



# Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

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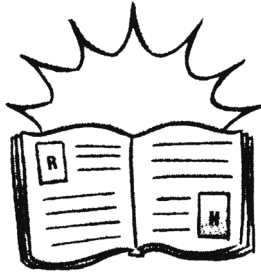
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# *Reading Horizons*

A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts



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## **Dear *Reading Horizon* Readers,**

A new season and a new start to a school semester/year are fully upon us. And our first volume and issue of a new print season is now in your hands, or on your screen. However, it is our task to see that the last issue of this volume is totally on-line keeping with the promise of an on-line journal.

While new beginnings can be an exciting time for the many initiatives that we as educators deal with annually, it can also be fraught with trepidation and a sense of what we are losing when we give up an old medium. In his publication, *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times*, Andrew Piper elegantly and eloquently traces the historic journey of the reading and handling of books as well as the reading and interfacing with digital print. Not choosing one over the other, Piper describes the “graspability” of books as well as the historic and inspirational experiences of what one does when handling, holding, tracing with one’s finger as in bookmarking, and carrying a book. The screen does not offer that feature, but is never viewed as less than Book.

All this is to say that personally, I will miss holding a book, a journal, a hands-on non-electronic device. In transitioning to an on-line publication, I will miss the visual and tactile pleasures afforded me in holding a book.

This issue of *Reading Horizons* has much to offer in-hand as well as on-screen with the following three articles. Husband’s article addresses the issue of underachieving African American boys in early childhood and elementary grades using a multi-contextual approach. Husband’s article brings new light to the issues relevant to younger African American males which adds to the growing literature on the pre-adolescent and adolescent African American males. While recognizing that not all African American boys fall into the category of underachieving readers, Husband details factors that impact young boys in general and African American boys in particular with the emphasis on change in curriculum, teachers and schools.





Next, Hu, Chen, and Li present their examination of Five Chinese first-graders who experienced growth in both bilingual and biliteracy development through the use of English/Chinese picture books. Viewed through the lenses of a reader-response and socio-cultural perspective, Hu, Chen, and Li provide insight and practical teaching to an ELL group of early learners.

In the third article, McArthur moves us to the adolescent reader and the challenges of reading in and learning from differing content disciplines and their content-specific writing styles. Presenting a meta-linguistic protocol, McArthur suggests a think-aloud process for secondary pre-service teachers to use to examine language, vocabulary, and thinking as used in differing disciplines.

As always, Young and Ward, in keeping with this debut volume and issue, offer up great books published with first-time authors who debut their books for our reading pleasures. Beginning with the youngest of subjects in *When my Baby Dreams*, we are then taken to the world of adolescents and their challenges. A wonderful picture book of the blues takes us through the escapades committed by a blue blob of a monster who personifies the blues as he (or it) gives anyone the blues. Next we go to the Florida swamps with a troubled family and characters that etch a place in our hearts, then a dystopian world that will thrill middle-grade readers. Our first-time authors introduce us to adolescents who are viewed as outside the popular and normal population of adolescents, who are dying, who have been date-raped, who suffer racial discrimination, who want desperately to be accepted as American given an Egyptian-Muslim heritage, and who want to survive after suicide attempts. In other words, we read of and empathize with adolescents who just want to be who they are even if they don't know who they are.

What great reading is in store for early grade and YA readers.

Enjoy and look for us coming on a screen near you soon!

Karen F. Thomas  
Interim Editor, *Reading Horizons*



**There is no more crucial or basic skill  
in all of education than reading.**





# Reading Horizons

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## **Addressing Reading Underachievement in African American boys through a Multi- Contextual Approach**

**Terry Husband, Ph.D.**  
Illinois State University

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### **Abstract**

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Much has been written about reading disparities between African American males and other student groups. Interestingly, the majority of this scholarship focuses on African American males at pre-adolescent states of development and beyond. To date, relatively little has been documented relative to improving reading outcomes in African American males in early childhood and elementary contexts. The purpose of this article is to present a multi-contextual framework for improving reading outcomes in African American boys in P-5 contexts specifically. I conclude with a discussion of three important commitments that teachers and administrators must be willing to embrace in order for these strategies to produce successful results.

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### **Introduction**

The reading achievement gap between African American males and other student groups is well documented in the educational scholarship (NCES, 2006; NCES, 2010). Scholars (e.g., Anderson, Howard, & Graham, 2007; Below, Skinner, Fearrington, & Sorrell, 2010; Chatterji, 2006; Haddix, 2009; Tatum, 2008) identify a wide range of explanations why African American males demonstrate lower reading achievement than other student populations. Notably, much of this scholarship focuses on African American males at pre-adolescent stages of development and beyond. To date, little has been documented relative to reading underachievement

in African American boys in early childhood and early elementary contexts specifically. Given this absence of scholarship on African American boys and reading achievement, the purpose of the article is two fold. First, this article outlines factors that contribute to reading underachievement in African American boys. Next, as a solution to this issue, this article presents a multi-contextual approach to addressing this issue. It is important to note here that not “all” African American boys are underachieving in reading. Therefore, the fundamental intention within this article is not to demonize African American boys and to perpetuate a deficit discourse (Haddix, 2009) on this issue. Instead, the multi-contextual approach discussed in this article centers on possibilities for curriculum, teachers, and schools rather than suggestions for African American boys and parents. It is also important to note here that African American boys are not homogeneous in nature, thus the strategies discussed in this article are not presented as “magic solutions” that will be effective with every African American boy in every classroom. This article takes into account the complexity of their (African American boys) identity as being members of two historically underachieving student groups (boys and African American) in reading. In clearer terms, this article considers how gender related factors and racial/cultural factors individually and collectively contribute to reading underachievement in African American boys.

## **Gender Differences that Affect Reading Achievement**

Although boys and girls experience the same reading instruction in most classrooms, boys and girls engage in reading in different ways (Smith, 1990; Twist, Gnaldi, & Schagen, 2004). These differences are frequently used to explain reading achievement gaps between boys and girls. In order to gain insight into how these differences might impact African American boys, I review the extant research on gender differences in reading in early childhood and elementary contexts.

### **Reading Attitudes**

Smith (1990) defines reading attitudes as “a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and emotions, that make reading more or less probable” (p. 215). There is a strong correlation between students’ attitudes toward reading and the ways in which they engage in reading activities in and out of school. Essentially, students with positive attitudes toward reading will engage in reading more often and with less resistance than students who have negative attitudes toward reading (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004). Girls tend to have more overall

favorable attitudes toward reading than boys (Kush & Watkins, 1996; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Smith, 1990). Differences in reading attitudes between boys and girls have been offered as one explanation behind why girls demonstrate high levels of reading achievement than boys. For example, in a recent study involving 288 average 3rd grade readers, Marinak and Gambrell (2010) note two important findings with regard to boys and girls and their attitudes toward reading. First, the boys in their study experienced less personal enjoyment while reading than girls. Second, the boys in the study reported seeing less overall “value” in reading than girls. This scholarship presents an important insight into understanding possible causes of reading underachievement in African American boys. If African American boys, much like the boys in this work, experience minimal enjoyment while reading and see less overall value in reading than girls, it is plausible that they are engaging in reading and reading related activities (e.g., summarizing texts, reviewing sight words, practicing decoding skills, etc.) with much more resistance than girls. It is further likely that this resistance toward reading and reading related activities in and out of school has an impact on reading achievement outcomes, as reading engagement is directly linked to reading development (Logan & Johnston, 2009).

Not only do boys have less favorable attitudes toward reading than girls, their (boys) attitudes toward reading tend to deteriorate over time (Kush & Watkins, 1996; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Smith, 1990). An example of this pattern of deterioration is seen in McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth’s, (1995) study with fourth grade boys. The researchers document a gradual decline in positive attitudes toward academic and recreational reading among fourth-grade boys that began early in their schooling careers. Researchers (i.e., Askov & Fischbach, 1973; McKenna et al., 1995) often attribute changes in the level of difficulty of texts and skills needed to reading fluently as potential reasons behind this decline in positive attitudes among boys. What this work suggests is that boys attitudes toward reading become increasingly more negative at the same time that the tasks and skills required to read fluently become more complicated. This work can be used to potentially explain why the reading achievement disparities between African American boys and other students groups that emerge in early childhood become progressively worse with time.

### **Reading Preferences**

Boys and girls prefer reading different kinds of texts (Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish & Shapiro, 2007). Boys tend to prefer reading texts that center on the

following themes: action; non-fiction; violent and scary fairy tales; super heroes; bodily humor; puns; video games and jokes (Bosacki, Elliott, Bajovic & Akseer, 2009; Brozo, 2002; Collins-Standley, Gan, Yu & Zillman, 1996). In addition, boys prefer reading texts with positive male characters as the main character in the text (Brozo, 2002; Millard, 1997; Smith, 2004; Sullivan, 2004). Unfortunately, the vast majority of the children's literature used in most early childhood and elementary classrooms consist do not embody the themes and characters that respond to boys' preferences (Yopp & Yopp, 2006). Consequently, boys are often less motivated to engage with texts in the classroom than girls. Again, disengagement with texts has a direct impact on reading achievement. In keeping with this frame of thought, it is possible that African American boys are not engaging with texts at school as often or to the same degree as girls due to a lack of access to texts that speak to the reading preferences of boys. To this end, it is also possible that this lack of engagement with text is contributing to reading underachievement in African American boys as well.

Not only do boys and girls differ in *what* they prefer to read, they also differ in *how* they prefer to read texts (Boltz, 2007; Clark, 2006; Sullivan, 2004). Boys tend to prefer reading for practical, analytical, informational, and directional purposes, while girls tend to prefer to read in ways that allow and encourage the reader to explain the literary qualities of a work (i.e., rhythm, imagery, metaphor) and depart from ordinary diction (Clark, 2006). Based on these differences, boys tend to navigate toward texts that explain how the world around them functions. As such, boys tend to be drawn toward reading newspapers, how-to manuals, and other short informational texts more often than girls. Notably, the majority of the texts used in early childhood and elementary classroom settings require "aesthetic" reading skills and center on narrative text structures (Sullivan, 2004). These types of texts are more consistent with the reading preferences of girls than boys. For instance, in a two-year qualitative investigation, Clarke (2006) notes significant differences in the ways in which boys and girls were positioned during literature circle discussions. In short, during the 4th grade year, many of the boys in the study were disempowered by the use of literature circles while the girls were simultaneously empowered by the use of literature circles. More specifically, Clarke documents incidents during the literature circles where the girls answered questions for the boys and or completely ignored the requests of particular boys in the group. Even more so, Clarke notes a particular instance where the boy who was assigned to be the literature circle facilitator by the classroom teacher was completely stripped of his position by the girls within his group. To this end, the boys in the study became even more disempowered by the use of literature circles during their 5th grade year at school. Ultimately, what

this study suggests is that reading instructional methods that are often designed to “open-up” discussions around texts and increase reading engagement may actually work to “close down” discussions for boys (based on the ways in which they respond to how boys prefer to read texts). In keeping with this school of thought, it is probable that the way in which a text is or is not read can be considered as an additional factor that contributes to reading underachievement in African American boys.

### **Neurological Differences**

Recent neuroscience research provides evidence that boys and girls have distinct neurological differences that can impact how boys and girls learn (Brizendine, 2006; Gurian, 2001; Gurian & Stevens, 2005; Sax, 2005; Sax, 2006; Spironelli, Penolazzi, & Angrilli, 2010). First, while the brains of boys and girls tend to develop along the same lines, girls tend to have more neurons in the brain areas devoted to language (Gurian & Stevens, 2005). Next, the areas of the brain associated with language and fine motor skills mature about six years earlier in girls than boys (Hamlon, Thatcher & Cline, 1999). Third, the areas of the brain associated with spatial memory mature almost four years earlier in boys than they do in girls (Hamlon, Thatcher & Cline, 1999). Finally, girls tend to have more estrogen, oxytocin, and dopamine in their brains than boys. At the same time, boys tend to have more testosterone in their brains than girls (Gurian, 2001).

Neurological differences between boys and girls can impact reading achievement in several ways. As a result of having more neurons in the areas of the brain that are devoted to language, girls tend to have less difficulty acquiring and utilizing the language and verbal skills (i.e., oral language, oral comprehension, vocabulary) embedded in reading processes than boys (Sax, 2006). Additionally, due to chemical differences within the brains of boys and girls, girls are better suited to participate fully and successfully in traditional reading activities. In clearer terms, estrogen, oxytocin, and dopamine (which are typically more prevalent in the brains of girls) produce feelings of satisfaction and contentment within the brain. As such, these chemicals make it easier for girls to read silently and independently for extended periods of time than boys. In contrast, testosterone (which is typically more prevalent in the brains of boys than girls) is linked to aggressive, competitive, and impulsive behavior patterns in boys (Gurian & Stevens, 2005). Having large quantities of testosterone in their brains makes it more difficult for boys to sit quietly for long periods of time and to read independently than girls. Essentially, these neurological differences make it much easier for girls to develop and utilize the skills needed



during reading interactions (i.e., read quietly, respond verbally, sit for extended periods of time) than boys. While most boys have to develop these skills in order to participate in reading activities fully and successfully, girls tend to have brains that are “pre-wired” in ways that encourage, support, and facilitate successful participation in reading activities naturally. Further, in as much as these neurological differences provide insight into explaining reading disparities between girls and boys in general, these neurological differences also provide insight into understanding reading underachievement in African American boys as well.

### **Factors that Impact Reading Achievement in African American Males**

There is a significant body of scholarship that examines possible causes of academic underachievement in African American males in general (e.g. Holzman, 2004; Kunjufu, 1982; Noguera, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999). As a result, I purposely choose not to review the scholarship on achievement and African American males here. Instead, given the central focus of this article on reading underachievement in African American boys, I review factors related to African American males and reading underachievement exclusively. As I mentioned previously, the majority of the scholarship on reading and African American males centers on African American males in pre-adolescent stages of development and beyond. While there are certainly developmental considerations that must be taken into account when applying this work to African American boys in early childhood and elementary contexts, this scholarship, nonetheless, provides valuable insight into how cultural/racial factors contribute to reading underachievement in African American boys. Again, the factors outlined here are not to suggest that “all” African American males are affected by these factors or affected in the same ways. Moreover, these factors are not presented to generalize about reading underachievement in African American boys. Instead, these factors are presented to make the discourse around this issue more nuanced and more complicated. With that being said, I highlight factors that contribute to reading underachievement in African American males that are associated with three contexts within the schooling process: curriculum, classroom, and comprehensive school.

#### **Curriculum Factors**

One possible explanation behind reading underachievement in African American males concerns the texts that are available in most classrooms. Alfred

Tatum (2006) points out that many adolescent African American males do not read because the texts that are available for them to read are not socially and culturally consistent and authentic. In other words, in many classroom contexts African American males often are not presented with opportunities to read texts that reflect their cultural and communal lived experiences and realities. As a result, they (African American males) are more apprehensive about engaging in reading and reading related activities. Tatum further points out that some African American males may even go as far as withdrawing from reading entirely on the basis of having access to relevant and authentic texts. In keeping with this logic, it is plausible that many African American boys in early childhood and elementary classrooms are also disengaged during reading activities due to a lack of culturally consistent and authentic texts. Further, because there is a direct link between reading engagement and reaching achievement (Logan & Johnston, 2009), textual selection can be considered as a possible factor behind reading underachievement in African American boys.

In as much as the texts that are chosen for use with African American boys can contribute to reading underachievement in this group, the standards that teachers teach toward can contribute to reading achievement disparities as well. Current educational reform initiatives mandate for states to begin adopting “Common” or standardized reading curricula as a means of eliminating achievement disparities in particular student groups. Ironically, while these standards are designed to help African American males and other student groups who are experiencing reading achievement disparities in schools, they actually exacerbate this issue due to their little respect for how African American males live and learn literacy (Kirkland, 2011). Kirkland (2011) points out two important flaws that the current Common Core Standards in English and Language Arts with regard to African American males and reading. First, these standards, like most standards based curricula, fail to place the individuality of African American males at the center of the curriculum. Next, standards based curricula fail to offer socially and culturally relevant strategies for differentiating literacy instruction to meet the varied literacy needs and interests of African American males. Instead, standards based reading curricula tend to lead to teachers to relying disproportionately on whole group, scripted, and uniform approaches to teaching reading and writing as a means of helping students demonstrate mastery of narrow grade level standards on standardized reading assessments. These standards provide few opportunities for teachers to tailor their instructional practices to closely meet the needs and interests of individual African American boys in their classrooms. For example, let us suppose that a third grade teacher named Ms. Johnson has three African American boys in her classroom who are

reading at a 2nd grade reading level. The state mandated standards-based reading curriculum forces Ms. Johnson to ignore the specific needs of these boys and to attempt to teach them the third grade reading curriculum. Because these boys actually need reading instruction on their instructional level, they become highly disengaged during instances of reading instruction. At the end of the year, Ms. Johnson discovers that the boys are still reading at a 2nd grade reading level as they prepare to matriculate to 4th grade. Paradoxically, what was designed to eliminate reading achievement disparities in this group actually made these achievement disparities worsen. As consistent with this illustration, standards based and or “Common” reading and language arts curricula can be considered an additional factor that contributes to reading underachievement in African American boys.

### **Classroom Factors**

Teachers who teach in ways that are consistent with the ways in which students prefer to learn are likely to produce greater achievement outcomes than teachers who teach in ways that are inconsistent with students’ preferred learning styles (Morgan, 2010). Accordingly, researchers (Gay, 2000; Kuykendall, 1992; Shade, Kelly & Oberg, 1997) postulate that African American students benefit more often from instructional activities that are highly stimulating, active and arousing than from lecture style and teacher centered activities where they function as passive receptacles of information. Even more so, Webb-Johnson (2002) points out that African American males in particular respond better in instructional environments that center on great degrees of interaction, movement, and energy. Unfortunately, many early childhood and elementary teachers construct learning activities that do not take the specific learning styles of African American males into consideration when developing and implementing instructional activities (Boykin & Cunningham, 2001). Instead of teaching reading in ways that support, build on, and draw from the socially and culturally situated learning styles of African American males, many teachers teach in ways that are disconnected from and inconsistent with these learning styles. As a result, many African American boys in early childhood and elementary contexts continue to experience grave reading achievement disparities (Ladson-Billings, 2011).

A second classroom factor that contributes to reading underachievement in African American boys concerns the ways in which texts are read in the classroom. Due to the No Child Left Behind legislature and other recent educational reform initiatives, teachers who teach in schools with significant numbers of African American males tend to teach in ways that place an overemphasis on helping students acquire the technical aspects of reading (Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron,

2005). Little or no attention is given toward reading critically or reading in ways that help students better understand the world around them and their role within it. Accordingly, African American males tend to disengage from reading when the reading process is seen to have little or no real world or personal significance (Tatum, 2006). This is illustrated in Hall and Piazza's (2008) study involving middle school African American males. In this study, the researchers compare one group of middle school African American males who read texts critically and another group of middle school African American males who do not read texts critically. The researchers report that the groups of students who were encouraged to read the texts from more critical perspectives engaged with the texts more deeply than the groups of students who read the texts in more traditional ways. In addition, the students who read the texts critically reported more enjoyment while reading the other group of students. Essentially, the African American males who read the texts critically reported enjoying reading texts that closely corresponded with their personal definitions of the world around them. Further, while this study in of itself does not completely explain reading underachievement in African American boys, it, nonetheless, provides another possible reason why many African American boys tend to be less engaged with texts than other student group—as early childhood and elementary teachers tend to encourage student uncritically more often than reading critically (Vasquez, 2010).

