

# Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

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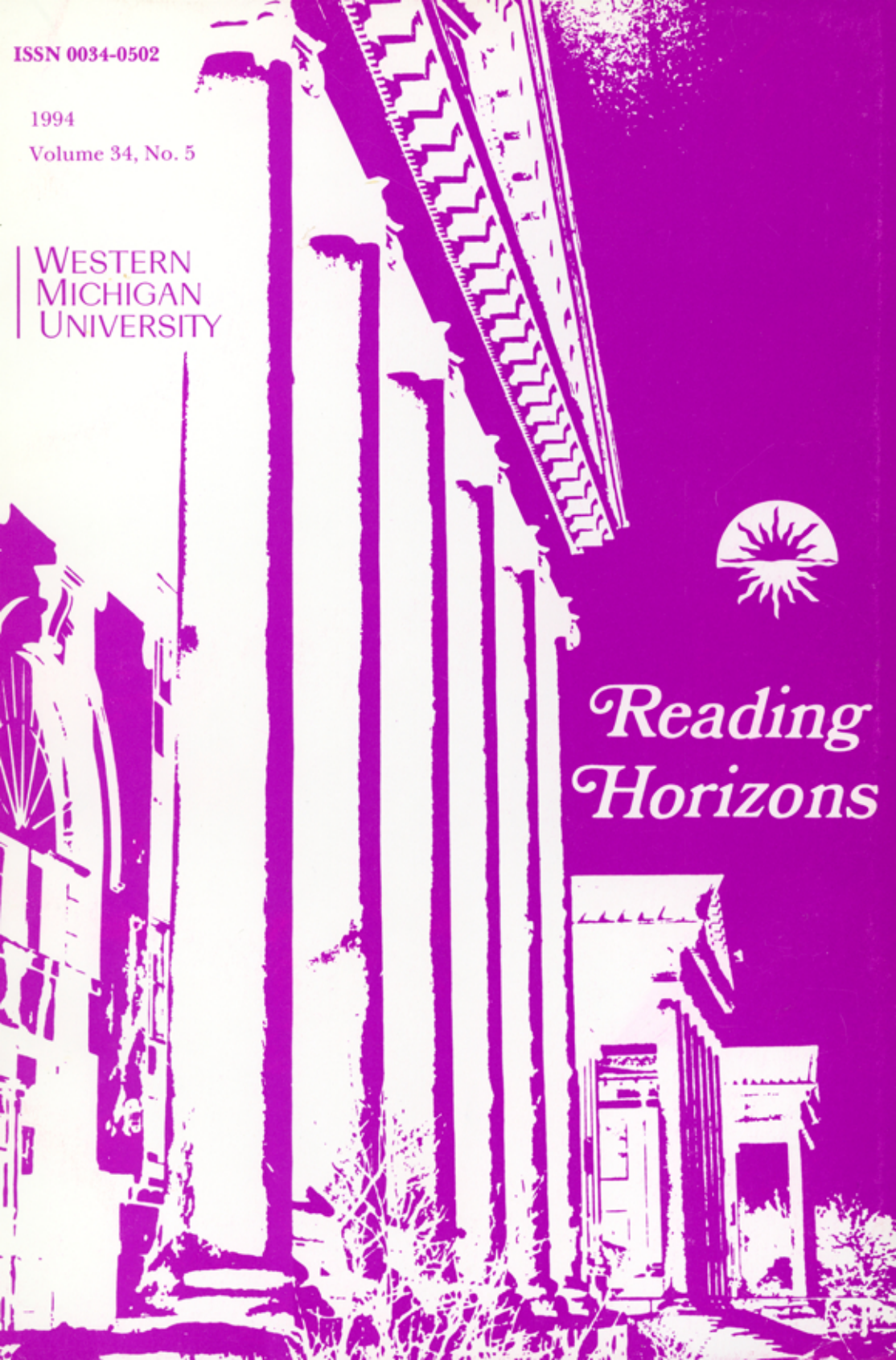
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# *Reading Horizons*





**READING HORIZONS  
VOLUME 34 NUMBER 5**

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## **June 1994 Themed Issue**

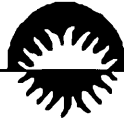
### **Literacy Through University-School Collaboration**

Our fourth themed issue of *Reading Horizons* focuses on examples of promoting literacy through university-school collaboration. The issue's lead article is contributed by Taffy E. Raphael, a faculty member in the Department of Teacher Education and Educational Psychology at Michigan State University and her collaborators. Guest editors for this issue are Dr. Janet Dynak and Dr. Ronald A. Crowell from the College of Education at Western Michigan University.

## **Call for Manuscripts for the 1995 Themed Issue:**

### **Multicultural Education and the Language Arts**

The 1995 themed issue of *Reading Horizons* will be devoted to efforts that link literacy practices with multicultural education. Articles relating to excellent practice, theory, and research, which relate reading, writing, speaking and listening to the theme of multicultural education should be sent to Dr. Jeanne M. Jacobson, Editor, *Reading Horizons*, WMU, Kalamazoo MI 49008. Manuscripts should be submitted following *Reading Horizons* guidelines: send four copies and two stamped, self-addressed business-size envelopes; include a cover sheet with author name and affiliation; use a running head (without author identity) on subsequent pages; follow APA guidelines for references and use of gender-free language. Manuscripts intended for the themed issue should be postmarked by March 1, 1995.



# Literacy Through University-School Collaboration

**Guest Editors: Janet Dynak and Ronald A. Crowell**

Dr. Ronald Crowell and Dr. Janet Dynak are faculty members in the Department of Education and Professional Development, College of Education, at Western Michigan University, where both have been extensively engaged in university-school collaborative efforts. Both also serve on the Editorial Board of *Reading Horizons*.

Janet Dynak has been a special education teacher, curriculum director, and reading consultant in Michigan and in Germany with the Department of Defense Overseas Schools. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in literacy and secondary instructional practice and coordinates a three-semester program for preservice teachers which is sited at a local high school. Her action research interests include use of secondary content literacy strategies to integrate curriculum and the role of self-reflection in teacher education.

Ronald A. Crowell teaches courses in reading methods, educational psychology and critical thinking. Currently, he is university coordinator of a Professional Development School, a collaborative effort between the College of Education at Western Michigan University and the Battle Creek Lakeview School District. In this role he works with university faculty, classroom teachers and interns, and is engaged in collaborative inquiry projects in the school.



# Literacy Through University-School Collaboration: A Prologue

Ronald A. Crowell  
Jeanne M. Jacobson

In schools, colleges, and departments of education throughout the country, collaboration with public schools is high on the agenda of current programmatic efforts to reform and revitalize teacher education. Teacher preparation programs designed or suggested by the Renaissance Group (1993), by John Goodlad and his group (1994), and the Holmes Group (1990) — to name but a few major efforts — hinge on establishing long term, field based programs in collaboration with the public schools. Collaboration between the university and the schools is not a new phenomenon, however. Some limited form of partnerships between schools and universities has always existed. What is new is the recognition that teacher preparation programs can no longer exist isolated from the field, and that university faculty must form alliances with teachers to pursue the rich research of the classroom.

This themed issue of *Reading Horizons*, "Literacy Through University School Collaboration," presents issues of research and practice characteristic of many current collaborative efforts. The development of new roles for university faculty and classroom teachers is illustrated, in the opening article, by Taffy Raphael and her colleagues Virginia Goatley,



Deborah Woodman, and Susan McMahon, through a description of a year-long Book Club project during which classroom teachers and university collaborators accepted multiple and changing roles. They describe collaborative research which tracks the book club program through two examples — an instructional unit and a study of students' questioning abilities. The process enhanced the classroom literacy environment and clarified for participating educators the benefits collaboration holds for both classroom teachers and university faculty.

The second article, presented as a dialogue between a university faculty member, Janet Dynak, and an elementary teacher, Nancy Gagliano, further explores the rich relationship that a collaborative effort encourages, and demonstrates how the connections of methods courses to classroom settings can influence and strengthen preservice preparation. Next, Sherry Macaul, Thomas Blount and Kimberly Hill Phelps explore three different types of collaboration and show how collaborative work can expand over the years as school/university contacts increase and become more elaborated. They offer a useful discussion of how the traditional boundaries between universities and school are being stretched and bridged, advocating collaborative relationships which engage participants in "co-planning, co-teaching, co-investigating and co-evaluating alternative teaching and learning models and practices."

In "School-University Collaboration: Everyone's a Winner," Carole Schulte Johnson, Mary Hughes and Rena Mincks again present a dialogue between those engaged in school-university collaboration. Their enthusiasm for such partnerships is heartening and motivating. Collaborative action research, a theme of earlier articles also, is described by Karen Cirincione and Denise Michael in "Literacy Portfolios in Third Grade: A School-College Collaboration." Their work contributes to current inquiry on the use of portfolios, and

highlights another important advantage of collaboration among educators.

Curt Dudley-Marling's article, "Struggling Readers in the Regular Classroom: A Personal Reflection," offers a different perspective on collaboration — that of a university professor teaching a third grade class while on a year's leave. His field notes, interspersed with his analysis and comments, offer valuable insights to all those who work with struggling readers. In the course of describing his experience during the year he makes a strong argument for diversity in the classroom and inclusive education.

This commentary serves as a prologue to our themed issue. More significantly, that theme itself describes a process which is still in its prologue phase. The articles all describe attempts to create environments which support literacy through collaborative action — teachers and university faculty working in concert to achieve group and individual goals. We hope that as our profession enters the twenty-first century such collaborations will no longer be prologue, but will be recognized as the central core of the professional continuum, and shared inquiry will bond school and the university firmly together.

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- Holmes Group. (1990). *Tomorrow's Schools: Principles for the design of professional development schools*. East Lansing MI: Author. (ED 328533)
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# Collaboration on the Book Club Project: The Multiple Roles of Researchers, Teachers, and Students

Taffy E. Raphael  
Virginia J. Goatley  
Deborah A Woodman  
Susan I. McMahon

Our article describes the potential benefits of university/public school collaborations for the teachers, researchers, and students involved. Even these common terms *teachers*, *researchers*, and *students* shifted meanings as each participant of our project assumed various roles. All of us were classroom teachers, though Taffy, Ginny, and Sue had returned to the university. Taffy is now a professor working with teachers through her research and the Literacy master's degree program, Ginny a graduate student leaving her first grade classroom, and Sue a doctoral student leaving behind her middle school teaching. Deb, in her first year of full time teaching, had returned to teaching as a second career after five years in the business world. Yet we were all researchers, maintaining field notes, analyzing classroom literacy events, sharing our thoughts and challenging each other's thinking at weekly meetings of the Book Club project team. The urban fourth and fifth grade students were also teachers as they worked with their peers mentoring and mediating each other's small group discussions. Further, some assumed the role of

researcher as they spontaneously gave us their field notes or noted reading log entries they thought we should copy as evidence of particular kinds of growth. In short, through our research during the Book Club project, we all grew from the multiple levels of collaboration as teachers, researchers, and students.

In this article, we share what we learned from a collaborative project that focused on moving away from a traditional, teacher-directed reading program to the social-interactive approach that characterized Book Club. First, we describe the project's goals and participants. Second, we focus on the four instructional components of the Book Club Program. Third, we trace the progress of Book Club in Deb's classroom using two examples: 1) a six-week folktale unit and 2) students' questioning abilities across the academic year. Through these examples, the impact of the collaborative efforts can be seen in the students' growth in their abilities to engage meaningfully in discussions about the books they read.

### **The Book Club project: Why?**

The participants in the Book Club project shared a common vision of the goals of literacy instruction: 1) promoting students' understanding, enjoyment, and choice to engage in literary activities, 2) helping students learn to acquire, synthesize, and evaluate information from text, and 3) helping students develop a language to talk about literacy. There has been a growing sentiment toward literature-based literacy instruction over the past decade, with arguments that students need to belong to a community of readers (Smith, 1988), recognize their role in author/reader relationships (Graves and Hansen, 1983), and have opportunities in school to participate in authentic reading and writing events (Au, Scheu, Kawakami, and Herman, 1990; Short and Pierce, 1990).

In fall, when we began meeting weekly, Deb talked of her ideal reading program, one that would include quality literature, active student interaction, critical thinking, and oral language connections. She said that, even before she was sure she had a teaching position, "I started looking into trade books, catalogues to order books [wanting to teach] critical thinking... [with] the kids... more in control... to be able to be a more active part in their own learning." When she thought about her role in such a program, she said she would "first present, and model, and make the instructions clear, and let it go. Let them work it out for themselves. That's when learning takes place and it does, every time... I picture the kids becoming more part of the program... it's their learning too." She was adamant about not wanting to repeat what she saw in her student teaching, where "you know, you have your lower kids in *Moonbeams* or whatever, and your middle kids, and then your higher kids... assign workbook pages this day and so many, and make sure you keep with the schedule... the test at the end of the week. I wanted to do something more than that!"

Despite a clear sense of where Deb wanted to go with her program, she also expressed concern about how to begin and whether or not such a program would provide students with the skills and strategies they needed. She noted she was concerned that they had had little experience with literature as the basis for their reading program, and little to no experience working collaboratively in student-led groups. "It's like I thought, I can't picture these kids carrying on a serious conversation about a book." She reported asking herself, "Could it be done? What were the expectations? Could they be accomplished?... I had that fear that much as [Book Club] liberated me to get away from tradition, I had the fear that the skills wouldn't be covered, because each grade level has their own curriculum statements and expectations, and I thought,

'How am I going to cover these skills... I'm scared to death... I can't do it.'"

### **The Book Club team**

The Book Club team served as a source of support as the program was developed and studied. In addition to the authors of this article, the Book Club team consisted of Laura Pardo, Jessica Bentley, and Fenice Boyd. The authors appreciate the contributions they made in helping us to bring this article to completion. The program is designed for a classroom with one teacher and no assistance, but the collaborative nature of the development provided multiple sets of eyes within each classroom and the opportunity to raise immediate questions and discuss current lessons. For example, university participants provided leadership in close analysis of the literacy events within the program and guidance on instructional possibilities. The public school teachers provided insights into the students' ongoing interactions and related instruction, the relationship between Book Club and other subject areas, and the practicality of the approach. We met as a whole team and in various subgroups. The entire group met once a week to share ideas for classroom instruction, reflect on students' progress in general, discuss specific problems or issues that had arisen over the week, and keep informed of one another's activities in the two classrooms.

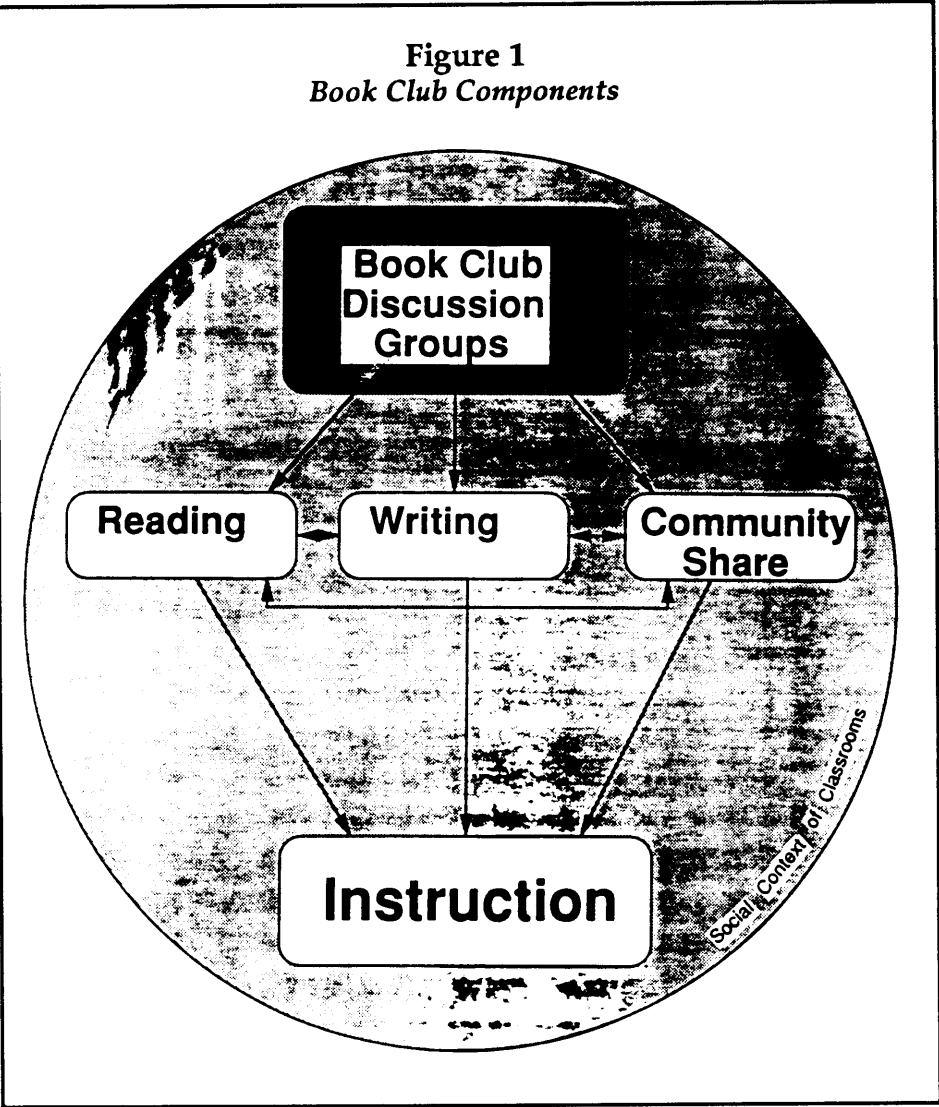
One subgroup was based on participants within the two separate classrooms. For example, two university participants, Taffy and Ginny, visited Deb's classroom once or twice a week each, on separate days. We took field notes, videotaped and audiotaped whole group lessons and Book Club sessions, and met with Deb to talk about what we saw. Another subgroup of research staff met to work with data analysis. Subgroups varied depending on particular needs (e.g., classroom considerations, presentations at conferences, writing articles).

