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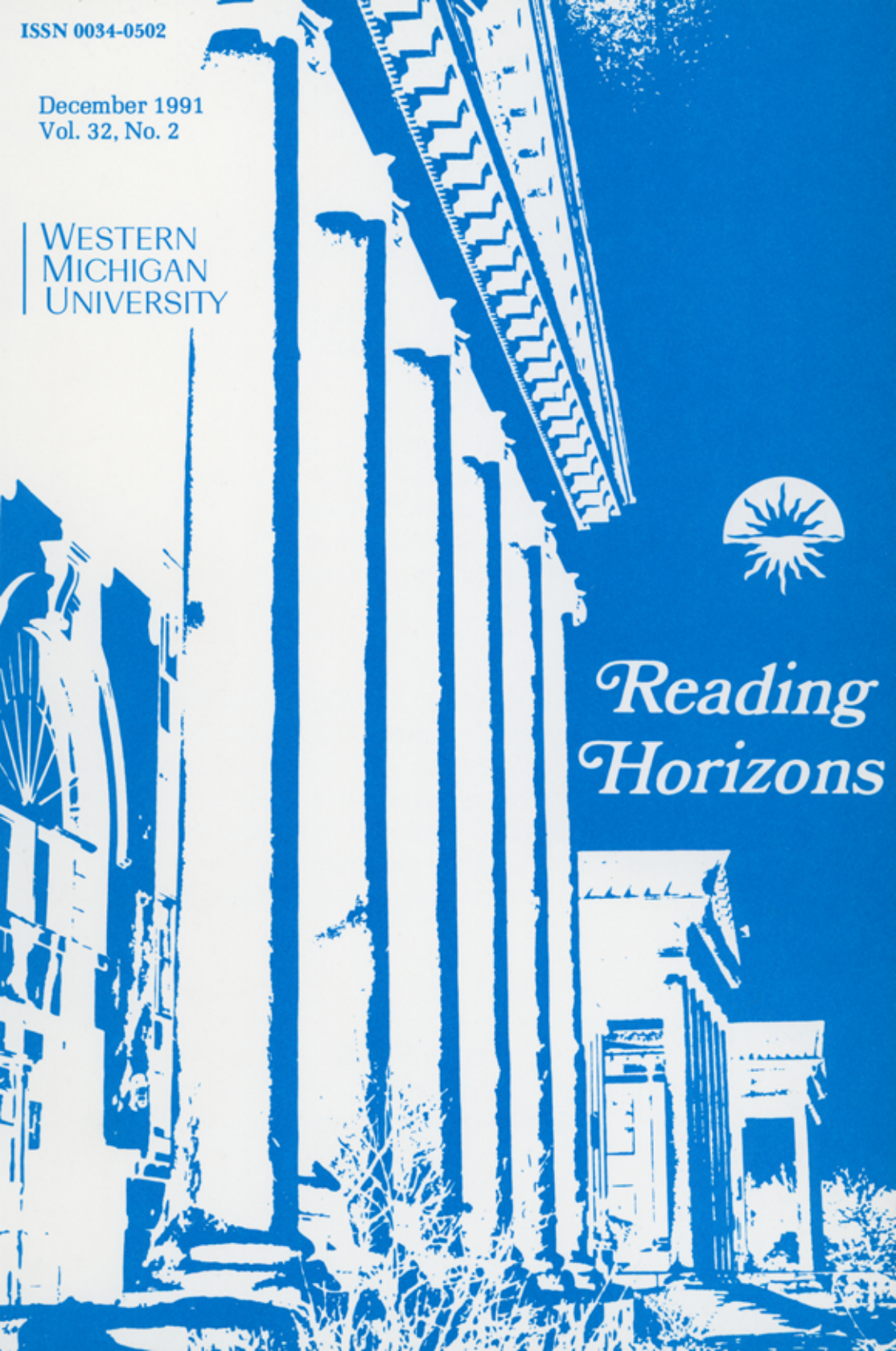
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# *Reading Horizons*







# **READING HORIZONS**

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**Editor — Jeanne M. Jacobson  
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Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008**

READING HORIZONS has been published since 1960, on the campus of Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo Michigan. As a journal devoted to teaching reading at all levels it seeks to bring together, through articles and reports of research findings, those concerned and interested professionals working in the ever widening horizons of reading and related areas of language.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Profile of a Heterogeneous Grouping Plan for Reading	85
<i>Nancy Leyse Logan</i>	
<i>Jean Dixon Rux</i>	
<i>Edward E. Paradis</i>	
The Effectiveness of One School District's Basal Reader Selection Process	96
<i>Michael A. Tulley</i>	
The What, Why, When and How of Reading Response Journals	109
<i>Julia Shinneman Fulps</i>	
<i>Terrell A. Young</i>	
Parent Communication in a Whole Language Kindergarten: What We Learned from a Busy First Year	117
<i>Beverly Bruneau</i>	
<i>Timothy Rasinski</i>	
<i>Martha Shehan</i>	
An Authentic Literary Experience: Sixth-graders and Preservice Teachers in Shared Response	128
<i>Delores E. Heiden</i>	
<i>Pamela Schmitt</i>	
Becoming Literate: The Acquisition of Story Discourse	139
<i>David L. Brown</i>	
<i>L.D. Briggs</i>	
Reading: The Conferences	154
Reviews	158

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# **Profile of a Heterogeneous Grouping Plan for Reading**

**Nancy Leyse Logan  
Jean Dixon Rux  
Edward E. Paradis**

Grouping children by ability for reading instruction is common practice in many elementary schools today. By reducing heterogeneity, ability grouping presumably allows teachers to provide instruction at an appropriate level for students in a particular group. However, research has shown that grouping children by ability can have a negative impact on lower ability readers, especially when the grouping occurs over time. The authors of *Becoming a Nation of Readers* state "because of the serious problems inherent in ability grouping, the Commission on Reading believes that educators should explore other options for reading instruction" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott and Wilkinson, 1985, p. 91).

Reflecting on available research on grouping will undoubtedly raise questions in the minds of teachers who use ability grouping. As we reflected, some of our questions were: If teachers choose not to group students by ability for reading, what can they do in its place? If teachers choose to group children of differing ability levels together (heterogeneous grouping) can students read successfully? If so, how might one organize and manage such groups?

With these questions in mind, we found a fifth grade classroom in which students were heterogeneously grouped for reading and observed how the teacher organized and managed this type of grouping, and its effects on students' reading. A description of the teacher's plan comprises the first part of this article. The second part of this article outlines factors contributing to the success of the plan in this classroom based on observation and student report.

### **Organizing heterogeneous groups**

The cooperating teacher had grouped her students heterogeneously for four years prior to the semester of observation and had tailored the program over time to suit her teaching style and students' needs. Through observations and discussion with the teacher and her students, two steps were identified as key in the organization of heterogeneous groups in this classroom: 1) the all-class book and 2) group books. In addition, several management techniques such as a daily reading schedule and rotating discussion groups were considered important.

**The all-class book.** Reading instruction began in the fall with all the students in the class reading the same book: *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt (1975). It was chosen because the reading level could accommodate a variety of abilities while the story line was interesting to all students. Beginning with an all-class book allowed the teacher to become acquainted with students and to model activities and strategies that the students would later use. In addition, the all-class book allowed all readers their first experience of being part of a heterogeneous group rather than being separated by ability.

Among the reading strategies modeled during the all-class book were 1): mapping and categorizing, 2) written

retellings, summaries, and responses, 3) mental imagery exercises, and 4) prediction/confirmation exercises. These four strategies were stressed because of their importance to reading comprehension and because each would be used frequently throughout the school year. Working through the all-class book took approximately four to five weeks. This time period was important to enable sufficient modeling of strategies so students could later apply them individually or in small groups. Based on conversations with the teacher and supported by classroom observations, time spent on the all-class book set the stage for groups to work smoothly and efficiently throughout the semester.

**Group books.** Following the all-class book, students formed small groups. The teacher introduced this step by previewing a variety of books for the students in order to provide background for their selection. The books varied in reading level to accommodate all readers and were based upon a theme of early America to integrate with the social studies curriculum. From the books, individuals were asked to choose one of interest to them. Using book choice as the common element, the first set of small groups was formed on the basis of student interest. Each group included readers from a range of abilities. Although there were more than three books from which to select, the teacher kept the number of reading groups at three, based on what she considered a number for effective instructional management.

Once students made a selection, they were allowed a period of one week to switch books. Some students made initial selections based on friends' choices or other criteria. Therefore, the trial period provided a respectable means of self-selecting out of a book if a child discovered it was uninteresting or too difficult. After choices were made, the teacher read aloud to each group the first two chapters of

the book to generate immediate interest in the story. While the teacher was reading to each group, other students were involved in prereading tasks for their book or other assigned activities modeled during the all-class book.

Students were then assigned to read two to three chapters at a time, depending on length and difficulty of the book. In class, some students read aloud together, some read silently sitting in a group, and others read alone. Children who did not finish reading during "reading time" read during Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) or took their books home at night. In approximately one month, when all of the small groups were finished with their books and associated reading activities, the process of forming groups was repeated. Each time, a new selection of books was offered. (Books not chosen for group work were available as Sustained Silent Reading choices.) During the fall semester one all-class book and two small group books were completed. In addition, students completed individual books during SSR. The following semester students again read books in small groups, as a class, and with partners.

### **Managing heterogeneous groups**

Once groups were organized, effective management became important. The teacher used the strategies that follow to teach children effectively and manage these heterogeneous groups.

**Daily reading schedule.** To keep reading instruction moving smoothly, daily group assignments and activities were listed on the board in the order to be completed. Students' attention was drawn to these lists at the beginning of each reading period, and necessary explanations were made and questions answered. This provided an overview

of each day's agenda for those not involved in group discussion, thereby avoiding interruptions to the discussion group. Students not involved in discussion spent time reading assigned chapters or additional books or working independently on activities associated with their books such as mapping, theme boxes (Carrico, 1988), vocabulary games, writing activities, art activities, and culminating activities such as plays or creating objects described in the book. To address varying ability levels, students were provided with options for activities ranging from easier to more difficult.

**Addressing individual needs.** One concern of the teacher was whether she was serving the individual needs of students. Was she challenging all students without frustrating others? She addressed this issue in three ways. First, she used regular discussion groups. Discussions allowed less fluent readers the chance to clarify content and to observe the connections and conclusions made by fluent readers while still challenging the higher ability students. Second, the teacher involved students in activities that allowed them practice on skills they needed, regardless of ability (e.g., summarizing and mapping). Some of these activities were cooperative in nature, allowing less proficient students to be paired with more proficient students, while some were individualized to provide an avenue for individual student evaluation. When appropriate, individuals or groups of students with a need for specific skill instruction were engaged in minilessons. Third, many assignments were open-ended to address individual needs of readers of all abilities. Most assignments encouraged students to create original work based on their interpretation of the text.

**Rotating discussion groups.** Reading discussions were held with one or two groups a day, since the teacher believed it was not necessary nor even possible for every

group to meet for book discussion on a daily basis. Groups were generally led by the teacher and occasionally by an appointed student. Time was spent discussing the reading material with the students, answering questions about the book, reviewing vocabulary and drawing connections to other books and background information.

**Pacing.** One of the teacher's goals was to have all groups finish their books at approximately the same time to allow for the formation of the next set of groups. This involved careful consideration and some trial-and-error on the part of the teacher. Groups needed to be paced to avoid too many activities for those moving faster and to avoid neglecting important learning activities for groups moving more slowly or reading longer books. The teacher worked through the pacing dilemma by balancing the time schedule for reading, discussion groups and extension activities (see Figure 1). The teacher indicated that the solution to pacing varied throughout the year and with groups because of attention to individual needs and book choices.

**Anecdotal records.** During group discussions, the teacher wrote anecdotal records for two to three children so that each student was observed at least once weekly. The teacher noted which students needed more challenge and which needed more guidance. Records were reviewed later for evaluation purposes, discussed with parents at conference time, and used to justify the program to parents and administrators. Thus, anecdotal records became crucial for evaluation and accountability. In sum, organizing heterogeneous groups for reading was carried out in two steps: first the all-class book and then the small group books. Throughout both steps, management techniques were incorporated to keep groups working smoothly and effectively in order to facilitate students' reading development.

**Figure 1**  
**Sample of Teacher's Planning and Pacing for Three Books**

Day	Book 1 (longest)	Book 2	Book 3
1	Teacher reads chapters 1 & 2  As a group, make some predictions on large tablet  SSR	Preview book; record questions you would like answered.  Compare questions with group members  Teacher reads aloud chapters 1 & 2	Same as Book 2  Same as Book 2  SSR
2	Read chapters 3, 4 & 5  Activity 1: Map Kit's route  SSR	As a group, make predictions on large tablet  Read chapters 3 & 4  SSR	Teacher reads aloud chapters 1 & 2  Make predictions on large tablet  SSR
7	Retell chapter 11	Retell chapter 9	Group discussion
15	Finish book  Group discussion	Culminating activity  SSR	Culminating activity  SSR
16	Culminating activity  Individual response conferences  SSR	Culminating activity  Individual response conferences  SSR	Culminating activity  Individual response conferences  SSR
Book 1: <i>Witch of Blackbird Pond</i> (1958) by E. G. Speare Book 2: <i>Sign of the Beaver</i> (1983) by E. G. Speare Book 3: <i>Sing Down the Moon</i> (1970) by S. O'Dell			

## Observations of heterogeneous reading groups

During the semester of observation in this heterogeneously-grouped classroom, it was evident that students of

differing reading levels were able to read the same books together successfully. Through observation and discussion with the teacher and her students, four factors emerged that we believe contributed to the success of heterogeneous grouping in this class: positive student perspective, student choice of reading material, group cooperation, and group discussion.

