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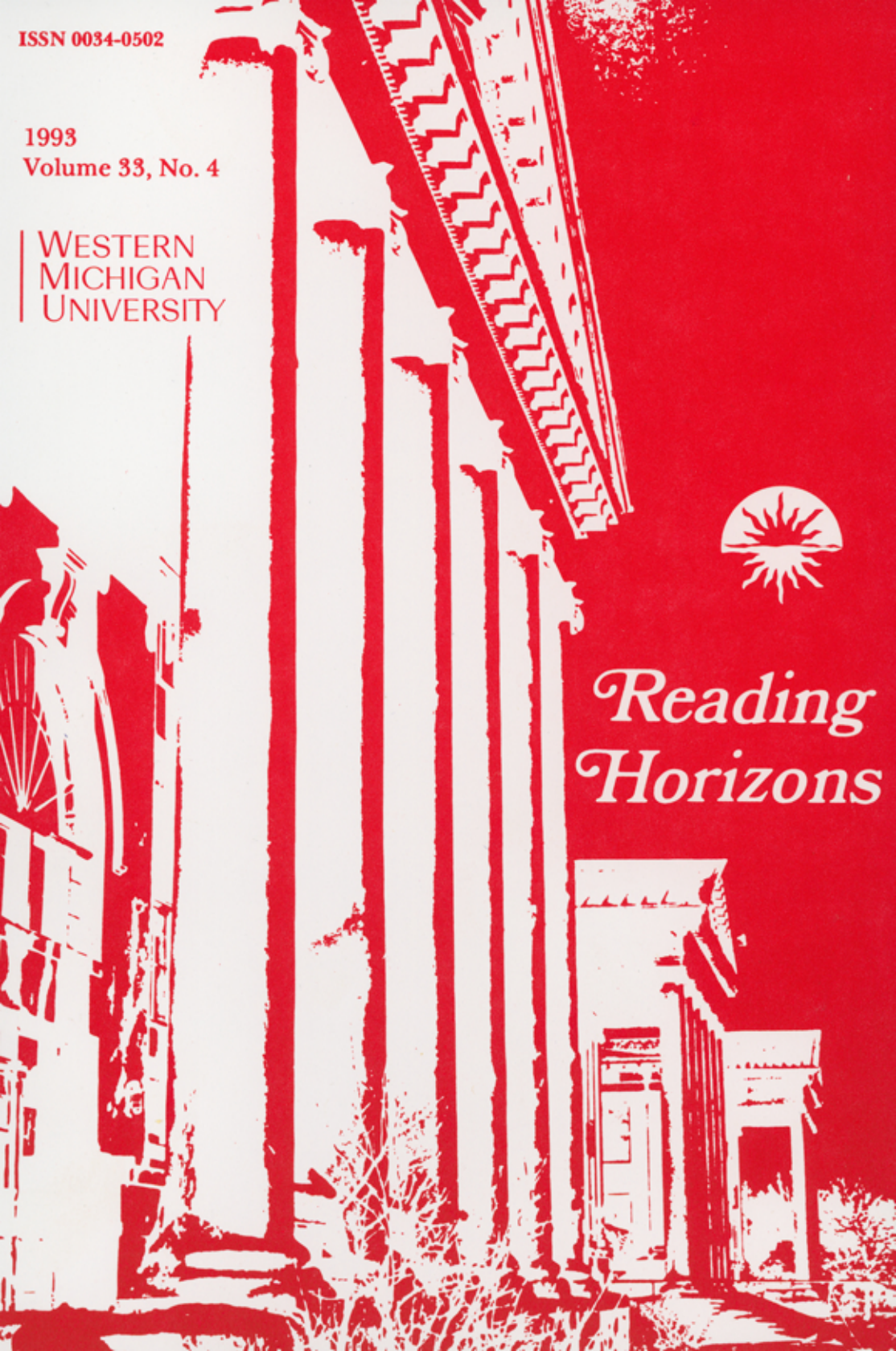
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# *Reading Horizons*







## **READING HORIZONS**

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# **Assessment: Insights into Children's Beliefs and Perceptions About Process Writing**

**Rebecca P. Harlin  
Sally E. Lipa**

How do children acquire knowledge about written language? Investigations of emergent literacy have shown that children's written language knowledge reflects their cultural environment (Clay, 1982; Kastler, Roser, and Hoffman, 1987). At home, children observe their parents writing grocery lists, letters to friends and relatives, and telephone messages, thereby learning the functions of written language as they are used in daily life (Morgan, 1987; Purcell-Gates, 1986). Independently, children experiment with their own messages, incorporating scribble, pictures and random letters. Often their written products mirror the functional writing their parents modeled (Rowe, 1989). In school, additional opportunities to learn about written language are presented. Some tasks are inherent to the school setting, such as reports and labels, while others resemble those practices at home (Dyson, 1984). Children in classrooms where traditional writing instruction prevails find constraints placed upon their writing by their teacher, such as topic, length and purpose.

In contrast, classrooms emphasizing the writing process involve the student in a wider array of writing, e.g., journals, learning logs, letters and descriptions; and provide choices of topics, time spent writing and social interaction. For each aspect of the writing process — rehearsal, drafting, revising and publishing, children learn the strategies real authors employ. To generate writing ideas for a child's topic, teachers model strategies such as webbing, brainstorming and drawing. During drafting, children are encouraged to develop their topic while focusing on the intended message, not the mechanics of spelling and punctuation. When a first draft has been shared with peers and feedback provided, students return to the draft to elaborate, delete and clarify ideas. Following subsequent peer group sharing sessions, the draft is further refined and attention paid to spelling, punctuation and revising ungrammatical or awkward sentences. When it has been edited by the writer, peers and the teacher, it is published in final form and shared with an appreciative audience.

The teacher's perceptions of the writing process and the instructional program affect children's understanding and attitudes toward writing. Children who experience the traditional writing program tend to view writing as a product where correctness, form, neatness and spelling are more important than substance (Boljonis and Hinchman, 1988). Conversely, children in process writing classrooms view writing as communication (Dahl, 1988; Dickinson, 1986; Mangano and Allen, 1986). Children's perceptions of writing are important. How can they be determined? A forced-choice questionnaire administered to a group of students provides one means of tapping students' beliefs about writing and collecting data rapidly. While results may differentiate between instructional programs (Rasinski and DeFord, 1986), this instrument limits the range of responses and



quality of data one can obtain. Much richer data result from individual interviews. Through questions, children's self-perceptions of their writing ability and conceptions of the writing process are clearly revealed (Fear, Anderson, Englert, and Raphael, 1987). Investigations of children's perceptions of the writing process have focused on specific age levels — prior to school entry, within the first years of instruction, and in the upper elementary grades — but few studies have compared children across the continuum. This study investigated elementary children's knowledge of the situational, procedural and functional aspects of writing across grade levels. The following questions were raised: Do children's definitions of writing differ across grade levels? How does children's knowledge of the functions of writing compare across grade levels? Are there differences in writing strategies used by children at each level? Do children's attitudes and interest in writing change from one grade level to the next?

## Method

**Subjects.** The sample consisted of three grade levels groups — grades one and two ( $n = 32$ ); grades three and four ( $n = 32$ ); and grades five and six ( $n = 32$ ) — for a total of 96 subjects. The number of boys and girls in each group were approximately equal. All of the children were enrolled in schools in western New York where the writing process had been implemented.

**Materials.** The 30-item Harlin-Lipa Writing Interview, developed by the researcher and a colleague, was used. Questions which tapped the children's attitudes toward writing, identified writing activities children engaged in at home and at school and outlined their understanding and viewpoints of the composing process were included.

**Procedures.** Each subject was individually interviewed by the researcher or a graduate student outside of

the classroom. The children's responses were recorded on the interview form; audiotape recordings of the interviews provided the opportunity to review responses for accuracy. The children were told that their answers would not be shared with their classroom teacher. Interviews were completed within 30 minutes.

## Results

Each subject's responses to specific questions were listed. From individual responses, major categories of similar responses emerged. After responses in each category were tallied, the percentage of subjects responding similarly was calculated.

**Interests and attitudes.** In response to the question, *Do you like to write?* the children were very positive. The percentage of affirmative responses increased by grade level with grades one and two having 81%; grades 3 and 4, 84%; and grades five and six, 88%. However, the students were not as enthusiastic about being asked to write by their teacher. The percentage of students responding positively decreased; 63% for both grades one and two and grades three and four compared to 44% for grades five and six. Older students indicated that their feeling about writing depended upon the type and length of writing being requested. Only 3% expressed this reservation at grades one and two, while 16% of subjects in grades three and four and 38% in grades five and six gave this response.

When asked about the type of writing they like to do, all three groups preferred writing stories — grades one and two, 34%; three and four, 56%; and five and six, 69%. For grades one and two, letters to friends (20%) and factual text (9%) were the second and third highest responses. Poetry (19%) ranked second for grades three and four with adventure and science fiction (9%) ranked third. With the older

group, letters to friends (19%) and diaries (9%) were the second and third most popular choices.

If subjects were writing a book of their own, the choice of topic would vary. *Animals* were the number one topic choice for two groups — grades one and two, 31%; grades three and four, 34%; while *autobiography* ranked first among fifth and sixth grades (28%). *Sports* was the second choice for grades one and two (12%). Third and fourth graders indicated that *autobiography* (9%) would be their second choice. Fifth and sixth graders' second choices were equally divided among *humor*, 12%; *animals*, 12%; and *fairy tales*, 12%.

**Knowledge about the writing process.** During the interview, subjects were asked, *What is writing?* Responses reflecting surface and deep understanding of composition varied from group to group. Surface responses were most frequent among the first grade and second graders (79%), dropping to 50% for grades three and four; and 28% for grades five and six. The younger subjects' responses included spelling, making marks on paper, and printing. Older subjects defined writing as putting thoughts and ideas on paper, making sense, or a learning process. Students viewed writing as being more difficult than reading. This perception became stronger with the older students — grades one and two, 44%; three and four, 59%; and five and six, 69%. Most subjects were aware of the connection between the processes, indicating that writing did help you read. This was true for 78% of the subjects in first and second grades, 88% in third and fourth; and 84% in fifth and sixth. Children's perceptions of the easy and difficult aspects of writing are presented below. The interview questions and the total percentages of children's major responses are given in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
***Perceptions of Writing***

	1 & 2 (N=32)	3 & 4 (N=32)	5 & 6 (N=32)
<i>What is the hardest part about writing?</i>			
Thinking of ideas	9	16	38
Getting ideas/thoughts on paper	22	12	30
Having enough time	—	3	—
Spelling	22	31	16
Writing neatly	16	11	—
Editing	3	—	12
<i>What is the easiest part about writing?</i>			
Thinking of ideas	22	31	16
Staying on topic	9	—	56
Writing final copy	3	3	3
Spelling	25	6	16
Writing neatly	19	28	—
Using punctuation	6	3	6

Do children's definitions of writing differ across grade levels? For younger children writing was defined by its surface features while older children regard writing as communication. These differences become more distinguishable when they identify the easiest and hardest parts about writing. The importance of thinking of and communicating ideas was reported more frequently for the oldest group than for the younger children as being the most difficult part of writing. The middle group, grades three and four, cited spelling as the difficult part of writing. Given their many experiences with first drafts on self-selected topics, it is not surprising that fifth and sixth grades rated staying on the topic the easiest part of the writing process. For the two young groups, concerns for spelling and neatness seem to be greater for some individuals than for others. Differences in each group's concept of the writing process is consistent with their views of good writers. While the younger children

**Table 2**  
***Perceptions of Writers***

	1 & 2 (N=32)	3 & 4 (N=32)	5 & 6 (N=32)
<i>Who is a good writer in your class?</i>			
Self	25	12.5	12.5
Classmate	81	75	84
Teacher	6	12.5	6
<i>Does a good writer ever have difficulty?</i>			
Yes	34	59	53
No	59	28	34
Don't know	3	6	6
No response	3	9	3
<i>What does a good writer do?</i>			
Writes a lot/practices	22	16	6
Has good ideas	21	15	60
Uses humor	—	—	6
Writes neatly	25	28	19
Spells correctly	9	16	3
Uses punctuation	3	9	—
<i>What does your teacher think a good writer does?</i>			
Has good ideas	16	31	75
Practices	3	25	15
Concentrates/takes time	15	19	3
Writes neatly	34	22	12.5
Spells correctly	16	9	6
<i>How would you teach someone to write?</i>			
Show them how	19	9	12.5
Tell them to think	3	3	16
Write it for them	25	—	9
Teach them to write letters	38	59	63
Tell them to sound out words	3	6	12.5
Teach them to read first	3	3	6
Ask them to try it	3	6	—

viewed themselves as good writers more frequently than older children, the appreciation for their peers' efforts remained high across grade levels — an appreciation which may be a result of the sharing conferences which are inherent in process writing. Teachers were not rated highly as good writers. Perhaps their teachers do not share their writing frequently enough for students to be aware of its

quality or perhaps the subjects thought we understood that teachers had to be good writers in order to teach writing. Older children tended to view good writers more realistically than younger children. They understood that good writers frequently did have difficulty. It is likely that older students' experiences conferencing with both good and poor writers over time helped them recognize that all writers experience problems at some point. In defining the attributes of a good writer, older students judged the quality of writing on ideas; younger students defined good writers more often in terms of their spelling, and neatness. Older students' perceptions of good writers closely resembled what they believed their teachers valued — ideas rather than mechanics. Students' definitions of good writers and what constitutes good writing are presented in Table 2.

