“If It’s Not Fixed, the Staples are Out!” Documenting Young Children’s Perceptions of Strategic Reading Processes
Bette S. Bergeron and Melody Bradbury-Wolff

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From the Editor

1960 was quite a year. In February, a group of African Americans sat at lunch counters in Greensboro, NC. Five months later, the city desegregated their restaurants. In New Orleans, two all white schools enrolled African American students. Xerox introduced the first paper copier machine, the first felt tip pen was introduced, and 2,000 computers were delivered in the United States. Aluminum cans were first used for soda, Chubby Checker sang *The Twist* at the Peppermint Lounge in New York City, and a young man named Elvis Presley was discharged from the army. Movie-goers met Norman Bates and his hotel, Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble made prime-time television, and Howdy Doody said farewell. Children chanted *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* while eating *Green Eggs and Ham* and we learned about a cricket who lived in Times Square. Scout told us about her father, Atticus, and Elie Wiesel wrote of the horrors of the Holocaust. And at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, MI, a newsletter titled *Reading Horizons* was published.

In the past 50 years, *Reading Horizons* has grown from a newsletter to the international journal of literacy research and practice that it is today. We have published countless articles covering every conceivable topic in literacy much of which has been read and cited in papers, theses, dissertations, and other scholarly work. *Reading Horizons* has surely broadened the horizons of many teachers, administrators, and researchers at every level of education.

Issue 50.1 adds to that ever-growing body of research. Dr. Bette Bergeron and Melody Bradbury-Wolff devised the Strategy Perception Interview to see what kinds of reading strategies fifth graders actually used when reading independently. Engaging these young students in metacognition allowed the researchers to gain an understanding of what they did which ultimately informed the researchers' literacy instruction.

Dr. Denise Johnson studied the self-efficacy of pre-service teachers for teaching literacy to their future students. Having learned that these pre-service teachers experienced a disconnect between what they learned about literacy practice in their university courses and what they experienced in their field placements, she devised a Teacher Swap which helped these students form better connections between what they were taught and what they experienced. As a result, Dr. Johnson found that these pre-service teachers’ self-efficacy for literacy instruction increased. Dr. Robin Griffith reports a case study of a fourth grade teacher who, as a writer herself, wanted to engage her students in meaningful writing and ultimately to read like writers. The case study describes an
educator who teaches the craft of writing by using models of good writing from literature, asking her students what they notice in well-crafted writing and then applying it to their own. Terrell Young and Barbara Ward introduce us to the many joys of reading companion and series books as they take us from Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings to The Hunger Games trilogy by Suzanne Collins. Once again, Young and Ward remind us of the joy of reading and encourage us to investigate new and interesting titles.

It is this kind of research that, even after 50 years, keeps Reading Horizons current and relevant. So strap on your saddle shoes, put The Twist on your iPod, sit back, and expand your reading horizons.

Allison L. Baer, Editor
Reading Horizons
Kalamazoo, MI

There is no more crucial or basic skill in all of education than reading.
“If It’s Not Fixed, the Staples are Out!”
Documenting Young Children’s Perceptions of Strategic Reading Processes

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Abstract
The purpose of this article is to describe how teachers can foster strategic reading processes in their early literacy classrooms, and how to incorporate a Strategy Perception Interview to assist in documenting students’ use and perceptions of these strategies. Descriptions of classroom instruction incorporating literacy strategies and implementation of the Interview are discussed as well as results from the administration of the Interview and specific classroom implications.

This investigation of children’s uses and perceptions of reading strategies has been the focus of an action research project jointly conducted between Melody, a first-grade teacher, and Bette, a university professor. The study was conceived from an interesting exchange that occurred while interviewing first graders regarding their preferred reading strategies. Bette was intrigued by the following interchange with Patti, one of Melody’s young students (all student names are pseudonyms):

Bette: What do you do when you’re reading and get stuck on a word?
Patti: I sound it out.
Bette: How do you know when the word is fixed?
Patti: Because the book has staples. If it’s not fixed, the staples are out.
Patti’s intriguing answer led us to more closely explore the stated perceptions of young children regarding their reading strategies, possible differences in these perceptions that may exist between proficient and less proficient readers, and instructional implications of these discoveries.

The following article describes one facet of a three-year collaborative study in which we examined how a strategies-based approach to early literacy instruction impacts first-grade students’ learning. A particular focus of this study was to determine how young learners describe their own strategy use, as indicated through a Strategy Perception Interview. Descriptions of strategic reading instruction and implications for classroom practices are also provided.

**Strategic Literacy Learning**

Teaching for strategies is considered a key component of early literacy instruction (Schwartz, 1997). Graham and Block (1993/1994) contend that children who receive in-depth, well-modeled strategy instruction obtain significantly higher scores on standardized tests of reading comprehension, reasoning, and self-esteem. Strategic readers also perform better on informal tests measuring the transfer and application of critical reading and thinking abilities to situations outside of the school context, and are also high performers on informal tests of problem solving and group work skills. In addition, flexibility is considered a hallmark of strategic reading, through which learners adapt their actions as they read (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008).

Readers use a variety of strategies to coordinate cues from different information sources, evaluate their progress, and draw upon options when encountering new and/or difficult text (Schwartz, 1997; Maxim & Five, 1997). Strategy use involves a conscious selection of an approach to solve a problem while reading (Spiegel, 1995), and allows readers to become autonomous in their control of the comprehension process (Dowhower, 1999). Thinking about thinking, or metacognition, is at the core of strategic behavior (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1994). Simply stated, strategies allow children to think in their heads, or practice metacognition, when attempting to make sense out of text (McTague, 1997). Eilers and Pinkley (2006) found that first graders’ reading comprehension is significantly improved through the explicit instruction of metacognitive reading strategies. Through this metacognitive instruction, learners are guided as they move from effortful to automatic reading (Afflerbach et al., 2008).
Afflerbach et al. (2008) suggest that the terms “skills” and “strategies” are sometimes used inconsistently or imprecisely. In this study, skills are viewed as units of knowledge that are applied automatically in literacy contexts, such as reading. Paris et al. (1994) suggest that strategies are skills that have been made deliberate. In other words, strategies are skills that have been taken from their automatic contexts so that the reader can more closely inspect them. Strategies can therefore be shared, debated, and analyzed collectively by a community of learners. Afflerbach et al. (2008) define strategies as “deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader’s efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings” (p. 368). Skills are described as “automatic actions that result in decoding and comprehension with speed, efficiency, and fluency” (p. 368). In effect, skills become strategies when the learner knows how to apply and transfer specific skills and have ownership over their use (Five & Dionisio, 1998). Ultimately, a balance of both the application of skills and employment of strategies is at the heart of proficient reading (Afflerbach et al., 2008).

Strategies are framed by common cues used in language: graphophonics (sound/symbol), syntactics (structure/grammar), semantics (meaning), and pragmatics (context). Graphophonics refers to orthography, phonology, and phonics while syntax includes the grammatical structures in text. Semantics, which is closely integrated with pragmatics, incorporates what the reader comprehends in a given literacy event as well as her/his social and personal meaning (Goodman, 1994; Goodman & Marek, 1996). In their groundbreaking work on reading miscues, Goodman, Watson, and Burke (1987) refer to semantics as the system of meaning in language, which includes the reader’s own personal experiences and how language is used to create meaning for that individual. The pragmatic system refers to the context or situation in which the reader uses language. Proficient use of the language cues involves their dynamic and varied application across literacy experiences. The ultimate goal of strategy use is for students to be aware of and use all cueing systems to make meaning of text (Maxim & Five, 1997).

Because the goals of various reading experiences differ, and because readers bring a depth of experience to each encounter, a wide array of strategies should be taught and used. For example, strategies appropriate for literacy instruction include predicting, visualizing, analyzing, summarizing, synthesizing, monitoring, and activating (Dowhower, 1999; Five & Dionisio, 1998). Self-monitoring and self-correction are excellent indicators of students’ inner control in oral reading, as students use their own resources to solve problems with text (Askew & Fountas, 1998). These
Critical metacognitive strategies should be an integral part of the core curriculum within any early literacy classroom.

**Strategic Literacy Instruction**

Today’s early literacy teachers are cognizant of the importance of providing effective reading instruction through their core curriculum. Taylor (2008) suggests that instruction in the use of strategies is an important part of those core practices, where the goal “is to teach students one or more strategies that they will ultimately use unprompted when reading independently” (p. 11). Instruction in strategy use can effectively be integrated into guided reading lessons as well as through modeled writing, read alouds, independent reading, and spelling (Baumann & Ivey, 1997). Research suggests that understanding and using strategies may be most beneficial during the initial acquisition of new skills and in reading experiences when unexpected difficulties are encountered (Paris et al., 1994). Explicit instruction in the use of skills and strategies helps children understand what they are doing and why it is important (Afflerbach et al., 2008), and provides young learners with a model for effectively applying a repertoire of strategies in a variety of situations.

It is important to develop strategies while actively engaging students in meaningful reading and writing experiences (Maxim & Five, 1997). It is also critical to focus instruction around whole texts, which allows students to maximize the use of contextual cues. When students are immersed in an environment rich with demonstrations that center on making sense of complete written texts, they acquire a complex and integrated set of reading strategies (Bradbury-Wolff & Bergeron, 1998). In addition to using complete and compelling texts, strategies instruction is also more effective when students are engaged in literature at a level that presents new challenges. By providing them with text that is slightly difficult, students have the opportunity to practice and refine their strategy use (McTague, 1997).

Effective strategy instruction is systematic and planned according to the needs of individual groups of children and the developmental expectations of a given grade level (Five & Dionisio, 1998). This instruction often encompasses a sequence of demonstrations that includes introducing a new strategy, modeling its use in appropriate contexts, scaffolding, sharing how strategies are used in pairs or small groups, practicing the strategy’s use independently, and teaching children how to select appropriate strategies in different contexts (Afflerbach et al., 2008; Janzen, 2003; Ross, 1999). Critical to this instruction is scaffolding, as teachers explicitly
teach strategies, engage children in multiple readings, and gradually transfer responsibility for strategy use (Clark & Graves, 2005). Although each of the instructional components is important, instruction should focus on the flexible application of strategies and not a rigid sequence of steps (Fielding & Pearson, 1994). Through a flexible approach to strategy instruction, teachers “teach children many strategies, teach them early, reteach them often, and connect assessment with reteaching” (Afflerbach et al., 2008, p. 371).

Modeling is particularly critical in strategies instruction, as it provides explicit, student-teacher dialogue and helps clarify invisible mental processes for young readers. Modeling also provides repeated opportunities for the teacher and students to explicitly explore the purpose of the task at hand as well as to suggest available options, both of which are necessary for children to read strategically (Paris et al., 1994). Bohn, Roehrig, and Pressley (2004) note that modeling is one of the distinctive hallmarks of effective primary teachers.

**Strategies and Assessment**

By carefully observing students’ reading behaviors, teachers can infer the types of cues and strategies children use (Schwartz, 1997) and this information, in turn, can direct instructional decisions. Assessment tools that include careful observation and anecdotal notes can guide teachers to adjust instruction and make accommodations according to the strengths that students are exhibiting (McTague, 1997). Student-teacher reading conferences also provide an effective venue for strategies instruction as they allow the teacher an opportunity to assess and document a child’s processes when encountering new text, as well as provide time for the child to independently identify and practice strategies. Conferences also enable teachers to tailor instruction to meet individual students’ needs by differentiating instruction developmentally (Dahl, Scharer, Lawson, & Grogan, 1999).

Running records are another effective way for assessing children’s strategy use as teachers listen to individual students read a complete text while recording their miscues (e.g., McTague, 1997). Running records can provide teachers with evidence that a child is monitoring or checking his/her reading strategies, searching for sources of information, and interacting meaningfully with the text (Askew & Fountas, 1998). Including question prompts that assess the child’s comprehension of the passage read can be a critical component of the running record as this assists in identifying those learners who can effectively decode text but who do not
understand what is read. The miscues and comprehension responses can then be jointly analyzed to determine which cueing systems and strategies the student uses or neglects. This procedure provides the teacher with a record of the student’s internal processing and helps them select text at an appropriate level for the child, analyze how individuals are sorting and relating sources of information, and assess a student’s phrasing and fluency.

**Strategic Instruction: Melody’s Classroom**

In Melody’s first-grade classroom, literacy instruction focuses on effective uses of varied reading strategies. Her goal is to increase students’ awareness of their reading miscues, foster their ability to self-correct, and enable them to independently construct meaning from texts (Bradbury-Wolff & Bergeron, 1998). This first-grade classroom is rich with meaningful texts and includes a focus on environmental print, class- and student-created books, and access to literature on a wide range of topics and levels. Melody’s instruction utilizes many components of the Four-Block literacy model (e.g., Cunningham, Hall, & Sigmon, 1999) as she infuses each of the four Blocks, guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, and working with words, on a daily basis.

**Small-Group Instruction**

Melody has found that an effective way to support her students’ strategy use is to provide direct instruction through flexible, ability-based literacy groups or “Strategy Circles” (Bergeron & Bradbury-Wolff, 2002). Though not used as the only delivery method for guided reading, small groups provide her with the opportunity to closely match student needs with appropriately leveled materials. Melody uses results from running records, administered monthly during students’ self-selected reading block, in two ways — 1), to carefully monitor and assess students’ growth and 2), to decide their placement within literacy groups. Eilers and Pinkley (2006) suggest that small group interaction may benefit students’ use of reading comprehension strategies, and provide a forum for rich discussion, opportunities for scaffolding, and assessment of students’ understandings and difficulties. In a study of struggling readers, Johnson-Glenberg (2000) found that small-group instruction in metacognitive reading strategies significantly improved performances in key measures associated with decoding, comprehension, and cognitive processing.
Small group instruction is encouraged in many different instructional designs. For example, in many classrooms today, instruction is being modeled using a Response to Intervention (RtI) framework, which includes continuous progress monitoring of students’ learning which is critical to insure that appropriate instruction and interventions are being implemented (Lipson & Wixson, 2008). This framework often incorporates tiered instruction to supplement the classroom’s core curriculum for those students who need specific interventions to better progress toward established benchmarks. Vaughn and Denton (2008) suggest that small-group instruction is important as part of the interventions implemented in an RtI framework, where students are given scaffolded support, assessment is used to monitor growth, and both instruction and texts are based on individual needs.

**Strategy Circles**

As noted previously, Melody uses small-group instruction or Strategy Circles as a primary venue for supporting students’ independent strategy use. At the beginning of the school year, she focuses on the strategies of tracking text to build one-to-one word correspondence, using picture clues, finding chunks in words, and stretching words (e.g., start at the first letter and slide to the end). Melody also guides students to make predictions about the story by discussing the title and cover, as well as picture walks. As the year progresses, and particularly with students already proficient in reading, Melody incorporates more sophisticated strategies that include self-correcting, thinking aloud about the context of the story, and rereading for both fluency and self-monitoring. She selected these focus strategies through careful observation of her students’ reading behaviors over time and continues to record and refine her strategy focus in order to provide the optimum instructional support for her young readers.