**Positive student perspective.** With the exception of one child, students' comments reflected a positive perception of the grouping plan. To explain how heterogeneous grouping worked in the classroom, one average reader said, "Readers who want to get to be better watch what the better readers do." A middle-to-low reader commented, "In past years when we were grouped by ability, most of the people in our group didn't understand [the selection]." This student's comment shows a contrast between her perceptions of ability grouping and heterogeneous grouping. Further, it reveals one possible result of grouping children by "like" ability. Even in this heterogeneously-grouped classroom, children were aware of and able to identify better and poorer readers. However, children did not see themselves as members of an ability group but associated themselves with a particular book. Thus, labels were not contrived and the group name was not a disguise for a reading level. In the words of a student who was new to the school, "That's what I like here because they mix readers up so those that can't read that well can learn from those who can."

**Choice of reading material.** "If you're grouped by ability and if the book is boring you can't change it ...so you don't pay attention to it," remarked an average reader in this classroom. While the impact of choosing one's reading materials is unlikely to be exclusively linked to heterogeneous

reading groups, book choice was the basis on which individuals were grouped in this room. In this way, student choice was linked to heterogeneous grouping. Comments from children indicated that interest was a major factor in their motivation to read. Discussion with the students revealed that they had different strategies for reading what did and did not interest them. They reported that they read better with material they were allowed to choose. One high-ability reader said, "If you choose the book you like and then if it's really good ...you can read faster." One middle-to-low ability student also reported, "If you like books you'll read better. If you don't like it you read slow or skip around." A lower ability student remarked that if he could not have switched books to read the one he wanted, "I probably wouldn't have worked my hardest." Asked when he did work his hardest, a high-ability reader answered, "If you have a real good book that you like." In essence, in the words of one student, "If you have a book that you don't like you're not going to work as hard."

**Group cooperation.** While good readers helped the less able readers, the latter also contributed to the group. Rather than being separated from readers of differing abilities as in ability grouping, children in this class learned from each other. Within groups, most children saw other students as reliable and willing sources of information even though they were aware of ability differences. Some students, especially girls, read together in close proximity. When asked why, one group agreed that if they had a question, help was immediately available. Another group said they read together to help each other and to discuss the book. A very good reader reported that students in her group helped each other. She stated she had not understood part of a story but two group members (less able readers) had explained it to her. Further evidence for group

members having an effect on peers came from an assignment apart from reading. Students were asked to write names of people who had taught them something special. One middle-to-low reader wrote the names of three reading group members and added, "My friends showed me how to read better."

**Group discussion.** Group discussion helped to fill in any gaps in understanding for students of all abilities and was important for their reading comprehension for two reasons. First, group discussion made students accountable for their reading. Second, groups were a place for the teacher and the children to share both their knowledge of the book and their enthusiasm. In discussions, children received guidance from the teacher, insights from other readers and established direction for future reading. While children were also accountable to the teacher for individual written and verbal response, group work allowed readers of all abilities to pool and expand their knowledge. Observations revealed that students were active and generally equal participants in these groups. When asked how group discussions helped their reading, some students commented that the teacher told them about words and things they did not understand, that they got parts of the story cleared up, and that questions were answered. In essence, discussions were the glue that held readers together as groups and enhanced reading comprehension.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, we return to the questions posed initially. First, the question concerning how one could set up and manage heterogeneous groups was addressed in the explanation of this teacher's use of whole class and group books as well as her specific instructional techniques. Just as this teacher continuously refines her grouping plan to

keep up with new insights and information and to meet the needs of her students, teachers who draw from her ideas will necessarily make their own adaptations. Second, can students read successfully in heterogeneous reading groups? Observations of readers and discussions with both the students and their teacher indicated students in this classroom, though of varying reading levels, were able to read and comprehend the same material. Finally, if teachers choose not to ability group students for reading, what can they do? There is no definitive answer and more research is needed on various alternatives to ability grouping. Heterogeneous grouping as described here is one option available to teachers. In this classroom, the teacher and students made the option of heterogeneous grouping work successfully for them.

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# **The Effectiveness of One School District's Basal Reader Selection Process**

**Michael A. Tulley**

The few studies conducted of the processes through which basal reading programs are selected have been concerned mostly with how these materials find their way into classrooms. Some, for example, have examined the statutes and policies that set the parameters within which state and local level selection processes occur (Tulley, 1985; Farr, Tulley and Rayford, 1987), while others have outlined the political, historical, and economic forces which shape and surround these processes (Bowler, 1978; Keith, 1981). Generally, an unflattering portrait has been painted of basal reader selection in the U.S. State level adoption processes, for instance, have been described as high-profile yet superfluous leftovers of an earlier era which offer little benefit to today's educators (Farr and Tulley, 1985; Tulley, 1989). Studies that have looked at the frameworks erected to support local level selection, meanwhile, have seen processes which range from smoothly-run curriculum review and development efforts to free-for-alls (Farr, Tulley and Powell, 1987; Tulley and Farr, 1990). Perhaps most troubling of all, however, may be the increasingly visible evidence that basal reader selection (and basal content) are often influenced by factors such as tradition, special interest group participation, and marketplace dynamics, which have little to do with reading (Crane, 1975; Tyson-Bernstein, 1989).

Studies such as these have improved our understanding of basal reader selection processes by providing some insights into the actions and interactions of those who participate in them. But these studies have revealed little about the *effectiveness* of basal selection processes – that is, whether they help teachers identify materials which support the type of reading instruction they intend to bring about in their classrooms. A basal reader selection process is, in other words, an arm of curriculum development, and its value must be weighed in large part after the selection process has been completed, the dust has settled, and teachers have begun to use newly adopted readers, workbooks and other materials to undergird reading instruction. It is usually the case, however, that when state or local level basal selection processes are concluded, curriculum directors, researchers, and others fold their tents and move on, leaving unanswered the questions of whether that process aided curriculum development in the way it was supposed to, or whether teachers got what they wanted.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the basal reader selection process in one mid-western school district. The study took place during the academic year immediately following that district's basal selection process, in the midst of teachers' first year teaching with a newly adopted basal reading program, and was guided by two questions: 1) what type of reading instruction did teachers intend for their classrooms when they adopted this particular reading program and 2) was that type of instruction occurring?

## **Method**

This study took place in one suburban central Indiana school district, with a student population (K-12) of approximately 4,500. This district was selected for several reasons.

First, during the mandatory statewide reading adoption of the preceding school year educators in this school system selected a new basal reading program, which at the time of this study was being used by elementary classroom teachers district-wide (see Note). Second was its moderate size (by the standards of this state), which facilitated district-wide data collection. Third, the district had in place a well-defined and organized basal reader review and selection process, typical in many ways of processes found in school systems throughout this state. Fourth was its reputation among area educators and others familiar with its operation as an affluent and academically successful school system staffed by an experienced and stable teaching force.

Data collection consisted of interviews with, and a survey of, elementary classroom teachers. Interviews took place during weekly visits by the author to the district during the period from January through March, 1990, and were conducted with teachers at every grade level in each of the district's five K-5 elementary schools. The purpose of these interviews was to "ground" information related to teachers' participation in the adoption process of the previous year and their reasons for selecting the basal reading program adopted during that process. All interviews were voluntary, conducted individually with teachers at their respective schools, and most were close to thirty minutes in length. Interview data were collected using standard discovery- and naturalistic-oriented techniques (Wolf, 1979), and analyzed using methods commonly employed with qualitative data, such as the formation of categories of responses, triangulation, and debriefings with knowledgeable associates (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Miles and Huberman, 1984).

Interview findings were incorporated into the design and content of a written survey, which was then distributed

to all regular elementary classroom teachers in the district. The purposes of the survey were to corroborate and to determine the extent to which interview findings applied to all teachers in the district, and to collect additional information related to the two inquiry questions stated earlier. Surveys were distributed in mid-April, 1990, by which time teachers had been using the new basal reading program for more than seven months.

## Results

Altogether, 54 (or 57%) of the 95 elementary teachers in this district participated in an interview, and 75 (79%) responded to the survey. During interviews teachers were asked to discuss the type of reading program they had been in search of during the basal review and selection process of the previous year. Analyses of responses revealed that most had intended to adopt a basal that would help bring about four changes in reading instruction. In the survey teachers were shown a list of these four changes and asked to indicate the extent to which each was occurring in their classrooms.

**Table 1**  
**Intended Changes In Reading Instruction**

<b>Change</b>	<b>As Intended</b>	<b>Opposite</b>	<b>No Difference</b>
Less time spent on skill/ seatwork	24%	29%	47%
More time spent reading	25%	28%	47%
More integration of skills	76%	5%	19%
Higher quality stories	76%	8%	16%

Teacher responses to this question are shown in Table 1. Listed are the four desired changes identified during interviews, and the percentage of teachers who indicated

that each change was occurring as intended, was occurring in the opposite direction, or that there was no difference. For example, 25% of those teachers responding indicated that their students were spending more classroom time engaged in reading than had previously been the case, 28% believed that students were spending less time reading, and 47% believed that the amount of time spent reading was unchanged.

## Discussion

During interviews a majority of teachers explained that there were four aspects of reading instruction with which they had become increasingly dissatisfied. Their intent, as they entered the review and selection process of the year before, had been to adopt a reading program which would make possible change in these four areas, and it was primarily their belief that the basal selected would help bring about these changes which led many teachers to support its adoption. First, teachers wanted students to spend more time during reading instruction engaged in reading. This meant that less time would be devoted to the teaching and practice of subskills than had previously been the case; this was a second goal. Third, teachers wanted subskill instruction to be more integrated, so that skills would mostly be taught within the context of stories or text, rather than in isolation, which many believed had been the case with their previous basal. Fourth, they wanted a basal that contained stories of a "higher quality" (a term which teachers tended to use synonymously with "well-known" or "award-winning") than those in their previous basal.

The issue of time spent reading versus time engaged in subskill instruction was for these teachers the most important area of concern. Many referred to the lack of sufficient time for student reading they experienced with their

previous basal, due mostly, they explained, to its heavy emphasis upon "seatwork drill." A number of teachers confessed, in fact, that because of their strong desire to change this aspect of reading instruction, they had not taken the time to review the newer edition of their previous basal, although it was among those on the state-approved list. They assumed it was still a predominantly "skills-oriented" program. Survey results show, however, that where the issue of reading time versus subskills was concerned, most teachers did not believe that students were spending more time reading and less time engaged in subskill instruction and practice than in previous years. Almost half believed that the relative amount of time devoted to reading and subskill instruction was unchanged, and the remainder believed that, since the arrival of the new basal, students were reading even less and receiving even more subskill instruction than before. (With only a few exceptions those who believed students were reading more were the same who believed that there was less subskill instruction.)

Approximately three-fourths of the teachers responding to the survey believed the new basal integrated skill instruction and text more than the previous basal, and the same number believed that the new basal contained stories of a higher quality. One teacher in four believed, however, that the extent to which subskill instruction was integrated was either less than before or unchanged, and the same number believed that the quality of the stories in the new basal was either lower or the same as those in the previous basal. Approximately 90% of all teachers believed that at least one of the four intended changes was occurring in their classrooms, while only 25% believed that all four intended changes were occurring. (Analysis of interview and survey responses on the basis of grade level revealed no significant or noteworthy patterns.)

Clearly, some of these teachers got what they wanted and others did not. The most obvious explanation for this, of course, is that *how* a basal is used is as important (if not more important) as *which* basal is used, and thus teachers are themselves responsible for whether or not reading instruction changed in the way they intended. But at the same time, the way teachers use the basals that schools buy is just one of many factors that can directly or indirectly influence reading curriculum and instruction. Indeed, because the teaching of reading is such a complex and multi-faceted occupation, fingers can be pointed in a number of directions. Moreover, these were experienced and concerned teachers, who expressed clear and precise ideas about what they liked and did not like about the reading instruction they had been providing to students, and how they wanted it to change. An explanation based on teacher decision-making alone seems insufficient, then, to account for the large number of teachers who were unable to create in their classrooms the type of reading instruction they envisioned.

Basal reader selection processes are supposed to help educators shape reading curriculum and instruction. It is legitimate, therefore, to expect these processes to share at least some – perhaps much – of the responsibility for the way reading is taught. The findings of this study show that within this district's basal selection process at least three alternative explanations can be found for what went wrong.

