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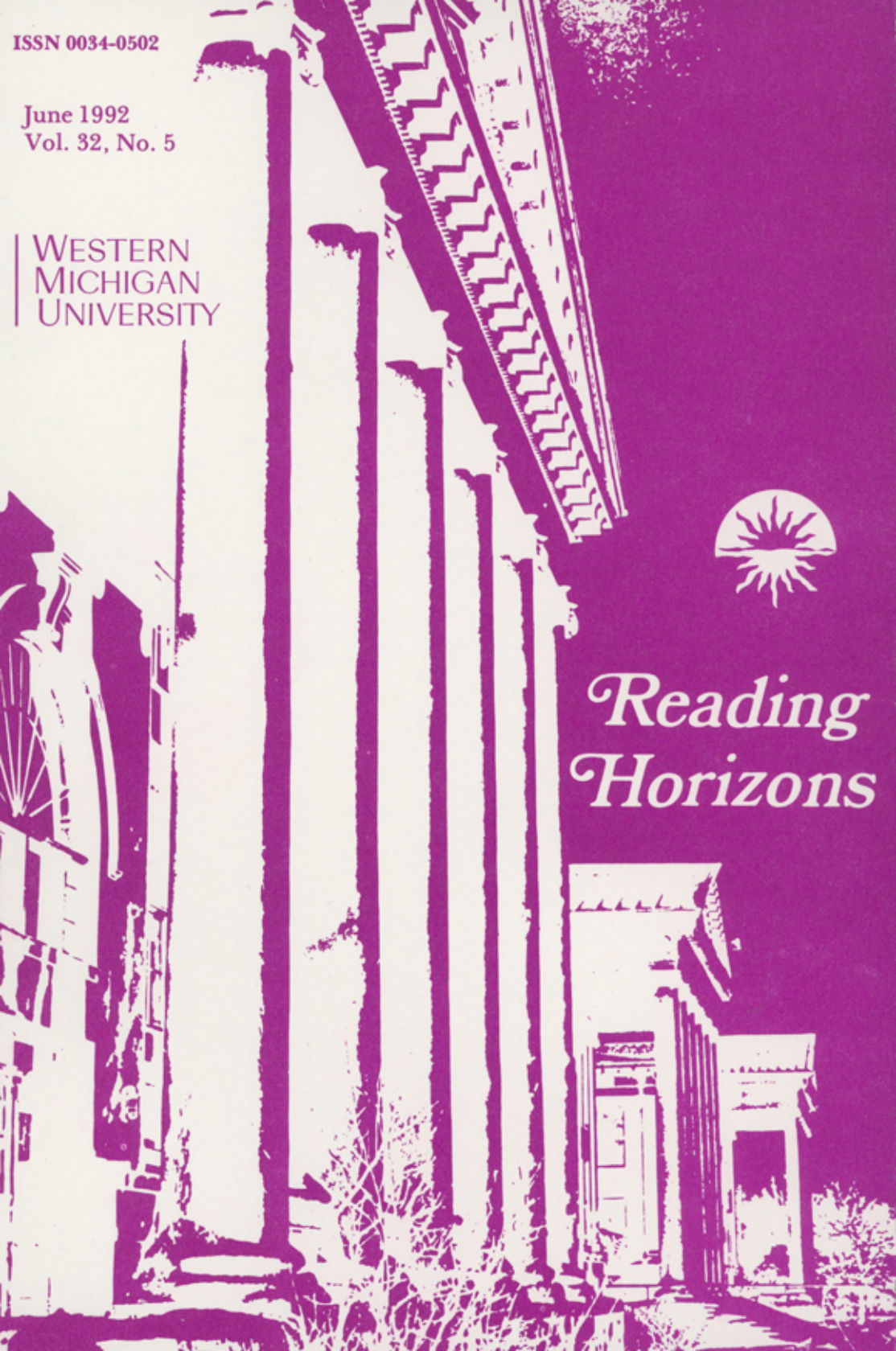
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READING HORIZONS

**Volume 32, Number 5
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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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**June 1992 Themed Issue
Alternative Methods of Grouping
for Literacy Instruction**

Beginning in 1991, *Reading Horizons* added a fifth issue annually, devoting that issue to a theme. This second themed issue of *Reading Horizons* focuses on ways of grouping students for language arts instruction which encourage literacy for all learners. Our lead article is contributed by Dr. Richard Allington, a widely known scholar for research into grouping practices and their effects. Guest editor for this issue is Dr. Mary Hauser, whose prologue provides a commentary on the articles which follow.

**Call for Manuscripts for 1993 Themed Issue:
*Exemplary Teaching and Exemplary Teachers***

The June 1993 issue of *Reading Horizons* will be devoted to the theme of the exemplary teacher. Contributions in the form of research reports, commentaries, case studies, and articles discussing theory and practice of exemplary teaching are welcomed. Manuscripts should be submitted following *Reading Horizons* guidelines: send four copies and two stamped, self-addressed business-size envelopes; include a cover sheet with author name and affiliation; use a running head (without author identity) on subsequent pages; follow APA guidelines for references and use of gender-free language. Manuscripts intended for the themed issue should be postmarked by March 1, 1993. Address all manuscripts to Dr. Jeanne M. Jacobson, Editor, *Reading Horizons*, Reading Center and Clinic, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo MI 49008.

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Alternative Methods of Grouping for Literacy Instruction

Guest Editor: Mary E. Hauser

Mary E. Hauser is a faculty member in the Department of Education and Professional Development at Western Michigan University, specializing in early childhood education and multicultural education.

Her editorial experiences include serving as an editorial assistant on the journal *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, an editor of *Literacy for Empowerment* written by Concha Delgado-Gaitan (Falmer Press, 1990), and as a member of the *Reading Horizons* editorial advisory board.

Dr. Hauser was a member of the first special education delegation for professional exchanges to visit the People's Republic of China. She has conducted comparative education studies in Kenya, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, and the former USSR as well as the People's Republic of China.

Her research includes studies of collaborative literacy, cultural sensitivity in teaching practices, multiculturalism, and cross-cultural classroom strategies.

She brings to the editorship of this themed issue a strong background in theory-based research and practice, a deep interest in literacy, and a passionate concern for children.

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A Prologue: What Happens Before Alternative Groupings

Mary E. Hauser

The articles in this special issue of *Reading Horizons* present a variety of perspectives and strategies for teachers to consider when they are thinking about their reading/literacy/language arts programs. Why use all three of these words? Aren't they basically synonymous? While the purpose of this prologue is not to define the terms, it is important to point out that how teachers define these concepts determines how they organize their instruction. Their definitions may be implicit or explicit — but they do exist and shape the work that goes on in classrooms. In this introduction I wish to stimulate you to raise questions that will help you to think about what your personal definitions of reading/literacy/language arts are and then to use this knowledge as a background for interpreting and applying the information presented in the articles in this special issue. It is only by regularly questioning the assumptions upon which we base our teaching that we can be responsive to the changes in our student populations, the materials we use and the demands of our society for which schools function. How else will we get beyond the "bluebirds," "robins," and "cardinals" (and their variations)?

How do children learn reading/literacy/language arts? Who are the children that we are teaching? The better we can answer these questions, the more prepared we will be to help children construct the knowledge they need. In con-

trast to the behaviorist paradigm that has dominated our thinking about learning and teaching for many years, the theoretical frameworks of Piaget and Vygotsky are now important in shaping our views that children learn through an active process of constructing their knowledge and that the process of construction occurs within a social context. These theorists are not part of the constant pendulum swing of pedagogical practice that seems to be endemic to education. While the notion that children construct their knowledge allows for a variety of interpretations, we have solid evidence of the efficacy of this approach. Articles in this special issue are all compatible with the ideas of children constructing their knowledge within a social context. They do not allow us to think of reading simply as a process of decoding, or of writing and spelling as disconnected skills taught during different times of the day. Instead, they enable us to consider how literacy can be approached as a developmental process of making meaning of the symbols of our language.

As we examine our assumptions about what goes on in classrooms, and begin to see the classroom as a place where a child constructs knowledge about the world, what effect does this have on the roles we as teachers play in the classroom? The direct instruction that now comprises the majority of a teaching day can be de-emphasized as we create an environment for children to be active processors of information. Classrooms will become more child-focused and we will be facilitators of the constructive process, helping to foster ownership for learning in every member of this learning community.

Such revisions in the way we think about classrooms also raise questions about the organization of class time. Activities that integrate what formerly was taught separately as spelling and writing, for example, demand larger blocks

of time and lend themselves to collaboration among students rather than independent work. Our plan books, with the little boxes previously labeled so neatly as *reading*, *writing*, *vocabulary*, *spelling*, constrain the planning process and need to be replaced by a large block labeled *literacy*. This may seem like an unnecessary observation — just reorganizing plan books isn't really a very significant part of dealing with this rethinking that we are doing. However, the structure of the book can provide a hidden constraint. How many teachers have you heard say things like, "I just have to fill in my writing section and I am finished with my plans for next week!" (Of course, *I* never did that, nor did you.) Just as we work to enable students to build mental structures or schemata to accommodate the information they are learning, we, too must develop new schemata to accommodate the ideas about literacy. We cannot fit them into our old structures. We have to build new ones — mental structures in our heads, and physical structures in our plan books. What may seem to be a small constraint — a plan book with boxes — may be more powerful than expected. Opening the structure of a plan book can help to enable teachers to implement thematic units. Planned and carried out collaboratively with students, units can help to create the community of learners that the articles issue emphasize.

As we rethink our views of the development of literacy and create environments in which children can construct knowledge about print through both shared and independent experiences, a community of learners can take shape. These articles provide some strategies for developing such communities.

Overview of the issue

Well known for his work on the impact of ability grouping on literacy learning, Allington, in his article, "Reconsidering Instructional Groupings," contributes necessary

historical and social context to this issue. He highlights the assumptions that influenced the thinking of educators which lead to the establishment of the *bluebirds*, *robins*, and *cardinals* as the primary delivery system of reading instruction. Assumptions, such as the belief that only some children can acquire full literacy, take on a different perspective in light of what we now know about the development of literacy.

"Including All Students in a Community of Learners" by Dudley-Marling and Stires contributes the framework for the notion of a community of learners that is developed through the articles in this special issue. They suggest a perspective that is based on respect and recognition for children and the concomitant freedom of students to take responsibility for their own learning and to share the responsibility for the learning of other members of the community. They see collaboration not as a formal structure but as a way of being. The authors advocate getting away from the rigid inflexible structures of the educational system and propose changes based on creating a sense of community. The way that is implemented depends on the members of the community. The authors are commended for not proposing another rigid set of guidelines in their place, but building effectively, with vignettes of classroom activities, a sense of the important components of the community of learners.

The idea of a community of learners is expanded by Danielson in "Literature Groups and Literature Logs: Responding to Literature in a Community of Readers." She grounds her work in collaborative social context informed by the research of Vygotsky. The literature logs and literature discussion groups on which they are based provide another example of how students can have an active role in their learning. The author has found that literature logs allow for students to react to literature in a way that enhances the

meaning for them and therefore enhances and enriches the act of reading.

"What's Going On Here?" by Stice and Bertrand provides a description of a classroom in which the teacher has developed a sense of community through her emphasis on whole language instruction. The benefit of this grouping was demonstrated in larger gains than expected for the at risk population served by the school. The practices described by these authors validate the ideas advanced in the article by Dudley-Marling and Stires. Everyone is a contributor in this classroom. Collaboration and student choice were documented and described by the authors.

Young and McCullough, in "Looking Out for Low Achieving Readers," also focus on improving instruction for readers who could be considered at risk for school success. They make the point that low achieving readers receive instruction that is inferior to more competent readers. Their suggestions for change are based on a definition of reading as an active process of constructing meaning from text. They provide examples of ways to foster collaboration and give students choices in reading and writing materials, activities that can result in improved student performance and certainly promote a sense of shared learning.

In "Cooperative Grouping in Literacy Instruction" Wiesendanger and Bader describe ways cooperative or collaborative grouping can be implemented in classroom literacy instruction. Wiesendanger and Bader see collaborative learning as a vehicle to student ownership of learning, and to developing an environment that de-emphasizes competition and authoritarian control. Classrooms that function in this way allow for an atmosphere of community to develop. The suggestions the authors make are valuable for teachers who want to change their grouping practices.

