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Kindergarten Teachers Speak Out: “Too Much, Too Soon, Too Fast!”
Patricia A. Gallant, Ed.D., University of Michigan, Flint

What Does TV Viewing Have to do with Internet Reading?: Readers, Television ‘Texts’, and Intertextual Links to Companion Websites
Rachel Brown, Ph.D., Syracuse University

An Analysis of Feedback Given to Strong and Weak Student Writers
Janet L. D. Dinnen, Cheyenne Mountain Charter Academy and Rachel M. B. Collopy, Ph.D, University of Dayton

Brave, Determined, and Strong: Books for Girls (and Sometimes Boys)
Barbara A. Ward, Ph.D. and Terrell A. Young, Ed.D., Washington State University
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From the Editor

Summer is upon us and life, for many, is different than during the school year. And yet the learning goes on. Being an educator is a profession that demands constant attention as we frequently take or teach summer classes, continue to read professional journals such as Reading Horizons, and, even during summer break, maintain the heart and mind of an educator. Truly, it is hard to leave our profession behind even when sitting on a beach or by the pool, and so we present Issue 49.3 which raises questions about what could be considered common issues.

Question One — What are the main issues facing kindergarten teachers? Patricia Gallant took it upon herself to research this question finding that the joys of teaching these young, vibrant children are accompanied by many pressures and tensions from outside the classroom. For example, teachers spoke of the frustration of having to teach standards that are developmentally inappropriate for the children and needing to eliminate play for more structured learning activities all of which ultimately results in less job satisfaction for the teacher.

Question Two — What kind of feedback do teachers give on student writing? Janet Dinnen and Rachel Collopy studied the kind of feedback 15 teachers gave to both their strong and weak writers. The researchers looked at three different kinds of feedback — improvement oriented, negative evaluative, and positive evaluative — and found that improvement oriented feedback, the most effective kind, was rarely given to any of the writers.

Question Three — In this age of explicit links between the Internet and television programs, do college students actually avail themselves of these connections? Researcher Rachel Brown studied over 400 undergraduate and graduate students finding some fascinating results that lead to a broader understanding of literacy in this age of technology. Brown also gives us a glimpse into the lives of these students and how they spend their time searching for information.

Question Four — What kinds of books are out there for girls? Our book reviewers, Barbara Ward and Terrell Young, present us with a list of exceptional books that will surely pique the interest of our female readers. The books in this issue highlight female protagonists that are strong, brave, and determined. Girls who go on adventures in castles, drop out of fairy school, speak out for the
underdog, learn to handle being different, and struggle with accepting themselves as they are. Whatever the age, you are sure to find a book that will interest your female readers.

What questions might you have? Acknowledging that it is summer and we all need some kind of break, we also know it’s hard to turn off our minds. Summer can be a perfect time for pursuing those questions that nagged at us during the school year. We encourage you to ask those questions and look for the answers. And, when you write it all up, send it to us for review. We value your research and look forward to your many questions and answers.

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Kindergarten Teachers Speak Out: “Too Much, Too Soon, Too Fast!”

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Abstract
This article presents results of a study of 229 kindergarten teachers who completed a survey designed to gather information about the current state of Michigan kindergartens. In addition to detailed data that reveals teachers’ literacy instructional practices, teachers provided written responses to the following open-ended questions: What are the main issues facing kindergarten teachers? What, if anything, would make a difference in your ability to provide the type of program you would like to provide? What kind of professional development would be useful to kindergarten teachers? Teachers identified issues related to working conditions (time, class size, materials) and literacy instruction (autonomy for decision-making, developmental appropriateness of curriculum, student readiness, parental involvement in literacy, and professional development). Their patterns of response and vibrant words provide a window on the current kindergarten teaching experience and highlight the pull (or tensions) that many teachers experience in their instructional decision making because of the complex links between policy and practice. Implications for future policy makers and professional development based in principles of emergent literacy are discussed.

A colorful poster once greeted people at the door of my kindergarten classroom. Bold red font scripted the title: All I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten. Pictures of smiling, playful children swinging, jumping rope, digging in a sandbox, building with blocks, and dressed for dramatic play formed a border that framed a poetic text:
Share everything. Play fair. Don’t hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don’t take things that aren’t yours. Say sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live a balanced life. Learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some... (Fulghum, 1989, p. 6-7)

It represented what I believed mattered most about the kindergarten experience for children. In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, goals such as socializing in a diverse community, caring about ourselves and the environment, developing oral language, and loving to learn formed the heart of my half-day kindergarten program. According to our local curriculum guide, the onset of formal reading and writing instruction was the responsibility of the first-grade teacher. I did not plan guided reading groups or formal writing workshops yet all children made progress in literacy and some learned to read and write as a natural outcome of literacy activities embedded within a playful, inquiry-based context in my half-day program.