### **Comprehensive School Factors**

Institutionalized policies, procedures, and programs can have a direct impact on reading achievement in students of color (Huidor & Cooper, 2010). In view of that, one comprehensive school factor that can be used to explain reading underachievement in African American boys concerns institutional disciplinary practices. African American males are suspended at disproportionate rates in most schools (Brown, 2005; Kunjufu, 1982). This time spent out of school has a direct impact on academic achievement in general and reading achievement in particular (Mendez & Knoff, 2002). For instance, through an analysis of four years of archival data, Anderson, Howard, and Graham (2007) note a strong relationship between suspension rates and reading achievement in African American males in one large urban school district. The African American males who were suspended from school had lower levels of reading achievement than the other students who were not suspended from school. This study suggests that many of the disciplinary procedures aimed at correcting and eliminating unwanted behavior in and among African American

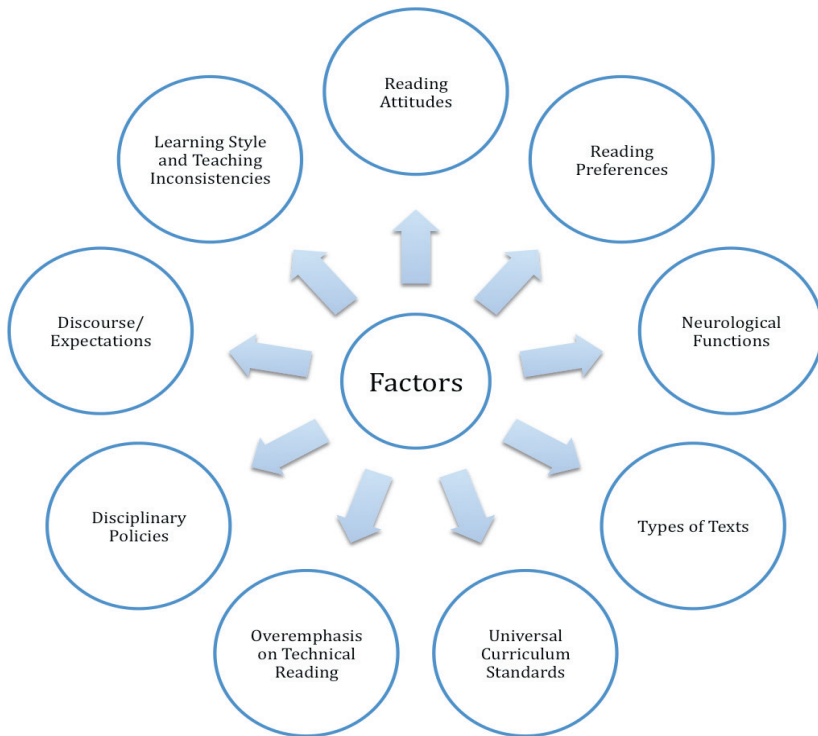
males may be having unintended negative consequences on reading achievement in this group. In this same vein, it is likely that African American boys who are suspended or expelled from school and or removed from class consistently as a disciplinary measure will not acquire the foundational reading skills necessary to become proficient readers. Further, because reading is a developmental process that depends on successful acquisition of series of previous skills, it is quite probable that dismissal from school will have a significant impact on reading achievement in African American boys in later years as well (Chall, 1996; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Another comprehensive school factor that contributes to reading underachievement in African American males concerns negative notions of African American males and literacy. Haddix (2009) points out that much of the public and research discourse surrounding African American males and literacy centers on a “failure” perspective (p 342). These dominant notions have a negative impact on both reading teachers and African American males. These low expectations stem from societal stereotypes about particular ethnic groups and academic achievement (Steele, 1997). Teachers who are impacted by these notions tend to have lower expectations for African American males. These lower expectations are often translated into pedagogical decisions and learning opportunities (Irving & Hudley, 2005; Kunjufu, 1989; Noguera, 2003). For example, let us suppose that Ms. Johnson holds a preconceived notion that African American boys are generally “poor readers”. She is likely then to teach reading in ways that are consistent with this belief. Ms. Johnson is likely to ask lower level questions and or use only lower level basal texts during small-group reading instruction. At the same time, if the African American boys in her class internalize this negative discourse they will begin exerting less energy and effort into reading and other academic matters (Steel & Aronson, 1995). If they (African American males) see themselves as “poor”, “struggling”, or “non” readers, they are likely to be disengaged during reading activities and processes. Further, low levels of reading engagement will ultimately have direct impact on reading achievement outcomes in this group.

## Using a Multi-Contextual Approach to Address Reading Underachievement

As discussed in much of this article, reading underachievement in African American boys is linked to multiple factors that span across multiple contexts (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** *Read Factors that Contribute to Reading Underachievement in African American Boys*



Given this basic premise, I espouse a multi-contextual approach to addressing reading underachievement in African American boys. Drawing from extant scholarship on practices that have been documented as producing positive outcomes with African American males, this framework focuses on possibilities for teachers and other school officials. In this sense, the multi-contextual framework draws from “what is” working in schools with African American males and applies these findings

to reading practices with African American boys, versus drawing from scholarship relative to what is not working with this population. To this end, the multi-contextual framework presented in the subsequent section encourages teachers and other school officials to work collaboratively and simultaneously within and across three critical contexts in the school to address this issue of reading underachievement in African American Boys.

### **Curriculum Context**

One way that teachers can address reading underachievement in African American boys within the curriculum is by increasing the number of texts that are culturally relevant (Feger, 2006). By culturally relevant texts I mean texts in which the characters, events, settings, and ways of talking and interacting are similar to events, settings, and ways of talking and interacting in and among African American boys (Feger, 2006; Jackson & Boutte, 2009). African American boys are likely to be more engaged with texts when these texts reflect their lived experiences and realities (Tatum, 2006). As mentioned earlier in this article, increased reading engagement will likely lead to increased reading outcomes. It is important to note that African American culture is not monolithic in nature. Hence, teachers should consider two questions when selecting culturally relevant texts. First, teachers should consider the extent to which the texts that are selected for use with African American boys responds to and reflects the people, events, setting, and ways of talking and interacting of African American people in general. Additionally, teachers should also consider the degree to which the texts that are selected for use with African American boys respond to and reflect the people, events, settings, and ways of talking and interacting of the African American boys in that particular classroom context. The later question is important because it takes into account the differences and complexities within the African American culture as a whole. For instance, teachers who teach African American boys in Harlem should be especially concerned with texts that reflect life in Harlem, New York, whereas teachers who teach African American boys in Cleveland, Ohio should be concerned with locating texts that reflect life in Cleveland, Ohio. In attending to both of these questions, teachers are able to acquire and implement culturally relevant literature that reflects African American culture in both broad and specific contexts.

In addition to increasing the number of texts within the curriculum that are culturally relevant as a means of increasing reading achievement in African American boys, teachers should also increase the number of texts that are available within the reading curriculum that center on African American male characters as

the main characters in the texts. As mentioned previously in this article, boys in general prefer reading texts with a male character as the main character in the text (Brozo, 2002). This has been attributed to the fact that boys enjoy reading about characters with whom they have something in common, can identify and can serve as role models for the future. In view of that, teachers should increase the number of texts that specifically include African American males as the main characters in the texts. African American boys are likely to read more often when texts are available within the reading curriculum that have main characters with whom they can identify with and or look up to as a role model. Further, because there is a direct relationship between reading frequency and reading achievement (Logan & Johnston, 2009), it plausible that reading texts more frequently will lead to improvements in reading achievement outcomes.

A final strategy that I shall mention here for teachers to use to address reading underachievement in African American boys within the curriculum is to increase the quantity of texts that deal with sociopolitical and or “real-life” issues. Studies indicate higher levels of engagement in and among African American males when teachers incorporate texts that deal with sociopolitical and or “real-life” issues (Tatum, 2006; Tyson, 1999). Accordingly, teachers should work to increase the number of texts that are available in the classroom that deal with issues of racism, classism, sexism, divorce, financial difficulties, bullying, etc. Further, two examples of “real-life” or sociopolitical texts that can be used in early childhood and elementary classrooms with African American boys are *Getting Through Thursday* by Melrose Cooper or *Everett Anderson’s Nine Month Long* by Lucille Clifton.

### **Classroom Context**

One strategy teachers can implement to increase reading achievement in African American boys in the classroom context is to integrate active reading strategies (Brozo, 2002) into their daily reading instruction. As mentioned earlier, there are multiple neurological, social, and cultural factors that make African American boys less prone to sitting and reading passively for long periods of times than girls. In an effort to address these needs, teachers should engage African American boys in active literacy strategies (Zambo & Brozo, 2009; Wilhelm, 2002). In short, active literacy strategies are reading strategies that require readers to become active participants during reading interactions. Some examples of active reading strategies include but are not limited to: using movement and kinesthetic devices to sound out words; rapping and singing poems and passages; Reader’s Theatre; process drama; reading in humorous voices to practice fluency skills; dancing out events from a text;



participating in a faux debate concerning the multiple perspectives presented in texts; using graphic organizers; and creating art projects to retell and summarize main events. Unlike more traditional approaches to reading instruction, active reading strategies offer the potential of higher levels of reading engagement among African American boys who will be required to “do” something rather than simply sit and listen. Further, active literacy strategies aid teachers in teaching in ways that are more consistent with the learning styles of most African American boys.

Another way teachers can respond to issues of reading underachievement in African American boys in the classroom is by changing *how* texts are read. As stated earlier, it is common for many early childhood and elementary teachers to read disproportional quantities of fictional texts in their classrooms. In keeping with this genre of text, early childhood and elementary teachers tend to read texts from what Rosenblatt (1995) refers to as an aesthetic stance (Boltz, 2007). That is, early childhood and elementary teachers tend to read in ways that require students to focus on personal meanings and feelings (Vasquez, 2010). Importantly, reading in uncritical ways can have a negative impact on African American boys, as boys tend to prefer reading in ways that focus on the “facts” reading (Boltz, 2007). Teachers can respond to this issue in two ways. First, teachers can carefully analyze the questions used during read-aloud, comprehension, and reading response activities to make sure there are equal numbers of questions that encourage readers to focus on personal and concrete meanings while reading. Failure to do so may create reading interactions where girls are favored more than boys (Clark, 2006). Next, teachers can counter this issue by encouraging African American boys to read texts from a critical standpoint. That is, teachers can encourage African American boys to read texts while paying close attention to issues of power and marginality. Regardless of the genre of text, teachers should encourage African American boys to interrogate textual events with regard to issues of power and marginalization. Not only will reading texts critically lead to higher levels of engagement among African American boys, this process may also lead to sociopolitical activism outside of the classroom as well (Tyson, 1999).

A third instructional strategy teachers can use to increase reading underachievement in African American boys in the classrooms concerns building on the multiple literacies that African American boys bring to the classroom. Scholars indicate that African American males are frequently literate in ways that transcend traditional notions of school literacy (Kinloch, 2010; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Tatum, 2005). In keeping with this notion, Tatum (2005) outlines a typology of various types of literacies that African American males are likely to possess:

1) cultural; 2) emotional; and 3) social. Teachers must begin to *acknowledge* and *build* on these multiple literacies and linguistic commonalities in order to make connections to the literacies that are valued most in school contexts. Rather than viewing African American boys as non-readers or having reading deficiencies, teachers must begin to acknowledge the non-school literacies that many African American boys bring into the classroom. Moreover, teachers must find organic and authentic ways of building connections between these out of school literacies and the literacies needed to be successful in school contexts. To this end, three additional types of out of school literacies that can be potentially used to help African American boys acquire in school literacies (based on their outcomes with boys in general) are video games, popular culture, and the new literacies (Newkirk, 2002; Sandford & Madill, 2007; Herbert & Pagnani, 2010) (See Table 1).

**Table 1.** *Strategies within the Critical Contexts*

<b>What can teachers do within the curriculum context to increase reading achievement in African American boys?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use culturally relevant texts</li> <li>• Use texts with male characters more often</li> <li>• Use texts with sociopolitical themes</li> <li>• Uses texts with "real-life" themes</li> </ul>
<b>What can teachers do within the classroom context to increase reading achievement in African American boys?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use active literacy strategies</li> <li>• Encourage critical literacy approaches</li> <li>• Support, draw from, and incorporate out of school literacies</li> </ul>
<b>What can whole schools do to increase reading achievement in African American boys?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reform whole-school behavior systems</li> <li>• Develop and implement Alternative Reading Support Systems (ARSS)</li> <li>• Create and implement reading programs that highlight African American males as readers</li> </ul>

### **Comprehensive School Context**

What can schools do, as a whole, to increase reading achievement in African American boys? We know that in order for children to achieve at optimal levels, it

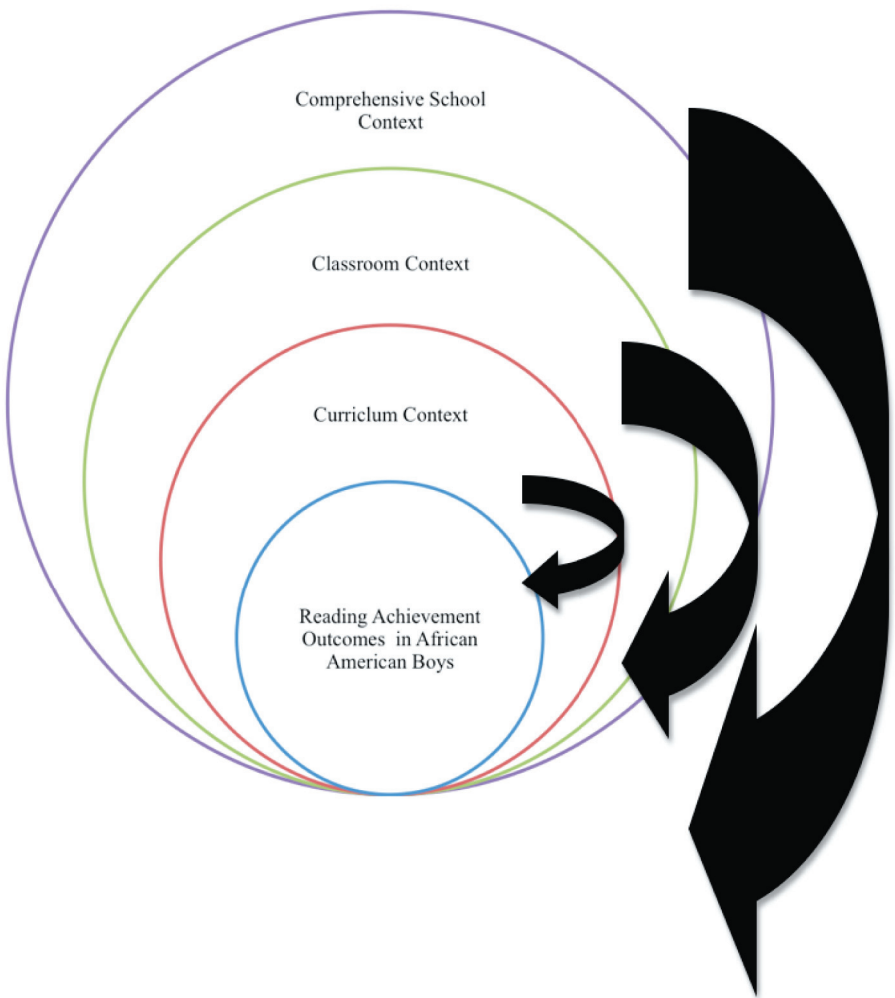
is necessary for schools to work collaboratively toward creating and implementing robust literacy programs that effectively serve all children. Thus, it is extremely important for schools to develop and implement whole school approaches to increasing reading underachievement in African American boys. With that being said, I offer three strategies for entire schools to adopt as a means of increasing reading achievement in African American boys. The first strategy whole schools can use to increase reading achievement in African American boys is to develop alternative behavior management systems that center on keeping African American boys in the classroom during reading instructional times. As mentioned previously, African American boys are impacted more often than other students groups by disciplinary, suspension, and expulsion policies and procedures in most schools (Kunjufu, 1982). Frequently, these policies and procedures result in African American boys missing a considerable amount of instructional time and content. To keep African American boys from missing fundamental reading skills that are necessary for future reading proficiency, school administrators and classroom teachers must develop classroom behavior management systems and policies that work to redirect rather than reprimand boys for not meeting teachers' and administrators' behavior expectations (Noguera, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Rather than "pulling out" African American boys who do not meet teachers' and administrators' behavior expectations as has traditionally been the focus of many "zero tolerance" behavior management systems, schools must work collectively to develop and implement policies and procedures that keep them in the classroom and in the school. Now, I am in no way suggesting that administrators and teachers should tolerate inappropriate behaviors that violate classroom and school behavior policies. Instead, I am suggesting that teachers and administrators take the factors that impact reading underachievement in African American boys presented in this article into consideration when making disciplinary decisions that are in the best interests of African American boys.