“Creating a Disabled Reader” by Phillips presents a parent’s perspective on the outcome of tracking in his documentation of how a child with an appropriate introduction to literacy ends up as a disabled reader. The article points out how grouping and tracking systematically destroyed the child’s ability to read. It is a strong message to consider: while prereading activities must be carried on, it is not enough to assume that because a child has appropriate prereading experiences that child will be successful all the way through school. The kernel of those early experiences — relevance, ownership and context — needs to continue in classrooms. The article highlights the discrepancy between learning and teaching that exists in our classrooms.

The final article, “The Non-Traditional Student,” a sensitive essay by Wickey, also presents a personal perspective on the outcome of tracking, this time from the point of view of the student herself. The essay speaks powerfully to each teacher and administrator concerned with the development of their students’ potential.

Taken together, the articles in this special issue make a strong statement for the necessity of broadening our concept of reading instruction to that of literacy instruction. Each article provides practical ways to implement that concept with the underlying idea of the importance of collaboration. As the variety of strategies presented demonstrates, collaboration is a way of being and working in the classroom. As teachers make their classrooms places that are congenial to the linguistic, cultural, social and intellectual backgrounds students bring to school, a true community of learners can be developed.



Reconsidering Instructional Groupings

Richard L. Allington

For over a half-century elementary school teachers have organized students for reading instruction into achievement groupings (sometimes mislabeled “ability groups”). The traditional three group scheme – top, middle and bottom – was recommended shortly after the turn of the century as a better alternative to whole class instruction. The idea was that creating three instructional groups would allow teachers to match the pace of reading instruction to the presumed learning aptitudes of their students. The central premise of the three group scheme was that only some children could be expected to acquire full literacy – that many students did not have the capacity to learn to read and write beyond very basic levels. Remember, though, that this was in an era when most students did not complete high school and most jobs involved agricultural or assembly line work.

The three group scheme has come under increasing scrutiny over the past few years as American society changed and our understanding of how children learn to read and write increased. Today, there are few jobs in agriculture or on the assembly line and even these jobs typically require high levels of literacy. We are an information society – a society that now rewards those who can organize and manipulate information more than those who manufacture

goods. We are a society which imports high-tech workers from other countries while we export agricultural and manufacturing jobs. We are a society that no longer has useful roles for poorly educated, low-literacy level workers. We are a society that no longer can support a bottom group.

All this presents difficulties for schools that are designed to produce a bottom group – elementary schools, for instance, where it is simply accepted that not all primary grade children will learn to read with their peers. Such schools are those most likely to continue to group children by how much they know about reading and writing when they arrive for kindergarten. These low-experience with literacy children then go on to become the first grade bottom group. A major difficulty with the three group organization is that initial group placement, which usually occurs in kindergarten or first grade, is largely maintained throughout a school career. That is, children placed in the top group remain among the highest achievers and the bottom group children remain among the lowest achievers through elementary, middle and high school (Barr and Dreeben, 1991). This result should not be surprising because children in different groups receive different instruction and these instructional differences virtually ensure some children will remain behind their peers in acquiring literacy (Allington, 1983).

The most common strategy for differentiating instruction for groups of children identified as less able has been to “slow it down and make more concrete” (Allington, 1991). In other words, these children are paced more slowly through instructional materials and offered more drill and practice activities, usually on isolated subskills. As a result, children in the bottom group typically do not meet grade level curricular goals and may actually read and write less than

children in the top and middle groups. This is a case of the rich getting richer and the poor poorer.

As we have learned more about how children learn to read and write it has become obvious that virtually all children who enter our kindergartens can acquire literacy along with their peers. To accomplish this, however, requires designing schools and instructional programs that accelerate the reading acquisition of those children who arrive with few experiences with print. Acceleration requires that we offer some students substantially more and better instruction from their earliest school experiences. This instruction must offer expanded opportunities to read and write and access to teachers who can facilitate learning to read.

One problem with three groups was the need for large quantities of independent seatwork to occupy those children not working with the teacher. Thus, the traditional workbooks were developed and soon became a common feature of elementary school reading and language arts instruction (Langer and Allington, 1991). Though all children can benefit from some well-chosen independent tasks, traditional seatwork often occupied two-thirds of the reading period when children were grouped! In these cases, children spent more time on the relatively less useful tasks of practicing isolated skills than they spent on reading, writing, or in discussion of the stories they had read. Real reading and writing activities came to play only a small role in daily reading lessons. Too often, those children who were experiencing difficulty learning to read and write spent the largest amounts of time working on seatwork tasks and the smallest amounts of time actually reading and writing. Traditional seatwork occupied children but did little to develop their reading and writing abilities and did not foster accelerated development in the lowest achieving children.

Single curriculum with flexible grouping

Criticism of the three group strategy has resulted in a perceptible shift toward increased use of whole-class reading instruction. The premise here is that if grouping children by achievement produces negative results, the obvious alternative is the elimination of such groups. Unfortunately, mandating whole-class instruction does not eliminate the real differences in children that produced the initial recommendation for differential goals achieved through grouping.

Classrooms will always contain children who differ one from another on a myriad of features, including their outside of school experiences with reading and writing and their proclivity for learning to read and write. We cannot expect that whole class instruction will be equally useful for all children. At the same time, the negative impact of organizing achievement groups is so well documented that we can no longer view the traditional three group classroom organization as viable. Fortunately, we do not have to choose – this is not an either/or situation. We can organize classroom instruction in ways that acknowledge the differences in children as literacy learners and yet does not limit their potential for learning (Cunningham, Hall and Defee, 1991).

We must begin with the children. We must agree that all children have the right to access the same rich literacy curriculum. In other words, all children have access to wonderful children's literature, to higher-order instruction, to rich opportunities to read and write and the opportunity to talk about their reading and writing with their peers. We begin with the belief that all children are learners and that each can and will learn to read. We begin by acknowledging that some children need more and better teaching than others (McGill-Franzen and Allington, 1991). This done, we begin

to rethink how we might organize our classrooms to achieve these goals.

A central premise of the alternative approach is that we can accelerate the literacy learning of children, especially those children who have often found learning to read difficult. This view acknowledges that children differ in many ways, especially in their literacy experiences before beginning school. However, rather than viewing these differences as signals to slow down instruction, the differences we observe in children are viewed as signals to enhance instruction, by any of several means, in order to accelerate their literacy learning and allow all children to become literate with their peers. We might enhance instruction by using whole group, small group, pairs or independent work.

For instance, we might work with a small group of children in a review or reinforcement activity following presentation of a main lesson to all children. We might have a reading, learning disabilities, or bilingual specialist teacher who will reinforce, reteach, or offer a review lesson for some students after the main lesson. We could organize cooperative learning groups and allow children to learn from each other. Perhaps we will elect to use pairs, reading partners, older student tutors, or some other one-to-one arrangement. We might have the reading material audio-tape recorded so that some students could preview or review the material outside of school. We might move around the room and work briefly with several individual children as they work through their lesson. We might decide that we need to offer another whole-class main lesson because so many children did not seem to understand our first attempt. We might create literature study groups of children who elect to read the same book. We could involve some children in dramatization to support understanding or extend interpretation.

We could elect to do a shared reading or a read-aloud if the story poses much difficulty. We could create an extended-day, after school program that provided children with the opportunity for close personal attention. In other words, we might adjust instruction in any number of ways – but how we adjust depends upon the children.

Some will say, “But that is just whole-class teaching.” But that is not really an appropriate description. It is better viewed as a single-curriculum approach – an approach that recognizes that while children do differ in many ways, they remain yet more alike than different. It is a variety of instructional groupings within the framework of a single rich literacy curriculum for all children. In order to ensure all children access to this rich curriculum we organize and re-organize our reading instruction, always attempting to address the differences individual children present as readers and writers. There is no single organizational scheme that we can simply put in place and leave alone. Every lesson, every story, every day presents a different set of opportunities for teaching and a different set of instructional problems. The only organizational strategy that can work is one that is flexible.

Providing all children with access to the same rich curriculum does not mean that all children always do all the same tasks and activities nor do they all read the same books and write on the same topics. There should be a core of readings and instructional activities that all children experience. It is this common curriculum that allows children to talk with one another, to learn from and about one another. It is also this core curriculum experience that allows the teacher to observe the similarities and differences in learners. But this core experience is just the beginning from which we adjust instruction. The core experiences hold the

lessons together and provide direction from which children can work.

Summary

Once we decide that all children will work on the same curriculum, we need to think about how to best adjust our teaching to meet the needs of those children who need more challenging tasks and those who need more instructional support than other children. We need, also, to think about how to foster students' independent, self-selection of reading material and writing topics. We need to reorganize our resources to provide some children with access to more and better instruction in order to accelerate their development. However, until we decide that all children will learn to read there is little motivation to redesign our instruction. Eliminating achievement groups can begin the redesigning process, but it will only be the beginning.

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Including All Students Within a Community of Learners

**Curt Dudley-Marling
Susan Stires**

One of the inevitable consequences of schooling is this: a substantial number of children will experience some failure during their educational careers. Evidence for this includes the fact that 11 percent of American school children are placed in special education programs (Lipsky and Gartner, 1989) because they cannot cope with the demands of the curriculum. Fifteen percent of students in grades K-8 receive part-time assistance in remedial, Chapter 1 programs (Steele and Gutmann, 1989) which require that students experience some failure before they are eligible for these services (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 1989). Many students who fail leave school before graduation. Nationally, over 10 percent of students do not graduate from high school (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990) and in some inner-city schools as many as 80 percent of the students who enter in the ninth grade leave school before graduation (Fine, 1987).

Schools respond to students' failure in a number of ways but special and remedial education – with their underlying assumption that there is something wrong with the student – are typical. When students fail we try to explain their struggles in terms of some disability, deficit, or lack of

critical experiences which are believed to cause their failure. Intervention usually focuses on either "fixing" what's wrong or providing critical experiences students have "missed."

There is reason to doubt the success of our efforts to fix or cure students. Studies of the effectiveness of special education, for example, have consistently reported little or no benefit for students placed in special education programs (e.g., Carlberg and Kavale, 1980; Glass, 1983). Based on a study of both the quantity and quality of reading instruction students received in Chapter 1 programs, special education resource rooms, and regular classrooms, Allington and McGill-Franzen (1989) conclude that "the expectation that participation in remedial or special education will enhance access to larger amounts of higher quality instruction remains yet unfulfilled" (p. 85). Some observers conclude that special education programs may actually harm both students and their families (e.g., Granger and Granger, 1986; Taylor, 1991).

Currently, a lot of attention is being given to the notion of students who are at risk for educational failure. In general, the term *at risk* is a euphemism for students of color, those who live in poverty, residents of inner cities, those with handicaps, and students for whom English is a second language (Lipsky and Gartner, 1989). Statistically, these students are especially likely to experience school failure and, perhaps, be placed in special education or remedial programs. Presumably, focusing our attention on students who are particularly likely to experience failure in school gives us an opportunity to prevent or reduce school problems. On the face of it, this is laudable. But there are two important assumptions underlying this effort. First of all, it is assumed that once we have identified a student as being "at risk" for failure we can provide some sort of intervention which will

help the student succeed in school. Perhaps we can, although, as we've already noted, previous efforts in special and remedial education do not give us reason for optimism. But there's another more basic assumption operating here. By focusing our efforts on at risk students we necessarily assume that the problem is *theirs*.

The almost exclusive focus on the problems of children who have experienced failure in school or whom we believe to be at risk for failure overlooks the programmatic and institutional contexts within which students fail. Statistical sorting of students, lockstep, age graded curricula, and a deficiency model which directs attention to what's wrong with our students guarantee that some students will fail in school. We recently overheard a group of teachers arguing that the rigid, subject-organized curricula common in secondary schools be introduced into fifth and sixth grade classes to prepare students better for this instructional organization. One teacher explained that "the child-centered approach in elementary schools might be good for students, but it doesn't get them ready for the realities of junior and senior high school." The reality is that the needs of individual students are often subordinated to the demands of the system.

In general, students fail when they are unable to learn the skills their teachers think they should learn, at the time the teachers think they should. Sometimes, students' difficulties may have less to do with their ability to learn to read or write than with their inability to meet inflexible curricular demands. Taylor (1991), for example, describes the all too common situation of a child whose problem was not that he couldn't read or write, but that he couldn't fit into the basal reading program. Similarly, the problem for some learning disabled and remedial students isn't that they don't

know the “skills,” but that they can’t cope with worksheets or tests (Rhodes and Dudley-Marling, 1988).

