’ exchange instead of her lesson guide. Many topics connected to the story were discussed. The conversation was longer, and more students participated and gave longer responses.

In another excerpt from lesson #3, Susan allowed opportunities for students to question each other and defend their ideas. We see that students have begun to respond to each other and not just to the teacher.

S8 Eddie said you can't use clothes over, but your little brother could wear them.

T1 So you say clothes can be recycled and clothes are important, too, but

S7 (interrupted) Another thing is she wanted to get what she wanted and she liked it.

S8 How can you tell what she liked?

S7 Because (hesitated, and Susan said to go on) I can have all the stuff to go camping and the accordion you don't need nothing, no batteries or nothing. It might take me a long time to drive to the camp and maybe not have all kinds of stuff and may have to stay in the backyard.

In the follow-up conversation, Susan said she was most surprised by a student who rarely participated, but today became very involved. When asked why she did this lesson differently, Susan replied,

“Last week we talked about letting the students know what we were doing, so I started that way today. I thought I'd do the story as a whole because I've always done it in parts. I thought we'd hold off till the end for a change, just a different approach. I was just interested, I guess now I'm trying to get as much conversation as I can because it's kind of like I want to see what they think because they have so many good thoughts I want to hear them... If I could teach myself to be quiet.”

Susan took time to watch her students as they listened to each other and became more involved. As well, she analyzed her behaviors of being quiet and hearing what her students are saying.

Two weeks later, Susan read *Sea Breeze Hotel*.

- T1 *Now, I'm going to Kenny's story.*
 S4 *It was nighttime and I was outside and it was raining and the wind was blowing and it tore a hole through it [a kite] and it fell down.*
 T1 *Someone ask him a question.*
 S15 *Why would you go outside in the rain? Could you go outside some other time when it was not raining?*
 S4 *I didn't know it was going to rain, it was nighttime and then*
 S15 *(interrupting) You said it was raining when you went outside.*
 S4 *I said (hesitates)*
 T1 *She's confused, that would have been a good word, I'm confused, tell me more.*
 S4 *It wasn't raining when I went outside.*
 S15 *It started pouring little drops or something.*
 T1 *That clears that up.*
 S4 *Then it tore a hole in my kite.*
 T1 *What tore a hole in your kite?*
 S4 *The wind.*
 T1 *And the rain when it got real wet.*

After another student told a short story about her kite, a student came back to Kenny's story.

- S14 *Kenny, in your story was there any thunder?*
 S4 *No.*
 T1 *Why are you asking?*
 S14 *If it was thundering it could hit the car.*
 T1 *Thunder? I have a question. Does thunder hit anything?*
 Ss *(a lot of yes and no)*
 S11 *If it hit the tree and knocked the tree down.*
 T1 *Thunder? Rob, help me out, I'm confused.*
 S15 *They're not going to knock the tree down because they are very high.*
 T1 *Anyone disagree?*
 S8 *I disagree because thunder is only a loud noise.*

- S3 *It could be so loud the echo could hit the tree.*
 S1 *I agree, thunder is so loud it shook the ground.*
 S15 *Sometimes it causes a earthquake.*
 T1 *Thunder causes an earthquake?*
 S5 *What you're looking for is lightning, cause lightning knocks down trees.*
 S13 *If lightning hit a kite it could fall to the tree and then be electrocuted.*
 T1 *How do you know that?*
 S13 *When I was in Miss Cole's class we were talking about weather and our teacher told us a story about weather and then she said there was this story about this man flying a kite and it started to thunder and it ripped the kite.*
 T1 *Not the thunder, the lightning. And he was holding something metal and this man's name was*
 S15 *Benjamin Franklin.*
 T1 *And he discovered electricity on that day when he was flying a kite.*

We see in the above example, Susan respected her students' ideas and stories and allowed time for them to talk. She modeled the skill of asking "why?" questions and explaining what you mean or don't understand. As shown in other studies (Almasi, McKeown, and Beck, 1996; McIntyre, Kyle, Hovda, and Clyde, 1996), Susan's modeling allowed students to see the thought processes of understanding text and communicating that to others. Susan guided the conversation, but allowed time for students to construct meaning. She asked a student for help, used questions to get students to elaborate, invited other students to contribute and modeled the idea that we can agree or disagree with each other in a conversation. Roehler, Hallenbeck, McLellan and Svoboda (1996), suggest that the teacher's modeling provides students with more opportunities to learn and helps them to learn how to talk to each other and to the teacher. During the follow-up conversation, Susan talked about trying to hold back and have the students ask questions and her use of deliberate silence to give them time to reflect.

During the three months of modeling and practicing instructional conversations, Susan began to use conversations to observe her students and listen to their stories. She encouraged them to question and share ideas. During these conversations, Susan's students actively constructed meaning in collaboration with others. Instructional conversations

allowed her students to put their thoughts into words, explain their ideas and hear what others are thinking. Eeds and Wells (1989) and Saunders, Goldenberg and Hamann (1992) document similar experiences of teacher and student behaviors.

In the culminating interview, Susan said that reading and discussing a book every week was very important in making instructional conversations routine. By doing this every week, she saw what students did and said while engaged in conversation. "Eddie has higher thinking skills and now that we take time for conversation he is not the first student to talk, but the third or fourth one because he has used the time to put his thoughts together. Eddie's an example of a child who needed the time." Susan talked about instructional conversation as a way for students to learn to work together, find things to write about, and learn more. "We can use instructional conversation in math. If it's always the teacher using the math terminology the students will never get it, they need to use it also and explain things to each other." She talked about the benefits for her students. "It's about kids listening and helping each other understand. They hear each other's perspectives, not just their own." Other researchers agree that instructional conversations promote learning and students increase their abilities to interact and work together (Roehler, Hallenbeck, McLellan and Svoboda, 1996; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988).

Goldenberg and Gallimore's (1991) research described what is needed for teachers to learn to conduct effective instructional conversations: 1) opportunities for teachers to meet routinely with a skilled person; 2) teachers' needs and concerns determine how that time was spent; 3) specific goals and specific times frame the time together; 4) teachers work to understand pedagogy as well as the skill of instructional conversation; 5) time provided for planning instructional conversations; and 6) opportunities for teachers to analyze transcripts or videotapes of their lessons (p. 70). As well, Pace (1992) examined teachers' shift from traditional to whole language instruction and found teachers need time to think about and feel comfortable with the implications of changing their practice. Without support many teachers may start to make changes, but in times of frustration go back to more comfortable ways. This study confirms that working together, talking right after the lessons, and reading the transcripts helped this teacher change. Susan comments to me during the culminating interview:

"When you are teaching you can't listen. You're rolling with them and trying to keep up with them. There's no time to evaluate yourself until you sit down like this; the evaluation at

the end is better. You, never said how I was doing, but the transcripts told me what was said and what happened. You knew what you were doing with instructional conversation, but I knew it took time to do this and that was very comforting. I didn't have to know how to do it, so that opened doors for me to ask for help and to wait and give time for students to think."

This study also supports what Tharp and Gallimore (1988) indicate is a major barrier to changing teaching practice, the absence of opportunities for assisting teachers in their classrooms as they work with students. Teachers, like their students, have zones of proximal development. Schools need to create opportunities for teachers to receive assistance. Richardson (1990) recommends we first acknowledge and build upon teachers' experiences, promote reflection of experiences, and then introduce new ideas and practices through dialogue that combines discussion of new practices with the teachers' current views of effective practices. Au's (1990) study of change in one teacher's view of interactive comprehension instruction included discussing instructional problems, which helped the teacher's thinking and implementation of solutions. Susan would agree,

"You learn over the years to try something so you can become a better teacher, and you learn more from sharing with people than just doing it. I watched (Becky) and tried to head to the same place, but then I also wanted to do something different. I felt like we were on the same level, but she also pushed me into some things. I like my old ways and I know they work, but this works better."

