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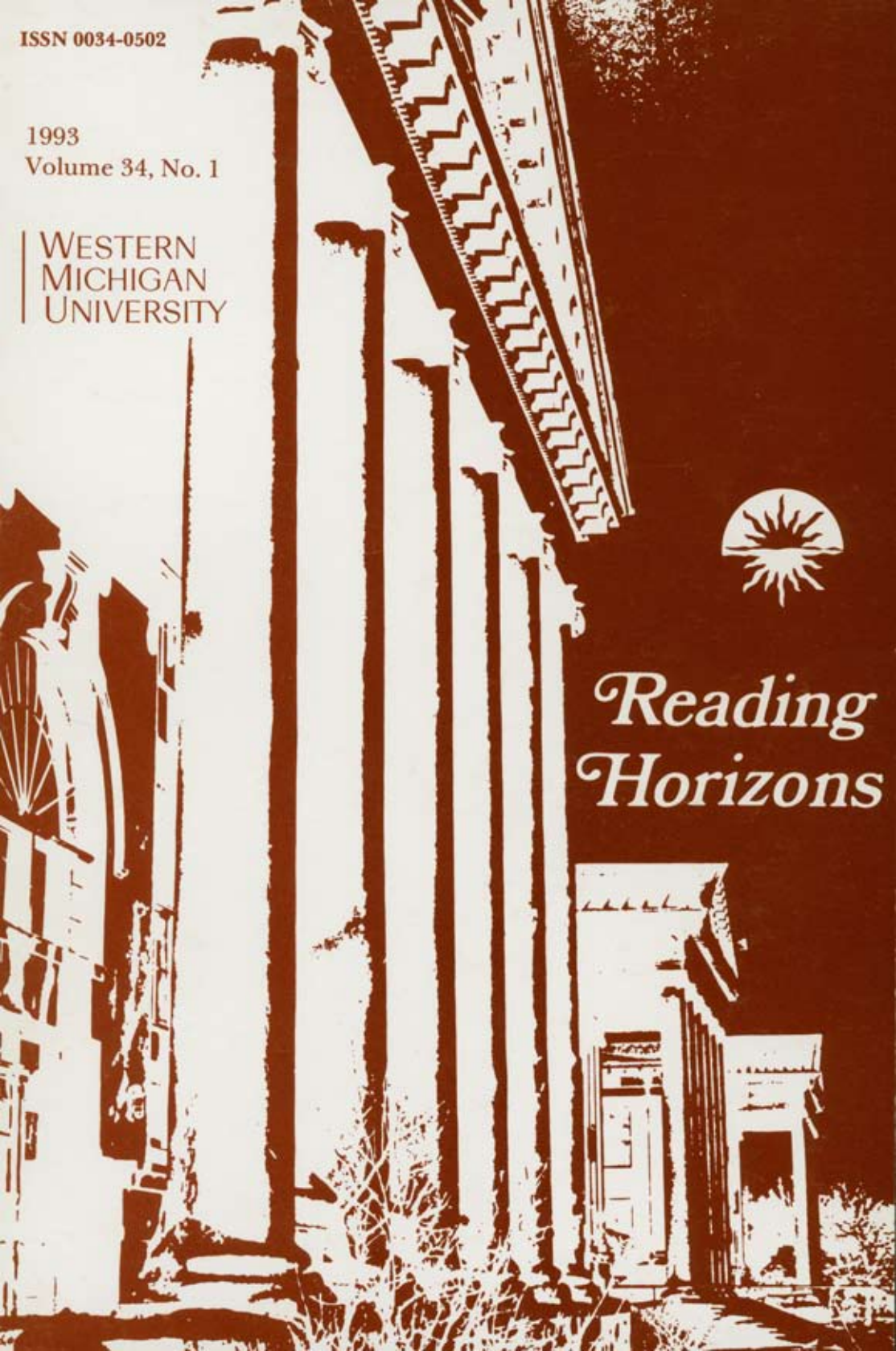
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# *Reading Horizons*







## **READING HORIZONS**

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# What's In A Name?

Arlene L. Barry

*I knew she considered me stupid, and whenever something had to be read out loud, she always called on me first, just to embarrass me. If I'd screw up on a word, she wouldn't let it go or tell it to me. Oh, no, that'd be too quick. She'd make me stand there in front of everybody and tell me to keep trying, pointing out how wrong I was. Over and over. I used to try to hide for the spelling games because I knew I couldn't spell. But she'd wait 'til all the teams were set, and then she'd find the best team with the smartest kids, and she'd say to the whole class, 'We'd better put Tony on this team to balance it out.' I didn't talk back, but I think I should have. I should have hit her as hard as I could, but I always backed away from things (Ungerleider, 1985, pp. 12-13).*

This story was told by 14-year-old Tony to Dorothy Ungerleider, a reading consultant. Ungerleider described Tony as "neither a minority nor disadvantaged. He did not misbehave or act out." His "IQ scores had ranged from 119 at age eight to an unexplained 74 at age 14" (p. 13). What especially alarmed Ungerleider about Tony's case was that he had received help from 23 different specialists in a ten year period; specialists who tested, retested and neglected to read each other's reports. By the time Tony got to 9th grade, Ungerleider believed he developed what she called "controlled rage." She thought the rage was caused by "remediation failure" and that it would continue to build and eventually cause Tony to explode.

When there is a lack of communication among specialists, as in Tony's case, mislabeling is bound to occur. Algozzine and Ysseldyke (1983) identify numerous cases of

mislabeled. More specifically, they have found few psychometric differences between groups of students that have been labeled learning disabled and those students labeled low achievers. "Many of the learning disabled children did not meet federal definition guidelines as we operationalized them and many low-achieving children were 'learning disabled' by these same discussion rules" (p. 242). Gaskins (1982), along with others (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Graden, Wesson, Algozzine and Deno, 1983), expresses frustration over the labeling issue:

*The question of who should teach a poor reader is often determined by a label. Yet the experts who do the labeling do not agree on a clearly definitive way to decide whether a poor reader should be labeled reading disabled or learning disabled (p. 81).*

Has this disagreement among experts regarding labels always existed (e.g., is it a historical pattern), or are current labeling issues the result of some recent phenomenon? The history of assigning labels to children who could not read originates with medical doctors. As in the case of Percy F., a bright and intelligent 14-year-old who was unable to read, those with significant reading difficulties were brought to a physician for a physical examination. Dr. W. Pringle Morgan (1896), Percy's physician, concluded that since Percy was "bright and of average intelligence in conversation...and his eyesight is good" (p. 1378), the adolescent must be "word blind."

The label *remedial* first appeared in the literature two decades later in an article by Willis Uhl (1916) titled "The use of the results of reading tests as a basis for planning remedial work." In his article Uhl did not specifically define his use of the term *remedial*, but described the students with whom he worked as retarded in their schoolwork and "in the retarded group" (p. 275). The term *remedial reading* did "come into



quite general usage during 1923 and 1924" (Smith, 1934, p. 191). A distinction was made during these years of general usage between a remedial case and a corrective case. Henry Morrison (1926), a professor of education at the University of Chicago, published a text which he wrote for high school teachers titled *The Practice of Teaching in the Secondary School*. In his text, Morrison defined a corrective case as one in which "the difficulty is not such as to make necessary segregation from the group" (p. 85). A corrective case turned into a remedial case, according to Morrison, "when the difficulty does not respond to corrective measures within the class group" (p. 86). Morrison then advised that "the school must set up an organization for special study and special remedial treatment" (p. 86). A similar distinction, one of degree, was used by Gray when he defined the two terms in 1931. Definitions by both Morrison (1926) and Gray (1931) were also sufficiently imprecise as to cover any number of reading difficulties. Gray explained that "corrective teaching includes steps that correct or eliminate errors or difficulties before they become serious" and that "remedial teaching implies that pupils have acquired bad habits which are difficult to correct" (p. 164). A decade later, however, Gray (1940) seemed to combine both concepts: "The term remedial reading has been used increasingly during recent years to refer to the corrective work undertaken by schools with groups or individuals who are retarded in reading" (p. 502).

In general, differentiations in the literature between remedial and corrective were infrequent. In a 1988 personal communication, Roy Kress explained that "in the literature you will find little distinction between the terms *remedial* and *corrective* prior to 1950" (p. 2). Kress himself published an article in 1960 to dispel confusion over these two terms. Kress' clarification was thus:

*The child with a corrective problem may be retarded in reading anywhere from a few months to several years below his expected grade level of achievement, as estimated by an intelligence test... However, the child with a remedial problem... is handicapped by a basic neurological or psychological difficulty... Such reading difficulties more appropriately are classed as visual aphasia, or dyslexia and properly are labeled remedial problems (p. 540-542).*

Based on his explanation then, Kress equated *remedial* with *dyslexic*. One's difficulty with reading took on another meaning during the 1960s, when the United States moved into the Great Society era. Many students who experienced reading failure during that time were thought to be culturally disadvantaged. To address the needs of the culturally disadvantaged, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. This act was implemented via five Titles. Title 1 authorized one billion dollars to improve school programs in low income areas (Hawes and Hawes, 1982). The thinking behind the Title 1 financed programs was that the information and experiences gained in those programs would compensate for background knowledge not received in impoverished homes. McGill-Franzen (1987) elaborates: "Compensatory education particularly in reading was seen as crucial to upgrading the school achievement of disadvantaged students and ultimately upgrading their status in American society" (p. 17). *Remedial* therefore meant *compensatory*.

Being *remedial* took on yet another meaning during the 1970s. Through Public Law 94-142, the Education of all Handicapped Children Act (1975), federal funding was provided to assist states in meeting the needs of handicapped students. The handicapping condition experienced by students with reading problems was called a *learning disability*.

A *learning disability* was defined by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare as:

*...a disorder to one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which... may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. Such disorders include such conditions as perceptual handicaps... dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include... learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disturbance, or of environmental disadvantage (HEW Standard Terminology [1975] as described in Hawes and Hawes, 1982).*

By virtue of this definition a student who was learning disabled could never receive compensatory education because that student could not be environmentally disadvantaged. The reverse was true also, then, because the stated purpose of Title 1 programs was to provide federal aid to "educationally disadvantaged children from low income areas" (Vazquez-Nutall, 1982). McGill-Franzen saw another polarization between compensatory and special education due to funding policies. It is her contention that because of funding policies the definition of reading failure was reconceptualized. Students who had previously been called disadvantaged and serviced in Title 1 programs started to be called learning disabled and were serviced in special education programs. To support her statements McGill-Franzen cites U.S. Department of Education statistics and a paper prepared for the Working Seminar on the Family and American Welfare Policy (Hartle and Bilson, 1986):

*Nationally the number of students classified as learning disabled has increased by 119 percent during*

*the past decade whereas the number of disabled students served in Chapter 1 [a descendant of Title 1] compensatory programs declined from 8.3 million in 1966 to 4.8 million in 1985, a decrease of 42 percent (p. 8).*

Information from other sources substantiates McGill-Franzen's theory. For example, an article on careers in the September 17, 1990 issue of *U.S. News and World Report* lists special education as among the top 20 "Hot Track" careers for 1991. The hottest area in special education noted by the article's authors was learning disabilities. According to Mannix, Friedman, Golden, Schrof and Nightingale (1990):

*The shortage of teachers for children with learning disabilities has been declared a national emergency. According to the most recent data, there was a shortfall of 30,000 teachers during the 1987-88 year. And the problem stands to get worse (p. 81).*

Despite the increased numbers of learning disabled students and teachers, current Chapter 1 programs "account for 20 percent of the U.S. Department of Education's total budget, or almost four billion dollars a year. Approximately one of every nine school-age children is enrolled in the Chapter 1 program" (Anderson and Pellicer, 1990, p. 10). Along with remedial education, special education and compensatory education programs, a whole range of students with reading difficulties struggle between these categories. Getting help for noncategorized students can be a difficult process. For example, if a moderately disabled student does not live in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood, that student would have neither eligibility for federally funded Chapter 1 programs, nor any right to special education, until the student's moderate reading disability became severe. At that point the student could be considered learning disabled and enter a special education program. Other students who do not fit into

special categories may be eligible for one of an array of local, state and federally funded programs, e.g., Structured Teaching in the Areas of Reading and Language Arts (STAR), High Intensity Language Training (HILT), Preparation for Raising Educational Performance (PREP), Learning to Read through the Arts (LTRTA), reading labs, learning centers, basic skills, developmental English, reading academies, and a host of literacy options. The problem with all of these programs, according to Allington and Johnston (1986), is a lack of coordination.

*Among those who discuss educational intervention programs for specially targeted student populations (e.g., Chapter 1 for economically disadvantaged, PL 94-142 for the handicapped...) there seems to be general agreement that little coordination exists among the various federal, state and local initiatives. While coordination has been variously defined in these discussions, regardless of definition, virtually no one reports locating coordinated efforts (p. 3).*

The case of Tony, discussed earlier, is a classic example of the effects of a lack of coordination and communication. With categorical procedures currently in place, the mislabeling noted by Algozzine and Ysseldyke (1983), Ysseldyke, et al. (1983), and Gaskins (1982) seems inevitable. The labeling process truly becomes, as Otto (1986) notes, whimsical. According to Algozzine and Ysseldyke (1983) one solution is "spending less energy in finding answers to the who, why and how of learning disabilities, and more effort in determining what to do with students who fail" (p. 246). Perhaps if educators followed Algozzine and Ysseldyke's suggestion to teach instead of label, those students who did not fit into a category but needed assistance could receive it. I have served on numerous multidisciplinary team meetings over the years for students who desperately needed help, but did not qualify for

special services according to established guidelines. There was 14-year-old Jane Doe, for example, who had a Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test composite of 75. Her overall IQ was deemed too low to allow her to qualify for a learning disabilities program and yet because one of her specific area scores was a 91, it was decided that she exhibited mental capabilities too high for placement in a cognitive disabilities program. Therefore, armed with the apologies of the educational system and a PIAT-R (Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised) general information score at the kindergarten level, Jane marched forth unassisted to attend high school. To no one's surprise, Jane dropped out.