We believe that efforts to reduce school failure must turn away from trying to fix students. Instead teachers should concentrate on transforming their classrooms to make them places which are more congenial to the linguistic, cultural, social, and intellectual backgrounds students bring to school. In short, teachers need to create a community of learners. Rief (1989) captures the spirit of this transformation when she says, “My students are my curriculum. I want to nurture that uniqueness, not standardize my classroom so that the students become more and more alike...” (p. 15).

A community of learners

What is a community of learners and how do teachers construct such an environment? Perhaps it will help to look in a classroom that, in our opinion, contains a thriving community of learners. These students range in age from five to seven and in development from students who can’t read print to fluent readers. It is reading time in this primary classroom. While Tristan passes out the folder containing the books that the students are reading, Alden records the title of his book, *Hill of Fire*, by Thomas P. Lewis. He finished reading it yesterday and today he shared his favorite part with the class. Kate and Shane head off to work on their torn-paper art project in response to the book *It Looked Like Spilt Milk* by Charles J. Shaw which Catherine had recommended to them last week. Catherine, Abraham, and Krystin became engrossed in the last chapter of *Owl at Home*, by Arnold Lobel. They will be discussing that chapter with several other students at the end of the reading workshop. On the other side of the room the assistant teacher and a group of six students rehearse their reading of

Rosie's Walk by Pat Hutchins and use the map that they made of Rosie the Hen's farmyard. Tristan, who has finished passing out the folders, is reading *I Know an Old Lady* to his teacher. Rachel and Sarah listen and laugh as Emily reads aloud *Sorry, Miss* by Jo Furtado and Frederic Joos. Just as Alden begins to read *The Littles* by John Peterson, Abraham comes over and asks about a word that he, Catherine, and Krystin are unsure of.

In this highly structured, predictable classroom, the students exercise choice and exhibit responsibility in their reading. They help each other and share with one another. They are all part of a thriving community of learners.

In her book, *When Writers Read*, Jane Hansen (1987) writes about the importance of readers and writers supporting each other in a community. She states, "A community is composed of individuals, each of whom has a unique contribution to make. The supportive community begins with the teacher's belief that each child has something to share" (pp. 58-59).

Most teachers readily acknowledge the ability of the majority of their students to participate in and benefit from being part of an active community of learners. But teachers may be less able to recognize the ability of those students for whom school is a struggle to participate in a learning community. In reality, specialized instruction and pull-out programs marginalize students who struggle in school by making it difficult for them to participate fully as members of the classroom community. From our perspective, however, in order for a community of learners truly to grow and flourish, all class members must be full and active participants in the community. Donald Graves (1991), who described classrooms as communities in his early research on writing,

extends the discussion to students with learning and emotional problems. He notes the isolation and lack of a sense of community these students have, as well as their histories of failure in taking responsibility for their learning. However, he further stresses the importance of developing a structured, predictable community to help these students overcome their feelings of isolation and histories of failure.

The challenge for educators is to begin to see students in inclusive ways and to value diversity in their classrooms so that those students who have been "ghost," as Nancie Atwell has called them, can become contributors.

The development of a sense of community begins with respect and recognition for individuals and the concomitant freedom of students to take responsibility for their own learning and to share the responsibility for the learning of other members of the community. In this context accommodation and collaboration become primary means through which students learn. In the following sections we begin by explicating respect and recognition and then freedom and responsibility which we see as prerequisites to the development of a vital community of learners. Finally, we discuss how effective teachers can exploit these conditions to encourage accommodation and collaboration within the classroom community.

Respect and recognition

Respect for who students are and what they have to say is an essential beginning. Perhaps the most significant way that we show respect for our students is by listening to them. Yet, even before we can listen, students must have the rhetorical space that they need in order to speak. Teachers indicate their regard for students and invite them to share what they think and what they feel by assuming that

all of our students, even those who are not always successful in school, have something to say. As teachers we need to ask students what they think and what they feel and listen when they tell us. If need be we should bite our lips, clamp our jaws, or count to 100, so that our students have opportunities to give voice to their ideas, concerns, problems, solutions, and joys. Conversely, if teachers concentrate on the "rightness" or "goodness" of what students say, or if they focus on the form instead of the content of their language, they signal a lack of respect for students as individuals and discourage future sharing. The following example illustrates how respect can encourage students to share and provide teachers with windows to students' thinking and learning.

Sara, a girl who had been labeled educable mentally retarded, spent half of her day in a resource room. There Sara and her teacher read together and conferenced about her reading. Since Sara's teacher listened to her and acknowledged what she had to say, sometimes responding to Sara in her journal, Sara learned that her teacher was interested, for example, in the connections that Sara made as a reader. As evidence of Sara's growing interest in genre, Sara commented about the book she was reading, Holling's *Seabird*, "This is a faction!" Sara's teacher didn't question Sara about the meaning of "faction," nor did she correct her. She understood what Sara meant and expressed delight at Sara's insight. (Interestingly, Sara's teacher later learned that Norman Mailer calls non-fiction novels, like Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, "factions.")

Lacking the confidence to speak or feeling uncomfortable with the social climate of school, students who struggle often do not share what they know or think unless they are convinced that their ideas will be respected (Fine, 1991). Their ideas may be validated in some cases and celebrated

in others, but students must trust that their language and their ideas will be respected by their teachers and peers. Teachers must be cautious in their use of praise to celebrate students' accomplishments, however. Teachers' praise must be sincere and students must understand what is being praised (e.g., their effort, the product). A sixth grade student, for example, wrote in his journal: *One day at art we made watercolors with chalk and everybody's was real good, but mine looked like junk, but my art teacher said it looked really good. I looked at her and said what is it. She said she didn't know and she told me to put it back with the other ones. But I still do not know why she said it looked really, really good. To me it looked like junk!*

Recognition comes when our students' voices — as readers, writers, and speakers — are heard and established. Recognition does not mean that there is a spotlight on the individual. Rather, it means that the individual has had an impact on the other members of the community, and the group learns what to expect from that member. Usually these expectations will be met but at other times students will surprise their audience and recognition of the individual will grow.

Recognition of students will not happen without the efforts of teachers who must consciously work to insure that student voices are established and heard within the community. Opportunities for group sharing, for example, insure that students' uniqueness will be recognized. William, who worked with a special education teacher in both a resource room and the regular classroom, had a fine sense of humor and an unusual way of seeing things. William learned from experience that his comments on books were always welcome. One day after his teacher finished reading *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*, William looked at the

last picture of the book – which showed Mary Ann, the steam shovel, converted into a furnace with Mike Mulligan relaxing in a chair nearby – and remarked, “Mike Mulligan is smoking his pipe and Mary Ann is smoking hers!” The first time that William spelled “from” conventionally, his teacher insured that William’s accomplishment would be recognized by the community. During group share, she asked him how he had learned the correct spelling. William grinned and explained casually, “from all those valentine cards.”

Teachers encourage recognition by having all students consistently share their accomplishments and their experiences through their reading, writing, and talking within and outside of the classroom learning community. Like William’s teacher, they may celebrate student achievements during group sharing times. Or they may use students’ work to illustrate some aspect of reading or writing during teacher- or student-directed mini-lessons. The publication of students’ written work, having students read books they are able to read fluently with other classes or their parents, and dramatizing books they have read for their classmates or other classes, also recognize students’ work. In general, the recognition of students’ work identifies them as members of a vital community of readers, writers, speakers, thinkers, and problem-solvers and this, in turn, helps define the community itself.

Freedom and responsibility

Too often students who struggle in school aren’t trusted to make choices for themselves or given the freedom to pursue their own interests. Underlying schools’ preference for highly structured, prescriptive curricula for less successful students are implicit beliefs about their range of interests and their ability to make choices. In general, we seem to believe that some students, particularly

those who struggle in school, do not have many interests or experiences and, therefore, lack the ability to make choices or evaluate alternatives.

The sorting of students on the basis of our beliefs about their ability to learn and make decisions often begins in kindergarten. Some students quickly convince their teachers of their ability to be successful in school. These students answer questions, follow instructions, initiate ideas which are in concert with teachers' thinking, and are neat and well organized. Other students may do these things less well but manage to convince teachers of their potential. But some students run afoul of their teachers almost from the moment they first enter the classroom. These students may be confused, fearful, or aggressive. They may not initiate ideas or do so at inappropriate times. They may be messy and disorganized. These students just don't seem to fit. The tendency is to attribute these problems to a lack of student ability and/or experience and reason that they need a structured, teacher controlled (i.e., inflexible) curriculum which focuses on giving them the skills and experiences they need to get along in school. When this happens, and it happens all the time, there is no reason to offer students choice since teachers decide what and how these students will learn by reference to the curriculum. Nor is there any apparent reason to consider or build on students' interests. In short, students are assigned to learn predetermined skills because – implicitly – the system does not trust students' ability to learn and does not acknowledge the validity of their interests and experiences. Student ability and experiences are remediated or compensated for instead of being used as a foundation upon which students can build.

A community of learners, in which everyone is a contributor, cannot thrive and flourish unless we learn to trust all

students and insure them the freedom that they must have to pursue learning. Lack of trust, coupled with a tunnel-vision which focuses our attention on students' weaknesses, and not their strengths, has the effect of excluding some students from the classroom community. If teachers can look at students in all their complexities and messiness as learners and accept it as potential, they can provide them with the freedom that students need in order to learn. Teachers can allow students choice in writing when they write on topics that are important to them and in reading when they read real books that they choose themselves.

Heath was a third grader who had a history of reading and behavioral problems. Before he entered the third grade the only books he had ever read were primers and the only strategy he had for reading was sounding out letters and words. In third grade, his teacher encouraged him to read books of his own choosing and provided him with a variety of books from which to choose. One day he poked his head in the door of the resource room and asked, "Do you have *The Cross Country Cat*? I think you do, I saw it over there," pointing to a shelf where it had been displayed. The resource room teacher assured Heath that she did have it and asked him what made him decide to read *The Cross Country Cat*. He explained that his cousin had borrowed the book from the library and he had read part of it. He liked the part about the cat skiing and wanted to read more. Because he was given the freedom to select his reading material Heath made great strides as a reader. The freedom to make choices depended, in turn, on his teacher's trust in his ability as a reader and a learner.

Along with freedom goes responsibility. Students who struggle in school, like other students, need the help and support of the community to learn how to make the best use

of their freedom. They need help learning how to proceed, how to choose, what strategies to use, how to follow through, and how to extend their learning. As their teachers, we must present information and ideas continually to build students' stores of knowledge of what is possible in reading and writing. Freedom without content and options is not freedom. It is a void and operating in a void can result in chaos.

Individuals must also learn to accept responsibility for their own learning and members of the community must learn to assume responsibility for each other. Students learn, for example, to read and write when they're given the time to read and write, to develop skills and strategies, to engage in conferences with others, to ask for help when needed, and to be a good audience for other students' work.

It takes time for students to accept responsibility for their own learning and the learning of the rest of the community. This process may take even longer for students who have experienced failure in these schools. Our lack of trust in some students has influenced us to take control of and assume the responsibility for their learning. As a result these students learn to respond passively to school instruction or, in the worst case, actively reject it. But students can overcome their passivity (or rejection) and learn to assume responsibility for their learning.

Kristy, a girl who had been labeled severely learning disabled, found it natural to take responsibility for selecting her writing topics, often planning them ahead of time. One day when she announced that she was going to write about sea animals like seahorses, crabs and lobsters, her teacher asked Kristy when she decided to pick this topic. She replied, "I thought about it in my mind last night." When the

writing workshop began, Kristy did indeed write about sea animals. Students who learn to assume this responsibility are set on the path of life-long learning which, after all, should be the primary goal of schooling.

Accommodation and collaboration

In order to reduce school failure we must create schools and classrooms which accommodate the needs of all our students, including those for whom school is a struggle. We believe the needs of the learning community and the diverse needs of students can be better accommodated by experimenting with different school organizations and through the flexible use of time and space.

A group of undergraduate students doing a practicum for their reading course was surprised to find that the teachers in one school either pushed the teachers' desks against the wall and used them as resource centers or moved their desks out of the classroom to create more space in which students could work. Similarly, other teachers may nourish the community by replacing desks with tables or rearranging student desks to encourage more face to face interactions, providing comfortable places for talking and reading, and so on.