The students themselves were part of the team from the beginning and contributed in many ways, once they realized they could help us learn about better ways to teach reading. They willingly engaged in formal and informal interviews, saved copies of their writing in and outside of Book Club, and in the case of three students, began to take field notes because, as Randy stated, "Ken was saying some really important things and I thought we should have it written down." Randy and two other students recorded what they and their peers said, as well as what Deb had written on the chalk board. Such student involvement supported the goals of the program in general, and Deb's belief of the importance of students "becoming more part of the program and contributing to their own learning."

### The Book Club

As evidenced by research on the students' entering abilities to talk in meaningful ways about what they had read, we saw that these students could benefit greatly from learning how to engage in response groups (McMahon, 1991; Raphael and McMahon, in press). We identified two areas that needed instructional focus: Knowledge about *what to share* and knowledge about *how to share it*. While students could talk about the importance of taking turns or asking and answering each other's questions, the transcripts did not show particular respect for one another's ideas, provided little evidence of follow-up or in-depth questioning, a narrowness of ways of sharing ideas (e.g., read aloud, go on to the next person), and little variation in purpose for the discussion. In listening to groups of students in this and other schools, we found that these interactions were not unusual (McMahon and Hauschildt, 1993).

Figure 1  
*Book Club Components*



We created a four-component approach to facilitate students' development in these areas, to provide classroom teachers support for the instructional focus of the reading program, and to guide the development of thematic literature-based instructional units. Deb specifically wished to move away from a narrow definition of the mandated district



curriculum materials toward a strong literature-based reading program, yet wanted to be sure that she addressed instruction toward the skill and strategy development her students needed, and the parents and district personnel might expect. Focus on support for the students' small group discussions, or Book Clubs, from which the program takes its name included the four components: 1) reading, 2) writing, 3) whole class discussions, or community share, and 4) instruction (see Figure 1). While these components interacted with each other to support and develop students' abilities to respond to their selections, for the convenience of readers of the article, we first address each one in turn.

**Reading.** Obviously, to be able to participate in a discussion about books, students need to have read the relevant material. To prepare for their Book Clubs, and give students of different abilities the support they needed, Deb used several different opportunities for reading, including partner-reading, choral reading, oral reading/listening, silent reading and reading at home the evening prior to Book Club. The students' reading logs replaced traditional workbooks, containing blank pages for representing ideas through pictures, charts, and maps, and lined pages that could be adapted for writing reflections on elements such as story events and characters, interesting words or language use on the part of the author, funny sections including dialogue and descriptions, and so forth.

Deb was conscious of the district reading requirements, noting that "each grade level has its own curriculum statement and expectations" and that her objectives included both "getting kids to the point where they feel comfortable talking about books [and] that they gain the necessary skills [including] the skills that are required for them to pass the MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program): main idea, getting the facts from the situation, sequencing, etc." She

hoped her students would learn to "maintain a Book Club, discuss, question, and feel successful at expressing themselves." Deb did not have students participate in formal vocabulary lessons each time they read. Rather, she asked students to note in reading logs confusing or interesting words to discuss. She included comprehension activities such as character mapping, sequencing, question generation, and other activities often associated with more traditional reading programs, but these were either selected by the student, or prompted by her sense of what was relevant to understanding and discussing their selections. In such ways, we enlisted students' help in shaping the details of their curriculum, albeit within clearly defined parameters of the overall program of instruction. In addition to reading the Book Club book(s), students participated in a weekly library program and a daily school-wide DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) program, ordered books from different school publishing catalogues, and used trade and textbooks in science and social studies. Many of these reading opportunities gave Deb a chance to examine individual students' reading fluency.

**Writing.** Researchers have suggested that writing and reading are mutually supportive processes (Pearson, 1994). For example, McMahon (1991) found that students' writing prior to Book Club influenced their discussions, and that their discussions influenced the amount and type of information included in later writing activities. Deb encouraged students' writing through three activities within the Book Club program: 1) the reading logs, 2) think-sheets, and 3) creating their own texts. First, students used reading logs to write about their ideas before each Book Club, using their log as a permanent record of their developing ideas, and after Book Clubs as a place to reflect on how their ideas had changed. Second, the students used think-sheets as individual guides to support specific reading strategies (e.g., comparison/contrast;

prediction; synthesis) or ways of responding to the literature. Figure 2 illustrates a think-sheet promoting students' critical response to literature. Landra has elected to critique Coerr's development of the character Sadako, after finishing the book *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, noting that the author had "showed a lot of Sadako..." so that readers now know what "Sadako thought and all her secrets..." but that Coerr had not done a thorough enough development of Sadako's siblings so that readers cannot tell how the two feel about their sister, Sadako.

Figure 2  
Book Critique

I plan to critique

(plot, character, setting?)

Character

What are some things the author did well? \_\_\_\_\_

She showed a lot of Sadako  
and she tells more about Sadako  
in the story, and we now how  
much everything that Sadako  
thought and all her secrets  
and everything else.

What are some things the author could do to improve the story? \_\_\_\_\_

The Author could tell a  
little more about the sister and the  
brother so that we will now  
more about them and she  
didn't tell us the sister and  
the brother feel about Sadako.

Third, students created their own texts that fit thematically within the Book Club units. For example, during a unit that explored the genre of biography, students gathered information from their families and created their own autobiographies, while during a folktale unit, they wrote their own folktales.

**Community share.** We found that students benefited from large group discussions especially in two circumstances. First, during community share, Deb raised students' consciousness about issues or events they would be reading. In one example, students were to read Sally Ride's account of her trip in the space shuttle, *To Space and Back*. They had also studied gravity in a recent science unit. Deb used community share as a time to remind students about what they already knew, and to prompt their thinking about both the fun and the frustration of zero gravity. Students next read the relevant section of the book and later wrote about fun/frustrating experiences, recording their ideas in their reading logs in preparation for their upcoming Book Clubs.

A second reason for community share was to give each Book Club the opportunity to share with the whole class what they had discussed. Students learned from each other, and Deb could identify where they might have some knowledge or comprehension gaps. For example, students read Lois Lowry's Newbery Award book, *Number The Stars*, which is about a 10-year old girl who shelters her Jewish friend from the Nazis during the German occupation of Denmark. In one Book Club, Crystal had asked why Hitler would want to attack Denmark. A student who had either missed the point in the selection or who may have been sensitive because of the beginning of the Persian Gulf War responded that, "The king was very rich and had a lot of oil. The other people were very poor and didn't have any oil and needed to get the wells. So

he started a war." When this emerged in the community share, Deb and Taffy, who had been observing that day, realized the need for a brief history lesson before students continued with the book. Deb immediately intervened with a mini-lesson on World War II.

**Instruction.** Observations of the students' early Book Club participation helped us determine the value of instruction in *what to share* and *how to share it*. To help students develop a range of possibilities for *what to share*, Deb modeled various rhetorical (e.g., text structure, story elements), comprehension, and synthesis activities, during community share. For example, Deb modeled rhetorical elements by helping students explore how authors create characters (e.g., modeling character maps and their use during discussion), how authors organize their texts (e.g., sequencing, comparing, and contrasting different books), and how readers evaluate texts (e.g., critiques). She modeled comprehension strategies including prediction, question-asking, monitoring, summarizing, and drawing upon prior knowledge and related texts. Discussions of overarching themes, common features across texts, and time lines provided students with models of discourse synthesis.

To help students develop appropriate social skills for *how to share*, Deb focused on both general interaction (e.g., turn taking, listening to one another) and specific ways to expand upon one another's ideas (e.g., asking follow-up questions, asking for clarification, relating to other ideas). Deb involved the students in critiquing Book Club interactions in different ways. Some discussions were videotaped, some audiotaped, and some were available in typed transcripts. Deb used these different versions throughout the year to have students consider both what the participants had done particularly well, and what they might want to improve.

## Components working together

Each of the four Book Club components operates in interaction with the others and all support students' development of the abilities to respond to a variety of selections and to develop their own sense as a reader and an author. For example, in one unit on folktales, students read, wrote, and discussed a variety of books including Aardema's *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain* and *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*, Clement's *The Painter and the Wild Swans*, Heyer's *The Weaving of a Dream*, and San Souci's *The Enchanted Tapestry*. Toward the end of the unit, Deb held community share to focus on features of folktales. The students used their knowledge base of the genre to create a list of common elements, then used this list as they created their own folktales. Following this, students held Book Clubs to discuss how the common elements were incorporated in different folktales, building a basis for later writing of their own folktales.

During the Book Club period every day, Deb and the students used the various components for many purposes. For example, students had been reading Heyer's *The Weaving of a Dream* and San Souci's *The Enchanted Tapestry* throughout the week writing about and discussing the stories daily. On Friday, Deb initiated a compare/contrast activity analyzing these two similar folktales drawn from the same oral story. Five activities made up the one-hour lesson that day: 1) Deb provided students some time to reread the two texts; 2) she modeled comparing and contrasting; 3) students did a compare and contrast activity in the reading logs; 4) Book Clubs met to discuss log entries; and 5) Deb led a community share to discuss folktale features. The critical thinking skills required in comparing/contrasting these two books gave students the opportunity to develop or practice reading

comprehension strategies, identify common rhetorical features, and relate elements to other folktales they had read.

In the following segment, a typical heterogeneous group of fourth graders focused on comparing elements of plot and the illustrations of the story following the community share and reading log activities. The students reflect the diversity of ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Vietnamese, Hispanic, Caucasian) and ability levels found at this school. In this case, it is a group of girls, though typically the groups were mixed in terms of gender as well. Their conversation highlights how the leadership shifted among the students as they talked about the characters, then a story event, and finally began to critique the pictures in the books. The conversation further illustrates how the student began to "co-construct" their response as they worked together to identify important events and similarities and differences.

*Eva: I thought it was exactly the same as Weaving of a Dream, 'cause it had the same characters, but not the same names. It wasn't, it wasn't exactly like Weaving of a Dream, but just where the parts are different...*

*Crystal: Yeah, they are exactly the same.*

*Mei: Some of them, they are differences. Right?*

*Eva: All the differences I hear are mostly their names.*

*Mei: (interrupting) — the part, wait. When he go get, um, the tarp —*

*Crystal: (interrupting) The tapestry?*

*Leanne: But anyway, it's almost exactly the same because inside, inside the story, the mother did have three sons, and there was, she was a widow, and there was a fortune teller in the story, and there was a stone horse in the story, and stuff like that, except for when he —*

*Eva: (interrupting) — except for when the horse in Weaving of the Dream he had to put 10 drops of blood on the horse.*

*Crystal: The Enchanted Tapestry book was sort of different (short pause)*

*Leanne: The pictures are different and neat... bright, real bright (pointing to Weaving of a Dream)*

*Eva: Sort of like bold.*

*Leanne: (pointing to Tapestry) They're like pencil, they're like (short pause)*

*Eva: Watercolors.*

*Mei: But they are good pictures.*

*Crystal: They're good pictures, but they're plain. They have, they need bright colors.*

This interaction illustrates the role of focusing students' discussion through prompts in their reading logs (e.g., focus on similarities and differences between the two books), reflects improvements in both *how* and *what* the students share during Book Club as they demonstrate turn-taking and respect for each other, provide help to each other when they sense some confusion (e.g., pointing to the pictures in the book), focus on the content of the selections as it relates to their own knowledge and opinion (e.g., pictures are good, but plain), and work collaboratively to co-construct their ideas (e.g., Leanne and Eva working together to talk about the exceptions).

In a mid-winter conversation between Ginny and Deb, Ginny noted that the community share sessions seemed to benefit the students, saying "I'm not sure, I think in some ways that's why they're doing so well now, because they had that chance to really learn what it means to communicate, and what they're really trying to do. I think in some ways if they hadn't had the whole group discussions, I'm not sure they would have been doing what they are now." Deb agreed that the whole class sessions set up expectations and noted that it had also helped that they had been continually asked to



evaluate how well their Book Clubs had gone. As Deb said, "they're proud of their Book Clubs, and they should be." The folktale unit also heightened students' interest in becoming authors. One community share activity asked Taffy to assume yet another role on the project, that of an unpublished folktale author working on a manuscript in the style of Kipling's *Just So* stories. Taffy underscored collaboration in the process of creating books, asking students to help her improve the manuscript for children their age. As students engaged in critiquing her story, and talked with her about the books they had read and their own writing, they expressed interest in writing their own folktales. At their request, Deb provided the time so they could write, illustrate, and share their folktales with each other and with a group of first grade students. Again, the outcome of collaboration among university, public school teacher, and student participants created an instructional opportunity that was shaped because of the collaborative effort.

Such activities progressed over the academic year as students moved through units connected by theme (e.g., the effects of war), genres (e.g., folktales from around the world and biographies), and topics (e.g., the holocaust). Generally, students in the class read at least one book in common, while individual copies of books related by theme, author, or genre were available in the classroom library. In addition to collaborating on the primary research agenda and the curriculum development, we also found collaboration particularly useful in choosing the books.

Even though Deb wanted the students to have a voice in deciding which books to read, availability constrained text selection. To incorporate choice in other ways, Deb established a system to help her choose books. First, she worked collaboratively with her students to identify a theme,

genre, or authors they wished to study. Deb then explored available options in the school district's language arts collection of classroom sets while those of us in the university setting explored availability from outside resources (e.g., public and university libraries, funds for research supplies to purchase books). She then identified those available book sets (of 10 to 30 books) and individual books that most closely related to one of the students' choices. Members of a single Book Club each read the same book related to the overall theme, while each student also selected a book for additional reading.

In identifying skills on which to focus, Deb drew on her knowledge of reading (e.g., from her teacher education program, the district guidelines, and the scope and the sequence chart of the district adopted basal reader) and her knowledge of collaborative grouping practices. She expressed concern early in the year about her students' questioning abilities, saying, "I want them to develop better questioning skills; they've gotten to a point where they'll ask, 'What do you mean by that?' but they have much more to learn." She thought about how questioning abilities might relate to the composition of the Book Clubs, and making changes in the groups based upon "their oral language, how they speak and listen, making [the Book Clubs] as heterogeneous as possible, test out mixes in case a group has someone too dominant." The focus on *how to share*, particularly how to ask questions of one another, occurred over the year, through Deb's modeling during community share and through students' analysis of their own Book Clubs (e.g., on video or audiotape). In mid-November, we began to see that children had internalized one form of questioning, asking for information. The following Book Club occurred after students mapped characters from *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*:

*Crystal: Jean, let's hear from you.*

Jean: Okay, but don't laugh. The mosquito talked too much.

Crystal: Yeah, Larissa, what's first on your map?

Larissa: The branch fell... said it was the crow's fault.

Crystal: It was the crow. Tremaine, what's yours? Let's hear about it.

Tremaine: I did the iguana. It had sticks in ears and walked in the forest.

Larissa: Why did it walk in the forest?

Tremaine: It got tired of the mosquito nonsense.

This discussion is certainly an improvement over students' Book Clubs in early October (Raphael and McMahon, in press) when the students could barely start a discussion, but not as strong as the one comparing *Weaving of a Dream* and *Enchanted Tapestry* that occurred somewhat later in the folk-tale unit. Crystal and her peers had the opportunity to share, they showed respect for what others had to say, and talked of specific parts of the text. However, while there were improvements in *how to share*, there was little elaboration, questions and answers were shallow, little personal response and no relations were made to experiences outside the text. Crystal assumed a "teacher role," directing the group rather than allowing students to assume collaborative roles. More modeling and analysis occurred to address these issues and changes were observed over the course of the following months.