During small group instruction, Melody takes careful notes regarding the strategies that are introduced, modeled, and spontaneously used by the students. These notations provide her with valuable information regarding the breadth of strategies used by the students, whether new strategies are becoming automatic, and where her subsequent instruction should focus. It also provides her with ongoing feedback regarding the appropriateness of the text level in which her students are engaged.

**Modeled Application**

Melody makes a concerted effort to model effective reading strategies throughout her literacy instruction as this not only provides reinforcement of the strategies
focused on during small group discussions, but also explicitly models how they can be applied across reading and writing contexts. She often uses her anecdotal notes from the small group sessions to decide the focus for this modeling. One of the most effective venues for this reinforcement has been during daily writing, as Melody constructs a chart story with the children. This is often experiential in nature as she shares her thinking processes. For example, she may demonstrate how she stretches out words that are difficult to spell, and model the importance of rereading her text to insure its cohesiveness.

Similarly, strategies are applied across other literacy contexts as Melody demonstrates how she uses a title and cover to make predictions before reading a story aloud or, when sharing a big book during guided instruction, she encourages students to track the text to develop print concepts. Decoding strategies, including stretching and chunking, are reinforced as students participate in word wall or word-making activities. Through the purposeful use of modeling, students are continuously exposed to a variety of contexts in which strategies can support their attempts at making meaning from text.

**Strategy Perception Interview**

In addition to anecdotal notes incorporated into small group sessions and monthly running records of student progress, we were interested in developing an instrument to directly identify students’ perceptions of their own strategy use. This instrument is similar to other informal interviews, which often center on a child’s interest in or motivation to read, but differs in its explicit focus on students’ perceptions of strategies, alignment with explicit cues, and use of actual print materials in its administration. Questions were developed around the four cueing systems so that we could ascertain if children’s perceptions of strategy use differed depending upon cues presented (e.g., focus on words/graphophonics versus texts/semantics).

It was anticipated that this tool could help us determine at what point students could articulate strategy use in a variety of contexts, which in turn would provide invaluable information for lesson preparation. In addition, Melody wanted to construct the instrument so that she could determine if students were differentiating between strategies and were discerning which were most effective for a variety of types of text. In effect, this tool would identify what proficient readers know about the cueing systems.

The instrument is structured as an informal interview to be administered verbally to individual children (see Figure 1). In each portion of the interview, students
are provided with the opportunity to manipulate authentic text materials and to
demonstrate their strategy use. For example, when asking children what they would
do when they encounter a difficult word while reading, they are provided with an
actual book so that they can model their strategy choices. The concrete nature of
this protocol is critical, particularly when working with young learners, as it brings
the interview questions into an authentic context.

**Strategy Perception Interview**

**SECTION ONE: PRAGMATICS**

[Prior to administration, select three text items in the classroom that would be familiar
to the children. It is suggested that one of these items be a trade book. Place the items
in front of the children when administering the interview.]

1. What do you do *before* you read?
2. Here are some things from our classroom that you might read. How is selecting
   [item 1] different from reading a book? Show me how they are different.
3. How is reading [item 2] different from reading a book? Show me.

**SECTION TWO: GRAPHOPHONICS**

[For the next three sections of the Interview, provide the children with access to a
familiar trade book as the questions are posed and answered.]

1. What do you do when you’re reading and get stuck on a word? Use the book to
   show me what you might do.
2. How do you know when that word is fixed?

**SECTION THREE: SYNTAX**

1. What do you do when you’re reading, and a sentence you’ve read doesn’t sound
   right? Use the book to show me what you might do.
2. How do you know when the sentence is fixed?
3. How does punctuation help you when you’re reading? Show me.

**SECTION FOUR: SEMANTICS**

1. What do you do when you’re reading and a *word* doesn’t make sense? Use the
   book to show me what you might do.
2. How do you know when the word is fixed?
3. What do you do when you’re reading and you don’t understand something in the
   *story*? Show me.
4. How do you know when it is fixed?

[Conclude the interview by asking the child, “Do you have any questions to ask
me?”]

*Figure 1.* Strategy Perception Interview (Adapted from Bergeron & Bradbury-Wolff,
2002)
The first portion of the interview focuses on the pragmatic or contextual nature of reading enactments as students are asked to articulate the differences between encounters with different types of texts (e.g., lists, charts, books). The remainder of the interview focuses on trade books, which are prominent in Melody’s instruction, and possible scenarios that students may encounter when independently reading a text. For example, students are asked to discuss what they would do if they got stuck on a word, encountered a sentence that did not sound right, or did not understand something in the story itself. For each of these scenarios, the students are invited to show the interviewer how they would apply the strategy using the book that is made available, and how they would know when that particular difficulty was fixed.

Methods and Analysis

We engaged in an inquiry of Melody’s first-grade students’ literacy practices over a period of three years, using a longitudinal case study design in order to address broad questions related to effective instruction. For this particular study, our focus was on the implementation of the Strategy Perception Interview, which was developed as part of Melody’s instruction in the use of literacy strategies. As noted by Dyson and Genishi (2005), case study research focuses on “the meaning people make of their lives in very particular contexts” (p. 9). This makes case methodologies a useful line of inquiry when exploring or explaining common experiences (Merriam, 1998), including classroom practices. The data sources and analysis used with case study methodologies includes rich descriptions of emerging themes, inductive analysis, and sorting interrelated data to increase our understanding of the practices under study (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

As the broader longitudinal study on effective literacy practices was enacted, we collected data from direct observation within the classroom, individual reflections made by Bette through journaling, informal interviews with Melody, and samples of student work. Data specific to the inquiry on the Strategy Perception Interview, which is reported on in this study, included the interview protocols and notes that Bette took during its administration.

Interview Administration

The Strategy Perception Interview is structured so that it is both interactive and open-ended to allow for children’s spontaneous responses. The Interview was
administered to Melody’s entire first-grade class during the end of the second and fourth quarters of three consecutive school years. This timeframe was selected to allow these young readers the opportunity to participate in the modeling and use of a variety of strategies before the Interview was administered and, with the final assessment being shared at the end of the year, provide an opportunity to demonstrate growth. This assessment was given to 63 children (30 girls and 33 boys) over the duration of the study. 92% of the participants were White, 6% were Black, and one of the children was Asian. These demographics reflect those of the community in which Melody teaches.

The Interview was first piloted with two of Melody’s more proficient readers as this allowed for an assessment of the tool’s wording and ease of administration. In order to avoid frustrating children who were not yet reading conventional texts independently, two readers were selected who had already demonstrated, through an initial running record, that they were proficient at the first-grade reading level. Both children answered each question prompt with ease, and were able to report on a variety of strategies used during reading. Once the pilot was completed, to provide consistency, Bette conducted the remaining interviews in a quiet corner of Melody’s classroom. This was not a problem as by the time of its administration, the students were accustomed to having Bette in the room and participating in their instruction. Consequently, the children appeared to be at ease with the interview process. When conducting the interview, Bette used materials that were familiar to the children as they were part of their daily literacy experiences. For example, in the first part of the interview, the children were asked to compare three texts, a book that Melody had recently shared aloud, a ring of words related to a recent unit of study, and a poem they had learned which was displayed in the classroom. As the interview questions were posed, Bette prompted each child once for additional responses. The term “strategies” was not used during the interviews in order to avoid having the children simply recite a list of strategies they were learning as part of their guided reading or strategy circle instruction. Additionally, it was decided not to use either audio or video recording so that the children would not be unnecessarily distracted. Instead, Bette recorded the children’s responses in writing as the interviews were conducted.

Data analysis was initially conducted as each set of interviews was completed, and then comparisons were made between administrations (e.g., comparing students at the beginning and ending of the school year, and comparing students’ responses across each of the three years of the study). Student responses were compared by
individual child, level of reading proficiency, and year of administration. Reading proficiency was determined by running records, which Melody administers to all of her students monthly. In order to determine trends within the data, both researchers reviewed Bette’s notes to generate emerging themes. Consistent with constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), these broad themes were also confirmed through a collaborative analysis of secondary data sources, including informal interviews, classroom observations, and students’ work.

The administration and analysis of the Strategy Perception Interview found that this instrument was useful in identifying young learners’ perceptions regarding the strategies that they believed they used when reading independently. As will be discussed, it was also evident through some of the children’s responses that there was at times an interplay between what children self-reported as strategies used during reading and those enacted while independently writing. This fluidity between reading and writing was surprising, and suggests that these young readers possessed an unanticipated level of sophistication in how they approached literacy as the combined practice of reading and writing. In addition, the concrete nature of the instrument’s protocol provided students with the opportunity to manipulate the texts with which they were engaged, enabling them to model their practices in a non-threatening context that mirrored their Strategies Circle instruction. It is also anticipated that the alignment between this instrument and their classroom-based literacy practices enhanced the level of responses from these young readers.

Results and Future Directions

The Strategy Perception Interview grew out of our interest in investigating young children’s self-reporting of strategies used in independent reading contexts and centers on four interrelated cueing systems: graphophonics, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. The following study questions were considered when analyzing children’s responses: 1) What are young children’s perceptions of their own strategy use during reading? and 2) What differences, if any, exist in strategy perceptions between proficient and less proficient readers? Our results, based on these guiding research questions, are provided below. As these questions are considered, we hope to generate instructional implications for early literacy teachers to consider within their own classrooms.
Question 1: Overall Perceptions

When combining the responses from all the children across the duration of the study, it was found that rereading, decoding, and seeking assistance were the most common strategies reported. The decoding category includes such word-level strategies as sliding to the end of the word, chunking word parts, and stretching out individual phonemes, all of which were modeled by Melody. The three common categories were consistent across all years of the study as well as across different levels of readers.

Cueing System Differences

Although decoding, rereading, and seeking assistance were consistently the most common responses across all groups, we did note differences in the dominance of these responses when comparing them with the cueing systems. For example, when asked what they would do when stuck on a word (graphophonics), the children most commonly indicated that they would decode or sound out that word. When encountering difficulty with a sentence (syntax), children indicated that they would most often reread. And, when having difficulty understanding the meaning of a story (semantics), children indicated that they would seek outside assistance. The differentiation in their responses across cueing systems indicated to us a level of sophistication in strategy use that we did not anticipate. Melody capitalized on this differentiation throughout her instruction, modeling how different strategies are most useful in various situations. Strategies that include stretching and chunking, for example, are more appropriate when trying to figure out an unknown word than comprehending whole texts. Because of the predominance of children’s responses indicating that they would “ask someone for help” when they had difficulty understanding a story, we also realized that we needed to focus more on strategies appropriate for text-level meaning, such as predicting and thinking aloud, in order to promote children’s strategic independence.

Response Sophistication

While the three primary response categories (i.e., decoding, rereading, and seeking assistance) remained consistent over time and across groups, when comparing individual children’s responses over the school year we noticed that the interplay between strategies became more sophisticated. For example, during her initial Interview, Becca, a proficient reader, responded with the following:

Bette: What do you do when you’re reading and get stuck on a word?
Becca: I look at the picture.

Bette: What else might you do when you’re stuck on a word?

Becca: I try to sound it out.

At the end of the year, Becca’s response to the same question prompt became much more sophisticated:

Becca: I sound it out. Then I go back and read to make sure it makes sense. Sometimes I try to find the smaller words.

Bette: What else might you do when you’re stuck on a word?

Becca: Sometimes I reread.

Regardless of reading level, each student appeared to become more sophisticated in his/her responses as the year progressed. This growth occurred as Melody continuously modeled a greater variety of strategies in her guided and grouped instruction, and as children were encouraged to practice these new strategies in their independent reading.

Pragmatics

One of the areas of the Interview that provided the most intriguing responses was the first section, which asked questions regarding pragmatics. To tap these perceptions, children were asked to compare how reading a book was different from reading a ring of individual vocabulary words and a class chart of a poem. Most children, and especially those in the first year of the study, responded by describing specific physical characteristics of the items and concepts of print: books have sentences, periods, and capitals; books have pages; the list has a ring; you can hold the list in one hand.

During subsequent years of the study, we made a concerted effort to focus on how readers approach different reading contexts. For example, Melody would model and explain how preparing to read a book would be different from previewing a poem. Although children did still focus on physical elements of the items they were comparing, by the end of the second year of the study the children’s responses were markedly more sophisticated and revealed an emerging understanding of how the use of text differs, as the following responses indicate:

- A list is just words telling about a story; you have to imagine the story. A book tells you more about it.
• A book makes sense. A list is just words.
• A book tells you stuff is happening, it tells you stories or tales. A list will help you read the book.
• A chart shows you how to read.

Gender Differences

One of the most unanticipated results found was the difference between girls’ and boys’ responses to seek assistance when stuck on a word or meaning of the story. Overwhelmingly, girls were much more likely to report that they would ask someone for help as compared to their male classmates. During the first year of the study, all of the girls indicated that they would seek outside assistance if stuck on a word or story meaning, as compared with 79 percent of the boys. Despite our attempt to focus more specifically on girls in the second year of the study, and to foster their independence in strategy use, 10 of the 12 girls (83%) studied that year still responded that they would seek outside assistance as compared with 60% of the boys. During the second year of the study, in both the fall and spring Interviews, the girls made 74% of all the total responses indicating that outside assistance would be sought.

Question 2: Comparisons Between Learners

One of the original intents of the study was to discover what differences, if any, were observed between those students who were identified as less and most proficient in reading as they described their independent strategy use. In order to make these comparisons, Melody divided her class list into three groups: less proficient, proficient, and highly proficient readers. These groupings were based on children’s performances on running records and the corresponding levels of text they could read instructionally. Proficient readers, therefore, were those who were reading at a level appropriate to a typical first grader at that given point in the school year. When comparing the most common responses between the three groups, no differences were found as each group reported that decoding, rereading, and seeking outside assistance were the most common strategies used independently. Some interesting comparisons did emerge, however, in terms of internal versus external locus of control and in the complexity of individual student’s responses.
Internal/External Loci

Although it did not occur with regularity, one interesting observation in this study was the focus of some less proficient readers on external factors that they felt contributed to their reading difficulties. Examples of external loci were observed throughout each year of the study. For example, when asked what he did when he got stuck on a word when reading, Antonio noted that he would “just erase the word and correct it.” When asked what happens when a sentence did not sound right, Jarob stated that “the author did something wrong.” Similarly, when encountering difficulty understanding a story, Brienna suggested that she would “self-correct two times and if it doesn’t make sense, I’ll tell the author.” Although occurring infrequently, these and similar responses by less proficient readers indicated to us that we needed to concentrate on independent strategy use during Strategy Circle instruction to enable these emerging readers to focus on what they could do themselves to affect their success in reading.