Accommodations must be made in time as well as space. Some students need more time, others need less. Some teachers provide flexibility in their daily schedules by implementing a center-based program in which students choose which activities they do and when they do them, although teachers may mandate some of the centers (Schwartz and Pollishuke, 1989). Providing adequate time for students depends on getting to know them well and trusting that they can, given the needed support, learn to manage their time.

The organization of schools – regular classrooms, resource rooms, segregated classes, tutoring labs, classes with twenty-five to thirty same-age students and one teacher, etc. – often has more to do with tradition or the convenience of school officials than the needs of students. In order to meet the diverse needs of members of the learning community schools could experiment with alternative school organizations like cross-aged, family groupings, various class sizes and teacher-student ratios, alternative graduation requirements, and so on. In general, the currently rigid organization of our schools will never be sensitive to the diverse needs and backgrounds of students in North American schools.

Perhaps the most important feature of the learning community is the opportunity it provides for students to collaborate with their teachers and with each other. Student learning is facilitated through collaboration within a community of learners in which students and teachers use oral and written language to share, discuss, debate, question and extend one another's learning. One day during lunch period Danny, a kindergarten student who had been labeled retarded, and his teacher built a block tower together. When Danny had put on the last block he stepped back and announced, "I did it myself!" His teacher was surprised and delighted. She realized that she had provided the collaborative support Danny needed to do something he could not yet do himself. Nevertheless, he *felt* the accomplishment was his and his self-esteem soared as high as his tower.

In collaborative classrooms students learn from and with each other as well as their teachers. Brooke, who was considered to have a language handicap and rarely spoke in class, was sharing an alphabet book with the class with the help of her friend Rachel. Rachel read the "A" page and

then whispered what was written on the "B" page to Brooke who then read it to the class. They continued in this alternating fashion until they finished the book. Along with Rachel the class celebrated Brooke's achievement and she was filled with pride at what she had accomplished. Brooke read the alphabet book to her teachers the next day and a week later she shared a counting book with the class on her own (Stires, 1991).

Collaboration is not a set of activities that students engage in. Nor is it a recently revived idea that we superimpose on the curriculum; it is a way of being and working in the classroom. Information must be shared as resources in communities are shared for the common good. Like villagers at the well, students and teachers dip in for water and talk and talk, as a means of gathering information, sharing ideas and making meanings.

Conclusion

The inflexible instructional arrangements present in so many of our schools will never be sensitive to the needs of all our students. Our best chance of reducing failure in school is to move away from models of remedial and compensatory education – which focus our attention on what's wrong with our students – and concentrate on transforming classrooms into learning communities which are responsive to the range of ability and experiences students bring with them to school. A learning community – in which students and teachers live, learn and work together – not only accommodates individual differences, but celebrates differences and draws on student diversity to sustain the community. Within a community of learners student diversity becomes a resource and not a factor which places students at risk for educational failure.

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Literature Groups and Literature Logs: Responding To Literature in a Community of Readers

Kathy Everts Danielson

Literature discussion groups

Literature discussion groups as a vehicle for discussing and responding to literature have recently received much attention as an alternative to basal reading groups. Though different names have been given to this type of group (e.g., Literature Circles, Conversational Discussion Groups, and Literature Study Groups), the basic premise for this grouping is the same: students work in heterogeneous groups to discuss the books that they are reading. This placement in groups is done randomly, or according to the number of students reading the same book at a given time. Students then discuss the book that they are reading in a shared reading community.

Recent research advocates this type of grouping. Harste, Short, and Burke (1988) described Literature Circles as open-ended discussions, focused on bringing the literature and the reader together. O'Flahavan (1988) described Conversational Discussion Groups as classroom discussions in conversational style. This type of conversation had the greatest effect on students' positive view of the usefulness of literature group discussions when used with

second graders. Eeds and Wells (1989) described how fifth and sixth graders shared personal stories, became active readers, evaluated the text as literature, and valued alternative views of literature when placed in Literature Study Groups.

Response to literature is an important aspect of literature discussion groups. As readers read quality literature and share their reactions to what they have read, further reading and writing is enhanced. Rosenblatt (1978) described the focus of reading as a transactional process. Meaning is simultaneously brought to the text and taken away from it in a personal manner. Students' responses to literature can show engagement in the form of personal involvement with the text, or can allow the reader to make inferences based on what is read. Responses can also be perceptive in nature, such as simply retelling the story, or more evaluative in nature, such as giving opinions about characters and the story in general (Purves and Rippere, 1968).

In order for honest response of literature to occur, there must be a trusting and supportive community for readers to respond within. Vygotsky (1978) discussed the necessity of social interaction for the support of learning. Atwell (1987) has referred to talking about books (in writing or orally) as required "literary gossip." Literary gossip must be grounded in a community spirit to flourish and grow. Although the teacher is a participant in this discussion of books, the teacher is not the only one asking or answering the questions that readers have about literature. Students have an active role in response to literature via literature discussion groups.

This collaborative social context for learning is important because “learners: 1) come to know each other; 2) value what each has to offer; 3) focus on problem solving and inquiry; 4) share responsibility and control; 5) learn through action, reflection, and demonstration; and 6) establish a learning atmosphere that is predictable and yet full of real choices” (Short and Pierce, 1990, p. 35).

Literature logs

Writing about literature has also been advocated as a way to link the processes of reading and writing and to encourage diversity of response: “The more opportunities that students have to read and to write about books, the deeper their responses to literature will be, and the likelier the chance that we will become partners in learning” (Pierpont, 1990, p. 105). Literature logs can provide the forum for this rich response to literature. Literature logs are a place for students to record their thoughts and impressions about the books that they are reading.

Logs and discussion groups in action

To allow for this rich response to literature in a community of readers, 22 fifth grade students from a small midwestern city kept literature logs while reading *The Not-Just-Anybody Family* (Byars, 1986). They were asked to write one question and one comment after reading each chapter of the book for use in a later literature discussion group. These groups were not homogeneous reading groups (i.e., they were not grouped according to ability), but rather randomly assigned groups of four to five students who talked about the book together with the teacher.

In order to understand the context of students’ comments and questions, a brief summary of the book is necessary.

The Blossom family consists of three children (Junior, Maggie, Vern), their mother Vicki (who is on the rodeo circuit in this book), and their grandfather Pap. In this book, Pap is arrested for disturbing the peace after he accidentally dumps 2,000 cans on a street in town. Meanwhile, the police come to the Blossom place while Junior is on the barn roof with cloth wings tied to his arms as he is about to see if he can fly. When Maggie and Vern (who are on the ground to watch Junior) see the police car, they run into the woods, leaving Junior to fend for himself. Junior jumps down from the roof, breaks both his legs, and ends up in a hospital where his roommate Ralphie develops a crush on Maggie when Maggie and Vern finally figure out that Junior is in the hospital. Maggie and Vern also try to help get Pap out of jail, by breaking into jail. And Mud, the family dog, tries to figure out where everyone went as he journeys around the area. The story winds up with Pap getting out of jail, Junior getting out of the hospital, Mud being found, and their mother returning home. The Blossom family celebrates by having fried shredded wheat with syrup.

Students' written responses in literature logs

After careful analysis of students' written responses in their literature logs, the following types of comments and questions were identified: 1) predictions; 2) text-related; 3) character involvement; 4) personal experiences; 5) language; 6) author; and 7) personal feelings. A description of each type of response and examples follow.

Predictions. Predictive comments and questions offered ideas of what might happen next in the text. As students read the book and recorded their questions and comments, they thought about what was coming up in the story. They examined chapter titles and made inferences about upcoming events. Below are some examples of the fifth graders' prediction questions and comments.

Where could Mud be?

Is there going to be another story about Maggie and Ralphie getting married?

Did they call this chapter "Bustin Open" because Ralphie's watermelon seed in his stomach is going to bust?

I was thinking before I read the whole chapter I was wondering what was wrong with him. (The chapter title was "Ralphie Goes To Therapy.")

I think Pap is going to find Mud.

The name of the chapter ("Rich and Special"), it sounded like Vern or Maggie was stuck up or something when I first looked at it.

Vicki Blossom is probably going to quit the rodeo.

Text-related. Text-related comments and questions focused on the plot of the story. Students wrote comments and questions about the length of the chapters and whether or not events in the story were realistic, and made inferences about the story based upon what they read. Examples of these types of questions and comments:

Where was the gun?

Why did they want to go through that small vent — they would probably get stuck?

How did he get in the hospital? (This was never stated in the book.)

What's a Winn Dixie?

Why would they walk across a board to break into jail when all they had to do was go inside to see Pap?

Where did the board come from?

This is the first time Vicki Blossom is really in the story.

Junior could have lay down on the barn so the police wouldn't see him.

I think walking on the plank is dangerous, but jumping off it!

Character involvement. There were many comments and questions that focused on the characters' development and motivation. Students also wrote about their involvement with the various characters:

Why would Pap want to collect pop cans again?!?!?

Did you notice that ever since Maggie got money from Vern she hasn't whined?

Do you think Vern was very brave to break in to see Pap?

Is Junior jealous of Ralphie because of Maggie?

I think Maggie is not really in love with Ralphie she just wants him to do stuff for her.

I think Ralphie's jealous because everybody is visiting Junior.

I think that they are very silly to want to break into jail, but then again they love him.

I think Maggie was very smart to pull off what she did. (She sweet talked him.)

I think Maggie is turning weird because almost every time Ralphie says something she sighs or thinks something mushy in her head about Ralphie.

I like the way Vern soothes people.

Maggie is starting to like Ralphie.

I'm glad that Maggie stands up for herself now.

Personal experiences. Students also wrote about their own experiences that related to the story. They identified with the story and were reminded of similar incidents that had happened to them. Below are samples of their questions and comments.

Has anyone ever had fried shredded wheat?

Mud seems like a dog I know.

I know what Junior means when he said stiff and clean sheets. (p. 25.) When I was in the hospital I had stiff and clean sheets too.

I was in a hospital once and I felt just like Junior.

Junior's just like me when I want to stay awake for something special.

I have problems sleeping on Christmas Eve too.

Language. References were made to language and vocabulary in their comments and questions as well. Students noticed particular descriptive language that was effective and noted that in their responses. They also asked genuine questions about the words or concepts that they did not understand:

What's coma?

Does therapy hurt?

What does the verdict mean!!!

What is his Adam's apple and where did it come from?

On page 85 that was a good expression – wiggle-eel.

I thought it was funny when Maggie's eyes turned round like cartoon eyes.

It makes you feel hurry up run, run Maggie and Vern.

I think flip flops is a funny word.

I like it when the author used the impression, "His heart was pumping hard, like the machines he'd seen occasionally through the doors of Intensive Care."

It was funny when Maggie said Verrrrn.

I like when Junior said he didn't want to grin, but his lips did.

I thought that this must have been so exciting I can't put the book down. Also I thought that this chapter had a lot of exclamation marks.

I think it's funny when it says everyone was sleeping, snoring, snorting, and groaning in their sleep.

I just love it when the judge said, "Order in the court."

We got stuck on had had. (Students found a typographical error in this book and talked a lot about it.)

Author. Some students wrote questions and comments about Betsy Byars, the author, in their literature logs.

They developed a concept of the author as an authority on the characters and the story line. They thought about her motives for writing this story:

Why did Betsy Byars write this book?

How can Mrs. Byars make you feel frustrated with Junior?

I like how Betsy Byars makes me feel in this chapter.

Mrs. Byars makes all these chapters seem real.

I think Mrs. Byars made you want to touch or see everything in this story.

One student made a list of the things to ask Betsy Byars in a letter to her:

- 1) Tell her chapters that we liked.*
- 2) Ask her about the had had. (misprint)*
- 3) Ask her where the board came from. (breaking into jail)*
- 4) Ask her when she started to write.*

Own feelings. Students' own personal feelings were evident in their comments also. They wrote about how they felt as they were reading the book:

I think this was an emotional chapter.

I'm happy that they're all together again.

I cried a little this chapter.

I'm really crying now. It is really sad, but I'm happy for them.

I feel this had mixed feelings, sorry for Mud, happy for Pap, Vern and Maggie and happy and sad for Junior.

I think I'm going to love this book (I already do).

Now the whole family is together and I hope they will never be separated again.

Isn't it great to be together (end of book)!

I felt sad that Junior's dad died.