Ultimately, effective instruction is about the teacher making decisions about what is best for kids (McIntyre, 1996). "The individual classroom teacher is a key player in reform. Knowing more about how teachers change is important if schools are to respond to changing needs in a changing world" (Pace, 1992, p. 475). Given the opportunity to observe, practice and get feedback through collaborative talk, this teacher made a shift from recitation to conversation and her students initiated conversation, and challenged and contributed to each other's statements.

The conclusions of this study in terms of the teacher and students behaviors are limited because of the short-term exploratory nature of the study and the impact of other factors on the teacher and her students.

However, the results suggest the importance of teachers' professional development as a continual everyday process of engagement, reflection, discussion, and collaborative efforts to learn. One of the implications for further research is a longer study to understand more about the processes that support teachers' professional development in the practices of critical analysis and reflection and explicit modeling and scaffolding in students' zones of proximal development. Teachers, as learners, need to experience successful practice, to discuss, to think about, and to try out strategies with support through modeling, coaching, and collective problem solving (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995). Research is also needed to determine teachers' beliefs and attitudes about the kinds of staff development that support changing in their practices as well as what supports collaboration and the sharing of knowledge.

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Spelling practices in school districts and regions across the United States and state spelling standards

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ABSTRACT

The authors sent a survey during the 1996-97 school year to 670 school districts in 41 states requesting information on spelling instructional practices to ascertain whether spelling texts are still widely used in the United States given the current emphasis on developmental spelling in the primary grades and the March, 1996 publication of the NCTE/IRA standards. In addition, a search of the reading/language arts standards in 50 states in 1998 revealed that most states do have spelling standards, but only a few coincide with the NCTE/IRA Standard 6 which mentions spelling.

INTRODUCTION

The International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English (1996) published a document called *Standards for the English Language Arts*. Although the birth of the Standards began in 1992, the effort was almost aborted in 1994 by the lack of funding (Salinger, 1996). Both associations continued the work, however, and finally published the list of the 12 content standards in March, 1996. *Standards for the English Language Arts* (National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, 1996) encompass reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing and are meant to describe what a student should learn in each of these areas. Spelling,

addressed in Standard 6, characterizes the student's use of spelling as a language convention that can be used to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts. In this context, spelling is seen as a key function in the language process and as integrated into a larger whole of knowledge application (Buswinka et al., 1996).

There is debate about whether the content standards truly can be integrated within the English Language Arts curriculum and whether school districts, communities and teachers can understand how the standards will appear in the teaching and learning process (Fleischer, Koch, Lewis and Roop, 1996). Some current English Language Arts publications ignore the integrated curriculum or talk about the English Language Arts skills in isolation (Wixson, Peters, and Potter, 1996).

One continuing concern of educators today is that spelling instruction emphasizes the memorization of words with no relationship to the process of reading and writing. Teachers discover that students perform well on weekly tests, forget how to spell the words soon afterward, and aren't using the words in journals or writings (Gill and Scharer, 1996; Barch, 1992; Teale, 1992).

DIFFERENT METHODS OF TEACHING SPELLING

Weiner (1997) describes four basic methods of teaching spelling being used in the classroom today:

1. Published spelling text: word lists are used with associated activities. Students are measured by formal weekly assessment.
2. Individualized spelling: sequenced word lists are given on an individualized basis. Placement tests are administered to the student and the student proceeds at his/her own rate. Formal assessment is then administered.
3. Developmental spelling with direct instruction: words are taught in context. Students are evaluated in individual conferences and given direction as to the appropriate strategies which can be used for spelling the word.
4. Developmental spelling without direct instruction: the child has been immersed in many and various reading and writing experiences. Teaching reflects and builds upon the developmental spelling stages. Evaluation can reveal where the child is located in the developmental stages.

Published spelling texts and word lists

The history of spelling instructional practices shows that from the eighteenth to the latter half of the twentieth century, spelling has been taught in U.S. schools through the use of word lists generally published in spelling textbooks which students were asked to memorize (Venezky, 1987). Zutell (1978) reports that memorization and drills caused boredom, frustration and a lack of carryover from memorizing the words to using them in written products. Henderson and Temple (1986) indicate that memory alone does not aid spelling competence, but that the memorization of words must be accompanied by an internalization of the phonetic relationship to meaning patterns.

Individualized spelling

A more recent method used to teach spelling is individualized spelling. Sequenced word lists are given to the students on an individualized basis after the administration of placement tests (Weiner, 1997). Students then proceed at their own rate. Hennings (1994) reports that individualized spelling has an advantage over a formalized spelling approach because individualized word lists can be modified by having the child create a list of similarly patterned words and compile his/her own list to study. Thus, the child is memorizing lists that are meaningful.

Developmental spelling

With the advent of whole language instruction in the United States in the last decade, there has been an emphasis on less direct instruction and a more personalized type of instruction in spelling. Read's (1971) analysis of the invented spellings of preschoolers shows that children use similar types of spellings. Gentry's (1981) account of developmental levels for children's spellings has also been based on study of young children's similar patterns in spelling. According to May (1994) invented spelling (one of the stages of developmental spelling) has been practiced in many primary classrooms since the 1980's. The employment of invented spelling in writing, however, has been one of the controversial topics linked to the whole language-literacy movement.

The literature concerning developmental spelling either extols the virtues of permitting children to use invented spelling or denounces the effects of its use in children's writings. Gunderson (1991) states that many whole language instructors do not believe in directly teaching early spelling or reading skills. The research of Huxford, Terrell, and Bradley

(1991) indicates that children have the ability to bring some phonological knowledge to the spelling task before they can do this in the reading task. Further work by Melling, Parkinson, and McLaughlin-Cook (1994) reports that children's spellings of personal words versus words from a traditional spelling program were retained better. Vacca, Vacca, and Gove (1995) suggest that children's spelling inventions should be regarded as signs of growth. In whole language instruction, errors are welcomed and not frowned upon.

In addition, Vacca, Vacca, and Gove state that skill-based and whole language perspectives are directly oppositional. Research that supports a more traditional manner of direct instruction in spelling indicates that children in whole language instruction have a tendency to increase their phonological errors as they develop (Oerlemans and Dodd, 1993). Immersion in texts, as whole language advocates would propose, may not be the answer to correction of spelling mistakes for some children.

However, Manning (1990) indicates that students in the whole language group versus a traditional writing group were better writers, viewed themselves as writers of real texts, had confidence in themselves as writers, and outperformed the skills-oriented students on measures of spelling achievement. Manning's findings suggest that whole language should be considered an alternative to skills-oriented instruction in inner city schools.

Direct instruction and indirection instruction

Farris (1993) states that although a majority of students in grades 2 through 6 learn spelling via a spelling textbook series, first graders usually receive little or no formal spelling instruction. Ehri and Wilce (1987) maintain that writing activities with direct teacher instruction is an effective approach for teaching reading, writing and spelling in first grade. Studies have shown that no formal instruction is just as effective as a formal program for teaching students beyond the fourth grade (Hammill, Larsen, and McNutt, 1977; Manolakes, 1975). Students at this grade level should focus mainly on understanding how meaning and form are related in English spelling. They can practice and play with those words that have related forms and roots, especially in the content areas.