Response Complexity

When we began this study, we assumed that more proficient readers would have at their disposal a larger array of strategies upon which to draw when reading independently. We had anticipated, for example, that we would find that the more proficient readers would rely on more different types of strategies or that less proficient readers would respond with fewer strategy examples. However, with the exception of the highly proficient readers, who indicated with much less frequency that they would seek assistance when having difficulty reading, no consistent patterns were found across the three groups of children interviewed. What we did discover, however, was that the complexity within individual’s responses differed. For example, compare the responses from Annie, a less proficient reader, and Sarrah, a highly proficient reader, when asked what they would do when reading and they got stuck on a word. Annie’s responses:

Annie: I would reread.

Bette: What else might you do if you got stuck on a word?

Annie: Ask the teacher.

Sarrah’s responses:

Sarrah: For example, the word “basement.” [points to a page in the book] I would start from the beginning of the word. Then I would
see if there were any chunks, like “base” and “ment.” I might skip and go to the end. Or think what the word was.

Bette: What else might you do if you got stuck on a word?

Sarrah: I might go to the end of the sentence and reread.

While we did not discover any consistent patterns when comparing groups of learners, the responses of individuals did indicate that, in some cases, the most proficient readers were at times more descriptive in the interplay of strategies to solve a problem. These readers did not necessarily have a larger arsenal of strategies from which to draw, but were able to use strategies to a higher degree of sophistication as compared with their peers who were still struggling with the processes of reading. Janzen (2003) suggests that proficient readers use a variety of strategies, while coordinating strategy use depending upon the task, reader’s knowledge, and type of text. This flexibility in strategy use differentiates these readers from their less proficient peers.

Discussion

The Strategy Perception Interview was designed to identify children’s awareness of strategies while reading independently. Information gained from the Interview is intended to augment other classroom assessment practices, such as running records, and to assist the teacher by providing a more complete understanding of those strategies that should be focused on in instructional contexts. Throughout this study, we were able to use children’s responses from the Interview to guide our instructional decisions and to make better connections between their learning and the application of strategies. Our findings include the following suggestions for other teachers who are implementing strategy instruction into the classroom:

- Be alert to unintentional gender biases. We were very surprised to find that, overwhelmingly, the girls in Melody’s classroom expressed less confidence in finding independent ways to solve difficulties when reading, and instead responded with much more frequency that they would ask for help if stuck on a word or on story meaning. We often wondered how we might have unconsciously been fostering the girls’ dependency, and how to better support them in becoming more independent in their problem solving. Melody continued to model a variety of strategies, think aloud about their
application, and focus specifically on her interactions with the girls in her class to insure that gender biases—though quite unintentional—were not being enacted.

- **Model various strategies for different situations.** Melody’s young readers seemed intuitively adept at selecting different strategies for various reading difficulties or issues with cueing systems. For example, the strategies they reported for assisting them when stuck on a word (graphophonics) differed from those when struggling with a story’s meaning (semantics). To capitalize on this understanding, instruction should focus on how to approach a variety of reading contexts. What strategies are more appropriate for figuring out a tricky word or for when something doesn’t seem quite right within the story itself?

- **Focus on strategies for story comprehension.** Across our study, we consistently found that students were most likely to respond that they would “seek assistance” when they encountered difficulty understanding a story. This observation led us to more specifically focus on text-level strategies, such as predicting, thinking aloud, and using picture clues, to enable these young readers to become independent in all aspects of the reading process.

- **Demonstrate the interplay of strategies.** Although initial instruction in strategy use should focus on one strategy at a time, as children’s repertoire of strategies expands it is beneficial to model how a number of strategies can be used in concert to figure out difficult text. These interplays need to be modeled and practiced with children, as the teacher thinks aloud about the processes that are being used.

- **Make connections to writing.** With minimal modifications, the Strategy Perception Interview can easily be adapted for use in the writing curriculum. We became acutely aware of the importance of the potential for reading/writing connections through the astute responses of some of Melody’s young students. For example, when asked what he would do when a word doesn’t make sense, Dillon remarked that, if he was creating the story, he would “write a different word.” Similarly, Staci noted that, when authoring texts in class, she would “cross it out and put in a new word.” As Melody thought aloud while writing her daily
chart stories, she capitalized on these connections by sharing those strategies she was using to spell difficult words or to insure that her text was meaningful.

Limitations

The Strategy Perception Interview was used as one of many tools to determine these young children’s independent use of strategies. When using our observations from these Interviews to suggest instructional implications, however, we are also aware of the limitations of this study. For example, this study focused on a limited sample of children. This study would be augmented by additional Interview responses across a variety of classrooms in diverse learning communities. The text prompts used in the Interviews might have also been limiting. For example, a book, list of words, and poem chart were used throughout the study. It is possible that an individual child may have had different responses to the Interview if a different book, or other environmental print sources more familiar to that child, were used instead. We also recognize that there is a difference between self-reported strategy use and children’s actual application of these strategies when reading unaided. It is important that children’s responses on the Interview be compared with other measures, such as observation, anecdotal notes, and individual conferences, to ascertain a more accurate picture of children’s strategy use and possible implications for classroom instruction.

Concluding Thoughts

The Strategy Perception Interview is one tool of many that has provided us with deeper insight into emerging readers’ independent strategy use. The ultimate goal is that when given an array of strategies from which to draw upon, young children have and use the tools they need to approach difficult reading tasks independently. We have found that, with independence, young readers emerge from the literacy encounter with renewed confidence and enthusiasm to “read it again!”

We also recognize that the Interview cannot be used alone, but needs to be incorporated as part of a total assessment system that teachers use to monitor each child’s individual and unique abilities over time. One model for instruction, or one mode of assessment, can do little to promote an individual child’s unique development. For example, while paper and pencil tests yield important information, alone they are not enough to provide an accurate picture of growth. Likewise, the
Interview without subsequent observations and conferences will be very limited in what it reveals about the individual learner.

As we have continued to refine our focus of instruction on strategy use, we have also become more aware of the critical nature of both modeling and scaffolding within effective literacy instruction. Through modeling, the teacher has the opportunity to demonstrate a variety of ways to approach difficult text in an environment that invites the learner to ask questions, practice, and experiment with new combinations. And, through the impact of scaffolding, we have become more acutely aware of the critical nature of working with each child at that learner’s point of difficulty. Strategies will not be practiced independently when a child encounters text that is too difficult or too easy. As young Patti might comment, for the story to be fixed, the “staples” need to be “just right.” That includes not only finding what strategies each individual child can most successfully use, but also the right level of text in which each young learner can become fully engaged.

References


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Learning to Teach: The Influence of a University-School Partnership Project on Pre-Service Elementary Teachers’ Efficacy for Literacy Instruction

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Abstract

Bandura’s (1986) theory of self-efficacy suggests that efficacy may be most malleable early in learning; therefore, some of the most powerful influences on the development of teachers’ sense of efficacy may be the experience of teaching during field placements and student teaching. Unfortunately, pre-service teachers may not be exposed to good role models for teaching during field placements. This article describes a qualitative study of the influence of vicarious experiences modeled by a teacher educator and master teachers on the development of pre-service teachers’ sense of efficacy for literacy instruction. Results indicate that the vicarious experiences positively influenced pre-service teachers’ efficacy for effective literacy instruction that was maintained through student teaching.

The role of the teacher is critical in ensuring that children are successful readers. But for some children, reading acquisition will be easy while others will find it difficult. Either way, all children have a right to well-prepared teachers who provide reading instruction that meets their individual needs (International Reading Association, 2000).

According to a synthesis of research on teacher preparation for reading instruction, newly graduated classroom teachers entering the field should have the following content knowledge: conceptual understandings about the foundations of language development; proficiency with formal and informal assessment tools to
determine readers’ reading strengths and weaknesses; and expertise with instructional strategies and materials for readers of all backgrounds and abilities (International Reading Association, 2007). The report indicates that teacher preparation programs that provide this content knowledge will produce teachers who are better prepared to teach reading well. However, a college degree and content knowledge does not necessarily equate to a highly effective literacy teacher as having the necessary knowledge and skills to perform a task does not ensure that the task will be performed successfully (Bandura, 1986). What is often overlooked is the interaction between teachers’ skills and knowledge and their beliefs. A teachers’ sense of efficacy may determine how much motivation, effort, and persistence they put into this process.

Bandura’s (1986) theory of self-efficacy suggests that efficacy may be most malleable early in learning; therefore, some of the most powerful influences on the development of teachers’ sense of efficacy for literacy instruction may be the experience of teaching during pre-service field placements and student teaching. Unfortunately, pre-service teachers are often exposed to poor role models for teaching literacy during field placements (Britzman, 2003; Donovan, 1999; Maloch, Fine, & Flint, 2003; Moore, 2003). Consequently, knowing that self-efficacy beliefs are so central to intentional action, the early formation of positive self-efficacy cannot be left to chance.

Vicarious experiences in the form of observations and cognitive modeling by teacher educators and master teachers can positively influence the self-efficacy of pre-service teachers (Henson, 2001; Labone, 2004). However, there is little research linking the process of learning to teach reading with a pre-service teacher’s efficacy beliefs. This article describes a study of the influence of vicarious experiences on the development of pre-service teachers’ sense of efficacy for literacy instruction.

Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy

Research has found efficacy to have powerful effects on teacher behaviors. Efficacious teachers are resourceful, cause-and-effect thinkers who persist when things do not go smoothly and persevere in the face of setbacks (Bandura, 1993; Guskey, 1988). They more effectively plan and organize for instruction and implement innovation to meet the needs of their students (Allinder, 1994; Guskey, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988). Efficacious teachers are also optimistic, confident, and enthusiastic about teaching and are committed to stay in the profession (Allinder, 1994; Coladarci, 1992; Evans & Tribble, 1986; Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982; Guskey, 1984; Hall, Burley, Villeme, & Brockmeier, 1992). Teachers with a higher sense of efficacy
also impact student learning by using more positive classroom management strategies (Emmer, 1990), by working longer with students who are struggling (Gibson & Dembo, 1984), by being less critical of students when they make errors (Ashton & Webb, 1986), and are less likely to refer a struggling student to special education (Meijer & Foster, 1988; Podell & Soodak, 1993). Teachers’ sense of efficacy has also been related to important student outcomes such as student achievement (Armor, Conroy-Oseguera, Cox, King, McDonell, Pascal, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Moore & Esselman, 1992; Ross, 1992), student motivation (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989), and students’ own sense of efficacy (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988).

Given the obvious importance of teachers’ sense of efficacy for optimal motivation in teaching, it makes sense that the formation of positive self-efficacy beliefs would be critical during teacher preparation and student teaching experiences. However, teacher efficacy is context and subject-matter specific. Research has shown that beginning teachers with a high sense of efficacy, as measured by a general teaching efficacy scale, rated the quality of their preparation higher than those who were less efficacious (Burley, Hall, Villeme, & Brockmeier, 1991; Hall, et al., 1992). But, research on beginning teachers with a high sense of efficacy for literacy, as measured by a scale specific to teaching literacy, did not rate the quality of their preparation as significant (Tschananan-Moran & Johnson, n.d.). Unfortunately, pre-service teachers in elementary education are exposed to varying contexts and teaching practices in practicum or field placements the quality of which teacher educators may or may not be aware. It is of utmost importance to understand the mediating role teacher educators and significant others (i.e. mentor or supervising teachers) can play to promote teacher efficacy within specific content areas.

The Development of Efficacy

According to Bandura (1997), the major influences on efficacy beliefs are the attributional analysis, or the different ways in which people explain and interpret the four sources of information about efficacy — mastery experience, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal — within a specific context. The most powerful source of efficacy information comes from mastery experiences or hands-on teaching opportunities in classrooms with students. Additionally, a teacher’s biases contribute to self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Efficacy is boosted if a successful teaching performance is attributed to internal or controllable causes such as ability or effort, whereas efficacy may be weakened if success is attributed
to luck or the intervention of others (Bandura, 1993; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

Vicarious experiences are those in which the target activity such as a particular instructional strategy is modeled by someone else. The impact of the model on the observer’s efficacy depends on the degree to which the observer identifies with the model (Bandura, 1977). For example, the impact will be stronger the more closely the observer identifies with the model. Social persuasion may entail a pep talk or specific performance feedback from a supervisor or a colleague, or it may involve the general chatter in the teachers’ lounge or in the media about the ability of teachers to influence students. Ultimately, the potency of persuasion depends on the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of the persuader (Bandura, 1986). According to Tschannen-Moran, et al. (1998), “a teacher’s sense of efficacy is determined by his or her self-perception of personal teaching competence in light of the assumed requirements of an anticipated teaching task” (p. 231) (see Figure 1). The standards the teacher holds for what constitutes good teaching will influence how these two factors are weighed.

![Figure 1. Teacher Sense of Efficacy Model (Tschannen-Moran, et al., 1998)]
Vicarious Experiences and Cognitive Modeling

Tschannen-Moran’s, et al., (1998) integrated model (Figure 1) holds much promise for the preparation of teachers in that it highlights the situational and developmental nature of the teaching task analysis which is more salient in shaping efficacy beliefs when teachers lack experience or when tasks are new. Vicarious experiences in the form of observation and cognitive modeling may be an effective way for teacher educators to influence both the situational and developmental nature of the teaching task in a particular content area. Gorrell and Capron (1990) describe cognitive modeling as a type of “think aloud” in which learners are exposed to the teachers’ way of thinking and frame of reference. Thus, students may adopt the teacher’s reasoning strategies more readily. They found that cognitive modeling with pre-service teachers enrolled in an educational psychology course increased their self-efficacy beliefs significantly more than when exposed to direct instruction (Gorrell & Capron, 1990). Yet, little research exists on the influence of cognitive modeling on the preparation of pre-service teachers, especially within particular methods courses such as literacy.

The challenge to teacher educators is to create different conditions for pre-service teachers’ thinking and learning by providing contexts that support an ongoing dialogue between cognitive processing of new sources of efficacy such as classroom teaching experiences (mastery experiences); observations, modeling, and simulations (vicarious experiences); university lectures, coursework, and feedback (verbal persuasion); and the excitement, anxiety, or fear (physiological arousal) associated with specific experiences. Cognitive modeling may also be an effective conduit for transmitting new knowledge and for mediating the influence of other sources of knowledge. The context in which this dialogue takes place is critical. Evidence suggests that context variables such as the level of collaboration and support have been linked to higher efficacy among teachers, especially novice teachers (Chester & Beaudin, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1989; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). However, most teacher efficacy research has not adequately considered context.

Contexts that Support the Development of Efficacy in Teacher Preparation

Educators of pre-service teachers acknowledge that teaching is a decision-making process involving systematic observation, in-depth analysis, hypothesis testing, and self-evaluation (Lyons, Pinnell, & DeFord, 1993). Through collaborative conversation, teachers become active in the knowledge-building process. In a study
on literacy professionals’ perspectives on current trends in literacy teaching and learning, respondents (K-12 teachers, reading specialists, administrators, library-media specialists, and teacher educators in the U.S.) indicated that they believe teacher preparation should be a collaborative enterprise among the student teacher, mentor teacher, and university supervisor (Commeyras & DeGroff, 1998). The overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that participation in this experience positively influenced their teaching practices.