John Doe presents another labeling dilemma. Each year, for the past several years, John's mother referred him for testing, hoping he would qualify for an LD program. John was bright and articulate, yet he struggled with reading. Ms. Doe perceived a learning disabilities program as the help that John needed. Unfortunately, while several years below grade level in reading, John's reading scores were never quite low enough for him to meet district guidelines for program placement. Eventually, John will probably fall far enough behind to meet the LD criteria. Hopefully when he does he will not be like Tony (Ungerleider, 1985), ready to explode from remediation failure and controlled rage.

There has been a historical pattern of disagreement among experts about the way to label children who have reading difficulties. This lack of agreement has resulted in difficulties for students who end up being labeled, as well as for those such as Jane and John who cannot receive help because they do not fit a label. One logical solution to this problem might seem to be to work on a standardization of the labeling process. However, based on both historical (Barry, 1992) and current (Ysseldyke, et al., 1983) data, regardless of the criteria, the students who are referred, labeled and placed are the

students who "bother" teachers. According to Otto (1986) "the actual placement decision has little to do with the data gathered. Decisions are based on sex, socioeconomic status, physical appearance, reason for referral, availability of services, and parents' power in the school system" (p. 573). Also, once placed in special programs, students seldom move out of them and frequently exhibit "minimal gains in reading" (Gaskins, 1982, p. 82; Muehl and Forell, 1973-74; Koppitz, 1971). The students with whom I have worked who have been placed in self-contained LD classes frequently asked "When will I get into regular classes?" "I am tired" they said, "of being a skid." Perhaps it is time to begin a discussion of new approaches for meeting student needs that do not rely on labeling. Perhaps it is time, as Taylor (1991) indicates, to try to change the system instead of trying to change the child.

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# **Book Reading Interactions: What Parents and Children Say**

**Janice Porterfield-Stewart**

Children's awareness of how they learn to read or how they view literacy events contributes to the way they approach book reading (Edwards, 1962; Johns, 1972; Muskopf, 1962; Stewart, 1988). Picturebook reading and story reading are the most common forms of interaction that occur between some parents and young children. Both kinds of interaction provide a rich context for language learning and for the development of story comprehension (Harkness and Miller, 1982; Morrow, 1989; DeLoache and DeMendoza, 1987). A number of studies have documented mothers as models in children's acquisition of literacy (Harkness and Miller, 1982; Morrow, 1989; Ninio and Bruner, 1978; Snow and Ninio, 1986). Interactions that occur during book reading provide a structure in which the adult elaborates, expands and relates information in books to the child's personal responses. The adult provides the arrangement of appropriate sequencing of materials and tasks, thus transmitting information and skills that help the child become literate. What and how parents interact with their children provides a framework for expectations and rules for reading.

When parents read to young children, parental styles and interaction patterns may differ due to function of age, competence of the child and sociocultural factors (Heath, 1983;

Schickedanz, 1986; Pellegrini, Brody and Siegel, 1985). Parents label different parts of the storybook reading as important, ask different questions and engage in different types of interactions. What the parents transmit through verbal statements during story reading or other types of literacy events will influence what children come to know about literacy. Stewart (1988) observed in the homes of four children and found that the parents were involved in monitoring the child's daily living or deliberate literacy events and that the home literacy events were directly related to their awareness of how they learn to read. Furthermore, children who engaged in story reading at home indicated in their awareness responses that home was the place where they learned to read. Children who were not read to often said that they were not learning to read at home.

The analysis presented here of the parent-child interactions during book reading events can provide a window for observing how parental beliefs and behaviors about literacy help to provide a home literacy context, shaping children's reading awareness and competencies. Although wide attention has been paid to the young child and parents reading picture books, story books and favorite books, there has not been significant attention paid to the beginning reader and how the interaction proceeds with parents attempting to read with those children. The present study was designed to expand our knowledge of the nature of verbal interactions that occur during book reading of mothers and young readers. The goals of the study were to 1) provide descriptive data on joint mother-child book reading; 2) analyze the structure and content of the interactions; 3) examine the types of strategies that the mother used to aid the child; and 4) relate home literacy events and children's awareness of how they learn to read to the structure of the book reading interactions.

## Methods

**Subjects.** Subjects were four pairs of mothers and their children — two boys and two girls, six years old. Two children, Joseph and Donna, attended a school in a rural town about forty miles from a major university. Both of these children received instruction in kindergarten that emphasized decoding. The other two children, Erica and Sean, lived in a town near a large university and attended a magnet school that focused on individualized reading and small group activities in kindergarten. The children were selected as participants of this study in the beginning of their kindergarten year on the basis of 1) some knowledge of letters; 2) low SES; 3) parents' willingness to participate in home observation; and 4) teachers' assessment that the children were making satisfactory progress in reading. One child, Erica, was a reader during this study. The other three children were attempting to read or were able to read very simple texts. All children were from low SES families, and parents reported reading to their children by age one.

**Procedure.** Four children were observed in their homes eight times for two hours each week over a two month period the summer before entering first grade. The book reading session took place during the next to last observations. During this observation session the mothers were asked to read a book with their child as they normally would do. The sessions were taped while an observer noted both verbal and nonverbal communication. The observer tried to maintain the role of a friendly, non-evaluating, nondirective and non-participating person who was interested in family reading.

The book was a handmade paper book with one to four words on each page. Each page was illustrated with predictable pictures. The child who was a reader read through this book quickly, not allowing any interaction to occur

between the child and mother. Therefore, another reading session was coded. The selection was made by the child from a workbook and included several short stories and comprehension exercises that followed each story.

Since all observations were naturalistic and accepted as they occurred, the setting for the book reading session varied for each child. Sean and his mother sat on one side of the dining room table while two toddlers that his mother babysat crawled around the floor. Erica sat at the kitchen table with her mother while her cousin Terri, age three, tried to participate. Donna and her mother sat outside at the patio table while her brother, David, age two, interrupted with his own "reading." Joseph and his mother sat on the living room couch while his younger brother, Dennis, age two, played with a toy.

The audio tapes of the book reading sessions were transcribed. The transcripts were verified and nonverbal communication was recorded from the observation notes. The home literacy events were identified through observation notes which were compiled during eighty hours of observation in the summer.

**Coding.** The coding system was designed to describe both the structure and content of the book reading interaction and yield information that would allow the observer to analyze the nature of the strategies used by both the parents and children during the book reading interaction. The categories were expected to provide an insight into the relative contribution of the two partners, the parameters of their contributions and how they approached the levels of print during the book reading interactions.

Appendix A gives a detailed description of the coding system that was applied to the transcripts. Generally, each speech act was coded based on a coding system that allowed examination of the interactive nature of the book reading sessions (DeLoache and Mendoza, 1987). Each statement, question and comment made by the child and mother was coded. The verbal interaction patterns then were coded by looking at the turns of each speaker. A turn is made up of speech acts; a speech act is defined as a complete expression consisting of a word or groups of words intended to communicate an idea, statement, question or response during the book reading interaction. A turn includes all verbalizing and pointing relevant to a given topic by one person before that person changed the topic or the other person said something about the same or different topic. It is possible for one speaker to have several turns before the other speaker responds or makes a statement.

The children's speech acts were coded as either *assertives* or *responsives*. The assertives included voluntary reading, statements or comments which the child made that were not responses to a directive or statement from the mother. The responsives included speech acts that were in response to the mother's directive or statement. The mother's speech acts were coded as *requestives* or *responsives*. A requestive speech act is a directive or a statement that requests the child to carry out or figure out an action, or supplies information, rules or explanations. Responsives are negative, neutral or positive statements that include praise, correction or confirmation of an answer without any value attached. *Aid statements* were usually speech acts by the parents that demonstrated the response was intended to signal an answer to the child by supplying practical information (see Appendix B for a full description of strategies used when aid was given). To assure reliability a second scorer independently coded a random

sample of 15 percent turns. The interrater reliability in speech acts was .96.

Both the mother's and the child's speech acts or turns were coded according to the kind of reading strategy indicated by the verbal exchanges with respect to the attention given to the print level. The print levels were *book/management*, *pictures*, *words*, and *letters*. Book or management statements, questions or comments are those speech acts that relate to book conventions or book reading. Pictures are speech acts that refer to pictures in the book. Words were statements, questions or comments that focused on words, phrases or sentences. Letters were statements, questions or comments that called attention to decoding letters or sounds. The interrater reliability on the levels of print was .89.

## Results

**Turns.** The interaction between Erica and her mother shows that Erica took 59 turns and her mother 34 (see Table 1). Donna and her mother had a small number of turns during their book reading interaction, eight for Donna's mother and seven for Donna. Joseph and his mother had the highest number of turns (100), but Joseph only accounted for 38; his mother took 62. Sean and his mother took 65 turns to complete their interaction. Like Joseph's mother, Sean's mother took most of the turns (40).

**Initiation.** Most of Erica's statements were assertive (38). Donna made four assertive statements out of a total of seven. A major portion of Sean's (17) and Joseph's (21) interactions were responses to their mothers' statements, directives or questions (see Table 1).

**Attention to print levels.** For all mothers, the emphasis was to direct the child to the word, phrase or sentence level.

Joseph's mother was the only mother who used a large number of statements, questions or comments in the context of letters or sounds. All mothers used a few management statements (e.g., "turn the page"). Three of the mothers referred to the pictures to help the child read the text (e.g., "what does it look like?"; "what is he doing?"). Erica's mother did not refer to the pictures; most of her directives, questions or statements centered around drawing Erica's attention to a word she read incorrectly, rereading of a sentence or facilitating comprehension (e.g., "what does that say?"). When Erica read "It is sweet to taste, we taste it with our nose," her mother responded, "with your nose?" Erica's mother directed 91 percent of her statements to words, phrases and sentences. Sean's mother had the highest proportions of statements related to pictures. Most of Donna's turns were tied to the picture content of the book. For example, Donna read "eating cookies" when the text was "mm cookies." The picture showed a boy eating cookies. Donna's mother did not correct her reading but accepted the words she read. Her mother called her attention to the picture once when she wanted her to say tummy ache and there was a picture of a boy holding his stomach. Joseph divided his turns between letters and words; since most of his reading was focused on decoding words this is not surprising. Sean spent more time on the picture content than his mother. He directed almost an equal number of his turns to both the word and picture level while his mother directed her turns at the word level (words, phrases or sentences) using the picture and letter level only once.

**Types of speech acts.** This category represented what kind of strategies mothers used and how they implemented the strategy. Erica's mother used the least amount of directives; most of her speech acts were directed toward giving aid (50 percent — see Table 2). Three of the parents used repetitions, such as

repeating a word phrase or sentence for the child. Most of the parents' evaluations were either positive (e.g., "good") or neutral ("o.k., o.k.").

**Structure of the strategies.** The range of how the child was assisted varied across mothers with one mother waiting until the child had completed the sentence before giving aid to another mouthing sounding out each letter for the child or supplying the word.

**Table 1**  
*Mother and child interactions*

<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Turns</i>	<i>Assertive</i>	<i>Responsive</i>
Joseph's mother	62		
Joseph	38	1 (.03)	37 (.97)
Donna's mother	8		
Donna	7	4 (.57)	3 (.42)
Sean's mother	40		
Sean	25	8 (.32)	17 (.68)
Erica's mother	34		
Erica	59	38 (.38)	21 (.36)

*Proportions of mother turns for the type of speech act*

	<i>Directive</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>Repetition</i>	<i>Aid</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Negative</i>
Joseph's mother	.37	.08	.05	.32	.05	.05	.08
Donna's mother	.50	.12	0	.12	.12	.12	0
Sean's mother	.42	.10	.07	.20	.12	.18	0
Erica's mother	.23	.06	.03	.50	.03	.12	.03



Erica's mother used the word strategy when she corrected Erica's reading of *it's* to *it is*; she also corrected her pronunciation and supplied words that Erica omitted while reading. Her phonics strategy consisted of reminding Erica of certain vowel rules. Her semantic strategy included drawing Erica's attention to making sense out of her reading of the text by relating it to her experience. Erica's mother initiated these strategies by waiting until Erica had completed several sentences or hesitated on a word. She also repeated the sentence or phrase that included the problem word or words. Erica's mother asked guiding questions which directed Erica toward phonic, semantic, or word corrections. Her strategies included encouraging Erica to sound out the words aloud to indicate to Erica her own mistakes.

Since many of the mothers' turns were in responses (depending on the structure of the interaction) it follows that the children's proportions of print levels within the interaction would be similar to their mothers'. Donna's mother used aid once. Donna read the text, used the pictures and supplied her own words. When she said "eating milk," she relied on a pattern that she had created from the pictures — "eating sandwiches, eating cookies." Her mother did not make any corrections until Donna said, "eating milk." Her mother responded by giving aid that focused Donna's attention on the meaning of what she just read or said.

Sean's mother's strategies focused on phonics, words and semantics. His mother provided cues until she believed the information was sufficient. When she tried to get Sean to read the word "lunch" she gave semantic cues. After Sean was unable to give the correct response from his mother's cue and the picture information, she said, "What time of day do you think he was eating that? Do you think that it was

breakfast or dinner or what do you think that it was?" Sean responded, "breakfast." His mother added, "You think that might have been breakfast with sandwiches? What else could it have been?" Sean still had difficulty responding correctly and said, "dinner." His mother continued her assistance by turning to phonic cues. "Look at this; it begins with an L. What other meal do you have that begins with an L?" This time Sean correctly responded with the word, "lunch." Sean's mother used various strategies to give Sean aid. She used questions and provided information that helped Sean pay attention to meaning, letter and word connections.