Stewig and Nordberg (1995) report that many curricular changes occurring today are reflected in spelling instruction. However, Stewig and Nordberg (1995) state that teachers are still wondering about the role of phonetics, the need for spelling word lists, rules learning, and about giving children freedom to write with or without spelling standards. In the whole language approach to teaching, developmental spelling is encouraged with the notion that the student given frequent opportunities to read and write, will eventually develop into a proficient speller without much direct instruction. Students who use developmental spelling appear to produce more fluent writing and learn to spell words without using word lists (Jewell and Zintz, 1990; Lamme, 1984). Teachers, then, are faced with the problem of desiring to retain the fluent writing that supports developmental spelling and also the realization that there is need for some skill instruction. The question that they appear to be struggling with is whether skill instruction will reduce spontaneity and fluency in writing. Since questions are being raised concerning spelling approaches, it is possible that the state of spelling instruction is presently not well defined. Therefore, the purposes of this study were threefold: 1) to ascertain if the published spelling text is still widely used across the country since the advent of the whole language movement and the newly published NCTE/IRA *Standards* (1996); 2) to determine if school district size effects the type of spelling program which occurs and; 3) to determine the type of spelling instruction that is most prevalent across regions in the United States. A comparison of the spelling standards in the state documents with Standard 6 of the NCTE/IRA *Standards* was also conducted to determine if the state standards are influenced by this publication

METHOD

Survey participants

The researchers designed a survey (see Appendix A) to correspond to the four basic methods of spelling instruction mentioned by Weiner (1997) and distributed it to approximately 670 school districts with a population of 20 or more teachers in 41 different states. We obtained a list of the school districts with a population of 20 or more teachers from the Directory of Public Elementary and Secondary Agencies (1988) published by the United States Department of Education and Improvement.

The number of classroom teachers in each district was used to establish the stratified random sample. According to, Hinkle, Wiersma and Jurs (1994), a stratified random sample is a homogeneous population which may have several sub populations called strata. All of the school districts which contained 2,000 or more full time classroom teachers were included in the sample. The remaining school districts were grouped according to the number of full time classroom teachers into four more size strata: 600-1999, 250-599, 120-249, and 20-119.

The school districts were also grouped into 8 regions for the purposes of this study: 1) New England — Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont; 2) Middle East — District of Columbia, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania; 3) Southeast — Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, West Virginia; 4) Great Lakes — Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin; 5) Great Plains — Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota; 6) Southwest — Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma; 7) Rocky Mountains — Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Wyoming; 8) Far West — California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington.

We sent a survey to the curriculum director of 670 school districts in the sample in November, 1996. A second copy of the survey was sent in February, 1997, to those districts that did not respond to the first copy. The total number of respondents after both distributions of the survey was 313 or 47%. The returns were as follows:

- School districts employing over 2,000 full time teachers returned 34 surveys.
- School districts employing 600-1,999 returned 44 surveys.
- School districts employing 250-599 returned 78 surveys
- School districts employing 120-249 returned 76 surveys
- School districts employing 20-119 returned 81 surveys. (see Table 1).

We conducted a search of the Internet in the spring of 1998 through <http://putwest.boces.org/standards.html> to determine which of the fifty states have content standards for spelling instruction. The standards were generally listed under the subject area of Reading/Language Arts. In addition, we followed up with an Internet search of the remaining states not listed at the previous address.

RESULTS

Question A (part one): Do you use a published spelling series?

Responses organized by school district size. Participants reported using spelling texts in 166 school districts and 147 districts replied that they did not use a published text (see Table 1). In districts which employed 250-599 teachers, there were 44 “no” responses to Question A and 34 “yes” responses. In all other district size categories, generally half of the districts are using a published text.

Table 1.

Distribution of Spelling Survey Responses Across School District Strata for Questions A-D

<i>Number of full-time teachers in district</i>	<i>Published spelling text</i>		<i>Individualized instruction</i>		<i>Developmental with direct instruction</i>		<i>Developmental without direct instruction</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
20-119	44	37	31	50	23	58	5	76
120-249	42	34	37	39	22	54	1	75
250-599	34	44	37	41	26	52	2	76
600-1999	26	18	22	22	17	27	1	42
2000+	20	14	18	16	13	21	4	300
Total	166	147	145	168	101	212	13	300

Responses organized by regions. Of the eight regions across the US, three regions showed a different result than the general trend of nearly 50% of the districts using a published spelling text (see Table 2). In the Far West Region, 36 school districts replied that they did not use a basal text versus 10 districts who answered that they did use a basal text. In the Rocky Mountain Region, there were 9 school districts which answered “no” and 6 districts answered “yes”. The Middle East Region results were 24 “no” replies and 23 “yes” replies.

Question A (part two): Please indicate which series you use

There were 188 respondents who did not list any publishing company. The remaining 125 school districts specified that they used 11 different publishing companies. The largest number of school districts using one particular publishing company was 25.

Question B: Do you use an individualized spelling program?

Responses organized by school district size. Eighteen school districts which employed 2000+ teachers reported using an individualized spelling series and 16 reported that they did not use an individualized series (see Table 1). School districts which employed 600 – 1999 teachers were equal in the number of districts which used individualized spelling and districts which did not. More districts replied “no” in the three other district size categories than replied “yes” to Question B. Again, the distribution was nearly split between negative responses and positive responses.

Table 2.

Distribution of Spelling Survey Responses Across Regions for Questions A-D

<i>Region</i>	<i>Published spelling series</i>		<i>Individualized spelling series</i>		<i>Developmental spelling with direct instruction</i>		<i>Developmental spelling without direct instruction</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
New East	13	11	12	12	8	16	2	22
Middle East	23	24	19	28	18	29	2	45
Southeast	27	17	20	24	17	27	2	42
Great Lakes	52	29	31	50	22	59	1	80
Great Plains	21	15	16	20	15	21	0	36
Southwest	15	6	5	16	2	19	0	21
Rocky Mts.	6	9	11	4	8	7	2	13
Far West	10	36	31	15	11	35	4	42
Total	167	147	145	169	101	213	13	301

Responses organized by regions. In the Middle East, Southeast, Great Lakes, Great Plains and Southwest regions, more school districts answered “no” to Question B than answered “yes”. (See Table 2). Eleven school districts in the Rocky Mountain region indicated that they used an individualized spelling program versus 4 districts which indicated that they did not. The Far West region reported using individualized spelling in 31 districts and 15 other districts replied that they did not use an individualized spelling program.

Question C: Do you exclusively use developmental spelling (invented spelling) with direct instruction?

Responses organized by school district size. Every district size category showed that there were more districts which reported “no” to the question concerning developmental or invented spelling with direct instruction than answered “yes”. (See Table 1). The three smallest school district size categories submitted approximately twice as many “no” answers as “yes” answers.

Responses organized by regions. The Rocky Mountain area was the only region which had more positive responses than negative responses to Question C. (See Table 2).

Question D: Do you exclusively use developmental spelling (invented spelling) without direct instruction?

Responses organized by school district size. The overwhelming majority of responses (300) in all district size categories was “no” to using developmental spelling without direct instruction. (See Table 1). There were only 13 districts by contrast which reported “yes” to using developmental spelling without direct instruction in Question D.

Responses organized by regions. In all of the regions, developmental spelling without direct instruction was an approach that was clearly in the minority. (See Table 2).

Question E: If you use a combination of spelling approaches, please indicate which ones:

1) Individualized and developmental; 2) Individualized and published series; 3) Individualized with direct instruction; 4) Developmental (invented) and published spelling text.

Responses organized by school district size. The last survey question involved asking the districts about the use of a combination of methods for spelling instruction. When asked about combination one, individualized spelling and developmental approaches, the school district strata results indicated that there were 238 districts which replied “yes” versus 76 which replied “no”. (See Table 3). The districts who marked “no” to combination two, individualized spelling and published spelling text, numbered twice as many as marked “yes”. The majority of answers were “no” to combination three, individualized spelling with direct instruction. Finally, the number of school districts who used combination four, developmental instruction and published spelling text, was almost equal to those districts which did not.

Responses organized by regions. In the Far West region, there were 15 school districts which reported using combination one, individual spelling and developmental spelling. (See Table 4). In the Great Lakes region, 35 districts reported using combination two, individualized spelling and a published spelling series. In the Southeast there were 12 district schools which used this combination. There were more regions who checked “no” to using combination three, individualized spelling with direct instruction, than checked “yes”. Only in two regions were there more school districts which reported using combination four, developmental spelling and a published text than did not.