A study conducted by The International Reading Association (IRA) also found a strong sense of efficacy to be a key theme among first-year teachers who “exemplified responsive and mindful teaching” (Maloch, Fine, & Flint, 2003, p. 349). The study followed 101 novice teachers through their first year of teaching to explore differences in understandings, beliefs, and decision making. These beginning teachers graduated from three types of four-year, undergraduate programs of excellence in reading teacher preparation: reading specialist programs, reading embedded programs, and general education programs. Findings from the study indicated that teachers who graduated from reading specialist and reading embedded programs were more willing to “teach against the grain” in order to meet students’ literacy needs and achieve their own vision of literacy development and instruction than the majority of other beginning teachers in the study (Maloch, et al., 2003, p. 451). It appeared that first-year teachers’ efficacy for decision making was increased in programs that required more coursework and more field experiences in reading than first-year teachers who did not graduate from such programs. They also found that there was a significant effort on the part of the teacher educators in the reading specialization and reading embedded programs to coordinate and carefully supervise the varied apprenticeship opportunities provided for the students in their programs. They concluded that it was the “carefully supervised apprenticeship experiences whereby students and ‘master teachers’ engage in reflective dialogue” that made the difference, not necessarily the number of hours of coursework or field experiences (Maloch, et al., 2003, p. 451).

However, only a small number of the teacher preparation institutions have the type of partnerships with schools that afford such careful placement and supervision by teacher educators. In an analysis of empirical studies examining the impact of teacher characteristics on teacher effectiveness, Rice (2003) found that “field experiences tend to be disconnected from the other components of teacher education programs, leaving teachers poorly equipped to apply their knowledge from classroom coursework to teaching in the field” (p. 38). The pervasive practice
of random placement of pre-service teachers in field placements leaves to chance the collaborative enterprise that is so critical for pre-service education. Pre-service teachers may not observe best practices in literacy instruction learned in their college coursework and they therefore cannot share a common experience when observing a classroom teacher. This may prohibit the process of ongoing dialogue, reflective inquiry, and the exchange of ideas that allows for the development of efficacy beliefs. Research suggests that many times what pre-service teachers have learned in the college classroom takes a back seat to what they perceive as reality in their field placement unless their university coursework makes a direct attempt to address this disconnect (Britzman, 2003; Duffy & Atkinson, 2001; Grisham, 2000; Hamman, Button, Olivarez, Lesley, Chan, Griffity, & Woods, 2006; Labbo & Reinking, 2000; Lesley, et al, 2004; Moore, 2003; Weinstein, 1988).

In order to facilitate efficacious learning, faculty members in programs with a limited number of reading courses and field practica must work within the limited resources and constraints imposed by local schools, universities, and states. They must also find powerful ways to integrate course work and field experiences that allow pre-service teachers to build cognitive guides for efficient analytical thinking under varying circumstances, promote a sense of community, and prepare them for instructional decision making and reflective practice.

Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; 1997) proposes that personal factors such as cognitive processes and behavior interact with the environment to influence each other through a process of reciprocal determinism. The purpose of this article is to describe a study of an innovative project that employed the knowledge-of-practice approach with pre-service teachers. How pre-service teachers process and internalize vicarious experiences and what characteristics of models best facilitate the development of self-efficacy beliefs are important issues that this study begins to address.

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample for this study was 25 pre-service teachers in two sections of the same reading methods course in Fall 2006. Fifteen of the pre-service teachers were graduate students in an initial certification program and 10 were undergraduate students. Twenty-two (88%) were female, and all but four (84%) were in their early twenties. All 25 pre-service teachers had completed the first semester of required courses, which included educational psychology, social foundations, and research
methods. The first semester also included a 10-hour field practicum in which the pre-service teachers were first introduced to their field placement (where they remain throughout their coursework and student teaching) and were only required to observe and document the classroom environment, students, and cooperating teacher. Consequently, upon entering the reading methods course the second semester, the pre-service teachers had no mastery experiences and minimal vicarious experiences.

Description of Reading Methods Course and Observations Made During Practicum

The study took place at a university in the southeast United States with 25 students enrolled in the only required four-credit hour reading methods course that was part of a National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) approved program designed to prepare elementary teachers for PreK-6. All students in this program must have dual concentrations, one in another discipline and one in elementary education. The course emphasized a constructivist theoretical orientation and focused on an apprenticeship approach to assisting children with achieving reading independence highlighting the role of the adult in supporting children’s developing control of literacy knowledge. According to Dorn, French, & Jones (1998), “In this model, the teacher provides clear demonstrations, engages children appropriately, monitors their level of understanding, makes necessary accommodations to ensure they are successful, and withdraws support as they exhibit greater control” (p. 15). The instructional framework presented to perspective teachers was grounded in best practices that included reading aloud, shared, guided, and independent reading, comprehension, language and word study, assisted and independent writing, genre study, reading and writing workshop, and content literacy (Dorn, et al., 1998; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). In this context, the course instructor provided verbal and vicarious experiences by modeling literacy strategies and providing hands-on experiences and opportunities for discussion and reflection.

The course was accompanied by a one-credit hour practicum of 20 field hours. As stated previously, students had been placed in practicum settings in their first semester to observe instruction and remained in that classroom throughout the program and student teaching. For most of the pre-service teachers, the cooperating teacher was the only teacher they observed throughout their undergraduate experience. The 25 pre-service teachers in this study were randomly placed in eight elementary schools within four school districts.
Although the opportunity to observe teaching could be a source of self-efficacy belief development, documentation of instruction observed by the pre-service teachers indicated that much of the literacy instruction conducted in these classrooms was not consistent with the best practices they were learning in their reading methods course. For example, over the course of the semester students were required to observe and document three literacy lessons in reading, writing, and word study/spelling. An analysis of the 75 lessons they documented (45 lessons observed in grades K-2 and 30 lessons observed in grades 3-5), indicated that they observed only whole group or ability grouping. They also observed the predominate use of basal reading series, oral round robin reading, worksheets for independent practice, teacher driven writing prompts, direct instruction, and isolated skills instruction. Class discussions throughout the semester supported the observational documentation indicating that the majority of instruction by the cooperating teachers was teacher centered and materials driven. This produced a potentially confounding effect on the development of efficacy beliefs of these pre-service teachers since the reading methods course promoted student centered instruction and positioned the teacher as decision maker.

The professor tried to provide opportunities for the pre-service teachers to gain mastery experiences in their field placements that would be consistent with their university instruction by requiring them to 1) administer authentic assessments and to use the results to inform and guide instruction through case studies; 2) videotape themselves conducting a guided reading lesson; and 3) conduct a writing activity and a read aloud activity and then reflect on those experiences with their cooperating teachers and peers. However, since most of the cooperating teachers did not adhere to a similar theory or instructional practices as the professor, the situation prohibited the process of continual, reflective inquiry and the exchange of ideas between the pre-service and cooperating teachers that would support the development of efficacy beliefs. As a result of this discrepancy, in order to create an environment in which strong efficacy beliefs could be developed, the professor needed to create a context in which conditions for the pre-service teachers’ thinking and learning could be bolstered by sharing common experiences observing classroom teachers using literacy strategies they had learned about in the reading methods course. The resulting project is described in the next sections.

**Procedures**

This study involved 25 pre-service teachers, one university professor, and three elementary teachers participating in Teacher Swaps and Teacher Visits, all
designed to provide the necessary elements for developing strong efficacy beliefs about literacy instruction.

**Teacher Swap**

The Teacher Swap involved the professor trading teaching roles with each of three elementary teachers at a local public elementary school over the course of the semester. This was done to allow the teachers classroom coverage so they would be free to teach the professor’s literacy course. The three teachers (all names are pseudonyms) who participated in the teacher swap varied in ages and teaching experience and all taught at Maple Ridge Elementary School. Miss Voss was in her late 20s and had been teaching third grade for six years. Mrs. Clough was in her mid 50s, taught fifth grade, and had taught various elementary grades for 20 years. Mrs. Hayes was in her mid 50s, taught first grade, and had taught various elementary grades for 13 years. They all shared a common constructivist philosophy of literacy instruction, consistent with that of the reading methods course, which is built on an apprenticeship process and is structured around a reading/writing workshop organizational framework. Most other teachers at the school held this philosophy so that the school culture seemed to also support literacy instruction.

The purpose of “swapping” classrooms was to provide the pre-service teachers an opportunity to engage in dialogue with and instruction by practicing teachers as well as a discussion of an elementary classroom model of effective literacy instruction consistent with what they were learning in the university classroom. Although the teacher swap would not provide mastery experiences, research has shown that other sources of self-efficacy such as verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, emotional arousal, and contextual factors seem to be more salient for pre-service and novice teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Therefore, credible sources such as elementary teachers who put into practice the instructional strategies taught in the university class could provide a context for building these sources of efficacy through a knowledge-of-practice approach.

Prior to the beginning of the semester, the three teachers and the professor met to plan the best way for the classroom teachers to provide cognitive modeling and collaborative dialogue with the pre-service teachers. Examples included the classroom teachers bringing videotapes showing their literacy instruction, student interactions, and the classroom environment; modeling and demonstrating instructional strategies; bringing materials such as children’s literature, students’ reading journals, and charts; and bringing handouts such as a copy of reading/writing workshop planning and conference sheets and daily schedules.
For each Teacher Swap, the professor began by observing the elementary classroom for approximately four weeks to become familiar with the classroom routine, environment, and children. When they “swapped” classrooms for a day, the professor taught the elementary students and the teachers went to the university and taught the pre-service teachers during their regularly scheduled reading methods course. On the day of each teacher swap, the teachers and the professors swapped classes with the professor teaching the elementary classes and the teachers sharing their “local knowledge” including daily routines, management practices, decision-making processes, materials, and how they help their students to meet state curriculum standards and testing requirements with the pre-service teachers. The elementary teachers provided cognitive modeling of instructional techniques and management strategies while also giving them an avenue for cognitive processing of new sources of efficacy and for mediating the influence of other sources of knowledge. The day after each Teacher Swap, the elementary teacher and professor met for a half-day to debrief their experiences and provide feedback on the project.

**Maple Ridge Elementary Teacher Visits**

The Teacher Visits involved all 25 pre-service teachers visiting Maple Ridge Elementary School which opened in 2000 and is home to over 600 hundred students grades K through five with an additional facility for preschoolers on site. This suburban school’s student body draws from low to middle socioeconomic households with 23% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. The student make-up of the school consists of the following: 79% Caucasian, 18% African American, 1% Hispanic, and less than 1% of Asian or American Indian.

After the first Teacher Swap with Mrs. Hayes, the pre-service teachers spent one day observing literacy instruction in the first-, third-, and fifth-grade classrooms of the participating teachers. During these visits, the pre-service teachers observed different instructional strategies within a reading/writing workshop framework. Following each classroom visit, they debriefed for approximately 15 minutes with each of the classroom teachers observed. This debriefing allowed the pre-service teachers to ask questions and make comments on specific strategies used by the teacher or students. The classroom teachers also had an opportunity to expand on the instructional and managerial strategies that they used in their daily practices.

**Data Description and Collection**

For this study, the interpretivist paradigm in which researchers watch, listen, ask, record, and examine to develop a reflective understanding of a specific
context or phenomenon was used (Schwandt, 1994). The researcher wanted to see how the participants interpreted similar teacher swap experiences and identified, understood, and described commonalities and differences amongst these interpretations. Particularly, the researcher wanted to understand how the teacher swap project influenced the pre-service teachers’ perceived efficacy for decision making in literacy instruction. The development of patterns, relationships of meanings, and clusters of themes were common to many of the participants’ descriptions in interviews, reflections, and observations and strongly supported the narrative.

Interviews. At the beginning of the study, data were generated in the form of twelve interviews (see Table 1) with seven pre-service graduate and five pre-service undergraduate participants, all who volunteered for the individual interviews. To sample the pre-service teachers’ perceptions at different times within the duration of the swap, four interviews took place after each Teacher Swap. Member checking, use of participant voice, and open-ended interviewing were used. While participants answered predetermined questions during the interviews, the researchers asked follow-up questions based on their answers. After the 12 student interviews were conducted, they were immediately transcribed and organized for data analysis. Participants were provided transcripts of their interviews via e-mail and asked to reply back to the researchers either confirming or disconfirming their statements.

Table 1. Interview Questions

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<td>1</td>
<td>What, if anything, did the teacher swap help you learn/understand that other aspects of the course/practicum did not?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>What, if any, topics discussed during the teacher swap were most important to you as a future teacher?</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>What, if any, are questions you would still like to have answered by the elementary teachers in the swap?</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>What, if anything, would you change about the teacher swap project?</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Would you recommend that this project continue to be implemented in the future? Why or why not?</td>
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</table>

Reflections. In addition to the 12 interviews, other sets of data were generated from the Teacher Swap experience as in all of the reading classes, several reflective assignments were given to document the students’ experiences with the teachers and visiting the school. The students were asked to write a reflection after each Teacher
Swap for a total of 100 reflective documents all of which were included in the data analysis as a means of gauging patterns of reaction and perception about the Teacher Swap experience from all of the student participants. The more in-depth information obtained in the interviews was generated with a sample of approximately half of the swap participants due to time constraints.

**Essays.** Pre-service teachers were also asked to respond to seven additional essay questions (See Table 2) before and after student teaching. These questions allowed them to reflect on the positive or negative effects the four sources of efficacy (mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological arousal) had on their beliefs that they could effectively implement effective literacy instructional practices in their future classrooms. Responses were open-ended, allowing the pre-service teachers to expand on their thoughts and beliefs as much as they wanted.

**Table 2. Essay Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The questions below apply to class activities/observations, field placement activities/observations, and the Teacher Swap presentations/observations.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mastery Experiences:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What teaching experiences have you participated in this semester that you believe have had the most positive impact on your ability to implement effective literacy instructional practices in your future classroom to meet the needs of all students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What teaching experiences have you participated in this semester that you believe have had the most negative impact on your ability to implement effective literacy instructional practices in your future classroom to meet the needs of all students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vicarious Experiences:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What observations of teaching practices have had the most positive effect on your belief that you can effectively implement effective literacy instructional practices in your classroom to meet the needs of all students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What observations of teaching practices have had the most negative effect on your belief that you can effectively implement effective literacy instructional practices in your classroom to meet the needs of all students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verbal Persuasion:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What information/presentations have had the most positive effect on your belief that you can effectively implement effective literacy instructional practices in your classroom to meet the needs of all students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What information/presentations have had the most negative effect on your belief that you can effectively implement effective literacy instructional practices in your classroom to meet the needs of all students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physiological and Emotional States:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel about your ability to implement effective literacy instructional practices in your classroom to meet the needs of all students?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

Open and axial coding were used by the researcher and a research assistant to examine the data that emerged from the interviews. Whenever possible, interviewees’ own words were used in the code labels. This was to ensure that the code reflected the interviewees’ intended meaning as much as possible. The open codes were grouped into 29 categories and interpreted in light of the study’s overall focus on teacher efficacy to provide a rich description of the experiences of participating pre-service teachers (see Table 3).