First, it appeared that some of these teachers were careless about their review and selection responsibilities. As a result, many of them may simply have been mistaken when they concluded that of the available choices the basal adopted was the best-suited for, and would be most able to help them bring about, the type of reading instruction they

sought. Interviews with teachers and conversations with district administrators and adoption committee members left the impression that a number of teachers treated basal selection more as a nuisance than as an opportunity, and as though their responsibilities were fulfilled when they expressed their concerns, priorities, and preferences at meetings early in the process and then left it to others to identify and deliver a basal reading program matching that description. Many teachers indicated that they spent only a few hours examining basals, that they reviewed only those texts and other materials corresponding to their grade level, or that they reviewed basals only after the district adoption committee had completed much of its work and had narrowed the list of state approved basals from ten to three. Only one of five elementary principals expressed confidence that all teachers in his building reviewed all state-approved basals, and that was because he maintained a checklist to monitor who had removed materials from the collection of samples housed in his school. Although open to all teachers, meetings of the district adoption committee were attended almost exclusively by committee members. When pressed, several teachers conceded that much of what they knew about the basals under review the year before had been learned by attending meetings, dinners, and presentations hosted by publishing company representatives. In fact, when asked what evidence they had for their belief that the basal adopted would support or help bring about the four changes in instruction they sought, the answer given most often was that the representatives and consultants from the company which published that basal all said it would.

Second, it appeared that the design and management of this district's review and selection process were unable to safeguard against or compensate for any teacher careless-

ness or abdication that took place. To be sure, there were several commendable aspects of this district's selection process. It was democratically and openly conducted; for example, nearly an entire school year and dozens of administrative hours were devoted to it, and there appeared to have been ample opportunity for interested teachers to influence its outcomes. But there were other elements not in evidence which might have enhanced teachers' ability and willingness to participate in it more fully. There was no inservice training in how to evaluate instructional materials, no released time from other responsibilities nor any other form of compensation to offset the many hours that thorough review required of teachers, and no plan for systematic piloting of the programs under consideration.

Third, it appeared that teachers received almost no external, post-adoption assistance when learning to use their new basal. During interviews several teachers noted that after the adoption process and before they started teaching with it, their only exposure to the new basal was the time they invested during the summer months engaged in a self-initiated and self-directed examination of early shipments of new manuals, texts and workbooks. Except for two, one-hour, building level inservice sessions conducted in the fall semester by a consultant made available through the publisher of the new basal, teachers underwent no formal training sequence designed to help them learn to use the new basal. There were indications, however, that teachers would have benefitted from some form of systematic training scheme. In the survey, for example, teachers were asked to estimate the length of time it had taken or would take them to learn to use or to "feel comfortable" teaching with this new basal. Less than half (44%) of those responding indicated that between one and six months was all the time needed, and thus at the time of

this study considered the learning process largely or completely behind them. Over half (56%) indicated, however, that they were still engaged in learning to use the new basal, and estimated that a full school year or more would be needed. (Teachers needing the most learning time were evenly divided among those who did and those who did not believe that most or all intended changes in reading instruction were occurring.) Teachers were also asked in the survey to identify areas of difficulty encountered while learning to use the new basal. Responses showed four commonly experienced difficulties (learning the organization of the teacher's manual, learning to make choices from among many instructional activities and options, learning to teach writing and thinking strategies, and accommodating inconsistencies between the new and the previous basal in the scope and sequence of sub-skill instruction). Any or all of these factors could have presented enough of a distraction or challenge to affect the reading instruction that was taking place in classrooms.

## **Conclusion and comment**

An effective basal reader selection process is one which results in teachers identifying materials that help bring about the type of reading instruction they seek for their classrooms. For reasons both within and outside the control of teachers, the basal selection process in this school district made but a limited contribution to the objectives these teachers set for reading curriculum and instruction, and that process should therefore be considered ineffective.

But ineffective basal selection processes are as avoidable as they are alarming. In this district, a modest investment of resources, coupled with a systematic and coordinated post-adoption inservice agenda, might have helped ensure teachers' more willing and robust participation in review and selection activities, might have helped them

make a smoother transition from one basal to another, and might have increased the likelihood of their being able to shape in their classrooms the kind of reading instruction they envisioned.

Implicit in these findings, too, is that teachers may not have had enough autonomy to fashion the type of reading instruction they desired. For some, perhaps many, of these teachers, bringing about the changes they sought might have required the use of materials or an approach other than what was available on the list of state-approved basal reading programs. True, teachers could adopt any of the basals on that list. But there were *only* basals on that list, which meant that some fundamental decisions about reading curriculum and instruction had been made by others before these teachers had even begun to think about which of those programs was best for what they wanted. Centralized state level control of which materials will be used and when and how they will be selected may inadvertently instill in teachers the impression that their importance and ability to contribute to the curriculum development enterprise are minimal. Unfortunately, the question these teachers asked as they entered the review and selection process was, *Which of these basals do we want?* But with greater professional freedom they might have asked instead, *Do we want to use a basal?*

It is risky to generalize from a single case study of a single school district. But experience and familiarity with selection processes throughout the country suggest that the basal selection process in place in this district is in many ways similar to those found in many other districts, in both adoption and nonadoption states. It may be, then, that there are many teachers who, like those described here, possess a clear vision of the type of classroom reading

environment they want to construct, but who find themselves with a poorly drawn blueprint, and holding the wrong tools.

### Note

Indiana is one of the 22 "adoption" states, and each of the 304 school districts in this state are required by statute to adopt textbooks in each subject area on a rotating, six-year cycle. In this state local districts must select textbooks or basal programs which have first been approved by an appointed, six-member state level Advisory Committee on Textbook Adoptions. Statutes empower this Committee to approve "as many textbooks as it finds are satisfactory" (Indiana Department of Education, 1989), and during the 1988 reading adoption ten basal reading programs were approved. Local districts establish their own review and selection procedures, subject to a few state guidelines (local review committee membership must include parents, for example). Basal and other textbooks are usually adopted at the district level, and often districts devote much of each school year to the review and selection process.

In each of the three previous reading adoptions, which stretched back to the early 1970s, teachers in this district adopted the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program. Newer editions were selected each adoption year, though, with the 1983 edition the most recently adopted. During the 1988-89 reading adoption teachers in this district adopted the 1989 edition of the Silver Burdett and Ginn World of Reading program. Teachers not using this basal on a regular basis (e.g., teachers of honors classes) were not included in this study.

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

*The June 1992 issue of Reading Horizons will be devoted to the theme of alternative methods of grouping for reading and language arts instruction. Dr. Mary E. Hauser, College of Education, Western Michigan University, will be guest editor. Contributions in the form of practical articles, research studies, case studies, commentaries, and articles about all aspects of grouping for instruction are welcomed. To submit a manuscript for review, submit four copies, each with a cover sheet giving author name(s) and affiliation(s); subsequent pages should include a running head taken from the title but no references to author identity. Text should be written using gender-free language; references should follow APA guidelines. Include two stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Manuscripts should be sent to Dr. Jeanne M. Jacobson, Editor, Reading Horizons, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, 49008, postmarked no later than February 29, 1992.*



# **The What, Why, When and How of Reading Response Journals**

**Julia Shinneman Fulps  
Terrell A. Young**

Today much student time is spent in preparation for mandated reading and writing tests. Consequently, students rarely get a chance to generate their own meanings as they read and compose from their own thoughts as they write. Ruth (1987) points out the need to present opportunities for students to ask and answer real questions of their own about reading and writing. Reading response journals provide students with an opportunity to respond and interpret their reading personally.

Reading response journals are informal, written communications between two or more people about something one person has read about. These journals can include personal reactions to, questions about, and reflections on what has been read (Parsons, 1990). Students can respond to what they've read, or, to what has been read to them. Even kindergarten and first grade students can respond to a story using illustrations, scribbles, random letters, and invented spellings (Farris, 1989; Hipple, 1985).

## **Why use reading response journals?**

All students can experience success in responding to literature regardless of reading ability. One of the primary

benefits of reading response journals is increased comprehension. Reading response journals enable students to grow as readers and writers by requiring them to use their own background knowledge to construct personal meaning (Wollman-Bonilla, 1989) and by encouraging, in writing, the integration of new experiences with past ones. Besides transforming feelings and thoughts about what they've read into words (Strackbein and Tillman, 1987), responses allow students to make the personal connection to texts (Simpson, 1986). In addition, Kelly (1990) reported that her third grade students displayed increased fluency and greater detail as a result of responding in journals. Besides developing children's understanding of reading strategies, comprehension, knowledge of literature and their ability to communicate and refine ideas, often the most striking development is students' growth in confidence, and motivation to read. Furthermore, reading response journals are an excellent means of recording how students' writing has changed and matured, and a valuable means of catching up on new literature that the students are reading (Strackbein and Tillman, 1987).

Reading response journals are not only for responding to independent reading and reading in the language arts block. They can also be used during shared reading time. In this manner, listening skills are sharpened. However, Parsons (1990) cautions that too much writing can strangle a read aloud program. When used in other content areas, response journals pay off with increased learning (Fulwiler, 1987; Smith, 1988). Smith cites several research studies which have favored written responses over reading alone as a study technique. As readers put what was read into their own words, they take ownership of what was read. The ownership and increased understanding result in better test results.

## What do the journals look like?

There is no one physical appearance for reading response journals. Likewise, content can vary, as can the format that these responses take. Below are some suggestions for design, content, and format of reading response journals. Teachers should look to see which of these will best fit their needs and the needs of their students. The suggestions can be adapted in order to make journals fit the needs of the class.

**Design.** Reading response journals can be as simple as a few pages stapled together. Some teachers choose to fold 8 1/2" x 11" sheets in half and sew it down the middle, while others prefer a spiral notebook. Teachers who have tried both homemade and spiral notebooks report that in addition to saving time and materials, the spiral notebooks make the journals seem more like the "real thing" to students (Harste, Short, and Burke, 1988). For younger students who are responding to their reading through illustrations and writing, blank artist's spirals are an ideal solution. Whatever style of journal is used, students should be encouraged to decorate their reading response journals to make them their own. Brewster (1988) encourages students to use colored ink pens or scented markers when writing their entries. This further encourages students to be creative and frees them from what is usually done in the classroom with standard writing instruments.

**Format.** Often the format for a response will depend on the response that the teacher is requesting. Reed (1988) suggests that the teacher encourage students to think and write as they read. Besides the traditional paragraph format, some teachers prefer that their student react to their reading in a letter format (Atwell, 1987; Five, 1988). These letters can be addressed to the author, a character in

their reading, or the teacher. Another format is a half-page entry. The students divide their sheets in half (length-wise). On one half they write a sentence or phrase that they liked from the book. Then on the other half they react to what they've written – how they felt when they read the passage, why they like it, or why they decided to write that phrase down. In order to help sustain motivation, the teacher can vary the format every couple of weeks (Brewster, 1988).

There are a variety of formats that readers may choose to use when responding to their reading texts. The list in Figure 1 was compiled from several sources (Atwell, 1990; Tompkins, 1990b; Tschudi and Tschudi, 1983).

**Figure 1**  
**Formats for reader responses**

ABC books	ads/commercials	"All About _____" books
anecdotes	biographies	book reviews
brainstormed list	calendars	cartoons/comics
catalogs	charts	diagrams
clusters	coloring books	comparisons
five senses clusters	five senses poems	games
greeting cards	interviews	journals-simulated
letters-business	letters-friendly	letters-simulated
lifelines/time lines	maps	newspapers
newspapers	oral histories	poetry
predictions	RAFTs (Dueck, 1986)	raps
resumes	riddles	songs
telegrams	word searches	wordless picture books

**Content.** Regardless of the different types of content within reading response journals, three items should appear on each page: the date, the title, and the author of the book. Title and author are needed so that students and teacher can refer to the book later (Parsons, 1990). The content of a reading response journal can be decided by the teacher

or left up to the students to decide. Initially the teacher might suggest the students react to the reading in a specific way: from a different point-of-view, by altering the time and setting of the story, alternating knowledge and opinion entries, by using drawings instead of words, or relating what they've read to an experience they've had that was similar. After several weeks (and a variety of reactions) teachers should allow the students to decide how they will respond to their reading (Strackbein and Tillman, 1987). As students become more independent and begin to accept their autonomy in the reading process, they should be guided away from a reliance on prompts (Parsons, 1990). It is important for teachers to remember that response journals allow for different interpretations of text depending on what the readers bring to the reading. If the teachers opt to use questions or prompts to direct students' responses, they should be broad and open-ended (Kelly, 1990); thus the questions should encourage students to develop their own meaning rather than teachers' desired interpretation (Wollman-Bonilla, 1989).

### **What is the teacher's role?**

Much of the success (and failure) of reading response journals lies with the teacher and the teacher's responses to what the students have written. Wollman-Bonilla (1989) reports that children invest more interest and energy in journal writing when their teacher writes back to them. When responding to what students have written in their reading response journals, it is best to comment informally as one might comment in dialogue journals (Kelly, 1990). And these should be responses – not a smiley face, a "GREAT!" or an "I agree." Strackbein and Tillman (1987) believe three or four sentences that respond positively and specifically to the writer's content will encourage the students to share their ideas and questions far more than a smiley face will.

Wollman-Bonilla (1989) further suggests that the teacher affirm ideas and feelings, provide information, request information related to students' responses, model elaboration, and guide students to examine their ideas as they discover new insights.