**Strategies used in writing.** Since the subjects were engaged in writing instruction which incorporated drafting, revising and editing, questions were posed to address their understanding of the strategies they used for each. Their responses to specific questions are presented in Table 3. One surprising finding of this study was that children from all three groups would revert to traditional methods in teaching others to write. Their responses included many more instances of emphasizing the mechanics of the process — letter formation and spelling than of helping the writer with ideas. The subjects may not have felt as confident in their ability to teach someone what they know about the process since they are still learning and refining it themselves. Instead, they would teach the things that are easy to teach.

As children gain experience in writing, how do their strategies change? In Table 3, we see that when writing unfamiliar words, students become less dependent on asking

**Table 3**  
***Perceptions of Writers***

	1 & 2 (N=32)	3 & 4 (N=32)	5 & 6 (N=32)
<i>What do you do when you come to a word you don't know how to write?</i>			
Sound it out	63	31	19
Ask another student	25	28	28
Ask the teacher	44	50	19
Use the dictionary	6	25	69
Leave it blank/skip it and go on	3	9	9
Spell it the best way I can	6	22	31
<i>Do you ever change what you are writing?</i>			
Yes	84	94	100
No	16	3	—
No response	—	3	—
<i>How do you decide what to change?</i>			
If it doesn't make sense	12.5	41	47
If I don't like it	22	—	19
If I have another idea	22	28	28
If I'm rewriting and find mistakes	12.5	25	12
If the teacher tells me to change	9	—	9
If I read it over	6	22	22
<i>How do you know when your writing is finished?</i>			
When there are no more ideas to write	22	31	50
When I like it	12.5	9	3
When it makes sense	9	32	34
When it comes to an end	3	6	28
When I am tired	16	—	9
When it says "the end"	9	6	3
When the teacher tells us	—	3	—
<i>Why do we use punctuation?</i>			
Give expression/clarity/meaning	44	46	94
Complete a sentence	22	34	—
Know when to stop	19	12.5	—
Make it lively	—	—	9
Separate sentences	—	3	28

a teacher for help and rely more on their ability to spell phonetically, use a dictionary or attempt it the best way possible when drafting. Older students also were more likely to review their writing and make decisions about what to change based upon meaning and less upon correctness, similar to

Monahan's (1984) subjects. Older students judged a draft complete when they were out of ideas or when the piece came to a logical conclusion. Punctuation also indicated some sophistication — they use it to clarify meaning, liven up writing or separate sentences. As children have the opportunity to take control of their own writing, to revise, edit and publish, they develop a greater repertoire of strategies for each step of the process. These findings coincide with research by Moore (1989) and Stice and Bertrand (1987) which found that young writers experience greater independence as they are actively involved with the writing process and have the opportunity to interact with their peers.

**Writing as a functional activity.** Children have opportunities to write both at home and school. To ascertain what type of writing takes place in each setting, subjects were asked several questions. Responses and questions are shown in Table 4. Does the knowledge of writing as a functional activity change as children become older? From results on Table 4, we see that children continue to write at home regardless of their age. The differences are in where the writing takes place — older students appear to need more privacy (the bedroom) and do more personal writing in diaries and letters than do younger children. At home, writing serves several functions — lists to remember, letters to friends, stories, telephone numbers and notes. At school, assigned writing consumes a larger portion of the child's time and increases across subject areas as well. From their responses, children of all ages seem well aware of the variety of purposes writing affords in daily life. In general, the students' attitudes toward writing became more positive as their experiences with the writing process increased. Their interest in topics also diversified, with the family becoming less important over time. Older students with more life



experiences also considered themselves to be good subjects for books.

**Table 4**  
*Perceptions of Writers*

	1 & 2	3 & 4	5 & 6
<i>Do you write at home?</i>			
Yes	100	100	100
No	—	—	—
<i>Where?</i>			
Bedroom	41	56	63
Desk	19	—	19
Kitchen	9	3	3
Dining room	3	3	3
Any quiet place	—	6	—
Library	—	6	—
<i>What do you write?</i>			
Letters to friends	47	75	72
Diary	12.5	6	19
Lists	59	69	91
Stories	44	28	28
Telephone numbers	75	78	88
Novel	—	—	3
Notes	12.5	3	16
<i>Do you write at school?</i>			
Yes	100	100	100
No	—	—	—
<i>What do you write?</i>			
Stories	41	28	41
Journals	12.5	3	25
Notes to friends	9	6	12
Telephone numbers	3	—	—
About books I've read	3	6	6
News	3	—	3
Assignments	59	41	66
Handwriting	6	12.5	—
<i>Do you write in--</i>			
Math?	66	88	78
Science?	66	91	100
Reading?	91	100	88
Spelling?	81	88	97

Perhaps this is a result of the feedback their peers and teachers provided as their journal entries and drafts were

shared. What can we learn about the impact of process writing as a result of the interviews? First, it becomes obvious that some aspects of the process are learned earlier than others but that with time children do come to understand the purpose of each step as they are engaged in it. Second, children need the opportunity to write for different audiences and purposes in order to become knowledgeable about the process. While some children have this opportunity at home, others may have to rely on the school setting to provide these experiences. Third, children do shift their focus from features of writing to the communicative features as long as their experiences across time consistently reinforce this view. Finally, teachers need to provide the model necessary for young children to understand the process by sharing their own writing frequently and by being consistent in their responses to young writers during conferences.

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# **Point-Counterpoint: Value of School Textbooks**

**Alan M. Frager  
Maureen Vanterpool**

Educators frequently are involved in textbook adoptions in various content areas, an important activity because textbook programs may define school curricula by dictating what is taught, in what sequence, and for how long. Recently, education groups have criticized school textbooks for being boring, incoherent, and “dumbed-down.” Viewed from one perspective the selection of new textbooks offers little hope for improving the school reading program because by their nature textbooks can inhibit the teaching of thinking. Viewed from a different perspective, textbooks offer the potential for much improvement in the reading program, if features of the text are used to the fullest with a critical approach. Educators looking to improve the reading programs in their schools may reasonably ask, *What are the positive and negative values of using textbooks?* This point-counterpoint discussion focuses on four issues involved in answering that question.

## **Encyclopedic or comprehensive?**

**Point:** Textbooks are encyclopedic. Because textbooks must be the source of all possible topics to be taught in a class, they include a little information on many topics, discuss none in depth, and fail to represent multiple viewpoints. As a result, according to Boyer (1983), “most

textbooks provide students with a highly simplified view of reality and practically no insight into the methods by which the information has been gathered and the facts distilled" (p. 143). Looking at math textbooks from a Foucauldian viewpoint, McBride (1989) describes the encyclopedic nature as a language framework of rigid categories that encourages students to "think in dualistic ways that dichotomize context from text" (p. 42). Perry (1981) explains dualistic thinking as dividing meaning into two realms — right vs. wrong or good vs. bad. Thinking about a textbook in a dualistic way means treating it as an authority that holds the right answer for every problem.

Teaching for thinking requires a critical approach, one that promotes questioning of authority. Perry explains that knowledge should be conceived as multiple and relative instead of dualistic, emphasizing the importance of the context in which the knowledge is presented. In McBride's investigation of math textbooks, mathematics was found to be presented in contexts which are less meaningful to women than men:

*If an historical picture is shown of a mathematician, it is that of a man; if a cartoon is shown, too many times, it is a girl struggling with a concept. The resulting image, even for those of us teaching math, is that serious mathematicians are (and historically have been) men (p. 42).*

McBride also noted that her women students were often not familiar with mathematical concepts presented in the context of baseball problems, further alienating them from mathematical knowledge. These examples suggest that textbooks, as single encyclopedic sources of knowledge, are unlikely to provide the multiple contexts needed by students of various backgrounds to promote learning. To perform higher order cognitive skills like analysis and

synthesis in a subject area students need in-depth knowledge gained from reading many different viewpoints on the subject.

**Counterpoint:** Textbooks are comprehensive. They provide an overview of topics related to the course of study, showing relative importance of interrelated topics and placing those topics in perspective. Every topic does not require extensive study, and any topic can be used as a departure point for further study, often facilitated by reference lists provided by the authors. The scope of the curriculum would be inordinately restricted without the breadth of content provided by textbooks. Developing thinking skills would pose too great a challenge with a curriculum that is narrow in scope due to limited information. Higher order thinking skills can and should be applied to topics as they are treated within a textbook.

Global coherence, the logical arrangement of ideas that allows the reader to see relationships between and across ideas, is the quality which makes textbook comprehensiveness an advantage to readers. A coherent textbook has a text structure of recognizable organizational patterns. Brozo and Simpson (1991) have described research showing how students' knowledge of text structure facilitates comprehension. Active learners use organizational patterns and other text features such as pronoun referents, connectives, and conjunctions to construct the flow of meaning. Other aspects of text structure include signalling devices such as previews, typographical clues, graphic organizers, and summary statements. Text structure should play a role in textbook selection, as it goes beyond superficial readability formulas that count sentences and word length. Furthermore, it is the teacher's responsibility to help students recognize and use text structure in textbooks.

When textbooks are not very coherent, it is the teacher's responsibility to create structures to help students organize text information.

The comprehensive nature of textbooks also can be used to develop students' metacognitive strategies. Brozo and Simpson (1991) cited research related to the metacognitive strategy of elaboration, including such strategies as focusing on key ideas, making connections between ideas, and integrating the ideas into personal schemata. The research showed that most secondary students lacked efficient elaboration strategies, but that they could learn them with direct instruction, modeling, demonstration and practice. Some examples of elaborations that can be developed with good or poor texts include composing titles, headings and subheadings; developing questions; paraphrasing main ideas; relating text to experiences; creating examples; making predictions; drawing inferences or conclusions; drawing pictures; creating graphic organizers; creating new problems; and applying principles to new situations. The textbook is viewed as a tool that provides a comprehensive array of information that challenges teacher and students to approach learning strategically.

### **Third-hand sources or efficient compilations**

**Point:** Textbooks are not primary or even secondary sources. They are written by authors who read the current reports of knowledge in an area (primary sources) and also the commentaries on those current reports (secondary sources) and then write a third-hand, supposedly easy-to-read version of the current state of knowledge in a field. This approach is inimical to teaching thinking because it asks students and teachers to accept the notion that knowledge should be broken down into digested chunks before it can be swallowed. Because it takes considerable time for

the experts to read, digest and rewrite the current state of knowledge in an area, textbooks are always at least three to five years out of date. In contrast, teaching for thinking helps students develop an appetite for the most current primary sources of knowledge in an area and the ability to digest the knowledge for themselves.

Another significant effect of textbooks' distance from primary sources is their susceptibility to censorship. For use in their literature anthologies, textbook editors regularly create sanitized segments of novels by popular authors, such as Judy Blume and M.E. Kerr, by excising episodes focusing on controversial topics like sexual maturation and adolescent experimentation with drugs. The problem is that the stories lose their essence because important character motivation elements have been deleted. Social studies textbooks have been subject to waves of censorship efforts from both the left and right wing political perspectives, resulting in books which ignore or put a false front on many vital social issues. As Fitzgerald (1979) concludes in the study of how and why history textbooks have changed over the decades:

*The censorship of schoolbooks is simply the negative face of the demand that books portray the world as a utopia of the eternal present — a place without conflicts, without malice or stupidity where Dick (black or white) comes home with a smiling Jane to a nice house in the suburbs (p. 218).*

This myth-making censorship not only hides knowledge about social concerns in our nation, it also inhibits future participating citizens from thinking critically about those issues. Fitzgerald speculates that the more young people believe the image of America described in history textbooks,



the more they may feel their own experience of conflict or suffering is unique and perhaps un-American.

Instead of textbooks, students could read primary and secondary sources. In literature and social science primary sources are abundant, whether fiction or non-fiction. These are the first hand accounts of experience seen through the eyes of the author whose name is on the cover. These sources exist for readers of all levels of abilities because different authors write for different audiences. While some primary sources such as journal articles could be used in the upper grades in teaching science and math (e.g., Mallow, 1991), secondary sources like trade books and magazine articles would be needed for most science and math teaching without textbooks. These sources are also abundantly and readily available in bookstores and libraries.

**Counterpoint:** Textbooks are efficient compilations of source materials. They represent analysis and synthesis of a wealth of information otherwise unavailable or too technical for classroom use. It would be unreasonable to expect teachers and students to sift through the raw data from which textbook information is derived. Textbooks present these data in forms that are more appropriate to the realities of the classrooms. Development of thinking skills would be frustrated if students and teachers always had to go directly to technical reports, professional papers, or archival documents for first-hand information. McKeachie (1986) suggested that without the structure of a good textbook students experience confusion and frustration if required to gather, judge, evaluate, analyze and synthesize information on their own from a wide variety of sources. Textbooks are efficient because they bring together many primary sources in one easily accessible reference.

An important consideration when evaluating how source materials are compiled is text technology, or the way information is put together and with what objective. Manzo and Manzo (1990) described two models of text technology, mathemagenic and generative. The mathemagenic model is described as focused on content, and is common in programmed texts and mastery learning materials. Such texts reportedly use a reductive approach to gear students toward identical responses and attempt to control student thinking. This approach inhibits development of metacognitive strategies and independent thinking. In contrast, the generative model is described as focused on the reader, and is evident in textbooks that have imbedded aids promoting learner generated metacognitive strategies. Such texts reportedly take a constructive approach that emphasize learner involvement and control. Learners use textual information to become acquainted with ideas of others and subsequently construct their own ideas. They begin to view textbooks as reference books and use them as the starting point for further study. The crux of the matter is not whether textbooks are original sources, but whether they present ideas in ways that constructively engage learners.