Table 3. Emerging Axial Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of professor in class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comments on observations/learning about children as readers/writers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on college class and professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on specific aspects of reading strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers as role models/experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions about teaching children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of professor in facilitating swap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insights/realizations brought about by swap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on teachers’ presentation modes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on teachers’ style/philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to see swap teachers teach other subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection between class and swap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swap implementation in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on teachers’ class environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to continue relationship with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on classroom management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to learn more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical teaching advice/Insights for first year of teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive affirmations about the swap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing is believing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in ability to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands on experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of lack of confidence/concerns about teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences between swap school/teachers and practicum placement school/teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on implementation of teaching strategies/philosophies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swap provided opportunities to learn about different grade levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General comments about reading workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on school visit and observations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The researchers resolved any differences between their lists of axial codes by looking at each axial code and its corresponding open codes, discussing individual interpretations of the axial codes, and mutually agreeing upon the specific axial codes that would be used for the study. With the axial codes defined from analysis of the interview data, the four different reflective documents (one on each of the three elementary teachers and one of the school visit) and all of the essays that each student created were then coded holistically. After completing holistic coding, the resulting frequencies were used as another way to inform the study’s findings as they evolved and became more apparent.

Qualitative data and interpretations underwent peer debriefing with an expert in qualitative research to facilitate internal validity. After careful examination of these categories and their contents, the following thematic trends emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): teacher credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise; teacher presentation modes; practical information; and seeing is believing. Salient points from each themes and representative samples of data are outlined below.

**Results**

As stated previously, the purpose of the Teacher Swap project was to employ a knowledge-of-practice approach with pre-service teachers in an effort to influence their beliefs toward a decision making process of literacy instruction. The results of the data analysis reveal that the vicarious experiences provided through the teacher swap project positively influenced pre-service teachers’ self-efficacy for literacy instruction.

**Cognitive Processing and Internalizing Vicarious Experiences**

Even though all four sources of efficacy play roles in the development of efficacy beliefs, it is how an individual interprets the information that is critical. “Cognitive processing determines how the sources of information will be weighed and how they will influence the analysis of the teaching task and the assessment of personal teaching competence” (Tschanne-Moran, et al., 1998, p. 230). When teachers make self-efficacy judgments, they weigh their self-perceptions of personal teaching competence in light of the assumed requirements of the anticipated teaching task (Tschanne-Moran, et al., 1998).

The data collected in this study indicate that students were able to use the information they gained from the vicarious experiences in the Teacher Swap project
to begin analyzing the task of implementing effective literacy practices in their future classrooms and to assess their personal teaching competence. One student stated, “You have to teach the children slowly but surely how to do reading workshop...you are not a bad teacher if it takes two months to get into the groove of reading workshop. It’s going to be better in the long run.” Another pre-service teacher asserted, 

I feel confident about implementing effective reading strategies in my classroom as a first year teacher because I have the theoretical background I need from class, I have observed excellent models at Maple Ridge, and I have participated in three presentation/discussions on the practical, nitty-gritty aspects with these teachers. I plan to teach in a school that supports this kind of teaching.

Additionally, a student remarked, “If there are teachers in the school doing these things and the materials available, I think I could implement them. I think I might be a little slower getting going than experienced teachers. But I could do it!”

These responses are representative of positive self efficacy judgments by the pre-service teachers which clearly indicate that they were weighing their capability to implement effective literacy practices in light of the requirements of school context and resources. The bolstering of vicarious experiences in this study may have made this process more salient for these pre-service teachers. But the question remained, was this heightened sense of self-efficacy temporary, or would it endure when the pre-service teachers entered student teaching and the source of vicarious experiences provided during the teacher swap project were no longer available?

Evidence of Teacher Efficacy from Student Teaching Experiences

Upon completion of the student teaching semester, the pre-service teachers were asked to respond to seven essay questions (see Table 2). These essays provided evidence of the influence of the students’ increased efficacy on the goals, effort, and persistence during their student teaching experience. One student responded, 

I think most of the observations during my student teaching experience were really negative overall, but they didn’t affect my belief that I can implement effective practices in my classroom. In fact, it only made me more convinced that I needed to find a job at a school where I would be able to use the effective practices I had learned and observed in the Teacher Swap project.
Another student wrote, “I have seen plenty of examples of poor literacy instruction, but these do not affect my belief that I can be effective in teaching literacy.” Additionally, another student noted, “The experience really made me think about what I want next year in my own classroom—I definitely want to use reading workshop and guided reading groups. I think that these strategies would better meet the needs of all of the students.”

Increased goal setting, effort, and persistence leads to better performance. Data from the essay questions provided information on students’ performances during student teaching or plans for future teaching that were indicative of the influence the teacher swap. One student stated, “I was able to edit with each student individually, once a week, during my student teaching practicum…it helped me become comfortable assessing the needs of individual students and talk to them about those needs.” Another student indicated, “I implemented guided reading in my kindergarten classroom. It was a wonderful experience for me.” A third student wrote, “I used anecdotal records from my reading conferences to informally assess my students’ fluency, and more importantly comprehension.”

Considering that these practices did not take place in the classrooms in which they had observed prior to these pre-service teachers entering their student teaching, it is apparent that the Teacher Swap provided these students with cognitive structures to guide and motivate them in the pursuit of teacher decision making and effective literacy practices even when faced with challenging tasks and contexts through student teaching. Therefore, it is important to consider the features of the Teacher Swap project that significantly influenced the pre-service teachers self efficacy beliefs.

Characteristics of Vicarious Experiences that Facilitated the Development of Self Efficacy Beliefs

Throughout the Teacher Swap project, what the students attended to, remembered, and considered important or credible impacted the influence the experience had on their efficacy beliefs. From the data analysis, the following characteristics of the vicarious experiences provided through the Teacher Swap project are believed to have facilitated the development of these pre-service teachers’ self efficacy beliefs described above.

Credibility. One of the themes that emerged from the data was that the pre-service teachers found the elementary teachers in the teacher swap to be credible. This is important, since research has shown that the impact of the model on the
observer’s efficacy depends on the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of the model (Bandura, 1997). For example, in a reflection on Mrs. Hayes’s visit, one student stated,

She was very knowledgeable about the psychological bases for many instructional strategies that she uses. It gave her that much more credibility; not only as having just great skills with children and learning, but knowing why she does the things she does scientifically.

The degree to which the observer identifies with the model is also important. Both performance (ability) and attribute (age and gender) similarities of models contribute to the development of positive teacher efficacy beliefs. All the teachers were female, which was consistent with a majority of the pre-service teachers but, only Miss Voss was close to their age. This attribute was reflected in one student’s comment, “One of the things that stands out in my mind is Miss Voss. She looks young. She was very enthusiastic and she was a role model.” According to Bandura (1997), models that are perceived by the observer to be competent are more likely to positively influence the efficacy of the observer regardless of perceived dissimilarities in personal attributes. Therefore, as indicated by the first student’s comment, the teachers’ competence had a far greater influence on the students than personal attributes.

**Presentation modes.** The modes in which the teachers presented information also emerged as an important aspect of the vicarious experiences. The most salient mode was cognitive modeling which was done in two ways - by actually modeling a teaching strategy and while watching a video of themselves teaching. One student commented, “I think what was really beneficial was having the teachers come in and give their commentary on the videos. In real life experiences, you can’t stop and comment on the strategies that are being used in the classroom.” A second student remarked, “Observing what we are discussing in our class actually working in the classroom makes it much more realistic. We are much more likely to use methods we have had a chance to see in action.”

In complex activities, the verbalized thinking skills that guide actions are generally more informative than the modeled actions themselves (Bandura, 1997). Planning, reflecting, problem solving, and decision making are all invisible skills that guide teachers’ choices and behaviors. By making these skills visible, the practicing teachers provided the pre-service teachers with a cognitive map of complex processes. Self-efficacy for a specific teaching task gained from cognitive modeling
can also enable pre-service teachers to assess effort expenditure, resulting in forma-
tion of new, or reassessment of existing, personal efficacy beliefs (Labone, 2004).

Practical Information. By sharing local knowledge, the teachers provided stu-
dents with normative information about teaching that, like cognitive modeling, can provide some indication of task difficulty. One student commented, “It was so good to get the practical experience part from her too like how to talk to parents and how to have parent conferences. Those are things I just don’t really get in my regular classroom.” Another student stated, “With Miss Voss, it was helpful for her to explain what she does everyday and explain her process of the first day of school. Seeing the actual things that she did just brings it all to life.”

Observers also benefit from seeing models overcome their difficulties by persistent effort rather than from observing only simplistic performances by expert models (Bandura, 1997). The three teachers were very forthright with the pre-service teachers in presenting themselves as teachers who have worked very hard to get where they are in their pedagogical understanding and who are continual learners. One student reflected, “I thought it was good to hear someone who was honest about the first year, instead of easing around the issue of it being hard. She was pretty frank and it was important to hear real experiences.” Another student elaborated, “Mrs. Clough explained that there is always room for improvement and that each year she finds strategies that work much better than ones she has used in the past... The willingness to be flexible and open-minded is essential for good teaching.”

Seeing is Believing. The students observed all three teachers teaching in their respective classrooms after which they held a debriefing session. Since most students were in practicum placements where they did not observe the type of literacy instruction they were learning in their university course, this was their first opportunity to observe them in action. One student commented, “Watching the fifth-grade teacher Mrs. Clough, and seeing her class doing reading and writing made it all seem within my grasp...Her classroom was one of the first times I felt comfortable with the idea of my own classroom.” Another student summarized the experience as follows:

It’s like the difference between being in a kitchen cooking with someone who cooks and helping them peel the onions as opposed to watching a cooking show. When you watch a cooking show, they already have most of the stuff completed for you and they already have the finished product. You are not actually hands-on. They don’t tell you things like “Hey, when you’re peeling the onions, your eyes are going
to sting a lot!” You never realize that. You don’t realize when you’re cooking and you run out of flour, what are you going to do? That will happen in a classroom sometimes. Things don’t go the way you planned. You have to be able to improvise. On a cooking show, they don’t improvise. They have everything set and planned out. This is how it goes in a perfect world. But it’s not a perfect world out there. Sometimes the soufflés fall flat.

Obviously, this student understood that teacher decision making requires quick thinking. As discussed earlier, cognitive structures must be in place to guide and motivate teachers in the pursuit of decision making and effective literacy practices even when faced with challenging and shifting tasks and contexts. The teachers at Maple Ridge Elementary not only modeled effective literacy teaching in their classrooms, but also allowed students to acquire cognitive skills through the debriefing process.

The pre-service teachers also viewed the differences between the teaching methods used by the teachers at Maple Ridge Elementary School and their practicum placement as significant. One student conveyed, “My placement is in one particular setting so you only see one sort of way of teaching, whereas, with this, you get a variety of people doing different things in terms of their methods and how they approach teaching.” Another commented, “It blew my mind because it’s the complete opposite of what I am seeing in my practicum. Here again is another reason why this project works. It gives another forum for us to see teachers in action.”

Along the same line, students also benefited from the perspectives of teachers at different grade levels as their required practicum and student teaching exposed them to one grade level, even though they would be certified to teach grades K-6. A student reflected:

As someone doing his practicum in a fifth-grade classroom, I really like the chance to go and see some of the younger grades and get a sense of what happens down at that level. Especially in the first-grade class, it was very different from what I get on a weekly basis.

The Teacher Swap project provided vicarious experiences that would not have been possible through this university course instruction or the practicum placements. The above characteristics of the vicarious experiences provided by the teacher swap project assisted the pre-service teachers with determining that the teaching task is manageable and that they were capable of being successful.
Discussion

One student’s reflection stated,
Looking through my notes I noticed comments like “This really works!”
and “Their routine is amazing!” I learned so much about the kind of
teacher that I want to be from these observations that my only regret
is that another visit can’t be squeezed into this semester!

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence that a university/public
school partnership employing a knowledge-of-practice and local knowledge ap-
proach would have on the efficacy beliefs of pre-service teachers toward a decision
making process in literacy instruction. The data indicated that by observing master
teachers using best practice strategies in literacy instruction, seeing the methods in
use with children, and getting a window into the thinking and experience of these
master teachers, the pre-service teachers cultivated stronger self-efficacy beliefs for
being able to implement these methods themselves.

There are several explanations for this finding. Social cognitive theory
(Bandura, 1986; 1997) proposes that personal factors such as cognitive processes and
behavior interact with the environment to influence each other through a process of
reciprocal determinism. This project placed the students and teachers in situations
that created a different status and thus, a different relationship between everyone
involved. As a result, the level of relevancy was increased, so that even though the
project entailed only four interactions between the elementary teachers and the
students, the implications for influencing the students’ efficacy were great.

The Teacher Swap brought the pre-service teachers together in a common
experience observing, reflecting, and thinking with credible, trustworthy, and com-
petent teachers who did not judge nor evaluate them. When students are in a
nonthreatening environment and feel like they belong to a community of learners,
they become invested partners in learning (Johnson & Altland, 2004). Too often,
when pre-service teachers are in classrooms with cooperating teachers, most of what
is observed as the daily experience of teaching is forgotten and not explained and
therefore, its potential to influence pre-service teachers’ learning is lost. Exposure
to multiple and diverse models also influence the effectiveness of modeling in the
formation of efficacy beliefs. All students at this university are placed in one class-
room with one cooperating teacher at the beginning of the program and remain
with that teacher through student teaching but the pre-service teachers in this study
spent time in multiple classrooms. Research shows that observation of multiple and
diverse models as opposed to a single model performing multiple tasks are more effective in enhancing efficacy (Labone, 2004; Schunk, Hanson, & Cox, 1987).

Self-reflection has also been found to impact efficacy beliefs (Henson, 2001; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). The pre-service teachers in this study reflected on each of the four interactions with the three teachers as well as at least three lessons observed in their practicum placement. It is possible that the development of students’ efficacy beliefs was facilitated by the appropriate attribution of these experiences to accurate explanations for success and failure. More research needs to be done to investigate the processes involved in such reflective practices and the impact of these practices on the development of pre-service teacher efficacy beliefs.