Percentages of responses. The percentages of the different types of responses in students' written questions and comments are included in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Percentage of Responses in Literature Logs

<i>Type of Response</i>	<i>Percentage of Questions</i>	<i>Percentage of Comments</i>
Predictions	7%	4%
Text-related	46%	34%
Character response	15%	27%
Own experiences	2%	6%
Language	28%	10%
Author	1%	1%
Personal feelings	1%	18%

The students' questions were mostly text-related, followed by language, character involvement, and predictions. Their comments were also mostly text-related, followed by character involvement, personal feelings, and language. They focused on the types of comments and questions that they could share with their discussion groups.

Summary and recommendations

Students' responses in the literature logs were genuine, honest and personal. They demonstrated evidence of comprehension and enjoyment. There were questions about plots, character development, and even the author's choice of words. Written comments and questions gave structure to the literature discussion groups and enabled students to participate in their community of readers.

The literature logs allowed students to write about what they read in a way that was meaningful to them. They provided for rich, deep, and diverse response to literature in a way that both enhanced and enriched the transactional act of reading. The following suggestions are offered for the use of literature logs and discussion groups: 1) *Grouping*

students according to the books they are reading, rather than by ability, can be effective. Students can be grouped together if they are reading the same book, a book by the same author, a book about the same character, or a book with a similar theme. For instance, one group of students might be reading a book about Anastasia by Lois Lowry, or a book about Ramona by Beverly Clearly. Students might be reading about a similar theme or setting, such as the prairie during the early 1900s by reading *Prairie Songs* (Conrad, 1985) and *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985). Or students could all be reading a book by the same author, such as Gary Paulsen's books.

2) *Providing some suggestions or prompts for writing facilitates student engagement in the literature logs.* Questions such as "How did this make you feel?" or "What might happen next?" help reluctant students to begin writing in response to literature.

3) *Groups work best with 4-6 students.* In order for a good discussion to occur, no more than six students should be in a group or one or two students can easily dominate the discussion.

4) *Literature group meetings can be held as often as the group deems necessary.* Students reading novels should meet at least once a week to discuss the chapters they are reading. Students reading picture books could meet several times in one week to discuss the book. The group can decide how often they would like to meet, depending upon how long the book is and how many chapters the book might have.

5) *The teacher's role is to facilitate discussion.* The literature log entries that the children have written will guide the discussion.

6) *The reading of good quality literature can add to the richness of the discussion groups.*

These suggestions can provide a framework for implementing literature logs and the discussion groups on which they are based. This format can be an effective way

of developing a community of readers – students making meaning of what they read in a collaborative social context.

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What's Going On Here? A Qualitative Examination of Grouping Patterns in an Exemplary Whole Language Classroom

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Recent debate has focused on two contrasting approaches to literacy instruction, a decoding versus a meaning centered paradigm (Adams, 1990). These curricular models differ in how reading instruction is conducted, because they differ in their underlying assumptions about how learning occurs, what language is, and what constitutes the reading act itself (Shuy, 1984).

While educational research into the effects of various teaching methods is to some degree inconclusive and fragmented, a few tentative conclusions can be drawn (Pearson, 1984). First, the emphasis in instructional method is reflected in learning; i.e., children learn what they are taught. Methods that promote decoding skills tend to yield greater decoding related ability, and methods that promote comprehending tend to yield greater comprehending ability. Second, conditions other than method (e.g., teacher expectations, organizational patterns, environmental considerations) appear to have consequences for

learning. This means that context as well as content contributes to what and how children learn. Therefore, the entire instructional process, in operation, must constitute the field of study.

Rationale

Presently, researchers cannot answer the question as to which, if either, method of instruction better answers the needs of children, without first specifying more fully the distinctive features of each focus and identifying the contextual aspects of each type of instruction that significantly influences the achievement of various groups of children. A need exists for practice-to-theory research, because the use of outcomes as the only measurement appears to be inadequate (Harste, 1988).

How instruction occurs in traditional, skills-based classrooms is well known and well documented. However, the same is not true for alternative philosophies such as whole language. Therefore, we decided to examine the practices, organization, and processes that comprised literacy instruction in one classroom of at risk children led by an experienced teacher who is committed to a literature based curriculum that focuses on the comprehension and use of language.

This classroom was examined in two parts. The first part, a quantitative study, researched the product outcomes of this type of instruction and preceded the qualitative study (Stice and Bertrand, 1989). The quantitative study provided baseline data and documented the achievement of children in five pairs of first and second grade classrooms over two years. The findings from part one indicated that: 1) at risk children in the whole language classrooms scored as well as their matched counterparts in traditional classrooms on

standardized achievement test measures; 2) at risk children in the whole language classrooms appeared to learn more about reading and writing, and their literacy development appeared to be enhanced in a wider variety of ways than children from the traditional classrooms; 3) whole language appears to be a viable instructional alternative for both rural and inner-city at risk children; and 4) the efficacy of whole language may be directly proportional to the understanding of the teacher who implements it.

Methodology

Following the quantitative study, a qualitative research plan was implemented. It was designed to determine what organizational and process elements in the daily life of these two types of programs produced the differences found in the two year study. The project used direct observation with videotapes as backup. The constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was applied to all field and video transcripts. Observers were in the classroom for sixty days during the course of the school year. Data consisted not only of field notes and video tapes, but artifacts from the classroom, and interviews with both the teacher and the students.

Artifactual data in the form of samples of children's writing were collected and tagged to the corresponding event in the field notes. Both the teacher and the children were interviewed and these data summarized. Data were categorized and subsumed into larger and larger domains. Eventually, data were arranged to form models that represent the essential structures of this classroom.

Participants

This study was conducted in a classroom with 26 second grade, inner city children. Most of the children were

considered at risk for school failure. More than 80 percent qualified for the school's free lunch program, and all of them came from the same low SES community. In addition, each child on whom we focused also met at least three of the following four conditions: 1) member of a single-parent family; 2) identified by the teacher as having a variety of problems that could interfere with school success that were usually related to home environments; 3) scored below the fourth stanine on total reading on the locally administered standardized achievement test; and 4) lived in publicly subsidized project-style, multiple family housing.

The teacher's instructional style could be characterized in the following ways: 1) identified as a whole language teacher on the DeFord (1985) Theoretical Orientation to the Reading Process (TORP); 2) engaged the children in writing every day; 3) planned instructional events and thematic units that employed children's literature and integrated the curriculum; 4) collaborated with children to develop the classroom curriculum; 5) allowed the children to read silently several times a day; 7) employed a wide variety of materials and equipment that promoted literacy learning and enriched the content of the classroom; 8) engaged in both formal and informal conferencing with the children; 9) read professional literature, and reflected on her own teaching through journal writing. She also helped found a local whole language teacher support group (Teachers Applying Whole Language, TAWL); and 10) incorporated authentic opportunities for reading, writing and thinking.

Findings

Ultimately, two models of this whole language classroom were designed, one focusing on the teacher's and the other on the children's experiences. Each model reflects the overall daily reality of this classroom.

Figure 1

Whole Language Classroom
Teacher Focus
Literacy Events

The Teacher

Teaches

Helps

Explains

Demonstrates

Organizes

Helps

Explains

Demonstrates

Teacher focus. First, this teacher's greatest emphasis was on activities aimed at helping children do things, sometimes as a teacher, sometimes as a co-worker and collaborator, sometimes as a resource and facilitator. She exhibited the habits and attitudes of a learner, making herself one of the most avid learners in the room, simultaneously modeling what she wanted from children. This represented her largest investment in time and effort as a

teacher. For example, she spent a great deal of time sitting on the floor with children helping them revise their written drafts. She also worked in the art and science areas, helping children design and execute projects.

This teacher's second largest emphasis was on giving children information and helping them find information for themselves. She served as a resource, and she guided children in the development of strategies for reading, writing, problem solving, and critical thinking. She helped them elaborate on the information they brought to school from their life experiences, and she helped them learn to think in strategic ways. For example, when children became involved in a unit on metamorphosis, she loaded the classroom with a wide variety of displays concerning this subject. She and the children became researchers together as they constructed a curricular unit that lasted more than three weeks and that reappeared periodically in the children's work throughout the remainder of the school year.

Finally, this teacher demonstrated difficult, new activities and then invited the children to try. Children were not penalized for imperfect attempts. Rather, they were encouraged and supported in their efforts. For example, when children wanted to write a play, she helped them order the tasks and examine how plays look and sound. Over a period of several days, the children prepared the drafts and made several collaborative attempts at the manuscript before they were satisfied. Grades were determined by cooperative evaluations with students.

In her role as teacher, she offered suggestions and questions and encouraged their projects. She modeled the reading, writing, and investigating processes, giving children the means to understand the power and usefulness of

language. For example, when a local controversy brought landfills to the attention of the children, the teacher and children collaboratively researched the subject and then built one to see where the problems were in the concept. The children brought in "materials" in the form of garbage and kept records of what was and was not biodegradable. The manifold skills involved in this project in gathering information, analyzing it, using it for a purpose, writing about it and so on are obvious. In math, the children used the amount of garbage that families generated annually to investigate ratios, averaging, fractions, and estimating in concrete ways that had meaning for the children. The vocabulary associated with ecology, solid waste management, landfills, etc., did not need to be presented on dittos and memorized. It was learned as a natural consequence of reading and talking about this issue.

Child focus. Because this classroom was a highly social and tightly integrated entity, it was complex and difficult to analyze. The children were continually engaged in some form of self-directed activity. This class did not proceed in teacher directed lessons that isolated the mechanics of language or subject areas. Thematic units allowed teacher and students to address literacy learning, mathematics, critical thinking skills, and a host of other teacher objectives through the subjects of science, social studies, and the arts. Children engaged in four organizational patterns of activities.

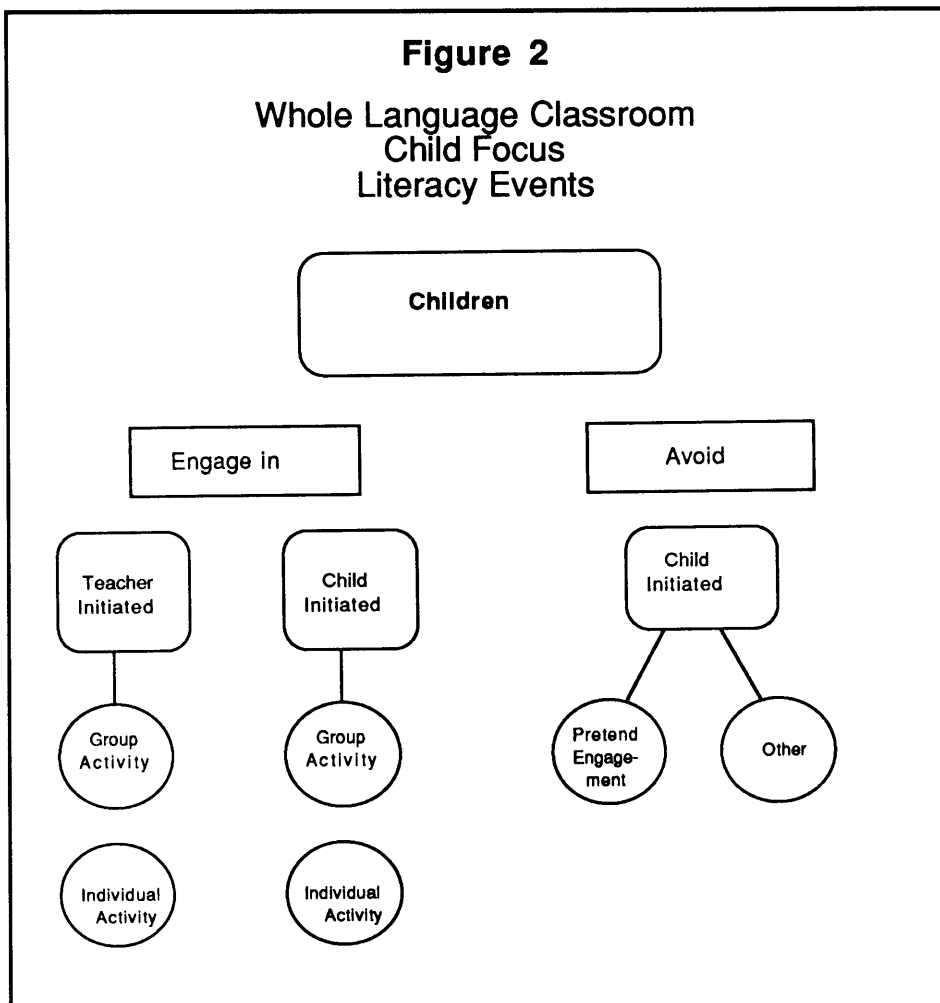
First, teacher initiated group activities represented the highest incidence of children's time. This was, however, very different from traditional teacher led group instruction. For example, one of the most pivotal points of the day was "rugtime," which usually began with classroom business (e.g., lunch money, the pledge, day's songs, calendar, etc.)

and a general discussion or debriefing in which children shared what was going on in their lives. This time was used to create a community climate, to share intimacy, and as an opportunity to teach. For example, the teacher frequently found it necessary to help children with survival or coping techniques. On several occasions, for instance, she discussed ways for children to react when they heard gunfire, or when a stranger came to the door and they were home alone.