### **Expensive or cost effective?**

**Point:** Textbooks are expensive. O'Donnell (1985) explains that a team creating a textbook works for three to four years on the project, with final development costs for a typical English text in 1991 exceeding \$100,000. Add to these costs the considerable expenses of publishing and printing textbooks to make them durable for repeated use. With the limited budgets of many schools the cost of textbooks exacts a high toll on the educational program. According to Keith (1981) the decision to undertake the development and publication of a new textbook is first based on economic rather than educational considerations. While

this is not surprising because the publishing industry exists to make a profit, neither is it reassuring. The same market forces which profit car makers to produce and sell restyled versions of the same basic models for decades without making significant improvements also guide the textbook industry. Some economic aspects of textbook selection were chronicled by Palonsky (1986), a teacher educator who took a leave of absence from his university teaching position to teach social studies in a public high school:

*'If we took everything worthwhile in that C-level American history textbook,' I said, 'and multiplied it by 100, we could still fit it inside a thimble'... Later (the principal) told me I had offended some of the teachers who had been a part of the book selection process, and he explained it had been the best book for the money. Funds for new texts were always limited, he told me, and this text was selected because it was least expensive (p. 61).*

Ironically, the inflated cost of textbooks actually lowers their value as resources for thinking. To justify the investment needed to purchase high priced textbooks, students must use the books year after year. To protect the school's investment in the books, students are prohibited from writing reactions in them, from highlighting memorable passages, and from taking the books outside of school to read, study or share — practices recommended by most experts in study skills improvement. The lesson taught by such textbook use is that important knowledge is heavy, permanently bound, property of the school, and intended to remain in an unused condition for as long as possible. How different this is from lessons taught by our favorite trade-books, journals and newspapers.

**Counterpoint:** Textbooks are cost effective. If the financial cost of textbooks is compared to the cost of

obtaining original sources, then it is clearly less expensive to purchase textbooks. Data on textbook sales showed that on the average, schools presently expend under \$35 per pupil per year for textbooks and related materials (Chall and Squire, 1991). This is a relatively low figure considering that textbooks usually are issued to each student in English, social studies, math, science and other courses. Few, if any, school systems would be able to afford adequate materials if they had to purchase or duplicate class sets of original sources. Furthermore, school systems would not be able to afford textbooks if they were consumable. While students don't gain pride of ownership, they learn to think about textbooks as useful and durable sources of information that reflect the continuity of the curriculum. Textbooks are the most cost effective way of making a wide variety of information available to students in easily accessible form.

Another cost effective aspect of textbooks is the savings of teacher time and energy. Teachers spend time and devote energy to identifying resources that supplement published texts. In addition, teachers also adapt instructional materials and develop their own supplementary materials. This is expected, and the school day is designed to accommodate it before, during and after school hours. If teachers were required to design materials on a scale as comprehensive as a textbook, they would not have the time or energy to teach. Ornstein (1990) suggested as a rule of thumb that spending more than 1 to 1 1/2 hours on developing materials for a lesson is not worth the time and effort. He cited research estimating that time spent developing completely new materials for a new program runs as high as 50 to 100 hours per hour of instruction. The availability of textbooks represents an enormous savings of teacher time and energy.

## Authors: known and unknown

**Point:** Many textbooks are written by unknown authorities. Winterowd (1989) described such books as “authorless textbooks, put together by in-house staffs after editors and publishers have scoured the profession for ideas.” Citing two recent examples (McDougal, Littel’s *English* for grades 9-12; and Scholastic’s *Scope English: Writing and Language Skills* for grades 6-12), Winterowd forecasted an increase in this practice by which “authors disappear and texts are viewed less as books than as products.” The work of a scriptor, one who integrates the writings of several unnamed authors into a textbook has been likened by Barthes (1977) to the work of a shaman, relating the ritual narratives of a culture. Barthes’ metaphor suggests again how using textbooks negates efforts to teach students to think critically: initiates to a culture are supposed to receive its narratives, not question them.

In contrast to trade books displaying the author’s name boldly on the cover so readers can judge the author’s expertise and biases by reputation or prior experience, textbooks are assumed to be written by experts without bias. The weighing of the logic of ideas against the known level of bias and expertise of the author is lost when authors are beyond reproach or not even identified. Crismore (1985), who studied textbooks from a rhetorical perspective, explained that textbooks are not so much read in an interpretive sense, but read in the sense of disentangling the meaning:

*[Readers] can follow the text structure at every point and level, but find that there is nothing beneath, that these texts can be ranged over, but not pierced. To give a text an author is to impose a limit for it closes the writing. A text with an author has a purpose, an intention the author wishes the reader to see and understand — it has fixed author meanings (p. 15).*

Critical reading and thinking require closed texts, ones which don't have all the answers. With such texts students can learn to find answers for themselves, become authors of their own knowledge, and join in conversation with other authors as equals instead of subordinates. Knowing the author of a book empowers students; not knowing the author of a text they must learn subjugates them.

**Counterpoint:** Textbooks are written by knowledgeable and experienced content specialists in collaboration with pedagogical specialists. Whether the authors are known or unknown, textbooks should be read as critically as any other reading materials. As with other materials, readers should expect textbooks to reflect the authors' biases, to represent cultural biases, and to be influenced by social contexts and political ideologies. The content specialists and pedagogical specialists who write textbooks are no more or no less biased than other authors. The teacher plays a major role in helping students ferret out biases that known and unknown authors bring to their work.

Through a discourse of text analysis (Giroux, 1988) teachers and students should question representations and interests that influence textbooks. Text analysis eliminates the notion that textbooks are neutral conveyors of ideas, by scrutinizing the cultural contexts and ideological positions they represent. Taking a critical perspective transforms textbook users from a mode of acquiring, retaining and regurgitating information to one of analyzing, integrating and making meaning of information. Criticism of ideas in textbooks provides a model that students can apply to other material as they develop lifelong habits of reading. They become critical readers and thinkers because they develop habits of mind through daily classroom processes. They learn to question information and the sources of that

information. They learn not to accept printed matter at face value, just because it was presented in a school book. A discourse of text analysis uses the textbook as a resource for development of cognitive processes and of critical consciousness about schooling.

## Conclusion

Textbook adoption decisions should be based on the goals of the educational program. If the goals of the program include developing critical thinking, hunger for learning, personal interaction with books, and in-depth exploration of subjects, one argument is that choosing better textbooks may yield little gain. The essence of the counterpoint argument was captured by Ornstein (1990) who stated "The textbook is an acceptable tool for instruction as long as it is selected with care and is kept in perspective so that it is not viewed as the only source of knowledge and does not turn into the curriculum" (p. 333). Perhaps the first move that should be made is to involve teachers in deciding how valuable textbooks are now and could be in the future. Because the debate on the value of textbooks will be with us for a long time, enlightened educators will weigh both sides of the argument as they contemplate textbook adoption.

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# **Literature Study Groups with At-Risk Readers: Extending the Grand Conversation**

**Deborah McCutchen  
Anne Laird  
Jan Graves**

As schools heed the ever-widening call to involve students with quality literature, we are forced to confront two questions. The first refers to the grand conversation (Eeds and Wells, 1989) alluded to in the title of this article: How do we enable literature study groups to engage in mutual discussions of ideas (which constitute the “grand conversations” described by Eeds and Wells) rather than teacher-led inquiries about surface meaning (which Eeds and Wells characterize as “gentle inquisitions”)? The second refers to an issue of equity: How do we provide equal access to quality literature for students with limited reading ability? This article describes the attempts of one school district to extend the grand conversation of literature study groups to students with reading difficulties.

## **Importance of extending the grand conversation**

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of extending the grand conversation of literature to students of low reading skill. Involving poor readers with quality literature should be viewed as an integral piece of their reading instruction. Considerable evidence indicates that, in addition to their lower reading skills, students who have reading

difficulties often have less exposure to print than their peers, especially exposure to high quality literature (Chall, 1983; Stanovich, 1986). Stanovich (1986) contrasts the reading experiences of good and poor readers, characterizing the contrast as a situation in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Poor readers rarely get opportunities to read the books that spark the imagination of their peers who read well. Because their limited reading abilities lock poor readers out of age-appropriate literature, their interest in reading declines and their motivation to read decreases. In this way, motivational factors combine with skill factors, with the result that poor readers read less than their peers.

To the extent that reading is a skill that increases with practice, poor readers are denied even the simple opportunity to practice that skill with good literature. Moreover, to the extent that reading is an active engagement with an author, poor readers are denied access to the vocabulary, the ideas, the perspectives and the knowledge of the world that their peers gain through books. Thus, the gap continually widens between good and poor readers. To close this gap, reading instruction must be embedded within a broader communicative context that includes quality literature.

### **Project history and general goals**

The instructional program described here, the “Extended Classic Books” program, was developed by one school district as an attempt to close the gap between the reading experiences of good and poor readers. It emerged from the district’s existing program, “Classic Books,” which was directed toward above-average readers in upper elementary and middle-school grades.

The Extended Classic Books program was procedurally and philosophically rooted in the district's original Classic Books program, which had a ten-year history of success in the district, and was based on the belief that meaningful discussions of literature revolve around questions of interpretation, not questions of fact (e.g., not *what* a character did, but *why* the character might have done it). Community volunteers led discussion groups, meeting weekly with children for six to eight weeks. The general format was much like a typical book club: children were expected to read a selected book over the course of a week and then discuss the book when the groups convened. Discussions lasted 40 to 50 minutes.

In order to help the volunteers foster grand conversations of interpretation rather than inquisitions of facts (however gentle), prospective group leaders participated in five weeks of training before meeting with students. During this training, group leaders read and discussed several classic children's books (e.g., *Charlotte's Web*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *James and the Giant Peach*), with rotating teams of two volunteers leading the discussions. Experienced discussion leaders modeled ways to pose questions that invite discussion, and they critiqued the questions posed by the volunteer leaders, distinguishing open-ended questions that spark conversation from single-answer questions that thwart verbal exchange.

The Extended Classic Books program adopted the same philosophy and the same procedures for training volunteers. Volunteer leaders (who generally worked in teams of two) were selected primarily from a pool of volunteers who had training in the original Classic Books program, and most leaders had experience actually leading Classic Books sessions before they participated in further training

designed for the Extended Classic Books program. This training also emphasized student expression of ideas, with additional emphasis on the special needs of at-risk readers (e.g., their need for opportunities to develop reading ability and expand their vocabulary), and their need to have positive literacy experiences.

Thus the main instructional goal of the Extended Classic Books project was to provide additional reading opportunities and opportunities to read and discuss quality children's literature to students at-risk for reading failure. As was the original program, the Extended Classic Books program was extra-curricular and voluntary, with no grades attached. Through the use of trained volunteers as discussion leaders, the project provided supplemental reading support to at-risk students with little added strain on existing school staff.

The research component of the project entailed evaluating the effect of the program on the students who participated. Details of procedures are provided in the description of the second year of the project, which follows; however, a brief account of the first year is also warranted. During the first year, we had taken a quantitative approach and examined the effects of the Extended Classic Books experience on students' reading skills. We assessed students' reading both before and after their participation in the six-week program, using a published informal reading inventory (Woods and Moe, 1989). While we found slight improvements in the students' reading speed and word-reading accuracy after our intervention, the largest gain seemed to come in comprehension of age-appropriate text passages. None of these differences were dramatic, and none reached significance in a statistical analysis. Still, they were encouraging.

But more encouraging, we believed, were the affective changes we noticed in students. Students seemed to adopt a new view of themselves as readers, and many beamed with pride as they left discussion sessions carrying the book for the next week. Participation in the original Classic Books program had become something of a status symbol in the schools — since it was limited only to better readers — and these at-risk students appeared to view the Extended Classic Books program in a similar way.

This change in students' affect was noteworthy. Stanovich (1986) suggests that ability and affect usually conspire against the poor reader. Just as students at-risk for reading failure have little access to quality literature, so they have little opportunity to view themselves as adequate readers. Remedial reading instruction frequently focuses on specific skills such as decoding and oral fluency, which may accentuate the weaknesses of slow achieving readers and conspire against their feelings of even minimal competence. Was their participation in Extended Classic Books providing these students with their first opportunity to discuss a work of literature like a competent reader?

During the second year we attempted to examine the nature of the students' experiences during the literature group discussions. There is evidence that poor readers can come to view themselves as competent communicators about books and that group discussion can play a key role in this transition. Palincsar and Brown (1984) describe an instructional technique that leads to substantial student growth, both in reading skills and in attitudes toward reading. Central to their approach, which is organized around small groups, is the idea that teachers and students take reciprocal roles during discussion, with the teacher modeling how to answer questions as well as how to ask them.

Donato and Lantolf (1991) further emphasize that the language of discussion groups can become an important tool for forging, not just encoding, knowledge. When speech is kept private (that is, within the thoughts of the individual), it serves primarily to regulate the individual's behavior and cognition; however, when speech becomes public during group discussions, it provides opportunities to develop and extend the knowledge of all participants in the discussion (Vygotsky, 1972). In the context of literature groups, the group dialogue could serve as a model for the internal dialogue that good readers have with books, providing poor readers with important insights into the goals, and the benefits, of reading literature.

In light of these studies, we looked closely at the group interactions within the Extended Classic Books program to see how the discussion groups might be contributing to the affective change we saw in students. Because of evidence that students are more likely to participate when discussion topics are negotiated by group members rather than imposed by the teacher (Barnes and Todd, 1977), we were interested in describing the ways students explored and discussed the books they read, as well as the elements of leadership style that may contribute to student exploration of books. We were particularly interested in how leaders responded to students' comments during these discussions. What kind of responses appeared to facilitate student engagement, and what kind, if any, seemed to hinder it?