The present study’s findings however, must ultimately be held tentatively. The study had a small sample size, and does not account for variables that may have influenced the results beyond participation in the Teacher Swap project. Yet, the positive efficacy beliefs for decision making for effective literacy instruction at the end of the study and after student teaching are of such magnitude that it is likely the Teacher Swap project contributed to them, at least in part. Longitudinal studies that examine the effect of the first years of teaching on efficacy must be conducted. As this study suggests along with other studies of inservice teachers, ongoing collaboration and mentorship for pre-service teachers entering the teaching force may prove to be a continued source of efficacy over time. The value of qualitative methods in this study should also not be underestimated. Tschannen-Moran, et al. (1998) state that the use of qualitative methods in efficacy research is “overwhelmingly neglected” and call for the use of “[i]nterviews and observational data [to] provide a thick, rich description of the growth of teacher efficacy” (p. 242). The qualitative nature of this study contributed to both the content and methods of inquiry into the development of teacher beliefs about decision making for effective literacy instruction.

Teacher candidates must be able to negotiate the multiple realities of what they are learning as best practice in their university courses and what they see modeled in their practicum placements. By doing this they will better construct the cognitive structures that will serve to guide and motivate them when faced with making well-informed and thoughtful decisions about literacy instruction best suited to meet their students’ individual needs. Duffy (2002) states, “Developing the strength to do this in the face of pressure to conform is a central task of teacher education” (p. 340). If schools of education and teacher educators are to increase pre-service teachers’ efficacy for reflective decision making in literacy instruction, then creating environments for efficacious learning must be a priority.
References


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**About the author:**

Dr. Denise Johnson is an associate professor of reading education at the College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, where she was named the University Professor of Teaching Excellence. She teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in reading and language arts methods, writing and children’s literature.
Students Learn to Read Like Writers: A Framework for Teachers of Writing

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Abstract

This study provides insight into the role of the elementary school writing teacher in helping students learn to “read like writers” (Smith, 1983). This case study documents how one fourth-grade teacher employed a gradual release of responsibility model as she deliberately planned activities that drew students’ attention to well-crafted writing. Findings indicate that this teacher played an important role in helping her students learn to read like writers and that through carefully crafted lessons she significantly influenced students’ knowledge of and implementation of crafting techniques.

“Good writing,” as defined by one fourth grader in this study, “feels good to your ears.” This definition, while brief, encapsulates many of the qualities of good writing yet leaves teachers wondering how to help young writers produce the kind of writing that is pleasing to the ear. Writing is a complex process that requires the divided attention of the writer, who must focus on the intended message, the conventions of print and spelling, and the crafting of the message with word choice and sentence variation. Many teachers of writing lament that they are much more comfortable teaching writing conventions than the writer’s craft, leaving the more subtle aspects of writing to chance (Fletcher & Portalupi, 1998). Unfortunately, writers cannot fully develop with instruction that focuses only on the conventions of writing; rather, instruction must also target the writer’s craft (National Commission on Writing, 2003). The craft of writing includes the incorporation of literary elements such as strong leads and powerful endings (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001), as
well as the more subtle aspects of word choice, phrasing, and voice (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996).

Quality children’s literature holds potential for serving as models for well-crafted writing and can play an important role in teaching the craft of writing (Avery, 2002; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983; Ray, 1999). Frank Smith (1983) explains that a great number of children learn to write with only a small amount of instructional time devoted to writing. Therefore, he believes “it could only be through reading that writers learn all the intangibles that they know” (p. 558). This notion of reading like a writer is the premise upon which this study is based.

While Smith (1983) does not address the role of the teacher in enabling students to read like writers, drawing upon the social constructivist theory of learning, the researcher argues that the teacher plays a critical role in the process. Acknowledging that learning is a social process and is influenced by the social context in which it occurs (Jaramillo, 1996; Palinscar, 1998), the individuals who surround the learner play a vital role in the learning process. Therefore, the primary research question that guided this study was, “What role does the teacher play in helping students learn to read like writers?”

**Reading Like a Writer**

The term “well-crafted writing” is synonymous with “good writing;” therefore, the writer must carefully craft the writing so that the reader views it as worthy of reading (Graves, 2004). Numerous individuals have attempted to define or at least identify qualities of good writing, yet the definition is still vague and subjective. Though difficult to define, most individuals agree that they know good writing when they hear it. Worsham (2001) believed that good writers appeal to the senses; evoking vivid images and scenes in the mind of the reader. Noted children’s author Mem Fox (1999) stated that good writing comes from writers who care about how their writing sounds to the reader. Writers who care, take the time to read every word, phrase, and sentence aloud over and over, “listening for the slightest hiccup in the rhythm” (Fox, 1999, p. 195). If writers are to produce good writing themselves, they must develop an ear for recognizing it (Heard, 2002). Burrows, Jackson, and Saunders (1984) found that even young writers could develop an ear for quality writing and could learn “to select patterns that give vigor and verve to their writing” (p. 7). The goal of reading like a writer then is to encourage the reader to identify
qualities of good writing and to further expand their current repertoire of crafting techniques (Portalupi, 1999). The ideas of reading like a writer and writing mentors are relatively new concepts in the school setting but not in the community of professional writers. Many published writers learned to write by studying the work of other authors (Fearn, 1989; Ray, 1999; Rylant, 1990) and by reading the works of the men and women who were doing the kind of writing they wanted to do (Anderson, 2000; Zinsser, 1994).

Just as professional writers study examples of other writing pieces in the genre they are trying to produce (Hillocks, 1986), children can learn about the craft of writing by listening to and reading quality literature (Ray, 2004). The awareness of the rhythm and cadence that is characteristic of quality writing can be learned by reading (Barrs, 2000; Titus, 1998) and “can determine how we come to think words should sound on the page” (Romano, 2004, p. 6). That awareness of how words should flow together is so strongly influenced by the texts we read that it is difficult to separate ourselves from what we have read. The texts become a part of who we are as writers. Ray (1999) reminds us that, “When we write we are not doing something that hasn’t been done before. Everything we do as writers, we have known in some fashion as readers first” (p. 18).

Building on the proclamation made by Frank Smith (1983) that individuals must read like writers in order to learn all they need to communicate effectively, numerous studies have addressed the effects of reading on children’s writing (Barrs, 2000; Calkins, 1985; Dressel, 1990; Eckhoff, 1984; Langer & Flihan, 2000; Lancia, 1997; Surmay, 2000). The first group of studies focused on how students’ writing was influenced by the books they read or by the books read to them. Eckhoff (1984) found that children’s writing mimicked the styles of the books they read. In this study, students in one classroom read from Basal A that closely matched the literary style of commercially produced children’s literature. The students in the other classroom read from Basal B, which consisted of a simplified, controlled-vocabulary style typically found in basal series. The results indicated that the Basal A children produced writing with more elaborate sentence structures than the students who read from Basal B, whose writing was consistent with the simple sentences of the Basal B series. In other words, the students wrote the kind of stories they read. They were reading like writers. During an eight week study of 48 fifth graders, Dressel (1990) found that students who listened to high quality literature daily incorporated more literary traits than those who listened to literature of lesser quality. In this case,
children’s writing was not just influenced by what they read but by what was read to them. Finally, Barrs (2000) analyzed the effects two mentor texts had on the writing of 108 Year 5 students in two London classrooms. By measuring syntactic complexity, Barrs determined that the sentence structures in students’ writing mirrored those of the mentor texts. Again, students were reading like writers.

Other studies focused more specifically on the elements of craft that students borrowed from texts. Calkins (1985) found that young writers included “About the Author” blurbs and prefaces in their own writing because they noticed those features in many books they read. Lancia (1997) coined the term “literary borrowing” when students in his second-grade classroom borrowed plot, characters, and plot devices from the classroom literature collection. He found that the structure provided by published authors served as a “jumping off point” for the student’s own writing. Finally, Langer and Flihan (2000) reported that students who read and studied poetry incorporated imagery and repetition in their own writing. While these studies reveal that many students do, in fact, learn to read like writers, they do little to explain how this happens. Informed by these studies and perspectives, the purpose of this study was to examine and describe the seemingly critical role of the teacher in helping students read like writers.

The Study

This study was conducted in a fourth-grade classroom at a district charter school in a large urban school district in the southwest. The ethnic distribution of students at the school was as follows: 10% African American, 69% Hispanic, 18% White, <1% Native American, and 2% Asian/Pacific Islander. Eighty-three percent of the students were classified as economically disadvantaged and 7 percent of the students were classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). The mobility rate was 35 percent.

Ellen (pseudonyms are used throughout), a fourth-grade teacher, was entering her sixth year of teaching when this study began. She was selected because she possessed understandings of certain aspects of writing instruction that were critical to this study. For example, she understood that writing workshop was an instructional format used to guide children in the process of writing. Like the workshop approach described by Calkins (1994), in Ellen’s classroom, writing workshop occurred on a daily basis for approximately one hour. Each workshop began with a 10 - 15 minute
mini lesson, followed by 30 - 40 minutes of independent writing. The workshop concluded with a 5-10 minute share time. Within the context of writing workshop, the students had choice in the topic, genre, and audience, which was important because it encouraged students to go beyond formulaic writing, and allowed them to develop their unique writing voices.

Though the focus of the study was on the role of the teacher as she helped students learn to employ the craft of writing, evidence was needed that the students were, in fact, using the craft elements the teacher taught. Evidence of students’ understanding was found in the writing samples the students created on a daily basis and in the field notes collected during the writing workshop time. Taking into account all elements of writing, quality of the message, use of conventions, and evidence of craft, the teacher nominated six case study students who represented the range of writing abilities in her classroom — two self-extending writers, two transitional writers, and two early writers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

**Data Collection**

The researcher adopted the stance of observer as participant, primarily observing the study’s context but carefully selecting moments of participation (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1988). As a participant observer, the researcher was able to witness the phenomenon firsthand (Merriam, 1988) enabling her to make sense of the complex classroom context because she saw each piece of the environment that affected the eventual outcome. Moderate interaction with the participants allowed the researcher to probe for more information through informal conversations with the students and teacher. One such interaction was initiated by the teacher at the very beginning of the study when, after several conferences with students, she approached the researcher and said, “I have a tough group. I have some very reluctant writers.” A brief conversation ensued about how the teacher was supporting those reluctant writers. On another occasion, the researcher was observing Anthony, one of the case study students. His story began with, “One day in the fairly month of May...” As she leaned over to read his writing, the researcher was unable to read “fairly” so she asked him what that word was. He said, “Fairly. I took it from that song, ‘One day in the fairly month of May’.” He then proceeded to sing the first few bars of the song. This interaction allowed the researcher to identify other sources of inspiration that the students were using in their writing. Clinging to the advice of Wolcott (1990) she “talk[ed] little [and] listen[ed] a lot” (p. 127).
Data collection began in late August and occurred two to three days a week for approximately four months. The final data set included detailed field notes from 17 writing workshop lessons, two transcribed writing workshop lessons, transcripts from two teacher and six case study student interviews, and various documents including photographs, writing samples from the case study students, the teacher’s schedule, and a listing of books the teacher reported sharing with her students outside of the writing workshop.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed to explore how the teacher helped her students learn about the craft of writing by reading like writers and how she encouraged students to employ those crafting techniques in their own writing. The researcher read the field notes in their entirety, keeping in mind ideas commonly associated with writing workshop, such as choice, response, routines, and time. These codes were then grouped into themes of literature, craft, conventions, conditions for writing, routines, and researcher/teacher interactions.

After determining the themes in the data, field notes were read again to determine the teacher’s role. Questions that guided this portion of data analysis were: 1) What was the teacher doing?; 2) How was she using literature?; 3) How was she creating conditions for writing?; and 4) How was she teaching students about the craft of writing? Particular attention was paid to the language the teacher used, the focus of the mini lessons, the time spent on each part of the writing workshop, and the presentation style of the mini lessons. This portion of data analysis allowed the researcher to describe the teacher’s role as facilitator and mediating agent (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003). The codes were subsequently applied to the transcribed lessons and results were then compared to the field notes, further strengthening the themes.

**Findings**

During the initial teacher interview, Ellen stated that she considered herself to be a writer as prior to her teaching career, she worked as a journalist for a local newspaper. She revealed that she loved writing in high school and dreamed of writing her own book someday. These experiences influenced the way Ellen taught writing and shaped the way she taught her students to read like writers. Because she was a writer herself, she was sensitive to the struggles and challenges that writers
face (Graves, 2004), and she made it her goal to show students that writing could be fun and rewarding.

Ellen adopted a social constructivist approach to learning in that she carefully fashioned a classroom environment that promoted “learning as a social process rather than individual phenomena” (Kozulin, et al., p. 1). She encouraged talk during the writing workshop and supported collaborative learning. The students in her classroom learned about writing not only from Ellen, but from their peers as well.

Interestingly, Ellen’s interactions with the six case study students during the writing workshop were strikingly similar. Even with the range of abilities from early writer to self-extending writer, she treated all of them like accomplished writers. An outside observer would have been unable to detect the differences in writing levels simply by watching the teacher interact with the students as Ellen expected all of them to be successful writers and even compared their writing to children’s literature. For example, when Isaiah, one of the early writers, shared his story, Ellen stated, “That was a good story, almost as good as *Pete’s a Pizza*” (Steig, 1998). She often spoke to them as fellow writers. On one occasion, Valerie was struggling to keep her piece focused. During the writing conference, the teacher put herself in the young writer’s place by saying, “It seems to me that you have three good ideas. I think what I might do is separate them and give each a title.”

While the four male case study students tended to be more vocal during the whole group mini lessons and sharing time, the two female case study students were equally active during one-on-one conferences. Regardless of the level of the writer with whom she was conferring, Ellen always let the writer take the lead. Almost every one-on-one conference began with the student making a comment about his/her writing like, “I don’t know what else to add” or, “I’m trying to think of another way to say this.” The main difference among the case study students was the level of support that Ellen provided during some of the writing conferences. The early and transitional writers sometimes needed more guidance in crafting their writing during the individual writing conferences. For instance, when conferring with Timothy about his planning web, Ellen noticed that it was very broad, so she asked him to be more specific. “Will this web help you remember all of the details that you want to include? You could add other bubbles coming off the family bubble to help jog your memory.” This suggestion allowed Timothy to move forward as a writer.
Ellen was very familiar with Katie Wood Ray’s (1999) framework for supporting the noticing of Wondrous Words and the habit of reading like a writer, as there was evidence of Ray’s work influencing Ellen’s approach for helping her students learn to read like writers. Ray’s (1999) framework consists of five steps: “1) notice; 2) make a theory; 3) name it; 4) relate it to other texts; and 5) envision it in your own writing” (p. 120). Ellen chose a framework of 1) noticing; 2) guided practice; and 3) trying it.

In order for young writers to begin employing the writer’s craft in independent writing samples, they must first be made aware of well-crafted writing. They must hear the sound of good writing and develop an ear for recognizing it and an eye for noticing it in print. In other words, they must learn to read like writers (Smith, 1983). Accordingly, Ellen spent a great deal of time helping students learn the craft of writing by recognizing it in well-crafted literature (Ray, 1999). In the subsequent paragraphs, her approach is first described and examples of ways that she developed her students’ understanding of the craft of writing are provided; followed by a description of ways Ellen helped students employ the craft of writing independently.