An additional whole-school means of combating reading underachievement in African American boys is to develop and implement what I call Alternative Reading Support Systems (ARSS). In clearer terms, schools can provide reading support systems that serve as alternatives to traditional "pull-out" or "after-school" reading intervention and support initiatives. In a traditional sense, these ARSS can be used as intervention and remediation for African American boys who are experiencing difficulties in reading. At the same time, these support systems can also be used as enrichment opportunities for African American boys who are currently reading on or above grade-level expectations. In an effort to meet the diverse needs of African American boys at a particular school, teachers must be willing to implement these reading support systems before school, after school, during lunch, and even on Saturday or Sunday mornings. Moreover, teachers must

also be willing to implement these support systems at school, at home, at church, or any location that works for best for the students involved. The fundamental idea behind these support systems is that schools would develop and implement reading support systems that meet the specific needs of the African American boys involved. A salient example of what an Alternative Reading Support System may look like is seen in Brinson's (2007) description of an innovative program with African American boys in a local barbershop entitled Boys Booked on Barbershops (B-BOB). In short, reading nooks were established in the participating barbershops to encourage boys and their parents to read to each other while waiting for their turn to get a haircut. The boys who participated in the program not only demonstrated increased reading engagement, but they also demonstrated significant reading achievement gains over time. Although a teacher did not initiate this particular program, it, nonetheless, illustrates how an ARSS might be developed in conjunction with community members to address reading underachievement in African American boys in alternative ways. As mentioned previously, much of the discourse surrounding African American males and reading is deficit oriented (Haddix, 2010). This discourse has and continues to have a negative impact on both African American boys and their teachers (Steele, 1997). Schools can work toward countering this negative discourse by creating and implementing reading programs that spotlight African American males as proficient readers and writers. Schools can develop and implement literacy programs for African American boys that are led by other African American males in the school and local community as a means of countering pervasive stereotypical notions of the African American male as a "struggling", "poor" or "non" reader. Because stereotypes arise out of one's personal experiences and exposures (or lack thereof) with particular groups in society (Steel, 1997), it is likely that teachers who hold deficit conceptions about African American boys and reading will change their thinking as a result of seeing African American males (at all age levels) who engage in reading on a consistent basis. At the same time, it is also likely that (through prolonged exposure to other African American males who engage in and enjoy reading activities and challenge dominant stereotypes) African American boys will change how they think of themselves in relation to reading as well. These programs will help African American boys move from seeing reading as something that is un-masculine (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) or counter cultural (Irving & Hudley, 2008) to something they enjoy and desire to engage in on a consistent basis. Again, because there is a direct relationship between reading engagement and reading achievement, reading achievement outcomes in this group are likely to improve as well (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** *Contexts that Contribute to Reading Underachievement in African American boys*

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## Conclusion

In this article I have outlined several factors that contribute to reading underachievement in African American boys in early childhood and elementary contexts. The causes I discuss here stem from African American boys being members of two groups (boys and African American males) that historically underachieved in reading. The factors that contribute to reading underachievement in African American boys transcend multiple schooling contexts (see Figure 2). Any robust attempt at addressing this issue warrants an approach that utilizes strategies across multiple contexts. As means of attending to this issue, I offer a multi-contextual approach to addressing reading underachievement in African American boys. Prior to implementing the multi-contextual approach discussed in this article, teachers and schools must be willing to undertake two important commitments in order to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. First, teachers and schools must commit to being part of the solution rather than continuing to articulate the problem. Teachers and schools must move beyond simply *reiterating* the problem and toward restructuring resources to *resolve* the problem. In other words, teachers must be willing to reject passive notions such as “that’s just how African American boys are” or “African American boys just don’t like reading” toward actively embracing new means of combating this problem. Unless this initial commitment to working actively toward finding solutions to this problem of underachievement in African American boys, teachers and school will inevitably continue to perpetuate deficit model or “blame the victim” approaches to addressing this issue.

Second, teachers and schools must make the commitment to work beyond the classroom. The issue of reading underachievement in African American boys is linked to multiple factors that span across multiple contexts. As such, teachers and schools can no longer emphasize approaches to combating this issue that involve classroom strategies exclusively. Teachers must be willing to commit to working beyond the classroom and school context as needed in order to combat this issue of reading underachievement in African American boys. They must be willing to formulate and implement programs and partnerships that respond to underachievement in African American boys in and across curriculum, classroom, and community contexts. Failure to do so will only produce limited progress toward eradicating this achievement disparity as we journey through the 21st century.



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## **The Metalinguistic Protocol: Making Disciplinary Literacies Visible in Secondary Teaching and Learning**

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### **Abstract**

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Concerns about adolescent literacy continue to be highlighted in regards to the challenges of reading and learning from academic text. Recent efforts to address these concerns have led to an examination of the disciplines and their specialized ways of thinking and using language. In this article I discuss a metalinguistic protocol in a think-aloud process as a framework to use in university content area literacy courses with secondary preservice teachers to examine the language and thinking as it is used in the disciplines of knowledge and to address the implications of disciplinary literacies for teaching and learning in secondary schooling.

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### **Introduction**

This activity really showed me the importance of prior knowledge and experience when approaching a text. The ability to access meaning, in certain cases, may be no more than a question of learning a bit about what you are about to read.

—Ashley, Spanish major

Recent conversations about disciplinary literacies (McArthur, 2007; Draper, Broomhead, Petersen Jensen, Nokes, & Siebert, 2010; Lee & Spratley, 2010; Moje,

2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008) have sparked an interest in issues related to secondary teaching and learning including the improvement of content area literacy instruction at the university level. As new perspectives emerge and we seek to “foreground” the field (Moje, p. 96) by recognizing the unique literacies of the disciplines inclusive of the knowledge, discourses, and social practices that contribute to professional identity, consideration of instructional approaches to make this visible are part of the next step.

I have used a metalinguistic protocol in a think-aloud process as an instructional approach with secondary preservice teachers in university content area literacy courses that I have taught for the last five years in order to raise awareness and begin conversations about disciplinary literacies. The metalinguistic protocol serves as a framework to help preservice teachers think about language and thinking as it is used in disciplinary texts and includes discussion about the implications for their future teaching with adolescent students in secondary schools. Preservice teachers bring a great deal of knowledge and expertise in their disciplines along with professional identities that have been integrated, over time into their daily lives and work. Because of this expertise, they often take for granted what they know, how they think, as well as how they navigate text in their field. In the course, I use the metalinguistic protocol and think-aloud process to open up conversations about socially situated literacies (Gee, 1999) which includes disciplinary literacies and the complexities involved in reading disciplinary texts.

Using think-alouds as a tool for exploring cognitive processes related to language and thinking is not new. They can, in fact, be traced back to the time of Socrates. Think-aloud protocols have been used in reading (Afflerbach, 2002; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995) as well as disciplinary studies (Wineburg, 1991, 2001). Braunger, Donahue, Evans and Galguera (2005) used a think-aloud protocol in a reading apprenticeship assignment in their secondary teacher preparation courses to examine the challenges of reading and learning from academic texts. I have adapted the metalinguistic protocol using the work of the forenamed researchers for the purpose of making explicit the unique language and thinking of the different disciplines.

It is generally accepted that the disciplines consist of four broad academic areas of study: science, mathematics, social sciences and the arts and humanities. Each of the disciplines has its own unique knowledge structure and ways of thinking; use of language or discourse; and ways of looking at or reading the world. Woolman (2000) suggests science as an empirical way of knowing using logic to think with the scientific method; mathematics as a logical way of knowing using

mathematical methods for thinking; social sciences, such as history, as a factual way of knowing pre-determined by authority with cause and effect thinking about how the past informs the present; and the arts and humanities as aesthetic ways of knowing and communicating thinking through the language of the sign systems such as literature, art, music, and dance or athletics. In schooling, the disciplines are considered from these four broad academic areas of study and are typically termed “content areas” or “subjects.”

Along with the ways of knowing, each discipline has its own way to mediate inquiry (Vygotsky, 1986). As Pontecorvo (1993) further explains: “forms of discourse become forms of thinking. Indeed methodologies of the specific domain are enacted through appropriate discourse practices that respond to the epistemic needs of a disciplinary topic” (p. 191). For example, the social studies specialist knows the importance of primary sources in the field, incorporates mathematical knowledge of scale when reading maps, and may contextualize events within a historical time frame to evaluate authenticity. The English specialist must understand the elements of story, genres of literature, and the structure or grammar of language in writing. Eisner (1985/1995; 1994) suggests multiple forms of representing thinking in the disciplines as appropriate to teaching and learning in the classroom.

The metalinguistic protocol becomes a tool for making disciplinary literacies visible for teaching and learning when used in university content area literacy courses with secondary preservice content area teachers. In turn, preservice teachers in the course recognize the difficulty their often less experienced adolescent students may face in navigating the language and thinking while reading to learn from disciplinary texts.

In this article I explore some of the challenges of reading disciplinary texts, explain how I use the metalinguistic protocol in the university content area literacy course, present an overview of the metalinguistic protocol and conclude with several examples of the protocol from preservice content area teachers.

## **Challenges of Reading Disciplinary Texts**

Along with the multiple discourse practices, methodologies and genres used by the disciplines to represent thinking, the disciplines lend themselves to written formats and text structures and features that can be considered as unique to that discipline (Bazerman, 1998; Coffin, 1997; Geisler, 1994; Lemke, 1990; Schlepppegrell, 2004). For example, the way of thinking in history, one of the social sciences includes examining the past in terms of the present and lends itself to both time/sequence and cause and effect text structures and often includes text features such

as maps and photographs. Due to the nature of text structure a historian reading a document in the field would know to look for dates, time periods, and other references to time/sequence as well as for causes or factors in their analysis of historical events presented by the author in the text. In other examples, someone from the field of English would be familiar with narrative text and the descriptive text structure often used in the discipline of the humanities and make use of text features such as chapter headings; while the way of thinking in science often contributes to a problem/solution text structure and might include text features such as charts and graphs instead of narrative explanations. While these examples are oversimplified and an in-depth discussion is beyond the scope of this article, they demonstrate nonetheless the types of expertise and background knowledge that develop from reading written text in a discipline.

In addition to the expertise outlined above, the disciplines employ technical vocabulary often with origins in Greek and Latin roots and use language in specialized ways. Technical vocabulary can be defined as “terms or expressions. . . with a specialized field-specific meaning” (Wignell, Martin, & Eggins, 1993, p. 144). Technical vocabulary can be challenging in itself with knowledge of such discourse usually learned through much experience and opportunities to participate in a disciplinary community (Gee, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991). However, technical terms can also be deceptive for the novice as they can be derived from common uses of everyday language yet become “technical or specialized” according to the specific nature of the discipline. The word *field*, for example can commonly mean a piece of land or also have a specialized meaning when broadly referring to a realm of knowledge. In science, *field* can be used to define a space where magnetic forces are active. In mathematics, *field* is defined by Merriam-Webster (2004) as “a set of mathematical elements that is subject to two binary operations the second of which is distributive relative to the first and that constitutes a commutative group under the first operation and also under the second if the zero or unit element under the first is omitted” (p. 466). Another challenge related to technical vocabulary and specialized use of language is the metaphoric language found in literary analysis in English or in references to historical time periods, for example “the Dark Ages.” Compound the specialized use of language in English and history with the variations of Old English in Shakespeare and dialect in Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer*, two examples of classics common in the study of literature.

Another challenge of disciplinary text is the unique grammatical functions of language that can impede comprehension for the novice reader. One such



complexity is *nominalization*, a linguistic device that transforms a verb or adjective into a noun or noun phrase (Halliday & Martin, 1993). In science text, for example, nominalization serves to condense dense concepts into abstract specialized terms. As Fang (2004) elaborates in one example where a scientific concept in one text clause “the respiratory passages narrow significantly” becomes the abstract noun “*this narrowing*” and thus “enables the author to continue discussion on the topic” (p. 339). In an example from history text, Schleppegrell (2004) notes that nominalizations are often used in more general ways such as historic events condensed into the nominalized terms periods and eras (p. 126). Mathematical word problems also commonly contain nominalizations (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2009). As used in academic text, “nominalization can, therefore create problems for readers, because it tends to neutralize or obscure meanings and construct an ideology that is often not transparent to naïve readers” (Fang, 2004, p. 340).

An additional complexity of disciplinary text is lexical density which Halliday and Martin (1993) define as “a measure of the density of information in any passage of text, according to how tightly the lexical items (content words) have been packed into the grammatical structure” (p. 76). While all academic texts can pack a great deal of lexical items in a short space, some texts, science and history, for example have a higher lexical number and cognitive load. The cognitive demand made on the reader can contribute to overload, frustration and shut-down.

The challenges of reading disciplinary texts as outlined in the section above demonstrate how inexperienced or novice readers, in this case adolescent students, face multiple cognitive complexities when reading and learning from different types of academic texts. However, as Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) note:

These text differences, however, are not often within the purview of literacy courses in teacher-preparation institutions, nor are they the subject of discipline-based methods course work; for that matter, they are not usually discussed in the basic content courses teachers take within their discipline. As a result, teachers are not prepared to address the challenges posed by the special demands of texts across the various disciplines. Yet, adolescent students engage in a daily struggle to learn the content of the various disciplines – content that is instantiated in the academic discourse that is an outgrowth of the differences in the disciplines themselves (p.53-54).

Thus the expertise that secondary preservice content area teachers have about how to read and learn from written text in their discipline becomes an important resource for their teaching and can in turn address the challenges adolescents often face when reading to learn in secondary schooling. While some would argue that the academic texts or textbooks used in schooling are not accurately reflective of the disciplines, Schleppegrell (2004) states that “the recontextualization of the discourses for pedagogical purposes does reflect the values and ways of thinking of the disciplinary communities” (p. 114).

### **Using the Metalinguistic Protocol in the Course**

The university content area literacy course is generally a requirement for secondary education majors and enrolls preservice teachers from across the disciplines (Farrell & Cirrincione, 1984). Classes consist of a variety of English, social studies, science, mathematics, music, art, kinesiology, and foreign language majors who usually take the course during the senior year of their program and after multiple content and methods courses in their specialization. I have taught one or two sections of the content area literacy course at a university located in the south each semester for the last five years. I plan curriculum for the course around the big idea of “many ways of knowing and the tools to learn” using backward design (McTighe & Wiggins, 1998). “Tools” in this case refer to disciplinary practices that promote literacy as unique to the discipline. Planning the course from a semiotic perspective or “many ways of knowing” recognizes the value of all disciplines and helps support community building across content areas early in the course. Recognizing “many ways of knowing” also serves to defuse the elitism that is sometimes prevalent in the content area subcultures in secondary schools (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995; O’Brien, Stewart & Moje, 1995). In addition I ground the course in sociocultural learning theory (Gee, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1986) and sociopsycholinguistic theories of reading (Goodman, 1996; Smith, 1997).

I use the metalinguistic protocol experience almost mid-way through the content area literacy course. Two important foundational concepts established at this point in the course are: 1) a broad definition of literacy which includes socially situated literacies such as disciplinary communities and 2) the language and culture of the disciplines including the ways of knowing, thinking and using language as well as the work of the discipline. Through readings, discussion and other course experiences the preservice teachers have examined membership and participation in their disciplines as a secondary discourse (Gee, 1999) acquired over time and

as having unique literacies according to the discipline. When we transition in the course to examine written texts in the disciplines and how they are used, ideas are being explored about the reading process and reading to learn. At this point in the semester I want to make disciplinary literacy even more visible through an examination of written text and reading to learn.

Preservice teachers often enter the content area literacy course with a prevalent view of reading as a basic skill that should have been learned at the elementary school and then “used generically to learn from text across the curriculum” (Braunger, Donahue, Evans & Galguera, 2005, p. 11). The belief being that once you learn to read, you should be able to read anything. To augment this misconception (Kintsch, 1986) I initially focus course readings, discussions and experiences on examining the reading process and the cognitive strategies such as predicting, inferring, sampling, confirming/disconfirming; integrating, etc. or the “universals” as Ken Goodman (1996) terms them that good readers use to make meaning or comprehend written texts. Along with discussion we address the role of background knowledge in reading comprehension and learning from text. I then transition to the challenges embedded in academic texts due to the nature of the disciplines. For example, in one augmented experience I assign the preservice teachers a text to read in class that is not particularly difficult to read at the surface level but is extremely difficult to comprehend due to the specialized knowledge, technical vocabulary and lexical density of the text. When literal level questions are added to the assignment it is particularly eye-opening in regards to typical school practices in using text for reading to learn. Text assignments such as answering literal type questions or filling in the blank worksheets are not too uncommon in secondary schooling and lend themselves to memorization rather than conceptual understandings of disciplinary knowledge and can impede the development of background knowledge a novice in the field needs in order to develop a level of expertise to navigate additional text.

Key concepts we explore next in the course include the different academic text structures and text features as well as the specialized language used by the disciplines. To further understand text patterns such as definition/example; cause and effect; compare/contrast; time/sequence, problem/solution we explore how the nature of thinking according to the discipline can lend themselves to particular structures and features. We also examine and question how textbooks used in school are reflective of the discipline. The secondary preservice teachers are then prepared to examine their own use of reading to learn strategies and their unique disciplinary literacy in the metalinguistic protocol experience.

## Overview of the Metalinguistic Protocol

The metalinguistic protocol is a three-part assignment in the content area literacy course that includes a metalinguistic think-aloud journal homework assignment; an in-class partner trade and discussion; and an individual reflection of the experience. To set the stage for the first part of the experience, the metalinguistic journal homework assignment, I bring in a journal article or book chapter from my field of language and literacy that I have not read before and model in class the thinking I do while reading it. Using an article or book chapter that I have not read before adds depth to the experience that would not be the same if I was familiar with the text. The think-aloud I do includes background knowledge from my field, recognition of disciplinary language, and the thinking needed to comprehend the literacy concepts presented in the article. During the think-aloud I make a record of both the text and the corresponding thinking I do on an ELMO or overhead transparency in a format similar to Wineburg (1991) as exemplified in figure 1 below:

**Figure 1.** *The Think-Aloud Journal Homework Assignment*

The Text says...	My Thinking is...

After the in-class demonstration the preservice teachers are given a think-aloud journal homework assignment in which they are to first choose a text they might read in their discipline. For example, a science major might choose an article from a science journal while a history major might choose a primary source document or book from their field. Some preservice teachers choose to read from a content area textbook from the secondary school. I don't exclude this choice as it adds another layer to our discussions. After the text selection is made the next step in the metalinguistic protocol assignment is to complete a think-aloud journal as modeled in class. The journal includes what the text says and the think-aloud process captured and recorded while reading the text. I ask the preservice teachers to read at least 2 pages of text, depending on the content and to prepare at least 3-4 think-aloud journal pages. This allows for adequate attention to both content and

process. The think-aloud journal homework can be both tedious and timely so I warn the preservice teachers in advance and also relay comments from past students in the course who have found the metalinguistic protocol experience extremely valuable. For the next class period the preservice teachers bring a photocopy of the text they read and the think-aloud journal they prepared for the second part of the metalinguistic protocol.

### **In-Class Partner Trade and Discussion**

The second part of the metalinguistic think-aloud journal assignment occurs during the next class period. To begin this step in the metalinguistic protocol experience, the preservice teachers partner with someone outside their discipline. This type of partnering fosters a novice experience, to some degree, as the preservice teachers may not have the depth of knowledge and expertise in navigating disciplinary text outside their content area. Setting the metalinguistic protocol experience up this way allows for the unique discipline literacy, including ways of thinking, background knowledge, text structures and text features, and specialized language, and cognitive reading strategies to be made visible. Once the partners are chosen they trade the photocopies of the texts while setting aside the think-aloud journals to use later. Each of the partners first reads the unfamiliar disciplinary text making annotations of their thought processes on the hard copy. For example, partners may note their use or lack of discipline specific background knowledge and thinking, unfamiliar language, and places of confusion. When both partners are finished reading the text outside their discipline, the think-aloud journals are used as a guide alongside the text for a second read. The preservice teachers add any additional thoughts to their notes. After the discipline specific texts and think-aloud journals are read, the partners engage in a discussion about the experience, including talk about what it was like to be a reader of unfamiliar content, and share their insights and questions. For this second part of the assignment a partner discussion sheet is used to make notes as shown in figure 2 below.