## **Program procedures**

Forty fourth-grade students from six elementary schools participated in the Extended Classic Books program during the second year. Student selection was based on Metropolitan Achievement Test reading scores of the third stanine and below, together with teacher judgments.

Students who met these criteria were invited to participate, and all students from a given school met as a single group. Sessions involved from four to ten students and lasted approximately 40 minutes. The discussion sessions were scheduled independently by each school, all during the regular school day. Most of the group discussion sessions were audio-taped.

Because the previous year's students had difficulties completing the reading, we made clear to students the importance of finishing the books before discussion, and we were explicit about ways they could do it. In the first two sessions with students, leaders provided students with some strategies for getting the reading done and for discussing literature. Leaders suggested ways that might help students finish the books, even when they had some difficulty (e.g., reading along with a parent or with a verbatim tape that we provided, asking questions of a parent, writing down a key question to bring to discussion group). To encourage students to finish their reading, we developed colorful charts with stickers corresponding to strategies, and students were to note on the chart any strategies they had found helpful with a particular book. In these initial sessions, the groups also read and discussed short poems and leaders modeled for students what it means to discuss literature. The discussion strategy training involved acquainting students with the distinction between questions that call for personal opinion and interpretation — in-your-head questions — and those that seek specific answers found in the book itself — in-the-book questions (Raphael, 1982; 1986). This training was in many ways analogous to the training that discussion leaders experienced. Students were taught to identify questions of both types. They were told that discussions involved mainly in-your-head questions but that

they could ask questions of either type to clarify their understanding.

At the close of the second session, and each session thereafter, students were given a copy of the book to be discussed the following week, together with a verbatim audiotape to help them get through the book if they wanted such help (Chomsky, 1976). Over the next week, students were expected to complete the assigned book. Books were selected from a list of books approved by the district for classroom and library use, and included *Cam Jensen*, *Stone Fox*, *How to Be a Perfect Person in Just Three Days* and *Arthur for the Very First Time*. When the groups met, leaders came prepared with a series of open-ended questions intended to initiate discussion. Leaders were discouraged from viewing their questions as scripts, however, and instead were encouraged to follow student leads whenever possible. Leaders were also asked to direct students' comments to one another, rather than just to the adult leaders.

### **Life within two discussion groups**

As we observed the discussion groups, we intuitively felt that some groups were more successful than others, and we chose to examine two groups more closely — one in which students seemed successfully engaged in the books, the other less so. In order to convey a sense of the different nature of these two groups, we provide some brief excerpts. These excerpts, however, do not constitute a complete analysis, but are intended only to convey a feel for the discussions. The excerpt in Figure 1 came from the less successful group.

In this interchange we see the leader begin with a question regarding strategies for completing the reading, as



well as for generating ideas for discussion (leader question #1). Because we had developed the charts and stickers to help motivate students to finish the books and prepare for discussion, many leaders began in a similar fashion, using the charts to emphasize the point that completing the books facilitates discussion. In this group, however, we see the leader stick too closely to her pre-set agenda. She mistakes the means (strategies for finishing books) for the end (discussion of ideas), to the extent that she avoids discussion when the students initiate it too early. For example, after leader question #3, the students launched into a discussion about the grandfather, a key character in the book *Stone Fox*. Rather than following the students' lead and extending the discussion, the leader effectively squelched it. As she tried to direct students back to their repertoire of strategies for completing their reading, they responded with irritated sarcasm.

### Figure 1

#### *Excerpt Illustrating a directive style*

Leader 1: Okay, we're going to put up all these stickers, what about reading, and jotting down your questions or ideas, as you went. Did you have any thoughts, remember, we had our index card in the book, to, to think up, one idea, M?

S1: I did.

Leader 1: What did you write down?

S1: Oh I didn't write it down. (students laugh)

Leader 1: What was your idea, then?

S1: Well I thought, well I thought he was kind of strange. I mean the, mean the grandpa, was kinda weird, was worried or something?

S2: Or old, or something.

Leader 1: All right, we'll talk more about that later. And, how many of you, did anybody ask for help, if you had trouble.

S3: Nope, I can read, I'm a big boy now. (sarcastic tone of voice)

S4: Yeh, so am I.

S5: I'm a big *girl*. (students laugh)

In contrast, consider the excerpt from the more successful group in Figure 2. In this discussion of *Arthur For The Very First Time*, the leader was consistently responsive to students' choice of topic. Repeatedly, the leader asked questions closely related to issues that students introduced. Student responses to leader questions #1 and #3 moved the discussion to different topics. The leader followed the students' lead, asking provocative questions about the student-suggested topics. This allowed the discussion to develop along a path initiated by students.

### Figure 2

#### *Excerpt Illustrating a responsive style*

Leader 1: Do you think Arthur felt comfortable?

S1: Yeah.

S2: I think he, after, after he'd seen what his aunt and uncle were like, he thought they were really fun, 'cause they come out and, well, when they got there, his mom was scared of the chicken, 'cause the chicken was pecking at her feet.

Leader 1: What was his dad's reaction when they arrived?

S2: Um, well, he wasn't scared of Pauline the chicken, 'cause he knew the chicken.

S3: He knew the chicken wouldn't bite.

S4: He just ignored it.

Leader 1: How do you think he got to know the chicken?

S2: Um, he probably, he probably, he'd probably gone there for awhile, been there for awhile.

S4: Of course, that's his father.

S3: I think, um, right when, right when he got there, when he got to pick his room like.

S5: Oh man, it was real cool, like he got to pick his room, it was probably before like he'd probably moved, or something like that, probably before.

S1: Oh yeah.

S5: Hmm. Bet they probably didn't have a really big house, and he always had to stay in one room.

S3: He got to pick out of a bunch, like nine rooms.

S1: He got the top, where the window was.

Leader 1: What do you think, out of all those rooms, how did his uncle figure out which one he was going to choose?

Through their own initiative, students broached an important issue of the book (the uncle's relationship with the boy), which the leader then capitalized on and began to develop in question #4.

In Figures 1 and 2 we see two different leadership styles in action, and those two styles led to different experiences for the students in the groups. In the first, the leader directs the discussion; in the second, the leader responds to leads from students, who in turn remain engaged and focused on the book. To illustrate how the two styles of leadership cannot comfortably co-exist, we return in Figure 3 to the less successful group somewhat later in their discussion of *Stone Fox*, after a second co-leader had joined the conversation. Leader 1 maintained a directive and Leader 2 a responsive style. Notice how the two leaders differed even in the way they attempted to elicit responses from students: Leader 1 by calling on students by name (in the figure, only an initial letter is given), Leader 2 by more gentle means.

In this interchange, the group was developing an important dialogue and exploring ideas about death, largely under the guidance of Leader 2. At one point, Leader 2 asked Student 3 to expand a response, thereby attempting to enlarge the student's role in the dialogue. Rather than allowing Student 3 time to articulate any underlying reasoning, Leader 1 quickly redirected the conversation to another student. Later, when Leader 2 probed for additional comments on the sensitive topic of death, Leader 1 did not wait for a response and instead interrupted with a command to describe the book's setting. After the extended silence that followed, Leader 1 defined the word *setting*; and when a student attempted a response, she interrupted with a clarification of her direction. By the time a student again tried to respond, the vitality had evaporated from the discussion.

Rather than helping students explore their feelings about the emotionally charged topic of death, Leader 1 redirected the discussion to the sterile terrain of the book's setting.

We should note, however, that Leader 1 did not intend to sabotage the discussion. On the contrary, she seemed genuinely interested in whether the students comprehended the book, and her comments could be viewed as instructional checks for comprehension: asking about students' predictions about the book's end, calling attention to the setting (even defining the term), and giving students more information about the kind of question she asked (e.g., "This could be an in-the-book question or an in-your-head question"). Still, this directive behavior in the midst of the discussion ultimately disrupted it. Leader 1 repeatedly turned grand conversations into inquisitions, despite the best efforts of Leader 2.

Of course, these two styles of leadership — responsive and directive — do not fully describe the nature of leader-student interaction, and leadership style is not the only factor that influences the quality of discussion. Still, there are clear differences in the way that leaders interact with students during literature discussions, and these differences may influence how engaged the students become with the deeper issues of the books. These portraits of discussion groups help us see that realizing the potential of discussion groups is indeed a delicate matter.

The main point we wish to make, however, is that these at-risk students were capable of high-level discussions when properly engaged. We saw considerable evidence of aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt, 1978), in which the reader moves beyond the literal recall of fact and explores the personal interaction between self and text.

**Figure 3*****Excerpt Illustrating Inadvertent sabotage***

Leader 2: How did you feel about the end of the story?

S1: (Whimper)

S2: She didn't like the grandpa dying.

Leader 2: No? The dog dying?

S2: Oh, yeah, the dog dying.

S1: Yeah.

Leader 2: So, H didn't like it that the dog died?

S1: Noo, it was such a good little puppy.

Leader 2: I know, it was hard for me to read that too. K, how did you feel about the end of it?

S2: Fine. I, I had three dogs that died, so it was OK.

S3: I had two.

Leader 2: Did you feel, did you feel happy that Stone Fox left little Willy in the rain? Did you like that OK?

Leader 1: Did the story turn out like you thought it would?

S4: Uh uh.

S5: Uh uh, I didn't, I didn't think the dog would die.

Leader 1: What do you think, M?

S3: I thought the dog would live.

Leader 2: Mmm. What made you think the dog might live?

S3: I don't know. It seemed like it was going to live.

Leader 1: What were you going to say, H?

S1: Uh, the doggie was a good dog, and I mean, if he would have stayed around, Grandpa wouldn't, wouldn't...

S3: Maybe the grandfather was a little bit happier when he stayed alive.

S4: You don't know if the grandfather stayed alive. You don't know if he dies at the end.

S5: He doesn't, because he sat up in bed.

S4: But you don't know if...That really doesn't mean, that he could live. (laughter)

Leader 2: Do you have some thoughts on the story you'd want to share with us? Gee, I thought you were going to say something.

Leader 1: Tell me about the setting of the story. (pause) The setting meaning where, and when, it took place.

S4: Where and when, I like —

Leader 1: Some comments. This could be an in-the-book question or an in-your-head question.

S5: Uh...like the forest, or something, over the mountains.

In their study of literature groups, Eeds and Wells (1989) identified four major categories of student response

that indicate aesthetic reading — constructing meaning, sharing personal stories, inquiring and evaluating — and the discussions we observed were filled with such talk. Through discussion, students were continually helping one another to construct meanings of what happened and why.

For example, in Figure 2, Students 2, 3 and 4 clarify that Arthur's father knew chickens do not bite because, by virtue of the family relationship, he had spent time on the uncle's farm. Even in the less successful group discussion, depicted in Figure 3, we saw students relating their personal stories to the book (e.g., "I had three dogs that died") and inquiring (e.g., actively questioning how one would establish, from the text, whether the grandfather had died). Later in the same session (see Figure 4), these students evaluated *Stone Fox* as "deadly" and requested a book with "more action," even suggesting the book *My Side of the Mountain* (which, interestingly enough, we had included in the first year of the project but abandoned in the second because we thought the language was too difficult for these readers).

#### Figure 4

##### *Excerpt Illustrating a literary conversation*

S1: Could you, um, get a book that's like...

S2: It's deadly.

S1: Yeah, more action in it?

Leader 2: Oh, more action, oh.

S3: *My Side of the Mountain!* *My Side of the Mountain!*

S4: Let's not...

S3: No, it's a good book!

Leader 2: Well, we could look at, uh, suggestions that you have. You want more action, is that what you're telling me?

S1: Yeah!

S4: I want a, I want a book that, uh...

S5: *Skateboard Man*, something...

S4: *Skateboard Man!* (in a disapproving tone)

Such debates over the respective merits of books by at-risk readers (some of whom may never before have *finished* a book), as well as the other indications of their aesthetic reading, represent for us dramatic evidence that these students considered themselves true participants in the world of literature.

## Conclusions

On the basis of our observations, it seems that the Extended Classic Books program successfully provided at-risk students with opportunities to read and discuss quality children's literature. While variability existed in leadership styles and effectiveness, most of the leaders successfully engaged students in the books they read. It is true that engaging these students may require some flexibility on the part of the discussion leader, a willingness to follow student leads, as well as considerable faith that students will eventually focus on meaningful issues. Students did focus on important issues, and their new status as readers of literature engendered affective changes in them. They carried the assigned books with pride, and they argued about the merits of others books that might be included. These at-risk students, for whom motivation is typically such a problem, actually argued about books *they* wanted to read.

This point is worth emphasizing because the issue of motivation is central to effective remediation. Remedial reading instruction too often focuses exclusively on isolated skills training, without integrating those skills into the complete act of reading. Effective instruction will help students read, and help them want to read. It may well be that we can help students improve their reading only when they see that reading opens up worlds that they otherwise could not enter. In this way, perhaps changes in reading skill must be

preceded by changes in reading attitudes. Thus, as we extend the grand conversation to all readers, we may finally begin to close the gap between good and poor readers.

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# **College Students' Reflections on Reading**

**Cindy Gillespie**

Many college students are required to enroll in remedial or developmental classes because it is believed that they are at-risk: their abilities are insufficient for the demands of college work. Once classified as at-risk, these students usually find themselves in reading classes designed to improve comprehension, reading speed, vocabulary, study skills and/or content area reading.

Instructors of such courses generally collect additional data relevant to the students' reading ability or disability through formal or informal testing. While evidence documenting students' academic abilities has been collected rather routinely, data concerning the affective factors defined as emotional activities or feelings, which may be influential in motivating students to read to learn or to read for pleasure, receive little attention.

