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# INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING LESSONS

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In American schools reading and writing are usually taught as separate subjects in the curriculum. This has been a convenient way to organize instruction even though for more than a century educators have advocated their integration. Research and pedagogy on integrating reading and writing (Chomsky, 1970; Loban, 1976; Smith, 1982) suggest "the facilitating effects of reading practice upon writing practice, and of writing practice upon reading skills" (Applebee, 1977; p. 536). Such proclamations have led to renewed interest and quests on the part of curriculum developers to design instructional programs that highlight relationships between expressive and receptive language skills.

## BACKGROUND

As reading/language arts professors, we were invited to a rural middle school to work with 5th grade teachers on integrating reading and writing lessons in the classroom. This middle school, located in northern Florida with a predominantly black student population, was the site of a year-long collaborative inservice project which included advanced instruction in reading and writing, and development and implementation of reading/writing lessons.

This collaborative effort was designed to function in tandem with the regular school program and schedule; that is, activities occurred at the school site and took advantage of teacher planning periods, regularly scheduled instructional sessions, and local resources.

Our initial collaborative work consisted of introductory sessions for discussing reading/writing relationships and processes, and planning sessions to discuss lessons for combining and presenting reading and writing in the classroom. To carry out the first task, i.e., conceptualizing reading and writing relationships, we relied on two major sources. The first was Bracewell, Frederickson & Frederickson's

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work (1983) "Cognitive Processes in Composing and Comprehending Discourse" in which the authors examine the cognitive and linguistic strategies involved in reading and writing. The second source, Birnbaum & Emig's article (1983) "Creating Minds, Created Texts: Writing and Reading" highlights the complex relationships between reading and writing by providing a taxonomy of similarities and differences between the two processes. Together these articles served to remind us that the linguistic and cognitive processes inherent in reading and writing were not the inverse of one another; nor were they identical and wholly discrete (Birnbaum & Emig, 1983). Rather, these two modes of written language, in actual practice, led to different strategies, modalities, conceptual frames, and task conditions. Acknowledging this, we spent a good deal of time practicing writing and discussing selections from Elbow's work (1973) Writing Without Teachers, Graves' book (1983) Writing: Teachers and Children at Work, and Zintz & Maggart's text (1984) The Reading Process. A review of these works prepared us for the second important task, which was to develop the integrated reading and writing lessons. To carry out this task, we identified skills and concepts across both reading and writing that could be included in the integrated lesson plans. Then we designed a model lesson plan, based on these concepts, that could guide the development and implementation of future lesson plans.

In designing the model plan, the teachers suggested we use an instructional framework that was familiar to them and consistent with their previous training and experience. This framework was the Developmental Reading Lesson, a popular format used in most basal reading series. A writing plan was created to parallel the reading lesson and the result was a combined reading and writing plan; we called it the Developmental Reading and Writing Lesson (DRWL). The DRWL included five steps: (1) prereading and prewriting; (2) guided silent reading and drafting; (3) rereading and revising; (4) skill development and editing; and, (5) follow-up/publishing activities.

Once the reading and writing skills had been identified and the model lesson plan designed, the next step was to practice strategies for implementing integrated reading and writing lessons.

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## PRACTICING THE DRWL

In preparation for implementing integrated reading and writing lesson plans in the classroom, teachers followed a two-phase cycle of practice. First they worked together during the inservice sessions to practice strategies involved in teaching the DRWL. Then they jointly planned and developed practice assignments for implementation in the classroom. Although a description of the actual classroom implementation goes beyond the limits of this paper, it should be noted that an integral part of the project involved university consultants observing classrooms, teachers verifying and validating observations, and both groups working together to change or refine the major aspects of the DRWL following implementation. And even though teachers were aware that reading and writing processes are holistic and recursive in nature, and taught them as such, they nevertheless chose to emphasize each step in the DRWL separately while practicing.

### **Prereading/Prewriting**

The first step of the DRWL plan, prereading and prewriting, was defined as strengthening background experiences, generating ideas, developing vocabulary and concepts, establishing purposes and motivating children. During the inservice sessions, teachers shared several lesson plans in which a single activity was used to integrate both reading and writing readiness. For example, one teacher showed how a map could be used to assist students in visualizing and understanding the relationships between a known geographical location and settings introduced in the basal readers. Taking this one step further, she demonstrated how to write descriptions of settings in a journal using sensory detail and concrete images.

Another teacher demonstrated brainstorming sessions and group discussions to help clarify purposes and generate information for both reading and writing. Still others showed how games, audio-visual aids, print materials, and discussions could stimulate ideas in reading and writing.

At the conclusion of these sessions, teachers selected a story from the basal reader that could be used to practice implementing a prereading and prewriting lesson in their classroom. Below are the assignments they created

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for practicing the first step in the DRWL.

Reading Assignment:

Select a story and choose 2-3 visual aids that could be used to strengthen student's background experiences; identify questions and/or key points that could be used during oral discussion to motivate students; introduce new vocabulary in a written context.