Table 3.

Distribution of Combination Approaches to Teaching Spelling Across District Size Strata for Question E

<i>Number of Individualized full-time teachers in district</i>		<i>Individualized spelling and developmental spelling</i>		<i>Individualized spelling and published spelling text</i>		<i>Individualized spelling with direct instruction</i>		<i>Developmental spelling and published spelling text</i>	
<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
20-119		21	60	27	54	17	64	26	55
120-249		14	63	18	59	12	65	39	38
250-599		16	62	30	48	21	57	40	38
600-1999		31	13	16	28	12	32	19	25
2000+		12	22	10	24	11	23	19	15
Total		76	238	101	213	73	241	143	171

State standards

We conducted a search of fifty state departments of education in the spring of 1998 on the Internet. An Internet search of 50 state departments of education in spring of 1998, indicated that 37 states publish their general curriculum guides on the Internet: <http://putwest.boces.org/standards.html>. After examining the language arts curriculum guides, we discovered that twenty-five out of 37 states do have a standard or standards for spelling (see Table 5). The majority of these standards are divided into primary grade standards and middle school standards. In seventeen states the standards are categorized as one or more for the primary grades and one or more for the middle school. There were four states which itemized specific standards at each individual grade level. Four state documents mentioned a spelling

guideline which would coincide with Standard 6 of the NCTE/IRA *Standards* (1996). Eight states listed no spelling standards and two states were revising their standards.

An additional Internet search of the remaining 13 states not listed on the Internet address revealed that ten of those states that had standards had no information available concerning Reading/Language Arts standards. The three other states did not have an accessible web page.

Table 4.

Distribution of Combination Approaches to Teaching Spelling Across Regions for Question E

Region	Individualized spelling and developmental spelling		Individualized spelling and published spelling text		Individualized spelling with direct instruction		Developmental spelling and published spelling text	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
New East	4	20	9	15	5	19	15	9
Middle East	8	39	8	39	10	37	29	18
Southeast	14	30	16	28	13	31	22	22
Great Lakes	17	64	35	46	14	67	30	51
Great Plains	6	30	7	29	5	31	11	25
Southwest	5	16	12	9	5	16	9	12
Rocky Mts.	7	8	4	11	4	11	7	8
Far West	15	31	10	36	17	29	20	26
Total	76	238	101	213	73	241	143	171

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There appears to be no general trend across school district size strata or across regions in the United States. The status of spelling instruction seems unclear.

Across the United States, 53% of the school districts in this study are using a basal spelling series and the remaining 47% are not. Clearly, the spelling text is still being used in the United States, but not in the overwhelming majority of districts.

In five of the eight regions across the United States, 50% or more school districts are using a published spelling series or basal spelling texts, but there is no distinct pattern. The remaining three regions also

show no consistent pattern in the number of districts which are using a published spelling text and those which are not.

Examination of school district strata in Table 3 reveals that some districts are using a combination of approaches such as individualized spelling and the developmental spelling (76); individualized spelling and a published spelling text (101); individualized spelling with direct instruction (73); and developmental spelling and a published spelling text (143).

Although the largest response to a combination of methods being used by school districts is developmental with a published text, there were 171 of the districts that reported that they did not use this combination. School district size does not seem to determine the type of spelling instruction which occurs. In all of the regions, a combination of methods is used. Since districts are using a combination of instructional methods, the basal text is not exclusively being used in the classroom.

A current search in the spring of 1998 of 37 state departments of education which publish their curriculum guides on the Internet, reveals that only four documents mention a spelling guideline which would coincide with Standard 6 of the English/language arts. It would seem that the state standards have not been influenced by the NCTE/IRA *Standards*. If the individual state departments have knowledge of the professional NCTE/IRA *Standards*, they apparently are not considering them when designing language arts curriculum guides.

Since the NCTE/IRA *Standards* were just recently published during distribution of this survey in the 1996-1997 school year, it would be reasoned that many school districts did not have the opportunity to examine and implement them at that time. As our survey in the spring of 1998 indicated, however, there were only four out of 37 state departments that did incorporate a spelling guideline which coincides with Standard 6. It is also apparent that the change in spelling methods will not come quickly from the state department to the districts, since only two states mentioned that they were revising their standards.

The results of this study indicate that spelling instruction is in a state of flux. Clearly, state departments of education have not yet implemented the new NCTE/IRA *Standards* and are not aware of the status of spelling instruction in their state as a whole or in particular school districts.

Table 5.

Spelling Standards in 37 States

<i>State</i>	<i>Generic standard for all grades K-8</i>	<i>Standards for individual grades, K-8</i>	<i>Standards for primary grades</i>	<i>Standards for middle grades</i>	<i>No spelling standards</i>	<i>Standards in revision</i>
AK	X					
AZ			X	X		
AR			X			
CA		X				
CO			X	X		
DE	X					
FL			X	X		
IL			X	X		
IN					X	
IA					X	
KS			X	X		
LA			X	X		
ME			X	X		
MD						X
MA			X	X		
MI			X	X		
MN			X	X		
MO	X					
MT			X	X		
NE				X		
NH			X	X		
NJ			X			
NM			X	X		
NY	X					
ND					X	
OH						X
OK				X		
PA			X	X		
RI					X	
SC					X	
SD					X	
TX					X	
UT		X				
VT					X	
VA		X				
WV		X				
WI			X	X		
TOTAL NO. STATES	4	4	17	17	8	2

Salinger (1996) reports that bringing about curriculum changes based on the new standards will cost much time and money. Another reason for the delay in implementation of the NCTE/IRA *Standards* is that states may be spending their time and money on other curricular areas such as technology.

Cooney (1992) believes that standards are not "packages to be accumulated, but terrain to be explored" (p. 64). Since spelling is only mentioned in one of the 12 IRA/NCTE *Standards*, as shown in this study, this terrain may not fully be explored in the United States. Teale (1992) states that educators are still debating about coherent spelling instruction which integrates a functional and holistic approach and recognizes the importance of the study of orthographic patterns of words in terms of application to the reading and writing processes. Debate about the philosophy of teaching spelling may be an additional reason that a combination of methods are being used and that no trend will evolve in the near future.

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Appendix
Spelling Survey

Please read the entire questionnaire before you answer the questions.
Circle Y for yes or N for n.

- | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|
| A. | Do you use a published spelling series? | Y | N |
| | Please indicate which series_____ | | |
| B. | Do you use an individualized spelling program? | Y | N |
| • | Do you exclusively use developmental spelling
(invented spelling) with direct instruction? | Y | N |
| • | Do you exclusively use developmental spelling
(invented spelling) without direct instruction? | Y | N |
| • | If you use a combination of approaches, please indicate which one: | | |
| | 1. individualized and developmental | Y | N |
| | 2. individualized and published series | Y | N |
| | 3. individualized with direct instruction | Y | N |
| | 4. developmental (inventive) and published
spelling text | Y | N |
| | 5. other _____ | | |



Gender and cultural differences: A sociocognitive perspective on parent involvement in students' autobiographies

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ABSTRACT

This inquiry examined the types of literacy support parents gave their children at home, with fifteen students from a diverse class of 23 third graders, during an eight week integrated unit on writing autobiographies. A naturalistic inquiry approach found pattern differences between genders, with respect to the nature of support given at home. Boys, particularly the African American males, received more explicit guidance than girls did. Understanding the nature of parent literacy support can inform ways to connect home and school literacy experiences.