Correlational research has demonstrated that a definite positive relation does exist between affective factors and achievement although causal relations have not been substantiated (Beane, Lipka and Ludewig, 1980; Byrne, 1984; Kahn and Weiss, 1973; Silvernail, 1985). However, Scheirer and Kraut (1979) suggest empirical evidence exists which does indicate that self-concept enhancement is a significant causal factor in educational achievement.

Reading researchers have also acknowledged the importance of affect on reading achievement. Nieratka and Epstein (1981) sought to develop an instrument which could be used to assess students' perceptions of reading. The most important factor identified by the students was attitude toward reading. Gadzella and Williamson (1984) explored the relations among study skills, self concept and academic achievement. Significant coefficients were found between grade point average and self-concept scores. Walberg and Tsai (1985) found that one of the strongest correlates of reading achievement was attitude towards reading. Marsh and Penn (1986) investigated the relation between self-efficacy and reading achievement and concluded that developmental programs should include attention to students' self perceptions.

Given that attitude and self-concept may influence a student's reading success or failure, it is important and necessary to examine these affective aspects as they relate to college readers. Two studies, similar to the present investigation, were conducted by Nelson (1983, 1989). The 1983 study asked developmental reading students to react to a forced-choice questionnaire concerning memories of experiences related to reading in both elementary and high school. Generally, students had positive recollections about learning to read. The 1989 study asked developmental students to rate their feelings about learning to read and the effects teachers, home and materials had on their reading, to check from among alternatives what they liked least about reading in elementary school and high school, and to list favorite books.

This investigation differs in that an open-ended questionnaire was used to allow students to respond freely to questions designed to examine students' attitudes toward

reading, their self-concepts related to reading, and their recollections of learning to read, both at home and at school.

## Method

**Subjects.** The subjects for this investigation were all students who were enrolled in a semester-long developmental reading course during one academic year at a mid-western university. These students were required to take such a class because their scores on the reading comprehension subtest of the Scholastic Aptitude Test were less than or equal to 29. All 121 incoming freshmen enrolled in developmental reading classes (71 females and 50 males) were surveyed at the beginning of fall semester. An additional 70 students (50 females and 20 males) who enrolled in the same developmental reading class spring semester were also surveyed.

**Materials.** The survey instrument was an adapted version of those suggested by Hoffman (1988) and Nelson (1983). Hoffman's (1988) instrument is an open-ended questionnaire designed to be used for preservice elementary teachers. Nelson's (1983) instrument was a rating scale with 15 items. 1) What is your definition of reading? 2) Do you consider yourself a reader — why or why not? 3) How would you describe your reading ability? 4) How do you read for your college courses? Tell where, when and how you read. 5) How do you read for pleasure? Tell where and when you read. 6) What do you remember about learning to read at home? Include both positive and negative experiences. 7) What do you remember about learning to read in school? Include both positive and negative experiences. 8) What do you remember as your best reading experience prior to entering college? 9) What do you remember as your worst reading experience prior to entering college? 10)

What kind of reading do you do now? (The students were asked to check what they read from among a list which included newspapers, magazines, directions, supermarket tabloids, mail, comic books, fiction, nonfiction, religious materials, and other. If they checked *other*, they were asked to identify what they read.) 11) From what type of reading do you get the most pleasure? 12) What is your favorite type of book? 13) What books have you read recently? 14) How many hours do you normally spend reading for pleasure in a week? 15) How many hours do you normally spend reading for classes in a week?

**Procedure.** Subjects were given the survey instrument prior to any instruction in the developmental reading class. They were asked first to fill out the demographic information (gender and class status). Next, the students were given the survey instrument and asked to respond in writing to the aforementioned questions. No time limits were set. Once the surveys were completed, the data were tabulated (see Appendix).

## Discussion

With respect to students' definitions, over 50 percent of the students believed that reading is 1) a word-by-word or line-by-line procedure, 2) a skill-oriented process, 3) a sounding-out activity, or 4) did not provide a definition of reading. Additionally, of those students who gave comprehension-based definitions, none mentioned interacting with the text or integrating new information with existing knowledge. These students appear to have a rather narrow definition of reading or no definition at all. For students to become skilled readers, they must view reading in a broader sense. Such narrow definitions of reading can and should be expanded through instruction.

Approximately as many students considered themselves readers as nonreaders. Their responses were most often based on whether or not they liked reading rather than relating their answers to their definitions of reading. It appears as though many of the students need to develop a positive attitude toward reading to enable them to become lifelong readers.

The findings related to students' perceptions of their reading ability are in agreement with findings reported by Reed (1989), who suggests that students enrolling in developmental reading courses claim they do not need the courses because they already know how to read sufficiently well to pass college courses. This response may not be as startling as one might guess. If students perceived reading from a skills point of view, then it seems logical for them to believe that they already know about pronouncing words, sound-symbol relationships, reading sentences, and selecting main ideas. Therefore, it becomes vitally important to expand students' definitions of reading through instruction.

Results related to reading for pleasure were encouraging, while results related to reading for classes were somewhat less encouraging. A total of 71 percent of the students said they found time to read for pleasure for several hours over the course of a week. Eighty percent of the students reported reading the assigned class text assigned for class in various traditional locations. That is encouraging; what is less encouraging are the techniques employed while reading. Most students reported using standard practices such as highlighting the text, taking notes, and outlining the material which indicate that students may have a limited knowledge of strategies to employ to learn from a textbook. Additional reading and study strategies could and should be taught to the students.

An interesting conclusion may be drawn from the question related to what the students remembered about learning to read at home. There is no evidence to suggest that students developed either positive or negative attitudes from their reading experiences at home. Although negative attitudes did not develop in most students, it appears as though positive attitudes were not fostered. Negative attitudes were evident from a small percentage of students. The generalization that can be made about the at-risk students' recollections of learning to read at home is that none of the students appeared to have developed strong positive attitudes toward reading. College developmental reading classes must attend to the affective domain, particularly working to foster more positive attitudes toward reading.

By far the most popular response to what students recalled about learning to read in school was reading orally in teacher-selected groups, phonics instruction, and workbook pages. Neither positive nor negative connotations were attached to their responses. Negative responses were, however, reported by over one-third of the students. The conclusion which may be drawn is that positive attitudes toward reading were not developed or nurtured while these students were in school. Through instruction and enthusiastic modeling, students could begin to develop a positive attitude toward reading.

According to over two-thirds of the students the best reading experience prior to entering college was reading novels. Conversely, 72 percent of the students reported the worst reading experiences prior to college were oral reading and book reports. Knowing that students enjoy reading novels but do not like reading aloud or reading for book reports is beneficial to instructors who are developing curricula for college developmental reading classes. A

more efficient and effective use of class time would be to use materials that students enjoy reading, rather than skill-and-drill workbook pages.

## **Implications**

The most significant implication which may be drawn from this investigation and from previous research is that an assessment instrument (reading inventories, student journals, attitude inventories and interest inventories) to evaluate the factors which affect reading should be developed and administered to students. Such assessment may assist instructors in determining whether emotional factors, studying difficulties, reading problems, time management problems or misconceptions about the reading process may be impairing students' progress in reading.

Through instruction students can broaden their views of reading and the reading process as well as develop positive self-concepts toward reading. College reading instructors may choose from a variety of acceptable teaching strategies and techniques to provide this much-needed instruction. One appropriate teaching strategy would be to combine a highly structured, teacher-directed style of instruction with cooperative learning experiences. Combining both types of instruction would allow the students the opportunity to discuss information and ideas with their peers while the teacher provides students with the guidance and instruction as it is needed.

Additional techniques which may be used to improve or address the affective needs of students include discussion, role-playing, cooperative problem-solving, goal setting, teacher modeling, and peer modeling. Corno and Mandinach (1983) and Schunk (1986) suggest that including strategy instruction may help students develop more

positive self-concepts about their academic abilities. Providing students with strategies for reading and studying would appear to be warranted considering the limited number of techniques used by the students in this investigation.

It is time to change the present developmental reading course. Instead of developmental reading classes designed only to improve comprehension, reading speed, vocabulary, study skills and content area reading, such classes should be designed to promote and encourage positive self-concepts as well as positive attitudes toward reading. This can be accomplished by providing students with more interesting assignments and reading materials, reading materials related to career goals, and reading materials related to their required and major courses. In addition, students must be encouraged to read for pleasure. Allowing class time for Sustained Silent Reading using student-selected books could be effective in fostering a more positive attitude toward reading.

The results of this survey can be valuable to those who are teaching or preparing to teach college at-risk students. Evidence from research investigations suggests that there is a relation between self-concept and academic achievement. Therefore, for students to be successful readers they must have a positive affective predisposition toward reading instruction.

Purkey (1970, p. 27) suggests that "although the data do not provide clear-cut evidence about which comes first — a positive self-concept or scholastic success, a negative self-concept or scholastic failure — it does stress a strong reciprocal relationship and gives us reason to assume that enhancing the self-concept is a vital influence in improving academic performance."



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## Appendix

### **Question 1: What is your definition of reading?**

After scanning the definitions provided by the students, their responses seemed to fall into three categories: *skill-related*, *comprehension-based*, and *interactive*. Some of the students told why they read, rather than provided a definition for reading. These responses were placed into a category labeled *purposes for reading*. Approximately 8% of the students gave both a definition of reading and a purpose for reading; only their definitions of reading were recorded. Prior to sorting the definitions into the aforementioned categories, twenty of the responses (10%) were randomly selected and categorized independently by two reading education professors to establish interrater reliability. A .90 proportion of raters' agreement was achieved.

**Skills-Based Definitions.** A total of 44% of the students' responses were classified as skills-based definitions. Definitions which were placed into this category included responses which emphasized phonics and word identification. Additionally, definitions which focused on specific skills such as drawing conclusions and selecting main ideas were included in this category.

**Comprehension-Based Definitions.** A total of 41% of the responses could be classified as comprehension-based definitions. These definitions used the words *comprehending*, *understanding*, and *interpreting*. Responses defining reading as learning were also included in this category.

**Interactive Definitions.** Very few students (5%) wrote responses which could be classified as interactive definitions (a combination of skill-based and comprehension-based views). Responses that simultaneously mentioned decoding and comprehension were categorized as interactive.

**Purposes for Reading.** The remaining students' responses (10%) fell into the category of purposes for reading. Students wrote that reading was something that was done for enjoyment and/or relaxation. In all cases where students' responses were placed into this category, there was no other information provided. These students did not provide a definition for reading; instead, they wrote about why they read.

### **Question 2: Do you consider yourself a reader? Why or why not?**

Overall, over half of the students (58%) considered themselves readers. Believing that the responses to this question were dependent upon the definitions written by each student, the responses were coded with respect to question one. However, an inspection of the data shows that only 36% of the students based their responses to this question on their definitions of reading. The rest of the students answered this question based on whether they liked reading and read (31%) or whether they disliked reading and did not read (33%).

### **Question 3: How would you describe your reading ability?**

One-fourth of the students described their reading ability as excellent, really good, good, or above average, while over half of the students stated

their reading ability was average, OK, or adequate. Only 22% of the students described their reading ability as below average, not very good, poor, low, or slow. A few students (1%) said their reading ability was heavily dependent upon what they were reading.

***Question 4: How would you describe your reading for your college courses?***

A total of 152 students (80%) reported that they read the textbook for their classes and gave complete responses to this question while 39 (20%) said they did not read the assigned text and did not respond further to the question. All 152 students who read the assigned text reported reading for their classes in their dorm rooms and/or in the library. Over half of the students (58%) said they read in the late afternoon or evening. The rest of the students who read the textbook (22%) reported reading in the morning, immediately after or between classes. The most often cited techniques employed while reading included highlighting the text (24%), taking notes (18%), reading slowly to understand the material (13%), outlining the material (10%), reading everything twice (9%), and reading the text and looking up vocabulary (6%).

***Question 5: How would you describe your reading for pleasure?***

Of the students surveyed, 28% said they did not read for pleasure. The rest of the students (72%) reported reading for pleasure. Most of the students (58%) reported reading in their spare time, while the others (14%) reported reading before going to bed. When asked where they read for pleasure, 60% reported reading in their rooms. The rest of the students said they read anywhere.

***Question 6: What do you remember about learning to read at home?***

The most frequent response to this question (35%) was that students said they had no recollection of any reading experiences at home or did not read at home. The second most common response (25%) was that students remembered reading aloud, reading specific books, and/or pronouncing words to parents, siblings, or grandparents. Additionally 8% of the students said they were forced by their parents to read aloud, while 7% of the students reported their parents didn't press the issue of reading at home. One-fifth of the students recalled their parents reading to them.

***Question 7: What do you remember about learning to read at school?***

Students most frequently recalled reading aloud in assigned groups (37%), while 20% of the students remembered sounding out words, phonics instruction, and/or completing workbook pages. There were no negative or positive connotations attached to their responses. Negative responses were, however, reported by an additional 25% of the students. These students recalled being embarrassed because of mistakes they made while reading orally. Moreover, 8% of the students' recollections were of being placed in special reading classes. The remaining 10% of the students recalled being bored with the stories in the textbooks.

**Question 8: What do you remember as your best reading experience prior to entering college?**

Over half of the students (67%) reported that their best reading experiences prior to entering college were reading novels for school and/or for pleasure. One-fourth of the students said that they enjoyed reading specific materials such as plays, religious materials, historical books, and the classics; 7% of the students reported not remembering a best reading experience.

**Question 9: What do you remember as your worst reading experience prior to entering college?**

The most-often reported worst reading experience was reading aloud and mispronouncing words; 44% of the students said they were embarrassed when they read aloud in class. Over one-fourth of the students did not like reading plays, poetry, English literature, books for term papers, or novels as a class, 28% of the students objected to reading for writing book reports, and 3% of the students could not recall their worst experiences.