**Figure 2.** *The Metalinguistic Protocol Partner Discussion Sheet*

Reading Processes	Discipline Specific Knowing and Thinking	Text Structure and Text Features	Confusions	Other Thoughts

After the partner discussion whole class debriefing takes place. Conversations among the class are engaging as the preservice teachers share insights they've had during the experience. Almost without fail, the importance of background knowledge in a field is highlighted in the discussions. Another key insight is the discipline specific language that is needed to understand a text. Others students note common reading strategies, such as predicting, that they use as readers. Conversations then shift to strategies that might be used more often due to the nature of the discipline. In one example, Frank, a mathematics major talked about the importance of visualizing in his discipline. While Angela, a history major, stated that she knows to always begin reading in history by finding out who the author of the text is first. Often confusions about reading strategies and discipline specific thinking are discovered.

Related conversations we have while reflecting on the experience with the metalinguistic protocol includes the role of apprenticeships, identity development, and social practices in professional communities. These conversations often reveal and focus on the multiple opportunities that have fostered the preservice teachers' disciplinary literacy including those that allow them to work with experts or "masters" in their field over time, to learn the work. Michael, a history major noted "I realize that I cannot expect students to all be naturally able to read as I do, not that they are incapable of doing so, but the fact is that I have had more experience and training". Here again, insights are gained into needed instructional practices and strategic decisions to support the disciplinary literacy development of their future adolescent students in order to help them develop some level of expertise for school success.

### Individual Reflection of the Experience

For the final portion of the assignment the preservice teachers write a reflection of the metalinguistic protocol experience as a follow-up to the in-class activities. This final part of the framework requires each preservice teacher to think deeper about disciplinary literacy and the implications for teaching. The directions for the homework assignment and the questions that guide the individual reflection and response are included below:

As you think about and reflect on the Metalinguistic Journal experience use the following questions as a guide to write a 3-4 page response about what you learned and use the implications for your teaching:

1. What reading strategies were visible as you read?
2. What strategies did you use as a reader to comprehend text in your discipline? Out of your discipline? Were your partners' strategies different? The same? Why, why not?
3. How did the text features and/or text structures influence your reading in your discipline? Out of your discipline?
4. What specialized vocabulary or use of language did you encounter in your discipline? Out of your discipline?
5. What discipline specific knowledge and thinking provided background knowledge for comprehending the text in your content area? Out of your content area?
6. What did you learn about yourself as a reader of academic text?
7. What did you learn about reading to learn from disciplinary text?
8. What are the implications for your teaching?

As one preservice teacher summarized:

This activity showed me the importance of prior knowledge and experience when approaching a text. Nothing about the words or concepts in the history text I read was too difficult for me to grasp. I also learned that when reading history text you have to recognize the time period you are reading about. You also have to know who's [sic] perspective you are reading from, who the author is (Dolores, English Major).

## **Classroom Examples of the Metalinguistic Protocol**

In this section of the article I include classroom examples of the metalinguistic protocol experience from preservice teachers who have taken the university content area literacy course. In the first example, a science and history major have partnered. In the second example, a math and English major have partnered. With both examples I begin first with a discussion of the think-aloud journal of each partner individually, next I discuss each partner discussion sheet individually and lastly I include selective comments from the reflections of each partner.

### **Partner Example 1: Science and History**

The first partner example is with preservice teachers who are science and history majors, respectively. Figure 3 below shows Tony, the science major's metalinguistic think-aloud journal with the science text recorded on the left hand side in "The text says" column and Tony's thinking recorded in the "My thinking is" right hand column. He has chosen to read from a middle school science textbook. Tony's reading process reveals strategies such as predicting, "The title leads me to believe" and "They are going to discuss". His think-aloud demonstrates a use of his background knowledge in science with an attention to terms like "mass" and "weight," the technical vocabulary of the field. He notes the inclusion of the sunken ship scenario as a feature of science textbooks and their efforts to make real-world applications of science for secondary students. Tony refers to text features such as sub-headings when he reads from the text: "What is matter?" and a familiarity of text organization "...most textbooks try to distinguish the difference between..." In addition, Tony's disciplinary thinking elaborates on the concepts of gases as "a little more difficult to visualize as matter" and definitions of mass and weight. Much of Tony's disciplinary thinking is invaluable for helping the novice scientist understand the concepts in the text selection as later seen in Figure 6 with his partner Michael's discussion sheet.



**Figure 3.** *Science Major Think-Aloud Journal*

The text says:	My thinking is:
The chapter title is <i>General Properties of Matter</i>	The title leads me to believe that they will be discussing topics like density, mass, volume. Also, since most textbooks try to distinguish the difference between mass and weight, I'm thinking that they will be talking about weight and gravity.
On July 19, 1545, a fleet of British warships sailed slowly out of Portsmouth Harbor, England, on its way to battle the French fleet. One ship, the <i>Mary Rose</i> , carried a crew of 415 sailors, 285 soldiers, and a number of very new and heavy, bronze cannons.	Most science texts like to begin by giving a real life scenario of how the concepts that are about to be introduced can be used in 'real life' situations. I would think the ship is going to sink and they will discuss how the mass of the cargo caused the ship to sink.
Some of the divers wore heavy weights on their belts so that they could hover above the sandy ocean bottom.	They are going to discuss how the properties of matter can have different effects on things. Why the heavy ship sank and why the divers wearing heavy weights are not walking on the ocean floor but are hovering just above it.
What is matter?	The text should explain what matter is. It should do this by describing matter as what the entire universe is made of, and then list specific examples.
Through your senses of smell, sight, taste, and touch, you are familiar with matter.	Your five senses are used to describe physical properties of matter, but some that might not come very easily to mind are things that you can not see, taste or hear. Gases are a little more difficult to visualize as matter since we can't perceive oxygen as a physical substance.
Some kinds of matter are easily recognized. Wood, water, salt, clay, glass, gold, plants, animals – even a piece of the moon – are examples of matter that are easily observed.	This makes me think of a fun and effective lab that is used to reinforce the idea of physical properties. Once the concept has been introduced, you can do a lab in which the students are given 10 random items and they need to list at least 5 physical properties of each item.
Properties describe an object. Color, odor, size, shape, texture, and hardness are properties of matter.	These examples are very specific, they should begin distinguishing the difference between these examples and general properties of mass, volume, density, et.
All matter has the general properties of mass, weight, volume, and density.	Now begins the meat and potatoes of the chapter. They should begin by discussing mass, and distinguishing the difference between mass and weight. Mass is the same whether you are on Earth or the moon. Weight is dependent on gravity.

McDougal Littell, (2005). *McDougal Littell middle school science*. Chicago, IL: McDougal Little/Houghton Mifflin.

Tony partnered with Michael, a preservice teacher from the discipline of history. Figure 4 below shows Michael's metalinguistic think-aloud journal. Michael chose to read from an academic text in his field of history. His reading process shows use of strategies such as activating background knowledge, predicting, inferring, confirming/disconfirming as he integrates across the reading of the text. Michael uses the title as a text feature to predict what the chapter might be about and later seems to make reference to the lexical density often found in history text when he comments on the author, "I like how Marks sets forth his chapter agenda very clearly and succinctly. This is great when one takes into account that historians generally tend to be very verbose." Michael then references historical ways of thinking, "It is nice being able to quickly identify the author's main points and move on to critical analysis of the information." This statement also reflects Michael's experience and expertise in reading history which is further demonstrated in his think-aloud journal by his ability to synthesize across the text while he is reading. Michael's disciplinary literacy and historical way of thinking are further exemplified in these think-aloud statements he makes, "historians have seen world history and the development of industrialized societies from a non-Eurocentric viewpoint" and "like anything else in history, European contributions and achievements must be placed in broader context".

**Figure 4.** *History Major Think-Aloud Journal*

The text says:	My thinking is:
<p>Title of the book: <i>The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Ecological Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-First Century</i> by Robert B. Marks; the chapter I am reading is entitled "The Gap"</p>	<p>The titles that I have listed bring forth in me feelings of familiarity and confusion simultaneously. From the main title, I know what the book is going to be about, and because I have studied this period in world history before, I feel that I am going to be able to understand the contents. The chapter title, on-the-other-hand, leaves me guessing a little about what to expect in the chapter.</p>
<p>In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, China, India, and Europe... were broadly comparable in terms of the level of economic development, standard of living, and people's life expectancies... those three parts of the world thus accounted for 70 percent of the economic activity in the world in 1700.</p>	<p>This echoes the point that we have been discussing in class since the beginning of the semester. Europe was not the begin-all, end-all in terms of advanced world civilizations. We need to look beyond a Eurocentric view of world history.</p>
<p>In 1900, Europe and the United States together account for 80 percent of all manufacturing activity.</p>	<p>At this point, Europe was still dominating the world in several ways, but the U.S. was at a point where it would soon be thrust forward, eventually emerging a true world superpower.</p>
<p>... a great reversal of world history... Chinese and Indians became relatively poorer over the course of the nineteenth century... they were not industrializing... cities were not developing, so they could not accommodate rising populations, leading to greater rural poverty. (paraphrased)</p>	<p>Helps to explain why roles were reversed. This ties in with what we know about wealth being linked with cities. With the rise of great cities throughout history, there also arose completely different groups of people whose lives were not tied to agriculture, thus allowing specialization of labor, a diversified economy, and eventually, industrialized societies. Unfortunately, although China and India were home to several great cities and ports, the fact that they were not industrializing on-par with their European and American counterparts speaks volumes about why their economies were stunted or reversed. Most likely, this had to do with the forms of government in place within these countries during the time.</p>
<p>The charts thus show the emergence during the nineteenth century of a large and growing gap between the West and the rest of the world, here epitomized by India and China.</p>	<p>The gap that the chapter title refers to is this one. There was a growing economic and social gap between people of the East and West, with the West overcoming the East. This was something in stark contrast to historical truths.</p>

Marks, R. B. (2007). *The origins of the modern world: A global and ecological*

*narrative of the fifteenth to the twenty-first century*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and

Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

On the partner discussion sheet as seen in Figure 5 Tony notes several reading strategies that he uses such as activating prior knowledge, read ahead, synthesize, and indicates that Michael's background knowledge and historical thinking were needed to support his own comprehension of the history text. Tony also states he "had to re-read" and references "rationalization of market economy" a nominalization which is a grammatical feature discussed earlier in this article that can create ambiguity and that is often used in history text.

**Figure 5.** *Metalinguistic Journal Partner Discussion - Science Major*

Metalinguistic Journal Partner Discussion				
Reader: Antonio Discipline: Science Title of Text Read: <i>The GNP</i>		Partner: Mike Discipline: History		
Reading Processes  I use these strategies too when I read...	Discipline Specific Knowing and Thinking  This was helpful background knowledge and disciplinary thinking...	Text Structure and Text Features  The text structure and text features were a guide here...	Confusions  I got confused here... ...because....	Other Thoughts I Have
Activate prior knowledge Read ahead Synthesize Summarize	Idea of world being linked to great cities is something that I had never thought of but after reading makes sense.  uses a lot of background knowledge his previous texts.	Summarizes most of chapter clearly & shows us what to expect.	Had to reread "rationalization of" market economy.  Didn't understand it at first & had to reread it	

Michael's partner discussion sheet as seen in Figure 6 makes reference to the strategies he used while reading from Tony's chosen science text as being predicting, inferencing, confirming/disconfirming, and activating prior knowledge. He further notes that the text organization helped guide his thinking while reading from the science chapter and that "it was orderly from the beginning". This would confirm Tony's helpful entry earlier stating that "most science texts..."

**Figure 6.** *Metalinguistic Journal Partner Discussion – History Major*

Metalinguistic Journal Partner Discussion				
Reader: <i>Michael</i> Discipline: <i>History, Social Studies</i> Title of Text Read: <i>General Properties of Matter</i>		Partner: <i>Antonio</i> Discipline: <i>Science</i>		
Reading Processes	Discipline Specific Knowing and Thinking	Text Structure and Text Features	Confusions	Other Thoughts I Have
I use these strategies too when I read...  <i>• prediction</i> <i>• inference</i> <i>• confirm/disconfirm</i> <i>• activate prior knowledge</i>	This was helpful background knowledge and disciplinary thinking...  <i>• Met Science texts...</i>	The text structure and text features were a guide here...  <i>• It was orderly from the beginning</i> <i>• Good attention getter</i>	I got confused here... ...because....  <i>• I really didn't too confused.</i>	Other Thoughts I Have  <i>• I think we both read for context, looking beyond the obvious in the text &amp; picking up on the cues.</i>

Excerpts from Tony's and then Michael's individual reflections, along with a discussion are included below:

Tony's individual reflection of the metalinguistic protocol notes his learning. He states "this assignment has taught me a lot". Tony obviously recognizes the expertise and disciplinary literacy he has acquired as he elaborates in the section of his response included here:

After this assignment I took away two different things. The first is that prior or background knowledge is extremely important in being able to not only understand but being able to predict and analyze the text. While Michael and I were both able to comprehend the text, Michael did a far better job of critically analyzing the text and drawing more meaning from it than I was able to. If I were to write out a journal of my own over the History text, it would state the basic information found in the text, but it would in no way be able to compare to the insight that Michael was able to draw from the same material. His previous experience in History has a great deal to do with this ability.

While here Tony makes reference to Michael's use of background knowledge he is also referring to the critical analysis or reasoning that Michael has gained and uses

well as a way to think as a historian. Tony continues on what he took away from the experience:

The second thing that is obvious is that reading is a skill that is taken for granted and more precisely reading to learn is a skill that is taken for granted. If you slow down to analyze how you read and comprehend the material, you discover that there are many skills being applied at once to help with reading and comprehension.

The insight that Tony has about reading to learn as made visible through the metalinguistic protocol experience is one that I have commonly seen in preservice teachers over many courses. Michael also discusses this insight in his individual reflection of the metalinguistic protocol experience and includes a comparison of the two disciplines in which he and his partner Tony have expertise:

What we found foremost was that when we compared our two journals, he [Tony] and I had used essentially the same reading process. For both the natural scientist (Tony) and the social scientist (myself), the reading skills of prediction, inference, confirm/disconfirm and activation of prior knowledge, are utilized within the texts of our respective disciplines.

Another aspect we both agreed was present in our texts was specialized vocabulary. My text referred to chronology, geography, economics, politics, society and historical event. While my partner's text referenced terms that were specific to a scientific study of matter, weight, mass, volume, etc. Each of our texts was very specific in the terms that it used because of the content being presented was specific.

Here Michael comments about the specialized language in the disciplines of science and history and how he and Tony have become familiar with this vocabulary or discourse in their disciplines

Just as there was specialized language and vocabulary present in both of our texts, there was also a certain level of discipline specific knowledge that was inherently present with each, as well.

## **Partner Example 2: Mathematics and English**

In the second partner example of the metalinguistic protocol experience Dorothy, a mathematics major and Kathy, an English major have worked together. Figure 7 below shows Dorothy's metalinguistic think-aloud journal. She has chosen

to read from a college mathematics text. Dorothy's think-aloud of the text in her "My thinking is" column on the right shows her immediate use of mathematical thinking. As Dorothy sets herself up to read she knows to expect abstract theories and prepares herself for this in a review of definitions. While stating the expectation as, "This book is going to talk about theories and applications..." shows reading strategy use of predicting on her part, it is also evidence of the expected way of thinking mathematicians use when reading in their field. Dorothy spends a great deal of time and space (as recorded in the right hand column of her metalinguistic journal) going over the theorems that will be used later in the text. She knows, as a mathematician, the logic that these theorems follow and that they will be important to comprehending the rest of the text. Dorothy has used the text features of the title, "the chapter starts" and paragraphing "the first paragraph explains" to help guide her comprehension. She also integrates and synthesizes information as she continues to read in the text. This is similar to Michael's think-aloud journal with the lexical density of the history text in the previous Partner 1 Example. In the mathematics text Dorothy must also read numbers and equations and in order to comprehend must know any relevant properties or theories behind this symbolic use of language in mathematics. In addition, Dorothy uses technical language such as "quotient" and "divisor" to think-aloud with the text and includes an abbreviation "gcd" (greatest common divisor) that no doubt is familiar to experts in her field.

Figure 7. Mathematics Major Think-Aloud Journal

The Text says:	My thinking is:
<p><i>Elementary Number Theory (revised printing)</i>  By: David M. Burton  2.3 The Euclidean Algorithm (Title of Chapter)</p>	<p>When I think of Elementary Number Theory, I think of Theories that are found in the lower level mathematics. This book is going to talk about theories and applications in an abstract way with few concrete examples. This book will challenge the reader to think abstractly.</p> <p>The section I chose was The Euclidean Algorithm because it is a more concise section with a concrete example to support the definition and proof.</p> <p>The chapter starts with a brief definition and what The Euclidean Algorithm is used for. The first paragraph explains that, with the use of the Euclidean Algorithm, you can find the greatest common divisor of two integers.</p>
<p>The Euclidean Algorithm may be described as follows: Let <math>a</math> and <math>b</math> be two integers whose greatest common divisor is desired. Since <math>\gcd( a ,  b ) = \gcd(a, b)</math>, there is no harm in assuming that <math>a \geq b &gt; 0</math>.</p>	<p>The Euclidean Algorithm is a Theorem. The proof of the theorem is as follows, we want to find the gcd (greatest common divisor) of <math>a</math> and <math>b</math>. <math>a</math> and <math>b</math> are integers. The definition of an integer is any number ranging in the set <math>\{..., -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3, ...\}</math>. We assume that the integers are positive or greater than 0.</p>
<p>The first step is to apply the Division Algorithm to <math>a</math> and <math>b</math> to get  <math>a = q_1b + r_1 \quad 0 \leq r_1 &lt; b</math>.</p>	<p>In order for the Euclidean Algorithm to work, we must know what the Division Algorithm means. The Division Algorithm is defined as, Given integers <math>a</math> and <math>b</math>, with <math>b &gt; 0</math>, there exist unique integers <math>q</math> and <math>r</math> satisfying</p> $a = qb + r \quad 0 \leq r < b.$ <p>The integers <math>q</math> and <math>r</math> are called, respectively, the quotient and remainder in the division of <math>a</math> by <math>b</math>.</p> <p>We are trying to find the gcd (greatest common divisor) of <math>a</math> and <math>b</math>. We write it as a</p>



Kathy, an English major, partnered with Dorothy. Kathy's metalinguistic think-aloud journal in Figure 8 also exemplified use of discipline specific ways of knowing, thinking and using language. She has chosen to read a story from a middle school language arts textbook. While Kathy's think-aloud of the text in her "My thinking is" column on the right-hand side of her journal shows her use of reading strategies such as predicting, her entry is also richly embedded with the disciplinary literacy of English. For example, in reading the title Kathy is referencing the literary element of theme in the notation "about a boy who finds something and it becomes a treasured item in his life" that might be revealed in the story. She then hones in on the authors' use of metaphoric language in images of the dark sky and the boy's mood and concludes "the boy is sitting on the steps of his family's apartment building and he is sad or angry about something". Kathy also uses knowledge of the literary genre of story in anticipating the conflict, "I am anticipating that this boy is also upset that his father doesn't understand his feelings and how hard math is for him" and notes the characters (the boy Greg and his father) in literary analysis, a way of thinking common to the field of English.