It is important that the teacher's responses be focused on the depth of thinking, rather than the mechanics of writing (Simpson, 1986; Strackbein, 1987). Otherwise there is no real request for reflection, but instead the journal becomes a vehicle to display the student's mechanical knowledge. Ruth (1987) points out that if the teacher's response is only to the mechanics and failures to approximate adult models of writing, then children's real accomplishments in relation to their purposes and intentions may be overlooked. Teachers may model correct usage in their responses, but they should *not* correct the students' actual entries.

Naturally, teachers should also write in a journal (whenever the students are asked to write in class). This shows students that journal writing is valued by teachers. Ideally, journals would be collected and responded to on a daily basis. This is often not practical, however, and teachers should schedule a way to respond on a regular basis. Keeping the reading response journals in a box or in one location makes them easier to manage (Simpson, 1986).

### **How does one begin?**

When beginning to use reading response journals, the first task is to encourage students to go beyond simple retrieval of information, and instead, to take risks when interpreting what they read. This can be accomplished most effectively by beginning with a group entry. Teachers first encourage the students to *respond to* rather than summarize some text that all of the students have experienced through

reading or listening (Tompkins, 1990a). Then, teachers can solicit oral responses. The oral responses allow the students to hear each other's thoughts about the story and also provide the teacher with the opportunity to model that all responses are valid. Predictably, students at first will say what they think the teacher wants to hear. As students become convinced that there are no right or wrong answers, they will begin commenting and predicting because they have the assurance that their *ideas* are important (Simpson, 1986). Finally, this oral presentation provides a framework and practice for future opportunities to respond to literature (Kelly, 1990). Once the class has made the move to written responses, students should still be given the opportunity to share with the class their written responses orally.

## Wrapping it all up

Reading response journals provide a teacher with a means of looking inside students' minds to view their understanding of what was read. In addition, these journals foster students' ability to connect literature with their own lives and therefore increase comprehension. With a carefully modeled introduction, management, and thoughtful teacher responses, reading response journals can work in any classroom. The rewards for students will more than make up for the time and effort of their teachers.

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# **Parent Communication in a Whole Language Kindergarten: What We Learned From a Busy First Year**

**Beverly Bruneau  
Timothy Rasinski  
Martha Shehan**

Among recent developments in literacy research and practice is the increased recognition of the critical roles that parents play in the education of their children (Rasinski and Fredericks, 1989). For example, in her review of research on parental involvement in educational programs and student achievement, Henderson (1988) found that parents have a highly positive impact on the achievement of their children and that "involving parents when their children are young has beneficial effects that persist throughout the child's academic career" (p. 15). Durkin's (1966) seminal work on early literacy learning found that parents played the key role in the literacy development of children who learned to read prior to formal school-based instruction. In a more recent study, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) described the rich literate home environments which initiated and supported the successful early literacy development of inner city children whose SES environments would not predict great achievement in reading. Clearly, parents do play one

of the most important roles in the development of their children as young readers.

Involving parents in their child's literacy learning is particularly important for kindergarten teachers. The kindergarten literacy curriculum should build upon what children have begun to learn at home, and, continue to involve parents in supporting their child's literacy development. Communicating with parents on how they can continue to give active support to their children's literacy learning is an important task for kindergarten teachers.

Although teachers may be eager to inform parents about their whole language literacy program, communicating with parents about how children develop literacy may be difficult. This difficulty may occur because a whole language approach may bear little resemblance to traditional readiness programs which the parents or their older children have received in school. In an interview study to determine parents' perceptions of how reading and writing develop in kindergarten children Bruneau, Rasinski, and Ambrose (1990) found that many parents believed that reading develops through check-point, systematic skills-based instruction; e.g., learning letter names and sounds and practicing the reading of simple words in isolation. Although the interviewed parents were pleased with their children's excitement and the enthusiasm for books which was emphasized in their child's whole language kindergarten, they also expressed concern for what they perceived as a lack of attention to necessary systematic skill development. Thus potential exists for miscommunication, because parents expectations may not match the description of a whole language program provided by the kindergarten teacher.

A parent education program concerning whole language instruction appears to be necessary to inform parents about recent research on early literacy development and how this is translated to sound classroom practice and also to advise them about ways they can continue to be actively involved in their child's literacy learning. Following is a description of what we learned when a classroom teacher not only initiated a whole language program, but also attempted to inform parents about the program.

### **Parent communication in one classroom**

A newly hired kindergarten teacher in a university-based child development center planned and initiated a whole language literacy program, a significant change from the skills-based program which had previously been in place. Twenty-five children were enrolled in the kindergarten classroom. The children were primarily of middle SES families, families highly concerned about their children's early success in reading development. Although initially the kindergarten teacher's attention and energy were channeled into building her new program and getting to know her students, she also realized she would have to explain this new program fully to the parents. She decided to begin this communication through the traditional parent orientation session held in early October.

**Parent orientation meeting.** At this meeting the teacher focused almost entirely on the new literacy curriculum. She emphasized three important components of her reading program: surrounding the children with a print-rich environment, using children's literature and experience stories as a means of involving children in reading meaningful text, and facilitating children's writing development through engaging children in invented spelling. She explained that

children learn to read and write when they are placed in environments that encourage them to experiment with literacy and where they can use their literacy abilities in functional tasks such as writing notes to and reading notes from others, creating and listening to stories, using recipes, and charting results from science experiments. She illustrated her talk with examples of experience charts already constructed with the children, described and displayed her well-stocked and attractive library corner, and talked about children's work in the writing center. Although the teacher had expected "hard questions" from the parents, there were none. Individual parents talked with the teacher about their child's enthusiasm for kindergarten. The teacher felt the evening had been successful because she had communicated the important goals for her program and the parents' responses to the program had not reflected concern or criticism.

With the parent orientation completed, the teacher again focused primarily on the children and their learning. Literacy experiences were subsumed within content areas. For example, the children predicted and charted results of science experiments such as listing objects which would sink or float. They prepared for a Thanksgiving feast by listing individual job responsibilities, things to remember to do, and recipes for their food preparation. Favorite songs and fingerplays were written into a class music book. Each week a different author was highlighted. Soon the children began to bring in library books from home written by favorite authors. The classroom teacher wrote regularly to parents describing these activities. However, as she wrote, she focused on content, the science or social studies unit, rather than on the development of reading ability. This seemed congruent with basing literacy activities in a functional print-rich environment.

**Parent conferences.** The second major opportunity for the teacher to talk with parents about literacy occurred through individual conferences held at the close of the first semester in December. The teacher had developed individual portfolios of each child's writing. These portfolios were shared with the parents and became a basis for talking about the development of invented spelling. The teacher was able to show parents where children had attempted to spell words on their own and to suggest encouragement for such risk taking.

During these conferences, some parents expressed their concerns. For example, one mother reported that her child who had been "a writing maniac" was becoming frustrated. She reported her daughter would say, "I don't like writing because the teacher won't tell me how to spell the words." The mother then described how at home the child had been told how to spell words correctly. The child was getting mixed messages from home and school. As part of the conference the teacher was able to help clarify how both home and school could work together. The parents could help the child begin to listen for sounds and the teacher could work on developing the child's confidence. The mother reported that as a result of the conference her daughter became less frustrated and more enthusiastic toward early writing.

The teacher reported answering many specific questions within these individual conferences. As the school year progressed, more parents appeared concerned about literacy instruction and would often "drop in for an informal chat." After such a conference one mother suggested to the teacher that it would be helpful to have specific information on literacy development written in a letter. The teacher decided this would be a good idea. In this way she could reach

cided this would be a good idea. In this way she could reach all of the parents, explain her approach to literacy instruction and address concerns that many parents seemed to share.

**The literacy letter.** In early spring the teacher wrote a letter to the parents in which she described how she read stories to the children, encouraged children to read on their own, facilitated their use of invented spelling, and offered suggestions for extending literacy activities at home. The teacher was pleased with the letter because she was able to articulate her belief that there was no one correct way to help a child, but that a number of strategies could be used depending on the child and the situation. (A copy of this letter is included in Appendix A.)

Several parents reported they found the letter helpful in not only understanding literacy instruction at school, but in also supporting their child's enthusiasm and growth for literacy at home. They mentioned that the letter allayed many of their concerns and they appreciated the permanent nature of the letter. They could refer back to the letter when a question about instruction in literacy arose. A few parents commented that they wished they had the information earlier in the year and suggested that the letter could have been presented in shorter segments throughout the year. Some parents mentioned that the length of the letter did not make it conducive to a thorough reading.

### **The first year's experience: What we learned**

This paper describes one kindergarten teacher's attempt to establish communication with parents during a very busy year in which she was very much engrossed in developing a whole language curriculum. For the most part, the teacher's initiative was successful. Through using sev-

parents and to provide information to help them in working with their children in ways that were satisfying to parents, teacher, and children.

Initially the teacher had hoped that the orientation session combined with parent-teacher conferences would suffice to inform parents and gain their involvement. However, we learned these limited and verbal communications were not enough. Although parents appeared to have accepted the initial message, as time passed other questions and concerns were raised. The teacher wisely responded to the parents' concerns and followed one parent's suggestion to give the information in writing. The letter was received by the parents as valuable in content, but several stated the letter would have been more valuable earlier in the year. In retrospect, it seems that frequent communication, in which segments of the letter would be presented, would make the most sense. Using this format, the teacher would be able to communicate with parents about the kinds of strategies she was using with children in the classroom.

Parent communications need to be a continuous part of a holistic literacy curriculum. In the case described here, it took a follow-up letter in the spring to complete communication with the parents. An ideal situation, perhaps, would have been to send information contained within the letter at more frequent intervals in which the information could be presented in readable chunks that reinforce and build on one another. For example, one letter could deal with reading instruction and home extensions, a second with writing and others dealing with supporting invented spelling, and connecting the content areas with literacy. A final letter might focus on vacation literacy activities. Although the teacher did write monthly

activities. Although the teacher did write monthly newsletters, these emphasized content activities. Highlighting how the children used reading and writing during these activities as well as perhaps including information on how the teacher was helping children engage in their own writing would be helpful. When parents are kept informed of what is happening in the classroom, they are more likely to identify with and support the teacher's/school's curriculum.

Not all parents read the written communications and not all parents attend conferences. The use of a variety of communication vehicles (e.g., group presentations, personal conferences, frequent newsletters, informal chats both in person and through the telephone) helps insure that parents are kept informed of classroom developments. Gaining parental involvement in ways that are congruent with the whole language curriculum can be achieved only through an aggressive approach to parental communication. We have learned the importance of maintaining a constant flow of communication to parents and providing variety in the media that are used to carry the communication.

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## Appendix A

### Text of Teacher's Letter to Parents

*Dear Parents,*

*Many of you have asked me to describe how I've been teaching and encouraging the children to read and write. The foundation of my literacy program was developed in the fall. The children were immersed in a print-rich environment from the first day of kindergarten. As we made group charts and stories, they began to understand that what they say can be written down and read back to them. From these charts and stories we discovered the many purposes of writing. Together we wrote not only stories, but letters and recipes; we put labels on objects all around the room; we wrote up our classroom rules and jobs; and we made many kinds of charts: lists of ways to describe our feelings, lists of words to describe foods that we used our senses to examine, lists of things we needed to do before parties and field trips, sequencing events from a story, steps of a science experiment, directions for a recipe, and making predictions and charting the results.*

*The children are continually allowed the opportunity to write for themselves. A variety of paper, markers, crayons and pencils are always made available to the children. Some of the writing they have done includes making up their own stories, writing notes and letters to me and to each other, making signs for the buildings and forts they create in the block corner, and in the dramatic play area writing checks and bills in their "office" and taking orders in their "restaurant."*

*The children enjoy keeping journals as their own personal books. Some like to try to write their own words for their pictures, and others prefer to ask me for help. Most children do a mixture of both. Either way is wonderful. They are interested in writing, seeing their words written down and hearing them read back to them. At least once a day we do a writing activity in their journals, on a chart, on the computer, or in a class group story.*

*Reading to the children is another important aspect of my program. There are two bookshelves in the kindergarten packed with all kinds of books: fairy tales, legends, myths, picture dictionaries, children's encyclopedias, poetry, fiction and non-fiction books and wordless picture books. I read quality literature to the children at least once a day. They often ask to have their favorites read over and over again. They like to read the books back to me from memory, or by looking at the pictures and making up their own words.*

*The shelves also contain "easy" readers, which are also available at the library! These are beginning "I Can Read" books with limited vocabulary, few words to a page and lots of repetition. The children have a lot of success with these books, especially if I read it once through first to them. They are so proud to be able to read a "real" book, as they see it.*

*During our morning center time, I am able to spend individual time with the children reading books together and writing in their journals. There are different approaches I use when reading depending on the child's needs and interests on that particular day:*

- I read the whole story to the child without stopping*

- I read a page, pointing to the words as they are read, and the child repeats the page after me

- I read most of the sentence, but stop and let the child read a word that I know he or she can read

- They'll read the whole story to me, only paying attention to the pictures and making up their own words

- They'll read the story to me, sometimes without any help at all

When they are reading to me and get stuck on a word, there are different things I may do:

- I wait a second to see what the child does

- If they are trying to sound it out, I may encourage it as long as they are not becoming frustrated

- I'll tell them to skip the word and read the rest of the sentence. Then they'll go back and figure out what word would make sense there

- They'll stop and look at the picture and try to find the word through what is happening on that page

Most times I will just tell them the words they don't know so as not to disrupt the continuity of reading and risk losing the meaning of what was already read. I don't believe that there is one right or wrong way to approach such a situation. What's most important, I feel, is to keep it positive! I want the children to think of reading as fun, not as a difficult chore.