During our meetings, we discussed possible grouping of students based on our observations. We noticed that interactions were affected by the group membership, and Deb shifted groups to find a good balance, based on leadership, communication, and social skills of the students. For example, Jennifer appeared to be shut out of discussion by a more dominant girl in her group, a fact that she was quite

aware of as she described in an interview several months later: "she was getting on everyone's case 'cause they wouldn't be doing nothing right and would get too slow so she was trying to be the leader." Joshua, a student who in October had refused to talk at all, needed support beyond being ordered to talk. Together with Randy and Jeffrey, Jennifer and Joshua comprised a Book Club for the folktale unit. Their interactions show the results of careful grouping, and the effects of engaging in a variety of comprehension and synthesis activities in their reading logs. Notice both the increased range and depth of questions asked:

*Jeffrey: I'd like to talk about the youngest son. I liked him because um, he didn't lie and um, didn't do all the bad things, like the brothers, 'cause the brothers went to town and got the gold instead of trying to help their mother.*

*Randy: What bad things did the other brothers do?*

*Jeffrey: They um, went to the stone house where the stone horse is and instead of taking the horse, knocking out their two front teeth, they went and got the gold and went to town instead of helping their family.*

*Jennifer: Okay, if you were in that, uh, if you were in that situation, what would you?*

*Jeffrey: (pause) Trust my youngest son.*

*Joshua: Trust all three of them, but the youngest son was the best.*

*Jennifer: What if he tr... what if like, what if he trusted the oldest one? That the oldest one was the one that he trusted?*

*Jeffrey: Um... I trusted, um, I would have trusted all of them, but he, when he left he never came back, he went to the other city.*

*Jennifer: (interrupting) I mean, what if he didn't know that the oldest one was really for you to trust? And you never found out? And then you would, and*

then you would think that the youngest one did all the bad things?

Jeffrey: I would just disagree with the boy if I was the mother... I would just disagree with the boy, with the two big boys.

Randy: How could the mother discipline them?

Jeffrey: Yeah, when she didn't even know about it.

Randy: Yeah, how could she discipline them?

Jeffrey: She couldn't discipline them. They went to town and took all the gold. But at the end of the story, I think they came back.

Jennifer: I want to talk about the um, first episode when they go to the land -- far east -- with that lady and her two sons?

While we could still see potential for improved discussions, it was clear that students were growing in important ways in *what to share*. First, all students had begun to participate, even quiet Joshua, and their responses were more interesting than merely rote reading from their reading logs. Second, there were personal responses, when Jennifer wondered how one of the students might act in that situation, or when they discussed what kinds of discipline might be appropriate. Third, there was a focus on the substance of the text. Students examined specific sections of the plot, from Randy's request for a summary at the beginning of this segment to their discussion of trust and hypothesizing different outcomes to Jeffrey's comment about the older brothers returning. Issues of trust and discipline formed central themes to the discussion. The Book Clubs comparing and contrasting *The Weaving of a Dream* to *The Enchanted Tapestry* further illustrate students' improved focus on both *how* and *what to share*.

Finally, an example from an April Book Club session reveals how students internalized the in-depth questioning that

Deb modeled frequently when scaffolding students' interactions during community share. For example, when Deb asked students to think about what features characterized folktales, she modeled how to probe for further information, using general prompts such as "tell me more about that," "can you explain that," or "what kind?" She also elicited more specific information, as in the following exchange:

*Jarrold: (Folktales have) a problem.*

*Deb: Can you think of a problem we have read about?*

*Jarrold: When the man goes through the ice.*

*Jennifer: In Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears there was a problem because it kept going on and on and made people angry.*

*Helena: The lesson is taught in the story.*

*Deb: What lesson?*

*Helena: Don't tell secrets.*

The modeling that Deb had done over the course of the semester began to have results, as you can see in the following exchange in April between Jennifer and Angela. Jennifer both probes and supports Angela, a student who frequently experiences comprehension difficulties, in her struggle to clarify a point about the astronauts in Sally Ride's book *To Space and Back*:

*Richard; Angela, let's hear yours.*

*Angela: It will be scary.*

*Jennifer: Why do you think it will be scary?*

*Angela: Because they leave the earth.*

*Jennifer: Why would you be scared to leave the earth?*

*Angela: Because I've never been up so high to know how it would look.*

*Jennifer: Do you think everything would look small or something?*

*Angela: Yeah.*

Jennifer: *Why?*

Angela: *'Cause you are in outer space.*

This interaction showed growth in Jennifer's ability to question for more information and ask for ideas beyond what is detailed in the text or her reading log.

### Concluding comments

At the beginning of the year, Deb talked about her concerns: Could such a program as Book Club work for her students? Could *she* make such a program work for her, given her responsibilities to the students, the district requirements, and her students' parents? By spring, Deb expressed both her pleasure with the students' progress, and her desire to incorporate the principles of Book Club throughout the school day the following year, by including Book Club in social studies and science. Deb also described differences in students' attitudes in terms of both their literacy attitudes and development, and their self-esteem. One source of evidence she cited was their weekly trip to the library. "You should see them when they go to the library now. They used to come back, and I can remember at the beginning of the year, they used to say 'I don't want a book, so what, I don't have to have a book.' Now I hear 'Ms. Woodman! Ms. Woodman! Look at the book I got, it's a folktale.' It's like, whatever we're doing, they'll look for a book and if they find it, they run back to me... they're really excited about reading."

Deb attributed part of students' excitement, and much of their self-esteem, to the heterogeneous nature of the Book Clubs, saying, "You're talking about last year, a child was in the lowest reading book and that child was, throughout the year, reminded that he is way behind somebody else. This year, he feels he has gained so many important life skills... and pulled him up on the same level as some of those higher kids, the ones who were in the highest book last year." About

another child, she noted "she is so confident... she's always been in the lowest groups. Look at her this year! She's so confident, she was even in the speech contest... she knew what she wanted to say, she said it well... she's come so far, and she feels good. She's experienced success and is gaining so many skills." In talking with Taffy and Ginny about how her students of higher abilities were doing in the heterogeneous groupings, Deb indicated that she believed they too had experienced success. She noted that "They've just gained or added to the confidence they previously had, and felt like they were a valuable contribution. I can see that, from time to time, they might have thought 'I'm the one who keeps this together, and I'm the one who does a nice job.'"

Finally, Deb believed that the students' excitement was revealed in their attitudes at home. During parent conferences, Deb drew on the students' reading logs and other writing samples to form the basis of her report to the parents. Deb told others on the research team that when she began to explain Book Club, that she was often stopped by parents who said, "Oh, we know all about..." — mentioning some of the students' favorite characters and books. Deb said of the parents during conferences, "They seemed excited, and I think that excitement was carried over from when the kids went home... I don't think they would have been solely convinced on just what I said."

We saw a lot of progress by the students when we thought about our original three goals of literacy instruction. The first goal — students showing enjoyment, understanding and choice to engage in the activities — was easily seen in their excitement. For example, one day when a number of extra books about folktales were brought into the room, students quickly selected from these new books those that they wanted to read during sustained silent reading. One



student exclaimed "This is just like Christmas!" A second example occurred when one of the children was hospitalized for three weeks with a broken leg, after being hit by a car. When Deb visited him on his first evening in the hospital, he asked her if his Book Club group could visit him to talk about their current book.

Meeting our second goal — helping students learn to acquire, synthesize, and evaluate information from text — was apparent in all the students' progress, specifically in the later Book Club discussions and reading logs. We saw students frequently referring to books read earlier in the year, to ideas from other students within and outside their Book Clubs, and to books and media sources outside the Book Club program. They learned to critique, compare and contrast, and identify themes across multiple books. The third goal of developing a language to talk about literacy is apparent in the many examples of the students' small group and whole class discussions. From the limited voice of students at the beginning of the year, we saw students mature into thoughtful and articulate participants in discussions about books. There was ample evidence that the students all demonstrated an ability to engage in "a serious conversation about a book," one of Deb's earlier concerns. They critiqued illustrations, plots, and character descriptions; asked questions about authors' motives for writing and about each other's interpretations of story events; created dramatic interpretations of books they had read; and discussed each other's written texts.

In short, the collaborative project that resulted in the form that Book Club took in Deb's room provided her with much of the support she needed to create a literacy environment in which students read high-quality literature, learned to respond to the literature in multiple ways, and developed an appreciation for the experience. The university

participants learned a great deal about the processes involved in developing an intervention in collaboration with public school participants and felt rewarded that despite the formal end to the Book Club study, Deb and other teachers involved have continued to work collaboratively with them to develop and expand the program, write about it, and present to their colleagues at state and national conferences. The fourth-graders, given opportunity, appropriate instructional support, good literature and nonfiction selections, and an integrated literacy program, not only became active members in a literary community, they developed the strategies, skills, and inclination potentially to continue this development throughout their school careers and beyond.

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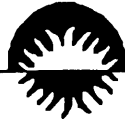
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# **Educators Collaborate to Integrate Language Arts Instruction for Preservice Teachers and Elementary Students**

**Janet Dynak  
Nancy Gagliano**

## **University Faculty Member - *Janet***

I was new to Western Michigan University. I was asked to teach the capstone course for the Integrated Language Arts Minor in the Department of Education and Professional Development. Previously established goals stated that the course was designed to provide preservice teachers practice in restructuring curriculum objectives, classroom organization, and teaching strategies in order to achieve the maximum integration of the language arts processes in the elementary schools. During the course, students were to demonstrate the ability to integrate curriculum through a guided field experience that modeled an integrated approach to learning. My first decision in planning the course was to find an elementary classroom teacher with whom I could work. A colleague suggested I contact Nancy, a teacher who taught at a nearby school.

## **Elementary Classroom Teacher - *Nancy***

As a classroom teacher in the Kalamazoo Public Schools, I had worked on curriculum integration for quite a few years.

Several of my colleagues in the district and I had developed thematic units to integrate various content areas. These were published for use throughout the district. In my classroom, I was committed to the power of classroom collaboration to enhance academic performance, social status, and personal aspirations. As I attempted to shift my second and third grade students from being listeners to problem-solvers, I welcomed Janet's contact to help in my endeavors.

### Conceptualization

As the two of us met to link the university course to the elementary classroom, we found our thoughts about how students learn were based on similar theoretical perspectives. We viewed learning as an interactive, dynamic, constructive process rather than a set of discrete, hierarchical skills to be mastered (Piaget, 1969; Vygotsky, 1962). This cognitive perspective suggests that a language arts curriculum should focus on a learner's existing knowledge and promote a set of strategies to use metacognitively to comprehend information through reading, writing, speaking and listening (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991). We decided both the preservice teachers and the second and third graders with whom they would work needed to have experiences that would promote this cognitive view of learning.

Research indicates that as preservice teachers process information about the knowledge base for teaching and learning, they need to be encouraged to resolve differences among their prior beliefs, the paradigms and models being covered in education classes, and the curriculum and instruction being delivered in the schools where they participate (Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann, 1989). As Lanier and Little (1986) point out, field experiences that are not programmatically linked to coursework often encourage preservice teachers to concentrate on the rules and procedures that are associated

with classroom management. Knowledge about learners and curriculum are often not considered when the technical aspects of teaching are observed and practiced in early field experiences. As a result, large numbers of students in teacher education do not connect concepts from their coursework to their field experiences, nor to consequent first year teaching experiences (Barnes, 1978; Lemlech, & Kaplan, 1990; Odell, 1991). The literature supports the need for teacher education students to examine a variety of teaching methods and instructional techniques in a context where they can be provoked to continually reflect upon their past experiences that relate to the knowledge base for teaching (Kennedy, 1991; Zeichner, 1987).

Based on the need to connect methods coursework to classroom settings, we attempted to link the preservice teachers' coursework and field experience very closely. We added a course goal which asked the teacher education students to demonstrate the ability to integrate curriculum through a guided field experience that modeled an integrated approach to learning.

Integrating the elementary curriculum through thematic units can provide students with experiences that promote constructive learning and metacognitive awareness (Hart, 1983; Pappas, Kiefer, & Levstik, 1990). Activities within a thematic unit that lead to exploration and discovery of content rather than a "talking about" approach can promote student choice about what they learn. Since Nancy was already using thematic units, we decided this approach would offer opportunities for the university students and the elementary students to negotiate their teaching and learning roles.

This article will explain the developmental process that we went through during our first semester of working

together. Using the work of Kovalik (1986) and Jacobs (1989), we will describe our experiences helping the preservice teachers design and facilitate a timeline, unit theme, key concepts, pre-assessment, outcomes, activities, and evaluation. Our purpose is twofold. First, ideas about how classroom teachers and university faculty can elicit support from each other to develop, implement, and evaluate specific content area units will be examined. Second, using our context-specific examples, generic guidelines to prepare content units which promote content literacy will be identified.

## Development

**Timeline.** The university course ran for 16 weeks. The course schedule was designed so that all of the 15 preservice teachers went out to the school to meet the elementary students and complete a unit pre-assessment during the first 10 weeks of the semester. The formal activities of the unit were implemented during weeks 11 through 13. During this time, each student was scheduled to be at the school at least 20 hours. Except for the "Kick-off" day when all preservice teachers were there to set up the activities, preservice teacher participation during this three week period was done on a staggered basis so that the elementary students had contact with the university students during most of their day. Evaluations were completed by the preservice teachers, elementary students, Nancy, and Janet during the 14th and 15th weeks of the semester.

In addition to the time that the preservice teachers spent at the school, they met on campus as a class for approximately three hours each week. Students worked on various components of the unit in small groups, discussed their teaching and learning experiences in relation to their prior experiences and

course readings, and met with Nancy who came in to discuss some of her classroom practices.

**Figure 1**  
*Plants And People As Partners*

*AESTHETICS*  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Nature Artists/Art Forms  
Landscaping  
Ethnic Connections

*PLANT PRESERVATION*  
Greenpeace  
Erosion  
Landfill  
Population

*HABITATS*  
Terrain  
Climate  
Seasons  
Rainforests

*FARMING*  
Hydroponic  
Fertilizer  
Gardening  
Sprouting  
Insecticide  
How to Grow  
Gatherer

*GENERAL INFORMATION*  
Types  
Categories  
Reproduction  
Parts of Life Cycle  
*respiration*  
*photosynthesis*

*RESOURCES*  
Dyes, Makeup  
Fragrance, Florist  
Nutrition, Food  
Medicine  
Wood  
Paper  
Shelter  
Clothing

**Choosing a Theme.** Nancy chose the theme based on her plan for the year. The broad theme of “interdependence” was chosen as a district-wide theme for the second grade.



Nancy used the concept of "Partners" to thread the theme of interdependence throughout the year. The class had done units on *People as Partners* and *Animals and People as Partners*. Nancy decided the theme of *Plants and People as Partners* was the one we would work on together.

**Key Concepts.** During Weeks 1 and 2 in the semester, the university students were asked to discuss the assigned readings on curriculum integration and thematic instruction. During Week 3 the students were introduced to the theme, *Plants and People as Partners*, and they were asked to brainstorm concepts or terms that came to mind when they thought of this theme. Using an instructional strategy that asked the preservice teachers to list possible unit concepts and categorize them with labels, the students and Janet created a concept map from a lengthy brainstorming session. Nancy was then given the concept map of over 100 terms and asked what categories and concepts she thought should be the basis for the unit activities. Nancy thought the university students had come up with some very unique links to the theme, and she chose six of the categories to be studied during the three weeks the university students were going to be in the classroom on a daily basis. Based on the district content outcomes for her grade levels, Nancy added a couple of concepts under the category that dealt with general information about plants (see Figure 1).

**Pre-Assessment.** During Week 4, Nancy gave the preservice teachers some background information about her students, and then each university student was asked to develop a pre-assessment that would give them information about the elementary students' prior knowledge and interests about the categories and concepts chosen for the unit. In addition, the preservice teachers were to consider various learning styles as they developed their pre-assessment instruments. Questions

were written in a variety of ways in order to gain an understanding of the elementary students' abilities.

During Week 5, the individual pre-assessments were peer critiqued and then blended into one assessment that was administered later in the week. Some of the sections of the pre-assessment included the following tasks: 1) the elementary students were asked to draw a picture of what they would look like if they could be a plant; 2) they were asked to write about what people do to help plants grow; 3) a list of activities such as learning about parts of plants, looking at a plant under a microscope, growing plants without soil, making things out of plants, and singing songs about plants was given to the elementary students to circle whether it would be "kind of boring," "OK," or "totally awesome" and; 4) when given a series of sentences such as "Some plants are poisonous," "Plants do not need to breathe," and "We can make clothing from some types of plants," the students were asked to circle whether they agreed, disagreed, or were not sure if the statement was correct.

**Outcomes.** From the results of the pre-assessment, the preservice teachers were asked to think about outcomes and activities that fit the concepts and needs of the students they now had met. At this point in the semester (Week 6), Janet divided the class into small groups to select outcomes and begin the development of related activities. The key concepts of *habitats, resources, ethnic connections, lifecycles, seasons, aesthetics, sprouting, landscaping, and climate* were chosen. One group's outcome statements and project plans using the concepts of *habitats, resources, and ethnic connections* will be described. Using countries and continents where students in the class had been born (China, Africa, Poland, & America), the preservice teachers developed three outcomes: 1) the student will construct a relief map of the types of terrain found in the country they choose to study; 2) the student will

illustrate the country's resources and the related jobs people do in the country they chose to study; and 3) the student will create an original story based on a folktale that relates resources to the lives of people that have lived in the country they choose to study.