So we kind of coaxed her into thinking about it more and we weren't necessarily putting words into her head but trying to get her — "Well, OK, what about that then? Didn't you think about this? And then she would [reply] "Oh yeah." So it was kind of coaxing it out of her I guess in a way, but we tried to let her think of as much as possible, or if we didn't think it was enough we would say, "Well, don't you think you could say a little more about that?" ...So really I guess it was trying to let her do the thinking process, trying to get her a little bit on a schedule as far as the things she had to do, and just kind of not really leading, but trying to get her a little bit on a schedule as far as the things she had to do, and just kind of not really leading, but trying to give her some direction.

(Parent interview, March 1997)

The above quotation is a mother's recollection of how she and her husband supported their daughter during her autobiography writing project. A sociocognitive view of learning asserts that learners construct meaning by interacting with adults or more capable peers in valued and functional social contexts (Langer, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978). These interactions can include observing a behavior modeled by an expert, experimenting with peers, and receiving explicit guidance. The latter can take on various forms including direct instruction, support offered when needed, questions asked by the "expert," and the structures that guide activities (Langer, 1991).

Student learning in school is fostered when the sociocognitive principles guide classroom experiences to provide purposeful activities that are congruent to students' cultural experiences from their home and community (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983; Irvine, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994). A few ethnographic studies sample a range of ethnic groups and lower to middle income families to find out what types of literacy events occur naturally at home (Heath, 1983; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Moll, 1994; Morrow, 1996; Snow, 1983). These studies showed that all of the children, regardless of their background, were involved in functional literacy events, though often these experiences were not congruent with the types of literacy events typically found in schools.

In the area of writing, recent work has focused on the writing process and fostering individual writing development in more relevant and interactive contexts (Applebee, 1981; Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1975; Smith, 1982; Zelman and Daniels, 1988). This approach emphasizes immersion in authentic writing experiences that communicate to real audiences. In classrooms, this is often implemented through a writing workshop. Students make choices about what they want to write and work at their own levels. A social context fosters collaboration and replaces the teaching of isolated skills in formal grammar instruction. Instead, skills are taught through interactions with the teacher and peers based on individual student needs and within writing contexts.

The effectiveness of the workshop approach for diverse learners whose experiences are linguistically and culturally different from mainstream practices and expectations has been challenged recently (Delpit, 1995; Reyes, 1992; Willis, 1995). The argument is that the process approach does not teach linguistically and culturally diverse children the discourse patterns and literacy codes that are used and respected in the "culture of power." Delpit recommends a combination process-oriented and skills-oriented approach within meaningful,

communicative contexts. In doing this students “must be allowed the resource of the teacher’s expert knowledge, while being helped to acknowledge their own ‘expertness’ as well” (p. 45).

Studies that have focused specifically on the literacy and writing development of diverse learners have considered the development of both literacy skills and literate behaviors within social and cultural contexts (Dyson, 1993; Heath, Mangiola, Schecter, and Hall, 1991). A common thread among these effective literacy environments is that they build upon students’ cultural knowledge and broaden the possibilities for what counts as a valued literacy experience. In addition, they use authentic experiences, provide instruction to develop the skills for composing texts, and create social contexts that invite learners to construct and negotiate their formal communication practices.

The inquiry for this study resulted from my interest to create a writing workshop approach that would effectively foster writing development and would give voice to my diverse group of learners’ cultural identities. In particular, I wanted to understand the off-task behavior of the African American males in my classroom during informal writers’ workshop sessions. According to Delpit (1995) and Murrell (1993), African-American boys are disproportionately disciplined and assigned to special education for learning problems when classrooms are not congruent with their learning and social styles. They “exhibit a high degree of physicality and desire for interaction” (Delpit, p. 168).

The purpose of my inquiry was to gain insight into the role that parents and home cultures played in supporting their children’s writing development. By learning about the way literacy practices occur at home, we can understand the cultural knowledge and values that learners hold, and make informed decisions that will build upon the cultural foundations unique to each individual. In doing this, we can strive to provide scaffolds where cultural incongruities between home and school occur.

The question that guided my inquiry arises from a sociocognitive perspective: What was the nature of the interaction when a parent and child engaged in a writing task? Although the subject of parent involvement on children’s writing has been studied during a child’s emergent writing stages and within the contexts of home literacy (Heath, 1983; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teale, 1986), the nature of parent involvement with older children’s formal writing development has not been examined.

METHOD

Participants

The site for this inquiry was my self-contained diverse class of 23 third grade students, during an eight week integrated unit of study on writing autobiographies. My classroom was part of a K-5 ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse public school, located in a metropolitan area in the southeast. Among my 23 students, 52% were African American, 22% were Caucasian, 13% were Asian, 9% were multi-racial, and 4% were Hispanic. In addition, approximately 43% received free or reduced lunches, close to 20% spoke a language other than English at home, and 9% received English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) services.

Since the data included taped interviews of the students' parents during spring conferences, this inquiry focused only on the 15 students whose parents I was able to record. This included six of the girls (66% African American and 33% Caucasian) and nine of the boys (67% African American, 22% Caucasian, and 4% multi-racial). The eight students whose parent conferences were not included in the study were either due to the parents' limited language abilities or scheduling conflicts. As one would infer, the role that non-native speaking parents played in their children's project was oral in nature, allowing the situation for these students to be independent in translating and recording their information.

Materials and procedures

Prior to the students' winter holidays, we discussed the upcoming unit on autobiographies. I explained to the students that they would take home a packet and would have the winter holidays to collect information about their lives. The packets contained sheets for the data collection, guidelines for collecting information, and a confirmation slip to be signed and returned, indicating that the packet was received. All of the slips were returned prior to the holidays. The tasks for collecting the data included: 1) describing a significant event for each year of the student's life; 2) collecting anecdotal memories that family members had about the student; and 3) interviewing an older family member about what he/she remembered about his/her third grade experience. In addition, I sent a letter to the parents that asked them to write a letter to their child about the day their child was born. To accommodate the non-English speaking parents, one of the letters was written in Spanish, and arrangements were made with the Cambodian families to have an

English fluent family member (one of the student's uncle in high school) assist with this project. I emphasized, both in the guidelines and during oral directions to the students, that parents and other family members could assist in the writing of the project. This was to encourage the assisting adults to serve as models when needed. In addition, the record sheets for collecting the information about their lives were open ended to accommodate different styles for recording the information. I speculated that this project would be a positive experience for both parents and students. Writing about the children's lives provided a topic that was authentic and valued, and positioned parents as the primary sources and "experts."

The completed data packets were used during the autobiography unit as information sources for the writing projects. This included a timeline of their lives and a hardbound autobiography that contained expository writing, poetry, and a letter to their parents. This unit also included activities that integrated other content areas to provide occasions for students to share and reflect on what they were learning about themselves as individuals and as members of different communities.

Writer's workshop

The writing workshop in this classroom incorporated both a process-oriented and skills-oriented approach. Most workshop sessions began with an author lesson to teach and model writing forms and the elements of the writing process. Often writing frames were used to provide a scaffold for learning paragraph development and text structures. Lessons were followed by a large block of time for students to work on their projects in progress. At this time I assisted students during informal conferences and encouraged peers to assist each other in their writing development. As a rule, students were to have three peers read their drafts and make at least one content change for a first draft and at least one editing change for a second draft. Those students who finished a writing project early and did a quality job, were often asked to assist those in need of help. The final moments of the workshop were devoted to the author's chair, in which one or two students were asked to read a work in progress, in order to receive feedback from the whole group concerning the strengths and weaknesses of their work.

Initial patterns

All 23 packets were returned by the end of the week, following the winter holidays. During an informal examination of the completed

packets, I noticed some differences with respect to how the packets were completed. In particular, I noticed a range in who actually wrote the information (handwritten by child or adult) and the sophistication of the responses (child or adult constructed). I noticed patterns with respect to the amount of written support given by gender and ethnicity. Initially, I tallied who was involved in writing the information by three categories: (1) completed by the parent only; 2) completed by both parent and student; or 3) completed by the student only (See Table 1).

Table 1.