When writing with the children I use a lot of the same approaches as described, but applied to pen and paper:

- I may write the whole story from dictation, writing down the child's exact words

- I may write most of it, but pass the pen over to the child to write a word or two that I know they can write

- Sometimes they want to write the whole thing and just have me there for support and encouragement

Even when I am doing all of the writing, I keep the children involved verbally. If they dictate to me, "Dear Mom," I may say something like, "'Dear' – what do you think that begins with?" By using this strategy I am encouraging the children to think about sounds in words, and putting their knowledge of letters and sounds into actual use as children write their very own words.

The most exciting thing happening in the kindergarten right now is children reading to each other and helping each other read and write. They love bringing in books from home that they can read and being able to sit in front of the room and share that book with the whole class, or individually with a friend or with me.

Here are some ideas I have for you to continue working with your child at home and all summer long:

- Keep going to the library and allowing your child to browse and choose books.

- Show your child how to research topics in the library: If you're getting a new pet, look up information on how to take care of it; if you see a shooting star, read to find out more about them; if you are going on a trip, look in an Atlas to find out where the place is located.

- Put simple notes and pictures in your child's lunchbox or under their pillow. Writing notes on the bathroom mirror with lipstick is always fun!
- Read to your child daily (poetry, too!).
- Do simple follow-up activities together after you read a story. If it is a story about plants, visit a greenhouse or plant some seeds; if it is a story about airplanes, make a paper or model airplane, or go to the library and research about the first airplane; if it's about friends, write a letter to a friend.
- Set an example: have a family reading time every night when you read a good book, too.
- Be aware of print wherever you go. Discuss signs on buildings, along roads and in the supermarket. Talk about why those words are important and needed at the particular place.
- When they are reading to you, KEEP IT FUN! Give them the words that they don't know and praise them for the ones that they do know.
- Write stories together, taking turns making up the adventure that the character goes through.
- When reading, talk about the author, the illustrator, the dedication, the publisher, and the title page. Discuss the illustrations and find other books by the same illustrator to compare and find similarities in pictures and style.
- Make labels for things around the house.
- Write a story yourself and let your child be the illustrator, and you illustrate one of your child's stories.
- Tape record a story while riding in the car and transcribe it later to be illustrated.
- When taking dictation, keep them involved, writing a word or at least a beginning letter or two per page.
- Write for a variety of different purposes; write letters to friend and relatives, invitations to a party or sleep over.

*This has been a wonderful year. The children have shown enthusiasm and an "I can do it" attitude toward reading and writing. Please let me know if you have any further questions.*

*Sincerely,  
Martha Shehan*

*Beverly Bruneau is a faculty member in Early Childhood Education at Kent State University, Kent Ohio. Timothy V. Rasinski is a faculty member in the Department of Elementary Education at Kent State University, Kent Ohio. Martha Shehan is a teacher with the McLean County Unit District #5 school system in Normal Illinois.*



# **An Authentic Literary Experience: Sixth-graders and Preservice Teachers in Shared Response**

**Delores E. Heiden  
Pamela Schmitt**

*November 8, 1990*

*Dear UWL Student,*

*My name is Mindy and I'm in the 6th grade. Right now I'm reading Ramona the Brave by Beverly Cleary. I liked it because of how Ramona acts like me toward my older sister. I like the part where Ramona and Beezus are in the park and some boys start calling Beezus "Jesus Beezus." I also liked how the author describes the characters. I give this book \*\*\*\*.*

*Sincerely,  
Mindy*

*P.S. I'm on page 20.*

*November 15, 1990*

*Dear Mindy,*

*My name is Doug and I'm a senior at the university. I'm glad you chose a book by Beverly Cleary. She is one of my favorite authors. The two little sisters in this book remind me of Peter and his little brother in Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing. I agree with you; the episode in the book was funny. It was interesting to see how upset Beatrice got when the boys called her "Jesus Beezus." Do you think she overreacted? Why? I have some free time now and will finish reading Ramona the Brave. I can't wait to see what happens next!!*

*Another student,  
Doug*

These entries are taken from the reading response journal of a sixth grade student. Response journals —often

called reading logs — are written conversations about books. When students' journals are shared with teacher or peers, lively dialogue about plot, characterization, favorite authors, and personal response to literature may ensue. In this instance, the student's journal was shared with a pre-service teacher. Through a joint effort between a middle school teacher and a university professor, reading response journals were expanded into each other's classroom. Students and teachers were equally delighted with the results, gaining new insights about reading and writing. In this article, both dimensions of the journal exchange will be explored through the observations of a classroom teacher and a college professor as their students connected with one another in an authentic literary experience.

### **Pam's perspective**

In the fall of 1990, I implemented a new method of teaching reading for my heterogeneous group of fifth and sixth grade students. Instead of using the basal reading text, my students were now involved in the reading workshop method adapted from Nancie Atwell's book, *In the Middle* (Atwell, 1987). Atwell states that if adolescent students are to appreciate literature, the first step is allowing them to exert ownership and choose the literature they will read. I agreed with Atwell's philosophy; if I wanted my students to become readers I must break away from traditional ties and let them choose their own books.

The next step in the reading workshop method was to introduce the reading response journals to my students. As an integral part of the Reading Workshop approach (Atwell, 1987), response journals have gained wide acceptance in classrooms where teachers are adopting more holistic approaches to reading and writing (Graves, 1989; Wollman-Bonilla, 1989). These dialogue journals were spiral

notebooks given to each student to write their responses, feelings, questions, and reactions about what they were reading. At first, children would write to me every week and I would respond back to them. I encouraged students to tell me not just about the summary of the book, but to go deeper into the plot, character, and even theme. I advised them to date each entry, and write freely instead of concerning themselves with spelling or punctuation. I also explained how to write book titles with capital letters, to underline these titles, and finally to sign their names to each entry.

After a few weeks of writing their entries only to me, I expanded the journals so that students wrote to their classmates. During this time, I observed an increased interest in reading; the students were very enthusiastic about conveying their opinions to each other. It was exciting for me as a teacher to see my students react so positively. Therefore, I decided to present my ideas on the reading workshop at our local reading conference. It was at this meeting that a university professor approached me indicating that she too was doing journals with her college students, and perhaps the two classes could write back and forth. After discussing the logistics of this project, we agreed to start our journal exchange between my middle school students and her reading methods students in the second quarter.

I went back to my class with news that they were going to write to university students in their dialogue journals. For their first entry they would write about themselves, their families, and about their book, using the following book log information which I adopted from a reading series (Pearson, et al., 1989). These open-ended sentences were interwoven into their own language, helping the students to reflect at a deeper level of understanding. I wanted more than just a general statement of whether or not a child liked a

particular book. Four open-ended sentences were used in my dialogue journals: 1) *This book made me think...*; 2) *I especially liked the way the author...*; 3) *Some words or phrases I liked in the book are...*; 4) *The part on page \_\_\_\_ was interesting because...* On the day when the first exchange was to be held with university students all my students had their journals on my desk, ready to be picked up by the university teacher. A few days later, I returned the journals to my students. Their excitement was contagious as the entries below indicate.

November 8

Dear UWL Student,

Hi, I'm Sarah. I'm eleven and in sixth grade. Right now I'm reading *Weekend by Christopher Pike*. At first it was boring, but now I just love this book! It's gotten more exciting. I can barely put it down. It makes me think about what it will be like when I'm in my senior year of high school... I like the way the author gives background on the people in the book. Now I think I'll tell you about the way I wish my life to be. I want to be a doctor for the deaf. My best friend Lindsey is deaf. I want to be a doctor at the Institute for the Deaf in Washington D.C. or in the Twin Cities.

OMS Student,  
Sarah

November 15

Dear Sarah,

Hi Sarah! My name is Jackie, and I'm a senior at the University. I totally agree with you that *Weekend* is boring so far. It's moving too slow and I'm having a hard time paying attention! Hopefully, it will get better like you said.

I want to tell you how great I think it is that you want to be a doctor, and I think it would be very interesting to work with deaf people. Keep up the good work in school, future Dr. \_\_\_\_\_.

Jackie

## Delores' perspective

I was seated in a session at the fall conference of our local reading council, listening to presenters Pam Schmitt and Judy Stodola tell about the inner workings of their reading and writing workshop, imagining how I could convey

their first-hand experiences to my reading methods undergraduates. As I listened to their excellent presentation, it occurred to me that substituting a real-world experience for a vicarious one would be of the most benefit to my students. After the presentation, I made my way up to Pam. Would she be willing to have her students participate in a reading response journal exchange with my class? She would, indeed; and so it began.

From the first, my university class appeared enthusiastic about the project. We had been simulating some workshop components – SSR time and journal writing time had been built in to the start of alternate class sessions – and the students and I were sharing dialogue journals (Bode, 1989) on a rotating basis. As Cooter and Reutzel (1990) point out, since journal writing plays such an important role in elementary schools, preservice students need to have experience with the theoretical structure and mechanics of journal writing. These authors recommend that the methods instructor model the procedure for preservice students. But the chance to respond to “real live kids” was what my undergraduates really wanted. Bushkie and Ford (1989) relate the success of their dialogue journal exchange between university undergraduates and Chapter 1 students. They found that their journal project helped university students “discover the general value of writing in the reading program and the specific value of using journals” (p. 17). In contrast, Pam and I were particularly interested in an exchange of reading response journals, in which students would express personal response to literature.

The plan was simple. I would obtain a list of sixth-grade students and the books they were currently reading from Pam, and my students would sign up for a partner. Once matched, the sixth-grader/university student pair

stayed the same throughout the course of the project. Fortunately, class sizes were nearly the same; in one instance, two university students wrote as a team to one sixth-grader. With Pam's list, and the assistance of our IMC and local children's library, I gathered the set of books my class would need. During SSR time the university students would read to keep pace with their sixth-grade partner, and then respond to the child's journal. In between journal exchanges, Pam and I kept in touch by phone and during brief moments when I stopped at her building to pick up or deliver journals. It all worked most smoothly when the partners maintained a correspondence about one book for several exchanges; it became a bit more hectic when a sixth-grader started and abandoned several books in turn. But that, of course, is exactly what one should expect, and my students took it in stride.

### **Pam's observations**

For the next two months, my students wrote to their university reading pals, each time anxiously waiting for their responses. Since both middle school student and the university counterpart were reading the same novel, both individuals could relate personal feelings to the literature. One of my frustrations as a teacher had been not relating a personal reaction to their novels simply because I couldn't read every book. The students were having the "dinner table talk" that Nancie Atwell stressed in her book, *In the Middle*. The entries took on a unique flavor of conversation between two students who discussed not only what they were reading but also what was happening in their own lives. I soon began to see some new categories of responses. The students were relating events in the books to events in their own lives. Two examples of this personal experience response follow.

*Dear Lisa,*

*I am reading One-Eyed Cat by Paula Fox, too! I'm about half done with it already. It's really good and when I start reading a good book, I can't put it down! This book really has a lot of emotion. I feel sympathy for his mother. She is so ill. I also feel sorry for Ned. My mom is very strong and I depend on her a lot. I can't imagine what it would be like if she were ill.*

*Mr. Scully reminds me of someone I know and care about very much. He is my neighbor and he is 84 years old. He lives in the apartment next door and he comes over to visit a lot. I think he is very lonely. We invite him over for supper a lot. You can really learn a lot from elderly people. Do you know any elderly people? (Maybe your grandparents?)*

*Sincerely,  
Heidi (university student)*

*Dear Heidi,*

*I'm still reading One-Eyed Cat. It's getting a whole lot more interesting. I agree. This book does have a lot of emotion. I would be miserable if my mom was ill. Also Mr. Scully reminds me of someone I know, too. I know many elderly people such as my grandparents...*

*Lisa (middle school student)*

Finally, in my observations I saw that both classes were learning from each other. The university students modeled effective questioning techniques, in-depth responses, and also correct usage, spelling, and punctuation. What really surprised me was that my fifth and sixth graders were modeling the process in writing reading response entries about books without giving summaries. The university students were responding also in their journal entries by using the same open-ended sentences that they learned from my students. Here are some examples of this modeling process at work.