Today, the illustrations and words on that poster remind me of a bygone era in most public kindergartens. Snapshots of children and teachers in classrooms I visited within the past year would form different images. Where the dramatic play center once stood, children and their teachers might sit in small groups for reading instruction. Where children once stood around a sand or water table, boys and girls might sit at literacy and math centers, engaged in written tasks. Where kindergarteners once constructed make believe villages by creating towers and roads with blocks, children and their teacher may cluster around a table for guided reading groups or writing conferences. Children who once boarded the bus at the end of a half-day in school might stay for lunch and return to the classroom for the entire day. The purpose of this article is to highlight the nature and impact of some of these many changes in literacy instruction occurring in today’s kindergarten classrooms.

No question—kindergartens have changed. Today’s public school kindergarten programs have become increasingly more academic and less play-oriented. Teachers provide direct instruction to teach children how to read and to write prior to first grade. This shift affects kindergarten teachers, children, parents, caregivers, and preschool teachers in myriad ways. After a brief historical perspective of the escalating academic expectations for kindergarten, research is presented from a recent survey of kindergarten teachers, highlighting their voices as they define and respond to the issues that arise from shifts in kindergarten curricular expectations for literacy. The
article concludes with a discussion of the implications of this research and recommendations are made related to the issues voiced by kindergarten teachers.

**Escalating Expectations**

Kindergarten, a pivotal year in a child’s continuous educational experience, represents the arrival of a relationship in which school becomes a significant partner with parents, childcare providers, and others involved in early learning experiences. Results from national and state research studies confirm its importance to the educational success of young children (West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000). Research also affirms that learning to read in kindergarten correlates with academic success throughout school (Hanson & Farrel, 1995). Although early literacy professionals and researchers ascertain that kindergarteners benefit from research-based explicit reading instruction (McGill-Franzen, 2006), the debate about whether and how to teach reading in kindergarten continues. A recent surge in popularity of professional books that focus specifically on literacy instruction and assessment in kindergarten suggests that kindergarten literacy is in itself a prominent topic, and responds to the needs and interests of teachers and schools who are extending their kindergarten curricula to include reading and writing instruction (Bergen, 2008; Duncan, 2005; Kempton, 2007; McGee & Morrow, 2005; McGill-Franzen, 2006; Schulze, 2006; Wood-Ray & Glover, 2008).

Attention to and concern about kindergarten literacy instruction are not new (Joyce, Hrycauk, & Calhoun, 2003; Moyer, 1987). In fact, Smith & Shepherd (1988) identified how kindergartens had increased their academic expectations during the previous twenty years, since 1968. Their paper was inspired by changes toward more academic kindergarten curricula that were set in motion in the early 1980’s, when the National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk* (1983). The report pointed at mediocre school achievement and advocated for higher expectations, lest we sink in world status. Escalating expectations in higher grades trickled into primary grades and kindergartens, creating a focus on early academic success and causing educators to raise expectations in lower grades. Schools consequently raised their kindergarten curricular goals to reflect expectations of their more able students and set out to raise all children to those standards.

As schools responded with urgency to *A Nation at Risk* (1983), however, researchers and practitioners warned about the effects of escalating academic demands in kindergarten. Smith & Shepherd (1988) and Egertson (1987) noted that
a shift of first grade expectations into kindergarten resulted from current social trends: universal access to kindergarten, the day to day pressures that teachers felt from accountability policies, and pressure for higher academic achievement from middle class parents. Policies and practices such as raising the entrance age, readiness screening, and retaining children in kindergarten emerged. As a result, declines in time spent at recess and the arts, and increases in the use of workbook-based reviews and didactic practices, have become commonplace. They further reported that, although these policies intended to solve the problems of having high academic demands on children who were younger or unready, they also resulted in excluding some children from school and increased the emphasis on mathematics and literacy skills (Egertson, 1987; Shepherd, 1988).

Determining appropriate instructional methods for young children became the subject of research and debate when the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) issued its first position statement on the subject in 1987. Its wording suggested a dichotomous relationship between teacher-centered and child-centered practices. Likewise, the heart of the debate centered on whether teachers should use developmentally appropriate, child-centered practices, based in exploration and play, or didactic, teacher-centered practices, which tended to rely more exclusively on passive forms of instruction as well as drill-and-practice approaches. National concerns about kindergarten focused on the developmental appropriateness of what was being taught and how it was being taught, which led to the increasing use of transition kindergarten classes, readiness assessment, and retention (Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1991; McGill-Franzen, 1992).