When the business of the classroom and living had been taken care of, rugtime then focused on planning. Children and teacher collaboratively reviewed and evaluated what they had accomplished and planned what they would do that morning. Often, the teacher structured this planning by giving choices and asking children to add to the list of options. These were written down and used to guide the remainder of the morning's events. Frequently, this first "rugtime" ended with the children selecting a piece of literature to be read aloud by the teacher. Since children therefore spent the morning in activities that the teacher approved of and which interested them, the teacher was freed from direct lessons and given the opportunity to observe the children, interact with individuals, and to gather materials for upcoming activities. Both children and teacher expressed enthusiasm for and satisfaction with this arrangement when interviewed.

The second most frequently occurring time structure was teacher initiated, individual contact, usually taking the form of pupil/teacher conferences. This teacher found as many opportunities as possible to sit with a child in formal, planned conferences or in impromptu interactions. She kept careful records of these interactions as a means to

guide her both in evaluation of the student and in curriculum planning.



The third most frequently occurring activity in this class was child initiated group activity. For example, when a caterpillar died in the science area, children gathered to examine it. One child suggested that they write about their caterpillar, and several children spent portions of the next week working on a story finally entitled "The Dead (Sorry)

Caterpillar.” The children added the word “sorry” to the title so the reader would know they were sorry their caterpillar had died.

Fourth, due to the importance of children working collaboratively and learning from each other, the least frequently occurring activity consisted of children working alone. However, children could and often did work individually on a variety of tasks. In addition, each day contained time specifically devoted to individual, silent reading and writing.

Discussion

The children in this study did as well as children in traditional classrooms on standardized tests and other school system required assessments. Moreover, they scored significantly higher on measures of knowledge of the uses of literacy, ability to apply language constructively, and metacognitive analysis of what they were doing with language (Stice, Thompson and Bertrand, 1991). This is consistent with the earlier finding that meaning based classrooms tend to foster comprehension and meaningful language use.

Also consistent are the findings that organizational patterns in this classroom reflected the philosophy and general goals of whole language. These children were grouped as dictated by the task to be addressed, not for the convenience of the teacher or because a textbook or curriculum guide required it a particular way. Such groupings therefore reflected both the teacher's and the children's purposes and intentions.

The high level of performance of these at risk children, compared to usual expectations for them in their school, leads to the conclusion that whole language instruction is a

viable alternative instructional philosophy. It follows that these grouping patterns help operationalize whole language instruction and play an integral part in the children's successful learning.

Summary

This study attempted to construct models that subsumed a great amount of observational data. The models may be used to illuminate, explicate, and replicate the structure of an exemplary whole language classroom. Clearly, this classroom offers children opportunities to succeed in school. One can also conclude that class grouping patterns that reflect authentic learning events contributed to higher performance on the part of these children.

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Looking Out for Low-Achieving Readers

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A mother shared her concerns about her son: "Nathan said that he is in the Blue Group at school. I was afraid that the Blue Group might be some kind of gang or something, but he said that it is a reading group, one of three, in his classroom. Later, when I talked to his teacher, I learned that the Blue Group is the *low* group."

She wiped her hand across her brow and hair before continuing, "When I asked his teacher why the students were in different groups, she said that by placing the students in smaller groups, she can monitor their individual work and provide them with appropriate materials. She said it's quite common to find elementary classrooms divided into three ability groups for reading instruction."

"I noticed the reading assignments on the chalkboard. Students' names were written on a large red, white, or blue square with their assignments for the day written next to the squares. *Anyone* could walk in and see that Nathan is in the low group."

With a long pause and a loud sigh she continued. "I'm not so sure that I like having *Nathan* in the low group. What does this mean for Nathan?"

To respond to this question, one could look at the numerous articles written about the differences in instruction provided to students in high- and low-ability groups. Authors have repeatedly made the point that students assigned to low groups receive instruction that is not as helpful in developing literacy as the instruction provided to the better readers. For instance, the instruction and instructional materials provided to students in low-ability groups may be characterized as uninteresting, repetitive, routine, slow paced, and unchallenging (Gamoran, 1984; Hallinan, 1987a, 1987b). Further, teachers emphasize decoding with low-achieving students, a practice in sharp contrast with the emphasis placed on comprehension with students in higher groups (Allington, 1983; Barr and Dreeben, 1991; Gambrell, Wilson and Gantt, 1981; Indrisano and Paratore, 1991; Shannon, 1985).

There are great consequences for being assigned to a low group since assigning students to low-ability groups may affect their attentiveness, achievement, motivation, aspirations, and self-esteem (Felmlee and Eder, 1983; Gamoran, 1984; Hallinan, 1987b). Felmlee and Eder (1983) found these consequences become greater over time. Indrisano and Paratore (1991) questioned whether the negative impact on low ability students "was related to ability grouping itself, or to differential instruction." Others have gone as far as to say that low-ability students in within-class ability grouped settings have a greater chance for success than their counterparts in whole-class heterogeneous settings, and most likely in tracked classrooms where students are of similar ability, because the teacher can pay

closer attention to their individual learning requirements (Karweit, 1987; Marliave and Filby, 1985).

This article explores some practical, research based principles for teachers to use in maximizing the learning of low-achieving readers, those students who aren't yet reading at their potential, in the regular classroom.

Increased reading time

Teachers who use ability grouping often provide equal instructional time to all reading groups. However, students in the low groups need more time than do their more successful peers (Allington and Johnston, 1989; Barr and Dreeben, 1991; Karweit, 1987). Struggling readers require more time for two reasons. First, these learners typically require more instructional time for discipline and organizational purposes than their peers in high-ability groups, time that could be used for instruction or reading (Hallinan, 1987a; Indrisano and Paratore, 1991). Second, they need more time to help narrow the gap between them and their higher-achieving peers.

Time alone is not the answer. Low-achieving readers need to use their time in ways that will enhance their literacy development. It is how time is used that makes the difference. Increasing the amount of students' time on task can positively influence reading achievement (Gaskins, 1988; Rosenshine and Stevens, 1984). The amount of engaged time is more crucial for low-achieving readers than their higher-achieving peers because students who are having difficulty in reading need a great deal of concentration for success (Marzano, Hagerty, Valencia, and DiStefano, 1987). Naturally, teachers need to make sure that all students have time available for reading. Increased contextual reading, as opposed to work on isolated skills, allows

students to practice the whole act of reading and contributes to improved reading achievement (Allington, 1983, 1984; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1985).

Facilitating cooperative learning

Reading should be a social act. Too often children read in isolation with few opportunities for peer response and feedback. Many teachers have been pleased with the progress their students make in cooperative learning groups. For instance, Johnson, Johnson, Holubec, and Roy (1984) found that the interchange of ideas among students of differing abilities and ethnic backgrounds enriched their learning, and students learned to accommodate themselves to each others' perspectives. Students, including low-achieving readers, not only learn more when they work collaboratively, but they also develop increased self-esteem, better intergroup relationships, a sense of community, and improved attitudes towards learning (Madden, 1988; Slavin, 1987; Slavin, Madden, and Stevens, 1989-90; Stevens, Madden, Slavin, and Farnish, 1987). Some teachers have feared that cooperative learning is less beneficial to the high-achieving students. However, Kagan (1990) emphasizes that research findings clearly indicate that both low-achieving and high-achieving students benefit from cooperative learning, and notes "there is no evidence that [cooperative learning] is a detriment to learning" (p. 3).

Promoting reading as meaning construction

Students may have difficulty with reading because they don't understand what reading is (Smith, 1985). One accepted definition of reading states that reading is the "active process of constructing meaning from text" (Anderson, et al., 1985). Unfortunately, many students are given the idea that reading is decoding and, as a consequence, feel that successful word pronunciation is reading. To them,

meaning is not even a consideration. Instruction for all readers should be meaning centered. Of course students need help in learning to decode words, but decoding instruction should be taught as a vehicle to reading. Teachers must have comprehension as the ultimate goal and end result of all reading instruction (Daines, 1982).

Building self-esteem

Poor readers almost always see themselves as poor readers and have low self-esteem (Athey, 1985). Such students are often fearful and anxious about reading and many avoid reading at all costs. Teachers can foster an improved self-esteem for low-achieving readers. Since self-esteem often improves as a result of improvement in reading (Harris and Sipay, 1990), it is important for teachers to provide students with opportunities for success. Cooper (1992) emphasizes that teachers must adjust instruction ("remediate instruction, not students") to reduce failure and enable all students to learn.

Teachers' comments to students can also influence their self-esteem (Wittrock, 1986). High expectations, less criticism, and frequent praise are more often communicated to more able students than to their low-achieving peers. It is important for teachers to communicate obtainable expectations for all students.

It is possible that teachers can help students' self-esteem by allowing them to choose their own reading materials. Teachers can begin by giving students two choices and eventually allow the students total responsibility in choosing books, magazines, stories, etc. Many teachers find they can help students make better choices by providing mini-lessons on how to choose an appropriate book – one that isn't too hard or too easy, but "just right." Moreover, self-

selection of reading materials motivates students and helps them learn to select materials which suit their interests, needs, and abilities (Hornsby, Sukarna, and Parry, 1988).

Enhancing reading through writing

Gaskins noted that process writing, where writers recursively move through a series of stages as they compose, distinguished effective from ineffective programs for low-achieving readers (1988). Typically, these students write only to fill in blanks on worksheets or sentences about topics their teachers have chosen. Yet all students need to write for meaningful purposes. Teaching the writing process is especially beneficial to low-achieving students since it focuses upon what the students already know (Graves, 1985). Constructing meaning in writing reinforces the construction of meaning in reading.

Allowing students to choose their own topics for writing is an essential element of the writing process. Students are empowered as they write about topics of their own choosing and are able to teach their teachers and fellow students (Graves, 1983, 1985; Hansen and Graves, 1986). While it should be obvious that students can write best about topics they already know about or desire to learn about, it is not uncommon to see teachers assigning topics for student writing (Hansen, 1987).

The writing process takes more time than traditional writing activities since students need time for their ideas to percolate, time for drafting, time for conferencing, time for revising, time for editing, and time for publishing. Each aspect of the process is important. Publishing, for example, makes the effort involved in drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading worthwhile. Students can publish their writing in a number of ways: books, posters, school newspaper

entries, letters, classroom anthologies and magazines, bulletin board displays, etc. (Nathan and Temple, 1990). The author's chair, where students read their own writing to their teacher and classmates from a special chair, is an effective way of sharing student work (Graves and Hansen, 1983). The books read by student-authors are received in the same manner as books written by professional authors, with students commenting on what they liked and asking questions about the author's source of ideas and future writing plans, etc.

Conclusion

Low-achieving readers receive poorer quality instruction than their higher achieving peers. Poor instruction has a negative impact on students who are already adversely affected by low achievement.

Students need equal access to literacy. Teachers can make a difference in the lives of low-achieving readers, as they enable their students to better understand and enjoy reading. They help narrow the gap between good and poor readers. They focus literacy instruction on meaning to give students a clear picture of what reading is – meaning construction. They provide low-achieving readers increased instructional and reading time. They tap from the social nature of reading and set up conditions where students interact with others in cooperative learning groups. They find ways to strengthen low-achieving readers' self-esteem. And, finally they let their students write for many purposes. We believe these changes will help low-achieving readers become better readers and result in enjoyment of reading – and school.

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Cooperative Grouping in Literacy Instruction

**Katherine D. Wiesendanger
Lois Bader**

The majority of educational programs group children according to ability or achievement level, giving the teacher the locus of control. Generally schools stress competitive grading and individual competition, and attempt to motivate students by external methods. While students do need to work alone and learn to compete, this conventional structure is very one-sided. Many classrooms only incorporate teacher controlled, competitive environments. Unfortunately this approach leads to frustration and is particularly detrimental for low-achieving students because their chances for success diminish as others attain their goals (Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec, 1988). In a completely teacher controlled environment, students are less likely to take initiative or be responsible for their own learning. They may feel that their own personal experiences are irrelevant and that only teacher-prescribed tasks are worthwhile.