*November 8*

*Dear UWL student,*

*My name is Eric. I'm in 6th grade. I'm reading The Beast in Miss Rooney's Room. By Patricia Reilly Giff. This Book mad me think about the time when my older friends moved up to a different pod. I like the way the outhter descibed all the new kids in his new class. There isn't a lot that I liked in it but the hole book is good so far. The part wen he*

*go's to the assmeby it shows how imbarrest he is about his class. I give this book \*\*\*.*

*Your friend,  
Eric (middle school student).*

*P.S. I'm on page 55.*

*November 15*

*Dear Eric,*

*It is so nice to be able to write to you. I enjoyed reading The Beast in Ms. Rooney's Room by Patricia Reilly Giff. Richard, the main character, sure seems like a funny guy. He is smart, yet he needs extra help in reading. I think everyone needs a little extra help every once in awhile. Do you agree? I liked the part on page 46 when Richard and Emily become friends and agree that they want to try to get the banner for the "best class." Keep up on your reading and writing!*

*Your friend, Jennifer (university student)*

Graves (1989) observes that children "become apprentices" when they write letters to their teachers; the children explore transactions with the adult and take steps toward understanding the literacy of adults. But teachers also need to know how to use letters to approach children, and in our project the university students were, in many ways, "apprentices" to the children. These preservice teachers were exploring transactions with children and beginning to understand the world of sixth-graders. Jennifer, a university student, pointed out that the experience gave her insights into how sixth-grade students write. And clearly, the experienced sixth-graders were excellent models for the adult learners. The structure and content of sixth-grade letters, especially in the ways they responded to story, were reflected in the letters of the university students.

### **Delores' observations**

Pam and I both wanted authentic literary experiences for our students. For most of my university students, the workshop approach to reading and writing was far removed from the way they had been taught in elementary school. Rupert and Brueggeman (1986) point out that many college

students have been taught in traditional programs that often ignore the social aspect of reading. Experiencing the communicative atmosphere inherent in the reading and writing workshops was a real departure from the kind of program my students knew best. But their comments at the project's end indicated that the journal exchange had been both enlightening and meaningful for them.

*Mark: The experience of handling a real situation was very valuable!*

*Jane: It gave us a chance to go through the process and see what it is actually like. It was a good experience.*

*Janna: I was impressed to see how children can be so excited about writing – especially to other people. I would try to replicate a similar situation with my class if possible.*

*Kirsten: This exchange was a great opportunity for us to see the process in action, rather than just hearing about it in class.*

*Shannon: In my past educational experience, I never had the opportunity to communicate through journals. I found it very worthwhile to experience it before being out in the field.*

While the motivation for participation in the project was different for the university students than that of the sixth-graders, the older students shared many of the benefits realized by their younger counterparts. Simpson (1986), writing of her seventh graders' response journals, points out the benefit of communal sharing among fellow learners: "We experienced an appreciation of the contribution that each of us brought to the event. We valued the narrative, and we valued each other" (p. 47). There was strong evidence that the university students truly valued the narrative as much as they valued their young partners. Although my students really only needed to read enough of each book to be able to respond intelligently to the sixth-graders, they too became caught up in the literature. At the end of our project one university student returned Wilson Rawls' *Where the Red Fern Grows* with this note attached: "Sorry I did not get the book back sooner, but I wanted to finish it."

## Suggestions

In reflecting on our experience, we saw some minor difficulties during the course of the project. Some suggestions for helping the journal exchange to proceed smoothly are given. 1) Anticipate minor problems. If a university student is absent, the professor or another student can step in to write that day's entry. If a child's journal somehow missed the exchange, the university student simply writes a letter to the student on a free choice of topic. The important thing is to make sure every child receives some correspondence in every journal exchange so that there are no hurt feelings. 2) Decide on a regular method of shuttling the journals between classroom and campus. In our case, Delores' more flexible schedule made it possible for her to pick up and deliver the journals during school hours. It does take time, but the results are worth it. 3) Communicate with one another. The telephone, notes, and quick consultations at drop-off time kept us working in concert. We had no pre-arranged schedule for the exchanges. When Pam's class was ready, the journals were picked up. 4) Have a common list of books for the exchange. One of our infrequent problems was not being able to provide the university student with a book that a sixth-grader was reading. Sometimes we had to ask that the sixth-grader send over his/her book so that the university student could get a look at it. A possible solution could be a pre-determined list of approximately 100 or more titles, available in both the sixth-grade classroom and the university IMC. The sixth-graders would be asked to select books from this list just for the duration of the exchange. The university students would be able to pick up the books themselves, and it would save a lot of hunting for titles. 5) Arrange for a meeting between the correspondents. At the end of the semester, the university class visited Pam's sixth grade classroom. The sixth-graders planned the visit unassisted. They took their guests on a tour of the building,

talked about themselves and their classroom, presented skits, and served refreshments. They had also made banners and a thank-you card. It was a wonderful finale to the whole experience.

### Notes

1. Pam's sixth-graders are teaching a new class of reading methods students from the university during the current semester.

2. Tradebooks referred to in the article include:

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# **Becoming Literate: The Acquisition of Story Discourse**

**David L. Brown  
L.D. Briggs**

Educators and researchers are focusing their attention on children's knowledge of reading and writing acquired prior to formal instruction. Many research projects have described the parallel between children's acquisition of spoken and written language. As a result of extensive research during the last twenty years, educators' understanding of how children learn to read and write has changed drastically. Marie Clay's work in the field of emergent literacy has been widely reported (e.g., Clay, 1991a, 1991b).

Harste, Burke, and Woodward (1982) made an assessment of preschoolers' knowledge of reading and writing by instructing a randomly-selected group of children to "write everything you can write." After an examination of the children's writing and a determination of the children's past experiences, the researchers concluded that the environment had a significant impact on the children's early writing experiences and the resultant literacy development.

When studying early writing experiences, Read (1971) found that children as young as three and one-half years of age produced invented spellings of words. Additionally, Read discovered that some children continued using these

invented spellings long after they learned conventional forms. In a similar study, Chomsky (1971) examined children's literacy development and concluded that reading and writing are related processes and that writing should precede reading. According to Chomsky (1971), children should play an active role in creating their own spellings for familiar words as they write their stories, and then start reading what they and others have written. As Chomsky states, "And what better way to read for the first time than to try to recognize the very word you have just carefully built up on the table in front of you" (Chomsky, 1971, p. 296). Moreover, she discovered that children were able to produce "writing" before they were capable of processing (reading) what was written. Several case studies support the assumption that reading and writing occur simultaneously, and that both communication processes are developed prior to formal instruction. For instance, Baghban (1984) observed and recorded her daughter's attempts to use writing in social situations, and concluded that her daughter was self-motivated to read and to write. Using observational techniques, Bissex (1979), Cohn (1981), and Cochran-Smith (1984) found that children's writing emerged with the beginning of reading.

The educational research provides ample evidence that children are interacting regularly with written language in their home and school environments. As a result, children learn that reading and writing are functional literacy activities. Similarly, research has shown that reading and writing are not separate processes in children's learning; instead, reading and writing are mutually-supportive literacy acts that develop simultaneously. Conversely, Chomsky (1971) and Baghban (1984) stated that writing should precede reading and that children are quite capable of writing themselves into reading. To determine the impact of social

interaction on story discourse, Dyson (1987, 1988) monitored the development of children's story-telling ability. Dyson found that children's understanding of story elements grows as children collaborate.

The findings of many research studies concerned with children's development of reading and writing skills have prompted educators and researchers to re-examine their position on children's literacy acquisition. More specifically, the educators' concept of "reading readiness" and the selection of methods and materials of instruction are changing as a result of research on children's literacy development. The purpose of the study reported here was to show the kindergarten children's literacy development as indicated by the use of six specific story elements in the children's original stories.

### **Subjects and procedures**

Subject selection was restricted to children who produced oral, dictated, and written stories. From a group of 20 kindergarten children, 16 students – 12 boys and 4 girls – met the criterion and were selected as subjects. The sample of children used in this study was non-random and was intentionally kept small because of the extensive analysis of the children's 48 original stories. The 16 children ranged in age from 5 years 1 month to 6 years, and came from families representing a wide range of educational backgrounds and socioeconomic levels. The children were enrolled in a university laboratory school in a small town.

Time was spent with the children to establish rapport; and as a result, the anxiety that children normally have when interacting with adults was reduced markedly. First, each child was taken, one at a time, to a quiet area in the laboratory school and was asked to tell a story, which was

audiotaped. Several days later, each child was taken to the same area and was asked to dictate a story, which was written by the teacher. Finally, each child was taken to a private conference area and was asked to write a story on a large tablet, and then the child was asked to "read" the story, which was audiotaped. The stories were collected during a five-week period. The audiotaped stories were later transcribed.

The transcriptions of the children's stories were analyzed to identify the use of the following six elements: 1) *Classic story version* — text that is directly related to classical stories and nursery rhymes; 2) *Connected events* — a series of related events in story discourse; 3) *Fantasy experiences* — text involving unrealistic experiences based on fancy and imagination; 4) *Goal directed experiences* — characters who perform goal directed activities; 5) *Personal experiences* — text that involves personal experiences in home and school environments and 6) *Social interactions* —text involving events and people in social settings.

A 2 x 2 chi-square analysis was used in this study to determine the significance of the difference between percentages of story elements by story mode, between percentages of a story element by modes, between three-mode averages, and between six-element averages.

## Results

**Oral stories.** The transcriptions of the children's oral stories were analyzed to determine the presence of the six story elements (see Table 1). The most frequently appearing story elements were "connected events" and "social interactions;" 75% of the children had "connected events" in their oral stories, and 63% had "social interactions." Fifty-six percent of the children told stories that dealt

with “personal experiences,” and 50% of the children told stories that had the element “goal directed experiences.” (See Figure 1 for examples of children’s oral stories.)

**Table 1**  
**Percentages of Story Elements by Mode**

Story Modes

<u>Story Elements</u>	<u>Story Modes</u>				Rank
	Oral Stories (N=16)	Dictated Stories (N=16)	Written Stories (N=16)	Three-Mode Average	
Classic Story Version	19%	63%	31%	38%	6
Connected Events	75%	69%	75%	73%	1
Fantasy Experiences	38%	50%	44%	44%	5
Goal Directed Experiences	50%	44%	56%	50%	3
Personal Experiences	56%	75%	44%	58%	2
Social Interactions	63%	63%	19%	48%	4
Six-Element Average	50%	61%	45%		

The 2x2 chi-square analysis showed that the percentage for “connected events” was significantly larger than that of “classic story version” ( $\chi^2 = 62.94, p < .001$ ); “fantasy experiences” ( $\chi^2 = 13.32, p < .001$ ); and “personal experiences” ( $\chi^2 = 7.96, p < .01$ ).

**Figure 1**  
**Examples of Kindergarten Children's Oral Stories**

Story A. Oral story mode. Age of child: 5 years 10 months.

Once upon a time in a far away land lived the three bears. First, there was the Papa Bear, the Mama Bear, then the Baby Bear. They went into the forest because their porridge was too hot, and along came a girl with long curly hair, name was Goldilocks. She was hungry so she took a bite of Papa's porridge, but it was too hot. So she took a bite of the Mama's porridge, but it was too cold, took a bite of the Baby's porridge and it was just right. So she ate it all up. Then the three bears came back. Well, the Papa Bear said, "Someone's been eating my porridge," and the Mama Bear said, "Someone's been eating my porridge, too," and the Baby Bear said, "Someone's been eating my porridge, and it's all gone." And Goldilocks said... So the Mama and Papa Bear came and the Baby Bear came and said, "Someone has been sleeping in my bed," said the Papa Bear. "Someone's been sleeping in my bed," said the Mama Bear. "And someone's been sleeping in my bed," said the Baby Bear and... that's who.

Story B. Oral story mode. Age of child: 5 years 3 months.

Teeth are good for you. If you get cavities, don't brush cause, that you know what, if you brush with cavities, they can hurt your teeth. Tooth can get food in it. You could be... sick. That is about all I was thinking about.

Story C. Oral story mode. Age of child: 5 years 10 months.

Well... uh... there is a rabbit and it got cut up into a stew and then it em then it em. Then it was asleep, and they put back together, and it was still dead. And they put some emmm poison on it, and when they did and he still didn't come back alive. But then he pulled a gear cause... he survived. Then he flipped the switch, and it turned everything invisible. Then he said, "Oh, Jesus there is something wrong here, everything is disappearing." Then he ran into everything cause it wasn't really gone. Then he fell asleep and dreamed about a giant, and he got a bar of soap in his dream and put the soap in his mouth and chewed it up. And again... uh... then he got into a refrigerator and ate all the things. Then he went everywhere in the world. Consplod the wor... conspl... consplored the world. Then when he woke up he didn't even know that... then he forgot all about it. And then he was so glad that when scary thing didn't really happen. And then he got a rubber cup and broke it in two. Then he ate all the things in the world. And... and um... and then he drank some poison. Then that's the end.

**Dictated stories.** The dictated stories were analyzed to determine the use of the six elements and the significance of the difference between percentages. The analysis showed that 75% of the children's dictated stories had the story element "personal experiences," and 69% had "connected events." Sixty-three percent of the children's stories were based on "classic story version," and 63% of the dictated stories had "social interactions." The story element "fantasy experiences" was found in 50% of the children's dictated stories, and the story element "goal directed experiences" appeared in 44% of the stories. (See Figure 2 for an example of a child's dictated story.)

### Figure 2

#### Example of Kindergarten Children's Dictated Stories

Story D. Dictated story mode. Age of child: 5 years 9 months.

Once upon a time there was three billy goats. The littlest one's name was Kirk. One day he said "Let's go on the other side of the bridge." The other goats' names were Button and Muffin. Button and Muffin agreed. The next morning they went on the other side of the bridge. Kirk went over it first. But he didn't know there was a Troll under the bridge. The Troll had eyes as big as plates. Kirk said, "Don't eat me. My sister is bigger and fatter." Along came Button. The Troll said, "Who's tramping over my bridge?" "It is I," said Billy Goat. Along came Muffin and hit the Troll with her horns.