**Table 2**  
*Proportions of mother/child turns directed toward  
specific aspects of print levels*

	<i>Turns</i>	<i>Letter</i>	<i>Word</i>	<i>Picture</i>	<i>Management</i>
Mother	63	.32	.52	.13	.03
Joseph	38	.47	.37	.16	0
Mother	8	0	.63	.12	.25
Donna	7	0	.14	.86	0
Mother	40	.07	.55	.28	.10
Sean	25	.04	.52	.46	0
Mother	34	.06	.91	0	.03
Erica	59	.02	.96	.02	0

Joseph's mother's strategies were primarily to assist Joseph by urging him to sound out the words. She aided this process by either beginning the sounding out of a word or

completing it. Often she did not provide the completed word but waited for Joseph to blend and come up with the word. Joseph's mother, like Erica's mother, reminded him of certain vowel rules (e.g., "remember what this sounds like; the y sound is what?" or "remember that's silent, isn't it?"). Joseph's mother did use some aid that focused on meaning at the word level ("it's another word for his stomach"). She also tried to help Joseph relate to the text by developing associations with his experiences, and when Joseph's response was still incorrect she provided aid at the word level and finally at the letter-sound level when she sounded out the word tummy ("t-u-m-ee").

## Discussion

A look at the structure and content of the mother and child interactions shows how the parent frames and communicates aspects of the literacy experience of book reading with the child. By examining these interactions we can see how the parent directs the child to the important features of the experience as perceived by the parent. It is not a question of whether the parent should focus on the letter and sound correspondence, meaning or picture or word learning. More likely, what parents do depends on the materials and intentions, and whether they expect children to remember the words taught, understand their meanings or just learn to love reading. The book reading interactions observed among these mothers and children are excellent examples of how scaffolding occurs in a natural way. When parents help their children in a manner that facilitates learning they are often working in the zone; e.g., the developmental area where a person can accomplish a task when aided by someone more capable (Vygotsky, 1978). Parents, teachers and more advanced children work within this zone by scaffolding the conversation or building one comment or question on the previous one, leading the child or peers from a situation where the task is

modeled to one in which the child takes over. All of the parents used the semantic cues when giving aid. It appears that the mothers realized that they were supporting and facilitating learning by the semantic contingency of their questions, answers and comments.

Erica's behavior may be a result of Erica's independent reading and her mother's interaction pattern. Erica's mother stopped her at appropriate points in the text, directing her to use strategies that would provide comprehension. Analysis of home literacy (Stewart, 1988) revealed a high occurrence of deliberate high literacy events (see Table 3), including frequent book reading sessions. Erica's mother's behavior was typical of many instances of Erica's book reading. It could be suggested that the high incidence of aid (90 percent) provided during the book reading interactions may have been a result of Erica's reading level and her ability to read text that provided more of an opportunity for directing aid. However, observations of Erica's mother working with a younger child, a non-reader, demonstrated consistency in her strategies. She allowed the child to be assertive, taking most of the turns, directing the child's attention to the word, phrase or sentences. The interaction during this session was typical of occurrences during the summer observations, in that Erica was reading independently and in control of most of the interactions.

The majority of verbal turns by all of the mothers focused on the word level. However, Joseph's mother also focused many of her turns at the letter level. The structure and content of the interaction between Joseph and his mother are interesting in that it mirrored his school instruction. He was in an instructional program that was strictly decoding and included a lot of practice in sounding out words. Joseph was successful in this program but was not a reader at the end of kindergarten. According to study results (Stewart, 1988) that

looked at the awareness responses of these four children with respect to how they were learning to read at home and at school, Joseph indicated that he felt he was learning how to read by learning his letters and sounding out words. He also indicated that "you learn to read in school." The strategies that his mother used while Joseph attempted to read the little book centered around sounding out words and providing the word after many unsuccessful attempts by Joseph. She knew he needed a strong base for phonics and instructed him as he was being taught in school. Observations in the home indicated that Joseph valued playing with his peers as the most important and frequent activity.

**Table 3**  
*Case study profiles — % of home literacy events*

<i>Child</i>	<i>Deliberate</i>	<i>Communication</i>	<i>TV</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>School</i>
Joseph (n=61)	13.1	17.4	0	0	0
Donna (n=108)	23.1	17.9	9.7	7.4	0
Sean (n=55)	41.6	9.1	0	0	0
Erica (n=70)	74.0	9.9	2.9	0	0

*Note: The % represents the frequency of observed occurrences of events in each category. Daily living events are not included.*

Sean's mother was also aware of Sean's desire to play with his peers, but her approach was different. Most of Sean's mother's turns focused on getting Sean to use both word and picture information. Her aid focused on meaning and kept building on information until Sean was successful in responding. This type of interaction was typical for Sean's

mother. The analysis of the literacy events showed that 41 percent of the observed events were book reading events. Sean's mother allowed him to play with his friends during the day but insisted that he read with her or his father at night. He was also instructed to bring library books home from the library. (His mother reported that last summer he brought home toys.)

The differences in the interaction pattern between Sean and Joseph were not just a matter of content. Sean's interactions were tied to meaning, while Joseph's involved decoding. Sean's mother allowed him to read through the story first on his own. He read the pictures and used his own words. She wanted Sean not only to be a reader but to love reading. Sean had several older brothers and sisters who were reading before the end of kindergarten. It is important to note that his school instruction was similar to his mother's approach — some emphasis on decoding, meaning and reading for enjoyment with peers or siblings. Neither of the boys was reading at the end of kindergarten, but both were readers by December of first grade.

Donna's session with her mother was very brief, consisting of only 15 turns. Donna's mother did not encourage correct reading of the book. The other three mothers did. Donna's mother observed her reading by using the picture information. Only when Donna made an error that was not semantically appropriate did her mother stop her. This was consistent with literacy events in the home and the vagueness surrounding Donna's awareness responses. Most of the encounters with book reading did not involve specific decoding strategies or letter sound correspondence. The dialogue was directed toward content (e.g., "what's the picture about?" or "why is she coloring?"). Donna was not reading at the end of kindergarten but did read by the middle of first grade.

Although this is too small a sample from which to draw broad generalizations, these differences and similarities among children and mothers during literacy events at home give us some insight into how mothers structure literacy events for their children. In all of these homes, there was literacy engagement. All of the mothers structured their strategies and the content of their interaction with their children according to how they perceived what was appropriate and natural during that experience.

Some children received more direction than did others. Donna experienced literacy as a natural part of daily living. Erica realized what was needed to be a good reader and was encouraged by her mother. Sean understood the importance of reading books but was more interested in playing with his peers. His mother identified what she felt to be important and worked with Sean accordingly. Joseph was more concerned with peer interactions and regarded reading activities as part of school and something to be done there. His mother reinforced his idea of school-type reading by her emphasis on decoding.

Judging from the data gathered from these interactions and the observations, it seems that although there are differences in the opportunity for the children to engage in deliberate literacy events and differences in some of the strategies used when reading with the children, the parents were successfully monitoring literacy engagement (according to the parents' understanding of literacy and their child's conception of a reader). These children were learning how to read through different experiences and instruction. The parents in this study used various strategies while reading books with their children. For further study it may be interesting to

observe longitudinally the interaction patterns between parents and children as they become readers.

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## *Appendix A* *Coding*

### A. Coding for mother speech acts

#### *Requestives*

**Directive.** A question or statement that requests the child to carry out or figure out an action. Example: "Look at the picture"; "sound it out"; "can you sound it out?"

**Statement.** An expression of information, rules or explanation. Example: "This is the letter *m* and it makes this sound."

#### *Responsives*

**Positive.** These statements include acceptance and praise to the child's answer. Example: "that's good"; "yes."

**Neutral.** Usually a confirmation of an answer without any value of encouragement attached. Examples: "o.k."; "mm mm."

**Negative.** Includes correction and admonishment or an indication by the mother that the child's response was unacceptable. Examples: "No, it's not *y*"; "are you sure?"; "you are not trying."

**Aid.** When the intent of the mother's response to the child's answer or assertive is to correct the statement by giving the child partial information or by supplying the answer if the child is incorrect. May include statements or questions that draw the child's attention to previous information or experiences related to prior knowledge. Examples: "l-u-n-c-h, lunch"; "remember when I sat down with you to read..."; "another word for stomach"; "Do you eat milk?"; "What other meal do you have that begins with an *l*?"; "remember what the silent *e* does?"

### B. Coding for child speech acts

**Assertives.** Statements and comments that describe, give information about the current reading task. Includes reading that the child does voluntarily, without the mother making a directive or statement.

**Responsives.** Verbal responses to the mother's prompt or directive.

### C. Level coding for mother and child turns

Both the mother's and child's speech acts or turns were coded according to the kind of reading strategy indicated by the verbal exchanges with respect to attention to the print level.

**Book/management.** Statements, questions or comments that were related to the book or convention of book reading. Examples: "turn the page"; "let's start at the top of the page."

**Pictures.** The mother's or child's speech act refers to the pictures in the book. Example: "look at the picture to see what he is eating."

**Words.** Refers to statements, questions or comments that call attention to words, word phrases or sentences. Examples: "look at those words"; "what do those words say?"; "the word is *many*."

**Letters.** Statements, questions or comments that call attention to letters, sounds or aspects of decoding. Examples: "what sound do those letters make?"; "sound it out." All speech acts, whether requestives or assertives for the mother or assertives or responsives for the child, were coded according to the levels of print.

## *Appendix B*

### *Mother's strategies for giving assistance*

#### **Erica's mother**

Seventeen turns were coded as aid.

**Phonic.** Reminds child of vowel rules. Example: "The *a* says its name."

**Word.** 1. Supplies word that child has omitted. 2. Says word that child has incorrectly sounded out or read. 3. Supplies word emphasizing syllables. Examples: "mud/dy."

**Semantic.** 1. Corrects based on meaning. Example: "Taste with your nose?"

**Implementation of strategies.** 1. Usually waits until the child has completed the sentence or hesitates at the word. 2. Reads entire sentences that include the word or phrase that gave the child a problem. 3. Gives information or asks a guiding question. Example: "that's a silent *e*." 4. Corrects own errors that she may make while assisting the child. Example: "mud-dee, no my fault, muddy."

### **Donna's mother**

**Semantic.** Correct or aid related to meaning. Example: "you don't eat a mile, do you?"

**Implementation of strategy.** Donna's mother has one turn related to aid and this was accomplished with a question.

### **Sean's mother**

Eight of Sean's mother's turns were coded as aid.

**Phonic.** 1. Called Sean's attention to beginning letter sounds.

**Word.** 1. Says the word.

**Semantic.** 1. Based on meaning, uses text or pictures to relate to child's previous knowledge. Example: "You think that might have been breakfast with the sandwiches?"

### **Implementation of strategy**

1. Used questions during and after child read the word or phrase. 2. Makes statement and leaves off the answer to allow the child to fill in (cloze type aid). 3. Repeats word or phrase.

### **Joseph's mother**

Twenty of Joseph's mother's turns were coded as aid.

**Phonic.** 1. Sounds out word. 2. Reminds child of rules. Example: "remember this, sounds like the y sound." 3. Supplies isolated sounds.

**Word.** 1. Supplies part of a word by saying a word with the same meaning. Example: "another word for stomach."

**Implementation of strategies.** 1. When the child is attempting to sound out the word, the mother takes over the decoding attempt. 2. Mother begins decoding and waits for child to finish. 3. Instructs child to put sounds together. 4. Asks questions or makes statements providing information, usually phonic based. 5. Supplies word after child has attempted decoding usually at the word or letter level, seldom at the phrases or sentence level.



# Ribtickling Literature: Educational Implications for Joke and Riddle Books in the Elementary Classroom

Patricia Wilson  
Karen Kutiper

During a recent visit to an elementary school we delighted in the number of classrooms which featured writing and reading centers. One innovative third grade teacher went a step further and provided her students with a lively outlet for their creative skills in the "Humor Corner." As we entered the classroom, two youngsters were enjoying jokes produced by classmates and browsing through a few of the riddle books on display. Holding *The Biggest Riddle Book in the World* (Rosenbloom, 1976), one student greeted us with: "I bet you can't answer this one! What does an envelope say when you lick it?" Before we had time to come up with an answer, the giggling youngster popped out with: "Nothing, it just shuts up!"

The professional literature often overlooks joke and riddle books because of the lack of instructional value attached to them. Teachers and library media specialists tend to ignore the high circulation figures in these categories. A comment by one librarian at a recent literature workshop on humor sums up this ambivalence among librarians and teachers toward joke and riddle books: "The joke and riddle books are

among my highest circulated books (even without promotion), but it seems that the kids just check them out because they're quick reads and fun. I don't see that they offer much educationally." Rather than ignoring the enormous interest of children for these books, educators can take advantage of their natural attraction by using them to involve children in reading and to provide worthwhile learning experiences.

### **Developmental levels of humor**

The type of humor individuals enjoy is influenced by their stage of human development. Therefore, knowledge of the developmental stages of humor through which children progress can help teachers better understand the appeal of joke and riddle books to young readers and the desirability of giving children an opportunity to explore these works.

When children reach the age of four, they begin to enjoy simple riddles and word play, especially with their own names or the names of friends. With their blossoming senses of humor, these preschoolers find body functions, body noises, taboo words, misnaming and exaggerations of size and shape funny and delightful. As youngsters reach seven or eight years of age, several characteristics of their senses of humor begin to emerge. They relish repeating jokes and riddles over and over and find them just as humorous the tenth time as they did the first time. They begin to realize that language cannot always be taken literally.

Preadolescents in the age range of nine to twelve years enjoy concrete puns, conventional jokes, and word plays. The ever-popular knock-knock jokes rate high on their list of favorites. For example, the following joke is sure to result in laughter among upper elementary children: "Knock knock!" "Who's there?" "William." "William who?" "Williamind your own business!" (Brandreth, 1979). The creation of, and

responses to, such jokes call on higher level thinking skills. During this time framework, we begin to see the emergence of sympathetic humor, verbal humor rather than physical humor, and a delight in things that adults might find disagreeable (Cornett, 1986). Examination of the developmental stages through which an elementary child progresses explains the inherent appeal of joke and riddle books in grades K-6. Knowledge of these stages can assist teachers in appropriate selection of joke and riddle books to meet their classroom needs.