**Question 10: What are you reading?**

The purpose of the last section of the survey was to find out what college at-risk students were reading. First, they were asked to check the items they read. The most commonly read materials included newspapers (93%), magazines (88%), fiction books (68%) and nonfiction books (55%). The second item asked "From what type of reading do you get the most pleasure?" Ten% said they got the most pleasure from reading magazines, newspapers (3%); fiction (56%); nonfiction (31%). The third item asked about their favorite type of book; 57% reported fiction as their favorite type of books; nonfiction (32%); comedy (eight%); westerns (three%).

Students were also asked to approximate the number of hours they read for pleasure and for classes. Nearly 90% of the students read less than or equal to five hours per week for pleasure; 51% said they read less than or equal to five hours per week for classes. Finally, students were asked to list some books they had read recently. The most frequently mentioned books included the Bible, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Color Purple*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Great Gatsby*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *A Christmas Carol*, *The House of Seven Gables*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *Animal Farm*, *1984*, and *Fahrenheit 451*. Other students reported reading self-help books, but could not recall the titles. A large majority of students also indicated their choice of books was dependent upon the author. The most frequently-read authors included V.C. Andrews, Stephen King, Danielle Steel, Lawrence Sanders, Mary Higgins Clark, Sidney Sheldon, Jackie Collins and Margaret Truman.





# **Metamessages and Problem-Solving Perspectives in Children's Literature**

**Kathleen A. J. Mohr**

Good literature can be a source for examples of problem-solving approaches that expose students to confident and effective conflict resolution strategies. By analyzing literary figures and their problem-solving approaches in a reflective manner, teachers encourage students to apply such techniques in their own complex circumstances. Regarding literature, Stephens (1989, p. 585-586) queried, "Shouldn't the books children read today reinforce the traits they are developing which will help them cope with their adult problems and become healthy, successful adults?"

## **Perspectives in children's literature**

Considering the use of books to promote personal growth and social responsibility, Shannon (1986) classified favorite children's stories as having individualistic, collectivistic, or balanced social perspectives. Shannon determined books in the study were predominantly individualistic in that characters pursue their own personal goals. Shannon characterized collectivism by an all for one and one for all attitude, but did not find this to be the orientation of any of the books studied. One book did evidence a balanced perspective because it promoted self-development in the context of a social conscience. Shannon observed that often "the authors distinguished the main characters

from their social context and had them seek to solve individual problems" (p. 661). Adolescence is often a time of alienation, when children feel alone in the struggle to leave childhood behind and gradually seek acceptance into the adult world. Many children's books present misunderstood youngsters facing conflicts alone. The orientation to conflict resolution in many of these stories is individualistic. Feeling alone with their problems, heroes commonly grapple with reaching a solution by themselves.

**Table 1**  
***Problem-solving perspectives of protagonists in  
 selected Newbery Medal Books, 1965-1990***

Year	Title	Problem-Solving Perspective	
		Individual	Cooperative
1990	<i>Number the Stars</i>		x
1988	<i>Lincoln: A Photobiography</i>		x
1987	<i>The Whipping Boy</i>	x.....	
1986	<i>Sarah, Plain and Tall</i>		x
1984	<i>Dear Mr. Henshaw</i>		x
1983	<i>Dacey's Song</i>		x
1981	<i>Jacob I Have Loved</i>	x	
1980	<i>A Gathering of Days</i>		x
1978	<i>Bridge to Terebithia</i>	x.....	
1977	<i>Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry</i>		x
1975	<i>M.C. Higgins, The Great</i>	x.....	
1974	<i>The Slave Dancer</i>	x.....	
1973	<i>Julie of the Wolves</i>	x	
1972	<i>Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH</i>		x
1971	<i>The Summer of the Swans</i>	x.....	
1970	<i>Sounder</i>	x.....	
1968	<i>From the Mixed-up Files of Basil E. Frankweiler</i>		x
1967	<i>Up a Road Slowly</i>	x	
1966	<i>I, Juan de Pareja</i>	x.....	
1965	<i>Shadow of a Bull</i>	x.....	
	Totals	11	9

... Shows changes in perspective

A recent study focusing on problem-solving perspectives of protagonists in Newbery Medal books of the last 25

years observed a different metamessage (Mohr, 1991). The study consisted of categorization of conflicts and analysis of problem-solving perspectives of protagonists in selected Newbery winners. Main characters in nearly half of these stories manifest a cooperative perspective toward their conflicts (Mohr, p. 33). Of the remaining 55 percent, characters in eight of the stories initially hold an individualistic perspective but alter their approach by the story's end. The main characters learn to cooperate with others or receive help from others in seeking resolution to conflicts. As shown in Table 1, only three of the 20 books present a protagonist in conflict who remains a strongly individualistic problem-solving perspective. The metamessage to readers is that "It's okay to seek help." Several books show cooperation and support primarily between two characters. These protagonists discover that by sharing their struggles, they achieve resolution and friendship. Although learning to work together to solve problems can at first be distasteful, willing and unwilling participants gradually realize the value of working with others and gain strength, camaraderie, and direction in the process.

### **Cooperative problem solving**

Conflicts include choices. One choice a person in conflict can make is whether to seek help from others. Many children are growing up in our culture feeling alone and misunderstood. They can be discouraged from seeking the help of significant adults in their lives. Heins (1986) asserts that recent adolescent literature has vividly presented this aspect of the generation gap (pp. 333-334). The role of adults is often central to conflicts of children's literature, but adults are often depicted as the source of conflict rather than facilitators in resolution. Other studies (Egoff, 1981; Millett, 1979) confirm that the role of adults in contemporary children's literature is less friend than foe. Some parents in

stories studied appear to love passively but do not really understand the struggles of their children nor take an active role in resolving conflicts. Without help, youngsters can be crippled by conflicts. Fear often causes doubt and in such circumstances, children need reassurance. Are children expected merely to adapt? How many adults can individually resolve their own conflicts successfully, much less children? Rather than assume young people will find direction, successfully overcoming their problems, parents and adults can help. Teachers, too, can facilitate the use of better problem-solving heuristics. Careful use of books in classroom discussion should communicate the message implicitly or explicitly that one need not seek resolution alone.

Adult problem-solving behaviors observed in award-winning literature include helping to recognize and define the problem, providing some perspective to the problem, assisting the prioritizing of responses to the problem, and facilitating the problem-solving processes involved in conflict resolution. Realistic conflicts commonly involve sacrifices, compromises, and loose ends. Adults (in life and in books) can model maintaining a proper perspective in such circumstances. Despite necessary sacrifices, children should be encouraged to effect at least a temporary, or at times an imperfect resolution. In addition, adults can and need to help children recognize that some problems are too big — that they are in a sense unresolvable. In Voigt's (1982) *Dacey's Song*, Dacey's acknowledgement of a certain helplessness is more palatable due to Gram's supportive and cooperative concern. Gram helps Dacey to realize that in some instances, mere recognition of a problem is a major step in reconciliation and that resolution is sometimes beyond one's reach. As Bloss' (1979) character, Catherine (*A Gathering of Days*), summarizes, "this year, more than the others has been a lengthy gathering of days wherein we



lived, we loved, were moved, learned to accept" (p. 140). Learning when to accept and when to act are choices that adults can facilitate.

## **Instructional opportunities**

In several Newbery Medal stories, protagonists seem to get lost in their troubles and do not know how to find their way out. By sharing their worries, characters are shown to learn that bewilderment is common in the teenage years. Alienation and confusion, although common, can be ameliorated when others help in the growing-up process. Emotional responses can be replaced with more mature responses. Teachers often hope that student readers will be able to identify with the emotions of the main characters. Do teachers also use books that communicate the value of reaching-out behaviors in dealing with emotional situations? Ideally, young people can observe adults in successful problem-solving situations. But books can also provide varied conflicts and problem-solving responses available for vicarious analysis. Teachers can play a part in this process. Shannon contends that "part of a teacher's task is to help children perceive what books are saying both directly and indirectly" (p. 656). Classroom literature-based programs should include analysis of the consequences of seeking resolution alone or with the help of others. Focusing on books whose adolescent protagonists reform their problem-solving perspectives from individualistic to cooperative can encourage the benefits of a social perspective.

Although adolescents in this culture tend to seek independence, books can demonstrate that some problems are large enough and important enough to solicit help in resolving. As Gram relates to Dicey (*Dicey's Song*), "You have to reach out to people. To your family too. If they slap it back, well you reach out again if you care enough" (p. 128).

Although an individualistic approach may be typical, providing students with a range of approaches serves to expand their problem-solving options. In today's complex, global community, adolescents must be encouraged to leave the egocentrism of childhood behind and approach problems in a cooperative manner. Paradigms presented in literature demonstrate the needs for and crucial elements of socio-centric problem-solving to children who may well have to employ cooperative strategies to solve far-reaching social concerns in their futures. Classroom analysis of good children's literature can facilitate effective problem-solving skills of future citizens. To consider the metamessage of cooperation as well as the individualistic perspective in such analyses would be well worth the time and effort. There are award-winning books that speak to the consequences of both individualistic and cooperative problem solving. Teachers must give heed to both voices.

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# **A Revitalized Role for Library Media Specialists in School Reading Programs**

**Mary L. Piersma  
Diane D. Allen**

*At 8:00 a.m., while children are arriving at school, Mrs. Beasley, the elementary school library media specialist, is busy shelving the books returned yesterday. She has new books to catalog, newspaper and magazines to display and audio visual equipment to distribute to teachers. Before she completes any of this, her first group of children arrives for their regularly scheduled 30 minutes library visit. Mrs. Beasley attempts to help a few children in their selection of appropriate books, but finds that she spends most of her time checking books in and out. To Mrs. Beasley's dismay, there is little time to share her love of books and reading with the children who visit her at the library. As this class leaves, another group of children arrives at the library, and the same scenario continues throughout the day.*

Mrs. Beasley's day is typical of most public school library media specialists. Even library media specialists at the secondary level report that much of their time is devoted to administrative tasks in the library/media center comparable to those described for Mrs. Beasley (Edwards, 1989). Secondary students sometimes are restricted to specific time periods for library use similar to the short library times for elementary students. Unfortunately, such views of a library media specialist's role prevent the library media specialist from assuming a major role in the promotion of schoolwide literacy.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress reported (1985) that while 99 percent of seventeen year olds had basic reading skills, only 39 percent of them could perform higher level reading skills. Only five percent of this group could perform such critical skills as the synthesis of information from a reading source. In order to build a nation of readers (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott and Wilkiinson, 1985) who have the skills to function in the real world, schools must instill in children a love of reading. This can only be accomplished when the responsibility for reading development is shared by all school professionals.

For years the classroom teacher has been solely responsible for reading instruction. Today the classroom teacher is only one part of the educational team who are all concerned about the development of reading strategies. Among those who should be instrumental and play a key role in the total reading program are the school library media specialists (Montgomery, 1987). However, the research literature does not indicate that library media specialists play such a vital role in the reading programs of today's schools (Baldrige and Broadway, 1987; Edwards, 1989). The research literature does suggest that working with teachers to plan curricula and instruction is an appropriate role for today's library media specialists. Rebecca Bingham (1989) reminds us that the library media specialist "is the only professional... who is in day-to-day contact with every teacher and administrator and who teaches each pupil every year that the pupil is in the school" (p. 87).

With the renewed emphasis on reading today, the role of library media specialists becomes more important. They may serve as a major resource for the reading program, provide actual instruction in reading strategies and/or foster

recreational reading. When investigating the importance of a professionally staffed library, Baldrige and Broadway (1987) determined that when library media specialists become actively involved in the instructional process, children make significant gains. Among the gains they reported were overall improvement in oral language for language deficient first graders and improvement in research and critical thinking skills required in content area subjects.

### **The study**

With this in mind, a study was designed to examine the role of school media specialists (elementary and secondary) in a southeastern state. A survey was conducted specifically to determine the role of library media specialists in 1) promoting reading growth; 2) assisting classroom teachers; 3) teaching reading skills and strategies. The specific questions addressed in the study included: 1) in what way(s) does the library media specialist contribute to the total reading program within the school; 2) in what way(s) would the library media specialist like to contribute to the total reading program within the school; and 3) what academic preparation do library media specialists have in the area of reading?

A total of 1257 surveys were sent to all public school library media specialists in one state. Of these surveys, 43 percent (546) were returned by the library media specialists. Respondents were asked questions regarding their roles in the reading program. For example, the library media specialists were asked the types of reading skills they taught; the frequency of instruction; and in what other ways they promoted literacy development in their students. Demographic information was also requested, allowing comparisons between urban and rural schools and between various sizes of schools.

## Results

The results presented in this paper represent conclusions based on 535 surveys from the library media specialists. Of the 535 library media specialist surveys analyzed for this paper, 251 were received from elementary schools (K-6); 103 from middle and junior high schools (7-8); 181 from high schools (9-12). Schools surveyed represented student populations of 100-1000 with the majority of all responses indicating student populations of 400-500 students. Of the library media specialists responding, 458 had full time positions. Thirty-five even reported having two full time library positions at their schools. Library media specialists also indicated some use of part time library media specialists and volunteers or paid aides. Student aides were utilized in about 50 percent of the libraries of library media specialists surveyed. Forty-two schools had no full time library media specialist.