**Figure 2**  
*Comprehension Activity Considerations*

• **COMMUNICATION PROCESS**

reading  
writing  
speaking  
listening  
movement

• **GROUPING PATTERNS**

individual  
small group  
large group

• **TEXT**

narrative  
expository  
atypical

• **EVALUATION**

self  
peer  
teacher  
parent  
other

• **HIGHER LEVEL QUESTIONING**

questions for answers  
statements to confirm or reject  
questions to elicit further questions

• **PRE-ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOME ALIGNMENT**

school outcomes  
district outcomes  
state outcomes  
national outcomes

• **STUDENT CHOICE BETWEEN OR WITHIN ACTIVITIES**

• **METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES**

• **INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN**

• **VARIETY OF MATERIALS**

**Comprehension Activities.** Using the comprehension activity considerations in Figure 2, the preservice teachers spent Weeks 7 through 10 designing the activities. Janet made it a course requirement that each of the nine guidelines be addressed in the plans. The group of preservice teachers who were doing their activities centered around the birthplaces of the students in the elementary classroom called their project "Lay of the Lands." The elementary students were asked to choose a country, continent or region and begin a top secret mission where they were detectives researching information from 30 books that the preservice teachers had gathered from eight libraries in the area.

The students were asked to use specific books to locate information about the terrain of their area. These books were sometimes written at a more difficult level than the students' reading ability, but the pages where the students could find the information were marked. When necessary, the preservice teachers taped the information on audio-cassettes for the students to use independently. The students took the information they had recorded on summary detective sheets and went to an art area to make relief maps using sand, gravel, grass, paper, etc. to represent different types of terrain. Once they finished the terrain maps, the students were asked to research the literature again for the resources found in their country's various types of terrain. This information was illustrated through small drawings that were cut out and placed on the various parts of their map. At this point, the students were asked questions about their maps, and checked their responses against an answer key. An example of a self-check for Africa is presented in Figure 3.

During the last part of the activity, the students chose a book that represented a folktale from their country. They listened to a tape of the story and were asked to fill out a story map on the content. Then they created their own story and

story map about the people and resources of their chosen country. These stories were illustrated or acted out with the help of classmates and videotaped. The preservice teachers provided the materials for illustrating the stories, and the video equipment was signed out from the university.

**Figure 3**  
**Self-Check Questions (AFRICA)\***

Name \_\_\_\_\_

*Region 1*

This region has mountains on the western coasts. Does your map show mountains there? YES NO

This region has a large desert in the north. Does your map show a desert there? YES NO

This region also has jungles, forests, and plains where plants can grow. Does your map show a place like this? YES NO

A major crop grown in Africa is coffee beans which are used to make coffee. Do you have coffee on your resource map? YES NO

Corn or maize is another crop grown in Africa. Do you have corn on your resource map? YES NO

Many other plants grow in Africa that people use as resources. Circle the ones you found.

palm trees

palm nuts

palm nut oil

cocoa

sweet potatoes

sugar cane

*Region 2*

This region also has a large desert. Does your map show a large desert here? YES NO

\* Figure 3 was developed by WMU students Lisa Dubois, Jennifer Field, Amy Donohue, and Heather Lynch

Nancy acted as a facilitator during Weeks 11 through 13 when the unit was implemented at the school. The elementary students worked on the "Lay of the Lands" project and six other projects. Her class had experiences with the key

concepts of *lifecycles* (creating compost in a can), *seasons* (researching how seasons affect people and plants), *aesthetics* (producing artworks in response to nature), *sprouting* (growing plants in different ways), *landscaping* (creating landscapes that serve a purpose to people), and *climate* (observing how climate affects plant growth). The preservice teachers brought in a wealth of materials to assist the students in their work. Over 100 pieces of text that related to the projects were collected for use. Janet borrowed art supplies and audio-visual equipment from the university to allow more options for the elementary students to express their thoughts as they studied the content. In some cases the university students obtained contributions from local businesses in the area.

**Evaluation.** During Week 15 the university students developed evaluation forms for all participants. A critique form was written for all preservice teachers to evaluate each other in order to examine how the projects aligned with the comprehension guidelines established earlier in the semester. Janet also used this evaluation form to critique the small groups.

Some evaluation questions were written for Nancy to critique the content and pedagogy used by the preservice teachers during the unit. Nancy was asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the preservice teachers' involvement and professionalism during the implementation of the unit and on the amount of teacher or preservice teacher guidance that was needed for the elementary students to complete the activities successfully.

Questions were developed for the university students to critique the unit implementation. The preservice teachers asked themselves to self-reflect about their personal interactions with the unit tasks and students. They also were asked

by Janet to describe how the unit and course in general provided experiences that helped them articulate their emerging philosophy about teaching and learning.

The university students also developed a post evaluation for the elementary students. The content was based on the pre-assessment that was given at the beginning of the unit. The elementary students were once again asked to answer questions about their content knowledge and interests related to *Plants and People as Partners*.

The evaluations were completed and the data was analyzed during the final week of the semester. The following themes emerged. All participants found the experience to be a rewarding one. The strengths that were cited included Janet's comment that the course content was done for "real students" in the context of a "real classroom," the university students' positive feelings about learning by doing, Nancy's comments that she would never have been able to complete a project of this magnitude alone, and the elementary students' rating the interactions they had with the university students as one of the most rewarding experiences of the unit. The evaluation data also provided ideas for improvement. The unit needed to be implemented earlier in the semester. All participants felt rushed through the evaluation and reflection period. We also learned that although the university students were informed that there was a field experience connected to the course, they needed to know the specific dates of this intense time well in advance of the semester, so they could make changes in their already busy lives. The evaluation feedback also caused us to reflect about the closure of the unit. It was recorded as too abrupt by many university students and elementary students. We decided a field trip which combined some of the unit concepts would be part of future units. (We did so during the following year.)

## Conclusion

The generic guidelines for developing a thematic unit which integrates language arts with other content areas were very useful to us during the semester. These guidelines provided the framework from which we coordinated our efforts to meet the needs of the students. All of the steps of the unit are important, but the order can vary depending on classroom situations. As a result of the university's set schedule, we had to develop a unit time-line before we began the semester. A more student-centered approach would suggest that the time-line might be established after the pre-assessment of the students' prior knowledge and interests. We could not do this with the present design of the university methods coursework. We had to problem solve as we dealt with the structural constraints that the university and public school presented us with.

This collaborative project could be adapted in various ways for other classroom situations. As an example, elementary teachers who are not near a teacher-training institution can still make use of this kind of university support. Even though it might be impossible to have preservice teachers implement the unit at the school, they can still collaborate to develop the unit. Parents and other community volunteers can assist with the unit implementation when the preservice teachers cannot be on site. Technology provides the field of education with another avenue to collaborate via long distances. Preservice teachers could do a great deal of the unit implementation through currently available various forms of telecommunications. In these situations, preservice teachers do have the opportunity to develop "real activities" for "real students," and classroom teachers can obtain plans and resources that would not otherwise be available to them. At the present time, many education methods courses have



students prepare wonderful units which are never used in a classroom.

We wrote this paper using the unit packet that the university students put together for their portfolios and future use as classroom teachers. The students felt a great deal of ownership as they compiled copies of the student assessments, their project plans, references, photographs, videotapes, etc. Some of them have made it a point to let us know that they have used this bound packet for presentations to colleagues in other classes, for review as they interviewed for teaching positions, and for a guide to their own unit planning and implementation as a classroom teacher. The process that the preservice teachers and elementary students went through together was documented in a useful product. In addition to the product of a tangible unit packet, we hope the preservice teachers also will internalize knowledge about the collaborative process that was modeled for them. We hope our actions will encourage the preservice teachers to seek these types of collaborative relationships when they join an elementary school staff.

We continue to collaborate with each other and our colleagues. Nancy has encouraged other classroom teachers to get involved with university faculty members in the Department of Education and Professional Development. Janet has joined a group of university faculty who get together on a regular basis to promote more collaboration with K-12 students and staff. As partners, we can provide more opportunities for university students and K-12 students to learn from each other.

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# School/University Partnerships in Reading/Language Arts: Working Toward Collaborative Inquiry

Sherry L. Macaul  
Thomas Blount  
Kimberly Hill Phelps

Efforts and initiatives to improve the education of our teachers are currently underway. The Holmes group reports *Tomorrow's Teachers* (1986), *Tomorrow's Schools* (1990), and the soon to be released *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* (in press) provide principles to assist schools and universities as they work together to improve the education of our students. In the Association of Teacher Educator's (ATE) annual survey of critical issues in teacher education, Buttery, Haberman, and Houston (1990) state that "teacher education will not be improved until the conditions of practice in the schools are improved." It is essential that reform in schools and teacher education evolve together.

Sirotnik and Goodlad (1988) identify a variety of relationships that exist between schools and universities. A collaborative relationship is one type in which a "sharing of responsibility exists but where authority for policy is separate and autonomous." A partnership, however, is a relationship

which Sirotnik and Goodlad (1988) define as "symbiotic mutualism" where both partners benefit from a common set of goals and contribute "selflessly." Most schools and universities begin working together from a collaborative perspective gradually moving toward a partnership arrangement that fulfills the needs and interests of the respective participants. Irvin (1990) states that "one of the most pressing issues in teacher education is the reconceptualization of teacher training by redesigning the roles for university and district personnel." Schools and universities can work together in a multitude of ways to support and enhance literacy.

In this article, we will first examine three types of connections in reading that may exist between schools and universities — professional service, teaching and learning, and shared critical inquiry. Next, we will explore an on-going critical inquiry partnership in reading/language arts in terms of the role of the administrator and reflective professional growth. Finally, we will reflect on the impact and insights gained from this partnership.

## **Types of school/university connections**

**Professional service.** Many informal connections exist between the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire Curriculum and Instruction Department faculty and reading specialists, Chapter 1 teachers, classroom teachers and administrators in the Eau Claire Schools. These collegial connections are of three different types. The first and probably one of the earliest and strongest sustaining connections is the local Eau Claire Area Reading Council, chartered in 1969 by faculty member Dr. Roger Quealy. The council has provided many opportunities for school and university faculty, specialists, teachers, administrators, librarians and parents to work together in the planning of three to four annual council meeting/programs each year. In addition, the fall state reading conference is held

in our city every three to four years. Area Reading Council members work together to host that conference. These meetings and conferences involve a great deal of collaborative work which extends into the schools as well as the community. District reading specialists, classroom teachers and university faculty have served together for many years on local and state reading committees and have regularly attended three to four reading/leadership meetings each year to participate in policymaking at the state level. These local and state professional contributions have created a vital link between the Eau Claire Schools and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Department of Curriculum and Instruction reading faculty.

**Teaching and learning.** A second collegial link between schools and universities has been the adjunct teaching positions and guest speaker roles which school district personnel have assumed in both undergraduate and graduate courses. These experiences range from offering sections of undergraduate and graduate reading classes to serving as mentors to candidates pursuing a master's degree in reading and as guest speakers to graduate and undergraduate classes. At least once a year, the reading/language arts coordinator and university faculty serve together on School Evaluation Consortium (SEC) curriculum evaluation teams to review reading/language arts curricula in various districts.

**Shared critical inquiry.** The third and most essential collegial link is critical inquiry. Over the past few years, partnership exchanges in reading between the Eau Claire Schools and University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire have ranged from partial load, semester exchanges — where the reading specialist taught one of the university faculty's reading courses on campus while the faculty member devoted one day a week serving as reading specialist in the specialist's school — to a

principal serving half time in the schools and teaching courses half time on campus, to a reading specialist and university faculty member co-teaching university classes while simultaneously serving as co-reading specialist in a school. The district reading specialist, school administrator and UWEC reading faculty members served side-by-side in schools working with students and teachers as well as with undergraduate/graduate courses. This plan was in response to a recent call (Sirotnik and Goodlad, 1988) for an emphasis on critical inquiry to improve teacher education as well as teaching and learning in local school districts.

Sirotnik and Goodlad (1988) refer to the notion of critical inquiry as "self-study generating and acting upon knowledge in context by and for those who use it." This model proved to be the most productive for us since it afforded opportunities to co-plan, coordinate, co-teach, learn and reflect together. Goals became mutual. We found that teaching simultaneously on campus and in the schools provided a unique opportunity to view reading/language arts instruction and assessment through one another's lenses. The opportunity to work systematically in our own and one another's educational environments led to rich dialogue, new challenges, insights and instructional change — all important outgrowths of our partnership exchange. Our goals became mutual. Each of us established professional commitments and made time and resource investments in both institutions. The opportunity to share experiences and insights while teaching, supervising and administering simultaneously across both institutions was one of the most valuable and formative experiences of the partnership.

### **Reflection and shared professional growth**

We found ourselves working together to improve teaching and learning at both institutions. The reading specialist

arranged for the practicum placements for the undergraduate course on assessment to be in schools where he served as reading specialist and could monitor student growth. He worked closely with the students and classroom teachers to oversee this experience. We constantly extend our base of knowledge that supports shared inquiry. School and university faculty, specialists and teachers regularly attend and co-present at local, state and national conferences. As a common basis for shared inquiry, specialists, faculty and teachers continue to share research and reports on literacy, books, articles, instructional approaches, technology applications and curriculum.

### **Administrative support**

In each type of collegial relationship described above, the building administrator and education dean were the essential links, providing leadership, opportunities, time and support for new ventures. In our particular partnership exchange, the district principal not only supported collaborative exchanges but became involved herself in a half-time exchange which involved teaching courses on campus, serving on School of Education committees, and supervising student teachers. Likewise, the School of Education Dean encouraged and supported collegial exchanges by providing faculty with opportunities to participate in differential staffing.

### **Reading/language arts partnership exchange**

Shared decision making and critical inquiry among the building administrator, reading specialist, and district and university faculty are essential components of an effective partnership exchange. The exchanges in which the authors of this article participated involved the following steps: establishing partnerships; sharing current literature; determining needs and identifying goals; securing commitment and resources; identifying participants and timelines; planning for

innovation and inquiry; reflecting on the effectiveness of the exchange; and planning a new cycle of collaborative partnerships. The purposes of the reading/language arts exchanges have been to improve the education of preservice teacher candidates while simultaneously enhancing the teaching and learning of practitioners and learners in the schools. Sirotnik and Goodlad (1988) state that a partnership should involve investigations which allow participants to "inquire systematically along with others in the same situation." The exchanges have involved co-planning, co-teaching, co-investigating and co-evaluating alternative teaching and learning models and practices. The reading specialist, administrator and university faculty accomplished the goals which they mutually proposed with teachers as they:

- co-designed/redesigned course syllabi
- assisted with teacher selected initiatives such as helping the media specialist identify ways to implement action research with book talks
- implemented a case study approach to course assessment
- simultaneously assisted classroom teachers and preservice teachers as they implemented inquiry-based learning
- established and evaluated effectiveness of a reading/writing workshop approach in several classrooms
- modeled and facilitated lessons and literature based reading experiences
- provided ideas and examples of authentic assessment to teachers and undergraduates
- met and reflected upon the drawbacks and successes of new ventures attempted and refined partnership practices
- provided more relevant and appropriate school-based field experiences
- encouraged teachers to serve as presenters at state conferences
- coordinated the university summer session reading assessment course practicum with the district's summer reading program



- invited/participated in planning and policy making meetings at each institution
- evaluated the effectiveness of our mutual roles on campus and in the schools
- implemented literacy/learning experiences which connected the schools, university and community

## **Impact and insights for the future**

Reflective practice and experimentation lead to refined visions. As our partnerships grow and change, the quest for a common mission, joint responsibility and a shared vision becomes more apparent. In this process of renewal and inquiry, questions constantly arise. What was learned? What needs to be done? Where do we go from here? Listed are our observations and insights as to the impact of our partnership exchange in reading language arts. 1) Communication is essential and leads to ownership and commitment. 2) There are many benefits to collaboratively planning, exploring and conducting pilot projects in reading/language arts. 3) University personnel need to experience time constraints faced by elementary teachers regularly, and thus come to understand them better. 4) It is important to have regular, frequent and extensive field-based courses in teacher preparation co-planned with district faculty. 5) It is necessary to redesign university courses so they reflect and exemplify current practice which benefits schools. 6) There is a definite need to monitor and support beginning teachers of literacy. 7) It is critical to evaluate newly attempted educational practices. 8) Teaching and learning can be improved through action research and school/site-based teaching and learning.

We believe that the partnership exchanges in reading/language arts have helped us to prepare for a greater degree of shared inquiry as we enter a new era of education in

reading/language arts and professional development in the schools.

## Conclusion

Our collegial connections in reading/language arts have expanded over the years in direct proportion to our school/university contacts. We have worked on-site in one another's institutions, experienced each other's workplace and culture often simultaneously with our own. We have witnessed the needs, struggles and successes in one another's reading/language arts programs. The exchanges have enabled us to extend and co-develop our knowledge bases, practices and modes of inquiry. Together we have explored ways to re-define our former notions of how literacy can best be acquired, applied and assessed. We have continued to seek, implement and evaluate ways to enhance the learning of preservice teachers, inservice teachers and most importantly the learners in our classrooms.