Who Wrote the Information

<i>Group</i>	<i>(n)</i>	<i>Parent</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Student</i>
Af Am Males	7	57%	28%	14%
Other Males	5	40%	40%	20%
Af Am Females	5	0%	40%	60%
White Females	3	33%	33%	33%
ESOL Females	3	0%	33%	67%

Although the samples were too small to consider the data with respect to ethnicity beyond my classroom, there was more substantial evidence to note a consistent trend when comparing data by gender. Little, however, could be inferred about the literacy process by only examining the written product. As stated earlier, I was interested in understanding the support that was provided at home during this project. Specifically, I was interested in the roles of the child and parent during their interaction. Admittedly, I was so focused on learning about the cultural literacy practices in my students' homes that the strong gender pattern surprised me.

I interviewed the parents during parent-teacher conferences to understand more about the literacy event and nature of the support that occurred at home. The following questions were generated to guide the interview and to obtain information about how the parents and children worked on the project at home and what their attitudes were about the project:

- 1) Who helped the student?
- 2) Who initiated how to work on the project?
- 3) Describe the process that was taken in completing the project.
(What roles did those involved play?)

- 4) What were the positive aspects of the project?
- 5) What difficulties did you encounter?

Parent interviews

I conducted the interviews in March, during the school's spring conference period. At the start of each conference, I asked parents if I could tape record part of their session that included questions concerning the project. I explained to them that I was interested in learning about what occurred at home during the project's information collection phase. I had a strong rapport with my parents, many of whom I had known for two years, after moving up with the class from last year. All parents agreed to be taped, without reservations. The data packets were present during the interview to aid parents in their recollections.

After a week of interviewing, I transcribed the tapes of the fifteen interviews and coded them for anonymity. I used a naturalistic inquiry approach (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) to examine the parents' responses to the questions. Using the procedures for constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), patterns emerged with respect to gender. The themes that emerged from the interview were triangulated with the written data packets in regards to whose handwriting (child or parent) wrote the responses and whose language and vocabulary (child or parent) was used in the responses. In addition, I conducted informal interviews with the students to obtain their perspective on how the project was completed when more clarification was needed. The results that follow will focus only on those areas that showed pattern differences between genders. In addition, responses from the six African American males will be presented to illustrate patterns that can offer insight into understanding social incongruities between the classroom workshop approach and the writing support received at home.

RESULTS

Who helped the student?

Although there were reports of other family members who provided content for the students' packets, parents were the primary supporters. The results of which parent(s) played the primary role, indicated that the males had more support from their fathers than the females. Only mothers attended the six female students' conferences, and only one described the support role as mutually shared by herself and her husband. Five of the male students' conferences were attended by their

mothers, and all reported being the primary supporter. Two of the male students' conferences were attended by both parents, and both reported a collaborative role in supporting their children. The other two male students' conferences were attended by their fathers. Both of these fathers reported being the primary supporter. In one case, the student was in the custody of his father. In the second case, the father played a stronger role due to the fact that his wife was Korean and felt inadequate about her English skills. It is important to note here that there were no consistent patterns with respect to the presence or absence of father support.

Table 2.

Who Helped the Student

<i>Group</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Father</i>
Males	56%	22%	22%
Females	83%	16%	0%

Who initiated how to work on the project?

Three themes emerged in response to this question: 1) the parent initiated a plan; 2) the effort was collaborative and all involved made decisions; or 3) the child was the initiator. Among the nine parents of the males, five parents indicated that they initiated the project, and the other four parents reported a more collaborative approach. In contrast, only one parent of the six females initiated the task, two parents reported a collaborative method, and three described how the girls initiated the task. Table 3 compares the results according to gender by percentages.

Table 3.

Who Decided How to Work on the Project

<i>Group</i>	<i>Parent</i>	<i>Combination</i>	<i>Student</i>
Males	55%	44%	0%
Females	16%	33%	50%

The following are examples of interview responses. The point of view that parents used to recall the experience most often indicated the degree of interaction that took place.

Parent initiated

Father: Well I had... Ernie was writing down a few ideas, but he kind of scribbled them on paper, so I kind of, sort of rewrote the ideas — more or less put them in a format of year by year. (M1)

Mother: I came to that conclusion and I helped him and I thought it would be good if he initially wrote it himself. (M2)

Worked collaboratively

Mother: As far as — I don't know we just all kind of talked together. (M7)

Mother: Well, that's a good question. Well kind of all of us and I tried to get from Julie what she was supposed to do. (F1)

Student initiated

Mother: I was probably cooking while she was asking the questions. (F2)

Mother: Edith wanted to write everything. She asked most of the questions. She asked her dad a lot of questions that he didn't know the answers to! So I had to answer a lot. (F6)

Describe the process that was taken in completing the project

An analysis of this question showed that the responses addressed two different stages. The first was the process of selecting what to include, and the second addressed the support given during the composing process. In the stage of selection, the following categories were created to label the emerging patterns: 1) parent directed; 2) a collaborative effort often involving negotiation, and 3) student directed.

Among the nine parents of the males, three indicated that they directed the selection of events and six described a collaborative effort. None of the responses indicated that the child was the one who primarily chose what to include. In contrast, among the six parents of the females, none indicated that they were the ones who chose the event. Instead, one parent described a collaborative process, and the rest of the

parents described their child as being the one who chose what she wanted to include (See Table 4).

Table 4

The Process: Selecting the Information

<i>Group</i>	<i>Parent</i>	<i>Combination</i>	<i>Student</i>
Males	33%	66%	0%
Females	0%	16%	83%

Below are some examples of responses about the process of selecting.

Information was selected by parent

Mother: I reflected on some things that were precious to me in reference to those questions. (M2)

Mother: Well for most of this, the earlier days I just told him, because he really didn't remember. The things that were most important to him were Disney Land, going to Denver, stuff like that. I mean, otherwise he was like, "Oh, OK." (M6)

Those parents who reported that all involved had input in selecting the information described their negotiating processes. Some instances indicated a kind of dissonance due to either a discrepancy that an event occurred at a particular age or to embarrassing moments that students did not want to share.

Information was jointly selected

Mother: Well some things he came up with — No I came up with and he was like, "I don't want to put that down," — like when uh — what was it you were talking about — (to child) — you didn't want to write down there? — Something embarrassing, I can't remember. (M5)

Mother: She was more "Mom don't put that part in, put that part in" — You know, instead of putting in everything we tried to pick the most interesting moment. (F3)

Those who described the selection process as being carried out by the student, indicated that the parent was a part of the process of gathering the information for each year, but took a “step back” to allow the child to make the choice.

Information was chosen by the student

Mother: She and I would discuss things that happened when she was one and she chose out of that what we talked about — what to put down. (F2)

Mother: I would just tell her what was going on and then she chose the one she wanted to put down. (F5)

There were four categories that emerged when examining the data for patterns regarding the amount of support given in composing the information (See Table 5). The writing was either done by: 1) the parent; 2) both the parent and the child; 3) the student, but the parent helped with the content and mechanics, or 4) the student, but the parent helped with the mechanics (spelling, punctuation, etc.). This portion of the analysis provided more explanation about what kind of support students received when they were the writers. Some of the students wrote the information in their own words, but may have received help with their form (spelling, punctuation, and grammar). Others wrote it themselves, but received support as far as what to write (content) and how to phrase it, usually in addition to help with mechanics.

Table 5

The Process: Composing the Information

<i>Group</i>	<i>Parent</i>	<i>Combination</i>	<i>Student w/ Content support</i>	<i>Studentw/ form support</i>
Males	44%	11%	44%	0%
Females	0%	50%	0%	50%

A second gender related pattern was evident in the roles played while composing the information. Four of the nine parents for the males indicated that they composed the information for their child. Only one parent shared the writing task with the child. The four boys who wrote the information were assisted with both the content and the mechanics. An opposite trend for the girls was reported. None of the

girls' packets were reported as being composed exclusively by the parent. Three of the six girls shared the writing task with their parents. Among the girls who composed their texts, all three students were helped primarily with mechanics. None of the responses made by the parents of the females for the independent writers, indicated that they were assisted with their content.