### **Humor as an instructional tool**

Surely when humor invades our classroom, it enhances the learning environment. A child's enjoyment of these humorous books is a natural phenomenon, and educators can help youngsters develop and nourish their senses of humor by being knowledgeable about the previously discussed stages. While some picture storybooks, folk literature, and fiction can also promote humor in the classroom, library circulation figures indicate that the joke and riddle books are among the most popular. Three educationally sound reasons exist for using these ribticklers in the elementary classroom: to promote interest in reading, critical thinking skills and creativity, and vocabulary and language development.

**To promote interest in reading.** What better way to interest children in reading than by giving them something they will enjoy? After all, the various types of joke and riddle books need very little promotion. Young people are likely to continue going back for more once they have experienced old-time favorites such as "Why are fish so smart? — They are always in schools!" (Hall and Eisenberg, 1983). Early experiences with jokes and riddles will help maturing young people appreciate the more sophisticated humor of James Thurber, Mark Twain and countless other humorists. And, most

importantly, these books provide a scaffold which will help move children into enjoyment of other forms of literature and into a lifelong love of reading.

**To promote critical thinking skills and creativity.** "What can be measured but has no length, width or thickness? — The temperature" (Rosenbloom, 1976). In order to solve that riddle, consider the thinking that occurred. You probably made some guesses based on your own background knowledge, then narrowed your choice of possibilities. You might have considered all of the ways we measure — for example, with rulers, thermometers, scales. If you had read or heard the riddle before, you probably searched your memory for the answer. Perhaps you tried mentally to picture the riddle before you came up with an answer. Did you see a scale, a ruler, or a yardstick in your mind? All in all, you were using your critical and creative thinking skills in order to be a successful reader of this riddle. According to Cornett (1986), several possible levels of thinking occur: problem solving, prediction, decision making, and visual imaging.

Higher level critical and thinking skills provide some of our greatest instructional challenges. Jokes and riddles can provide us with some ideal materials to promote such thinking skills because children are motivated to read and listen to stories that amuse them and automatically use those higher level thought processes in order to comprehend. Jokes and riddles force students beyond the literal level of thinking. When children are involved in listening to, reading, or creating their own jokes and riddles, they are unconsciously using their higher level thinking processes. Quite simply, jokes and riddles can stimulate intellectual growth. After reading these books, youngsters can move to the creative process. This natural classroom extension requires students to analyze,

synthesize, and evaluate their accumulated knowledge about jokes and riddles in order to create their own.

**To promote vocabulary and language development.** Joke telling involves various language skills. For example, in the joke above, you had to consider the concept of measurement and all of its related vocabulary. You had to access your schema for measurement. With children, the desire to be a riddler or to understand jokes and riddles will often encourage the development of language and vocabulary. For instance, a response to the following riddle (Bernstein and Cohen, 1986) requires a rich vocabulary: "Why are umpires so fat? — They are always cleaning their plates."

But consider the following riddle: "Who is married to Uncle Beetle? — Aunt Ant." This is just one of the many riddles in *Eight Ate: A Feast of Homonym Riddles* (Terban, 1982). To understand this riddle students must go beyond surface level vocabulary and use their higher level thinking skills to comprehend. To do so, they must understand the concept of homonyms. Cornett (1986, p. 12) emphasizes that puns, figurative language, homonyms, and homophones provide us with the "staples of jokes and riddles." Thus, exposure to tradebooks and activities which encourage language development is important.

### **Classroom use of joke and riddle books**

By incorporating joke and riddle books into the elementary classroom, we can provide worthwhile learning experiences which enrich and supplement the educational program. As mentioned previously, joke and riddle books can certainly be integrated into the reading/language arts classroom to promote language development. For example, Giulio Maestro's *What's mite might?* (1986) and *What's a frank frank: Tasty homograph riddles* (1984) are packed with language



experiences. Likewise, Marvin Terban involves children in the delight of language as they enjoy his *Too Hot to Hoot: Funny Palindrome Riddles* (1985), *The Dove Dove: Funny Homograph Riddles* (1988), and *Eight Ate: A Feast of Homonym Riddles* (1982).

Why not also consider using joke and riddle books to promote reading in the content areas? For example, one fourth grade teacher uses joke and riddle books to spice up the science curriculum. During a unit on animals his classroom filled with smiles as students sampled *Creepy Crawly Critter Riddles* (Bernstein and Cohen, 1986) as well as Hall and Eisenberg's *Fishy Riddles* (1983), *Grizzly Riddles* (1989), and *Snaky Riddles* (1990). What better way of adding a spark of humor to the study of insects than by sharing a few ribticklers from *Buggy Riddles* (Hall and Eisenberg, 1986)! Kids will delight in responding to "What kind of seats do bugs have in their cars? — Bugget seats." Likewise, joke and riddle books that focus on historical topics can put giggles into the social studies classroom. In David Adler's (1987) *Remember Betsy Floss and Other Colonial American Riddles* Betsy Floss is given thread to sew a flag but cleaned her teeth instead. David Adler's wacky riddle collection, *Wild Pill Hickok and Other Old West Riddles* (1988) is filled with laughs galore, and Charles Keller's *Remember the A La Mode* (1983) uses a famous Texas historical event to answer the riddle: "What did the piece of pie say to the man who was about to eat it?"

The selected bibliography of joke and riddle books appearing after the list of references contains resources which are popular among elementary youngsters and can be used, along with the titles discussed in this article, to highlight humor throughout the school day. While we have no problem attracting children to humorous books, various activities can make them more aware of the importance of

humor in everyday life. Why not try starting off the school day with a joke from *A Joke-a-Day* (Brandreth, 1979)? Some teachers choose to use a joke or riddle to end the school day; what better way to send your classroom of youngsters home than filled with laughter? Bulletin board and book displays, sharing of jokes and riddles during a special time of the day, discussing the history behind jokes and riddles, using the indexes of joke and riddle books to promote reference skills, and organizing "riddling" contests are just a few strategies that can be used to put laughter into the classroom.

A "Joke and Riddle Center" in the classroom offers teachers an opportunity to take advantage of the ideas discussed in this article. Teachers can develop a corner of the classroom into a special center by arranging a display of various joke and riddle books and by placing a decorative box in the center. Such centers encourage children to read jokes and riddles and then to create their own. Students can then place their creations in the joke and riddle box and share them with classmates. Some teachers may choose to highlight a certain type of joke ranging from elephant to knock-knock jokes. On the other hand, they may choose to focus on a specific author/compiler such as Joseph Rosenbloom or a particular topic such as "School Jokes." The center can also provide teachers with an excellent means of sharing background information on humor and identifying the various types of jokes and riddles. One teacher went a step further and added a tape recorder to the center. She encouraged children to record their jokes and riddles for others to enjoy. The "Joke and Riddle Center" is likely to be a popular spot in any elementary classroom.

### **Teacher resources for joke and riddle books**

Teachers will find several resources particularly helpful in promoting joke and riddle books and developing fun-filled

activities and centers. Alvin Schwartz's humor-packed book, *Unriddling* (1983), acquaints teachers and students with various types of jokes and riddles collected from American folklore as well as background information and history on the origin of the various types of jokes and riddles. For example, did you know that hundreds of years ago royalty had "riddle wars" which decided upon the best riddler? Teachers can use jokes from this work as models to help students create specific types of jokes. One teacher ignited interest in creating elephant jokes among students after providing them with a sample from *Unriddling* (Schwartz, 1981): "How do you get down off an elephant? — You don't. You get down off a goose or a duck." *Witcracks* (1983), another valuable resource by Schwartz, provides a collection of jokes from American folklore and provides more background information on the various types of jokes which teachers will want to share with students. In this one, you'll find the answer to such questions as "Why did the girl put her bed in the fireplace? — She wanted to sleep like a log."

## Conclusion

As we look for ways to develop the literacy skills of our young students, we should not ignore the power of jokes and riddles. The pleasure they offer young readers, the means they provide to increase critical thinking, and the scaffold they build to a life-long love of reading are reasons enough for classroom teachers to make them a regular part of their instructional day.

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# Perceptions and Reactions of Language Arts and Reading Teachers

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The success of whole language will depend upon its acceptance or rejection by classroom teachers. Some teachers avidly support change to whole language while others are reluctant to do so. Given the shift of language arts instruction from the mastery of skills and subskills to a whole language approach, this study investigated current practices in language instruction, the nature of changes, and the perceptions and reactions of teachers. Although the basal reading program continues to be the most widely-used approach to teaching reading in our country (Flood and Lapp, 1986; Barksdale, Thomas and Jones, 1990), a whole language philosophy is infiltrating elementary schools and appears to be establishing a foothold in many schools. In many instances whole language instruction has been initiated at the grassroots level where teachers are viewing it as a natural process to teaching reading and writing.

## Statement of purpose

The purpose of this study was threefold: 1) to determine changes in the methods of language instruction nationwide and identify current practices; 2) to examine the roles that

teachers' experience, school location and size play in today's language instruction; and 3) to analyze teachers' perceptions and reactions to whole language instruction. Through five major questions, we investigated the following: 1) the use of a curriculum guide which governs language arts instruction; 2) the establishment of whole language in schools; 3) pilot programs using whole language; 4) the length of time that whole language had been in existence; and 5) teachers' satisfaction with their total language curriculum. In addition, we examined teachers' perceptions and reactions to the establishment of whole language instruction within their schools.

## Method

A three-page written survey, designed to investigate the manner in which teachers view whole language instruction, was mailed to an elementary teacher located in one of the 20 randomly selected elementary schools in each of the 50 states. The names were procured from a computer list of schools throughout the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1990-91). When answering the survey, teachers first provided demographic data concerning years of teaching experience, school location, number of students per classroom, and number of students per school. Secondly, their responses addressed five major questions: *Do you follow a curriculum guide which governs your language arts instruction?; Has whole language been instituted in your school?; Are pilot programs in whole language instruction being planned and conducted?; How long has your whole language program been in existence?; and Are you satisfied with your total language instruction?* When the surveys were returned, they were prepared for computer analysis and manipulation of data. We tabulated results based on the total number of responses to each question rather than the total number of surveys.

## Results

Of 1,000 surveys mailed to 20 randomly selected schools in each state, 491 surveys were completed and returned (49 percent return). Responses came from all 50 states; 45 states returned between 6 and 15 surveys, 4 states returned less than 6, and one returned 18 surveys. Results were presented in two parts: 1) percentage responses to 5 major questions and 2) representative comments from teachers, noted by states, regarding their perceptions and reactions to whole language.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Variables of Responding Teachers*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i># of Teachers</i>
Teaching experience	Beginning (1-2 yrs)	18
	Critical Yrs. (3-7 yrs)	16
	Experienced (8-19 yrs)	47
	Veteran (20+ yrs)	19
Location	Urban	24
	Suburban	32
	Rural	40
# of students per room	11-20	18
	21+	82
Average # of students per school	200	21
	300	22
	400	57

**Demographic variables.** Because of the number of returned surveys, we divided the years of teaching experience into 4 categories: 1) beginning teachers, one to 2 years; 2) teachers in the critical years, 3 to 7 years; 3) experienced teachers, 8-19 years; and 4) veteran teachers, 20+ years. We

termed the second category critical since teachers who are dissatisfied with the teaching profession tend to leave during this time (Schlechty and Vance, 1983). We divided experienced teachers into 2 categories when the data revealed teachers with 20 or more years had different perceptions and reactions to whole language than did those with less than 20 years. Approximately half of the respondents were experienced teachers located in rural schools, followed by suburban schools. Predominating were schools with enrollments of approximately 400 students per school and more than 21 students per classroom (see Table 1).

**Responses to major questions.** The teachers addressed five major questions. All answered the first, second and fifth questions. Only those responding "no" to the second question answered the third question; "yes" respondents answered the fourth question.

*Do you follow a curriculum guide which governs your language arts instruction?* Of all the responding teachers, the majority (85 percent) stated that they followed a curriculum guide. The remaining 15 percent reported they had no curriculum guide or they were not required to follow it.

*Has whole language been instituted in your school?* Two-thirds of all teachers indicated they were teaching reading through basal readers. A small portion of this number reported they use an eclectic approach implementing other instructional methods to complement or supplement a basal reader. Some reported they used whole language to provide variety but did not advocate teaching reading predominantly through a holistic approach.

One-third of all responding teachers, located mainly in suburban schools, reported whole language has been



implemented in their schools. The majority of whole language teachers had less than 21 students in their rooms and approximately 300 students enrolled in their schools (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Responses to:**  
**(1) Has whole language been instituted in your school?**  
**(2) Are pilot programs being planned & conducted?**  
**(#2 — "no" respondents only)**

Variables	Whole Language in Schools		Pilot Programs			
	Yes (29%)	No (71%)	Planned		Conducted	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>Location</b>						
Urban	27%	73%	52%	47%	48%	52%
Suburban	33%	67%	53%	46%	45%	55%
Rural	23%	77%	45%	55%	41%	59%
<b># of Students per classroom</b>						
11-20	31%	69%	49%	51%	30%	67%
21+	28%	72%	50%	50%	47%	53%
<b>Average # of students per school</b>						
200	27%	73%	28%	72%	30%	70%
300	32%	68%	54%	46%	42%	48%
400	27%	73%	55%	45%	46%	54%

*Are pilot programs in whole language instruction being planned and conducted?* Only "no" respondents answered this question. Several reported their schools had pilot programs planned to assist teachers in making smooth transitions to whole language instruction. The highest percentages for *planned* pilots came from urban and suburban schools and schools with 300 or more students. The highest percentage *conducting* pilot programs were reported by urban

schools, classrooms with 21+ students, and schools with approximately 400 students (see Table 2).