According to Sirotnik and Goodlad (1988) reform requires four conditions, namely "dialogue, decisions, actions, and evaluation at individual and institutional levels." As those of us involved in the exchanges met on a regular basis, we discussed theory and practice, raised issues, shared articles, books and generally focused on ways to bridge the gap between preservice and full-time classroom instruction conducted by practitioners. School/university partnerships provide continuous opportunities for school and university faculty, specialists and administrators to live, work, critically examine and influence teaching and learning in one another's educational community. The focus in our minds has shifted from implementing the latest practices to mutually identifying problems which we can collectively solve.

To maintain and enhance partnership programs, the university and schools have established two other collaborative programs, namely the Collaborative Efforts Committee and the Task Force on Teacher Education for the 21st Century. Through these two programs, school and university faculty and administrators have been working together on a regular basis to forge new horizons, expand insights, and gain new perspectives on how we can continue to work collectively to effectively prepare future teachers and students to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

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# **School-University Collaboration: Everyone's A Winner**

**Carole Schulte Johnson  
Mary Hughes  
Rena Mincks**

## **How did our collaboration develop?**

Mary and Rena are first grade teachers in the same elementary school. About five years ago, Carole spent her sabbatical year working with Chapter I students in the local public school district. At that time she and Mary often discussed Mary's Chapter I students. These discussions included general issues related to the teaching of literacy and it became apparent both had similar questions and concerns about approaches to teaching emergent and beginning readers.

Since her sabbatical, Carole was often the professor working with the university practicum students assigned to teachers in the local district. Mary and Rena regularly participated in the program, so Carole would meet with them to discuss the preservice students in their classrooms. During these meetings, Mary and Carole continued their discussions regarding emergent and beginning literacy and Carole began to share related articles (Bracey, 1992; Cunningham, 1991; Cunningham, Hall and Defee, 1991; Eldredge, 1991; McIntyre, 1992; Taylor, Short, Frye, and Shearer, 1992). These informal discussions laid the basis for the collaboration.

During the discussions, Mary indicated she was interested in changing her program but had not decided how to revise it. Although her program included regular reading of self-selected books, process writing and invented spelling, she felt her time was too tied up with homogeneous basal groups, thus requiring many children to work on their own for much of the literacy period. Based on her readings and experiential knowledge, she wanted to give more individual help, yet also provide a structured approach to the teaching of literacy strategies.

During spring of 1992, Mary was enthusiastic about one of the articles from Carole (Cunningham, Hall and Defee, 1991), because it contained the elements she believed desirable in an emergent/beginning literacy program. The article described a first grade program which included four components, approximately equal in time: reading real books, writing, whole class basal, and a structured approach to word recognition. The whole class basal, which included comprehension and the structured approach to word recognition components incorporated teaching strategies, reviewing and reinforcing them while the reading real books and writing components provided time to practice those strategies and involved individual help from the teacher. Other adults, such as parents, Chapter 1 teachers, reading specialists, aides, and the university collaborator, also could provide attention during these times.

Mary shared her excitement about this approach with her principal, the other first grade teachers, and Carole. This led to a decision to develop an Action Research plan and to request district approval to pilot a similar program. Rena was interested and decided to participate in the research. Carole was asked to be the "critical friend" whose role was to continue to share her research and knowledge background as the

teachers would share their knowledge and experience. From the beginning, all three were involved in the development of the Action Research plan. Thus the research was a collaborative effort, not one basically defined or developed by the university collaborator and then implemented by the teachers.

The research plan presented a brief rationale, described the four components of the reading program, and listed some of the activities included within each component. The types of data to be collected at the beginning, middle, end, and throughout the year were specified. For instance, an attitude toward reading inventory was included for each time period. Measures to be given in the beginning of the year included the regular first grade reading inventory (developed by the local teachers) and sections from Clay's Diagnostic Survey (1986). Middle and end-of-year assessment was based on informal reading inventories as well as the usual assessments given by the first grade teachers. In addition, samples of children's writing were to be collected throughout the year and the teachers planned to keep anecdotal notes as well as weekly journals. The plan worked well, with minor changes made as the project developed. For example, in the fall we recognized it was necessary to specify which writings to include. We chose two elements: the children's writing journals (self selected topics written once or twice a week) and a set of writings related to their ongoing course work throughout the year. The latter were identified on a month to month basis. During the spring it was decided to obtain monthly timed samples of their writing vocabularies, related to Clay's writing vocabulary in the Diagnostic Survey.

### **What were the greatest benefits to you as a teacher?**

**Mary:** As a teacher I appreciated the opportunity not only to listen to, but to be heard by, an education professor whom I respect. She brought us access to new information

and research. Then through a mutual exchange of ideas and reactions, we began to look at old ideas in new ways. An example of this was Carole's bringing to my attention the Cunningham, et al. (1991) article which led to our collaboration. It seemed to be just the type of program I had been seeking.

**Rena:** I agree. Teaching is a complex task, not a bag of academic, management and curricular tricks that you reach into and apply to the classroom. I reflect upon how I can make the best use of both the students' and my own time, while accommodating various learning styles, in order to attain appropriate educational goals. All of these considerations are necessary in each subject area. Sharing helps me answer some of my own questions. For instance, one student who in March was an emerging reader consistently chose books he could not read. He did not accept my suggestions of appropriate books, even when I handed several to him. I tried Mary's and Carole's suggestions and he did begin to make more appropriate selections.

**Carole:** I appreciated that Mary and Rena were willing to take the risk and share their classrooms with me; after all, to some extent they regularly put themselves on display as teachers. Since my previous K-12 teaching was in the intermediate grades and also with special needs readers, I was limited to a cognitive understanding of emergent and beginning reading behaviors. Working with these first graders reinforced the distinction between talking about teaching and actually teaching, where decisions must be made. I worked with first graders who came to school reading picture books and chapter books, as well as first graders who had no sight words and could not name or write any letters of the alphabet if they were not in the child's first name. Unless children had limited English proficiency, they usually understood stories read

to them. However, this was not necessarily true for stories they read. Some concentrated so hard on figuring out the words that they did not remember much of the story. However, later in the year as these same children became fluent readers, they had no trouble with comprehension. Now in my teacher education courses I can refer to these examples.

**Rena:** It's easy for teachers to become very protective of students. This can result in cloudy vision regarding them. I may think I am doing the best for a student while someone without my attachment will see how I may not be enabling that student to develop the wings necessary to fly. Collaboration helps clear my vision, and sharing suggestions and experiences, whether successful or not, is an avenue for my growth as a teacher. Take the boy I referred to previously. I wanted to avoid continually enabling him to pretend to read; yet I wanted to maintain his self-esteem. When I presented my dilemma to Mary and Carole, their ideas helped me balance the two.

**Mary:** As we put theory into practice, the collaboration provided support to take risks and the flexibility for each of us to fit our own teaching style. As we implemented the program and shared ideas, we realized that as long as we kept within the basic framework, the two classrooms did not have to be exact replicas of each other; for instance, I was able to have parent helpers several days a week during self-selected reading while Rena was not.

I know I made quicker decisions regarding children's reading because of the perspectives, experiences, research and backgrounds we each brought to the problem solving situations. This was feasible because the university collaborator became a part of the classroom on a weekly basis. In the past I used the various basal levels as a guide to the individual



students' progress. In the new program I couldn't use the basal as a guide since the class read it together. Thus I needed to rely on their reading in the self-selected books. I was uncomfortable because I thought I did not know as much about each child's development in reading as previously. Rena and Carole helped me realize that many of the self-selected books could be identified as comparable to various levels of the basals and when in doubt, I could ask a child to read from a book at a level I recognized. They helped me realize I did know about individual students' growth in reading and could knowledgeably discuss it with their parents.

**Carole:** As a teacher educator, I'm aware of the changes in the schools. However, since participating in these classrooms I *experienced* how much more complicated reading is today. Not only are there more problems in terms of number, but teachers need to be aware of problems such as physical and sexual abuse which previously were not recognized. The wide disparity among children in terms of the background knowledge they bring with them must be accommodated. For instance, at the beginning of the year, some children only used context, while some relied heavily on memory and did not use print. Except for those children who entered first grade as readers, most of the children seemed to go through a stage of reliance on sound. With these experiences, I can bring realistic situations into my college classes; for example, *How do you work with parents who show up two or three times a week and demand to know how their child is progressing?; How can you encourage parents to read regularly to their child?; and How does your program meet the diverse needs of the students?*

### **What were the main problems in collaborating?**

**Rena:** The only problem I have seen is the time factor. All of our schedules are so full, but I truly believe that for me,

changing a schedule and doing whatever I can to meet with others is well worth it. The benefits far outweigh the scheduling difficulties.

**Carole:** I agree. Although I was able to spend one half day a week in the two rooms working with and observing students, time to discuss what happened and do further planning was limited. Only short, brief sharing could be done during recess. We did eat lunch together and tried to preserve at least 10 minutes for each of us to do journal writing. However, interruptions from other teachers, office staff, parents and students did interfere. One result was that the questions/concerns of highest importance to each of us were usually first on the agenda. When I look back now, it is amazing how much sharing we were able to do.

**Mary:** Besides time for collaborating, time was needed to establish appropriate records for the project and to go through the proper channels within the district structure to obtain permission for the project. In addition I believe collegial relationships are important in schools, so I felt consideration needed to be given to the attitudes of my colleagues. Also, since I was vitally aware of how much I was gaining from the collaboration, during the course of the project I hoped I was giving my share.

### **What were the greatest benefits to you personally?**

**Carole:** It's hard for me to separate personal benefits from those to me as a teacher; however, as I reflect back upon the year, I know the Friday mornings I spent in the classrooms were the highlight of each week. I re-experienced the joys of working with children, getting to know them as individuals and trying to nudge them to develop their full reading potential. I was enthusiastic about observing the changes in the children's reading behaviors. In the spring as we ate

together and compared notes, we would celebrate for those children who were finally moving into the beginning reader stage.

**Rena:** Good elementary teachers need to be mentally alert the whole time they are in the classroom. This can lead to stress, particularly on days when you wonder if anything will go right! Collaboration provides a mini-support group. When I was down, just knowing I could share my concerns with Mary and Carole helped me face the day or the next week.

**Mary:** An important benefit to me personally was the sense of security the collaboration brought to my willingness to risk trying a new teaching style. This led to my growth as a teacher and professional. Because of this experience and the support we provided each other, I now am comfortable in assessing children's reading without reliance on the levels of the basal and also using the basal with the whole class rather than pacing ability groups differently.

**Rena:** I believe when we feel positive about our teaching we tend to feel positive about ourselves. I am a better teacher because the collaboration provided time to bounce new ideas and solutions around, a time for creativity. Yes, one person alone can be creative, but even creative people can blossom when others encourage and add to the ideas and creations. Besides, I don't know what I would do without having people from outside adding a glow of sunshine to my classroom. They may confirm my procedures and observations or give suggestions which help me grow as a teacher. An example is that at one point I felt many in the class were not reading during self-selected reading. Because of our discussions I decided to start this component with silent sustained reading, before beginning the one-on-one reading.

This helped students become involved in their reading so most students made better use of their time.

**Mary:** Since I tend to be intuitive, the collaboration offered a more objective, data-based interpretation of my intuition concerning how the children in my classroom were learning to read. This was largely due to the researcher's being a skilled listener and her ability to link my insights with current research. Teachers often share ideas but this project included interpretation and assessment from several different perspectives. Carole shared the mid-year data results with us and we made our interpretations in terms of the behaviors we observed in the classrooms.

**Carole:** The sharing of problems, concerns and alternative strategies was valuable for me also. I learned from the good ideas and insights which came from Mary and Rena. My high regard for teachers was reinforced through their willingness to risk, to change, to share problems and successes not only with each other but with me. In addition, it contributed to my professional growth because it required me to test my knowledge in the real life situations of the classrooms. My experience reinforced the value of the one-on-one reading during self-selected reading because it provided private opportunities to encourage using alternative strategies. I tried to finish each one-on-one reading with a comment about what I specifically liked about their reading that day. Invariably I was rewarded with a big smile.

### **Advice to collaborators**

**Mary:** My first advice to anyone even remotely considering collaboration is to *do it!* Choose to collaborate with someone who wants to learn from you and the children as well as do research and share important data. Then get the support and permission of your school administrator and

other appropriate district groups. Inform and involve the parents so they feel part of the project, and follow up with data and information to all.

**Carole:** Mary has an important point. All team members should see it as an opportunity to learn from each other and from the students. At times during our discussions we had different hypotheses. Sometimes we decided more information was needed. At other times, since the teachers spent more time observing and assessing their students, greater weight went to the teacher's opinion.

**Mary:** I recommend keeping a journal of dreams, data, observations, frustrations, and resolutions to problems. This can provide reminders for later sharing since so much happens daily in classrooms. I highly recommend the active and regular involvement of the university collaborator in the classroom. When other teachers and parents see collaboration taking place naturally, they have more confidence in the project and its results.

**Carole:** In fact, if the project is going to be truly collaborative, it's necessary for the university personnel to spend time in the classroom. However, final decisions — whether they be strategies to use, lessons to present, or data to be collected — must rest with the teachers.

**Rena:** Collaboration is a great stress reliever, and to me a necessity. When classrooms have 20 plus students with different learning styles and various levels of learning in a variety of academic areas, it is not possible for a teacher to do the best job using only personal insights. Collaboration provides an opportunity to discuss current trends in the classroom, components of the curriculum that are or are not working

and sharing ideas for working with individuals who provide a variety of challenges to teachers.

Without collaboration we probably would not have been as systematic in collecting and interpreting data. The data certainly support our decision to continue the program. That's why I agree with Mary — *do it!*

## Conclusion

While our journals, anecdotal notes and the data which is analyzed indicate the program was not a panacea — that is, all students did not become proficient readers — we are happy with the results and plan to continue it and encourage the other first grade teachers to do so also. There were important benefits for each of us.

**Carole:** I am much more knowledgeable and thus comfortable in discussing emergent and beginning reading in my teacher education classes. In addition I cherish the friendship which has developed between the three of us.

**Mary:** I wanted to revise my literacy program and I am so pleased to have found one which is successful and fits my teaching style. The collaboration also provided the support I needed, since questions arose as we implemented the program.

**Rena:** I value my growth as a teacher. The collaboration helped me clarify my thoughts and then make decisions regarding the next teaching steps.

**For the Students:** At the beginning of the year we wondered if there would be a negative effect on the above grade level readers, since the pacing in the basal program might be slower than if they were in an ability group, nor would they

receive the recognition of being in the highest group. The mid- and end-of-year informal reading inventories indicates this was not the case, since results placed the students in third to above fifth grade reading levels.

In both classes there were students who would have been in a below grade level group and in all probability they would have stayed there the whole year. During the spring each of us independently observed that some of these "slow to take off" readers began to blossom. Their oral reading improved both in fluency and in the variety of strategies they used, and during self-selected reading they chose appropriate level books and made better use of the time. Near the end of first grade, the informal reading inventories indicated many of these children were reading on grade level. Checking with their second grade teachers indicates they continue to do so.

We believe the biggest benefit to the first graders was that the program allowed them to have positive attitudes about themselves as readers even though they knew who the best and least able readers were. We attribute this to two factors: the students were not put in ability groups (and by implication labeled by the teachers) and each of us regularly made conscious efforts to inform and praise individuals specifically for improvements, no matter how small.

The whole class instruction enabled us to teach literacy strategies but also freed our time (since we didn't have several more groups to fit in) so we could individually support and encourage students to apply appropriate strategies, no matter where they were on the literacy continuum.

From our multiple perspectives, reviewing our journals and the data we have analyzed, we are in agreement that the program itself, while allowing students to view themselves as

readers, did not have negative effects for any group of children or for any individual child.

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# Literacy Portfolios in Third Grade: A School-College Collaboration

Karen M. Cirincione  
Denise Michael

"I really liked it," Sandra enthusiastically responded when asked how she felt about keeping her portfolio throughout the year. "You can keep anything you want in there. Keep your memories, keep your secrets you don't want people to know." In this article we will present our teacher-professor collaborative investigation of the implementation of Literacy Portfolios (Hansen, 1992). We will discuss teacher-professor collaborative research, Literacy Portfolios research, how our collaboration began, how we implemented Literacy Portfolios, our findings, implications for changes for the following year, and our reflections on our collaboration.

## **Teacher-professor collaborative research**

Although in 1933 Dewey advocated that teachers observe in their classrooms and reflect on their teaching as a means of solving problems, this is not always what transpires because according to Deal (1984), teachers have been instructed to "...look outside rather than within for solutions to problems, criteria for improvements, or directions for change" (cited in Dana, Pitts, Hickey, and Rinehart, 1992, p. 1). Tikunoff and Ward (1983) indicated that teachers frequently don't rely on research to inform their instruction because often it doesn't

address their concerns, or they may not know how to apply research findings in their classroom. Therefore, due to these shortcomings of teachers as consumers of research, the professional literature in the 1980s began to acknowledge the importance of teacher research to solve school problems (Kern, Nielson, Walter and Sullivan, 1991). As a result of the push for school reform and restructuring in the 1980s, school-university collaboration was recommended by business, education, and government groups such as the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy and the Holmes Group (Dana et al., 1992).