The following responses illustrate the kinds of roles that were played during the composing process. In examining the responses of those parents who wrote the information, the parents had felt the student would have done an inadequate job.

Parent composed

Mother: I figured it would be better for me to write it, so somebody could read it. (M4)

Mother: I wrote it down. So we just sat here with the pictures and I wrote certain sentences... trying to get him to understand how to write sentences properly, is I'm sure you know is difficult. (M6)

Those parents who shared the writing did so for the sake of getting it done on time and sharing the "labor" of writing.

Both parent and child composed

Father: We were just getting closer to deadline so I had to just start writing. (M8)

Mother: She wrote it — I wrote some of it. We just took turns — "Mom my hand hurts." (F3)

Although the following students performed the actual writing of the task, the parent responses indicated differences in the amount of support given with respect to content and/or form.

Student composed and parent helped with the content

Mother: We made him write it. We pretty much told him what to say. (M7)

Father: I try to put the idea in his head and I say well tell me, if you went to South Korea, tell me what you would say and then try to write it down in the same way. (M9)

Student composed and parent helped with form

Mother: She might have asked me a couple of how to spell something, but she basically did the sentences and stuff.
(F5)

Mother: She always put them down in her own words.
(F2)

Patterns among the African American males

In examining the responses from the parents of the African American males, found that most of the responses fell into categories that indicated a relatively high degree of support.

Table 6.

Roles Played Among African American Males and Their Parents

<i>Role Played</i>	<i>Parent</i>	<i>Combination</i>	<i>Student</i>
Initiated	66%	33%	0%
Selected	50%	50%	0%
Composed	50%	16%	33%*

Note. *Assistance with content was reported. No parents of the students who composed the information, reported that they assisted with the mechanics only.

Overall the parents of the males provided more explicit guidance and made more contributions to the information in the packets than the parents of the females. When excluding the three males who were not African American, a slightly stronger trend shows that the African American males received more support than the females. Although among individual cases the degree of support fluctuated from a high degree of parent assistance to a collaborative effort, almost none of the responses indicated that the students ever wanted to take charge as did some of the females.

There was, however, one African American male who played an integral role in completing his project. For example, he was taught a strategy on how to take notes, and used the strategy with the help of his aunt to record his information. This type of support was unique to all of the cases, including the females. The following excerpt is from the interview with his mother:

Teacher: Who helped collect the information — Did you mostly assist him?

Mother: Yes I helped him. His aunt, his grandfather, and his grandmother and his father contributed a little.

Teacher: And then who decided how you would work on the project?

Mother: Basically that was a collaboration between LaMar and his Aunt Alicia. She helped with that.

Teacher: And tell me a little bit about LaMar's role in the project. What was his job and what were the jobs of the aunt and you?

Mother: OK well LaMar mainly asked the questions and what it was is like... we all gathered around and he asked the questions and whoever knew something just jumped in and started talking about it and elaborated and uh she showed him how to take notes so he jotted down a few things.

Teacher: OK, so there was some assistance in the writing?

Mother: Uh huh, not so much in the writing, but in saying LaMar when you hear a key word you need to write it down so that you'll remember.

This same student was also the male exception when observing his behavior during writers' workshop. He was consistently on task, exhibited a high degree of self-motivation, and was the second student to finish his hardbound autobiography. He also produced one of the most detailed and well-written books.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

The small sample size and representations of gender and ethnic groups limits the findings to my classroom. Another limitation is the long time lapse between the home component of the project and the parent interviews. In addition, it is important to note that the data are based on parents' recollections of their experience rather than the actual discourse that occurred at home. Triangulating the data, however, with the data packets that the students completed at home, in addition to informal student interviews, validated the findings from the interviews. In addition, the fact that parents openly admitted when they completed the majority of the home assignment suggests that they were honest reports.

This inquiry illustrates that my students and parents did engage in different types of interactions at home, as defined by the sociocognitive

perspective (Langer, 1991), when parents assisted their children in their literacy development. There were consistent patterns to substantiate that the boys in this study were given more explicit guidance than girls, particularly the African American males of the group. Although it is beyond the scope of this inquiry to determine why the parents shaped the children's literacy experiences so differently with respect to gender, there is evidence in the literature to support gender differences in literacy are influenced by sociocultural factors. A few studies have considered the notion that reading and writing are viewed as female activities (Pottorff, Phelps-Zientarski, and Skovera, 1996; Price and Graves, 1980). Others have found that boys and girls have different writing interests, with girls writing more personal themes, such as family, whereas boys seldom write in first person and choose aggressive characters (Graves, 1975; Freedman, 1995; Thomas, 1997). Even though the writing topics centered on each student, it is possible that a lack of self-motivation for writing about oneself, by the boys, provoked more explicit support on the part of the males' parents.

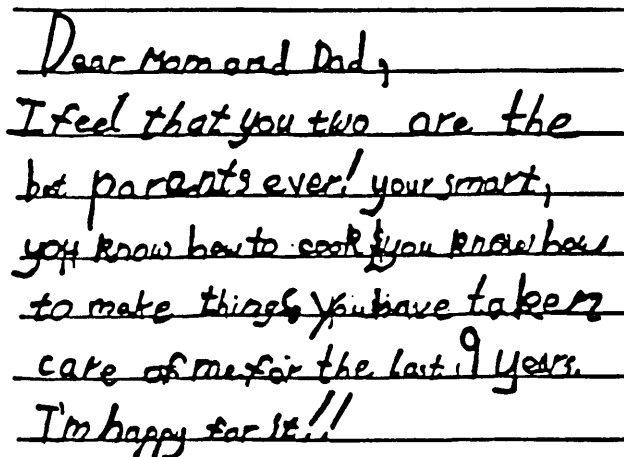
Future investigations of the types of literacy practices used at home and modeled by male and female parents may provide information on how literacy practices may be perceived as gender roles. These roles may also be defined differently within different cultural settings. In addition, a more comprehensive look at the actual discourse that occurred during these practices would provide more insight into the support that was given to each child. It would be equally valuable to compare the discourse practice between the teacher and students and among peer collaboration to understand what circumstances help students to construct knowledge in various settings (See Simmons, 1997, on the social process of writing and gender similarities).

By gaining insight into the way parents support their children's writing, we can begin to understand the cultural knowledge that students hold and the behaviors that they exhibit. Earlier observations during writers' workshop that noted the off-task behavior of some of the males, particularly the African American males, may be explained by their inexperience with directing their literacy learning, as illustrated by the parent responses. These were the same students who were able to successfully apply the skills when I worked with them one-on-one. The results of this investigation informed me that although the writing instruction involved direct instruction and teacher modeling, some of the students were still being asked to take a giant leap when it became time to apply the writing skills. It appeared that although I spent much preparation in teaching the explicit skills and forms for good writing,

more work was needed to foster the literate behaviors of my male students. Although many of the girls took charge of the assigned task, with their parents serving either as collaborators or resources, the boys were more often explicitly directed. Their parent support ranged from collaborator to initiator, in everything from organizing the way the task would be completed, choosing the information for the project, and translating that information into a written format.

Overall the project was a wonderful success. All of the parents interviewed commented on the joys that reliving memories brought, and students loved to learn about the early years they could not remember. The sharing of letters of older family members' own third-grade experiences brought significant discussions, as when the student who shared her grandmother's memory of being the only black child in her classroom. Composing the assignments for the autobiographies was indeed a challenge for my boys. After examining the literature on writing differences, I wonder if I should have provided more choice. It also occurs to me that in fostering those literate behaviors for writing, more could have been done to capitalize on their very strong verbal abilities. Lessons can be gleaned from LaMar's family and their guidance in teaching him to take notes during their oral recounts of LaMar's childhood.