**Figure 8.** *English Major Think-Aloud Journal*

METALINGUISTIC JOURNAL	
THE TEXT SAYS:	MY THINKING IS:
<p><i>The Treasure of Lemon Brown</i> By: Walter Dean Myers</p>	<p>I have not read a book by this author before. I am thinking this story will be about a young boy who finds something and it becomes a treasured item in his life.</p>
<p>The dark sky, filled with angry swirling clouds, reflected Greg Ridley's mood as he sat on the stoop of his building.</p>	<p>I am thinking that it is an overcast day and this young boy is sitting on the steps of his family's apartment building and he is sad or angry about something.</p>
<p>His father's voice came to him again, first reading the letter the principal had sent to the house, then lecturing endlessly about his poor efforts in math.</p>	<p>I am thinking this boy is having a hard time with his math lessons at school. He's feeling frustrated and angry. I am anticipating that this boy is also upset that his father is lecturing him and he feels that his father doesn't understand his feelings and how hard math is for him.</p>
<p>"I had to leave school when I was 13," his father had said, "that's a year younger than you are now. If I'd had half the chances that you have, I'd...."</p>	<p>I am thinking that Greg is listening to this lecture and is getting more frustrated that his father keeps lecturing him but doesn't try to help him or understand his problems.</p>
<p>Greg had sat in the small, pale green kitchen listening, knowing the lecture would end with his father saying he couldn't play ball with the Scorpions.</p>	<p>I am thinking the Scorpions is the baseball team that Greg plays on. His father will take away this privilege as a punishment for not doing well in school.</p>

Myers, W. D. (2001). The treasure of Lemon Brown. In *Glencoe Literature Course 3* (TX Edition), (pp. 5-13). New York: Glencoe McGraw-Hill.

After Dorothy and Kathy traded journals in the metalinguistic protocol experience they made entries on the partner discussion sheet. Dorothy's discussion sheet, as shown in Figure 9 lists the reading strategies decoding, predicting, using context clues and re-reading. She also mistakenly lists "foreshadowing" as a strategy which an English expert would know is not a strategy but a literacy device used in disciplinary thinking in the field.

**Figure 9.** *Metalinguistic Journal Partner Discussion – Mathematics Major*

Metalinguistic Journal Partner Discussion				
Reader: Dorothy Discipline: Math Title of Text Read: The Treasure of Lemon Brown		Partner: Kathy Discipline: English		
Reading Processes	Discipline Specific Knowing and Thinking	Text Structure and Text Features	Confusions	Other Thoughts I Have
I use these strategies too when I read... - decoding the text - foreshadowing - context clues - predicting - re-reading	This was helpful background knowledge and disciplinary thinking... - summarizing - confirming/disconfirming	The text structure and text features were a guide here... - context, reading the story and anticipating what will happen next. - footnotes - synthesizing	I got confused here... because.... I didn't have much confusion because of the help of footnotes and the reading level of the short story	

Kathy's partner discussion sheet as seen in Figure 10 records the reading strategies she used as: decoding, activating prior knowledge and re-reading. She references Dorothy's helpful background knowledge, "the theory and specific math terms," and notes the two text features of "footnotes and explanations," commonly used in English text, and used especially in secondary literature textbooks, that would have been helpful in clearing up her confusions. No doubt Kathy has learned as an expert in her field to think with and use these features in her own reading to learn. Dorothy, on the other hand, has had to develop expertise beyond surface level definitions in order to navigate the specialized language of mathematics and the complex conceptual knowledge associated with using that language in written text.

**Figure 10.** *Metalinguistic Journal Partner Discussion – English Major*

Metalinguistic Journal Partner Discussion				
Reader: Kathy Discipline: English Title of Text Read: The Euclidean Algorithm		Partner: Dorothy Discipline: Math		
Reading Processes	Discipline Specific Knowing and Thinking	Text Structure and Text Features	Confusions	Other Thoughts I Have
I use these strategies too when I read...	This was helpful background knowledge and disciplinary thinking...	The text structure and text features were a guide here...	I got confused here... ...because....	
I also use decoding to make sense of the text. Prior knowledge- what info I understood from previous math classes. Re-reading - trying to comprehend the material	A person needs to use background knowledge to understand abbreviations, what they know about the theory, and specific math terms.	Context Clues- The 1st paragraph explained the theory and its history. The paper began using abstract information and concluded giving concrete example	Footnotes and explanations would have been helpful when I was reading.	

Selected comments from Dorothy and Kathy's individual reflections are included and discussed below:

Dorothy writes about the difficulty she has in preparing the metalinguistic think-aloud, "I have to say it was quite difficult dissecting my mathematics text. I do it subconsciously and I never really noticed the way I read my mathematics text". Although Dorothy states that it was "quite difficult," she understands well the mathematical way of thinking and using language as elaborated below:

In order to read mathematics text, you must understand mathematical syntax. Understanding certain definitions and the language helps with the decoding of the text. I knew that whoever would switch journals with me would have difficulty reading the text because of their possible lack of mathematical knowledge and language.

Dorothy's think-aloud journal and discussion sheet as previously discussed also exemplify her knowledge of disciplinary literacy in her field of mathematics. She contrasts this with the difficulty she had while reading from the short story Kathy used for the metalinguistic protocol experience: "The first time I started to read the short story, I had to read the first page three times. Once I got the idea

of what was happening, I continued on.” As a good reader and someone who has experience with difficult academic text, Dorothy knew to re-read. This is not always something novice readers, such as adolescent students would do.

In Kathy’s individual reflection insights into discipline specific strategies for helping adolescent students learn are evident. She references the logic of mathematical thinking and the creative expression which is a way of knowing in the humanities and the field of English.

I feel that predicting is a reading strategy that language arts teachers use to help their students anticipate and predict what is going to happen in the story. I do not feel that prediction coincides with math in the same way that it does in reading. In math, students know they are going to be answering and solving equations; therefore, prediction of what is going to happen is a natural process. However, in reading a story, there are many times that the reader is unable to predict the end of the story because of the twists and turns the author has made when writing the story.

Both Dorothy and Kathy understand their disciplines well and are able to explain their unique way of thinking and using language in the written texts. Just as important, each partner in the metalinguistic protocol experience was also able to note strategies they use specific to reading to learn in their discipline and discuss that knowledge in implications for their future teaching of adolescent students. This is not always articulated well by preservice content area teachers after the metalinguistic protocol experience.

While both metalinguistic journal partner example 1, with a science and history major and partner example 2, with a mathematics and English major demonstrate that preservice teachers in the university content area literacy course gain insights into their discipline specific literacy and the implications for their teaching, some still report little beyond the importance of background knowledge for reading to learn. While this is valuable learning and will no doubt benefit their future teaching, I have realized more needs to be done earlier in the course experiences fore-fronting the disciplines. Next semester of the university course I plan to include an interview with a disciplinary expert who is doing work in their field as a course assignment before the preservice teachers engage in the metalinguistic protocol experience.

## Conclusions

In this article I have explored some of the challenges of reading disciplinary texts, explained how I use the metalinguistic protocol in the university content area literacy course, presented an overview of the metalinguistic protocol framework and concluded with several examples of the protocol from preservice content area teachers. The metalinguistic protocol experience serves as a framework in university content area literacy courses to help preservice secondary teachers gain insights about the unique disciplinary literacies and challenges of reading to learn. While the initial experience preparing the think-aloud journal with the disciplinary text can be a tedious process, the secondary preservice teachers over the last five years I have taught the university course have consistently commented on how valuable the metalinguistic protocol experience is for the insights they gain into the reading process and reading strategies; the role of disciplinary background knowledge in reading to learn; and socially situated literacies, which includes disciplinary literacy and the unique way of thinking and of using language in the disciplines of knowledge .

In addition, the metalinguistic protocol experience has important implications for their future teaching of adolescent students. Until more recently university content area literacy courses have tended to focus on generic use of learning strategies rather than those unique to the disciplines. What is needed is more understanding about disciplinary literacy and how preservice content area teachers might use those literacy practices with their less experienced adolescent students. In addition, inservice teachers would benefit from professional development using experiences like the metalinguistic protocol. Schoenbach and Greenleaf (2009) state “as students encounter more sophisticated disciplinary texts and tasks, they need support to learn more discipline specific strategies” (p. 103). It has been more common in my experiences over the last five years for the preservice teachers to make reference to the knowledge they gained about the reading process and their general use of reading strategies to learn rather than specific literacy characteristics or strategies in their discipline. This is probably to be expected due to the preservice teachers’ expertise and efficient use of such knowledge as well as to the time we spend in the course developing those concepts. However, deeper insights into the unique disciplinary literacies needs to be fostered and made visible through additional course experiences. As Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) state “the nature of the disciplines is something that must be communicated to adolescents, along with the ways in which experts approach the reading of text” (p. 51).



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## **Exploring Bilingual Books with Five Chinese First Graders: Children's Responses and Biliteracy Development**

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### **Abstract**

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This qualitative case study examines how five Chinese first graders responded to bilingual English/Chinese picture books and how bilingual books used during an eight-week study session impacted their bilingual and biliteracy development. Reader response and socio-cultural theories were the theoretical perspectives that underpin this study. Four bilingual picture books were selected for the five participating Chinese children to read during an eight-week period. The researchers specifically sought answers to two questions: (1) How do Chinese children respond to the bilingual books? (2) What impact do the bilingual book study sessions have on children's bilingual and biliteracy development? The findings suggested these children responded positively by becoming engaged, making connections, activating cultural and background knowledge, and showing unnoticed talent. In addition, bilingual books, combined with appropriate instruction, can be a powerful resource to promote bilingual and biliteracy development.

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## Exploring Bilingual Books with Five Chinese First Graders: Children's Responses and Biliteracy Development

Research has shown that high quality multicultural literature not only enhances children's awareness of diversity in the world, but also ensures a sense of belongingness when children of diverse cultural and language backgrounds see themselves represented (Reddish, 2000; Salas, Lucido, & Canales, 2001; Walker, Edwards, & Blacksell, 1996). As one type of multicultural literature, bilingual books have great potential in promoting bilingualism and biliteracy development (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003; Jeffers, 2009). A growing number of studies have examined how bilingual children respond to texts in their developing language—English (e.g., Colledge, 2005; Gregory, 1990; McGonigal & Arizpe, 2007). However, research that builds understanding on how bilingual children respond to bilingual children's books is scarce and under-developed. In addition, there is very little empirical evidence regarding how these books can be used instructionally to promote bilingual and biliteracy development. The purpose of this study is two-fold. First of all, we investigate how Chinese children who are learning English as a foreign language respond to bilingual English/Chinese children's books. Secondly, we explore how these books can be used to develop bilingualism and biliteracy. Reader response theories (Rosenblatt, 1938) and sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978) are the theoretical perspectives that underpin this study. This is the second phase of a large project on bilingual English/Chinese children's picture books. The first phase of the project focused on the examination of the quality of the bilingual picture books and has been completed. Based on the results from the first phase of the study, researchers selected four high quality bilingual picture books for the participating Chinese children to read. Researchers specifically sought answers to these two questions: (1) *How do Chinese children respond to the bilingual books?* (2) *What impact do the bilingual book study sessions have on children's bilingual and biliteracy development?*

### Literature Review

High quality multicultural literature plays a critical role in promoting all children's awareness of diversity in the rapidly changing world (Reddish, 2000; Salas, Lucido, & Canales, 2001; Walker, Edwards, & Blacksell, 1996). Perkins and Mebert (2005) found that preschoolers who attend schools that adopt multicultural curriculum have less biased racial attitudes than those who attend schools that do not. Moreover, authentic multicultural literature is especially valuable for children from diverse cultural and linguistic background as they see their unique culture

being represented in a positive light. It also helps these children to bridge the gaps between school and home (Edwards & Walker, 1995), as a result, empowering them to cope with multiple, oftentimes conflicting, identities. Cummins's (1996) research on bilingual students has confirmed that strengthening a sense of belonging for culturally diverse students is not only "fundamental to the academic success" (p.2), but also critical "to thrive in the interdependent global society in which they will live" (p. 236).

Bilingual books are a type of multicultural literature. The bilingual books discussed in this study refer to the books that have two full versions of the texts. Research has shown the benefits of exposing children to bilingual books. Saldana (2009) found that the bilingual book club is a creative way to encourage young Latino readers to read and build a school-home connection. Bilingual books not only promote biliteracy for English Language Learners (ELLs), they are also valuable in fostering literacy in the mainstream classrooms (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003; Jeffers, 2009). "[T]he presence of books in other languages in the classroom library sends a clear message about the value of languages, scripts, and cultures in that classrooms" (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003, abstract).

Further, Kalia (2007) indicated that there are positive impacts on the second language development (e.g., oral language, narrative, and literacy development) among bilingual preschoolers who are exposed to books in the second language. Ample evidence from research has shown that academic and linguistic skills can be positively transferred from one language to another (Au, 1993; Cummins, 1991; Ovando & Collier, 1998). Therefore, bilingual books provide a rich, meaningful context to encourage more positive transfer of literacy skills from a stronger language to a newer language.

While research has recognized the importance of acknowledging multiple identities of diverse students (Chen, 2010; Cummins, 1996) as well as the positive effects of using multicultural literature in promoting bilingual and biliteracy development (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003; Jeffers, 2009), there are very few empirical studies on the use of bilingual books with bilingual students. However, there is a growing body of studies looking at how culturally and linguistically diverse children respond to texts in English. Teachers' roles as to how their, or lack of, support, in engaging students' interactions with children's literature, is also considered along this line of research.

As for selecting criteria for children's literature to use in the classroom, Laycock (1998) suggested that well chosen children's literature, based on content,

prior background, picture, language, and format (e.g., bilingual or parallel versions), are able to provide additional support for culturally diverse children if used in carefully structured ways (p. 80-81). Gregory (1990) looked at the act of negotiation, defined as collaboration, between a teacher and a five-year-old Bangladeshi child in a British school while sharing books. She found that during the negotiation process, both the teacher and stories play significant roles in acculturating the child from minority cultural background in understanding literacy. Children's literature, in this case, becomes a spring board as it "... provides both the backcloth and support to the necessary structures of language and culture as well as being a forum for negotiation to take place" (Gregory, 1990, p. 112). Colledge's (2005) one year study examined how the five to six years old English/Bengali-speaking children responded to narrative picture books in English. Analysis of the children's responses has shown that "the books formed a bridge between the known and the culturally unfamiliar, giving the children access to an understanding of scenes from types of homes other than their own" (Colledge, 2005, p. 24). It was pointed out that these bilingual children's responses, limited by their less than perfect English, were often ignored by their teacher who emphasized heavily on the verbal text.

The national study in Scotland conducted by McGonigal and Arizpe (2007) analyzed how ethnic minority children made sense of a range of Scottish texts and pictures. Their study has shown that the unique features of picture books, together with a supportive environment, provide a rich and secure context for "emergent bi-culturate children" to construct meanings from unfamiliar elements and negotiate their evolving identities. "The interaction of teachers and pupils around a text can lead to a better understanding, for everyone involved, about how texts work within a particular cultural context and also about what readers bring from their own cultural backgrounds to the meaning-making process" (McGonigal & Arizpe, 2007, p. 43).

In summary, two common themes emerge from the above mentioned studies: (1) carefully selected children's literature creates a secure space for diverse children to bring in what they know and explore what is new; and (2) a supportive environment, typically nurtured through a teacher who acknowledges children's multiple identities and encourages their exploration, is beneficial in acculturating in the new culture and language.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Two theoretical perspectives provide a framework for the study. First, reader response theories (Richards, 1929; Rosenblatt, 1938) take into account the reader's interaction with the text and the author; thus, what the reader brings to the reading process, for instance, prior knowledge, beliefs, feelings, and attitude, matters as much as the text. It is important to consider the role of the reader when considering how diverse children respond to bilingual children's literature because in this case, readers' background and cultural knowledge can be strikingly different than what is portrayed in the text. The meaning-making process is also a negotiation between the reader and the text as s/he engages in questioning, confirming, and reconstructing.

Second, sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) asserts that learning takes place in a social process and interactions among learners are critical in helping them construct meanings. Learners' interpretation of text is often negotiated and reconstructed through discussions with others. A social context, with the support from a teacher and peers, allows children to consider different perspectives and receive proper guidance when needed. Through rich discussions with the teacher and peers, children are scaffolded to discover new meanings and make meaningful connections to the text.

## **Methodology**

This is a qualitative case study that examines how Chinese children respond to bilingual English/Chinese picture books and how bilingual books used during the 8-week study sessions impact their bilingual and biliteracy development. Five children who attend first grade in Beijing, China participated in the study. Data were collected during an eight-week period in an informal, out of school setting. Data sources included pre- and post-assessments, researchers' observation and tape recordings of the children's comments and discussions when they responded to these bilingual picture books, interviews with the children and their parents, and the children's work samples.

## **Research Setting and Participants**

Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. Author Three, who is a university professor in Beijing, helped Author One locate four children who were his son's classmates living in same neighborhood to participate in the study. In order to provide these children with an environment that was different



from the traditional Chinese classroom setting, Author One and Three have decided to use the living room areas in Author Three's condo in Beijing. The researchers redecorated the area to make it a learning room with a big white board in front, safety mats on the floor to sit when teaching as a whole group, and small tables and chairs for the children when conducting individual activities.

The five participants (age 6.5 to 7 year old, first grade) included four boys, Bill, Jack, Michael, Tom and one girl, Alice (pseudonyms used in this study to protect children's confidentiality). All these children are Chinese, speaking Chinese as their native language. At school they have English classes four times in a week and all of them attended the Cambridge Children's English class once a week.

### Book Selection Criteria

Findings from Phase 1 of the project indicated that there were a wide variety of English/Chinese bilingual picture books in terms of genre, theme, presentation format, and translation quality. Phase 1 of the project also suggested a list of criteria, including the qualification of author, illustrator, and translator, consistent format of illustration and texts, equal presentation of both languages in all places in bilingual books, cultural authenticity and appropriateness, and positive theme of promoting bilingualism and multiculturalism, for educators and caregivers to select high quality English/Chinese bilingual children's books. Based on the phase 1 findings, the following criteria were considered when selecting bilingual children's books: the book should be culturally relevant, close to students' life and be able to stimulate students' conversation, creativity, and imagination. Author One and Two selected three out of ten high quality English/Chinese bilingual books used in this study. The fourth book, Yeh-Hsien, does not belong to the high quality category due to stereotypical images; however, Author One and Two selected it because the story was culturally familiar to these children. The four books were in the order in which they were used.

Week 1 and 2: Tsai, I. Y. (2008). *Frog in the well*. Philadelphia, PA: CE Bilingual Books LLC.

Content Summary: The Frog in The Well (井底之蛙) is a Chinese idiom, which is based on an old Chinese folklore. The story is about a frog that lives in a well. The frog is very content about himself, believing that he is the best and smartest creature alive. He is very satisfied with living in the well - his whole world. Then one day, he meets a Sea Turtle and learns that the world is much bigger than the well. The story teaches children that they

need to keep their minds open, and never believe that they have learned all they need to know.