**Table 3**  
*How long has your whole language program  
been in existence?*

	1-2 yrs (51%)	3-4 yrs (24%)	5+yrs (25%)
<b>Location</b>			
Urban	59%	34%	7%
Suburban	60%	23%	17%
Rural	56%	30%	14%
<b># of students per classroom</b>			
11-20	53%	40%	7%
21+	58%	25%	17%
<b>Average # of students per school</b>			
200	39%	44%	17%
300	63%	23%	14%
400	60%	25%	15%

*How long has your whole language program been in existence?* Teachers who are implementing whole language responded to this question and were grouped in the following three categories: 1-2 years, 3-4 years, and 5+ years. Of the respondents, 7 to 17 percent have implemented whole language for at least five years, 23 to 34 percent have used it during the past three to four years, and 56 to 60 percent reported implementing it within the past two years. In this study the number of teachers using whole language doubled during the past two years. Whole language instruction escalated in classrooms of all sizes but particularly in rooms with less than 21 students. Schools with enrollments of over 300 students advanced most rapidly in the use of whole language, more than doubling in number during the past four years (see Table 3).

**Table 4**  
*Are you satisfied with your total language program?*

	<i>yes</i> (28%)	<i>somewhat</i> (55%)	<i>no</i> (17%)
<b>Variables</b>			
<b>Teaching experience</b>			
Beginning (1-2 yrs)	35%	46%	19%
Critical (3-7 yrs)	22%	62%	16%
Experienced (8-19 yrs)	26%	57%	17%
Veteran (20+ yrs)	33%	51%	16%
<b>Location</b>			
Urban	35%	46%	18%
Suburban	28%	57%	14%
Rural	25%	57%	18%
<b># of students per classroom</b>			
11-20	28%	70%	1%
21+	34%	63%	3%
<b>Average # of students per school</b>			
200	28%	42%	30%
300	25%	62%	13%
400	29%	55%	15%
<b>Whole language in schools</b>			
Yes (29%)	46%	52%	2%
No (71%)	31%	56%	23%
<b>Teachers currently using whole language</b>			
1-2 yrs (53%)	31%	68%	1%
3-4 yrs (26%)	51%	43%	6%
5+ yrs (25%)	68%	32%	0%

*Are you satisfied with your total language curriculum?*  
All teachers answered this question: 28 percent reported they were very satisfied, 55 percent were somewhat satisfied, and

17 percent not satisfied with their total language curriculum. Expressing the greatest satisfaction were beginning (1-2 years) and veteran (21+ years) teachers, teachers in urban schools, and those in larger classrooms. Those who had implemented whole language in their schools expressed slightly more satisfaction than those not using whole language. Teachers who have used whole language for a longer period of time expressed the greatest satisfaction (see Table 4).

### **Teachers' perceptions and reactions**

Teachers appeared to react diversely to the philosophy of whole language. To report all responses would have been time-consuming and repetitive so we selected representative comments from teachers and indicated the state in which they teach. For their perceptions and reactions to whole language, we classified responses in the following categories: 1) positive; 2) negative; 3) more information or resources needed, and 4) changes needed.

**Positive comments.** Several teachers in various states praised whole language. A teacher in Arizona reiterated what many of the teachers expressed: "We are just getting our feet wet with whole language. It is a marvelous, exciting challenge." "Whole language is beginning to spread in our system due to teacher demand and supportive principals" (Idaho). "Since our district has not made a commitment to a whole language program, several primary teachers and I have devised our own." "We have seen fantastic results in the affective as well as cognitive domain of students' learning" (Illinois). "Teaching whole language is very exciting... our children enjoy it" (Hawaii). "The excitement and desire to read is so evident in the K-3 students that we are sold on the results and are encouraging others to get involved. It's a *natural!*" (Wyoming).

**Negative comments.** Negative comments were also reported from the east to the west coast. A teacher in Maine said, "We have had whole language courses offered but not all teachers have participated." One from California stated, "Whole language takes excellent teachers to implement it and most teachers are mediocre and/or old-fashioned. Whole language will ultimately fail because of the negative attitudes toward phonics which most children need to learn to read." "Our school has only begun to use a whole language approach but many teachers are reluctant to change their methods" (Tennessee). "The difficulty with a whole language approach in this school system is that we are under pressure to teach for tests" (Florida). "Our school board strongly discourages anything labeled whole language... we just don't use those words" (New Mexico).

**Changes needed.** Just as change is needed in any endeavor, teachers who have instituted whole language instruction in their classrooms recognize that their approach to teaching reading will always need adjusting. "Since this is our first year using whole language instruction, we have learned things that worked and things that didn't. We are excited about using the whole language approach to a greater degree next year" (Virginia). "Changes are slow and we continue to revise and revamp our approach to reading" (Missouri). "We have so much more to do! Continual efforts to improve are being made" (Indiana). "We are still exploring, experimenting, and enjoying whole language in the classroom. More inservices and literature will be most welcome" (Hawaii).

**More information or resources needed.** "Our teachers are open to new ideas and would like more information about planning and implementing whole language in order to do a more effective job" (Idaho). "We believe in the whole

language program; however, a great deal of training needs to continue for several teachers" (California). "Most staff members feel untrained to attempt new teaching styles" (Connecticut). "I believe some of us still lack an awareness and understanding of the whole language process" (Nebraska). "The administration also needs to be more educated in workshops and courses about whole language" (Utah). "The resources needed are inadequate. We need appropriate literature selections and classroom libraries" (Oregon).

## Discussion and conclusions

Teachers expressed strong perceptions of whole language instruction which appeared to influence their reactions regarding its implementation. However, while reading through the comments, we questioned teachers' definitions of whole language. Those who commented on using whole language on a part-time basis did not necessarily demonstrate an awareness that whole language is a philosophy committing to process and child-centered learning and teaching. Rather, they are viewing whole language as a program, similar to a basal reading program, which can be fractioned and used with a combination of approaches. Some teachers have not grasped the concept that whole language is a belief system, not a package of materials or a set of books to be purchased (Chew, 1991).

Although whole language instruction has almost doubled during the past two years, there exists the question of what constitutes a sound whole language curriculum. Ideally, as teachers become more familiar with whole language, they will become more aware of its benefits in their classrooms. Even though 85 percent stated they are governed by a curriculum guide in language arts, almost one-third reported they currently have or are beginning whole language instruction

in 1992. This may indicate that teachers are questioning curriculum guides with written objectives to be imposed on children who are unknown to curriculum writers. Whole language appears to be gaining a foothold in suburban schools that tend to have approximately 300 students and less than 21 students per classroom. These small numbers appear to provide some degree of security to teachers who try new approaches to language instruction. Urban and suburban schools reported having *planned* more pilot programs but fewer schools reported actually *conducting* pilots. The teachers recounted difficulties in establishing whole language in schools because of a lack of familiarity or misconceptions about whole language.

Although rural schools comprised the largest reporting population, those teachers indicated little movement toward whole language. It appears that current updates in whole language replacing existing language arts and reading curricula are reaching suburban and city schools but have not penetrated rural areas as reported in this sampling.

Beginning and veteran teachers expressed satisfaction with whole language. This seemingly polemic population may suggest the following. Beginning teachers are not entrenched in any open language arts philosophy and whole language has probably been presented in their preservice university classes. Therefore, whole language may be the known approach to teaching and is rewarding and satisfying for beginning teachers. Veteran teachers, however, may represent the crux of the matter in adopting whole language philosophies and instruction. Veteran teachers, with 20+ years of experience, have taught through the days of skills, subskills, teach, reteach, test for mastery and retest. These management systems offered a preset guide of skills in an instruction sequence or format determined by people outside the classroom

who do not know the students to be taught. Having spent large amounts of time on such management and mastery systems, veteran teachers are in a position to pose hard questions regarding such language arts systems. Obviously, this population of teachers did not find answers favoring reading and language arts programs which parsed, segmented, and isolated language arts and reading. Whole language represented an alternative for the veteran teachers. The satisfaction experienced by the veteran teachers attests to the fact that whole language implementation is offering them and their students a chance to succeed in ways not allowed under the former language arts programs.

Another population reporting satisfaction with whole language was found in teachers in urban schools who had more than 21 students in their classrooms. Obviously, whole language is not just for small groups but works well in larger classrooms. Teachers who have been implementing whole language for at least five years reported the most satisfaction with their whole language instruction. The test of time appears to be favoring whole language. We see this as a strength; whole language is not a quick-fix nor a patch-up answer to ailing language arts and reading programs, but rather a commitment to how people grow and learn over time. With added time, whole language approaches can resolve issues of assessment, resources and materials, and, probably, parent education.

Teachers' comments represented both the best and the worst of the teaching profession. In these self-reports, teachers labeled their colleagues who were not attempting whole language and not succeeding with whole language as "mediocre," "old-fashioned," and "not willing to change." While these labels are highly subjective, they do indicate some problematic areas of instituting change in our schools. Likewise, administrators posed some problems as reported by



teachers in this survey. Several teachers said that they could not attempt whole language because administration held teachers accountable for test results and teachers were afraid that tested items may not be covered in whole language classrooms. In this case of the "tail wagging the dog," curricula appeared to revolve around tests.

However, the best of the teaching profession came through statements praising whole language such as "exciting," "natural," and "the kids love it." These statements praising whole language speak to teachers who work and learn with their students and work hard at instituting change. Comments indicating a need and desire for change to whole language became evident. Several teachers mentioned change as a necessary component of teaching, but changing to whole language was "too slow" for them. Several expressed a desire for more inservices to foster a change to whole language. We viewed teachers who perceived themselves as change agents for their students' learning as healthy and productive professionals.

## Summary

Inherent in all the reactions to and perceptions of whole language is the concept of teacher belief systems. If teachers are to change their language arts and reading instructional behaviors, it is necessary for change in their beliefs about how children learn. An understanding of current teacher beliefs may need to precede attempts to change beliefs (Allington, 1990). Tied into teachers' belief systems is their knowledge. Kagan (1990) defines knowledge and beliefs as being the same. Therefore, the whole notion of change implies learning and changing one's actions based upon new knowledge. Change involves an uncomfortable set of circumstances for some teachers. Therefore, it is most encouraging to read the comments of teachers who are changing and attempting to make a

difference, and even more encouraging to read about teachers slowly committing to change, struggling to incorporate whole language instruction despite adversity. These are successes in teachers' belief systems, systems that know teaching and learning are forever changing and growing.

Language arts and reading instruction is a process not a product. The very process that teachers go through in transition to whole language instruction is one of the characteristics of whole language, that of process. Further research is indicated. Research involving rural, suburban, and urban schools going through changes and the struggles involved in changing belief systems needs to be documented.

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# **Alphabet Books Can Be Used With Fluent Readers and Writers**

**Luethel M. Kormanski  
Carol B. Stevens**

Text and pictures share the responsibility for storytelling in picture books (Bishop and Hickman, 1992). Purists often define picture books as those books in which text and picture work interdependently, the visual and verbal are integrated, and pictures and text blend perfectly to tell a story. Pragmatists tend to include in the picture book genre all books that have a picture book format: 24 and 48 pages, pictures on every double page spread, and a brief text with equal space taken up by the pictures. Alphabet books are an important part of the picture book genre because concepts are communicated through both text and illustrations.

## **Alphabet books for older readers**

Parents, teachers, and others assume that the purpose of alphabet books is to encourage young children to learn the alphabet and to associate a specific letter with objects that have that particular initial letter. In this case the concepts are related to learning the alphabet and matching beginning letters. Both text and pictures are critical for the emergent reader to understand the use of alphabet in reading and writing.

However, a closer look at many recently published alphabet books suggests that they may have some potential for use with intermediate and middle school students. The purpose of this article is to discuss the value of using alphabet books with older and more proficient readers, to describe alphabet books which are appropriate for the more mature reader, and to suggest some specific strategies for their use in the intermediate and middle school classrooms. Alphabet books chosen for fluent readers should contain content that appeals to older students, as well as a more sophisticated text. Adults can assume that the more mature reader has more experiential background than the younger child. However, the criteria of appropriate content and sophisticated text need not be applied as strict guidelines. Any picture book can be enjoyed by readers of any age at some level when adults have clear objectives for their use.

### Using alphabet books with older readers

Perhaps the most compelling reason for using alphabet books with intermediate and middle school students is that alphabet books are enjoyable. Enjoyment should be the primary reason for sharing any book with a child (Norton, 1991; Bishop and Hickman, 1992; Newkirk, 1992). One clever and humorous alphabet book is *ANTics* by Cathi Hepworth. This alphabet book uses words in alphabetical order that include the word *ant* such as *brilliant* and *vigilant* to intrigue readers. Not only is the word *ant* in every word, but all the illustrations feature ants. Another delightful and humorous alphabet book is *Aster Aardvark's Alphabet Adventures* by Stephen Kellogg. This delightful alphabet book uses alliteration such as "Happily hibernating Harris Hare heard her howling and hastened to help, heroically heaving Hermione head over heels into the hammock" to amuse and entertain intermediate and middle school youngsters.

A principal academic reason for including the genre of alphabet books for older readers is that alphabet books provide an excellent opportunity for language and vocabulary development. One comprehensive and beautifully illustrated alphabet dictionary is *The Annotated Ultimate Alphabet* by Mike Wilks. Seven thousand and seventy seven illustrated objects are included in 26 beautiful scenes. Wilks identifies 26 words beginning with each letter of the alphabet — ultimate, for example — and provides synonyms such as *definitive, extreme, conclusive, or lasts* in a thesaurus-type format. One alphabet book that offers teachers an opportunity to facilitate language and vocabulary development is Chris Van Allsburg's *The Z Was Zapped*. This alphabet book plays with language to create a 26-act drama. The tremendous talent of Van Allsburg is demonstrated through humorous black and white illustrations, which foster the dramatic mood created by the book.