An alternative is to incorporate cooperative grouping, which puts students in control of their own learning and better meets their diverse needs. Research has demonstrated that this is not a fad, but an effective method to improve education (Slavin, 1989; Johnson, Maruyama,

Johnson, Nelson, and Skon, 1981). However, many teachers and students find it difficult to develop a cooperative environment in the classroom because the transition process may prove overwhelming. In order for cooperative learning to be a viable option, the teacher must develop techniques for its implementation.

The purposes of this paper are to describe cooperative grouping, to explain how the transition may be made to cooperative grouping, and to show how the process can be adapted to reading and writing instruction.

A place to start: Informal pairing

The transition process from a traditional to a cooperative learning environment should be completed gradually. For several weeks, teachers might implement informal cooperative learning pairs. During this stage, children are paired with different partners throughout the day for short term intervals. Seating arrangements do not change permanently, but when the situation warrants, children may temporarily move their chairs to work with their assigned partner. Informal pairing is effective with any size class, for any subject, at any time, in a variety of ways. It can be used before the lesson to help focus students, during the lesson to break it up and check for understanding, or at the end of a lesson to summarize its principal elements. Teachers may have students who have grasped and successfully completed an assignment or reached a goal tutor those who require additional explanations. One purpose of this stage is to challenge gradually students' previously constructed understandings of school by having them begin to control their own learning. Another is to determine the effectiveness of pupil relationships by carefully observing which students best cooperate when given a task to complete.

Formal pairing

Once the goals of the initial stage have been accomplished, students are ready to move to formal pairing. During this stage, teachers assign pupil partners and pair their desks to form more permanent, working relationships. When the situation warrants, two students may easily work together without the physical movement required in the previous stage. When pairing students, the teacher should consider pupils' academic ability and personality. This stage is important because students, feeling less isolated in the classroom, are more apt to accept the advantages of cooperation and make a stronger commitment to it.

Heterogeneous grouping

After students complete the two previous stages and gradually change their philosophical approach to learning, they are prepared to work in heterogeneous groups. One strategy is to create base groups of six students (or approximately six, depending on classroom size), which are kept together four or five weeks before being reassigned. Group members should be heterogeneous in personality, sex, ethnicity, personal characteristics, academic performance level and ability. If possible, each base group should contain an equal number of low, average, and high achieving students. Desks can be left in group clusters all day. Students face each other for group work and simply rotate their desks to face the front during instruction. The six member team can either work together as one unit or be restructured into ready made partners or two heterogeneously grouped triads.

Selected structures adapted to literacy learning

There are literally dozens of specific structures designed for cooperative grouping (Kagan, 1989; Aronson, et. al., 1978; Slavin, 1990; Lyman, 1987; Sharon and Shackar,

1988), which may include anywhere from two to six students. We have selected the ones whose versatility allows for adaptation to literacy instruction, and given examples of how teachers may use the various structures to meet that end. Although our examples have all been successfully implemented in the classroom, they should not preclude teachers from discovering additional ways these organizational patterns can be effectively used.

Team word webbing. Working simultaneously on a piece of chart paper, students write words which are important in the topic being studied, and make drawings which illustrate main concepts and their supporting elements. Before implementing team word webbing, students should have had numerous opportunities to web as a teacher-directed activity. *Literacy application:* Triads work well in this structure, which can be used to help students understand multiple relationships and analyze concepts into components. It can be used with either narrative or expository material. For example, after reading a story, students might be asked to write the name of the most important element or character in the story in a center circle and then to create a surrounding web of words and drawings.

Roundtable. The teacher asks a question that has multiple correct responses. Each student in turn writes one answer as the paper and pencil are passed around the group, composed of six or three members. With simultaneous roundtables, more than one pencil and paper are needed. *Literacy application:* This can be used in reading instruction for activating prior knowledge, comprehension monitoring, and skills assessment. For example, prior to reading a selection, students might answer a general question about their knowledge of the subject, or they might record as many facts as possible learned after reading the

selection. Information obtained may be used as a basis for small group or whole class discussion. Students might then categorize the responses, place them in order from least to most important, or select several on which to expand.

Jigsaw. A different part of the material is assigned to each student on the team. Each student on the team works with members of other teams who are also assigned to become experts on that topic. Students return to their teams and teach all members of their group, who are then responsible for learning all aspects of the material. A typical timetable might include the assignment of the topics to the various team members, half hour sessions for working with the team members from the other groups, and a final fifteen minute period for members of the original team to confer.

Literacy application: This procedure can be used for the acquisition and presentation or review of units or other large amounts of material. Assignments should be made to each group member according to the student's ability, and reading material should be provided at students' independent reading level.

Pairing

There are several ways in which teachers can use pairing situations to enhance reading instruction. Each six member team can be divided into three pairs. Because this grouping is more intimate, each student is given more opportunity to be active in learning. Students may select their own partner, or teachers may assign partners.

Partners - students work in pairs to master or create content. *Literacy application:* Partners can work together using variations of partner reading. If two students are evenly matched in reading ability, they may alternately read a page from a story on their independent reading level.

In cross age groupings, children from a higher grade are paired with students from a lower grade. This is particularly useful for low achieving students who can share their expertise with their younger partner. Older less skilled readers practice reading books appropriate for their ability level and subsequently share these books with younger students. For example, having low achieving fifth graders read to a kindergarten class often greatly improves their self-concept as well as reading skills. The stigma of reading easier material is lessened because they are now in a teaching role.

Pairs check. Students work in pairs within teams. Within pairs, students take turns – one solves a problem while the other coaches. Students then reverse roles. They can check with another pair in the team to make certain they have the correct answer. *Literacy application:* While popular in mathematics instruction, the pairs check technique can also be effectively implemented in reading for reinforcement of sight words. Each pair is given sight words or phrases that have been previously taught. One child says the words while the other coaches. They then alternate. If both children have difficulty, they may consult with members of another pair. A similar approach can be used to teach spelling.

Three step pair interview. Given a specific topic, students interview one another in pairs. Each member alternates asking and answering the questions. Then each student tells the whole team what was learned from the interview. It helps if a certain amount of time is designated for each phase and each student. For example, after twenty minutes of reading or whole class discussion, allow six to ten minutes for interviewing and three to five for sharing. Two or more cycles may occur within one lesson. *Literacy application:* This can work especially well with content area

reading instruction. After reading and discussing a manageable amount of social studies material, students may be paired for the interview. They must process and clarify concepts in order to ask and answer the questions.

Think-pair-share. Two students pair up to discuss or write about a topic presented by the teacher, after which they share their ideas with the entire class. *Literacy application:* This strategy can be used to promote writing for reluctant students by having students alternate writing paragraphs or sentences. Both partners are responsible for written revisions. This is especially effective with bilingual, or linguistically different students.

Summary

Cooperative methods usually have a positive effect on student achievement. Students enjoy working and learning together in groups for academic as well as social reasons. When working together toward a common goal, students encourage one another's learning and help their group mates succeed. Group assignments enable learners to work together to discover their own meaning. Cooperative grouping promotes language development, listening skills, and equal participation. The various structures presented in this paper provide a forum in which students make inquiries, discuss topics and issues, criticize constructively, make mistakes, learn to listen to each others opinions, integrate new knowledge with prior knowledge and summarize their ideas in writing. Although it is important to continue independent and whole group learning, incorporating various grouping structures will improve the academic climate and increase learning in the majority of classrooms.

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Creating a Disabled Reader: A Father's Perspective

Jerry Phillips

"I never read much; I have something else to do"
(Austen, 1986).

Despite the dismissal of reading by John Thorpe, a character created by Jane Austen to poke fun at ignorant, egocentric young men, people are always learning to read. This is not different from other types of human behavior. Goodman (1976) argues that people purposely play a cognitive guessing game. Whether literate or not, they make predictions in everyday life situations — but being literate makes the game easier to play. This is especially true in school learning situations. Parents want their children to be competent in reading so the children can play the game on a level field. However, the school reading game can be a “no win” situation when played in certain contexts. Despite the pervasiveness and ease Goodman used to characterize the acquisition of literacy, my daughter, Charlie, echoed the opinions of Jane Austen's character.

Preschool

I was a teacher in Texas during Charlie's preschool years. I provided a print-rich environment, and was an adequate literacy role model. We visited book stores and libraries, selected pleasing material, enjoyed books daily and developed a special reading time and place. We read to each other, and she displayed a healthy interest in print. I

sensed she was going to become an active reader. She entered a center advocating a philosophy that reading with children was an excellent introduction to the value of literacy. She participated in self-expressive creative reading events, practiced home language, became comfortable learning parental rules and met verbal expectations. I believed she was ready for school.

Kindergarten

Charlie enrolled in kindergarten, and continued to develop established reading habits. I thought she would continue to learn about books because she liked school. The class took field trips to absorb environmental print in urban and rural contexts. She started writing during this time. Teachers and children read to each other. I recognized activities showcasing her literacy knowledge. She tried out existing knowledge while writing, and then experimented without direction or observation, sharing prior knowledge and seeking approval of a supportive teacher. Reading opened new doors, granted new experiences, and provided a way to enjoy leisure times. Research in emergent literacy (Teale, 1987) supports such activities.

Elementary school

The elementary years gave us a different reading perspective. Now reading became work, and took effort. While in elementary school Charlie was placed in a low reading group, based on miscuing eleven words in a story. She now understood that she was not a good reader. Placed in the low group, she continued to read and then re-read kindergarten books.

This grouping did not please me because it was a new and scary experience. I had difficulty accepting that Charlie would find reading rigid, visited the school, and asked about

the reading problem. "She has poor auditory memory." I wondered what this meant. "She cannot make the link between letters and sounds." I did not know what "making the link" meant, but knew she did not have a poor memory. Astonished at "poor," I questioned the teacher's sophistication about the learning process, and considered the differences in my memories of Charlie's rich emerging learning process and what I was hearing. Being a teacher, I trusted teachers to teach, to know what they were doing. However, I was not so sure about this one. The school told me not to worry; Charlie would eventually mature and learn to read better. Meanwhile, remedial lessons were in order. I placed my trust in the school. Parents, swayed by society, place confidence in those commissioned to teach.

Charlie passed reading. However, beyond the school, a dark side was emerging. She did not read at home. I noticed, but did nothing, thinking she was learning to read in school. She continued to struggle in the low group, resisting remedial instruction, spending more energy going to the water fountain than in remedial class. She found creative ways to avoid this class, such as permission to skip class to help create homecoming posters. Elementary school was her first contact with negative evaluation and labeling. She became confused and faced a difficult choice – accept the grouping and turn against herself, or reject the evaluation and value herself. She rejected negative evaluation, but accepted the grouping. Labeled unmotivated during these years, she turned from the standard curriculum, developed other interests, paid less attention to school learning, and the conflict led to acceptance of an alternative curriculum. Cazden (1985) claims that this conflict of learning interest means the child cannot bring outside prior knowledge into the school context.

Middle school

Competitive sports started in the seventh grade, and marked Charlie's drive toward athletic acceptance. This curriculum diverted attention from the classroom to the playground. I recognized the diversion when she came home discussing the new remedial groups. The low placement took her from friends, diverted attention from real reading and replaced it with structured exercises. She began to attend to outside learning activities and teachers began to lose her. However, the coaches did not lose. She became involved in the extra activities, and devoted extended effort and attention toward coaches. After-school activities took up her time to the extent that she found excuses not to finish regular assignments.

Charlie was not a permanent member of the remedial class. When reading class started, she left the regular classroom bound for another – singled out, separated and away from normal routine. I wondered about this and during school visits, I found she received the same instruction for remediation as the low reading class, only more. When she could not or would not pass a reading skills test, the school placed her in a special class offering more practice on individual skills. I did not have a strategy to improve the scores. I did not like test scores, but did not know what to do about her reading problem. Rather than leave the problem to the school, she decided not to worry about scores and remedial instruction – let the school play its games during the day and she would play hers afterwards. She was now active in all sports. I regarded this action as positive and encouraged it. If she could not excel in academics, maybe she could in extracurricular activities. She had at least found something positive and self-fulfilling. I could not understand the school's position, but I could understand hers.