Tikunoff and Ward (1983) identified the following characteristics of collaborative research with the most intense teacher involvement: 1) the teacher is involved in the research, 2) the research stems from the teacher's concerns, 3) joint decision making takes place through all stages of the research, 4) professional growth results for teacher and professor, 5) attention is given to both the research and the applications of the findings, and 6) the complexity of the classroom is recognized and the teacher's instruction is not altered (pp. 455-458).

### Literacy Portfolios research

Literacy Portfolios for students have evolved over the last eight years due to dissatisfaction with tests (Winograd and Jones, 1993), and also because, as a means of assessment, they are compatible with our changing views of writing instruction (Camp, 1990). There are many different kinds of Literacy Portfolios. The present study is based on the process portfolio which is defined as follows:

*A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits to the student (and/or others) the student's efforts, progress or achievements in (a) given*

*area(s). This collection must include student participation in selection of portfolio content; the criteria for selection; the criteria for judging merit; and evidence of student self-reflection (Meyer, Schuman, and Angello, 1990, p. 23).*

According to Mitchell (1992), "All of our education should be about putting students in control of their own ability" (p. 2). Traditionally, teachers have evaluated students' writing; however, Swing, Stoiber, and Peterson state that "The portfolio has the potential to be a powerful educational tool for encouraging students to take charge of their own learning (cited in Paulson and Paulson, 1990, p. 1).

According to Paulson and Paulson (1990), "...evidence of students' metacognitive activities may include students' description of the experiences that they believe account for differences between early and recent work, or descriptions of their activities as they proceeded to compile their portfolios and evaluate the contents" (p. 13). Students begin to evaluate their writing and set writing goals for themselves which result in their gaining more ownership of their writing (Winograd and Jones, 1993). Metacognitive awareness, then, is integral to Mitchell's (1992) contention, cited above, about the purpose of all education.

### **The attraction of like minds: Birth of a collaboration**

**The teacher's view.** It was while doing my graduate work at Dowling College that I began to question not only my instruction but also the way in which I assessed my students. I wanted to increase my students' level of literacy so that it went beyond the mere functional level. I wanted to instill in them a love of reading and writing that would last a lifetime, and I also wanted to give my students the control over both written and oral language that makes higher level thinking

possible. After attending conferences and reading articles and books on the topic of portfolio assessment, my belief that tests were not accurate measures of children's reading and writing was even stronger.

I expressed to Karen Cirincione, my professor at the time, the interest I had in having my students create portfolios and in working with her in this endeavor. I was thrilled when Karen shared that she, too, was interested in a teacher-professor collaboration. I knew it would be essential for me to also develop a portfolio because only through keeping my own portfolio could I know firsthand the questions and choices with which my students had to struggle.

In September 1992 my students, Karen, and I began an exciting journey as the students developed their portfolios and began to take control over their language and literacy.

**The professor's view.** I believe that classroom research is a valuable means of determining effective instructional practices. Having taught children for many years and having spent the previous year studying portfolio implementation in a first grade classroom, I have realized that it's impossible to evaluate an instructional approach without taking into account all the variables that impinge on the delivery of the approach.

As a teacher educator, I have found that many teachers, perhaps because they are themselves the product of teacher-dominated classrooms, often are reluctant to create student-centered classrooms and change their role to that of facilitator and co-learner, a tenet of a whole language philosophy (Goodman, 1986). Therefore, it is always enjoyable for me to meet teachers who translate a whole language philosophy into their classrooms because they genuinely believe that this

is how children learn. Denise Michael is such a teacher. I first met Denise when she was enrolled in the Master of Science in Education Reading Teacher Degree Program at Dowling College in Oakdale New York. During the semester she was enrolled in my clinical practicum course, I observed her enthusiasm and dedication to teaching while she implemented a whole language philosophy and fostered the literacy development of a first grade boy who, due to a learning disability, was reluctant to read and write. Meanwhile, in her own classroom, she had initiated a daily writing workshop, and she assessed her students' reading based on a psycholinguistic model of the reading process (Goodman, 1986).

When Denise and I attended Jane Hansen's (1992) Portfolio Assessment Conference, we both felt excited about Hansen's approach to Literacy Portfolios. Hansen's (1992) model embodies my own beliefs about how children's writing develops: First, when children write about personally important topics, they come to love writing and write more than when they write for teacher-directed purposes. Second, maintaining a portfolio enables students to reflect on their writing over time, develop their metacognitive awareness of their own writing process, and set goals for themselves. In discussing Hansen's Literacy Portfolio approach and how it would fit in with Denise's classroom writing workshop, we decided to collaborate on studying the effect of Literacy Portfolios on her students' writing development during the 1992-1993 school year. I was excited about our partnership because I looked forward to being a part of her classroom and learning from her and her students about the efficacy of my beliefs.

## **Our plan for implementing Literacy Portfolios**

**Initial preparation.** We began with the idea that the children would maintain Literacy Portfolios, based on

Hansen's (1992) model, which includes the portfolio as an integral part of their writing workshop. During the daily writing workshop, the children wrote on self-selected topics, conferenced with Denise and their peers and then once a week with Karen, read their writing to the class, and revised and edited their writing when they wanted to "publish" it in a hardcover book. Denise wrote along with the students, shared her writing, and provided mini-lessons on writing strategies.

Karen would be a participant observer on Thursday afternoons, which would also be the children's portfolio sharing time. Denise and Karen would begin portfolios along with the children. First, Denise would model all portfolio activities. The Literacy Portfolio would consist of items selected by the students. Similar to Hansen's (1992) approach, the children would bring in their special belongings, share them with the class, write about them, and then read their writing to the class. According to Hansen (1992), when students collect items that show who they are in their portfolios, their self-confidence increases. The children would also be encouraged to include in their portfolios their favorite writing, books they had read, lists of books read, their reading response journals, their reading and writing goals, and a special memories book. Denise would ask the children to write an explanation of why they included each item in their portfolio.

We decided to keep journals of our observations of the students' writing development, their behavior and comments regarding their writing and their portfolios. We would meet weekly while the children attended art, to discuss what had transpired during the week and how to proceed.

Although the students included books they had read, their reading response journals, and their reading goals and

plans to attain them, we decided only to study their writing development. We agreed that we wanted to determine if the Literacy Portfolios would foster the students' 1) writing development and 2) metacognitive awareness of their writing needs and therefore enable them to set writing goals and set plans to attain their goals. We would answer these questions based on our observations of the students' writing development, their ability to set goals and plans to attain their goals, and the students' responses to questions pertaining to their writing.

### **Literacy Portfolios in third grade**

The school in which Denise teaches is in a neighboring town to the college and consists predominantly of middle class families. She had 20 children in her class in September and two students entered mid-year.

In October, Denise aroused the children's anticipation by telling them that they would be participating in something special, promising to tell them more after she attended a conference and learned more about it. In the beginning of November, she introduced Karen to her class as her teacher. She told the students that they could conference with Karen about their writing and that Karen would be part of the upcoming special project. The children appeared delighted by Karen's visit and she felt the same way about meeting them. After the first visit, Karen sent the class a large alligator card and thanked them for the opportunity to visit their class.

Individual and whole class discussions with the students about their writing proved to be opportunities to encourage the students to reflect and develop metacognitive thinking about their writing as well as their classmates' writing. Students requested conferences or asked for help during class share time when they came to a place in their writing where

they needed help. For example, a student asked to read what she had written about her trip to Florida so that her classmates could help her create an ending. When Denise and Karen conferenced with individual students, instead of providing answers to the students' questions, they tried to get the students to answer their own questions by asking "What do you think you should do?"

In the beginning of December, Denise asked the students to brainstorm what the word *portfolio* meant. Next, she explained that they would have their own portfolios in which they could keep their special belongings. She provided them with blue and red, heavy duty portfolios on which they wrote their names and drew illustrations. The children enthusiastically clapped and cheered when Denise shared with them the story of how she became engaged to her husband. She explained that she was including in her portfolio a card on which he wrote his proposal because it was very special to her. Denise invited children to share their special treasures if they chose.

When the students described their special belongings to the class, it was apparent that they were sharing important parts of themselves. One boy wrote, "my ring is special to me because my grat grat gammr momther (*sic*) gave it to me." Another student wrote, "My drawings of the crash dummies show that I am an artist so that is why I pout (*sic*) them in my portfolio." If an object was too large for a portfolio, or if students didn't want to leave their special belongings in school, Denise took pictures which the students placed in their portfolios along with their writing.

In January, in order to model that writing is special to her, Denise showed the children that she put her journal about her school in her portfolio because her writing is special



to her. Following Denise's demonstration, a student wrote that she put her story in her portfolio "... because it shows that I'm a writer." Another student who added his "published" book to his portfolio wrote that he did so because "It is the first time I did the whole book."

In February, in order to increase the children's metacognitive awareness of their writing process, Denise asked them to examine their writing and think about the ways they'd grown as writers. After looking through their writing, the children enumerated the following ways: writing in different genres; writing better leads, endings, and dialogue; brainstorming topics to write about; describing better character traits and settings; showing rather than telling; and using correct punctuation. When students entered writing pieces in their portfolios, they wrote their reason for doing so. Some of their reasons included: "... because it was the first time I used quotation marks"; "... because this is the first non-fiction book I wrote"; "because this is the longest book I ever wrote and I like the dialogue"; and "... because writing this helped to get my feelings out."

In March, to increase the children's metacognitive awareness of their writing processes and needs, set goals for themselves, and devise plans to attain their goals, Denise modeled her needs and her plan to improve her writing. In March, April, and May, she asked each student, "What would you like to learn next to become a better writer?" and "How will you achieve this goal?" The students discussed their responses to these questions, wrote their goals and plans to attain them on a sheet of paper titled "Goals," and then placed this paper in their portfolios (see Table 1 and Appendix). Some children indicated more than one goal and some children changed their goals.

**Table 1**  
*Students' Writing Goals and Plans to Accomplish Them*

<i>Writing Goals</i>	<i># of Students</i>	<i>Plans per # of Students</i>
Write more non-fiction	4	List (1), Graph (1), Portfolio (1)
Improve scene descriptions	2	Portfolio (1)
Write more at home	1	List (1)
Draw better illustrations	1	Practice (1)
Write more	7	Calendar (1), Write everyday (1), Home (1), Portfolio (3)
Write more books	3	List (2), Calendar (1)
Write longer stories	1	-----
Improve leads	5	Write why leads are good (2), Practice (1)
Use stronger words	2	List (2), Portfolio (2)
Write more limericks	1	-----
Write neater	1	-----
Write better endings	1	-----
Get better ideas for stories	1	Read books (1)
Improve spelling	1	Read (1)
Use more dialogue	4	Practice (2), Portfolio (2)
Writer bigger words	2	List (1), Graph (1)
Finish stories	2	List dates (1)
Use alliteration	1	-----

In May, Denise read a story she had written about a special memory and then encouraged the children to share their special memories. After they did so, she provided them with blank hardcover books in which they could write their special memories. The value of having the children write about

their special memories was explained by one student, "When we had to write the memories, I like when I wrote when I got hit by the car. I like to write about that because that's one of my memories and I just like to write about when I got hit by the car. Because everybody wants to hear about it so I write about it." It appeared that writing about this incident helped him to feel some control of the fear he must have experienced. Also in May, Denise collaborated with the children in planning a portfolio sharing afternoon with their parents. During this event, five children explained to an audience of parents, siblings, friends, teachers, and the principal why they had selected items for their portfolios and their processes of developing their portfolios. At the end of May, in order to understand the children's feelings about their Literacy Portfolios, we encouraged them to think about the following questions for several days and then to respond honestly: 1) How did you feel about keeping a portfolio and 2) How did you feel about setting a writing goal? We tape-recorded the responses of 21 children (one student was absent), transcribed, and analyzed them both quantitatively and qualitatively (see Table 2 and Appendix).

**Table 2**  
*Quantitative Analysis of Students' Responses to Interview Questions*

<i>Question</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i># of Students</i>	<i>% of Students</i>
How did you feel about keeping a portfolio?	Liked	11	52%
	Disliked	2	10%
	Mixed	8	38%
How did you feel about setting a writing goal?	Liked	12	57%
	Disliked	6	29%
	Mixed	3	14%

## Findings

*How did you feel about keeping your portfolio?* The students who liked keeping portfolios gave the following reasons. Three students said their portfolio enabled them to keep their memories, four students liked sharing their special treasures, one student liked being able to work on a goal by himself, one student liked writing and keeping his writing in his portfolio, and one student liked keeping her portfolio, but couldn't elaborate why (see Appendix).

One student didn't like keeping a portfolio because it was embarrassing to show his classmates his special things. Another student didn't like bringing in his special things, didn't like setting goals because he didn't feel as if he needed to, and didn't like the fact that he had to do these things.

We categorized responses as mixed when they included a positive response to one aspect of keeping a portfolio and a negative response to another aspect. Six students indicated that they enjoyed bringing in their special things or writing their memories, but didn't like setting goals; one student found setting goals helpful but didn't like sharing his personal belongings; and two students liked to share their special belongings but felt left out if they forgot to bring something to school.

*How did you feel about setting a writing goal?* Nine students claimed that setting a writing goal helped them to attain their goal, one student indicated that he liked setting a writing goal because he enjoyed writing, one student liked setting a goal because he wanted to become an author, and one student liked setting a goal but couldn't elaborate a reason (see Appendix).

Six students disliked setting writing goals for the following reasons. Two students believed that setting a writing goal hadn't helped them to attain it. Two students didn't like making graphs as a means of showing how they attained their goal, one student didn't think he needed to set a goal, and one student revealed that he would feel like a failure if he didn't achieve his goal.

The mixed responses to this question included two students who thought that they had made progress with their goals but working on them had been difficult. Another student indicated that although he had made progress with his goal, it was very hard for him to think about his goal.

### **Answers to our research questions**

**Did the Literacy Portfolios foster the students' writing?** Twenty-one students' writing was fostered by their Literacy Portfolios based on comparison of earlier and recent work. Many students explained how they had grown as writers; 22 students set writing goals; 21 students devised plans to attain their goals; 13 students indicated their writing goals helped them; and many students included their writing in their portfolios.

Of the 13 students who indicated that their writing goals had helped them, one student explained, "I felt good about my writing goal because it helped me because from all the books I read, I got more ideas for all the stories." Another student reported, "I'm working on a story now. I never wote (sic) such a long one and I really like the way I did some things in the story." One student, who hadn't written very much all year, explained why he began writing so much in his special memories book, "Sometimes, I can write feelings that I don't want someone to know; it's like talking it out."

The increasing number of published books throughout the year and a comparison of the students' earlier and recent writing attested to the writing growth of all the students. However, the writing ability of one student was not fostered as a result of his Literacy Portfolio. This appeared to be because he resented keeping a portfolio because he had to. He was a self-motivated, prolific writer before he began his portfolio and he continued writing on self-selected topics, not related to portfolio activities, throughout the year. He explained, "I didn't like the writing goals because I didn't like to do them. It's too hard to make up my mind when sometimes I don't feel like I need anything to do."

**Did Literacy Portfolios increase the students' metacognitive awareness of their writing needs?** Twenty-two students made writing goals; 21 students made plans to attain their goals; 13 students indicated that setting a goal helped them; 2 students expressed that thinking of a goal was difficult; 6 students didn't like setting goals; 21 students explained their feelings about their Literacy Portfolios; 22 students evaluated their own and their classmates' writing; one student couldn't think of a writing goal until May; many students pointed out differences between their earlier and recent writing.

Even though it was difficult for several students, all the students were engaging in metacognitive awareness of their writing abilities to some extent. Some students could not only identify what specific part of their writing had improved, but were also aware of areas they needed to work on. For example, during a discussion of how they had improved as writers, one student indicated that his endings in his stories had improved while another student chimed in, "My endings aren't too good; I need to work on that." Another remarked, "I liked this lead because it really happened, and when I wrote

*My Dog Shadow*, I liked the lead because I started out telling about my dog."

In May, one student, after examining her writing folders, came across the first piece she had written in the beginning of third grade. Writing in hand, she asked "Mrs. Michael, do you remember this? This was the first piece of writing in third grade. I used to think it was good, but now I can't believe how bad it is." She giggled, embarrassed at this realization, and pointed out her writing deficiencies. "Look at the lead," she said. "Over here, I should have shown how I felt instead of just telling." She continued to critique her entire piece in this manner, explaining what she should have done. This student and many of the other students will no longer look at a piece of writing in the same way because they have increased their metacognitive thinking about their writing. This was especially evident during the group share portion of writing workshop. When the students listened to their classmates read their pieces, their comments changed from, "I liked it because it was funny" to "I liked the way you used strong verbs," or "I liked the way you showed us you were angry." Similarly, their questions and suggestions to their classmates also changed. For example, in the beginning of the year, they asked literal questions such as "How old was your cousin?" In mid-year, the literal questions decreased and they began asking more elaborated questions such as "When you read the part about... I had trouble making a picture in my head. What can you do so that I can get a better picture?"