The percentage for "personal experiences" was significantly larger than that of "goal directed experiences" ( $\chi^2 = 19.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and "fantasy experiences" ( $\chi^2 = 13.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In contrast, the percentage for "goal directed experiences" was significantly smaller than the percentage for both "social interactions" and "classic story version" ( $\chi^2 = 7.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Written stories.** Finally, each child was asked to write a story and then to read the story, which was audiotaped and transcribed. The transcriptions were then analyzed to

detect the use of the six story elements. The most frequently appearing element in the children's written stories was "connected events," which appeared in 75% of the stories (see Table 1). The next most frequently appearing element was "goal directed experiences," with 56% story use. Each of the two story elements, "fantasy experiences" and "personal experiences," was found in 44% of the children's written stories. Also in written stories, the least frequently appearing story element was "social interactions," which appeared 19% of the time. (See Figure 3 for examples of children's written stories.)

### **Figure 3**

#### **Examples of Kindergarten Children's Written Stories**

Story E. Written story mode. Age of child: 5 years 10 months.

Ones there was three little pig's and they had home's and they were happy. And the fox was afre the pig's. Then the pig's had foxstew the end."  
(as written by the child)

Story F. Written story mode. Age of child: 5 years 2 months.

MDHMTWTSKPTMBMSFIDET (as written by the child). As read by child to examiner: "My dad helped me with my tricycle. He pushed me by myself. I did it."

The 2 x 2 chi-square analysis showed that the percentage for "connected events" in written stories was significantly larger than the percentage for "classic story version" ( $\chi^2 = 38.84, p < .001$ ); "personal experiences" and "fantasy experiences" ( $\chi^2 = 19.92, p < .001$ ); "goal directed experiences" ( $\chi^2 = 7.96, p < .01$ ); and "social interactions" ( $\chi^2 = 62.94, p < .001$ ).

### **Other comparisons across modes and elements**

The kindergarten children used some story elements more often than others, regardless of the story mode used. Of the six elements, the story element "connected events,"

with a three-mode average of 73%, occurred most often in the children's stories, and this three-mode average was significantly larger than the three-mode average of the following elements: "classic story version" ( $\chi(2) = 34.78, p < .001$ ); "fantasy experiences" ( $\chi(2) = 17.30, p < .001$ ); "goal directed experiences" ( $\chi(2) = 11.16, p < .001$ ); and "social interactions" ( $\chi(2) = 13.06, p < .001$ ). "Personal experiences" had the second largest three-mode average, and the average was significantly larger than that of "fantasy experiences" ( $\chi(2) = 3.92, p < .05$ ) and "classic story version" ( $\chi(2) = 8.00, p < .005$ ). Of all the story elements by mode, the two elements with the smallest percentage (19%) were the "classic version" in oral stories and "social interactions" in written stories. Yet "social interactions" was the story element that ranked fourth overall in frequency, whereas "classic story version," which did not have the smallest percentage in dictated or written stories, was the least frequently appearing story element overall, with a three-mode average of only 38%.

Within a single story element and across story modes, the "classical version" story element was produced significantly more often in the dictated story mode. The percentage (63%) for the story element "classical version" was significantly larger than the percentage (19%) for "oral stories" ( $\chi(2) = 40.00, p < .001$ ) and the percentage (31%) for written stories ( $\chi(2) = 20.54, p < .001$ ).

Across story modes, the "personal experiences" story element was produced significantly more often in the dictated story mode than in the oral or the written story mode. The dictated story mode percentage (75%) for "personal experiences" was significantly larger than the "personal experiences" percentage (44%) for the written story mode ( $\chi(2) = 19.92, p < .001$ ) and the percentage (56%) for the oral

story mode ( $\chi(2) = 7.96, p < .01$ ). Across the three modes, the story element "social interactions" appeared significantly more often in oral and dictated stories than in written stories ( $\chi(2) = 40.00, p < .001$ ). In contrast, there was no significant difference in percentages between modes – oral, dictated, or written – for the story elements "connected events," "fantasy experiences," or "goal directed experiences."

The percentage of elements found in the children's stories differed according to story format – oral, dictated, or written. As shown by the six-element average, the children had a larger average percentage of the six story elements in dictated stories (61%) than in oral (50%) or written stories (45%). The percentage for dictated stories was significantly larger than the percentage for written stories ( $\chi(2) = 5.12, p < .025$ ). On the contrary, the percentage for dictated stories did not differ significantly from the percentage for oral stories ( $\chi(2) = 2.42, p > .05$ ).

## Conclusions

The children's dictated story mode had the largest percentage of the six story elements. Perhaps this mode gave the children more freedom, which in turn caused them to produce more story elements. Obviously, the kindergarten teacher who wishes to increase the children's use of the six story elements, as identified in this study, should use dictated stories as a first choice. The next best choice would be oral stories. The last choice would be written stories, which had the smallest percentage of story elements.

When considering the findings of this study, some teachers might avoid using written stories because of the low story-element generation and the obvious difficulty that children have when expressing themselves in writing.

However, even when recognizing the reduction of the six story elements in the written story format, the kindergarten teacher should not neglect this mode. A high-level, dynamic, expressive language activity occurs only when children write their stories. There is another reason for using written stories: this story mode had the largest percentage for two of the story elements – “goal directed experiences” and “connected events.”

One possible explanation for the children’s high level of awareness and use of the six story elements is that these children had many opportunities to participate in functional literacy events. Each day the kindergarten teacher read a story to the children from a fantasy or a predictable book. Also, the children listened to many audiotaped, read-along stories in the school’s listening center, and the children averaged two stories a week in this activity. Moreover, the children had written many stories and had made books from their stories, which they read regularly.

This study found that age, prior knowledge, level of social interaction, and environmental experiences influence the content and organization of the children’s stories. Story length and complexity increased with age. Therefore, in this study, the eight older children, aged 5 years 7 months to 6 years, composed stories that were longer and more complex (see stories A, C, and F in Figure 1) than the stories composed by the eight younger children, aged 5 years 1 month to 5 years 6 months.

As would be expected, the story element “fantasy experiences,” which involves the use of imagination, increased in use and sophistication with age (see story C in Figure 1); this result corroborated the findings of other researchers. For example, Botvin and Sutton-Smith state

"that the complexity of children's fantasy narratives progressively increases with age" (1977, p. 384). In addition, the children's stories – oral, dictated, and written – in this study contained plots and characters that ranged from simple to complex.

This study found that some kindergarten children are consciously aware of story beginnings, middles, and endings. Unfortunately, there are other children who do not have a good understanding of stories; therefore, story knowledge varies greatly among children.

### **Instructional implications**

The gaining of knowledge of story discourse is a developmental process and is not a discrete skill that can be taught through formalized basal textbook worksheets, which are often used for this purpose in many elementary schools. As a general rule, children acquire story discourse by engaging in environmental experiences that provide them with many opportunities to hear and to read high quality literature (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Teale, 1984). Some of the children in this study participated in pretend reading and reading reenactments, which are high literacy transactions that are beneficial in helping children acquire story discourse (Sulzby and Teale, 1987). Moreover, the children had experienced repeated readings of their favorite stories. Morrow and Smith (1990) found that repeated readings facilitate comprehension and help to develop story knowledge. Another way children can develop story sense is by the use of pretend reading. Kindergarten teachers can encourage this activity by providing wordless picture books, which should motivate children to create stories.

The findings of the present study give direct support to the belief that learning to read and learning to write are

separable elements in literacy development. Thus, kindergarten teachers must acknowledge and use for instructional purposes what children already know about reading and writing. Of course, the more precocious children would become familiar with many story elements before entering kindergarten. From their encounters with stories, children naturally acquire a rhythm for language patterns; or as Holdaway (1979) states, children develop a "story set." Children gain this knowledge from positive experiences with stories.

Numerous research reports and journal articles concerned with children's literacy growth have recommended instructional techniques for developing story discourse. For example, Brown and Briggs (1987) made these suggestions for teachers: 1) Children must be exposed to various types of literature to broaden their story knowledge. Teachers should allow student self-selection of many stories. 2) Children should be encouraged to write. Unfortunately, many teachers still believe that reading precedes writing. 3) Teachers must realize that children constantly read as they write. The same cognitive process is involved; only the communicative mode is different. 4) Writing must be presented in meaningful and functional situations, such as in writing poems, stories, letters, or notes. 5) Children must be allowed to share their writing with an audience other than the teacher. The meaning should be conveyed to a known audience. 6) Parents and teacher should demonstrate literacy events (reading and writing) in the presence of children (p. 280).

Story-telling experiences in the home and school environments can provide children with an opportunity to acquire knowledge of story discourse in a natural context. Reading to children is a common activity in many homes

and schools, and the activity is associated with accelerated development of children's story understanding because "children expand their knowledge of written language from hearing stories read aloud" (Brown and Briggs, 1986, p. 54). Indeed, observational learning – learning by observing others – can make a significant contribution to children's growth in literacy.

Children should be encouraged to participate in environmental literacy activities because these experiences are indispensable to language development. Also, the desire to communicate and the frequency of communication are influenced by the environment. The contribution of the home environment is crucial to literacy growth. As Jencks et al., state, "Our research suggests, however, that the character of a school's output depends largely in a single input, namely the characteristics of the entering children" (1972, p. 256). Variability among home environments is reflected in differences in children's qualitative and quantitative language acquisition. Regardless of the child's developmental language level, the school must build on the literacy foundation established in the preschool environment.

Although the findings of the present study support the current views on children's language acquisition, further research is needed to assist parents and teachers in designing even better home and school environments for fostering children's literacy development.

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# **READING: THE CONFERENCES**

**Jeanne M. Jacobson**

***In the Winner's Circle:  
Middle Level Education***

## **National Middle School Association 18th Annual Convention, November 1991**

A substantial number of presentations at the annual convention of the National Middle School Association, held in Louisville Kentucky in November, were concerned with literature and the language arts. Three sessions were cosponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English. "Research Writing in the Middle School," one of the NCTE cosponsored presentations, was led by Kim Wilson and Sharon Shrout, colleagues from Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville Kentucky, where Wilson teaches seventh grade at Noe Middle School and Shrout teaches fifth grade at Byck Elementary School. Their presentation illustrated several conference themes: the importance of language arts in middle level education, the richness of collegial interaction among teachers, and the empowerment of teachers in devising and developing curriculum.

Wilson and Shrout alternated in presenting a chronology of their collaboration and the work of their students,

which resulted in a locally published book, *Circles: Will There Ever Be Peace?*, written by seventh graders taught by Wilson, and prepared using desktop publishing software by fifth graders in Shrout's classroom. When it comes to collaboration, said Shrout, "technology is the answer."

The original writing project stemmed from seventh graders' interest in the events of World War II, aroused by reading *Night*, by Elie Wiesel (New York, Bantam Books, 1960), an account of a boy's survival in a Nazi death camp. Wilson provided conference participants with extensive lists of methods her students used in research writing (e.g., double-entry journals, interviewing, learning logs, reaction journals, webbing), and the genres they chose for report writing (e.g., biographies, calendars, essays, interviews, letters, maps, mobiles, murals, plays, poems, short stories, time lines, travel guides). During the research process, the seventh graders discovered a wealth of resources within the community, including relatives who served in the armed forces during the war. The gulf war inspired essays and poems on the theme of recurring wars. (Excerpts from poems and interviews are shown here, and on the next page.)

### Excerpts from a seventh grader's poem

#### *CIRCLES*

by Ruben Gerding

*Going in circles, again and again  
War after war, it doesn't seem to end...  
The death of the innocent, the casualties of war  
Fighting a battle forever more.  
We're back where we started, no ground has been gained  
In circles we travel, in which peace has been slain*

*from "OPINION POEMS: From WWII to War in the Gulf," chapter 3 of  
Circles: Will There Ever Be Peace? written and produced by Jefferson  
County public school students; shared at the NMSA Conference, November 9, 1991.*

## Excerpts from interviews by seventh graders

### INTERVIEW OF ERNIE MARX

by Stephanie Wright

Ernie Marx was born on November 8, 1925 near Frankfurt, Germany. He was the son of a rabbi and in November of 1938 was looking forward to celebrating his bar mitzvah, a ceremony which marks the time when a young Jewish boy takes on the responsibilities of a Jewish man. He was to receive gifts, the most precious being a bicycle. He never got it. On November 9, Hitler order every synagogue in Germany (180) burned and all Jewish businesses destroyed. This was known as Kristallnacht or Crystal Night, night of the broken glass. ...1942 was the last time he saw his father. His father had been sent to Auschwitz. Seventeen members of Ernie's family perished at Auschwitz, or "disappeared." ...Mr. Marx said, "The greatest gift is for a person to bury his own, and 6,000,000 did not get buried."

Ernie survived the war and miraculously found his mother alive. He then moved to the United States. He is now a resident of Louisville, Kentucky. His message to all, "This should never happen again."

### INTERVIEW OF WES ROBERTS

reported by Elizabeth Brady

Q: Did you or anyone in your family fight or participate in World War II?