Meanwhile, I tried to recapture the good reading times. Charlie had not learned to read well in spite of six classroom years. I introduced her to Judy Blume's books, which captured her attention momentarily. She read every one we could find, but soon there were no more. I believed she could read, but for some reason she would not perform for the school. I wondered about this. A child who looks forward to reading the Blume books at home should be able to read at school.

The content classes offered merely the raw materials of reading. The basals in Texas are skills-based and closely tied to skill-based mastery learning. Apparently, Charlie saw reading as a difficult decoding game having little to do with the meanings found in the Blume books. She would not play the reading game according to school rules, but decided to play for the coaches' team. She accepted an athletic peer group as a new source of self and rebelled against reading. Willis (1981) argues that learning forms in the process of students rebelling against the institution that has dominance over them. In Charlie's case, the motivation for reading was present early, but school erased it through a system of tracking. Her desire to be an athlete affirmed her motivation, as well as her external rebellion against skill-based instruction.

High school

In an effort at educational reform, Texas sought a rigid policy of "no pass, no play." Students must attain certain academic standards to participate in extra activities. This policy heightens the role of athletics as the reason for attending to academics, with athletic participation the reward for persevering through academics. Today, these standards do not bother Charlie. She tolerates coursework of the standard curricula to remain eligible for sports

participation. These alternative activities demand more time, and are more effective than regular school learning. This lifestyle is attractive, offering anti-attention discipline patterns – now tuned to the *thump-thump* of a basketball, and ignoring noun-verb agreements. This lifestyle has its own curriculum. Rather than study the questions at the end of the chapter, Charlie studies a text of basketball diagrams. Regular schoolwork has not challenged her, but she delights in the outside curriculum. The enthusiasm for sports reflects the pre-school success with literacy.

At present, Charlie struggles with reading in the content areas. She reads at home, not as much as I would like, but apparently as much as she cares to. She reads teen magazines, while family newspapers and magazines gather dust. Occasionally, I recommend a novel, but to no avail. Her recreational reading belongs to her. I salute this ownership because I know she can read. She just does not want to read school materials.

Charlie has coping strategies for academic tasks. I do not think they are markedly different from the norm. Many students use selected strategies to achieve grades. She reads textbook assignments by hunting for answers to chapter-end questions – a search and seizure syndrome; search the pages and seize the answers. She is good at listening attentively to teachers and peers, doing a minimum of homework and borrowing someone's notes. She is proficient at "apple polishing." She talked a teacher into giving repeated exams until the grade met the standard, yet cannot meet the state's standards for rounding numbers.

Today she is not interested in grades. Instead, she uses her strategies to maintain her position on the team. Her athletic ambition defines what and how it is learned. In

the conflict between reading what the school wants or what she wants, the school lost. She reads what she wants and chooses her own strategies.

Discussion

Looking back, I see that the school and I neglected Charlie's reading progress. I did not question teachers enough about the grouping practice; this was my mistake as a parent-teacher. It is a common practice that teachers do not question other teachers' methodology; however this may be an exaggeration of professional courtesy.

I see Charlie's problems rooted in social separation, standardized test scores, remedial instruction, and the school's disregard for research findings. These problems mesh, creating social learning conflicts between teachers and children. The methods of exclusion may be so subtle that none of the actors realized their involvement in the process. Rist (1970) defines tracking as separation for social purposes, and Rosenthal (1985) calls it the cumulative self-fulfilling prophecy. Regardless of label, Goffman's (1986) stigma of detachment was present throughout Charlie's school life, a blemish she will carry into adulthood.

Owen (1985) argues that standardized test scores drag students down a "track" of no return. The school tracked Charlie too early and left her on track too long. Kozol (1985) asserts that tracking schemes are more popular than ever. The good news is that they are being questioned. Critical theorists (Freire and Macedo, 1987) view them as outdated theories serving to divide social groups and maintain social boundaries that exist in the broader culture outside of schools. In effect, grouping and standardized test scores create and then reify a reality that is unassailable yet clandestinely subjective.

That grouping does not work is old news to those in reading research. Allington (1980a, 1980b) found children in high ability reading groups read two to three times as many words as children in low groups. McDermott (1985) argues that once classified, readers become chained to their social strata with differentiated instruction. Charlie will not "jump track" short of graduation. She squandered eleven years "on track." Only now, as a senior, does she feel free to express herself. She has enough credits to graduate, yet must still contend with mandated graduation requirements, and pass another test to graduate.

The school's approach to remediation is theory based, however there may be as many approaches as problems. Flesch (1981) argued that when children come to a dead end in their reading progress, they require an extended structured approach before risking additional exposure to new reading. Flesch's views are supported by powerful researchers in literacy, who would have remedial instruction focus on discrete sub-skills of literacy (LaBerge and Samuels, 1974). I oppose this approach because children should never come to a dead end in literacy progress. For many children, a corrective approach may make the child ashamed to read. Charlie's isolated skill-based remediation was a clumsy, unreliable system when compared with her pre-school success.

Charlie and I were not strong enough to hurdle learning roadblocks between successful beginnings and unsettled futures. She may have difficulty with literacy expectations in higher education. She believes she is a deficient reader, and her reading repertoire appears very limited. In the past, Charlie endured the school ways of gaining knowledge. Now, preparing for college, she realizes that all

knowledge is not school related. She grasped this by herself, and once I understood, I became an avid supporter.

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The Non-Traditional Student

Brenda J. Wickey

She peers through rain-spotted glasses, watching the young students pass, laughing and talking to each other. They brush past her, nearly unaware of her presence. Sometimes they stare, wondering why she's there. She walks alone. Clutching her bag of school possessions, she makes her way to the building, stepping quickly around puddles on the sidewalk. A young man holds the door for his girlfriend and together they walk past her, hand in hand.

As she watches them, her mind returns to a time when she was young, to a young man who held her hand. She married him.

She was thinner then. With long, brown hair and large, brown eyes, she had been reasonably attractive. School had been so easy for her, filled with successes throughout her elementary years. The teachers all had said that she had a lot of "potential." In fact, she dreamed of someday being a teacher herself. However, when she reached high school the classes were divided according to an in-district system of tracking. She was tracked in with the academically lower, non-college bound students. No one had discussed this with her or her parents. Her family was large and poor, her parents drop-outs. College was not considered an option for her by the faculty or advisors. Scholarships were never mentioned.

Tired of the mediocre educational system in which she was trapped and the aimless direction in which it was taking her, she dropped out of school after her junior year, got a

job in a factory, and was married that fall. Two years later she became a mother. The years that followed were happy, busy ones for her husband and her. They had four sons within five years. He began his own business and became quite successful. She was happy with her life, her family, her friends. Yet her husband knew.

She wanted to teach.

He could see it in her eyes when she gathered her sons around to explain things. He could hear it in her voice when she talked to the children in Sunday school. He could feel it in her emotions when she spoke of her former dream of teaching.

He wanted her to make this dream come true.

He pushed her to finish high school. He said her grades were very good. He was enthusiastic about her accepting the college scholarship she had won. He was supportive of her as she began attending college. He was sympathetic of her fears. She wasn't like the other students. But he knew she could do it.

She walks alone. Days pass without another student speaking to her. But she's there for only one purpose. She wants to teach. Determined to succeed, she pushes on. Her chance came late in life, but now that she has it she won't let it slip by. Her grades are excellent, but no one realizes how hard she works. No one but her husband.

She walks through the door and sits down at her desk. No one notices the twinkle in her eyes as she removes her glasses and cleans them in preparation for the beginning of class. She knows her dream is nearly within reach. She's almost there.

At the time this was written, Brenda Wickey was an undergraduate student completing work toward a BA degree and teaching certificate. She now is an elementary school teacher in Lake Area Christian School, Burr Oak Michigan.



Professional Book Review

This book was selected for review because of its compatibility with the subject matter of this special issue. Whole language approaches such as those described in this book require a rethinking of our ideas about grouping students as well as about the nature of the learning environment that we create to support learning. This book provides a theoretical framework for whole language instruction as well as examples of its application to classroom instruction. (MEH)

Early Literacy: A Constructivist Foundation for Whole Language. C. Kamii, M. Manning, and G. Manning, Editors. National Education Association, Washington D.C. ISBN 0-8106-0355-1. 1991. 160 pp.

Reviewed by Mary E. Hauser
Western Michigan University

Consideration of literacy education and whole language teaching from the perspective of constructivist theory and research is the stated purpose of this practical volume. The editors have collected chapters from many experts in the area of whole language teaching that advance educational practices based on a scientific explanation of how human beings acquire knowledge. The editors describe the whole language movement as part of a larger revolution in our thinking about learning and teaching. It is their desire to equip practitioners with information to explain, evaluate, and improve their knowledge of whole language.

The first chapter, by Kamii, presents a definition of constructivism drawn from the ideas of Jean Piaget. Kamii was a student of his and has written extensively on constructivist education. While a thorough discussion of Piagetian theory is beyond the scope of this book, the

reader unfamiliar with his ideas will acquire sufficient information to make the topics of the chapters that follow meaningful.

Chapter two, by Ferreiro, elaborates on constructivist theory from the perspective of the development of the representation of language. Questions such as *what should be introduced first, reading or writing?* and *how should letters be introduced?* are considered from a constructivist perspective. Ferreiro states that these questions cannot be answered as different teaching methods; rather the response should be based on the understanding of the process by which children construct knowledge.

Unfortunately chapter three, a study of how French school children construct their knowledge about written language, is difficult to get meaning from without an understanding of the French language. The authors attempt to provide comparable examples from English and point out that, despite the differences in writing French and English, there are similarities in the way all children go about solving problems. However, the examples presented in the chapter do not help readers who are not familiar with French. We have to accept the conclusions that the fundamental constructivist and interactionist view of Piagetian psychology appears to be a fruitful approach to the psychological study of writing without a good understanding of the presented evidence.

Chapter four looks at a comparative study of the development of spelling in two groups of young children: Spanish speakers and English speakers. It provides needed background information about invented or temporary spelling that is gaining acceptance in some classrooms. Also explained is the fact that use of invented spelling is

based on a developmental process of construction that children go through as they try to make sense of the writing they find in their environments. Subsequent chapters discuss aspects of literacy development and how they can be taught from a constructivist perspective. There is no specific formula to learn, as Ferreiro points out in chapter two. What is advocated is that teachers adopt a perspective that considers the activities in language learning as processes of making meaning instead of a collection of surface skills and bits of information. Indeed, the editors point out, *whole* language denotes an opposition to language fragmented into parts. Additionally, it is important for teachers to view the child as an actor in a social context who draws on the sum total of personal literacy experiences in learning. These themes are evident in each chapter.

While not based specifically on constructivist theory, the whole language approach that is used nationally in New Zealand is very compatible with constructivist teaching. Chapter five describes the five components of the teaching routine which carry out the idea that children learn to read by reading rather than by learning decontextualized skills. Big books, an integral part of the reading program, are discussed in chapter six by Holdaway, the “creator” of the shared reading experience. The shared book experience was developed to meet the challenge of a growing migrant population of Pacific Islanders as well as Maori people who were moving from rural districts to urban schools.

Chapter seven on modeled writing, prepared by editors M. and G. Manning can easily be seen as a variation of the language experience story approach used in many primary classrooms. This familiar activity provides a good vehicle to understand the constructive processes that can occur during such a lesson. Analysis of the interactions be-

tween the teacher and students provide the reader with an understanding of how this process enables the children to construct their knowledge about reading. Of special note is the classroom atmosphere that allows the children to respond informally and spontaneously during the activity both to the teacher and to one another. This element is essential to the constructive process.

The authors of chapter eight, Lewis and Long, use a Piagetian perspective to try to understand just what makes certain children's books so popular. Four widely read books are analyzed to determine how they foster the assimilation and accommodation of information that occurs during children's construction of knowledge. Their analysis suggests that certain books do a better job than others of allowing children to elaborate their knowledge. When children select such books again and again, it is likely that they are books that serve this purpose.

Chapter nine examines the assessment of early literacy using portfolios. The author, Engel, shows how the information in portfolios can provide information for everyone who needs and wants to know about children's progress – teachers, parents, administrators, school board members, and the community at large. She shows how portfolios can provide an informative alternative to standardized tests. Since one of the problems in implementing whole language instruction often is how to evaluate progress, this chapter will be helpful to teachers and administrators alike.

Teachers and preservice students who are working to deepen their understanding of the relationship between constructivist ideas of teaching and whole language instruction will find this book useful.



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