Academic preparation of library media specialists in the area of reading was encouraging. All but a small percent had at least one course in reading methods, as Table 1 indicates. Library media specialists in this study are as well prepared in reading as many elementary classroom teachers in this particular state. Research indicates that this is true of library media specialists across the country. Lynn Myers (1990) observed that library media specialists have in depth knowledge of children's literature and an awareness of the elementary school curriculum.

## Real vs. ideal

The main focus of this paper is to compare the actual and ideal responsibilities of school library media specialists with special emphasis on those activities related to reading. An average percent of time spent in each activity was

calculated to determine how library media specialists actually spend their time and how they would ideally spend their time.

**Table 1**  
***Academic Preparation of Library Media Specialists***

<b><i>Courses</i></b>	<b><i>Librarians (N=535)</i></b>
Children's literature	94.01%
Elementary reading methods	61.68%
Secondary reading methods	33.08%
Diagnosis of reading difficulties	28.22%
Content area reading methods	48.97%
None	0.01%
Other courses	31.40%

The first comparisons between real and ideal responsibilities were calculated across levels (K-12) for all respondents. These comparisons of the library media specialists' perceptions of their actual and ideal responsibilities directly related to reading (Table 2) revealed the following. 1) Library media specialists would like to be more involved in planning with teachers for the coordination of reading programs; for the use of content area resources; and for the selection of basal reading materials. 2) Library media specialists indicated a need to devote more time to the promotion of recreational reading. 3) Library media specialists also thought more time should be spent reading to children. 4) Library media specialists want to spend less time checking books in and out and managing audio visual equipment. 5) Library media specialists expressed a desire to devote more time to the young readers' choice awards in the state.

The first set of comparisons of real versus ideal were analyzed for all respondents. We also wanted to know if there were differences in perceptions for elementary library

media specialists and for those at the secondary level. So, for the second group of comparisons, respondents were divided into groups according to the grade level of student(s) with which they worked.

In this analysis comparisons were made among library media specialists for grade levels K-6, 7-8, and 9-12 (refer to Tables 3, 4 and 5 for specific comparisons). As in the previous comparisons across levels, library media specialists who responded to this survey, even when grouped only with others at specific levels, expressed significant differences between their perceptions of their actual roles and what they would like to accomplish in tasks related to reading. These comparisons revealed that regardless of level, library media specialists would like to spend more time with the following activities.

**Table 2**  
*Comparisons of Real and Ideal Responsibilities*  
*Grades K-12*

<b>Activities</b>	<b>% of time (N=535)</b>	
	<b>Real</b>	<b>Ideal</b>
1. Reads to students	23.5	30.1*
2. Plans with teachers for the coordination of reading programs	17.3	34.0*
3. Plans with teachers for use of content area resources	22.9	36.4*
4. Assists in evaluation and selection of basal reading materials	12.2	24.9*
5. Motivates and encourages recreational reading	41.0	48.6*
6. Participates in state young readers' choice award	7.9	23.2*
7. Instructs children in reading related skills	50.2	60.0

\*significant differences  $p < 0.001$

**Increased reading time.** All library media specialists would increase time devoted to reading to students. For



the researchers, this was an unexpected finding at the secondary level. Elementary library media specialists indicated that they already spend a large proportion of time reading to children but would like to increase this amount. Secondary library media specialists recognize that little of their time is spent sharing the reading of books with their students, but they would also like to increase this amount of time.

**Planning time.** All levels of library media specialists would augment time spent planning with teachers for the use of library and media materials in reading programs and across the curriculum. All levels indicated that about one-third of their time should be devoted to working directly with classroom teachers in the planning of instruction.

**Recreational reading.** The majority of respondents to this survey indicated they were spending large portions of time supporting the recreational reading of students. Across all levels, however, there was indicated a need to increase this involvement.

The only item in which there was not consistent significant differences between real and ideal roles was in the area of instruction of specific reading skills. For library media specialists at K-6 and 7-8 (see Tables 3 and 4) there was not a significant difference between the amount of time actually spent on reading instruction and the amount of time that library media specialists felt they should ideally spend on instruction. The amount of time they were presently spending in the instruction of specific reading skills was viewed as appropriate. However, library media specialists at the 9-12 (see Table 5) level wanted to spend more reading instructional time with students than they reported spending at the time of the survey.

**Table 3**  
*Comparisons of Real and Ideal Responses*  
*Grades K-6*

<b>Activities</b>	<b>% of time (N=251)</b>	
	<b>Real</b>	<b>Ideal</b>
1. Reads to students	35.3	40.6*
2. Plans with teachers for the coordination of reading programs	16.2	33.9*
3. Plans with teachers for use of content area resources	20.1	35.0*
4. Assists in evaluation and selection of basal reading materials	9.8	23.1*
5. Motivates and encourages recreational reading	44.9	50.1*
6. Participates in state young readers' choice award	46.7	45.0*
7. Instructs children in reading related skills	43.9	45.0*

\*significant differences  $p. < 0.001$

Results of the study suggest that library media specialists not only want to be more involved in school reading programs; they have the training to be a valuable asset in the planning, evaluation and support of reading and language arts curricula. Our research indicated that the library media specialists have more background in basic reading courses and literature selection than many classroom teachers. They also have the knowledge of new literature and audio visual materials available for use in the classroom. Moreover, they see the need to become part of a total reading instructional team.

### **Needed changes**

If the school library media specialist is to assume a legitimate role in the promotion of reading as suggested by this research and the American Association of School

Librarians, the American Library Association and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (1988) and other research (Jay, 1986), several changes need to occur.

**Table 4**  
*Comparisons of Real and Ideal Responses*  
*Grades 7-8*

<i>Activities</i>	<i>% of time (N=103)</i>	
	<i>Real</i>	<i>Ideal</i>
1. Reads to students	20.2	26.2*
2. Plans with teachers for the coordination of reading programs	20.6	37.7*
3. Plans with teachers for use of content area resources	24.7	39.3*
4. Assists in evaluation and selection of basal reading materials	10.8	27.1*
5. Motivates and encourages recreational reading	45.1	52.2*
6. Participates in state young readers' choice award	8.3	25.3*
7. Instructs children in reading related skills	43.9	45.3

\*significant differences  $p. < 0.001$

**Administrators.** Library media specialists must first enlist the support of administrators. Library media specialists should initiate communication with the building principal and with other central office administrators. Notifying the administration of the fundamental and supplemental services offered by the library should be a regular responsibility of the library media specialist. Administrators could be invited to directly participate in library activities such as reading to children or providing book talks. Additionally, library media specialists should not only document the needs of the library center but also provide suggestions for alternative solutions to meet these needs.

**Table 5**  
***Comparisons of Real and Ideal Responses***  
***Grades 9-12***

<b>Activities</b>	<b>% of time (N=181)</b>	
	<b><i>Real</i></b>	<b><i>Ideal</i></b>
1. Reads to students	9.1	17.8*
2. Plans with teachers for the coordination of reading programs	17.0	32.3*
3. Plans with teachers for use of content area resources	25.7	36.7*
4. Assists in evaluation and selection of basal reading materials	16.2	26.2*
5. Motivates and encourages recreational reading	33.3	44.4*
6. Participates in state young readers' choice award	3.3	21.3*
7. Instructs children in reading related skills	33.0	40.0*

\*significant differences  $p. < 0.001$

**Teachers and students.** Karlene Edwards (1989) suggests teacher and student perceptions of the library media specialists' role need to be expanded. First, lines of communication between teachers and library media specialists need to be strengthened. Library media specialists need to familiarize themselves with curriculum materials in the school to more easily integrate library resources with curriculum materials and to share their expertise with classroom teachers. Monthly newsletters could be used to notify teachers of new materials available and to highlight materials relevant to units of instruction being planned. At the beginning of the school year the library media specialist should survey teachers in the school to determine planned topics and their needs for time and services. To expand the image of the library media specialists' role from the perspective of children several suggestions are appropriate. Children's access to the library must be reevaluated to

provide more opportunities to use the library for research or recreational reading. Flexible scheduling is one alternative currently used by some school districts (Houff, 1990; Hughes, 1990). Additionally, the library media specialist might investigate the possibility of opening the library at non-traditional times — one evening a week, before and after school or during the weekend. Secondly, children need to view the library media specialist as part of the larger faculty. To accomplish this goal, library media specialists need to move away from the confines of the library media center and participate in classroom and school activities. This might be accomplished by giving book talks in the classroom or by assisting students in initial stages of research, such as brainstorming and defining research questions before they go to the library.

**Library aides.** Finally, resources should be sought to provide aides to assist the library media specialist in clerical duties. Suggested resources are parent/teacher organizations, local businesses, senior citizen groups, and volunteers from students within the school system. If schools are to continue to move toward a more holistic view of education, it is important that the library media specialist's ideal perception becomes a reality and the library media specialist becomes a partner in the instructional process. If this happens, Mrs. Beasley's day would be quite different.

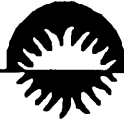
*At 8:00 a.m., as the children are arriving at school, Mrs. Beasley is in the hall. She greets the children and occasionally stops a child to tell him/her about a book that has just arrived in the library. Children, too, are eager to tell Mrs. Beasley about books they have completed. When Mrs. Beasley returns to the library, volunteers are busy reshelving books. Mrs. Beasley begins to set up a display of books about space exploration. The display includes not only books by well-known authors but also books written by children in the school. This display is just one of the exciting things she has planned for the week. Other activities planned for the children*

include: 1) giving book talks to third and fifth graders; 2) reading books about space to all children who visit the library; 3) having a tasting fair for second grade; 4) helping plan a puppet show for kindergarten and first grade; 5) showing a film to fourth grade; 6) assisting children as they come to the library to work on individual reports and projects. She has begun a monthly newsletter to inform teachers about new arrivals that would enrich the reading program. She has also scheduled time each week to assist teachers in locating resources for their upcoming units. She and the teachers are making plans for an exciting school-wide literature festival as a culmination.

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# **Teaching the Whole Enchilada: Enhancing Multiculturalism Through Children's Literature in the Content Areas**

**Nicole Flood  
Brenda Hamm  
Tina Herrington  
Christine Turk**

Historically, educators disagree on curriculum goals and as a result the educational process is fragmented. This fragmentation is evident in standards that differ from state to state, district to district, and teacher expectations at kindergarten to teacher expectations at high school. In the report, *A Nation At Risk* (Gardner, 1983), the National Commission on Excellence in Education found that "where there should be a coherent continuum of learning, we have none, but instead an often incoherent outdated, patchwork quilt" (p. 14). This fragmented approach is almost impossible to change. In *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*, TheodoreSizer (1984) states that "a curriculum represented by six or seven autonomous subjects quickly freezes hard..." (pp. 216-217).

## **Theme units and theme cycles**

Use of thematic units is one method of defrosting the boundaries between subjects and incorporating teaching the child using individual learning styles. Thematic units

allow the teacher to develop a theme around an activity, resources or central topic and integrate the theme into the content areas. In addition, the theme cycle allows students to determine the topics and to drive the curriculum. The teacher must decide how the thematic unit is to be best used and then choose between a teacher-directed theme unit or student-directed theme cycle. When creating thematic units and cycles, there are several major considerations. One is Routman's (1991) warning to avoid trivialization of a thematic unit:

*A thematic unit is an integrated unit only when the topic or theme is meaningful, relevant to the curriculum and student lives, consistent with whole language principles and authentic in the interrelationship of the language processes (p. 278).*

Another consideration is presented by Kaplan (1990): thematic units are successful when teachers and students see a purpose to their reading. In addition, thematic units have brought innovative teaching strategies into the classroom. French and Danielson (1991) suggest that organizing classroom instruction according to thematic units offers a rich environment for developing early literacy skills. Activities suggested for different content areas throughout this article are based on Carmen Lomas Garza's book, *Family Pictures*.

### **Health**

- While studying nutrition, look into the differences between American food groups and Mexican food groups.

- While studying health care providers, look into folk healers in Mexico and how the healer's remedies play a large role in Mexico.

- Research and look into the folk tale of "mal de ojo" and some of the other illnesses people can place on you.



## Integration of curriculum

The term integration refers to the implementation of language arts across the curriculum (Routman, 1991). Through this process reading, writing, speaking and listening are all used together as teaching tools to enhance learning. Routman believes "literature is the best vehicle to achieve integration of language arts" (p. 277).

Through the use of children's literature and the integration of content, the student can be addressed through all subjects. While integrating content area literature, many curriculum areas can be and should be covered at one time. Narrative literature makes comprehension easier because it is written in a form to which students can relate. Regardless of what some teachers believe, all subjects relate and should not be taken apart; therefore, all teachers share a responsibility for developing reading skills. Literature enhances and promotes comprehension of all subject matters. In working with the curriculum process our goal is to "dissolve the boundaries" (Drake, 1991, p. 20) so subject areas come together naturally with integration.

### Math

- Graph the number of words it takes to say the same thing in Spanish as English.
- Predict how many swings it will take to break a piñata. Record the data. Now, actually count how many swings it took and compare the data to find the difference.
- Measure the ingredients needed to make tamales. Compare the fractions.

## Creating thematic units

When creating a thematic unit to integrate subject areas, there are two approaches. According to Pappas,

Kiefer, and Levstik (1990) the traditional approach involves the following steps: 1) choosing a theme; 2) completing a web; 3) selecting resources; 4) planning activities; 5) organizing the classroom; and 6) implementing the unit.

In the second approach, the focus shifts from the theme to activities developed from the available resources, while still incorporating a theme integrating the subject areas. This approach is one which teachers typically use when developing lesson plans. The steps in this second approach are as follows: 1) selecting resources, including printed materials, manipulatives, and community resources; 2) choosing a theme relating to the resources; 3) completing a web and integrating the subject areas; 4) planning activities and matching them to the appropriate objectives; 5) organizing the classroom; and 6) implementing the unit.