Week 3 and 4: Casey, D. (2007). *Yeh-Hsien: a Chinese Cinderella*. London: Mantra Lingua Ltd.

Content Summary: Similar to the Disney Cinderella story, Yeh-Hsien was the girl who lost her father and lived with her step-mother and two step-sisters. Befriended by a magical fish, Yeh-Hsien was granted her wish of going to the village festival to dance with the King, but she lost a golden shoe. Being recognized by trying the shoe on, Yeh-Hsien finally married the King and lived a happy life ever after.

Week 5 and 6: Genechten, G. V. (2006). *Floppy*. London: Mantra Lingua Ltd.

Content Summary: Rabbits' ears are all straight and long except Floppy, who had one straight ear and one floppy ear. He tried all kinds of ways to make his floppy ear straight but the other rabbits just laughed at him more. After a visit to the doctor, Floppy and other rabbits finally realized that there is more than one way to be the same.

Week 7 and 8: Curtis C. (2008). *I took the moon for a walk*. London: Mantra Lingua Ltd.

Content Summary: This was a little boy's magic adventure. He was taking a walk across a rural landscape with the moon besides him. He imagined that the moon and him tiptoed together, raced for the swings, and flied to the sky. Then the moon followed him home and stayed all night to keep him accompany during the sleep.

### Bilingual Study Sessions

For eight weeks, Author One and Three worked with the five children every Friday afternoon for one hour and 30 minutes and all the sessions were digitally recorded. Author One and Three had different roles during the sessions. Author One served as the teacher and Author Three served as a silent observer and the note-taker. Two sessions were devoted to study one book: the first session was dominated by Chinese with some English teaching and the second session was dominated by English. Four instructional activities were usually conducted in the first session. First, Author One presented the book to these children and conducted picture walk asking them to comment on the books in Chinese. The comments included making predictions about the book, talking about illustrations, and making personal connections and relating to children's background knowledge. Second, Author One asked the children to construct a story in Chinese based on their understanding

of the book after free commenting. Third, Author 1 read aloud the Chinese texts in the book and asked the children to comment on their versions of the story and the author's story. Finally, Author 1 taught the children the key vocabulary words in both Chinese and English. When teaching Chinese, Author 1 wrote the Chinese characters on board and required the children to read aloud to facilitate memorization. When teaching English, Author 1 focused on word pronunciation and spelling (letter-sound relationship). The recording of the session was transcribed immediately after.

In session two of the following week, the same book was used, but the major content was presented in English. Six instructional activities were usually conducted in this second session. First, Author One read aloud the story, first time in Chinese and then in English. Second, Author One reviewed the key words in English using flash cards. Third, Author One asked the children to use five to six sentences to orally summarize the story in Chinese, then with Author One's help, children were asked to translate the sentences to English. Fourth, Author One wrote the key sentences in English on board and echo read with the children for multiple times. Fifth, Author One dictated selected key words and the children were encouraged to spell out the word as best as they could. Lastly, the children were asked to write these sentences in their notebooks to practice read aloud at home.

### **Pre- and Post-Assessments in the first and last session**

Several assessments were conducted in the first and last sessions. The purpose of the pre-assessments in the first session was to obtain a general idea about each child's English level. Three assessments were administrated in the first session: (1) Hu-Li 2010 pre-assessment questions (Appendix A) developed by Author One and Three based on children's English textbook used in China, (2) reading the pre-primer and primer level words from the Dolch/Fry combined wordlist (Appendix B) (Hu & Commeyras, 2008), and (3) invented spelling of ten words selected from the pre-primer and primer level wordlist.

The purpose of the post-assessments was to measure the language and literacy growth of these children. Three assessments were administered: (1) rereading the pre-primer and primer level words from the Dolch/Fry combined wordlist, (2) invented spelling of 20 words the children learned during the eight-week long study sessions, (3) the reading of four sentences these children (one from each book) have learned during the eight-week long study sessions (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Selected sentences for running record

Oral Storytelling in Chinese	English translation provided by Author 1
1. 一只青蛙在跳，它跳得很高。	1. A frog is jumping, way up high.
2. 王冠掉到水里，找不着了。	2. He dropped his crown and cannot find it.
3. 然后，它跳得很高，到水里去捡它的王冠。	3. Then he jumped into water to find his crown.
4. 青蛙找到它的王冠了，它很开心。	4. He found it and he is very happy.
5. 青蛙爬到石头上去捉虫子。	5. He climbed to a stone to catch a fry.
6. 它弹着吉他唱着歌。	6. He played his guitar and sang a song.
7. 一只乌龟来了，它看见一口井	7. A turtle came and saw a well.
8. 它和青蛙讲话。	8. He talked to the frog.
9. 乌龟在水里游，还有好多鱼虾，螃蟹。	9. The turtle is swimming with lots of fish, shrimps, and crabs.
10. 青蛙跳上来了，王冠又掉了。	10. The frog jumped up and his crown fell again.
11. 青蛙特伤心，然后就到草丛了，低下头。	11. The frog is so sad. He jumped to the grass and bowed his head.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Multiple data sources were used in order to enhance the credibility of the study. Data collection included eight weeks of study sessions, informal interviews/chatting with children throughout, interview with parents at the end of the eight-week study session, and the pre- and post-assessments. Data analysis was directed by the two research questions: (1) *How do Chinese children respond to the bilingual books?* (2) *What impact do the bilingual book study sessions have on children's bilingual and biliteracy development?* In order to answer the first question, the authors read through Author Three's notes and the transcriptions of children's free comments toward each book, children's constructed stories, and the conversation Author One conducted with both the children and parents carefully to look for patterns and themes. The authors coded by themselves first and then shared their codes with each other to look for consensus.

The second research question was broken into two parts during data analysis: English language and literacy development, and Chinese language and literacy development. To report children's English language and literacy development, descriptive statistics were obtained from the pre- and post-assessments, children's invented spelling from the first and last sessions were compared, and running record and miscue analysis were conducted on their reading of the four sentences. In order to report children's Chinese language and literacy development, their oral telling of the stories over the eight sessions were analyzed. The total words used in each storytelling were calculated and story plots were also examined.

## Results

### How do Chinese children respond to these bilingual books?

Results suggested that these Chinese children had the following responses to the bilingual books: becoming engaged, making connections, activating cultural and background knowledge, and showing unnoticed talent.

**Becoming engaged.** Researchers have noticed children's eagerness and interest to be engaged in the book. When Author One presented the book to the children to do a picture walk and ask for their comments, all of them eagerly started to share their thoughts. Author Three wrote in his notebook, "Children got too excited to talk. Teacher has to stop to talk about class management issues to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak". These children also enjoyed the opportunity to make up a story themselves rather than just reading the story. When asked to compare their version of the story with the story in the book, one child said: "I like my story better because I like it my way." Another child also said: "I like Jack's story the most because in his story, the frog and the turtle become good friends...It ended nicely" (Field notes, April 9, 2010; Translation provided by the authors from Chinese to English).

The parents also mentioned positive changes in their children. One mother mentioned that her son was always willing to tell her what he did during the session on their way home. Her son was excited to tell her the story he made up and the story in the book. Afterwards, her son asked her which version of the story she liked the most. Another parent observed a few sessions and said that her son was like a different person in this class compared with his behavior in the regular English classes at school. She said,

He was never like this in an English class. I always told him that he needs to speak more often and answer the teacher's question, but he is just a quiet child. That is why his teacher thought that he is a shy boy. But actually he is really not. I am surprised to see that he has SO much to say and want to say it. He even volunteered to read the English sentences (Bill's Mom, personal communication, April 16, 2010; translation provided by the authors).

**Making connections.** During the study sessions, these children offered all kinds of comments and opinions on the books. Children were asked to make predictions when doing a picture walk, comment on the illustrations and texts (including the text in the book and different versions of the text made up by all children). Researchers noticed that the content of children's conversation centered on relating the books to themselves, to each other's texts, and to the world they know.

**Text-to-Self Connection.** When reading the book *Floppy*, these children had the following conversation.

Michael: Floppy is different from others.

Bill: We are all different.

Alice: No one likes Floppy at first, then they all like him  
because he made them laugh.

Michael: But he is sad when others did not like him...

Jack: I would be sad too if my friends do not like me.

Bill: We all need to be nice to other people,

Tom: Even people who are different from us.

Alice: I like everyone in our class...

Jack: but your best friend is me...

Alice: But I still like other classmates

(Field notes, April 30, 2010).

In this conversation, the children associated *Floppy* with themselves. They understood that they were all different from each other and they needed to be nice to others regardless of the differences.

**Text-to-Text Connection.** When working on the book *Yeh-Hsien*, the children compared Alice's version of the story with the texts in the book.

Jack: The text said the old man, but Alice said Grandpa Wind. I  
like Alice's story better.

Michael: I like her story too. I like Grandpa Wind.

Author 1: Why you all think Grandpa Wind is better than The Old Man?

Jack: Because Grandpa Wind sounds much nicer.

Bill: Because an old man should be called Grandpa.

Tom: Grandpa Wind made the story sound more beautiful.

Michael: (looking at and pointing to the illustration) Because he is Grandpa Wind, he is the wind, coming from the sky.

Alice: I read other stories and they used Grandpa Wind. I like it.

(Field notes, April 23, 2010).

In this conversation, the children commented on Alice's description of an old man coming from the sky. It is this old man who told Yeh-Hsien that her step-mother killed her best friend, the little red fish, and the bones of the fish contain powerful magic that could get Yeh-Hsien whatever she wished for. Different from the texts which stated "the old man", Alice used a more personified title "Grandpa Wind" in her telling of the story. Alice associated her use of the title with other books she read to make text-to-text connection. Other children, however, compared Alice's title with the author's texts and explained reasons of their preference. Even though not said directly, Jack and Tom's reasons seemed to imply that Grandpa Wind had made the story more personified and alive. Bill stated a reason of common sense which also bears the cultural phenomenon in it. In China, Grandpa, Grandma, Aunt and Uncle are general titles that children use to address elders, even strangers. Michael's reason came from the illustration. To him, an old man coming from the wind was Grandpa Wind.

***Text-to-World Connection.*** Children also made text-to-world connection when they talked about the book Floppy.

Bill: Floppy was not his name.

Jack: No, it was the nickname others gave him, so they can make fun of his floppy ear.

Michael: It is not good to call others by their nickname.

Alice: No, our teacher told us that we should not do so. It will hurt others' feeling.

Michael: And it is very rude to do that

(Field notes, May 7, 2010).

In this conversation, the children talked about the issue of giving nicknames to others based on Floppy. Considering the children's age and the content of the book, the children in this conversation have related the book knowledge to a worldwide issue that they are familiar with. We do have to admit, though, that among all the three types of connections these children had least conversations about relating the text to the world.

**Activating cultural and background knowledge.** All these children enjoyed the opportunities to have book discussions and they applied their cultural and background knowledge into discussions. The story of Yeh-Hsien is considered as the Chinese Cinderella story and is very similar to the Disney version Cinderella. However, none of the researchers and parents (all Chinese nationals) were aware that there is a Cinderella story in Chinese as well as the children. They were not aware that there was a Chinese version Cinderella story, but they were excited reading the book and did a lot of comparison with the most popular Disney version Cinderella.

The children talked about the pretty dresses illustrated in the book; however, they felt the illustrations of the people in the book looked ugly. Alice said: "Cinderella should be pretty, but she is ugly in this book. Her clothes are pretty – it is made of feathers." Jack commented: "the people in Cinderella all look different. But in this book she (Yeh-Hsien) looks the same as her two sisters. They are not pretty at all." Michael then added: "The prince is not handsome either!" Alice further showed her opinion saying: "No, they should draw a pretty Cinderella and Prince" (Field notes, April 16, 2010).

Children also had a conversation comparing the story plots of Yeh-Hsien to Cinderella.

Bill: In this story, the King asked his servants to leave the gold shoe on the street. He did not come to Yeh-Hsien's home.

Alice: Yes, because he wants to see if Yeh-Hsien would come to claim it.

Tom: Cinderella lost a shoe that is made of crystal.

Alice: Yes, but Yeh-Hsien's shoes are made of gold. I like crystal shoes.

Jack: The shoe made of gold will get lost easily.

Alice: Cinderella's two stepsisters also tried the shoes on, but Yeh-Hsien's stepsisters did not

(Field notes, April 16, 2010).



It is very obvious that all these children were very familiar with the story of Cinderella. Even though this is not part of the Chinese culture, Cinderella is part of their background knowledge. The children used this background knowledge in reading the story about Yeh-Hsien and constantly compared this new version with the Cinderella they knew.

Another incident was reading without the support of cultural and background knowledge. The *frog in the well* is a well-known Chinese idiom, suggesting the tunnel vision of the frog; however, to everyone's surprise, none of these children were familiar with the idiom or story. Hence, children constructed a very different frog in the well stories. For examples, Jack's story was about how the little happy frog lost his crown, hence, he asked his friends, such as the sea turtle, butterflies, and birds to help him getting the crown. Bill's story was about the little frog making friends with birds, rabbits, and the sea turtle. Then he invited them to come to the well, so they could play together.

**Showing unnoticed talent.** The study sessions using bilingual books were very different from the regular English classes or extracurricular English classes. In these sessions, children got the opportunities to be authors – something they have never done in the past. According to Alice, it has always been her mother or teacher who read a story to her. She was never given the chance to construct a story on her own when reading books. Tom also said that he enjoyed hearing all the different versions of the story from his classmates. They were not the published story, but they were stories from people/friends he knew. Among all the children, Jack was the one who had a great sense of humor and liked to make all the stories humorous. He liked being the author because he wanted people to laugh when they read his stories.

The parents also reported that they have discovered some new talents of their children. At the beginning of the session when Author One chatted with the parents about their children's creative writing skills, they stated: "My child does not know what to write," "Not good with composition," "His teacher said that he is going to need individual tutoring sessions on writing" (Field notes, April 2, 2010). However, at the end of the sessions when Author One presented their children's own stories to the parents, they commented: "WOW, is this his story?" "I cannot believe that he has this much to tell," "Look at her use of phrases, it is full of creativity!" "I think I will do similar things at home for him in the future" (Field notes, May 28, 2010).

**What impact do the bilingual book study sessions have on children's bilingual and biliteracy development?**

**English language and literacy development.** The children's English language and literacy development was reflected in three aspects: an increase in the number of indentified words from Dolch-Fry combined wordlist, the development of invented spelling, and the use of graphophonic cues in reading.

**Word identification.** In the first session, these children were asked to read the pre-primer and primer level words on the Dolch-Fry combined wordlist and they scored an average of 28.6% and 9.2% respectively. In the last session, the same assessment was administered again and the children scored the average of 56.6% and 36.4% with an increase of 28% and 27.2% respectively on reading pre-primer and primer level words (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Pre- and Post- Reading of the Dolch-Fry Combined Wordlist

	Preprimer level words (35 words total)		Primer level words (39 words total)	
	pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test
Alice	10/35 = 29%	15/35 = 43%	5/39 = 13%	8/39 = 21%
Bill	6/35 = 17%	18/35 = 51%	8/39 = 21%	15/39 = 38%
Jack	18/35 = 51%	30/35 = 86%	6/39 = 15%	20/39 = 51%
Michael	9/35 = 26%	20/35 = 57%	6/39 = 15%	17/39 = 44%
Tom	7/35 = 20%	16/35 = 46%	3/39 = 8%	11/39 = 28%
Average	28.6%	56.6%	9.2%	36.4%

**Invented spelling.** Invented spelling was a process that was unfamiliar to all these participants. As strong believers who attach ultimate importance to accuracy, teachers and parents in China do not promote the idea of using invented spelling. Several parents mentioned their confusion and doubts about invented spelling at the beginning and had comments, such as “if you let them invent the spelling, how can they learn the correct spelling?” “I don’t think that will work because they will remember their wrong spelling rather than the correct spelling.” “They should not invent the spelling of an English word. They should memorize the correct spelling” (Filed notes, April 2, 2010).

The children had never used invented spelling prior to the sessions. When Author One dictated 10 selected words from the Dolch/Fry combined wordlist, they only wrote down the words they knew how to write correctly and refused to try invented spelling of unknown words at first. After Author One repeatedly explained that there was no problem to spell a word wrong and she just wanted them

to try to write down what they heard, only one child (Jack) tried invented spelling of all the words. Table 2 presented the results of the five children's invented spelling in week one. Invented spelling was the one activity that the children did in each session. Author One had constantly encouraged them to spell out the word based on what they heard. Toward the end of the session, all the children were familiar with this practice and had demonstrated growth in the frequency of using invented spelling and the accuracy of sound-letter relationship in the first and last letter in words (Table 3).

**Table 2.** *Invented Spelling in Week 1*

	<b>Alice</b>	<b>Bill</b>	<b>Jack</b>	<b>Michael</b>	<b>Tom</b>
<b>and</b>	and	end	and	-	and
<b>away</b>	-	-	awei	-	-
<b>can</b>	-	-	ken	-	can
<b>come</b>	-	-	km	-	come
<b>big</b>	big	big	big	big	big
<b>look</b>	-	-	look	look	look
<b>must</b>	-	-	mst	-	mast
<b>all</b>	-	-	ou	-	-
<b>play</b>	pla	-	play	p	play
<b>help</b>	-	-	aip	p	help

**Table 3.** *Selected Sample of Invented Spelling in Week 8*

	<b>Alice</b>	<b>Bill</b>	<b>Jack</b>	<b>Michael</b>	<b>Tom</b>
<b>frog</b>	frog	frog	frog	fog	frog
<b>well</b>	wall	wol	well	vo	weill
<b>come</b>	cm	come	come	com	come
<b>sea</b>	si	sad	sea	ci	see
<b>kind</b>	kand	kd	kid	cd	kand
<b>like</b>	lik	laik	like	k	like
<b>poor</b>	p	pr	per	p	pur

	Alice	Bill	Jack	Michael	Tom
follow	fo	faolou	flow	fl	folo

In comparison with Table 2 in which only Jack and Tom used invented spelling on a few English words, Table 3 presents all the five children's attempt of invented spelling of the eight English words. In addition, their accurate spellings of the beginning and ending letter of the words evidently reveal the children's development of the English sound-letter relationship to some extent.

The parents (Author Three included) were all surprised and content to see the growth of their children's spelling development. Author Three commented: "This is really a good way to help Jack to achieve correct spelling gradually." Another parent said: "I think this is much better than asking them to spend all their time memorizing correct spelling of words. This gives them chances to explore and then they can get it themselves" (Alice's Mom, personal communication, May 28, 2010).

**Graphophonic cues.** At the last session, each child was asked to read aloud four sentences (Figure 1) while Author One took running record of their reading. The children made a total of 13 miscues, four repetitions, and three self-corrections. Analysis of the 13 miscues (Table 4) suggested that the children were using mostly the graphophonic cues in reading. The mispronounced words all had similar beginning or ending letters compared with the text words and this has further suggested these children's development in the letter-sound relationship.