Figure 1



A photograph of a handwritten letter on lined paper. The handwriting is in cursive and appears to be from a child. The letter is written on a piece of paper with horizontal lines. The text of the letter is as follows:

Dear Mom and Dad,
 I feel that you two are the
 best parents ever! you smart,
 you know how to cook you know how
 to make things you have taken
 care of me for the last 9 years.
 I'm happy for it!!

Much more can be learned from understanding the social worlds of our students and using them as opportunities to explore their social,

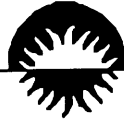
cultural, and literate roles and possibilities. If our goal in education is to foster independent learning and critical thinking, then we need to understand our children's perspectives and invite them to explore their world, community, and family in school. As I listen to Sam's voice in his letter to his parents, I am reminded to consider the possibilities for involving who and what really counts in his world (See Figure 1).

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Children's literature: What's on the horizons

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CHAPTER BOOKS

Bierhorst, John (Ed.). 1998. *The Deetkatoo: Native American stories about little people*. Illustrated by Ron H. Coy. NY: Morrow Junior books. ISBN: 0-688-14837-9. 160 pp.

This book is a fascinating collection of twenty-two folktales that involve the little people. The little people provide a charming thread that runs through the folklore of a variety of Native American cultures such as Mohawk, Suni, Cherokee, Maya, Inuit, Seneca, Passamaquoddy. The little people share their power and wise ways with deserving "big" people. They also entertain themselves by tricking the "big" people. The black and white illustrations by Native American artist Ron Coy complement the focus of each tale. At the end, Bierhorst includes a list of references for further reading.

Dygard, Thomas J. (1998). *River danger*. NY: Morrow Junior Books. ISBN: 0-688-14852-2. 176 pp.

Eighteen-year-old Eric and his eleven-year-old brother Robbie set off on a fifty-mile canoe trip that will take five or six days. They do not have a close relationship and would not be together except that their father broke his ankle and Eric, after a fair amount of cajoling, agrees to take his father's place. On the way to the river, the two boys come across Wilmer, Jerry, Lucas and Dorothy (Jerry's wife) whose behaviors make the boys suspicious. On their first night of camping, Robbie insists that he and his brother develop a secret code for communicating in case of danger. Eric thinks it's silly but indulges his little brother. As it turns out, the secret code becomes a critical factor as the boys find themselves

separated and embroiled with the four adults who turn out to be part of a stolen car ring. This is a fast paced, well told adventure/suspense story. The characterization is developed largely through the dialogue and the relationship between the two brothers grows along with the reader's knowledge of who these two boys are.

Porte, Barbara A. (1998). *Hearsay: Strange tales from the Middle Kingdom*. Illustrated by Rosemary F. Covey, NY: Greenwillow Books. ISBN: 0-688-15381-X. 144 pp.

Based on Chinese history, legend and myth, the fifteen tales included in this volume have been retold or created by the author. Through her intense interest and study of the Middle Kingdom (the Chinese name for China) Porte has included in this collection intriguing, gripping, and often, daring tales of magic, dynasty, tradition and family. At the end are notes for each story which offer the reader additional information. This is a wonderful book for students intrigued by storytelling who like to read and tell stories of their own. The black and white block illustrations which begin each story offer an effective introduction.

Siebold, Jan. (1998). *Rope burn*. Morton Grove IL: Albert Whitman & Co. ISBN: 0-8075-7109-1. 82 pp.

Writing assignments based on proverbs lead Richard to think about and then truly deal with his parents' divorce. Mr. Best is the English teacher at Richard's new school and facilitates along with Richard's friend James, Richard's working through his feelings of anger and alienation. The book consists of nine pieces of writing based on such proverbs as "One good turn deserves another" or "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Siebold has created a unique way of pulling this story together and along with the first person voice has provided a powerful tool for sharing the concerns and feelings of this sixth grader.

Stevenson, James. (1998). *Mud Flat April fool*. NY: Greenwillow Books. ISBN: 0-688-15163-9. 48 pp.

This is an illustrated chapter book for young readers. It is April 1st and all the animals in Mud Flat are trying April Fools tricks on each other. In each of the ten short chapters, the planning and result of a different trick are narrated. This is a playful and fun story that children

will thoroughly enjoy and be able to share in with experiences of their own.

PICTURE BOOKS

Hesse, Karen. (1999). *Come on, Rain*. Illustrated by Jon J. Muth. NY: Scholastic. ISBN: 0-590-33125-6. 32 pp.

In this book, Tessie and her family and friends are all waiting for the rain to come. They urge it to come, talk about it coming, pray for it to come. While Tessie and her family are African American, the other characters in the story are of a variety of ethnicities. The water color illustrations complement both the tone of the story and the mood of the weather. This picture book makes a wonderful companion to *Out of the Dust* also by Karen Hesse.

Hobbs, Will. (1998). *Howling hill*. Illustrated by Jill Kastner. NY: Morrow Junior Books. ISBN: 0-688-15429-8. 40 pp.

This is the story of Hanni the wolf pup who is swept down the Nahanni River on a log that she and her siblings have been playing on. She is alone and frightened and risks swimming to shore. There, she finds a cave and a bear beginning his winter hibernation. The bear is not quite sleepy yet, so he helps her find her way home which he recognizes from the smell on her coat. It is the smell of the hot, stinky water which bubbles out of the ground on Howling Hill. This is a warm story about growing up and gaining independence and, in Hanni's specific case, learning to howl. The lush oil paintings capture Hanni's feelings as she moves through the story.

Pyle, Howard. (1998). *King stork*. Illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman. NY: Morrow Junior Books. ISBN: 0-688-15813-7. 48 pp.

A reissue in hardcover of a fairytale initially published in 1973, *King Stork* is a captivating story. The illustrations add to the magical, lyrical qualities as well as to the charm of the drummer, the main character. The story is of a drummer who, on his way home from the wars, carries an old man across a river. He comes to find out that the old man is really King Stork who has been bewitched and is now free of the spell due to the kindness of the drummer. Because of this good deed, the drummer is able to accomplish the seemingly impossible deeds

demanding of all who would marry the princess and win her hand. The princess is a wicked witch and has succeeded in having all of her other suitors beheaded. This is a highly readable tale that children of all ages will enjoy.

San Souci, Robert D. (1998). *Cendrillon: A Caribbean Cinderella*. Illustrated by Brian Pinkney. NY: Simon & Schuster Books. ISBN: 0-689-80668-X. 40 pp.

In this Cinderella variant, the narrator is Cendrillon's godmother, a poor blanchisseuse (washerwoman) who has only one thing of value in the world — a magic wand left to her by her mother. The narrator works for Cendrillon's family and when Cendrillon's mother dies, she makes the washerwoman Cendrillon's nannin' (godmother). San Souci uses Creole words throughout the text and includes a glossary at the end of the book. The scratchboard illustrations fix the story in a Caribbean atmosphere filled with light and color. This variant will entertain and intrigue readers of all ages.

Turner, Ann. (1998). *Drummer boy: Marching to the Civil War*. Illustrated by Mark Hess. NY: HarperCollins. ISBN: 0-06-027696-7. 32 pp.

The story is narrated by the thirteen-year-old drummer boy who is the youngest in his family and serves only as the "crow boy" on the farm. He hears Mr. Lincoln speak and along with his disgust and anger at the idea of slavery, decides to run away and enlist. Through sharing his experiences in battle, he highlights the fear and anguish of war. An historical note at the end tells of the importance of the drummer boys in the Civil War. The paintings add to the realism of the narrative. Though sparsely told, the story shares movingly but not sentimentally the horror of a mere boy seeing and doing the things that war demands.



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