Another reason for including alphabet books as literature study for older readers is that alphabet books are often informative. Alphabet books may be used to supplement textbooks in content areas. Jerry Pallota's *The Icky Bug Alphabet Book* provides the reader with mini-science lessons about bugs and other insects. This author has also published *The Frog Alphabet Book, The Furry Alphabet Book, The Yucky Reptile Alphabet Book, and The Ocean Alphabet Book* and many other books to provide fascinating information that will delight readers regardless of grade level or age group.

Science teachers who wish to promote ecology and the environment will find several alphabet books which emphasize the need to protect and care for the environment and all living creatures. Ann Jonas focuses on endangered and extinct animals in *Aardvarks Disembark*. Jan Thornhill emphasizes the wildlife of North America in her book *The*

*Wildlife ABC: A Nature Alphabet*, and George Ella Lyon names familiar as well as exotic trees in *A B Cedar: An Alphabet of Trees*.

In addition to informational books about science, there are alphabet books that enhance the social studies textbooks. *Ashanti to Zulu* by Margaret Musgrove creates an authentic portrait of the customs of 26 African tribes. Leo and Dianne Dillon illustrated this alphabet book to include as much visual information as possible about each different culture. This book needs to be carefully studied to be enjoyed thoroughly. *Jambo Means Hello: Swahili Alphabet Book*, a Caldecott honor book by Muriel Feelings suggests an in-depth study of one culture. This book could be used as a model to research a personal heritage. A third alphabet book that celebrates culture is John Agard's *The Calypso Alphabet* which depicts Caribbean culture and its contemporary life. Foreign language teachers could enhance their curriculum by using Patricia Borlenghi's *From Albatross to Zoo: An Alphabet in Five Languages*. Through the creative use of different letter styles and colors she allows readers to tell whether they are reading English, German, French, Spanish or Italian.

Alphabet books also provide older students with excellent models for writing. Students' abilities to write may not develop at the same rate as their ability to read (Newkirk, 1992). Alphabet books use many forms of writing. For example, Edward Lear's classic *A Was Once An Apple Pie* demonstrates 26 rhythmic nonsense verses that almost sing. This book encourages reluctant poets of all ages to attempt nonsensical verse. Because of their economical use of language, almost all alphabet books teach a valuable lesson about writing: that communication is enhanced with the use of precise words. Many alphabet books such as Crescent Dragonwagon's *Alligator Arrived with Apples: A Potluck Alphabet Feast*

show the use of careful alliteration with such phrases as "Pumpkin pie and pickled peaches were provided by parrot" and "Onions and olives were offered by orangutan."

Finally, many alphabet books are uniquely illustrated and with adult guidance readers can begin to develop an appreciation for a variety of art forms. Lois Ehlert in her informative *Eating the Alphabet: Fruits and Vegetables From A to Z* uses brilliant watercolor collages to introduce readers to many less common vegetables. Lovely paintings are used to illustrate Alice and Martin Provenson's *A Peaceable Kingdom: The Shaker Abecedarius*. Detailed black and white drawings enhance *The Z Was Zapped* by Chris Van Allsburg. In Mitsumasa and Masaichiro Anno's *Anno's Magical ABC and Anamorphic Alphabet*, a curved, mirrored instrument is provided to see the distorted letters of the anamorphic art alphabet more clearly. In addition, this book gives directions to those students who would like to attempt anamorphic art.

### **Ways to use alphabet books with older readers**

One obvious use of alphabet books with older readers suggests an alternate to the content area research report. Instead, students may choose a topic to research and create an alphabet book regarding the selected topic. Kristin Joy Pratt, the 15-year old author and illustrator of *A Walk in the Rainforest*, creates this alphabet book about the diversity of the rainforest as an independent study project. However, this seemingly simple task is in reality quite complicated. Thus, such an assignment may provide students with an opportunity for cooperative learning by allowing students to work in small groups with each student researching topics for specific letters. Also, students can develop dictionary skills by enhancing their content area alphabet books with glossaries.

Older readers may also create an alphabet book for primary children. This task which involves the use of creative thinking and writing is to encourage intermediate and middle school youngsters to create an alphabet book for primary age children. These alphabet books may or may not be thematic and can be shared with younger students. In addition, older students can study and mimic the style of writing of an author of a specific alphabet book. Certainly writing and illustrating alphabet books encourage vocabulary and language development. Most alphabet books contain little text; therefore, intermediate and middle school writers will need to focus on using the exact word needed and concentrate on economical use of precise language. The use of alphabet books with older readers and writers is only limited by the teacher's and the student's creativity.

## Summary

As with any picture book, alphabet books can be used with any age reader at any time. When teachers choose alphabet books to use with intermediate and middle school students, they need to keep several guidelines in mind. Excellent A-B-C books, like any picture book, are dependent upon the quality of the text and the illustrations. The text and illustrations should enhance each other. It may seem as if picture books are only appropriate for less able older readers. However, good alphabet books provide much enjoyment for proficient older readers and writers as well as younger developing readers and writers.

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# **Helping Parents To Select and Evaluate Private Reading/Learning Centers**

**Norman A. Stahl  
William A. Henk**

For many parents, the various types of reading and learning centers springing up across the country represent a potential answer to their children's academic problems. In fact, commercial tutorial services are opening up on a daily basis in avenue strip malls, in community shopping districts and in local medical buildings. The marketing of these educational support services is part of a growing national trend toward offering private academic services. This rapidly growing service industry caters to parents with disposable income and a desire to help their children improve low grades and test scores, or to move and stay ahead of classmates.

To date the literature on commercial reading/learning centers and franchises has been sparse. General descriptions of the overall franchise operations as well as discussions on marketing issues can be found in popular press pieces like those by Bennett (1990), Bowen (1986), Fiske (1986) and Mummert (1986). Articles that address the unique interactions between business practices and educational ethics have been presented by Bridgman (1987), Cork (1987) and Stahl (1987). Other authors have attempted to trace the growth of

this expansion-oriented field (Kline, 1983; Robbins-Wilf, 1986; Seat, 1983; Committee Reports, 1989). Collectively, this literature demonstrates that a highly competitive, multimillion dollar market exists that is dependent upon a range of market factors for success. Consequently, both Robbins-Wilf (1987) and Stahl (1987) have proposed recommendations for developing future professional policy, as well as a research base for such programs. Yet as long as the literature base is primarily descriptive, and the research base is closely guarded and designed only for internal corporate consumption, educators and parents alike must heed the oft-quoted Latin warning — *caveat emptor*, or *let the purchaser beware*.

Unfortunately, parents and even teachers are unlikely to be fully aware of the types of services available or of many factors that need to be taken into consideration when selecting and evaluating reading/learning centers. This article describes the four primary types of programs and then provides suggestions and guidelines that educators can follow in making referrals, or assisting parents to make better informed decisions about educational support services.

### **Four types of reading/learning centers**

Most of the commercial reading/learning centers are actually franchise operations, where local entrepreneurs offer educational programs approved by, and marketed through, a national company. Three large companies are the primary forces in the franchising movement: the Sylvan Learning Corporation (a subsidiary of Kinder-Care Learning Centers, Inc.); the American Learning Corporation (Britannica Learning Centers, formerly The Reading Game) and the Huntington Learning Centers. These three corporations control much of the market in part because of active advertising and public relations campaigns. While franchise holders do not always hold a graduate degree or have advanced

competencies in education, certified teachers generally serve as the tutors. However, even when franchise holders have a teaching background, there is no guarantee reading or language arts coursework has been taken. The primary requirement for franchise holders is the business expertise to conduct a profitable business.

A second category of service provider is the local for profit or not for profit reading clinic or learning center. These programs are often offered by an individual reading or learning disabilities specialist, an educational psychologist in private practice, or a group of subject matter specialists. In some cases, services are limited to diagnoses. In other cases, traditional tutoring services are provided to support classroom instruction directly. For many years these small scale operations were run by teachers who were either recently retired or moonlighting. Although once very popular, local, independent reading clinics have declined as a result of the mass-marketed franchises.

A third category of service provider is associated with private schools and institutions like hospitals or medical centers. These service providers tend to offer specific programs to a restricted clientele such as youngsters with mild to severe learning disabilities, suspected neurological dysfunction, or unusual visual or auditory problems. In many cases, clients are referred to these programs by family physicians, optometrists, or special education personnel.

The fourth type of program is the college or university reading clinic. These programs, which are usually found in urban areas and college towns, offer both diagnostic assessment and tutorial services at a reasonable fee. Reading clinic personnel tend to be graduate students fulfilling internship requirements for advanced degrees or state certification. In

nearly all cases, a trained specialist who probably holds a doctorate in reading education, educational psychology or special education directly supervises personnel.

As one can see, there are indeed program options from which parents may select. Yet the very fact that there are options can promote confusion and a degree of anxiety. After all, there is always the potential for choosing an inappropriate service provider. Consequently, classroom teachers and reading specialists can expect that some parents will eventually ask for help in selecting a center for their children facing problems in reading instruction. Parents will also ask specific questions about the type of services (e.g., reading tutoring, content area instruction) required by the youngster.

In some cases, an educator may be familiar with a reputable center or clinic and with members of the instructional staff. Yet, in larger school districts, it is rather unlikely that any one teacher can be familiar with all of the services offered in the greater community. The educator or the reading/learning center may also be new to the area, which makes referrals difficult at best. For these reasons, some direct suggestions are provided here for teachers who may be called upon to make referrals to reading and learning centers.

## **Making referrals**

When making a referral, teachers need to keep in mind that a program meeting the needs of one individual family unit (e.g., the parents/caregivers and youngster) will not necessarily meet the unique needs of another family unit. As a result, the selection of a learning center will be a very private and personal decision based upon academic, philosophical and financial considerations. At the same time, when called upon, teachers should recommend centers having certain fundamental professional characteristics. Such professional

characteristics are options that parents would be unlikely to consider without the counsel of a professional educator.

First, teachers should refer parents to reading/learning centers where the instruction is offered by qualified personnel. Ideally, reading tutors will meet the qualifications for reading professionals as suggested by the *Standards for Reading Professionals* (International Reading Association, 1992). As an example, center staff providing basic educational services should meet the standards set for either of the two classroom teacher categories (e.g., preferred six to nine credits in reading and literacy related coursework), and remedial services should only be offered by individuals meeting the requirements for the reading specialist (e.g., a minimum of 18-24 graduate credit hours in reading education courses). Second, parents should be directed to learning centers where staff supervision is conducted by the qualified reading coordinators or supervisors as described in these same IRA guidelines. In situations where tutors are student interns, supervisors should also meet the recommended requirements for consultant/coordinator or a teacher educator/researcher.

Educators should refer parents to clinics that operate under the basic ethical standards of professional organizations such as the International Reading Association. This recommendation is important because such private clinics are not yet accredited, licensed, or evaluated regularly by professional organizations or state agencies. The basic standards for operating, evaluating, staffing and funding clinics as specified in *Standards and Indicators of Quality for Clinic Preparation in Reading and the Operation of Reading Clinics and Clinics With Reading Components* (College Reading Association, 1987) can provide another benchmark for potential referrals. Programs should also follow guidelines for testing and assessment issued by the American Psychological Association

(Davis, 1974). If content area subjects are tutored, the center should adhere to the appropriate guidelines issued by the professional organizations that focus on the respective content specialties.

Another point to consider is that referrals should probably be made to programs that will work cooperatively with the child's teachers to develop the best possible educational experience for the youngster. For example, the tutor from the reading/learning center should provide the teacher with up-to-date progress reports, while the tutor should be informed of the school's expectations for the child. This is particularly important if the parent(s) believe that the school's learning program is not benefiting the child. School personnel and learning center personnel alike should be careful not to be manipulated into a position of competition with each other. There is always the possibility that parents might use the center's assessment or educational plan to challenge decisions made by the teacher or other members of the school staff. A long-term working relationship between the center and the school should transcend any one particular case and, over time, positive interactions will benefit many children. Making referrals to cooperative, time-proven centers and clinics that adhere to accepted professional standards will be a relatively easy task. On the other hand, making referrals to new or unknown programs may be difficult. Therefore, it is important that reading professionals extend an invitation to all individuals operating or serving with private programs to be part of the local school community (e.g., parent-teacher organizations, school advisory boards) and the local professional community (e.g., the local IRA reading council, the local Learning Disabilities Association chapter). Through such interaction, knowledge of programs can be shared, and reciprocal activities may be undertaken — all of which will make the task of appropriate referrals easier in the long run.

## **Guidelines for assisting parents**

The referral is only the first step in securing the appropriate tutorial services for the student. The parents must still visit the center(s) and evaluate their various instructional programs before entering into a legal contract. Since visiting a program can be challenging and stressful, parents may find it helpful to have a set of questions or prompts to guide their evaluation. With this in mind, we have prepared a reproducible narrative influenced, in part, by the professional standards and guidelines that were mentioned earlier as well as ideas based on our own experiences (see Appendix A). This narrative of generic questions and concerns can be given to parents before they meet with any reading clinic or learning center director. While this narrative deals primarily with the language arts and reading in particular, it can be adapted to focus on other content areas as well. Additionally, we have prepared a visitation checklist that consists of both direct questions to be asked at site visits and questions the parents will want to be able to answer based on their own observations. This checklist provides a structure for evaluation and comparison across visitations. It is extremely important that the guidelines and visitation checklist (see Appendix B) not be simply handed over to the parents. Rather, the teacher should take the time to go through the materials with the parents to clarify meanings of any technical terms and to explain the basic rationale behind the suggestions. It may also be necessary to revise the guidelines to fit the specific backgrounds (educational, social, etc.) of the parents of the children currently being served in the classroom.