**Table 4.** *Analysis Results of the 13 Miscues*

Text says	Child says	Graphically similar?			Syntactically similar?	Semantically similar?
		B	M	E		
sea	sai	yes				
told	tood	yes		yes		
very	virī	yes				
wide	window	yes				
they	the	yes				
fell	fall	yes		yes		
love	long	yes				
lived	live	yes			yes	yes

Text says	Child says	Graphically similar?			Syntactically similar?	Semantically similar?
		B	M	E		
tried	told	yes		yes		
kinds	kind	yes			yes	yes
ways	walls	yes				
followed	flowed	yes		yes		
forest	frost	yes		yes		

**Chinese language and literacy development.** During the eight-week long study sessions, the children were given opportunities to be authors, something they have never experienced in the past. These children's language and literacy growth was mainly reflected in the language they used during oral storytelling, such as longer stories, more complex, attractive and creative story plots, and lots of conversations. In addition, several children also used Pinyin, the sound representations for Chinese characters, in their writing of Chinese.

**Longer stories.** Comparing children's storytelling of each book from the first session to the last, the most noticeable characteristic was that they had longer stories in latter sessions. The authors averaged the number of characters each child used in the storytelling of each book and results suggested a definite growth in the use of total characters. The average numbers of total characters used in storytelling of the books were 132 characters for book 1, 293 characters for book 2, 425 characters for book 3, and 522 characters for book 4.

**Complex, attractive and creative story plots.** Another growth of these children's storytelling in Chinese was having complex and creative story plots. At the first few sessions, children used mostly just one sentence describing each illustration. Instead of telling a story, they were, in fact, describing what they saw in each illustration. There were weak story plots, such as unclear problem, missing the high point or solutions (Figure 2). The children's storytelling in later sessions, however, has demonstrated major improvements. They used more sentences describing each illustration and their stories had clear and complex story plots. For example, Figure 3 presented the story plot of one child's story telling of *Floppy*.

**Figure 2.** Bill's oral storytelling of *Frog in the Well* in week 2 (translation provided by author 1).

problem	One of Floppy's ears was not straight. It was floppy. So Floppy's friends in school laughed at him. Floppy wanted to fix his floppy ear to be just like other rabbits.
roadblocks	Floppy tried all kinds of ways to make his ear straight; however, none of these ways worked.
the high point	One of his ears was still floppy, and all his friends were still laughing at him. Floppy was so sad. He hid in the wood, felt so lonely and cried so hard.
solution	Floppy went to see a doctor and learned that ears come in all shapes. Floppy was no longer sad and his friends missed him when he was gone. So all Floppy's friends decided to fold one of their ears to be just like Floppy.

**Figure 3.** Story plot of *Floppy*.

Jack's Oral Storytelling in Chinese	Chinese texts in the Book
1. 傍晚的时候，我去散步。回头一看月亮正跟着我。	1. 昨夜我和月亮一起散步了。月亮就像一只大风筝似得跟在我的身后。
2. 我问月亮：“月亮，月亮，你跟着我干吗呀？”月亮说：“我要和你一起散步。”我问月亮：“你怎么跟着我啊？我拉不住你。”可月亮还是跟着我。	2. 尽管没有任何线牵着月亮。当我和月亮一起散步的时候。
3. 我走在森林的小路上，拿着一个手电筒我一开手电，照到了猫头鹰。猫头鹰不怕我，可其它的小动物不知道是手电筒，为是猎枪呢，都四处逃窜，鸡飞狗跳的月亮也吓得躲了起来。	3. 我还带着我的蓝色手电筒以防万一，月亮却被吓得藏起了它的脸，
4. 我来到了牧场。三头牛哞哞的叫着。我到月亮跟着我，这才放心。然后，这三头牛看到天色晚了，月亮出来了，就回屋觉去了。	4. 但是月亮却透过淡淡的云朵偷偷地注视我。当我和月亮一起散步的时候，
5. 后来又到了教堂前，房顶的尖戳了月亮屁股一下，月亮就不小心把鞋弄掉了。	5. 我告诉月亮要升得高一点，这样月亮就不会被教堂的屋顶钩住了。
6. 我跑过去，把月亮的鞋捡了起来。有好狗都看着月亮。	6. 邻居家的狗的叫声像火车的汽笛一样。当我和月亮一起散步的时候，
7. 我捡到鞋以后赶快叫月亮下来。	7. 我们小心翼翼地踮着脚走过小昆虫睡觉的草丛。当所有红腹知更鸟都去睡觉的时候，
8. 月亮下来了，我给它穿上鞋。	8. 月亮叫来了一滴滴像眼泪似的露珠落在青草上。当我和月亮一起散步的时候，

Jack's Oral Storytelling in Chinese	Chinese texts in the Book
9. 然后，月亮又飞起来了。	9. 我们比赛荡秋千，看看谁的脚步更高，我还想象着月亮是如何叫我像它一样飞起来。
10. 我又叫月亮下来。月亮下来以后，我说：“咱们荡秋千吧。”月亮说：“我没有秋千啊。”我说：“你在空中，我拉着你一起荡秋千。”	10. 我们手拉着手飞过布满星星的夜空。当我和月亮一起散步的时候，
11. 后来，我拉着拉着，没拉住，月亮带着我就飞上天了。	11. 我们跳着舞穿过了静静流淌的小河，穿过了小桥。月亮高悬在天空，美丽的剪影倒映在水中。
12. 我们飞到一个小桥上，月亮高兴地说：“看，水里还有一个月亮。”	12. 柔和的月光笼罩着我的全身，当我和月亮一起散步的时候。
13. 我摸着水，一边摸，一边告诉月亮：“这是你的倒影，不是另外一个月亮。”	13. 当我们回去的时候，月亮一直都静静地陪在我的左右。月亮和我回到了家中，整晚不曾离去。
14. 我要回家休息了。月亮紧跟着我，和我说：“你能不能把床搬到外边，我们一起睡。”我说：“行啊。”	14. 月亮还说谢谢我与它分享这么甜蜜的夜晚，当我和月亮一起散步的时候。
15. 然后，我就和月亮一起睡了一整个晚上。	

**Figure 4.** Jack's storytelling of I took the Moon for a walk in week 8 (translation provided by Author 1) in comparison to the texts in Chinese and English.

English Translation provided by Author 1 based on Jack's storytelling	English texts in the Book
1. In the early evening, I went for a walk.	1. I took the Moon for a walk last night. It followed behind like a still summer kite.
2. I turned and saw the Moon was following me. I asked: "Moon, Moon, why you are following me?" The Moon said: "I want to go with you." I asked the Moon: "How can you follow? I can not hold you?" But the Moon insisted to follow me.	2. Though there wasn't a string or a tail in sight when I took the Moon for a walk.
3. I walked to a little road in the forest with a torch. As soon as I turned on the torch, I saw an owl. The owl was not afraid of the light, but all other animals did not know it was the torch. They thought that I had a gun, so they all escaped. The Moon was afraid too and tried to hide.	3. I carried my blue torch just in case the Moon got scared and hid its face.

English Translation provided by Author 1 based on Jack's storytelling	English texts in the Book
4. I walked to the farm. Three cows mooded and mooded. I saw the Moon was still following me, so I am relieved. Then the cows saw that it was getting late, the Moon was already out, so they went home to sleep.	4. But it peeked through clouds there were fragile as lace when I took the Moon for a walk.
5. I walked to the church. The tall spire stamped the Moon's button, so the Moon dropped his shoe.	5. I warned the Moon to rise a bit higher so it wouldn't get hooked on a church's tall spire.
6. I ran and picked up the shoe. There were many dogs watching the Moon.	6. While the neighbourhood dogs made a train-whistle choir when I took the Moon for a walk.
7. I asked the Moon to come down after I picked up his shoe.	7. We tiptoed through grass where the night crawlers creep when the rust-bellied robins have all gone to sleep.
8. The Moon came down and I put his shoe back on him.	8. And the Moon called the dew so the grass seemed to weep when I took the Moon for a walk.
9. Then the Moon flew up again.	9. We raced for the swings, where I kicked my feet high and imagined the Moon had just asked me to fly.
10. I asked the Moon to come down again. Once he was down, I said: "let's play the swing." The Moon said: "I don't have one." I said: "you are in the sky. You hold my hands and we swing together."	10. Hand holding hand through the starry night sky when I took the Moon for a walk.
11. I did not hold fast enough, so the Moon took me to fly.	11. We danced cross the bridge where the smooth waters flow. The Moon was above and the Moon was below.
12. We flew to a bridge. The Moon said happily: "Look, there is another Moon in the water."	12. And bright in between them I echoed in their glow when I took the Moon for a walk.
13. I touched the water and said: "This is your reflection, not another Moon."	13. Then as we turned back, the Moon kept me in sight. It followed me home and stayed there all night.
14. I wanted to go home to rest. The Moon followed me, and said: "Can you move your bed out so we can sleep together?" I said: "of course".	14. And thanked me by sharing its sweet sleepy light when I took the Moon for a walk.
15. Then I slept with the Moon together for the whole night.	



Some children also demonstrated creativity in their storytelling. For examples, in Alice's storytelling of Yeh-Hsien, she referred to the old man from the sky as Grandpa Wind. This personified title for the old man from the sky was both creative and attractive. In addition, one child's story of the last book – *I took the Moon for a walk* was creative in many ways in comparison to the texts. Figure 4 provided Jack's storytelling in Chinese (English translation provided by the authors), the Chinese texts, and English texts. It was evident to see that Jack's story was more creative compared with the original texts. For instances, for sentence number three, Jack talked about not only the Moon, but other animals in the illustration to create a plot; for sentence number five, Jack thought that the reason of the Moon dropping one of his shoes was because the tall spire stamped his button.

**The use of conversations.** Another distinguishing characteristic of children's Chinese language improvement was the use of conversations in storytelling. When *The Frog in the Well* was introduced in the first couple of weeks, these children constructed different stories, but none of the stories contained any conversation among the characters. Two children's stories of the second book *Yeh-Hsien* had one conversation: Yeh-Hsien's conversation with the little red fish and with the Grandpa Wind. When using the third book, *Floppy*, all children except one included conversations in their storytelling, and by the end of the session with the last book, *I took the Moon for a walk*, everyone used conversations between characters in their story telling.

**The use of Pinyin in writing.** Because exploring the development of their writing in Chinese was not the purpose of this study, children were only asked to orally tell the story which was transcribed by the authors. No assessments were done to evaluate their Chinese writing and no activities were conducted to improve their writing in Chinese. Some of the parents, however, reported that their children were so involved in the story, they started illustrating and writing about the stories they constructed at home. The parents also brought their children's illustrations and writing samples. From these illustrations, the authors found that these children used Pinyin, the system used for transliteration of Chinese using a romanized alphabet, for the unknown characters (Appendix C). One parent explained this by saying,

In the past, she wouldn't write it out if she did not know how to write the character. She asked me how to write it or I just told her to look it up in the dictionary. Ever since you taught her the invented spelling in English, I found that she started to use Pinyin to replace unknown characters. I think she enjoys writing more than before.

Another parent commented,

I used to correct him when he was not writing (the characters) exactly. But since you told us that invented spelling is helpful for children to develop correct spelling in English, I did not insist on letting him use a dictionary (to find out how to write a character correctly). I notice that he started to really enjoy writing and write more often.

## Results

This study combined the new instructional materials (i.e., bilingual books) with a set of innovative instructional approaches in the eight-week bilingual study sessions. The findings indicated that bilingual books are enjoyable learning resources to use. Both the content of the bilingual books and the instructional approaches engage readers in many different ways. In the study, all the children have responded positively to the bilingual books. They were excited about learning English using storybooks and participated in all the instructional activities enthusiastically. The children responded to these bilingual books in many ways that are similar to native readers. They made connections to self, text, and the world, and they used their cultural and background knowledge to facilitate comprehension. One thing that is worthy of mentioning is that to these young children, background knowledge matters more than cultural knowledge in terms of facilitating comprehensions. The children's classic story – *Cinderella* was more familiar to these children than the culturally relevant Chinese story *Frog in the well*. This finding warned us that no assumption should be made that children would have an easier time to understand books that are related to their own culture.

This study also suggests that bilingual books, combined with appropriate instruction, can be a powerful resource to promote children's bilingual and biliteracy development. In terms of foreign language development, growth was reflected in the number of words these children could identify, use invented spelling, and use graphophonic cues in reading. Comparing the number of words these children could identify at the first and last sessions, we saw a significant increase. We need to acknowledge that even though the study sessions have positively influenced their vocabulary learning, their English classes they took in and out of school also contributed greatly to their vocabulary learning.

The children's development of invented spelling and the use of graphophonic cues in reading revealed that they have gradually developed some letter-sound relationship. Their dominant approach to spelling and reading was to use the names of the letters as cues to the sound they want to represent, and this has been the characteristics of beginning readers (Bear, 1989; Viise, 1996). In addition, some of these

children's writing also reflected their knowledge of Pinyin in Chinese (first graders in China have already learned Pinyin, the alphabet that represents the pronunciation of Chinese). This is similar to the findings of another study on using wordless picture books to promote the biliteracy development of a five-year old Chinese child (Hu & Commeyras, 2008). This finding has suggested that the Chinese Pinyin system has become an important and useful tool that Chinese children at the beginning stage depend on when learning how to write English. In addition, the finding also shed more light on the similarities of invented spelling in both English and Chinese and how Chinese children presented evidence of positively transferring such knowledge from one language to another.

In terms of the native language development, the children have used richer oral language in storytelling, which was reflected by having longer stories, more conversations, and complex, attractive and creative story plots. The importance of storytelling in children's language development has long been recognized (Berkowitz, 2011; Riley, 2007; Singhai, 1998); however, not many studies addressed the importance of conversation construction among story characters in children's storytelling. We believe that children's construction of conversations among story characters in their storytelling marks an important difference between describing pictures from telling a story. These children's gradual increase of vocabulary and story complexity indicated that they think deeper and more critically about the characters and the plots, which as a result, enhanced their comprehension of the stories. It may be arguable that the inclusion of dialogue could be the nature of the stories; however, we believe that all these four books have rich content that stimulate conversations based on the criteria we used when selecting the books.

Furthermore, the use of Pinyin to substitute unknown characters in writing had two indications. First, it indicated that these children have applied the idea of invented spelling into Chinese writing. The children have learned to focus on the sound when they used invented spelling for unknown English words, and they have applied this same strategy to write Chinese using Pinyin which represents the sounds of Chinese characters. Hence, the children used the sound representation to replace unknown characters. Second, the fact that the children used Pinyin to substitute unknown characters rather than using lines or symbols suggests that these children are in the advanced stage of Chinese writing development (Chan & Louie, 1992). They understood the non-alphabetical nature of the Chinese language, were aware of the conventional representation of Chinese characters, and could clearly distinguish the sound and character demonstration of the language.

The bilingual texts in the book can serve as the authentic texts for children to learn vocabularies, phrases, or native expressions. Moreover, when ignoring the texts, bilingual books can be used the same way as wordless picture books – encouraging children to come up with their own stories to promote the concept of story and to learn the languages (Hu & Commeyras, 2008).

Importantly, this study has suggested that instructional approach matters. In the study sessions in this study, the researchers used approaches such as picture walk, constructing children's own versions of the story, interactive read aloud, and response to writing with the encouragement of using invented spelling. These instructional approaches have been very successful in creating a supportive environment and making a difference in these children's motivation and class participation. Picture walks have helped children activate their prior knowledge and make predictions about what they will be reading. Constructing their own versions of the story has given children a sense of ownership, suggesting that it is "my own" story! Interactive read aloud has actively engaged them in the story, made connections, and prepared for critical response after reading. The encouragement from the teacher to use invented spelling or Pinyin to represent a challenging Chinese character for a child has freed writing from conventional spelling/characters and focused on meaning. Findings from the study have also shown that it is beneficial for educators to shift from an entirely teacher-centered class to a balanced, teacher-centered and student-centered class for active engagement and motivation. It is crucial to educate parents by offering them workshops on literacy education that emphasizes the importance of meaning (content) rather than form (conventional spelling/character) only.

These new instructional approaches and materials, combined with other more traditional direct teaching methods and resources in China, have shed new lights on literacy education for educators, parents, and students in China. It also confirms that a supportive learning environment, typically nurtured through an understanding teacher, is important in children's exploration of new culture and language (e.g., Gregory, 1990; McGonigal & Arizpe, 2007). With the support from teachers and parents, students will be able to find who they really are by exploring their different identities through the power of reading, writing, and multicultural children's books.

## Appendix A

Hu-Li 2010 Pre – Assessment Questions

I. Do you like to learn English?



II. Listen and choose. Circle the words you hear.

1. cook    book    look

2. lake    cake    wake

3. boat    coat    goat

4. hut    nut    cut

5. foot    wood    good

6. car    garden    warm

III. Listen and fill in the blanks.

1. b\_\_ke

2. b\_\_\_g

3. b\_\_\_x

4. f\_\_\_sh

5. be\_\_\_\_

IV. Match the pictures and the words.

1. dish

2. spoon

3. eyes

4. ear

5. boat

6. rain

7. ball

8. hand

9. fish

10. pen

## Appendix B

### Dolch/Fry Combined Word List

Dolch/Fry Combined Word List

Preprimer	Primer	First grade	Second grade	Third grade
a (F1)	all (F1)	after (F2)	always (F3)	about (F1)
and (F1)	are (F1)	again (F2)	around (F2)	carry (F3)
away (F2)	at (F1)	an (F1)	because (F2)	cut (F3)
big (F2)	be (F1)	as (F1)	been (F1)	far (F3)
can (F1)	but (F1)	ask (F2)	before (F2)	got (F3)
come (F1)	came (F2)	by (F1)	both (F3)	grow (F3)
down (F1)	did (F1)	could (F1)	call (F1)	if (F1)
find (F1)	do (F1)	every (F3)	does (F2)	keep (F3)
for (F1)	eat (F3)	from (F1)	don't (F3)	kind (F2)
go (F1)	four (F3)	give (F2)	first (F1)	light (F3)
help (F2)	get (F1)	had (F1)	found (F2)	long (F1)
here (F2)	good (F2)	her (F1)	made (F1)	much (F2)
I (F1)	have (F1)	him (F1)	many (F1)	never (F3)
in (F1)	he (F1)	his (F1)	off (F2)	only (F2)
is (F1)	into (F1)	how (F1)	or (F1)	own (F3)
it (F1)	like (F1)	just (F2)	read (F2)	small (F2)
little (F2)	must (F2)	know (F2)	right (F2)	start (F3)
look (F1)	new (F2)	let (F3)	tell (F2)	together (F3)
make (F1)	no (F1)	live (F2)	their (F1)	try (F2)
me (F2)	now (F1)	may (F1)	these (F1)	
my (F1)	on (F1)	of (F1)	those (F3)	
not (F1)	our (F2)	old (F2)	us (F2)	
one (F1)	out (F1)	open (F3)	use (F1)	
play (F2)	saw (F3)	over (F1)	very (F2)	
run (F3)	say (F2)	put (F2)	which (F1)	
said (F1)	she (F1)	some (F1)	why (F2)	
see (F1)	so (F1)	stop (F3)	work (F2)	
the (F1)	soon (F3)	take (F2)	would (F1)	
three (F2)	that (F1)	them (F1)	write (F1)	
to (F1)	there (F1)	then (F1)	your (F1)	
two (F1)	they (F1)	think (F2)		
up (F1)	this (F1)	walk (F3)		
we (F1)	too (F2)	were (F1)		
where (F2)	was (F1)	when (F1)		
you (F1)	well (F2)			
	went (F2)			
	who (F1)			
	will (F1)			
	with (F1)			

Note. F in parentheses represents Fry and the number shows the level in the Fry word list.