Writing assignment:

Have students begin a journal in which they respond to major events in the story. Have them record interesting or unusual words in a notebook for later writing assignments.

**Guided Silent Reading and Drafting/Rereading and Revising**

Steps two and three of the DRWL were combined since these steps focused upon questioning and responding techniques. These steps of the DRWL plan emphasized guided silent reading and drafting; rereading and revising. Guided silent reading was defined as setting a purpose, recognizing details, and understanding the story line. Drafting included generating ideas, specifying detail, and creating a story line. Rereading and revising was defined as clarifying purposes, interpreting details, making inferences, reconceptualizing the story and gaining new perspectives.

During this inservice session the participants engaged in reading and writing and practiced ways to promote critical thinking and comprehension skills through small groups discussions of reading texts and writing samples. One of the teachers demonstrated how to help students "map the text," i.e., to understand the specific details and significant events that occurred in the story and to creatively interpret or predict events in the text or beyond the text. Two teachers role played a writing conference (following Graves, 1983) to demonstrate how to add specificity, clarity, and relevant details to a composition.

At the conclusion of these sessions, teachers planned how they would implement the second and third steps of the DRWL. The following teacher assignments were used:

Reading Assignment:

Using the basal reading story from

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the first assignment, consider questions that will help students to understand major issues in the story. Assign each student the task of developing three questions related to the story. These questions can be shared orally or in writing.

Writing Assignment:

Conduct a teacher/student writing conference. Model questions that help the writer to generate, extend or clarify information to be used in written composition.

### **Skill Development and Editing**

The next aspect of the DRWL addressed skill development and editing. Reading skills were defined as phonics, structural analysis, comprehension, and vocabulary; editing skills included spelling, grammar and usage, capitalization and punctuation, syntax, and proofreading skills. Teachers practiced teaching the mechanics of written language in the context of basal textbooks and samples of students' writing. Generalizations discovered in reading could be applied and used for writing and those learned for writing could be applied and used for reading.

Teachers also practiced problem solving strategies for teaching skills in reading and writing. They became aware of how students generate their own rule systems and suggested ways to provide appropriate feedback. The following assignments were developed to practice this step of the DRWL.

Reading Assignment: Help students discover a phonics or spelling generalization using words from the basal texts.

Writing Assignment: Organize editing groups for identifying, diagnosing, and correcting spelling and other mechanics of writing.

### **Independent Follow-up Activities**

The remaining inservice sessions dealt with the final step of the DRWL, independent follow-up and publishing activities. The teachers and university consultants discussed the importance of teachers extending the texts and using new knowledge in real, authentic experiences. Teachers practiced performing texts through role-playing and other creative dramatizations. They also prepared drama enactments based on their own original written work. The

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corresponding practice assignments to be implemented in the classroom were:

Reading Assignment: Have children use written texts for choral reading or dramatic enactments. Encourage students to take part in reader's theater.

Writing Assignment: Have students write material that can be published and encourage submission of students' writing for publication. Place students' writing on display in the classroom or make copies of student work for others to read.

As the teachers practiced each step of the DRWL in the classroom, a checklist was used as a guide for observing the implementation of the integrated reading and writing lessons; this checklist should incorporate all of the steps of the DRWL and include features which address planning and organizing for instruction.

Figure 1  
Observation Checklist

Lesson development	YES	NO
Assignments are integrated. Writing tasks build on reading tasks and vice versa.	_____	_____
Lesson allows for active involvement of students in authentic reading and writing activities.	_____	_____
Extensive background information and actual experiences are shared during instructional sessions to expand children's knowledge.	_____	_____
Questioning and response strategies aid inferential and interpretive thinking, logical reasoning, and problem-solving.	_____	_____
Specific reading and writing skills (e.g., phonics skills, punctuation, etc.) are taught in the context of the reading text or student writing sample.	_____	_____
Planning and organization		
Scheduling reflects and integrated reading and writing block	_____	_____

- Seating arrangements facilitate discussion \_\_\_\_\_
- Lesson objectives take into account \_\_\_\_\_  
reading and writing as a process \_\_\_\_\_
- Materials of instruction include student \_\_\_\_\_  
writing samples as well as commercial \_\_\_\_\_  
texts and visual aids. \_\_\_\_\_

SUMMARY

In this article, we have described a cooperative endeavor between university and public school professionals interested in integrating reading and writing lessons. Teachers shared and practiced activities that would integrate reading and writing lessons through the DRWL, a format designed specifically for the program. This joint effort was successful for at least three reasons: (1) it emphasized collaboration between teachers and university professors, (2) it offered advanced instruction in reading and writing at the school site, and (3) it provided opportunities for immediate practice and feedback in implementing integrated reading and writing lessons in the classroom. The observation checklist helped to focus attention on the special features of integration and served as a basis for future planning and implementation.

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