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DIVORCE—READING STYLE

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What is one of the biggest problems in the teaching of reading today? It is curriculum isolationism which results in treating reading as a separate entity rather than as part of the language arts. Teachers spend vast amounts of time teaching reading skills as outlined in basal readers while virtually ignoring the opportunities for children to listen, speak and write. This divorce creates a sterile reading program whereas a marriage of reading with other communication skills results in an effective and healthy reading program.

In too many classrooms, reading instruction consists of using a reading text, workbook and barrels of ditto sheets. Although suggestions are offered in teachers' guides for integrating the program, many teachers prefer to rush through basals so that a certain number can be covered per year. Facets of language arts are ignored which could effectively reinforce reading skills and enhance the entire reading program.

Let's illustrate this point by taking a mythical story "Mr. Floyd's Dilemma" from a mythical basal text *Bold Horizons*. This story is about two children, Margo and Tommy, who help a blind man solve a problem. Reading group members have just read the story and have done their workbook assignment. Ms. Zachary, their teacher, has followed the manual and taught the skill outlined in Step 3: using the consonant clusters *cl* and *bl*.

For some teachers, the end would be there. But not in this classroom. For a listening activity, a paragraph from the story is read to the children. After the paragraph is read, Ms. Zachary asks the children a question on it and reads the answer using three different kinds of expression. Was the character sad? angry? excited? By listening to the paragraph read, children must sense its mood and tone and supply the appropriate response.

Grammar is covered by putting sentences directly from the story and asking children to punctuate each sentence. Oral language is stressed by having children recount, in their own words, experiences they have had which parallel those of the central characters in the story. A related activity would be to give one sentence from the story and each child in turn adds one sentence to it. An oral summary emerges. This type of activity reinforces both oral language and summarization skills.

Creative writing is easier when it's related to specific topics which evolve from one's reading. The nature of the story can change to develop invented circumstances surrounding the major characters. "What if Mr. Floyd were not blind, would the problems he experienced be the same? Would Tommy and Margo have reacted differently?"

Children can be asked to deal with these invented circumstances through writing. Primary children with limited spelling skills can write

rebus stories using pictures either cut from magazines or drawn by themselves to complete these stories.

Since “Mr. Floyd’s Dilemma” deals with a blind person, creative dramatics can take place by blindfolding a child and then asking him or her to do “simple” tasks which could become quite difficult with sight.

A good activity in drama can also occur by asking children to imagine that they are going to produce a play on this story. The following format will be helpful:

Scene	Location	Characters	Action
1	Main Street	Tommy Margo Mr. Floyd	Tommy and Margo see Mr. Floyd at a curb with a white cane. They help him cross the street.
2	Living room of Mr. Floyd’s home	Mr. Floyd Mrs. Floyd Margo Tommy	Mrs. Floyd is pouring lemonade into four glasses. She asks the children if they could do something for her and her husband.

This chart is completed by the children as a group process. Parts are then assigned to individual children who can then either write out dialogue for each scene or pantomime it.

The process of integrating the language arts does not stop here. The whole room atmosphere can indicate that the reading program in essence is a language development program. Time spent independently on seatwork and projects can also reflect this commitment. For example, some teachers have gotten usable typewriters for children to type out original stories. This spot is known as the Peck Deck. They have secured a small table with a lamp on it for kids to write out their impressions and reactions to their reading. This spot is known as the Jot Spot. Tagged items are placed on a table to stimulate children to do some independent research. This spot is the Label Table. All sorts of spots can be found in a typical classroom which will help children use a variety of language art skills to acquire information and find reading both useful and appealing.

As illustrated in this article, so much can be done with one story to integrate the reading program. When listening, speaking and writing skills are used to reinforce reading skills, a marriage takes place which makes for a much more comprehensive program. A fully integrated program produces not only more efficient readers but motivated ones as well.