**Helping Students Learn to Read Like Writers**

Ellen’s writing instruction centered on the craft of writing. All of the seventeen mini lessons observed during this study related to craft. Ellen helped her students learn about the craft of writing by providing models of good writing and by asking them to notice well-crafted writing (Ray, 1999). She also deliberately planned activities that required them to read like writers. The following examples illustrate her approach.

During one mini lesson, Ellen copied a page from the popular picture book Thunder Cake (Polacco, 1997) onto a transparency. After reading the text aloud, she said, “Tell me some words that you think are describing words, or naming words, or that just stand out as special.” As the students identified words and phrases like “grease stained pages,” “surveyed,” “lovingly,” and “scurried,” Ellen underlined them on the transparency. By asking the students to notice the words, she conveyed the message that they, too, could identify good writing. When asked how she drew students’ attention to well-crafted writing, Ellen explained:
Especially at first, I’m very deliberate about it. If I see something that’s worth pointing out, I will stop and point it out to them. And now, I’ve turned over that job to them and so they find things that they want to bring up or discuss and talk about.

By employing the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), she was steadily turning the task of noticing good writing over to the students. This “turning over of responsibility” was especially evident during the sharing time. Ellen sometimes asked, “Did you hear anything you liked in her writing?” Students made comments such as, “It’s a good story because of the details you used.” Ellen encouraged the students to extend their comments:

Ellen: Can you give an example?
Valerie: Like when the snake went “ssss.” That was really good when you did that.

As the study progressed, the students began to notice more and more craft elements in their peers’ writing. For example, during sharing time the students noticed interesting phrases in Katherine’s story as they identified the phrases “steamy day,” “strange looking van,” and “stars in my eyes” as well-crafted writing. Ellen rarely needed to comment on the description in a student’s story as the students did it for her. On the final day of observation, Ellen chose to read Appelemando’s Dream (Polacco, 1997). She gave each student a note card and explained:

Every time you hear something in this story that you think is “Wow, fantastic!” that you think is worth using in your own stories sometime, I want you to jot it down and make a little note to yourself so that at the end of the book, you’ll be ready to share it with the rest of the class. By the time I get to the end of this book, I’m assuming and I expect that you will have at least a few things written down. As I’m reading you need to be listening carefully to the words that Patricia Polacco uses. If you hear something in there that you think is really spectacular, you need to write it down.

Ellen’s language indicated her belief that the students could identify good writing and would know when they heard it. Interactions like those described above trained students to read like writers and led to the use of those newly discovered crafting techniques in their own writing.
Helping Students Learn to Write Like Writers

Helping students learn to read like writers was the first step in helping them learn to write like writers. Ellen was deliberate about helping them learn to employ the craft of writing. She did this by (a) pointing out well-crafted writing, (b) engaging the students in guided practice, and (c) asking them to “try it” during independent practice (see Figure 1).

![Reading Like a Writer Framework]

As an example, after identifying interesting words and phrases from the page in *Thunder Cake* (Polacco, 1997), Ellen modeled how to borrow words and phrases from Polacco’s story to create her own original poem. The next part of the lesson served as guided practice as she reminded the students that it was acceptable to borrow ideas and phrases from other authors if the students used them in their own way. Using the words they selected as unique and interesting, the students and teacher wrote a poem entitled Storm (see Figure 2). Ellen guided the students through the process:

Ellen: Tell me some of the words that kind of go together.

Timothy: Black clouds.

Ellen: Do I have other words in here that might support the black clouds idea?
Katherine: Thick.

Ellen: Let’s start like this, “Thick, black clouds.” (She wrote the words on the overhead transparency.) In Patricia Polacco’s story, she didn’t say anything about the clouds being thick. That’s our idea. Is there anything else?

Katherine: Thick, black clouds gather.

Ellen: Okay. (Wrote “gather” at the end of the line.)

By the end of the lesson, the students and teacher had written an original poem using some of Polacco’s words.

Figure 2. Class Created Poem, Storm

To set the idea of borrowing words and phrases from other authors firmly in the minds of her students, Ellen asked them to write their own Thunder Cake poems. Each student selected and highlighted twenty of Polacco’s interesting words and used some of them to write poems (see Figures 3 & 4). Again, independent practice was used to reenforce and encourage the employment of a crafting strategy.
Figure 3. Student Created Poem, Stormy Day

Stormy Day

Lightning flashed!
Thunder boomed!
Grandma softly
hugged me!
The air was damp
and dark out side!
Lightning flashed
through the cold
night sky!

Figure 4. Student Created Poem, Scared

Scared

The air was hot
Thunder shook
Softly
lightning flashed
Then a loud
Ka-BOOOOM!!!
Again, crackle, I
stammered.
On other occasions, Ellen exposed her students to different ways to begin stories by reading leads from various picture books. After categorizing the different types of leads, Ellen supported her students’ use of these leads by teaching several mini lessons. She began by asking

Ellen:Yesterday, we talked about beginnings and revisions of beginnings. What does that mean?

Anthony:To rewrite the beginning

Ellen:Why would you do that?

Isiah:To try to make a better story.

Ellen:Yesterday, we did a “try it.” We talked about lots of different ways to start a story. We focused on “setting” beginnings. Today, I want to read you a different kind [of lead]. I’m going to read three examples. See what’s the same.

Ellen read the first sentence from Westlandia (Fleischman, 2002), Hey, Little Ant, (Hoose & Hoose, 1998), and Grandpa’s Teeth (Clement, 1999). After the students identified the lead as a “dialogue lead,” Ellen engaged the students in guided practice and asked three students to share the first sentence of the story they were currently writing. She then showed the class how to change their first sentences into a dialogue lead. After the mini lesson, Ellen stated:

You are going to do another “try it.” Today, I want you to try a dialogue beginning. You may have to rearrange your ideas a bit. I just want you to try it. Remember that in Westlandia, the dialogue makes us want to find out why Wesley is so miserable.

Ellen taught several more lessons on borrowing words and phrases from other authors. By the end of the study, students were borrowing not only from published authors, but from the teacher and fellow students as well. Jasmine incorporated the phrase “mass chaos” into her story after hearing it in Ellen’s, and Missy began her story with the phrase, “It was a grueling hot day...” The students noticed the similarities between these students’ stories and Ellen’s, but the teacher reassured the class that it was acceptable to borrow from other authors, including her, as long as they made the writing their own. Ellen considered this practice favorable and continued to encourage it and the students obliged by reading like writers and incorporating the crafting techniques into their own writing.
What was Ellen’s role in helping students employ the craft of writing and write like writers? This fourth-grade teacher stated that the only way she knew how to teach it was “through read alouds and talking about what you notice.” By surrounding her students with models of good writing, Ellen helped them learn to employ the craft of writing. When asked how her teacher helped her become a better writer, case study student Valerie explained that by reading books the teacher helped them get topics for writing and ideas for word choice. Ellen taught her students to follow the lead of successful authors as the practice of borrowing words and phrases from other authors was encouraged. These students understood that, as Josh stated “Even good authors borrow stuff from other books.”

As a writer herself, Ellen had a clear vision of where she was headed with her students. Her path for getting there was well marked. During her final interview, she stated, “I don’t like to write just for the fun of it, just for myself, but I am a writer. I know how it should flow and I have a good idea of what to do next.” Deliberate teaching drew students’ attention to the writer’s craft and deliberate teaching helped them learn to employ it. Using the steps of modeling, supporting with guided practice, and allowing for independent practice, Ellen encouraged the incorporation of crafting techniques.

**Insights into the Role of the Teacher in Helping Students Read Like Writers**

Ellen’s students noticed well-crafted writing because she deliberately planned for and engaged them in activities that drew their attention to the words in the texts. Like many other quality teachers of writing, she gave her students multiple opportunities to practice writing. What set her apart from other teachers, though, was the way she supported students in their independent practice. After noticing interesting word choice or a crafting technique, Ellen modeled how a writer might use the technique in his or her own writing by engaging them in guided practice. Following the guided practice she required students to “try it” in their own writing.

Several aspects of Ellen’s approach were influenced by Ray (1999), including her practice of noticing and naming a crafting technique. Ellen’s approach contrasted with Ray’s (1999), however, because rather than asking students to “envision using this crafting in [their] own writing,” (p. 120) she required students to “try it” on one of their writing pieces. While Ray (1999) cautions teachers against
always ending focus lessons with “guided and independent practice,” (p. 233) Ellen explained her rationale in this way:

If I teach a technique, then I have them sample it or “try it” on one of their compositions. And they don’t have to go with that, but just try it and see if it works, because I feel like they need to see what it would look like. I think it gives them confidence [that they can use the technique independently].

**Implications for Practice**

Teachers of writing who want to further the development of the writers’ craft can employ the Reading Like a Writer Framework (see Figure 1) presented in this article. Beginning with the sharing of quality literature, teachers can fill the classroom with sounds of writing that are pleasing to the ear as repeated readings of well-crafted literature are just like a good song on the radio that plays on and on in the mind of the listener. The crafting techniques present in quality literature that is shared over and over can spring forth from the recesses of the mind at a moment’s notice. Teachers who engage in the practice of reading like a writer themselves are better able to help students learn to read like writers. These teachers notice well-crafted writing while reading for pleasure, while reading the writing of their students, and while reading aloud to the students in their classes.

Though all crafting techniques might not have names, teachers can pause as they read a particularly striking phrase or sentence. They might even reread it again for emphasis. Over time, as students develop awareness of the written word, teachers can begin to turn over the task of noticing to the students. Once a crafting technique has been identified as one that is within the students’ current writing potential, teachers can engage students in guided practice, with the whole class employing that technique on a common piece of writing. After modeling how the technique might be used, teachers can ask the students to “try it” on an old or current piece of writing. As the students engage in this independent practice, teachers confer with individual students, noting the use of the technique. Following the writing and conferring time of the writing workshop, teachers might select one or two students to share their “try it” attempts. By taking the time to celebrate the students’ attempts, teachers reinforce the idea that young writers can use the crafting techniques of professional writers.
The findings from this study extend the field of writing by providing insight into the role that teachers play in helping students learn to read like writers. The gradual release of responsibility model commonly employed in other areas of literacy development can also serve as a framework for helping students learn about the craft of writing. Paired with quality literature, this framework allows teachers to play an active role in helping all students learn to read like writers. In turn, students who learn to read like writers may well continue to grow as writers.

References


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Companion and Series Books: Invitations for Many Happy Returns

by Terrell A. Young, Ed.D. & Barbara A. Ward, Ph.D.

Repeated generations have delighted in the multiple books in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. These readers are not alone in their desire to know more about the many worlds and minor characters created by authors past and present. Those unwilling or unable to let go of a character or a time period have surely been pleased with the abundance of companion books published recently as they seem to have exploded in popularity.

The trend may have received a boost when the ever-popular Esmé Raji Codell wrote *Vive le Paris* (2006), which was marketed as a companion book to the earlier *Sahara Special* (2003). Set during the same time period, both books involved many of the same characters—students in Ms. Poitier’s fifth-grade classroom in inner-city Chicago. Although many consider books about similar topics to be companion books, for our purposes we have defined them as books written by the same author about the same characters, but the books stand on their own. For instance, a reader can enjoy Richard Peck’s companion book, *A Season of Gifts* (2009), without having read either of his previous books featuring Grandma Dowdel, *A Year Down Yonder* (2000) and *A Long Way from Chicago* (1998). While having read the previous titles might provide insight into the character of Grandma Dowdel, unlike the 39 Clues series, a reader can pick up *A Season of Gifts* and enjoy the story on its own merits without necessarily reading the earlier books.

Readers turn to companion books for many reasons, such as their familiar format, settings, situations, language, style, and characters. “Readers form connections with characters, and they want to stay with them. An annual book is like an annual visit from an old friend. That may be even stronger with teens,” writes Kelley Armstrong, author of *Bitten* (cited in Rentilly, 2009, p. 36). McGill-Franzen and Botzakis (2009) note that the redundant language in companion books “supports inexperienced readers. Many particular words and phrases are constantly repeated, providing the needed practice that leads to automaticity” (p. 111).
Another value of such books is the social interaction that surrounds them. The beginning of the 21st century witnessed the Harry Potter phenomena that had just about everyone talking about the boy wizard and his adventures and waiting for the next book to arrive. More recently tweens, teens, and adults donned t-shirts identifying themselves as members of Team Edward or Team Jacob in response to Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight series. Researchers have noted that the sense of belonging to a group and the talk that surrounds the discussion of such books promotes reading comprehension, engagement, and identity (McRae & Guthrie, 2009).

Likewise, series books are very popular with young readers. Many have noted that series books keep students reading. “Not only do series books sustain a narrative over many pages of text, they also sustain student involvement over multiple books” (McRae & Guthrie, 2009, p. 111). Allowing students to read what they like is important even if their choices are what their teachers might refer to as “light reading” as such reading has many academic and affective benefits for students. There is evidence that light reading “promotes fluent reading and vocabulary development, leads to better attitudes toward reading, helps develop the linguistic competence necessary for reading more difficult materials, and typically gives students the competence and drive to read more sophisticated materials” (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999, p. 24).

Below we share some of our favorite companion and series books. We hope you will enjoy reading and possibly return to these literary companions, some familiar, some not so well known, as much as we did.

**Early Grades**


Supremely confident third grader Dyamonde Daniel lets nothing get in her way—not being the new girl in school, not meeting a grouchy classmate named Free, not even her parents’ divorce that prompted her mother’s move to a new place. She loves numbers, especially even ones, instead of English because numbers
are dependable and not constantly changing like the confusing rules in English. With her dazzling personality and can-do attitude, Dyamonde is sure to inspire other youngsters to look for the brighter sides to challenging situations. In the second book in this series, *Rich: A Dyamonde Daniel Book* (2009), Grimes tackles homelessness and writing with sensitivity and respect. Young readers and adults will clamor for more of this heroine with her irrepressible hair and personality. The illustrations fit Dyamonde and her classmates perfectly.


Fancy Nancy fans will want to add *Fancy Nancy: Splendiferous Christmas* to their collections as Nancy finds the holidays a perfect time for lots of fancy activities. In this endearing story, her grandmother comes to her aid when a fight with a dog results in a toppled Christmas tree and her special tree topper is broken. As in previous books such as *Fancy Nancy Sees Stars* (2008) and *Fancy Nancy’s Favorite Fancy Words: From Accessories to Zany* (2008), young children—and their parents—will delight in Nancy’s daily theatrics and fancy vocabulary.