## Appendix C

### Writing Samples in Chinese



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## New Authors, New Books, and New Horizons

**Barbara A. Ward**

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This is a time of transition for *Reading Horizons* as it moves from a print to an online journal format. To celebrate this transition, we have selected some of the best debut books published recently. For avid readers, there's nothing quite as exciting as discovering a new author or two and paying attention as these new voices join the familiar ones already beloved by bibliophiles. The entrance of a new author on the children's and young adult publishing scene is something to cheer. As you read our brief reviews, you will see that these first-time authors have showered the world with hours of wonderful reading enjoyment. Judging from these first efforts, it's doubtful that any of them will experience the dreaded sophomore slump, promising even more reading pleasure in the future.

### Grades K-3

Enersen, Adele. (2012). *When my baby dreams*. New York: HarperCollins/Balzer + Bray. 48 pages, \$14.99, ISBN: 978-0-062-07175-0.

Garnering immediate attention as soon as some of the photos appeared on the Web, this book started out as a tribute to the author's baby daughter Mila on her blog entitled "Mila's Daydreams" at <http://milasdaydreams.blogspot.com/>. Drawing on the fascination that babies have for their parents and grandparents, the author has taken photographs of Mila that will certainly bring smiles to readers' faces—and likely prompt several adult readers to reach for their own cameras in order to immortalize their offspring. The intent in this colorful book with its simple lines, and original photographs



is to act out the baby's dreams (or the mother's fantasies for her daughter). Among other carefully and cleverly staged moments, the photos show a baby petting a lamb, fashioned from gauzy material and black and white socks; walking through a cotton candy forest created from knitted and crocheted throws; and traveling the world on the back of a blue elephant, again fashioned from cloth folded to form its body and trunk. Young readers will enjoy looking at the adorable photos of Mila as she has all sorts of adventures, all while she is sleeping safely at home, seemingly never twitching at all through all these creative efforts. No one could possibly resist smiling at the photo of Mila "splish-splashing with her tail" (unpaged) formed from a green crocheted piece draped around her lower body. Above all, it's comforting to know that someone who loves you is right there by your side, keeping a watchful—and obviously very busy—eye on you and dreaming of all the places you may someday go.

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Lewis, Caron. (2012). *Stuck with the blooz*. Illus. by Jon Davis. New York: Harcourt Children's Books. 40 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-547-74560-2.

It is difficult to explain to others what it means to feel blue or slightly depressed. Sometimes words just aren't adequate to describe the emotion or to sort out what prompts the blues. This picture book tries to make sense of those feelings with which just about everyone is familiar. Apparently, the root of the blues could be just about anything. Because she knows the signs of the blues approaching, a girl tries valiantly to keep them away, and then when they arrive anyway, she tries to figure out what brought them on. Because the text and illustrations personify the blues as a huge, oozy, blue blob of a monster, readers can see how he puts a damper on all the girl's happy moments, even ruining her chocolate milk and lemonade with his blue drappiness. The melancholic feelings that accompany her are represented through digitally painted illustrations and generous amounts of white space. The book captures this particular feeling quite well, even depicting its swift departure, leaving just as swiftly as it comes.

## Grades 4-6

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Ashley-Hollinger, Mika. (2012). *Precious Bones*. New York: Delacorte. 344 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-385-74219-1.

The summer of 1949 brings lots of heartache, adventure, and mystery to ten-year-old Precious Bones, her mother, and part-Miccosukee Indian father Nolay. The trouble begins with a huge storm that fills their home with water (and a couple of snakes). Then two murders take place, and Nolay is considered a prime suspect for each of them. Bones learns lessons about miracles, family, friendship, grief, abuse, discrimination, judging others, and kindnesses that help her to develop as a compassionate, well-rounded person. Ashley-Hollinger creates a setting so rich that readers can feel the heat and humidity of the Florida swamp, experience the bites of pesky mosquitoes, and hear the sounds of the birds and animals. Likewise, readers will find many of the book's well-developed characters occupying places in their hearts. The plot is gripping, engaging, and has enough suspense to make it a book that is hard to put down.



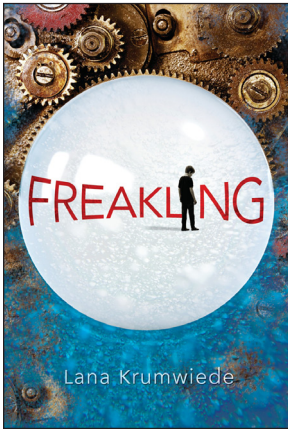

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Dias Lorenzi, Natalie. (2012). *Flying the dragon*. Illus. by Kelly Murphy. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. 240 pages, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-1-580-89434-0.

Fifth grader Skye (born Sorano) has no idea that she has a cousin who lives in Japan until her cousin Hiroshi arrives to live in Virginia while their grandfather undergoes treatment for cancer. Both children are drawn to this elderly man who is a skilled artist and kite builder although Hiroshi resents sharing his grandfather with Skye. In interesting parallels, Skye resents being forced to learn Japanese so that she can communicate better with her relatives while Hiroshi is unfamiliar with American idioms and classroom customs. Although Skye dislikes being asked to translate for her cousin, she also tries to provide English tips about slang so that he can fit in more easily. The author de-



scribes vividly the resentment and insecurities that fill both Skye and Hiroshi. Skye's reflection on how she chose to adopt an American name rather than her Japanese one will remind readers of the thoughtless cruelty of those who make fun of anything they don't know or understand. The passages in which Grandfather tries to bring his grandchildren together through their shared interests in the beautiful dragon kite they are flying are particularly memorable. Grandfather's approach to life--and death--remind readers that hearts matter more than objects. The changes in both Skye and Hiroshi are believable, an acknowledgement that anyone can change for the better. This debut title from a new author promises readers much thoughtful enjoyment.

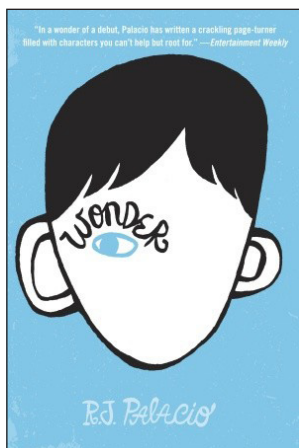


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Krumwiede, Lana. (2012). *Freakling*. Watertown, MA: Candlewick Press, 320 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-0-763-65937-0.

Debut author Lana Krumwiede has written an intriguing and engaging dystopian novel that will appeal to middle grade readers. Taemon is born into a society where people have telekinetic powers but must first visualize an action and then make it happen using psychic powers called psi. Taemon is the antithesis of a super hero because he loses his psi and then is forced to cover up his lack of the power that others in his city take for granted. After his secret is revealed in a sports tournament, Taemon is banished to a powerless colony.

At the “dud farm,” he learns many secrets that could give even greater power to the psi wielders. When Taemon accidentally leaks a secret, he must return to the society that banished him to save two groups of people. Taemon learns many lessons about justice, loyalty to family, and loyalty to society. Readers will appreciate the opportunity to enter into Taemon's intriguing world, and the multifaceted plot will keep them turning the pages. The perfectly crafted ending will leave them eager to learn more about Taemon and his society in the sequel scheduled to come out in 2013..



Palacio, R.J. (2012). *Wonder*. New York: Random House, 313 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-0-3758-6902-0.

Ten-year-old August Pullman regards himself as rather ordinary, while others see him as anything but normal due to his extreme facial abnormalities. Auggie explains the dissonance between how he sees himself and how others regard him: "But I know ordinary kids don't make other ordinary kids run screaming in playgrounds. I know ordinary kids don't get stared at wherever they go" (p. 3). His life changes once his parents enroll him as a new fifth grader at Beecher Prep School. This will be Auggie's first experience in school since he has been homeschooled during the previous years due

to his numerous surgeries. Not only must he deal with the looks and whispers of his new classmates but also a cruel game in which students that touch him and fail to wash within 30 seconds of contact will have "The Plague." In addition to learning about the traditional subjects of language arts, social studies, science, and math, Auggie also learns powerful lessons about friendship, courage, loyalty, and betrayal. His school days teach him about overcoming unexpected challenges as well as introducing him to bullies and their abilities to coerce others into joining their cruel behavior toward anyone different from the norm. Palacio skillfully narrates the story from alternating points of view, offering insights from Auggie and some of his classmates as well as his teenage sister and her friends. This is a WONDER-ful book, brimming with hope and possibilities balanced against thoughtless acts of unkindness based on ignorance.

## Grades 9-12

Andrews, Jesse. (2012). *Me and Earl and the dying girl*. New York: Harry N. Abrams. 304 pages, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-1419701764..

No one really knows Greg Gaines, and that's exactly the way he likes it. Although he gets along with all the cliques in his high school, he doesn't fit anywhere. In fact, he only feels engaged when coming up with ideas for the movies that he and his friend Earl create. After classmate Rachel Kushner is diagnosed with leukemia, Greg's mother insists that he spend time with her since they were once something of an item. He does so, unwillingly, and strangely, Rachel seems to understand Greg's humor and the films starring Cat Stevens, the family feline. Greg's emotional detach-

ment as he hides behind jokes and the camera while Rachel's death is imminent keeps him from realizing just how unique this dying girl is as well as how precious life is, hiding those feelings from himself and even the book's readers in the end. Anyone who has dealt with the loss of someone or faced his/her own mortality will surely be moved by this story filled with insight and pathos mingled with wonderfully hilarious descriptions of the dreadful films Greg and Earl create. In Greg's case, art becomes more important than all the living and dying that occur around him.

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Clayton, Colleen. (2012). *What happens next*. New York: Little Brown/Poppy. 310 pages, \$17.99, ISBN: 978-0-316-19868-4.

Everything changes after sixteen-year-old cheerleader Sid Murphy is date raped while on a ski trip with several classmates from her Cleveland, Ohio high school, an incident about which she can remember very little. She tells no one about what happened, not even her mother or two best friends, Kirsten and Paige. Her initial avoidance of them angers them, and they shun her at school, leaving her completely alone. Sid is kicked off the cheerleading squad, and volunteers to work in the AV room rather than attend one of her classes. At first repulsed and then attracted to Corey Livingston, a classmate with a reputation of his own, Sid thinks she knows how to manage everything while keeping the rape a secret. Desperate to erase the parts of her—her large boobs and her rear—that seem to attract male attention, Sid begins running at all hours of the night and eating next to nothing. She clearly needs help, but she keeps blowing everyone off. This debut author has done a great job of creating a likeable character in Sid while exploring her emotions thoroughly. The high school years can be fueled by gossip and assumptions, many of which are completely wrong and downright presumptuous. Teen readers are sure to race through the pages of the book to find out what happens next. In the end, while everything isn't perfect for Sid, she has the resources to survive and to begin to heal. What happens next—for better or for worse—is up to her.



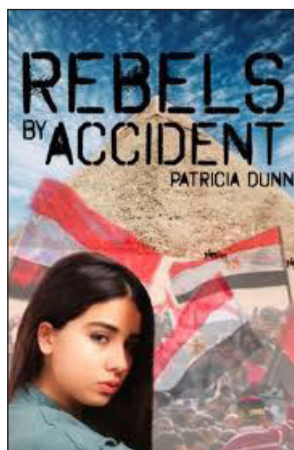
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Dunn, Patricia. (2012). *Rebels by accident*. New York: Alikai Press. 225 pages, \$12.95, ISBN: 978-0-9854921-2-0.

Mariam wants to appear to be a “normal” American more than anything else. She hates everything about being Egyptian and Muslim. Her desire to fit in leads to



her sneaking off to a party that results in her being sent to jail. Shocked and disappointed, her parents decide she needs to go visit her grandmother in Cairo. Mariam's best friend Deanna accompanies her on the trip to Egypt. The girls quickly learn that Mariam's grandmother—her Sittu—is both wise and wonderful. While in Egypt Mariam comes to terms with her bicultural identity and heritage, falls in love, and experiences her first kiss. Several surprises, including the revolution that toppled Mubarak's government, cut the friends' visit short. Mariam learns many lessons while in Egypt, but her biggest discovery is the strength she finds within when called to tackle difficult and important tasks.




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Howard, A.G. (2012). *Splintered*. New York: Amulet/Abrams, 377 pages, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-14197-0428-4.

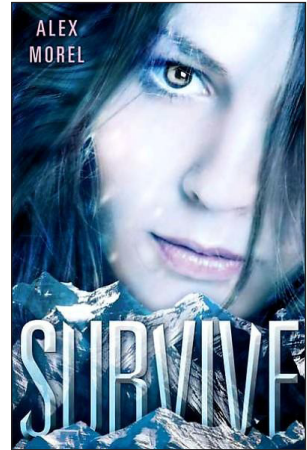
Life for Alyssa Gardner is anything but boring. Yes, Alyssa goes to school where she deals with mean girls and she even has a part-time job, but she can hear the voices of flowers and bugs. As readers turn the pages of this beautifully crafted, lyrical book, they learn that Alyssa is the great-great-great-great-great granddaughter of Alice Liddell, Lewis Carroll's inspiration for Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*. Alyssa must keep many of her gifts/delusions secret because she is afraid that she will one day end up institutionalized like her mother since her family has been cursed with insanity ever since Alice went down the rabbit hole. To break this curse, Alyssa must go on a quest—down the rabbit hole—to right the wrongs of Wonderland. Her friend (and real-world crush) Jeb accompanies her on this journey. Yet, in Wonderland she is torn between Jeb and her enchanting guide Morpheus. She quickly learns that in the dark world of Wonderland, nothing is what it appears to be, nor is anyone.



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Morel, Alex. (2012). *Survive*. New York: Penguin/Razorbill. 259 pages, \$17.99, ISBN: 978-1-595-14510-9.

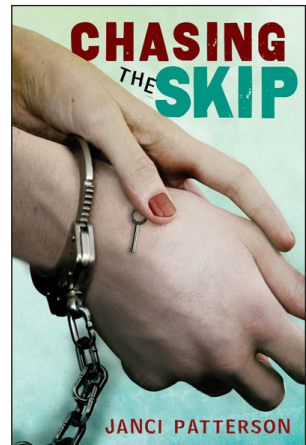
Jane Solis has planned everything carefully. On leave from the hospital for Christmas, she is preparing to swallow the pills that will kill her when her plane crashes in a wilderness area. Only Jane and her annoying seatmate, Paul Hart, survive. Strangely, with as much determination as she had wanted to die, Jane now wants to survive, and the duo gather food and supplies before walking and climbing as far as they can in order to improve their chances of being spotted by a search plane. Forced to rely on each other, they form a strong connection, and reveal their secrets to one another, hers about her suicide attempts and his about his estrangement from his father. When an accident further incapacitates Paul, Jane must summon the strength to go for help, possibly saving the two of them, and to reach out for her own future. Teen readers will surely be touched by the poignant, short-lived romance between Jane and Paul and be amazed at her will to live and his generosity. Teen readers will question some of the decisions made by Jane and Paul along their journey and ponder what they might do in order to survive, and how those particular decisions might shape their own futures.



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Patterson, Janci. (2012). *Chasing the skip*. New York: Henry Holt, 228 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-8050-9391-9.

In Janci Patterson's first novel, *Chasing the Skip*, she examines the challenges faced by young people who are raised by absentee parents. Fifteen-year-old Ricki knows the drill when her mother takes off—she goes to stay with her paternal grandmother. However, this time, her grandmother decides it is time for Ricki's father to take over. The father, Max, disappeared before Ricki was born so she does not really know him and is not excited to join him as he travels around the intermountain west looking for "Skips," criminals who have jumped their bail. Ricki's days are filled with tension as she struggles to become acquainted with her father, to trust him, and gain his trust. The tension quickly escalates when Ricki finds herself attracted to the

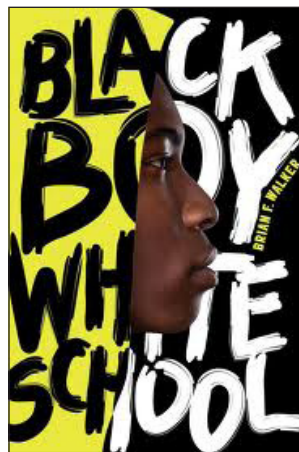


newest “Skip”—a wild, self-assured, teenaged bad boy. Readers will appreciate the well developed characters, and the twists in the plot that keep them turning the pages.

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Walker, Brian F. (2012). *Black boy white school*. New York: HarperTeen. 256 pages, \$17.99, ISBN: 978-0-061-91483-6.

Sixteen-year-old Luke’s publisher sends him on a publicity tour when the book he wrote chronicling his spiritual journey starts selling and gaining attention. Due to a scheduling glitch, Matt, Luke’s older brother, will be responsible for getting him to the book signing venues on time, but Matt has his own agenda involving his girlfriend Alex. Matt rents a Hummer and heads across the country along Route 66. The fact that Fran, a girl on whom Luke once had a crush, comes along adds to the complications. The descriptions of the book signings during which Luke must field difficult questions and sign until his arm aches are spot-on as are the complaints Luke utters throughout the scenic detours on which Matt takes his fellow passengers. Luke is portrayed realistically, floundering from one mistake to another, disappointing and betraying himself and others. Luke is, after all, a seeker, and if he isn’t sure exactly what he believes or how firm that belief may be, his seeking is typical of an adolescent. Threaded through the storyline is the very real consideration of how much an author owes to his/her readers, an issue worth pondering in this time in which authors have written partially fictionalized memoirs. Also, worth noting is the media frenzy that ensues once Luke is found to be less than forthright about his book and some of the events occurring on the trip. Once again, readers will be astonished at how quickly the media—or social network, for that matter—can create or destroy someone’s image. Although the problems Luke is facing seem resolved rather quickly in the end, this title is thoughtful and encourages readers to reflect on their own actions and beliefs. While tackling serious issues, this title does so with humor and moments of bonding between siblings and friends.



### **About the Authors**

Barbara A. Ward and Terrell A. Young are dedicated bibliophiles who love teaching as much as reading. Ward is on the faculty at Washington State University in Pullman, and Young at Brigham Young University in Provo.



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