Revealing that metacognitive thinking is not easy for all students, one student explained why setting goals was difficult for him, "because we had to think a lot and I don't like to think. It was hard, really hard to think of a goal." Another student, who had advanced literacy ability, informed us that "...and the writing goals, I didn't like to do them. It's too hard to make up my mind when sometimes I don't feel like I need

anything to do." It wasn't until May that one student was able to think of his writing goal. Moreover, one student had great difficulty explaining how she felt about keeping her portfolio, setting goals, and making plans to attain them. It is possible that some of the other students also found it difficult to think about goals for themselves, but either weren't aware of their feelings or perhaps, gave responses they thought we might like to hear.

### **Implications for the following year**

Denise and I believed that Literacy Portfolios were an effective means of fostering the students' writing and their metacognitive thinking about their writing and therefore agreed that it would be important to continue them during the next school year with some changes. The importance of student choice in maintaining a portfolio, setting goals, making plans to attain the goals, and sharing with the entire class became even more clear to us as a result of the students' responses to the interview questions. It wasn't until the end of May when it was too late to make any changes that we found out that one student had resented having to keep a literacy portfolio, a few students felt uncomfortable sharing their personal belongings with the entire class, and several students found it difficult to make and/or work on their goals. Even though we thought we had been accepting about individual differences, the fact that these students hadn't voiced their concerns until we asked indicates that we should have elicited their responses throughout the year.

We agreed that during the following year students would share their portfolios on a voluntary basis with small groups rather than with all their classmates. This would not only save class time, but might provide a more comfortable setting for sharing personal belongings. Having students take their portfolios home two or three times throughout the year



will allow for more understanding, support, interest, and conversation from the students' families.

## **Our reflections on our collaboration**

**The teacher's view.** When Karen and I decided to collaborate, I had mixed feelings. While I felt thrilled at the opportunity to work with such a caring knowledgeable educator, I also felt some initial anxiety. I wanted our collaboration to be just that — a collaboration where there was an equal sharing of ideas, concerns, and problem-solving as well as mutual support and motivation. Knowing Karen's personality, I knew this was likely; however, I still feared the possibility that our collaboration would become another student teaching experience. Needless to say, this was not the case. I attribute the success of our collaboration to our similar personalities and to the fact that we both have a common philosophy.

Collaborating with Karen allowed me to discuss educational issues and concerns with someone who was familiar with the same research and who shared the same beliefs. Her input was very valuable to me. There were many times throughout the year when I was not quite sure how I should proceed with the portfolios. Through discussion, sharing of experiences, and reading research together, we were able to make decisions. For example, I was not quite sure how the portfolio celebration with the parents should be organized. Karen suggested that I ask the children for their input because it was their portfolio, their parents, and their day to shine and if they were involved in the planning, the event would be more meaningful to them. Participating in the research and seeing the results firsthand provided the impetus for me to continue using Literacy Portfolios, with changes we had planned. Although my current class of children are excited about their portfolios, they are not as excited as the children in our study. Karen's relationship with the children appears to

be the missing element because the children looked forward all week to Karen's visit. They liked her and felt good having "my teacher" admire their writing.

**The professor's view.** When I entered Denise's classroom, I considered my role to be that of participant observer and therefore I did not want to interfere with her instruction. When Denise asked me questions, I provided suggestions, and on several occasions, I gave her related professional articles. Believing as I do, that she knows her class better than I ever could, I encouraged her to make her own decisions. I knew our collaboration would not be beneficial for either of us if I took the role of the "one who knew." Our personalities blended well. Each of us is easygoing and can look at a situation from different perspectives and make changes without the need to be right. I looked forward to Thursday afternoons; Denise and the children welcomed me with their friendship and trust. I felt that we were part of something special. The children frequently gave me pictures and letters and I sent them letters. One student wrote, "Dear Dr. Cirincione, it was a lot of fun having you at our school. We were so excited when you came. We loved it."

Another aspect that added to our collaboration was the fact that Denise and I are both committed to the same philosophy of how children learn to read and write and I admired the way she translated this philosophy into her classroom. When I became part of writing workshop, I saw children who loved writing, who would choose writing over anything else. All my beliefs were confirmed and expanded on by being in the classroom. This experience resulted in enriching my college teaching; I enthusiastically shared firsthand accounts of the children's embrace of literacy with my graduate students. Our collaboration proved to be an equal partnership from

which we both benefited. We had achieved the characteristics of fully collaborative research.

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## APPENDIX

*Student's Writing Goals, Plans, and Feelings About Portfolio and Goals*

Students	Writing Goals	Goal Plans	Feelings Portfolio	Feelings Goals
Peter	3/93, get better ideas for stories 3/93, to use stronger words 5/93, improve spelling	Read books to get ideas  List sources of his ideas List strong words used Read more	Liked bringing in his special things	Liked getting more ideas for writing from the books he read
Marty	3/93, write 12 books	List books he wrote	Liked being able to work on goal alone, without help from the teacher	Liked writing his memories -- setting a goal helped him to read more
Wayne	3/93, write better endings	-----	Disliked bringing in his special things	Disliked -- didn't feel he needed to set a goal and didn't like that he had to
Kara	3/93, write better leads 3/93, use dialogue 4/93, write more	Write why her leads are good Practice  Put writing in portfolio	Liked bringing in her special things	Liked -- setting goals helped her attain them
Cora	3/93, write more	Write daily at home & put writing in portfolio	Liked bringing in her special things	Liked -- setting a goal helped her attain it
Martin	3/93, write more books 3/93, write more limericks 4/93, write non-fiction	List books he wrote ----- -----	Mixed -- liked keeping memories, didn't like thinking of goals	Disliked -- thinking of goals was difficult
Tommy	5/93, write better leads	-----	Liked writing	Liked -- setting a goal helped him attain it

Robert	3/93, write more stories 4/93, write longer stories 5/93, write bigger words	----- ----- List	Liked writing	Liked -- setting a goal helped him attain it
Robert	3/93, write more stories 4/93, write longer stories 5/93, write bigger words	----- ----- List	Mixed -- sometimes liked to share but didn't like to share personal things	Mixed -- setting a goal hasn't helped him yet
Ann	3/93, write more at home 3/93, write better leads 5/93, use stronger words	List stories she wrote ----- Put the stories with bigger words in portfolio	Mixed -- liked bringing in special things but it was hard to work on her goal	Mixed -- setting a goal helped her to attain it but it was difficult for her to do
Jake	4/93, finish his writing	List dates when he began & finished a piece	Mixed -- liked bringing in his special things & writing memories but didn't like setting goals	Disliked -- felt like a failure if he didn't attain his goal
Murphy	3/93, write everyday & be a child author	Write everyday	Disliked -- it was embarrassing to share his special things with class	Disliked -- setting a goal didn't help him
Valerie	3/93, write better leads 5/93, write more non-fiction	Write why lead is good Make graph of non-fiction pieces written	Mixed - liked bringing in special things but felt left out if she forgot to bring something in	Disliked -- didn't like making graphs to show how many non-fiction pieces she wrote
Patty	3/93, write better dialogue	Put writing with better dialogue in portfolio	Liked everything about it	Liked -- began using dialogue
Sandra	3/93, write more non-fiction 3/93, write more 3/93, improve descriptions	Put list of stories written in portfolio Write at home -----	Liked keeping memories and secrets	Liked -- she saw her growth as a writer

Kathy	3/93, use alliteration 3/93, use dialogue 3/93, write better leads	----- Write stories with good dialogue & leads	Liked bringing in special things and liked writing	Liked -- setting goals helped her attain them
Dan	3/93, write more 3/93, improve dialogue	Put books he wrote in his portfolio	Liked keeping his memories	Liked writing
Alice	3/93, write more non-fiction	List of books read in portfolio	Mixed -- liked bringing in his special things but it was difficult to write hard words	Mixed -- figuring out hard words was sometimes easy and sometimes hard
Curt	3/93, write more books	Write books read on calendar	Liked because he can look back on his memories	Liked because it will help him to become an author
Charlene	3/93, draw better illustrations	Practice	Mixed -- liked keeping her memories but didn't like making a goal	Disliked -- setting a goal didn't help
Brian	3/93, write bigger words	Graph of number of letters in bigger words	Mixed -- liked keeping his memories but didn't like when he forgot to bring something in	Liked writing longer words without asking the teacher for help
Wesley	3/93, improve descriptions 4/93, finish his stories	Put pieces with good descriptions in his portfolio	-----  Absent -- didn't obtain his responses	-----
Kim	3/93, write more 3/93, write neater 3/93, write more books	Put writing in portfolio ----- -----	Liked -- couldn't provide a reason	Liked -- couldn't provide a reason



# Struggling Readers In The Regular Classroom: A Personal Reflection

Curt Dudley-Marling

Last year I took a leave from my university duties to teach third grade. Given my background in special education I was anxious to address the needs of students who struggled in school, but without sacrificing the needs of the other students. I learned how hard this can be.

My teaching was informed by whole language theory and practice, but there are other approaches to teaching struggling students. A review of the language arts literature reveals three versions of instruction for special and remedial students, each informed by a different set of assumptions. The first version is that special learners require qualitatively different sorts of instruction (Hallahan and Kauffman, 1976; Lerner, 1993). Proponents of this point of view sometimes appeal to evidence of neurological dysfunction to support arguments for unique instruction, but the case is usually put more simply: since these students did not profit from standard curriculum, something fundamentally different is needed. Special education was founded on, and is sustained by, this assumption.

Eclecticism, a common alternative to the model of unique instruction, "holds that *multiple* perspectives and

approaches will be necessary to accommodate the needs of children who possess differences in abilities and learning histories" (Kameenui, 1993, p. 376-383). Here teachers select the best teaching and learning activities from various approaches to literacy as a means of meeting the diverse needs of learners.

A third version of instruction for struggling students assumes that there are models of literacy learning which best describe the reading and writing development of all children. From the perspective of whole language theory and practice, for example, there are universal language learning principles from which instructional practices derive (Edelsky, Altwerger and Flores, 1991; Weaver, 1990).

Whole language theorists and practitioners dispute unique instruction for struggling students because they assume that there are language learning principles that apply to all learners. Whole language practitioners reject eclectic models of literacy instruction because the eclecticism in these approaches is informed by fundamentally different and often contradictory assumptions about how people learn to read and what it means to read. Skills-first and meaning-centered approaches to literacy instruction, for example, represent more than different sets of instructional activities.

The assumption of universal language learning principles does not mean that all learners should be treated the same. Whole language practice recognizes individual differences in students' learning and life histories as the foundation upon which teachers can build, but not as the basis for qualitatively different sorts of instruction. But even though whole language advocates do not believe that struggling readers need qualitatively different instruction, they recognize that struggling students often require more frequent and



intense reading opportunities and more individual and explicit support from their teachers.

Following are my efforts as a third grade teacher to support struggling readers. I will begin by briefly describing the students with whom I worked. All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the students.

Norwood Elementary is a K-5 school serving approximately 300 students within an ethnically, linguistically and socio-economically diverse community. There were 24 students in my third grade class whose diversity mirrored the school as a whole. My class included several excellent readers and many students who found reading difficult. Three students who found reading particularly difficult — Lila, Charles and Martin — are the principal players.

When I listened to Lila read on the first day of school she read slowly and haltingly, pointing to each word with her finger as she read. If she encountered an unknown word her preferred strategy was to sound it out — no matter how long it took. Because Lila's decoding skills were weak, this was rarely successful.

Charles loved to look at books, but he rarely found books he was able to read independently. His oral reading was slow and dysfluent. When he came to an unknown word he either dismissed it with "whatever" and read on, or he relied on his weak phonics skills to try to sound the word out. Charles rarely used contextual information to make sense of words in text and it was not unusual for his miscues to result in meaningless text.

Charles spent two hours each day in a special education resource room. He was clearly embarrassed and frustrated by

his difficulties which may have contributed to his frequently disruptive behavior.

When Martin arrived in our class in October he had difficulty sitting with a book for more than a few minutes. He read word by word with little sense for the whole of the text. His miscues usually looked like the expected response, but often resulted in nonsensical text (e.g., "the second little pig made a horse out of sticks").

Like Charles, Martin spent two hours each day in a special education resource room, but his violent outbursts often required that he be removed from the classroom for varying periods of time.

### Keeping print out of the cupboard

Before the school year I wrote in my field notes:

*Must work to see that there are lots of invitations (reasons) for reading and writing in my third grade class (August 10, 1991).*

The fundamental assumption which guided my reading program is this: people learn to read by reading. The common practice of limiting some students' reading opportunities until they are "ready" (Allington, 1983) exacerbates their difficulties by denying them access to the data they need to develop as readers. Immersing students in print, providing students with regular demonstrations of how print is used, and offering frequent opportunities for students to read themselves promotes the reading development of all students, especially students for whom reading is a struggle.

Perhaps the most common way teachers invite students to read and demonstrate the power of reading is by reading to

them. I read to my class three to four times each day but took advantage of any opportunity to read more often. When we had to wait outside the gym to perform for a concert, for example, I read *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs* (Barrett, 1982). When we had to wait for a presentation by a fifth grade class I asked Ali to read us several poems from *The Golden Unicorn* (Cochrane, 1987). And sometimes, when students were getting a little wild, I'd call them to the carpet and read them a story to settle them down. Charles, for example, often acted out in class, but a story from *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton, 1985), a book his mother read to him at home, would always settle him down.

Reading to students is not a luxury, nor is it a reward for good behavior. There is a strong relationship between being read to and reading development (Wells, 1986). Students' reading vocabulary, comprehension, reading interests, and oral language may all be affected by being read to (Huck, 1979; McCormick, 1977).

The strategic use of environmental print was another way I invited students to read. Each morning, for example, I wrote a chart story for students to read. For example:

*Good morning, boys and girls. Welcome to the Norwood Learning Center and Hair Salon (this refers to the girls' practice of working on each others' hair). Today is Wednesday, October 2, 1991. Last night the Blue Jays won and the Red Sox lost. The Blue Jays have clinched a tie for the pennant. Yesterday's highlights: Nicholas read his circus story to the class; Roya read her story about Iran to us; and Razika and Benizar read the Velveteen Rabbit to us. And Martin joined our class. For me, yesterday was a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. I'll bet today is a lot better day.*

Many students read these stories as they entered the classroom in the morning, often before taking off their coats. When students came to the carpet after hanging up their coats I asked them to read the chart story to themselves before I read it to them. Occasionally we read the chart story chorally. I wrote (and read) the chart stories largely for the benefit of struggling readers, but I wasn't always sure they were actually reading them. One morning, however, Charles looked at the chart story and then asked me "You ran 30 miles last night?" (I wrote that I had run three miles the previous night.)

I tried to take advantage of every opportunity to invite reading and demonstrate its uses. A discussion prompted by a picture of a gravestone in Grace Maccarone's *The Haunting of Grade Three* (Maccarone, 1984), for example, led me to bring in a collection of grave rubbings my wife and I had made from a graveyard in Concord, Massachusetts. I displayed the grave rubbings around the classroom, reading them to the class after they'd had a few days to read the grave rubbings themselves.

I tried to play my guitar and sing with my class every day and, largely for the benefit of struggling readers, I wrote out the lyrics for the songs we sang. Sometimes I'd invite the class to read song lyrics chorally before we tried to sing it. Song lyrics were a powerful invitation for many of my students. A few days after I introduced the song "The Cat Came Back" to my class I observed several girls gathered around the lyrics posted on the blackboard alternately singing and reading the words.

*Once I almost forgot the power of songs to invite reading. I copied out the lyrics to the Beatles' "Birthday" this morning. After copying the lyrics I started to put the sheet away reasoning that the lyrics might get them excited (i.e., wild). But then I realized how stupid that was since the point of environmental*

*print is to invite the students to read, something not likely to happen when it's in the cupboard (October 8, 1991).*

Written directions, announcements, samples of students' written work, comics and articles from the newspaper, posters, sign-up sheets, chart stories, and song lyrics frequently engaged my students' interest. But unless regularly refreshed, environmental print soon loses its power to engage students' interest and invite reading (Loughlin and Martin, 1987). So I worked hard to see that the print around the classroom was kept fresh.

Perhaps the most obvious way I invited my students to read was by the presence of books — lots of books. We had over 700 books in our classroom, many of which I had purchased at book sales and garage sales. I regularly supplemented these with library books, books from my own children's library, and books published by my students. I worked to ensure that we had plenty of not too difficult books for our struggling readers. When I went to a book sale in early October, for example, I tried to find books which would interest my students — especially my struggling readers. I wrote in my notes:

*I'm going on a book buying spree next week so I put up a sign-up sheet and asked the students to use "post-its" to let me know the kinds of books they'd like me to buy (am indebted to Jane Murphy for this idea). Also need many more books for kids who are having a difficult time with reading (October 19, 1991).*

I was sometimes dismayed by the books some students chose to read. For example:

*Charles again just looked at the pictures in a book that was much too difficult for him (September 19, 1991).*

This led me to dedicate a bookshelf to "not too difficult" books so students could find them easily. I encouraged — but did not insist — that some students choose books from this shelf, but they continued to choose books I judged too difficult. At the time I concluded that students chose these books to protect their self-image, but I discovered that struggling with difficult texts can be worthwhile. Lila, for example, managed to cope with texts such as *Amelia Bedelia's Family Album* (Parish, 1991), which she could not read independently, with the support of her friend Roya. Nader, an ESL student, spent six weeks struggling with Barbara Parks' (1982) *Skinnybones*, a book we had read in class and by the time he was finished, he was a much better reader.