History and its famous figures are cast in a humorous yet informative light in this introduction to the childhood and lifework of a scientist laboring in a specialized field. In simple yet engaging text, the book introduces young readers to archaeologist Mary Leakey, whose fossil discoveries changed the world of paleontology. As with the other books in this series titled “Getting to Know the World’s Greatest Inventors and Scientists,” Venezia includes carefully selected photographs that show the scientist at work in Africa as well as cartoons that poke fun at the serious nature of science. Readers will quickly recognize the unique book covers of this series featuring various tools of the scientific trade and will also want to read *Alexander Graham Bell: Setting the Tone for Communication* (2008),


*Pigs Make Me Sneeze!* is Mo Willems’ 10th book featuring the dynamic Gerald and Piggie. When Gerald keeps sneezing, he decides he must be allergic to pigs and may have to stay away from his good friend Piggie forever. Later, Dr. Cat assures Gerald that his excessive sneezes are due to a cold. Readers will see that the pair shares more than friendship when Gerald tells Piggie the good news. As in the previous books, Willems utilizes speech balloons and expressive illustrations to tell funny, but touching stories of friendship for an early reader audience. Two of the Elephant & Piggie books, *There Is a Bird on Your Head!* (2007) and *Are You Ready to Play Outside?* (2008), have been honored with the Theodore Seuss Geisel Medal, making Willems’s books perfect choices for beginning readers.

**Middle Grades**


Set in 1935, the Newbery Honor-winning *Al Capone Does My Shirts* (2004), introduces 12-year-old Moose Flanagan who, with his family, moves to Alcatraz so his father can work as a prison guard and, Natalie, his younger sister with autism, can attend a special school in San Francisco. In this book, Moose appeals to the famous gangster to aid in Natalie’s admission to the school. In *Al Capone Shines My Shoes* Moose learns that help from criminals often comes at a high cost. Fortunately, he and his friends are able to thwart what would have been a huge
escape by Alcatraz prisoners while his sister Natalie’s visit to the Rock could have made her an unsuspecting accomplice to the crime. Through the adventure, Moose discovers how important family and friends really are, and that the line between good and bad is much clearer than he previously thought.


Left alone for far too long, Meg’s once diminutive dragon Laddy has grown enormous and decides to leave home to seek adventure and attention, and a concerned Meg gathers her friends to bring him back home. Meg knows a thing or two about being lonely since her father, the King of Greeve, once imprisoned her in a tower to force her to participate in his ill-conceived plan to auction her off to the highest bidder. Princes from everywhere sought her hand, but Meg remained true to herself and rejected them all in an earlier title *The Runaway Princess* (2006). On this new journey, she meets several strangers and relies on friends Dilly, Cam, and Lex to recover her dragon and parts of herself she seems to have lost.


When the Theater Royal in London is closed for repairs, Cat is left with nowhere to go. She falls in with a publisher who prints her manuscripts detailing her adventures but fails to pay her. Worried about Cat, friends of the plucky 13-year rescue her and send her off to France where she witnesses the French Revolution. In addition to all the excitement and personal experience with historical events, Cat’s story also provides insight into the economic challenges faced by the lower classes in Paris and London. Readers who first admired Cat in *The Diamond of Drury Lane* (2008) and *Cat Among the Pigeons* (2008) won’t be disappointed in this third visit to the 18th century world of the feisty heroine. Cat’s pluckiness and street smarts serve her well as she navigates a completely different world from her familiar theater district.
In the fifth title — if you include the how-to-tell-your-own-life-story Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Do It Yourself Book (2008) — protagonist Greg Heffley is up to his usual tricks, trying to outmaneuver his equally wily Mom. After all, it’s summer, and all students long for the freedom to enjoy the great outdoors, right? Not Greg, who pulls his window shades and plans to spend the summer indoors playing video games. But Greg and his mother clash because her summer plans call for much family togetherness. Kinney continues to deliver the wry humor and simple drawings that persist throughout this series, guaranteeing that middle graders will have something to read and recommend to their friends. School libraries haven’t been the same since the publication of the first title in this series, Diary of a Wimpy Kid (2007).

In Martin’s A Dog’s Life: Autobiography of a Stray (2005) readers were introduced to Bone, who was separated from his sister when they were puppies. In Everything for a Dog, Martin deftly weaves three story lines into a satisfying and heartwarming story narrated by Bone. One thread follows Bone and the changes in his life as he goes from stray to a beloved member of a family. Later he is passed on to someone else and eventually abandoned again. Another strand features Henry, a boy who wanted a dog more than anything else, but for some reason unbeknownst to him his parents will not allow him to have one. The final strand is about Charlie who, along with his family and community, grieves over the death of his brother, RJ. His brother’s pet dog helps Charlie deal with his loss before another tragedy strikes.

This oversize book purports to be the diary of a Greek girl, Iliona, who is captured by pirates while on a voyage with her parents. Taken to Rome, she and her brother Apollo become the property of others, and readers are treated to a view of Rome through her eyes. Although the author puts a decidedly positive spin on enslavement, readers will enjoy sharing her surprise at the treats and horrors Rome has to offer as she visits the baths, the Coliseum, the Senate, and various building sites. This title joins the equally interesting earlier titles in providing insight into a long gone time: *Castle Diary: The Journal of Tobias Burgess* (1999), *Pirate Diary: The Journal of Jake Carpenter* (2001), and *Egyptian Diary: The Journal of Nakht* (2005).


Adam Canfield, his coeditor/friend Jennifer, and their star reporters are on to some red-hot leads — including a rigged school election, a bike-theft ring, and suspect test scores. This time, however, they have a huge problem. The Harris Elementary/Middle School’s student monthly paper, the Slash, has been shut down for exposing a prominent family’s activities. Now Adam and his team must find another way to publish these stories. As in *Adam Canfield and the Slash* (2005) and *Adam Canfield, Watch Your Back* (2007), the truth must come forward. This book adds a budding romance to the action-packed, humorous adventures found in the previous books.
Upper Grades


Things are no better on the water-logged Earth than they were when readers first met the determined Mara, who led an expedition from her island home in an attempt to find land. Mara continues her quest to find a home and a way to survive in this gripping continuation to last year’s *Exodus* (2008). As she leads a group of refugees north from New Mungo, it isn’t clear how much of the Earth’s landmass has been submerged, and how likely the possibility of a landfall exists. Readers will be intrigued by the courage of this brave 16-year-old as well as fascinated by Fox, her counterpart in the first book, and a new acquaintance who adds all sorts of complications to Mara’s story. Although some of the same characters and elements from the first book are featured, the author also introduces a group of humans trying to survive by clinging to caves closed by automobile doors they have gleaned from the sea. The separation of Fox and Mara becomes especially acute as a child is born. Readers will turn the book’s pages desperately to find out what happens to Mara and look for hints about the final title in this end-of-the-world trilogy.


With the fate of the world resting on his slender shoulders, teen bloodsucker Vlad tries to adjust to the idea that he really is the Prauvus. Being a vampire, especially an important vampire, in the tenth grade isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. Vlad must contend with those who would reveal his secret, and even worse, he must figure out what to do about the crush he has on a girl at school. Brewer dishes out the horror with plenty of humor, and the characters and plots continue to hold readers’ attention. If the storyline featuring the vampire first encountered in *Eighth Grade Bites* (2007), *Ninth Grade Slays* (2008), and now in this newest addition is growing increasingly improbable, it is also great fun, and dare we say, provides books that you can sink your teeth into.

For Gallagher Girls, the cover is the key to having a seemingly normal life while also maintaining one’s identity as a spy. Girls at the elite Gallagher’s Academy for Excellent Young Women take classes in covert operations, protection, and enforcement, and there are pop quizzes to determine their mastery of the material upon which lives will later depend. In this, the third title of the engaging series, Cammie Morgan (also known as the Chameleon for her ability to blend into surroundings) prevents a rooftop kidnapping during a national political convention. Her roommate Macey McHenry had invited Cammie to Boston for the event as her father prepares to accept the vice presidential nomination. But a spy-in-training is never off duty, of course, and Cammie and Macey put their skills and instincts to the test during the attempted kidnapping. This series with its clever titles, interesting family dynamics, and strong female characters that are much more than pretty faces, gently pokes fun of the stereotyped expectations many have about finishing schools. In this case, while the girls are certainly privileged and well-connected, their teachers also have secrets and their own covers. Cammie’s friends, Liz and Bex, once again prove their loyalty and aptitude for the world of spies. Fans of the earlier titles in this series, *I’d Tell You I Love You, But Then I’d Have to Kill You* (2006) and *Cross My Heart and Hope to Spy* (2007) will chortle at the misdeeds of Cammie and company but also feel her pain as she struggles with the two confusing men in her life and with her own mother’s choices.


Fans of the incredibly imaginative *Graceling* (2008) are sure to enjoy this latest offering from the creative mind of its author. A companion book to the other title, this one explores the Dells and provides the background behind the chilling powers of Leck who somehow uses his extensive powers of persuasion to control those around him. But interesting as Leck may be, his story pales next to the story of Fire, a woman whose beauty is so abundant that everyone who sees
her desires her. Even the insects and birds of the air attack her when she ventures forth, and she must hide her beauty under weighty wrappings. Fire is also heavily burdened by her ability to read and control the thoughts of those around her and filled with guilt over the misdeeds of her father Cansrel. The characters, setting, and plot are fully realized, and more than a reader or two will fall in love with the dashing and noble Brigan who leads the king’s forces against incredible odds. There is almost limitless territory to explore in the world Cashore has created, and her fans long to read her next offering.


The fleet-of-foot Phoebe Castro continues to adjust to life as the descendant of a goddess, in her case, great-grandmother Nike, in this sequel to *Oh. My. Gods*. (2008). Life on the Grecian island of Serfopoula grows even more complicated as Phoebe is sent to boot camp in order to learn how to control her goddess-given powers. If she cannot do so, she may end up being smote by the gods. Other than that small consideration and her concern that her boyfriend may be cheating on her, things are good for the California transplant. Tween and teen readers will enjoy the mystery that she must solve and appreciate her attempts to get along with her stepsister, who may not be as horrible as she seemed in the first book. It’s great fun to watch her navigate her way through this mythological-based world and the one with which she is familiar and have to adjust her plans. Phoebe’s tongue is as swift as her feet, guaranteeing she will make more than a couple of missteps, and adding to readers’ pleasure is the witty exchanges among the book’s characters. Even her nemesis from the first book has more depth and evokes some sympathy, albeit briefly, from readers.


In the sequel to the much-loved *Hunger Games* (2008), life as a winner and champion of the games is disappointing to Katniss Everdeen. Although she and her fellow District 12 tribute Peeta survived everything the Capitol’s games makers could throw at them, emerging victorious, she returns home to find that her best friend Gale now avoids her, and her fellow citizens treat her with fear. As she and
Peeta prepare for their Victory Tour, visits to each of the districts, and a visit from President Snow remind Katniss that her rebellious act during the Games did not go unnoticed and she will be punished. Katniss must prove that the love she and Peeta proclaimed for each other during the earlier games was real and not simply a heartstring-tugging performance to gain sympathy during the earlier Hunger Games. The twists, turns, and surprises for Katniss on the tour and afterward will not leave readers disappointed in this sequel. Katniss will need to rely on every bit of strength and shred of intelligence she has to survive what the Capitol has planned for her as, without knowing it, she has become the symbol of a revolution that is sweeping through the districts. While part of her knows she must stop this rebellion, another part applauds its bravery and necessity. Assaulted on every side, doubting herself and everyone around her, Katniss once again relies on her instincts. But will that be enough? The author’s careful weaving of bits of memories from her earlier time in the Arena adds poignancy to her plight. Readers will care deeply as the rules to this game to the death are changed, and wonder if anyone will be allowed to survive. Although Katniss reminds herself who the enemy is, distinguishing between friend and foe becomes increasingly difficult as all sorts of plots and intrigue emerge. Bring on the third one!


Crutcher takes authorial license to have several of the characters from his previous books meet despite the fact that they lived at different times. The three stories in this collection are tied together by having the participants attend a group therapy session dubbed Angry Management by its leader, Noburu Nakatani, who brings them together to work out their issues. In the first story, the deeply wounded Sarah Byrnes from Crutcher’s masterful *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (1993) takes a road trip with Angus Bethune to Las Vegas to meet her mother once again and discovers some disappointing and hurtful truths about the woman. The second story features Montana West, who faces censorship of the newspaper by the school administration and must decide who to believe and how far to push the
envelope. The third story circles around Marcus James, the only black gay student in a conservative Northwest high school. While all the stories do not have happy endings, their conclusions are satisfying in different ways, proving once again that Crutcher knows this territory and troubled teens very well.


Jack Danielson barely has time to breathe. Having lost his parents in a violent conflict, the smart and athletic teen was forced to leave behind everything he knew when assassins came after him. On the run, Jack then underwent intensive training to prepare him to save the world’s oceans (*Firestorm*, 2007). Next he traveled to the Amazon and tried to prevent the logging of the their forests (*Whirlwind*, 2008). Just when Jack seems ready to put his role as eco-hero aside and return to the life of a typical teenager spending some quality time with his girlfriend, P.J., disaster strikes. Wrenched away from those he knows and loves and forced into unfamiliar places and situations, Jack travels through time to the fiery deserts of the future and the frozen tundra of the Arctic where he must fight improbable opponents including cyborgs, zombie warlocks, and tank-sized scorpions. But Jack is not alone in his battle since he has his two helpers introduced in the earlier books—a telepathic canine and a talented fighter, Eko. Jack finds himself in a race to save Earth as well as himself. As the trilogy’s climax looms, Jack faces an impossible decision, choosing between two women who love him. What lies in store for this flawed hero? As in the earlier books, the pace is furious, and readers will truly care about what happens to the likeable Jack.


Six months have passed since teenager Chanda lost her mother to AIDS in the riveting *Chanda’s Secrets* (2004), and she tries hard to keep her word to her mother that she will keep her younger siblings safe. Having seen her mother die in isolation and fear, shunned by relatives and friends, Chanda knows the price paid by her mother and eventually agrees to visit her family in a far away village. Haunted by dreams filled with blood and a looming sense of danger, Chanda must risk her
own life and safety when rebels kidnap her brother and sister and take them into the bush to be child soldiers. The long-reaching effects of violence are particularly palpable in the behavior of her once-arrogant little sister, and readers will again find themselves rooting for this brave young woman and her family. The book was honored with the Canadian Library Association’s Young Adult Book Award.

References


About the authors:

Terrell Young is on the faculty at Washington State University and Barbara Ward teaches Language Arts to students at Madison Middle School in Tallulah, Louisiana.
History and Mission of Reading Horizons

Reading Horizons began in 1960 as a local newsletter and has developed into an international journal serving major colleges, universities, and individual subscribers across the United States and Canada as well as a host of other countries. The journal serves as a forum for ideas from many schools of thought dedicated to building upon the knowledge base of literacy through research, theoretical essays, opinion pieces, policy studies, and syntheses of best practices. Reading Horizons seeks to bring together school professionals, literacy researchers, teacher educators, parents, and community leaders as they work collaboratively to widen the horizons of literacy and the language arts.

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*Reading Horizons* (ISSN 0034-0502) is published quarterly by the Dorothy 
J. McGinnis Reading Center and Clinic in the College of Education at Western 
Michigan University. Postmaster: Send address changes to Reading Horizons, WMU, 
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5197.

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