A: Yes, I did; I made maps for invasions.

Q: Where were you living between 1941-1945?

A: New Guinea, Japan, Philippines, and army bases in the United States.

Q: What changes in your life took place during the war?

A: I grew up.

Q: What was public reaction to the activities of World War II?

A: They supported the government.

Q: What was your opinion of Hitler?

A: He was too low for words.

Q: What were your forms of entertainment?

A: U.S.O. shows, radio, swim across a bay to see Bob Hope, movies. They sent over good movies.

### INTERVIEW OF MELVIN JONES

reported by Shaun Conley

My interview was with my uncle Melvin Jones. He joined the U.S. Navy in 1937 at the age of 21. His job was to ready supplies, ammunition and weapons. He got out after three years but volunteered to re-enlist in 1942 when the war got worse. He was stationed in the South Pacific islands and involved in two combat battles. Many of his friends lost their lives and he was seriously wounded, but continued to stay in the service and fight. He felt that it was his duty to defend his country and do what had to be done. ...When asked how he felt when the war was over, he laughed and said: "Happy! Very Happy!"

*from "EXPERIENCES: The Way Life Felt," chapter 2 of*

*Circles: Will There Ever Be Peace? written and produced by Jefferson County public school students; shared at the NMSA Conference, November 9, 1991.*

When Wilson shared her enthusiasm about the students' work with her friend, Shrout suggested that the writing be published. She planned a curriculum for her fifth grade students which engaged them in using word processing software with Macintosh computers — learning to place text, select fonts and design pages. Language arts learning was enhanced by studying the writing of the older students, which also gave the fifth graders a view of the work expected of middle school students. Collaboration between the two grade levels was fostered by visits from the seventh graders as the text was prepared for publication. The book's title was drawn from two poems, a compromise devised by a fifth grader who asked, "Why couldn't we put *Circles*, and then some of those dots, and then *Will There Ever Be Peace?*"

To conclude the project, the middle school principal suggested a field trip for middle school students to teach the information they had learned to all five fifth grade classrooms. The seventh graders prepared and taught their curriculum through five programs, including a panel discussion and a play. Each of the 125 fifth graders were given a copy of the book — which includes three chapters and a glossary — to use as a textbook supplement in their study of this period in history.

"Teachers can invent curriculum," Wilson and Shrout told their audience. Their collaboration resulted in a product-based curriculum emphasizing student as worker, within an extended learning community in which teachers learn as well as teach, and students teach as well as learn.

*The 1992 NMSA conference will be held in San Antonio, Texas, from November 5-8. Proposals for presentations must be made on NMSA forms, available from NMSA (Phone: 616-848-8211) and postmarked no later than Monday, February 3, 1992.*



# REVIEWS

## Professional Materials

***Basic Reading Inventory*** by Jerry L. Johns.

Kendall-Hunt Publishing, 2460 Kerper Blvd., Dubuque IA 52004-0539. 1991  
ISBN 0-8403-6279-X. 284 pp. US\$24.00

Reviewed by Kathryn Kinnucan-Welsch  
Western Michigan University

While the field of reading assessment reflects the changes which are occurring throughout education today, the Informal Reading Inventory continues to be widely used by, among others, regular and special education teachers, reading specialists, and school psychologists. The text *Basic Reading Inventory* by Jerry L. Johns is representative of those instruments which can provide the professional with a great deal of useful data about a reader in a relatively short period of time.

The fifth edition of the *Basic Reading Inventory* is patterned after the IRI (Informal Reading Inventory) format which includes sets of graded word lists, a series of graded paragraphs, and comprehension questions. According to the author, the purposes of the inventory are to determine the student's 1) reading levels (independent, instructional, frustration and listening); 2) strategies for word identification; and 3) strengths and weaknesses in comprehension.

Additional features enhance the value of this inventory. The author has included a brief section on background information relevant to each section of the text. This background includes history and development of the IRI and suggestions for instructional strategies to support learners in becoming strategic readers. The fifth edition also includes a section in scoring according to significant miscue analysis. The passages in the

*Basic Reading Inventory* have been lengthened, but the professional must determine whether or not their purpose of assessment is served through an administration of an informal reading inventory. If that can be determined, then the *Basic Reading Inventory* contains many positive features which would make it a viable choice.

## Children's Books

***Merry Christmas, Amanda and April* by Bonnie Pryor.**

Illustrated by Diane de Groat.

Morrow Junior Books, 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016.

1991. ISBN 0-688-07544-4. 32 pp. US\$13.95.

Reviewed by Sherry R. Myers  
Western Michigan University

Sisters Amanda and April are sent by their mother to get ingredients to make cookies for Santa's snack. On the way they stop to sled-ride and do a good deed. When they get to the store, the grocery list is missing and they must try to remember what their mother wanted, ending up with both flour and flowers. The piglet sisters leave both cookies and a bouquet for Santa, and in return, receive the presents they had hoped for.

*Merry Christmas, Amanda and April* is a gentle story, only minimally about Christmas; it's really a good tale for all winter long. The illustrations are colorful and entertaining, and the story is appealing in its knowledge of listener reaction to its plot. The idea that flowers could be as important to Santa as the flour in his cookies is pleasing, as is the feature that the person helped in the story is an adult, not another child. The story subtly reminds children that adults can truly need their help, that they can contribute something to an adult's life, instead of the other way around. Most appealing about the story, though, is its characterization of the sisters who are neither too loving, as was true in books of an earlier generation, nor too hateful, as seems to be true of many current books. It has just the appropriate mix of not getting along and getting along, concern and unconcern. It is the relationship between April and Amanda that will captivate the reader, young and old alike.

***Chicken Man* by Michelle Edwards.**

Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016.  
1991. ISBN 0-688-09708-1. 32 pp.

Reviewed by Paul Bright  
Western Michigan University

The summer that *Chicken Man* works in the kibbutz chicken coop, the hens lay more than ever before. But as is the custom on an Israeli kibbutz (a self-supporting farm), *Chicken Man* is moved to another job, and then another – until the hens stop laying eggs. *Oy va voy!* From the brightly colored illustrations to the charming Yiddish expressions, this book is a delight. The illustrations contain two notable features. At the very beginning of the book is a simple map of the kibbutz where *Chicken Man* lives and works, giving the reader a sense of what a kibbutz is like. Second, the book unexpressedly invites the reader to interact by searching for *Chicken Man*'s red hat on each page that he is pictured.

One could say that *Chicken Man* is an Israeli version of "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence" for while *Chicken Man* is always happy in whatever job he does, his fellow Kibbutzniks are envious and think that he must have the best job on the kibbutz. The reader might chuckle at *Chicken Man*'s seemingly optimistic view of work; however, his simple character also exemplifies a good work ethic. This book quietly states that we should make the most out of our present circumstances and not waste our time wishing for a better tomorrow. Finally, with the recent focus of the world on the Middle East, and education's multicultural thrust, this culturally-rich book has much to offer both library and private collections.

***All the Lights in the Night* by Arthur A. Levine.**

Illustrated by James E. Ransome.

Tambourine Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019.  
1991. ISBN 0-688-10107-0. 30 pp. US\$14.95.

This beautiful Hanukkah story, recounting events in the life of the author's grandfather and great uncle, reminds us of the bravery of families who stand united even when separated

by distance and by the cruelty of oppressors. The year is 1914. Of three boys in a Russian family, the oldest, David, has been able to emigrate to Palestine. Persecution of Russian Jews is increasing; David has sent his parents money — enough for two more family members to escape. The parents will remain; young Moses and Benjamin will travel together from their tiny village, hidden in the cart of a friendly neighbor, to Minsk, then by train to Warsaw, finally by ship to Palestine. Their mother has sent with them a Hanukkah lamp; echoing the miracle which Hanukkah celebrates, they have only oil enough to light the lamp once. Though the oil is indeed consumed, the lamp enables the boys to stay together; the miracle we see is one of human love, ingenuity and endurance. The story's conclusion is joyous: in place of the lamp, the boys have all the lights in the night sky. *Softly Moses began to sing the Hanukkah prayer and Benjamin joined in. And their voices took to the air like seabirds, their bright music carrying over the wind.* (JMJ)

### Classics Retold

***Jack and the Beanstalk*** by Steven Kellogg.

Morrow Junior Books, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016.

1991. ISBN 0-688-10250-6. 48 pp. US\$14.95.

***The Swineherd*** by Hans Christian Andersen.

Illustrated by Deborah Hahn.

Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books. 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016.

1991. ISBN 0-688-10052-X. 32 pp. US\$14.95.

Gorgeous, glorious illustrations sweep across the pages of Steven Kellogg's brilliant version of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, beginning with a frontispiece explaining the source of the ogre's ill-gotten riches. Partly concealed in the skin of a creature with terrifying tusks and claws, the horrible ogre is swooping down on a pirate ship, where the wicked crew, now begging for mercy, have been counting their booty: bags of gold, a squawking hen with two golden eggs beside her, and a magical harp whose resident singers are wailing frantically. The end pages present a marvelously happy ending, in which a carriage whose passengers include the joyous harp, a jewel-bedecked hen clutched by Jack's still-amazed mother, a mastiff and four cheery cats, draws Jack and his princess bride, and their three royal children, to a distant castle, while a benign

wizard, standing with his equally happy cow, waves in greeting. Between these two elegant additions to the story are a treasurehouse of other illustrations, with gently witty text.

Deborah Hahn gives credit not only to the author of the story she has chosen to illustrate, but to her own ingenious creations: *The Swineherd, by Hans Christian Andersen, Narrated by Himself and Acted by His Favorite Friends and Relations*. Two concurrent stories are presented. The printed text tells Andersen's story of a prince who becomes a swineherd out of love for a silly princess, who loves possessions too much, and, in the end, is desolate and deserted. Above this text, Andersen himself, and a lovable cast of children and animals, keep up a running dialogue as they act out the story. And then Andersen asks his little audience for their opinion of his ending, and they give it: *unjust, unbearable, such sadness, fierce, unforgivable, cruel, he couldn't have meant it, heartless...* and they decide to make a change: *with all due respect Hans, we'll give it a new ending*. The "truly happy ending" is a joy; Andersen's bleak conclusion is lightly but firmly transformed. (JMJ)

## **Two by James Stevenson**

### ***The Worst Person's Christmas***

1991. ISBN 0-688-10210-7. 32 pp. US\$13.95.

### ***That's Exactly the Way It Wasn't***

1991. ISBN 0-688-09868-1. 32 pp. US\$13.95

Both from Greenwillow Books, 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016.

In *The Worst Person's Christmas*, grumpy Mr. Worst reappears (earlier tales: *The Worst Person in the World; The Worst Person in the World at Crab Beach*), taking a characteristically Scrooge-like view of neighborhood festivities. He is foiled, though not reformed, by a gift, — "*How about a fruitcake?*" said Jenny. "*He is a fruitcake,*" said Walker. "*Perfect,*" said Jenny. — a piece of ice, a sled, and a fortuitously placed party. Using a cartoon format, *That's Exactly the Way It Wasn't* takes the theme of family arguments to hilarious lengths: "*Must be getting late, Wainey.*" "*Early.*" "*Steep hill, Wainey.*" "*Flat. Nice view, Wainey!*" "*Icky.*" RRRRUMBLE "*Does that sound like a landslide, Wainey?*" "*Nump.*" and heights and depths: "*Well, I guess you'll have to agree, Wainey, that we're falling...*" THUD! "*Nump... not any more!*" Present day spats among siblings are

tame compared to Grandpa's argument with Uncle Wainey about a long-ago adventure featuring a protective purple armadillo, a yawning green iguana, assorted chatty birds, and an eventual landing on something hot and bubbly and about to erupt. (Given the author's lush imagination, we can conclude it won't be a volcano.) Ethical, humorous and inventive, Stevenson's books are perennial favorites for all ages. (JMJ)

**The World of Work**  
***An Auto Mechanic; A Carpenter; A Potter***  
by Douglas Florian

Greenwillow Books, 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016. 1991.  
ISBN 0-688-10635-8, 0-688-09760-X, 0-688-101003-3, respectively.  
Each 24 pp., and US\$13.95.

Douglas Florian's books celebrate workers: a potter, a carpenter, an auto mechanic. The workers are diverse in gender and age, but have one characteristic in common: all have red hair. Warm colors predominate in the big, bright illustrations. The print is also large, and the brief text is chunked into phrases, making the books good choices for early reading; occasional rhymed sections contribute to reading ease. Florian treats young readers with respect; the descriptions of different kinds of work are informative, sound and straightforward. (JMJ)

***Meredith's Mother Takes the Train***

by Deborah Lee Rose. Illustrated by Irene Trivas.

Albert Whitman and Company, 5747 West Howard Street, Niles IL 60648-4012. 1991. ISBN 0-8075-5061-2. US\$10.95.

*Meredith's Mother Takes the Train*, dedicated by the author "to my mother, who took the train," is a clever, briskly-rhymed account of a busy child and her busier mother, spending their weekdays, respectively, at a well-run daycare center and an active office. The happy conclusion to the week is a Saturday spent together at the zoo. The book is a welcome celebration of hard work, and the joys experienced by career women and their children. (JMJ)

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