Students also brought their own reading materials to school. A group of boys which included Charles spent weeks reading and discussing comic books they had brought from home. Early in the year several students brought fan magazines to school so they could read and discuss their favorite characters from the TV show *Beverly Hills 90210*. Crystal brought a couple of books on vampires to class when a group of students came together to read and share scary books. Sometimes students discovered unexpected reading materials in the classroom. Several girls, for example, often read song lyrics from my song books and when they discovered the Beatles' "Sexy Sadie," which they thought was a "dirty" song, it became a must reading for everyone in our class.

A print-filled environment only has the potential to invite reading. Students must also have time to read. My students had 45 minutes each day for independent reading. I

sometimes tried to influence their reading selections and I often spent the first five to ten minutes of reading helping students find books to read. But the final choice of reading material was theirs.

Students were free to read by themselves or with their classmates, but reading collaboratively had a powerful effect on the reading of Lila, Martin, and Charles. Charles enjoyed listening to the stories read to him by Ali and Martin loved to listen to the stories Crystal read to him. Lila always read with Roya to whom I must credit much of the progress Lila made as a reader. I often worried that reading with Lila every day would have a detrimental effect on Roya's reading but, over the course of the year, Roya made more progress as a reader than anyone in the class.

Opportunities for reading extended beyond the officially designated reading period. My students often took advantage of the times when they entered the classroom in the morning or after recesses to read environmental print. Written directions at the math, science and art centers demanded reading although I was available to provide needed assistance. Science and social studies units often required reading. Students read one or more books as part of an animal study in science, for example, and there were regular opportunities to read during our writer's workshop. Students often read each other's work. "Author's chair" offered students a chance to read their own work and students often used our message center to share notes with each other. I also wrote notes to students, often singling out struggling readers. When Charles referred to my Volkswagen van as "turtle van" I wrote him the following note:

*Dear Charles: I thought it was funny yesterday when you called my van a "turtle van" — Mr. Marling.*

Looking back I can see that writing notes to students was a powerful invitation to read (and write) and to establish relationships. This is something I did not do enough, perhaps because I was often overwhelmed by competing demands and behavior problems.

Immersing struggling readers in a print rich environment will make a significant contribution to their literacy development, but it is not enough. They will also need explicit support and direction. The next section considers my efforts to offer this support.

*I Want to Nudge and Challenge*

*Even in some of the best whole language classrooms I see I'm not so sure they "nudge" enough. Perhaps too much patience and too much dependence on language rich environments. Something I can explore next year — the tension between nudging and taking control. Given my daughter Anne's difficult experience in first grade I want to nudge and challenge as much as I can (August 10, 1991).*

A print rich environment is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for reading development. Many students, especially those for whom school is a struggle, also require explicit, individual support and direction from their teachers. I recognized the need for direct support and instruction before the school year began.

*I should make every effort to focus on those students for whom reading is a struggle and be prepared to do special things with these students. Consult the book Readers and Writers With a Difference (August 27, 1991).*



Once school began I continued to give much thought to supporting struggling students. For example:

*More work needed for students who are struggling (October 2, 1991). I continue to be excited about what we're doing in reading, but I want to do better for the students who are struggling (October 18, 1991).*

But, early in the year, I was less than satisfied with my efforts to support these students.

*One other frustration: the work I am doing with the students who are struggling. Need to do much more work for them recognizing that it is going to require more preparation (October 6, 1991). Continue to have very difficult time with Charles... at this point he's learning almost nothing in our class. I'm a special educator. This shouldn't be happening (October 16, 1991).*

As the year progressed I learned to manage my time more effectively and I was able to provide regular, intensive, and direct support for struggling students.

The most common, and perhaps the most powerful, strategy I used to support struggling readers was assisted reading — a technique appropriate for students who read word by word in a choppy, stumbling manner (Rhodes and Dudley-Marling, 1988). Usually I began by sitting next to the student and reading a book to them, sometimes pointing to each word as I read. Then the student and I would read the book together, but I would lower my voice when the student's reading was strong and raise it when the student needed support. For example:

*Read The Big Enormous Turnip (Shannon, 1988) with Nader. At some points I paused and he finished the lines (the more predictable/repetitive ones). At other points he read along with me... After I left him he re-read the story on his own (September 16, 1991).*

Assisted reading was also a way to encourage students like Lila and Charles to use contextual information to make sense of words in text.

*Did assisted reading with Lila again using Finders Keepers (Will and Nicholas, 1989). Today I continued to read with her, even providing support for the parts I knew she could read. I was trying to use assisted reading to encourage her to read more quickly. She still tends to plod along making it difficult for her to take advantage of contextual clues in the process of reading (May 20, 1992).*

Later in the year I sometimes read texts chorally with Charles, Martin and Lila to make more efficient use of my time. Other variations of assisted reading I used included reading along with audio-taped stories and paired reading. Early in the year students were asked to read with their partners on Fridays. I tried to pair struggling readers with students — usually those with younger brothers and sisters — who provided helpful, unobtrusive support for struggling readers. When paired reading was no longer required, many students — including Charles, Martin, and Lila — continued to read with partners.

Another way I tried to increase struggling students' reading fluency (and sight vocabularies) was by encouraging the repeated reading of texts. For assisted reading, for example, we repeatedly read the same text until students could read it independently. Opportunities to encourage the repeated

reading of texts often arose naturally, however. When students started asking to read to the class I put up a sign-up sheet, but insisted that students practice their books before reading them to the class. A school-wide reading program which partnered my students with a first grade class also encouraged students to practice books they were going to read with their younger "reading buddies." Lila, Martin, and Charles, perhaps anxious to avoid embarrassment, worked especially hard to practice their books.

I used explicit strategies to help students learn to make sense of texts. When I read with Lila or Charles, for example, I often suggested specific strategies for making sense of words in text. For example:

*During reading I read with Lila and Charles again using assisted/choral reading with Where the Wild Things Are (Sendak, 1963)... When one of them read "...roared their terrible eyes..." I went back and asked "Do they ROAR their terrible eyes?" and they corrected their miscue (April 6, 1992).*

*Martin read the first few pages from Frog and Toad are Friends (Lobel, 1970). Some miscues: He read "Frog ran up the path to Toad's house." He stopped on "path" until I encouraged him to skip this word and go on. He did and was able to come back and get the word. When he came to "knocked" ("He knocked on the front door"), he paused and I again encouraged him to skip the word and come back. He read ahead and then came back and correctly read "knocked." When he read the line "Blah said a voice [he didn't know the word voice so I encouraged him to skip it and come back. When he did he said monster] from inside the house." But the next time he came to the word "voice" ["I am not here, said the voice"] he read it correctly and then went back and pointed to "voice" and self-corrected (March 24, 1992).*

For the benefit of struggling readers we also did whole class lessons on making sense of words in text.

*A couple of the kids got hung up on proper names... so at the conclusion of reading I did a quick lesson on how to deal with proper names in text. I asked the group what they did when they came to a name like this which they couldn't pronounce, and held up a copy of Malcolm's Runaway Soap (Bogart, 1988). Most volunteered that they sounded the name out, but Roya said that she just made up another name and went on reading. I picked up on this suggestion and noted that this is what I do (September 6, 1992).*

I sometimes took advantage of opportunities to model strategies for making sense of words in text when I read to the class. For example, if I came to a proper name I couldn't pronounce I told the class that I wasn't sure how to say the name so I would have to make up a name (until I learned the proper pronunciation). And, since many of my struggling readers were convinced that good readers did not make miscues, I occasionally pointed out miscues that I made when reading aloud. And, if my miscues didn't change the meaning of the text, I'd tell them that miscues which did not result in meaning change were acceptable (and natural).

I sometimes prepared cloze tasks to encourage struggling readers to use contextual information to make sense of words in text. For example, in early April I prepared a cloze task for Martin, Charles, and Lila based on the book *I Know an Old Lady* (Chambliss, 1987) which they were reading with my assistance.

*I know an old \_\_\_\_\_ who swallowed a \_\_\_\_\_.  
I don't know why she \_\_\_\_\_ a fly.  
\_\_\_\_\_ old lady, I guess she'll \_\_\_\_\_.*

Cloze tasks did not work equally well for all students, however. Martin and Denise usually tried to locate the book on which the cloze was based and use the book to find the missing words. Copying from the book did encourage reading, but missed the point of the exercise. This was easily solved by briefly removing the books from circulation. But for Charles cloze was always a problem. Despite my instructions ("put in any word that makes sense"), he tried to faithfully reproduce the text as it was in the book. I finally overcame this difficulty by making up my own cloze passages.

Cloze is helpful for encouraging students to use context to make sense of words in text, but is not a substitute for students reading actual texts.

*I had intended to start Lila, Martin, and Charles on a new cloze task but Lila was so productively engaged in reading Piglet Is Entirely Surrounded by Water (Shepard, 1991) that I didn't think it was a good idea to interrupt her (February 18, 1992).*

My individual and group lessons on making sense of words in text did not ignore phonics. For example:

*When Charles came to the sentence "... under the hen was quite an egg" he asked for help with "under" and I suggested he go on. When he came back he still had difficulty so I covered up "der" in under leaving "un" for him to sound out (January 6, 1992).*

My principle strategy for supporting the development of phonics skills was through individual and whole class spelling lessons.

*When I was with Crystal, Benizar asked me how to spell "operation." I suggested she listen for the sounds and she said "o-p-r" ((hen I told her that "er" was usually spelled "er" not "r") and then I said "shun" and Crystal volunteered "shun." Then I started to say that "shun" is usually spelled "tion" but before I could Razika said it. Then I talked about "tion" and noted that other words like vacation and celebration (this one came from Crystal) were also spelled "tion" (October 11, 1991).*

During our daily, whole class spelling mini-lessons we explored the sound-symbol system of English orthography by listing (and discussing) words containing similar sounds (e.g., words beginning with *f*, words ending *ing*, words containing a long *o* sound, etc.). Another type of spelling lesson encouraged students to venture spellings for difficult words such as "audacious" or "cellophane."

I was able to provide regular support and direction for struggling readers, but my ability to provide this support depended on the efficient management of time, space, and classroom resources. This is the subject of the next section.

### *Managing Time and Space*

*The other day I mentioned to the speech teacher that Martin's language was sometimes inexplicit. Today she gave me a "barrier" game I could play with Martin to encourage more explicit language. This is something I might have done for teachers when I was a special education consultant. It now seems awfully hopeful to me. How can I do this kind of individual work with him and when would I do it? Kind of amusing really... (November 25, 1991).*

Traditional instruction — which derives from a common curriculum — will never be congenial to the needs of special and remedial students. Standardized curricula allow teachers to adjust the pacing of instruction for their students but, by treating all students to the same curriculum, do not accommodate differences in students' cultural backgrounds, knowledge, or ability. Nor do these approaches provide teachers with many opportunities to offer intensive, individual support for struggling learners. But, as the above excerpt from my field notes suggests, unique instruction for struggling students is not a workable alternative to traditional classroom organization.

The degree to which I was able to immerse students in print, encourage extensive reading, and provide individual support and direction to struggling students was directly related to my ability to manage time and space effectively and furnish students with the necessary resources. In this section I'll consider how I organized time and space to accommodate the diverse needs of my students.

*Kleenex... and books*

*I've tried to do what I can to make sure that it's their classroom. I've placed the kleenex on the bookcase... because they are there for their use. Putting them on the teacher's desk... suggests that they're mine... The placement of books, writing materials, and art supplies is intended to send the same message — this is their classroom (August 27, 1991).*

I tried to create space in which students could read and discuss books and easily access reading materials. A small, carpeted reading center, provisioned with large pillows, provided space for students to read comfortably and quietly. Two students at a time were also allowed to read in the hall. Paul,

one of our most eager readers, often preferred to read in the hall, away from the commotion in the classroom.

Round tables, clustered desks, and another carpeted area offered places for students to read and discuss books together. Members of the "Scary, Evil Book Club," a group of students who came together to read scary books, liked to meet at a round table so they could share what they were reading. For example:

*John: Mr. Hyde is crazy. Look at him. Look at Mr. Hyde. That looks like this guy, dude.*

*Crystal: Maybe it is...*

*Fatima: A vampire.*

*John: It could be. No, that's probably the driver of the coach. They're going to show his face here. Catherine! Catherine! They're going to show his face. [as Catherine pages through the book] Find the one where the girl takes off his mask. There. It shows his real face.*

*Crystal: He has no wounds.*

Before I started my year in third grade I wrote:

*Too Much To Do*

*I'm getting more and more anxious about next year. With art, music, phys. ed., science, social studies, math, AND language arts there just seems to be too much to know and do (August 16, 1991).*

Time is a precious commodity for teachers so it's not surprising that managing time is a dominant theme in my notes from last year. Out of school I had to find time to plan and prepare lessons and locate resources mindful of my family's resentment that I was stealing time from them. But, as I got more efficient organizing my classroom each morning



before school, I found that I could usually devote up to 30 minutes preparing individual and small group activities for struggling readers and writers.

Managing time also meant finding a large block of time each day for students to read. I began each day by reading to students for about 15 minutes. The next 45 minutes was reading time, during which students were free to read by themselves, to read with classmates, or to share and discuss books with other students. Talk had an important role in our reading program and much of the support students provided for each other would not have been possible if reading time had been silent (i.e., Sustained Silent Reading).

Providing a large block of time for reading gave me the time I needed to provide explicit support and direction to struggling readers. I tried to spend about 15 minutes each reading period working individually or in small groups (i.e., assisted or choral reading) with two or three struggling readers each day. But I did not ignore the needs of more able readers. I regularly met with all my students to discuss what they were reading and provide support and encouragement. I also encouraged all of my students to participate in literature sharing groups and I tried to meet with one or two groups each day. But some days I was disappointed in how I spent my time during our reading period.

*During reading I spent most of my time dealing with behavior problems and about the only productive thing I got to do was read a book with Lila which we had to stop because of problems in the hall (January 9, 1992). Reading was fairly chaotic today. I talked to one student about what he'd been reading but otherwise it seemed that I was just keeping order today (January 22, 1992).*

Days like these made me work even harder to manage my time. In order to provide effective support for my students' reading development I had to have a clear sense of their progress. Therefore, I found time each day to observe three of my students closely. My observations of struggling readers tended to focus on the strategies they used to make sense of text. For example:

*Listened to Nader read from Skinnybones (Park, 1982). One miscue: "cracked" for "croaked" which changed the meaning, but was linguistically okay. Another miscue: "made" for "mad" (as in "I was mad about it") resulted in a significant change of meaning and in fact didn't make sense (April 28, 1992).*

The individual support and direction I was able to provide students was informed by these observations.

## Conclusion

Accommodating the needs of struggling readers within the regular classroom is possible and this paper shares one version of how to do that. But it will never be easy. Increasing student diversity — by increasing the demands on teachers and complicating the interpersonal dimensions of the classroom community — will almost certainly make the difficult and uncertain business of teaching (Britzman, 1991; McDonald, 1992) even more difficult and uncertain.

Despite any difficulties, the regular classroom is the best place for most special and remedial students. Special and remedial education programs have not fulfilled their promise. Efficacy studies, for example, have consistently reported little or no benefit for students placed in special and remedial programs (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 1989; Carlberg and Kavale, 1980; Glass, 1983). Allington and McGill-Franzen

(1989) conclude that "the expectation that participation in remedial or special education will enhance access to larger amounts of higher quality instruction remains yet unfulfilled" (p. 85). Some go further and conclude that special education programs may actually harm students (Granger and Granger, 1986; Taylor, 1991).

Regular classrooms, by contrast, have the potential to provide rich classroom communities that are responsive to the range of abilities and experiences students bring with them to school. Here differences can be celebrated as a resource students can draw upon to learn from and with each other. But, of course, for this to happen teachers have to create classroom structures which are congenial to differences. I think I managed to create a classroom which gave me the time to provide individual support for struggling readers without ignoring the needs of other students. By encouraging cooperation and collaboration I also enabled students to provide support for each other.

The strongest argument for inclusive education may be a moral one. Sorting students on the basis of ability will always participate in the broader and more destructive practice of sorting students on the basis of gender, class, and race. Diversity is a reality in American and Canadian society and should not be seen as a threat to effective education. Classrooms which recognize, celebrate, and accommodate student diversity will play an important role in the creation of a more equitable and just society in which all people have an equal opportunity to "fully participate in the search for the truth" (Tinder, 1980).

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