## **How this information helps**

For the parent, the child and also the teacher, the careful selection of a program could lead to a very successful experience. Benefits could be felt for years to come. Consequently,



teachers should find it useful to share the reproducible narrative and the visitation checklist with parents. It has been our experience that parents seeking counsel are appreciative of this type of guidance particularly when both parents and teacher review the guide together before the selection process begins. When problems arise, it is often when parents, for whatever reason, believe that the school is not serving their child in a proper manner. In such a case, it is unlikely that they will ask for the counsel of a member of the school staff. On the other hand, they may very well listen to the guidance of another parent. One recommendation is for the school's parent/teacher association to hold a session each year on community resources that support learning. At this session representatives from creditable centers can discuss the services provided at each respective center, and a teacher or PTA officer can advise parents how to evaluate and select a private learning center by using the ideas put forth in the narrative provided.

By reading the narrative carefully, parents will gain the preliminary background necessary to make an enlightened decision about a learning center. In addition, by taking the visitation checklist to the center, parents can make a more systematic and effective appraisal of the services being offered. The checklist further serves to keep the center honest and delivers the message that the parents are knowledgeable consumers who expect quality. Clearly, the guidelines that cut across the narrative and the checklist do not guarantee that the proper decision will be made; however, when used together, they do increase the chances dramatically. Parents who might otherwise make uninformed judgments can now be positioned to enhance their child's academic and personal well being.

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*Single copies of the Standards for Reading Professionals can be obtained at a cost of \$3.50 by writing to Standards, International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8139, Newark DE 19714-8139.*

*Single copies of the IRA Code of Ethics can be obtained at no cost by writing the Public Information Office of the International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8139, Newark DE 19714-8139.*

*Single copies of the Standards and Indicators of Quality for Clinical Preparation in Reading and the Operation of Reading Clinics and Clinics with Reading Components can be obtained at a cost of \$6.00 by writing to the Publications Business Manager, College Reading Association, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Pittsburgh State University, Pittsburgh KS 66762.*

***Call for Manuscripts for the 1994 Themed Issue:  
Literacy Through University-School Collaboration***

The 1994 themed issue of *Reading Horizons* will be devoted to efforts that promote literacy through university-school collaboration. Guest editors are Janet Dynak and Ronald Crowell of Western Michigan University. Contributions in the form of research reports, commentaries, case studies, and articles discussing the area of literacy relating to university-school collaboration are welcomed. Preference will be given to manuscripts co-authored by classroom teachers and university faculty. Manuscripts should be submitted following *Reading Horizons* guidelines appearing on the inside cover of this journal. Manuscripts intended for the themed issue should be postmarked by **March 1, 1994**. Address all manuscripts to Dr. Jeanne M. Jacobson, Editor, *Reading Horizons*, WMU, Kalamazoo MI 49008.

**Appendix A**  
***A parent's guide for selecting a  
reading/learning center***

Now that you have made the decision to get academic help for your child, the next step is to pick a reading/learning center that will meet your needs. In looking for the best learning center, ask for guidance from either your child's teacher, the reading specialist at your child's school, the reading supervisor for your school district, or a faculty member of the reading program at a local college or university. Then as you evaluate the learning centers, ask the questions and raise the concerns that are discussed in the following guide. For your convenience, the questions and hints are organized into four sections, *Evaluating the Environment for Learning*, *Evaluating the Educators*, *Evaluating the Educational Program*, and *Raising Practical Questions*.

**Evaluating the environment for learning.** Before signing any contract, be sure to visit the center while it is in operation. As you walk through the learning center, ask to see where the instruction will take place. Make a mental note of whether the space is large enough for the staff to conduct the educational program and also note if the facility seems to be safe. Look for several exits, fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, and first aid kits.

Check the supply of instructional materials and equipment such as books, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, audio equipment, video equipment, computers, and computer software. Don't assume that because the site has a row of computers or other appealing learning aids that all of the pupils will be able to use them. This equipment may be part of another program at the same site; ask upfront which learning materials and computer hardware will be used in your child's educational program.

As you observe activities in the center, look to see if the youngsters appear to be enjoying the experience of learning while working in a

comfortable, relatively quiet setting. Ask yourself if your child would fit in with the other children and be comfortable in the setting.

**Evaluating the educators.** Check to see if the staff members of the learning center appear to enjoy their work and if they are enthusiastic about teaching. Then ask the director about the professional experiences and backgrounds of the staff members. Ask if each of the tutors has a teaching certificate, and make sure that your child will be assigned to a qualified tutor.

Since not all clinic directors have a background in education, ask about her/his degrees or credentials. Evaluate whether the program's supervisor answers your questions in a straightforward and honest manner, or on the other hand, whether you seem to be receiving a well-tested sales pitch. Remember that you are dealing with a fee-generating service; profit making is the bottom line. Be sure to ask whether the center is licensed by the state, or if it is accredited by a reputable professional organization.

Besides proper certification, make sure the tutor who is going to work with your child has the proper background (i.e., he or she has worked previously with other children from the same age group, grade level and/or subject field). If your child has a specific learning problem or disability, try to determine if the tutor has the proper knowledge (generally a specialist's credential or advanced degree) and the relevant experience to meet your child's learning needs. You might want to discuss your findings with trusted and knowledgeable school personnel to get alternative opinions.

**Evaluating the educational program.** Try to determine the center's philosophy of learning. Decide if it agrees with what you believe and whether it seems to fit your child's needs and learning style. Also decide how this philosophy of learning matches the one found in your child's daily educational setting at school. This is rather important if you believe that current educational placement is not meeting the child's needs. While a perfect match is not always necessary, the center and the school should at least be supportive of each other's endeavors on behalf of your youngster.

You will certainly want to ask if the center will give your child a thorough educational assessment if you enroll your child. In addition, be certain that the center will schedule a conference with you after the testing to give you a written copy of the diagnostic report and to provide you with an explanation of their findings. The center should also be willing to submit a copy of the report to your child's school at your request. If you do not want the school notified, be sure to tell the director of the center. If tutoring sessions will follow the assessment, you should determine if there is a planned educational program for your child. You may get this information at the assessment conference. Insist that the tutor fully explain this plan to you and that he or she keep you notified of your child's progress as long as tutoring continues. Of course, you'll probably want to have a copy of the academic plan sent to your child's school as well. The tutor might even be asked to attend the next parent-teacher conference to help include the plan into the school's program.

The instruction program should be customized for the academic needs of your child, and it should then be evaluated and revised as necessary across the tutoring sessions. There are other questions about the plan you should think about as well, such as: Will the educational program help your child to function adequately in a range of subject areas? Will the program offer opportunities, if appropriate, for integrating all of the language arts (i.e., reading, writing, spelling, listening, speaking) as opposed to placing the child in a step by step, rigid workbook or workbook via computer approach? Will the service not only promote the learning of concepts, but also the process of independent learning? Above all, the program should use a variety of instructional approaches rather than one proven or innovative package for all pupils.

Consider whether the tutor's plan for your child will help to develop independent reading skills. Ask how the reading instruction will relate to your child's interests. Will the prescribed instructional plan include your child's ideas, hobbies, and interests into the more directed instruction? The service should certainly promote the youngster's curiosity, satisfaction in

learning, and positive self-image. Try to judge if the instruction will lead to initial success for your child as well as to ongoing success. In other words, will the tutor have a specific plan that builds upon academic and personal success and then transfers that success to both the classroom and the home. The director of the center should be willing to give you the names of several former clients who could provide information about the long term effect of the center's services.

Check to see that the center provides for a range of both group and individualized activities. Inquire about the tutor-to-student ratio (i.e., one to one, one to three). While one to one attention is generally desirable, check to see if your child would also receive valuable social experiences while learning. Many learning experts recommend that educational programs should provide some opportunities for youngsters to work in groups of two or three to take advantage of cooperative or collaborative learning.

The program should assist you in developing a home reading/writing program. Family members can share the joy of reading materials such as newspapers, magazines, books and varied reference sources. Find out if the tutor will also help you to develop a set of home-based activities. These activities might help to expand your child's realm of knowledge and his or her enjoyment of learning. You might also ask whether the center offers parent workshops. These workshops can help you to increase your child's academic performance and use of study strategies.

If the program uses a reward system, be sure that it matches your personal philosophy. That is, some centers provide rewards for progress like books, pencils and other learning materials, while others use informal rewards like direct praise to the learner and positive comments to the parents. Check to see how this system compares to the system of rewards used in your child's school. If the reward structure used by the center differs greatly from either your values or from the school's system of rewards, your child might begin to expect the type of rewards given by the center for all learning endeavors. Remember, rewards should come from satisfaction associated with the experience of reading. In the long run, praise, personal enrichment,

and success should serve as the primary rewards for learning. Ask whether the tutor will assist your child with school assignments. Although the services provided should be more than merely a homework center, assigned homework from the school must not be overlooked. This is particularly true when homework assignments are in subject areas in which your child generally encounters difficulties.

**Raising practical questions.** For practical reasons, be sure to ask about the days and hours of the program's operation, the schedule for any specific academic services, and any other special services such as transportation to and from the center. Ask about the fees for the services, and ask how these fees must be paid (i.e., cash, check, charge card). Also ask whether the fees must be paid before services begin or if there is a payment plan across the period services are being provided. It would also be helpful to learn if there are scholarships or partial tuition waivers based on financial need. Do not agree to a contract that does not permit you to stop payment for services if you believe that your child is not benefiting from the tutoring. Check to see if you are entitled to a refund or a credit if your son or daughter is ill and cannot attend a session or if you withdraw the youngster from the program. Ask how soon in advance you must notify the center of your child's inability to attend a session because of illness.

Check to see what records will be kept on your child and whether they remain confidential. You should make sure the center will allow you to examine all of your child's academic records upon request. Ask if you can obtain a copy of these records, and if so, what charges might be involved. It is also important to know if the program will send a copy of these records to your child's current or future school if you request it.

**Final thoughts in selecting a learning center.** Remember that identifying your child's learning center is as important as trying to find the right doctor for your family. Do not be fooled into believing that one center is better than another simply because it has the endorsement of a national celebrity, the backing of either a large, highly respected corporation or an affiliation with a college or university, the promise of a quick-fix



guarantee, or the atmosphere of a medical office. Although some of these aspects can be positive indicators, each is only a single factor in selecting a center. Remember, in some cases, these may be forms of deceptive marketing.

**The parent's role after enrollment in a learning center.** Once you decide that a particular center is right for your child, talk to the youngster and explain why the tests or tutoring will provide benefits. At the same time be careful not to overemphasize the possible positive effects as you might develop unrealistic expectations in your child. Let the student visit the center before services are to begin. Of course, the cost of the services must never be used as pressure for the child to perform or to excel in the program. The center should not be used as a convenient childcare service or as an enrichment program. Traditional activities such as library visitations, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Little League, social clubs or family outings should be encouraged instead. These activities enrich your child's life and help to build a firm foundation of knowledge and experience that promote school success.

Finally, do not push your child to be a superachiever. Allow the youngster to act in a manner appropriate for his or her stage of development (age, sex, grade level, etc.). A child is an individual with unique strengths and weaknesses; together with the child's teacher and tutor you should strive to build upon these strongpoints while overcoming weaknesses.

***Appendix B***  
***A parents' evaluation checklist for***  
***learning center site visitations***

***Evaluating the environment for learning***

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Is there enough space to conduct a quality education program?	-----	-----
Does the facility appear to be safe?	-----	-----
Are the instructional materials and equipment adequate?	-----	-----
Is the setting comfortable and conducive to learning?	-----	-----
Is the tutor-to-student ratio satisfactory?	-----	-----

Comments:-----  
-----

***Evaluating the educators***

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Are the staff enthusiastic and positive?	-----	-----
Are the tutors properly certified?	-----	-----
Is the center accredited, licensed, or evaluated regularly?	-----	-----
Do tutors have the background to meet my child's needs?	-----	-----

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

*Evaluating the educational program*

	Yes	No
Is the focus appropriate for my child?	_____	_____
Will my child receive thorough testing?	_____	_____
Will the results of the testing be shared with me verbally at a conference <u>and</u> in writing?	_____	_____
Will the center send a copy of the report to my child's school?	_____	_____
Will the center provide a planned, personal educational program for my child?	_____	_____
Will the educational program for my child be evaluated by staff on a regular basis?	_____	_____
Will the tutor share the educational plan with me and consistently keep me apprised of my child's progress?	_____	_____
Is the center willing to share the educational plan with my child's school?	_____	_____
Will the plan promote my child's independent reading skills?	_____	_____
Will tutoring in reading also stress the related fields of writing, listening and speaking?	_____	_____

Will the educational program help my child  
succeed in other school subjects?                      -----                      -----

Is the educational program offered by the  
center flexible?                      -----                      -----

Will the program teach my child how to learn on  
his/her own?                      -----                      -----

Will my child's interests be considered?                      -----                      -----

Will the educational program be tailored  
to the needs of my child?                      -----                      -----

Are opportunities available for my child  
to work in small groups in addition to  
one-to-one tutoring?                      -----                      -----

Will the center give me help in setting up a  
positive learning environment at home?                      -----                      -----

Are parent training workshops offered by  
the center?                      -----                      -----

Will my child receive help with homework?                      -----                      -----

Comments: -----

-----

***Raising practical questions***

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do the center's operating hours fit my child's needs?	-----	-----

Does the center provide any special services  
such as transportation?

-----

Can I afford the cost of instruction, and are  
there payment plans that fit my budget?

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Is financial assistance available if we  
qualify?

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Are there specific conditions within any contract  
that I must sign?

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Will the center keep records on my child?

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Will all records of my child's work be kept  
confidential?

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Will I be able to review these records  
upon request?

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Will the center send a copy of the records  
to my child's school upon request?

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Is there a charge for sending out my child's  
records and is it reasonable?