### **Science**

- Plant some of the plants that are native to Mexico and grow well in the area.
- Discuss the plants that are fruit bearing and those that are not.
- Discuss plants that can live with very little water and why that is important in some parts of Mexico.
- Research the animals that are used for food in Mexico.

### **The whole enchilada**

With the current emphasis on multicultural education, we used the second strategy to create a thematic unit on Hispanics. We first selected the children's book entitled *Family Pictures* by Carmen Lomas Garza (1990). Through illustrations and a bilingual explanation, the author describes her childhood in Kingsville, Texas. Additional literature is available to teach other thematic units on Afro-

Americans, Asians and a variety of other cultures. With *Family Pictures* as our primary resource, we chose Mexican-Americans as our topic.

### **Art and Physical Education**

- Make a pinata out of papier mache. Report the history of the pinata.
- Make a sombrero.
- Prepare a maraca out of beans and a coffee can.
- Prepare a song and dance to go with it.
- Prepare a cake walk and discuss the physical activity that goes with it.
- Research some of the sports native to Mexico and analyze physical attributes of each. Play some of the games.
- Perform a Mexican folk dance.

The activities we have chosen provide integration across the curriculum using resources which are readily available. No time constraints can be placed on the theme. Each group will need different amounts of time, depending on your individual students and involvement.

### **Language Arts**

- Study the Spanish language. Note differences in placement of nouns and verbs. Use a Spanish-English dictionary to translate.
- Correspond with a letter to a pen pal from Mexico.
- Write a comparison/contrast theme.
- Write a response letter to the author of the book.
- Learn some of the basic words in Spanish and learn to spell them. Examples: hola, gracias, etc.

The activities in this article are only a few of the possibilities you have for integrating. As you can see, the subject areas overlap with each other in many activities. This is important to schools that departmentalize. All teachers will plan and integrate instead of not knowing what the other is doing or working on. When a thematic approach is integrated throughout the curriculum, teachers plan cooperatively rather than working in isolation. These activities enable students to compare and contrast two cultures, develop an appreciation for other cultures, and cultural activities.

### **Social Studies**

- Research the culture of the people of Mexico. This can be done by going to a library or visiting with people who are natives of Mexico.
- Study and celebrate the holidays of Mexico. Prepare costumes to really get involved.
- Use a map to locate Mexico and compare it's size to others. While looking at the location discuss any weather hazards.
- Set up an assembly line for preparing tamales using division of labor.

### **The last bite**

The use of thematic units can eliminate the boundaries between subjects and provide opportunities for children to learn in a variety of ways. Through the use of children's literature and the integration of content areas, teachers may work as an integrated team in teaching.

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*Reading Horizons* seeks to publish descriptions of practice and research supporting the development of literacy through multicultural education. Prospective contributors should follow guidelines for submission of manuscripts, given on the inner front cover of this issue.





# READING: THE CONFERENCES

**Janet Dynak**  
**College of Education**

*A Celebration of Diversity*  
Association of Teacher Educators  
Los Angeles California — February 1993

"A Celebration of Diversity" was the theme of the Association of Teacher Educators' meeting in Los Angeles during February, 1993. Several thematic sessions presented instructional models to promote use of multicultural literature in classrooms. Kay Moore of California State University and John Smith of Utah State University discussed a joint project titled "Teachers as Readers of Multicultural Literature." Moore and Smith used guidelines established by the International Reading Association and the Association of American Publishers to organize a program where university faculty, student teachers, and supervising classroom teachers form a readers' book group to study multicultural literature. Volunteers from each university have established their own readers' book groups, on the basis of collaboratively developed goals.

The program has five goals. The primary purpose is to promote awareness of multicultural children's literature. Additional purposes are to develop and share strategies for teaching with multicultural children's literature; to promote collegiality among teacher education faculty, student teachers and cooperating teachers; to view multicultural

children's literature through each group member's eyes; and to demonstrate to participants that reading of multicultural children's literature can become a part of their lives.

This is the structure that planners have found useful. Meetings are scheduled one semester at a time, and are held in a centrally located comfortable setting approximately every two weeks, with each meeting focused on one or more books which have been read in preparation for the meeting. A volunteer begins the discussion with a brief summary of the book and a personal thought about the multicultural issues which are raised. Discussion revolves around participants' sharing of personal responses, connections and questions about the multicultural issues in the book, and reaction to other participants' comments. In conclusion, participants share ideas on how to use the book in the classroom. Throughout the semester, participants are encouraged to keep reading response journals and it is useful to have participants write a brief project evaluation after the semester's last session.

Using evaluation received from past participants, Moore and Smith suggest that structure of the sessions should provide a time for socialization and refreshments, book and activity sharing, and a selection of a book or books for the next session.

*Information about this project may be obtained from:*

- Gerald Casey, Field Services Coordinator, International Reading Association, PO Box 8139, Newark DE 19714-8139.
- Kay Moore, California State University, Sacramento School of Education, 6000 J Street, Sacramento CA 95819-6079.
- John A. Smith, Utah State University, Department of Elementary Education, Logan UT 84322-2805.



# Reviews

## Children's Books

### Two books for the middle grades

Reviewed by Sandy VanStee  
Northern Hills Middle School

***Backfield Package.*** Written by Thomas J. Dygard. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11471-7. 1992. 202 pp. US\$14.00.

In Thomas Dygard's newest book, four high school football players have the potential to take their football team to their first conference championship. Joe, Lew, Tracy and Coley are referred to as the "Backfield Package" and at the height of their success, they agree to keep the backfield intact by going to the same college. The only school offering them football scholarships is small Ryder State College, but they all agree to stay together despite opposition from several of their parents.

Joe Mitchell, the quarterback and main character, is an exceptional player and he finds out that Randolph University is interested in offering him a scholarship to attend their prestigious school. Joe seems to be unaware of his talent until a sportswriter praises his ability and gives him sole credit for the Cardinals' success. Joe's parents subtly try to suggest that he keep his options open, but he believes he needs to remain loyal to his friends.

Dygard has included lots of playing action in this book to satisfy the sports fan, but he has also created a dilemma with no easy solution. Even though Joe wants to remain loyal to his friends, he faces a difficult decision. What is in his own best interest? Many young adults will be able to identify with the tough choices that must be made when leaving high school and entering a new lifestage — often without those friends who were so important.



***The Witch of Maple Park.*** Written by Stephanie Tolan. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 010019. ISBN: 0-688-10581-5. 1992. 154 pp. US\$14.00.

Casey Corrigan's best friend is Mackenzie Brewster. Mackenzie is a true individual and is into psychic powers, meditation and a few other New Age ideas. Mackenzie lives with her mother, a struggling caterer, who must find a way to make a living when Mackenzie's father leaves them. Mackenzie babysits to make money and one day while in the park with her charge, Barnaby, she and Casey see a strange looking woman who seems to watch little Barnaby, and who Mackenzie claims is a witch. Casey, the level-headed one, doesn't believe in witches and does some research at the library to prove that the strange lady is just strange — not a witch. Her research, however, only proves that Mackenzie is right and the girls try hard to protect Barnaby, at the same time that they are helping to save Mrs. Brewster's failing business. However, when Barnaby disappears they know the witch must have him. This is a delightful story that will keep middle school readers laughing and in suspense at the same time. The characters have lots of personality and the plot moves quickly.

***Timmy Green's Blue Lake.*** Written by Donna Bergman. Illustrated by Ib Ohlsson. Tambourine Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN 0-688-10747-8. 1992. Hardcover, 32 pp. US\$14.00.

Reviewed by Jeanette Jefson  
Western Michigan University

What is there to do on a summer's day when all your friends are away on vacation? Timmy Green solves this dilemma when he finds an old blue tarpaulin and lets his imagination change it into his own private lake. Adventures on his lake are suddenly interrupted when his friend Sherry Lou returns. Her misadventures with the blue tarp force Timmy to create new ideas, filling his summer days with hours of fun and enjoyment. This fanciful story of a young boy's adventures is enhanced by Ib Ohlsson's colorful, playful illustrations, which capture the carefree spirit of the main character. "It's a funny story with great pictures and Timmy has a real sense of humor," comments a nine year old after reading this story. *Timmy Green's Blue Lake* shows children that a little imagination can change an ordinary situation into an exciting adventure.

## **Popping out of a hat... Bunnacula!**

***Rabbit-Cadabra!*** Written by James Howe. Illustrated by Alan Daniel. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-10402-9. 1993. 48 pp. US\$15.00.

Everybody's favorite vampire-bunny is back, and The Amazing Karlovsky has come to town. How can it be that sheltered little Bunnacula, who rarely leaves his cage except at midnight (after which all the carrots are drained white), is pictured — complete with flaming red eyes — on Karlovsky's posters? Chester the cat investigates, and the usual hilarious chaos ensues. As an added feature, there are directions for the pull-the-rabbit-out-of-a-hat trick, provided with punch-out props. Applause! Applause! (JMJ)

## **Replete with revelry**

***Aster Aardvark's Alphabet Adventures.*** Written by Steven Kellogg. Mulberry Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11571-3. 1993. 40 pp. US\$3.95.

Who can doubt that fluency, elaboration and originality are characteristic of the creative artist after even a glimpse at Steven Kellogg's work? On the front cover, parachuting pigs playfully plaster the alphabet across the sky, and within, hotdog it happily as they helicopter upside down, handing out the Alphabet Award. Spring may be late this year, and skies gray, but cheerfulness erupts here with every turn of the page. Rush out, rampage through the mall, root out this wonderful book and relish the rambunctious relaxation. (JMJ)

## **Folktale**

***Two of Everything.*** Retold and illustrated by Lily Toy Hong. Albert Whitman & Company, 6340 Oakton Street, Morton Grove IL 60053-2723. ISBN: 0-8075-8157-7. 1993. US\$14.95.

*Once long ago, in a humble little hut, lived Mr. Haktak and his wife, Mrs. Haktak. They were old and very poor.* The story of the elderly impoverished couple, amiable and hard-working, rewarded with a marvelous container that fills itself, is common to many cultures. Here the miraculous pot, when one thing is placed in it, magically produces its double. But how will the Haktaks get sweet cakes, when they have none to put into the pot? Clever Mrs. Haktak solves the problem — but what happens when she falls into the pot herself? Hong's retelling, with her charming illustrations, creates a double delight. (JMJ)



## Water, water all around

**Water.** Written by Francois Michel. Illustrated by Yves Larvor. Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11427-X. 1993. 10 pp. US\$19.95.

For students to wonder at, manipulate and pore over; for families to treasure; for teachers and librarians to share with care, here is a gorgeous expository text in the form of a very elaborate, and fortunately very sturdy, pop-up book. Each double page section has its own topic. "Underground Water," for example, includes four movable features, three fold-out sections, and a variety of multi-layered illustrations, one of which shows an underground cave in which stalagmites and stalactites can be made to grow. Short, clear pieces of informational text are placed everywhere: on clouds, beside a three-dimensional illustration of an aquifer, beside a well which can be made to show different levels of the water table. It is thrilling to have publishers of factual books continually moving into territory hitherto only the province of the storybook. (JMJ)

**World Water Watch.** Written by Michelle Koch. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11464-4. 1993. 32 pp. US\$14.00.

Watercolor wash drawings in lovely greens and blues accompany the handsome text by author-illustrator Michelle Koch. In each section, a child watches the sea and the creatures whose domain is the sea: in Alaska, sea otters; in Mexico, sea turtles; in Antarctica, penguins; in Chile, fur seals ("The Juan Fernandez seal that inhabits the offshore islands belonging to Chile is now protected by the Chilean government... When every country joins in protecting them, fur seals will be free to play safely on all beaches"); in Norway, polar bears; in Maui, hump-back whales. A poem — *watch over the world, watch over the water* — illumines this beautiful book's beginning and end. (JMJ)



## A Creation Story...

***And God Created Squash.*** Written by Martha Whitmore Hickman. Illustrated by Giuliano Ferri. Albert Whitman & Company, 6340 Oakton Street, Morton Grove IL 60053-2723. ISBN: 0-8075-0340-1. 1993. US\$14.95.

Reviewed by Mary Radtke  
Western Michigan University

*And God Created Squash* is an artistic rendition of the Genesis creation story. The book begins with a universe "all darkness and swirling water." In a pleasant, chatty format, the author shows God adding light, water, land, plants and whirling planets, followed by creatures of the sea, sky and land in turn. And then God makes people — to care for the earth and for company. "Welcome," God said. "You are my most ambitious creation. You are a lot like me. I have given you power. Not to mention a brain. I hope you are happy, and that you love the world I have made. I do — it is quite wonderful."

Author and illustrator have, together, created a tender, playful religious text for preschool and primary age children and for storybook collectors everywhere.

## Eve Merriam — a poet for all seasons

***The Singing Green: New and selected poems for all seasons.*** Written by Eve Merriam. Illustrated by Kathleen Collins Howell. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10017. ISBN: 0-688-11025-8. 1992. 102 pp. US\$14.00.

Eve Merriam — prolific, honored, anthologized, loved — shows once again that language can delight readers of any age. In this bubbling celebration of words we follow her into dreams of competing frogs and snakes each with their own cheering squad ("sis, boom, bog! Roll 'em off the log..."), into mysterious faraway places ("...I want to connect with Schenectady, the town I select is Schenectady...I'll take any trek to Schenectady"), into the night ("I swim in the skybloom sea").

Merriam seems never to have met a word she doesn't find intriguing, or even a letter (Q and J are separately celebrated here) and she catches us up in her sparkling, endless delight. (JMJ)



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