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Comments:-----

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# READING: THE CONFERENCES

Jeanne M. Jacobson

*Literacy for the New Millennium*  
**First International Conference**  
**Australian Reading Association**  
**Melbourne Australia — July 1993**

The role of writing in literacy development was highlighted at the first international, and nineteenth national, Australian Reading Conference, held from July 5-9 at the World Congress Centre in Melbourne Australia. Lucy McCormick-Calkins, in her plenary address on "The writing workshop: A place for thoughtfulness" urged flexibility in writing instruction (moving away from an unending cycle of plan-write-revise-plan-write-revise). Offering her audience guidance on ways to encourage young writers, she suggested avoiding the stock phrase, "Tell me more about this," and instead using some form of the statement, "This is very important, isn't it?" — recognizing that a child's choice of a particular piece for the topic of a writing conference signals its importance to the young writer, even though the value of the piece may not be immediately apparent to an adult.

"Literature circles: Children talking and writing about their reading" was the topic of a presentation by two educators who collaborated in research: Paula Willson, teacher of a sixth

grade class in a suburb of Adelaide, and Anne Simpson, professor of literacy and language education at the University of South Australia, who observed in Willson's classroom regularly for a year. Willson's interest in engaging her students in collaborative reading stemmed from her dissatisfaction with the individualized language arts instruction she had been providing, with students self-selecting the books they read, conferring with her, and completing a book review or another agreed-upon culminating project. Students, she said, enjoyed this, but she had come to believe that their text-based meaning making was narrowed because participation in each conversation was limited to two people (teacher and one student). Another motivation for change was her desire to broaden students' reading interests.

Literature Circles became the basis for a new language arts program. Following a month of individual conferencing and assessing students' reading ability and interests, Willson grouped her 31 students into five Literature Circles (to allow for one conference with each group per week), and presented each group with a choice of novels for their first reading assignment. Literature Circles met for half an hour, as the first activity of the day; the group's primary role was to discuss their reading, but had also to agree how much was to be read for the next week.

Students' written responses to their reading were made in two forms: a weekly entry in their individual Reading Response Books (into which Willson had glued the guidelines for their responding), and "stickums" — post-it notes which students attached to the pages of the novel as they read, or reread. These notes served as the basis for Literature Circle discussions, and as one method Willson used to document student effort. After the notes were used in discussion, students pasted them into their Reading Response Books.

Both Willson, the teacher, and Simpson, the observer, stressed the importance of the post-it notes. Students were

told to use them to note interesting descriptions, unfamiliar words or puzzling events, questions, predictions, feelings and opinions. Students came to value the notes as an aid in discussions — a source for comments to make to the group, and a documentation for points they wished to make.

Simpson commented on the extent and effectiveness of Willson's written responses to students' weekly entries in the Reading Response Books, citing these examples: "I'd also like to read what you think about certain characters in the story so far," "It's great when you put yourself and your family into the story. You certainly would know how he feels," "I like to hear about your feelings, especially, Craig," "It's good how you're talking to me on paper" and "It's good when you give me an example to back up your comment." Responding to students in writing was time-consuming, but productive. After Literature Circles had been a class activity for many months, Simpson noted that the students' comments, and their teacher's responses, focused increasingly on the author's role as shaper of the story, and not solely on the events and characters within the novel. In evaluating the Literature Circles, all students said they enjoyed this method of learning and all but two of the students said they were reading more than they used to, and thought their reading had improved.

Books which Willson recommended for use in Literature Circles with 11- and 12-year-olds included *This Place Has No Atmosphere* (P. Danziger), *Misery Guts and Worry Worts* (M. Gleitzman), *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (E. L. Konigsburg), *Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird* and *The Whispering Knights* (J. Lively), *Toby's Millions* (M. Laurie), *Clancy's Cabin* (M. Mahey), *Creeps* (T. Schoch), and *The Return of the Nimbin* (J. Wagner).





## Professional Materials Review

*Infotext: Reading and Learning.* Written by Karen Feathers. Pippin Publishing Ltd., 380 Esna Park Drive, Markham Ontario, L3R 1H5. ISBN: 0-88751-056-6. 1993. 143 pp.

*Reviewed by Janet Dynak*  
*Western Michigan University*

*Infotext: Reading and Learning* is written as an alternative to the typical content area reading text which gives the reader an array of instructional strategies to assist students when reading informational text. The author presents this book from the perspective that teachers should not generate or control the instructional activities that promote the successful reading of infotext. Instead, teachers need to provide experiences for students to take control of their own informational reading.

The theoretical framework for this student-centered approach to content area reading is based on the constructivist view of how learning takes place. The importance of prior knowledge and its connection to obtaining new knowledge is woven throughout the text. Each suggested activity is presented as a way to help students monitor their own learning. The author views reading as an interactive process where readers have the right to interpret texts. Readers also need to be given the opportunity to evaluate their interpretations.

The chapters focus on topics which are common in many content reading textbooks. The chapters include the purpose of teaching content reading, evaluating students and

texts, organizing information, understanding vocabulary, and the importance of reflective writing. They are written in a user-friendly style for the reader who is unfamiliar with the field of content reading. Often the author cites current research as a basis for the ideas presented. The specific activities suggested for the various topics are discussed with sufficient detail, but explicit examples to illustrate how the activity could be used in various subject areas are scarce. The steps to develop a DRTA (Directed Reading-Thinking Activity) when reading expository text are described well, but I question a person's ability to design one from the material provided. There are no samples. In the section on text assessment, the quantitative and qualitative measures to be considered when evaluating textbooks are explained, but the author does not include any of the checklists that have been developed in recent years. Thus, the information on text assessment is not easy to apply. When using this text, teacher educators might need to supplement with more examples of the strategies presented. The lack of examples is problematic for both inservice and preservice groups.

*Infotext: Reading and Learning* reflects the author's belief that reading and learning are not separate activities. The importance of meaningful activities where students take ownership of their reading learning is stressed throughout the book. A strong case for the need to view content reading from the perspective of the reader is successfully presented.

*This review of professional materials is the second in a series of titles from the Pippin Teacher's Library, published by Pippin Publishing Limited. Future titles will include Oral Language in Today's Classroom and Whole Language: Practical Ideas.*

*Kathryn Kinnucan-Welsch, Reviews Editor*



## Children's Books

*I Want To Go Home.* Written by Alice McLerran. Illustrated by Jill Kastner. Tambourine Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10018. ISBN: 0-688-10144-5. 1992. 32 pp. US\$15.00.

*Reviewed by Maureen A. Hart*

When Marta and Mama move to a new house, Marta is convinced it will never be "home." Her new bedroom walls are peppered with yucky purple and yellow flowers and the closet shelves are too high for her to reach. When Mama gives Marta a cat named Sammy who also had to leave his comfortable home, Marta pretends she doesn't care. But soon Marta's attention shifts from her own feelings of displacement to concern for Sammy and his adjustment to his new home — the home he now shares with Marta and her mother. In attempts to comfort and persuade Sammy that he will adjust and eventually be happy in his new house, she convinces herself. McLerran's simple story line deals sensitively and realistically with the emotional upheaval of change. Kastner's illustrations are double spread, making the book ideal for reading aloud to a group of children. Children who have experienced a difficult move will relate to Marta's initial unwillingness to call her new environment home and her longing for her old familiar surroundings. The reassuring ending makes this an upbeat and timely tale for our increasingly mobile society.



*Reviewed by Susan Miller  
Comstock Public Schools*

*An Evening At Alfie's.* Written by Shirley Hughes. Mulberry Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY. ISBN: 0-688-11520-9. 1992. Softcover, unpagged. US\$3.95.

Shirley Hughes has penned another delightful story about Alfie and his sister, Annie Rose. In this book, Hughes weaves a bedtime story about Noah's Ark and a leaky pipe in the household into a memorable tale that will be loved by all. Throughout the book, the soft illustrations add to the beauty of the story — making the characters as unforgettable as any childhood adventure. This tale of a babysitter, a bedtime story, a drippy pipe and a wet diaper will appeal to the child or parent who shares the full color illustrations and the humorous, realistic storyline. *An Evening At Alfie's* is an addition to the Alfie episodes that surely will be treasured!

*Look Alive.* Written by Elaine Scott. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-09937-8. 68 pp. US\$14.00.

This wonderful book takes the intricate topic of the film and print industry and depicts it comprehensively through text and illustration. Using the familiar character of Ralph S. Mouse from Beverly Cleary's books aids in developing an understanding of making videos. Stop-action animation and other special effects are used to explain how clay figures can be brought to life on the screen. This book is sure to be a popular title. An easily understood text, a thorough index and a generous use of black and white photographs (to illustrate the written descriptions) make it an obvious choice for the young and curious.

## What's So Special About Being Special?

*Poison Ivy and Eyebrow Wigs.* Written by Bonnie Pryor. Illustrated by Gail Owens. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11200-5. 1993. 162 pp. US\$14.00.

*Reviewed by Dona Icabone*  
*Western Michigan University*

*Poison Ivy and Eyebrow Wigs* — the title was intriguing enough to pique the interest of my nine year-old daughter. Just what were eyebrow wigs? And why would someone need them? Although the book answers these questions, more importantly, it details the adventures of fourth-grader Martin Snodgrass as he tries to determine what is "special" about him. With a mother who is town mayor, a father who is the beloved town doctor, an older brother who is a skilled athlete, an older sister who is in classes for gifted and talented, and a two year-old brother who excels at "cuteness" — poor Martin. What was *his* specialness? The book describes his journey as he tries to answer that question. It's a lovely journey that we enjoyed sharing and would make an excellent book for a teacher to read aloud to a third or fourth grade class.

## Awe and Reassurance

*Around Me.* Written by Erica Magnus. Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-09756-1. 1992. 24 pp. US\$13.00.

Great world, huge and limitless; tiny world, in which a child towers like a giant over pebbles and flowers and birds — Erica Magnus' artistry awes and reassures through brief, lovely text, and the ingenious pattern of her beautiful book for children. Each four page arrangement presents the same combination: a page of brightly chalked color on the left, a full page picture on the right — these pages separated by a leaf

with a cutout square in its center, so that first there is a glimpse of the picture that lies ahead, then on the reverse contrasting colors of the page itself and the square of color from an earlier page. Beneath the cutout square, the brief text on these pages runs as a caption: "The world's so big... and even so it fits me." (JMJ)

### **A fast-paced, philosophical tale**

*Stop, Thief!* Written by Robert Kalan. Illustrated by Yossi Abolafia. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11876-3. 1993. 24 pp. US\$14.00.

Cleverly combined text and pictures produce a charming children's book — and capture attention also for an elegant, understated philosophical treatise on property rights. Does the acorn belong to the squirrel who dug it up ... or to the squirrel from whose tree it fell? Should ownership be the right of those with special powers (the crow who flies, the otter who swims), or of those who outweigh others (as a dog outweighs a fox)? Or should it be those who know how to *use* the acorn who should possess it as a reward for their knowledge? *Stop, Thief!* would enrich as well as enliven courses in economics or ethics. It also fulfills admirably its primary function as a fast-paced, action-packed read-it-again storybook, with simple text young readers can quickly master, and illustrations that delight the eye. (JMJ)

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## Multicultural Literature

*If I Had a Paka.* Written by Charlotte Pomerantz. Illustrated by Nancy Tafuri. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11900-X. 1993. 28 pp. US\$14.00.

The lilt of language enables the poet's voice to instruct as it delights. In Samoan, the words for *owl* and *secret* are similar: "Owl, owl, I've a secret" becomes "Lulu, lulu, I've a lilo." What fun to know these words, to learn and to discover the origins of words which are gifts to the English language from many countries and cultures. The title of Charlotte Pomerantz's intricate, ingenious collection comes from a cumulative chanting of Swahili words: "If I had a paka — meow, meow, meow, meow — I would want a mm-bwa — bow wow wow wow." No need for translation here, with ample clues from the text and from Nancy Tafuri's crisply beautiful illustrations. Each of the poems is different in style: a fairytale told in verse (Serbo-Croatia); a list of colorful Native American words; a Yiddish lullaby, each celebrating the joy of diversity.

*Where Are You Going, Manyoni?* Written by Catherine Stock. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-10352-9. 1993. 48 pp. US\$15.00.

The author of *Galimoto* has written and illustrated another engaging children's story set in Zimbabwe. Manyoni sets off early in the morning on the long path beside the Limpopo River, the forest of palms and fever trees, the sandstone kopjes, eventually meeting her friend Tula, and finally arriving at school in time for a few minutes of play before the beginning of the day. In an Author's Note, Catherine Stock describes the way she, like Manyoni, walks long distances as she sketches African wildlife and scenes. Also included are a glossary defining words from the Venda language used in the story; and labeled, miniature pictures of the wildlife shown in the illustrations throughout the book. (JMJ)

## Adolescent Torment and Triumph

*Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes.* Written by Chris Crutcher. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11552-7. 1993. 224 pp. US\$14.00.

Trapped with genetic predispositions which are his only link to a pudgy father who deserted his wife before their child was born, Eric Calhoun endures the nickname of Moby bestowed by classmates with more socially acceptable physical styles who get a kick out of the "great white whale" allusion. Sarah Byrnes, also a social outcast, has no cruel nickname. She insists on always being called by her full name as a defense against the recurring realization of fellow students that her last name is a wonderfully apt play on words: Sarah's face is permanently, dramatically scarred from burns she acquired when she was three. The novel's title reflects one of its themes: the stressful decision faced in some form by all adolescents of deciding whether to show loyalty to friends by refusing to grow and change. Eric joins the swimming team, but confounds his coach for a year by working out exhaustively without losing any weight — a feat deliberately accomplished by massive overeating, so that he can swim and still not betray his friendship, "staying fat for Sarah Byrnes." As the plot progresses, a rich array of characters are introduced: other students including two ministers' children and the son of a town derelict; their very diverse families; and a larger than life, though still believable, group of teachers and administrators — some monsters, some miracles.

Chris Crutcher, a counselor working with children, adolescents, and their families at a mental health center in Spokane Washington, writes young adult fiction and adult novels, including a recent suspense thriller focused on child abuse: *The Deep End* (William Morrow, 1992). *Staying Fat* has terrifying sections, but is rapid-paced, eventually optimistic, and compellingly readable. The author's dedication is "to all those who finally stand up for themselves." (JMJ)



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