Since the early 1990’s, the U.S. has experienced a dramatic increase in state and federal level policies related to early literacy, standards, and accountability. The turn of the century brought a surge of research on early literacy (Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax, & Perney, 2003; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Xue & Meisels, 2004) and extensive attention from the U.S. Department of Education directed toward early reading (No Child Left Behind, 2001; Reading First, 2002). How the current period of high-stakes testing and accountability is transforming the nature of schooling in the United States is at the forefront of educational criticism and debate (Allington, 2002; Goodman, 2006). Policy mandates, political rhetoric, curricular programs, and public sentiment all have influenced instructional practice and student outcomes (Xue & Miesels, 2004). Kindergarten has, through escalating federal, state, and local attention, increasingly become a target for educational change and is now considered a tool for narrowing the achievement gap.
Furthermore, pressure to achieve builds, as students who perform poorly on standardized tests face the possibility of retention, and low-scoring schools may lose funding and their accreditation as an outcome of No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation. While formally reported testing typically targets students in grades 3-12, early childhood and primary school teachers often feel under the gun to get children “ready” for the next grade and the ensuing standardized tests. Increasingly, schools have changed to full day kindergarten programs to address these issues (Clark, 2001; Villegas, 2005). External factors, such as pressure from upper grades teachers and curriculum constraints within a school district, coupled with teachers’ own beliefs and practices, also shape the environment that young children experience in the primary grades (Sacks & Mergendoller, 1997).

Although a strong base of research on early literacy development and debate about appropriate practices has continued during past decades (Karweit, 1992; Vecchotti, 2003), relatively little research exists about the kindergarten teacher’s experience during an era of increasing standards and accountability. In 1992, researchers from the University of Vermont conducted a study with that purpose (Lipson, Goldhaber, Daniels, & Sortino, 1994). Through a survey of approximately 500 Vermont kindergarten teachers, the researchers found that the majority of the teachers felt that the emphasis in kindergarten should be play, affective development, and activities selected by the children. While nearly all of the respondents thought that kindergarten teachers should encourage children to explore building materials like Legos and blocks and facilitate explorations with sand and water, fewer than 14% thought that teachers should involve all children in formal reading instruction or group students for instruction. A majority of the teachers reported that the only literacy activities they used more than three times weekly were teacher read-alouds and language experience charts. In addition, researcher observations in randomly selected kindergarten classrooms corroborated that, even where teachers reported literacy instructional practices, little observable actual reading or writing instruction existed (Lipson et al., 1994).

Two Decades Later: The Current Study

With guidance from their research team, the Lipson et al.’s (1994) kindergarten survey was revised to reflect current trends in early literacy instruction and was mailed to kindergarten teachers in both Vermont and Michigan (Gehsmann, Woodside-Jiron, & Gallant, 2005; Gallant, 2007). As with the prior study, the
researchers wanted to provide a window into current kindergarten literacy instructional practices, identify issues of importance to kindergarten teachers, and plan appropriate professional development in literacy from the teachers’ perspectives. The eight-page survey addressed program and teacher demographics, teachers’ beliefs about teaching literacy, their use of literacy materials and literacy instructional practices, their instructional priorities, and sources of influence on their instruction. Results provided longitudinal information about trends in literacy instruction and materials used in Vermont kindergartens during the past 20 years, as well as current practices in Michigan schools. Results affirm that research on early literacy, and/or the push to influence instruction through standards, assessment, and grade level expectations, is changing the kindergarten experience for students and teachers.

Although no longitudinal data exists from Michigan teachers, their responses on the recent survey aligned closely with those of Vermont teachers. Literacy materials and instructional practices not present 20 years ago in Vermont are now prominent in both states. At least 75% of the teachers reported the presence of materials typically used for explicit reading instruction—big books, charts, decodable books and leveled texts. They also reported the frequent use of phonics workbooks and worksheets (46%)—a dramatic change from 1992 in Vermont, when only 2.6% of teachers felt it was appropriate to provide seatwork or workbook activities (Lipson et al., 1994). Teachers reported that they used shared reading, guided reading, shared writing, teacher read-alouds, journals, and literacy centers in over 75% of the classrooms at least three times weekly, confirming that explicit reading and writing instruction is prevalent in today’s kindergartens. This contrasts significantly with the 1992 study, when literacy materials and formal reading instruction were not necessarily a prominent part of the daily kindergarten curriculum. The preponderance of specific literacy practices now reported by teachers reveals a shift away from child-centered pedagogy, towards a more curriculum-based approach (Gehsmann et al., 2005).

Additional data, however, revealed teachers’ frustration with this change (Gallant, 2007; Gehsman, et al., 2005; Woodside-Jiron, Gehsmann, & Gallant, 2006). In addition to the quantitative components of the survey, teachers were asked open-ended questions related to professional development, developmentally appropriate practice, and issues confronting kindergarten teachers, offering opportunities for teachers to use their own words to raise issues or offer information not addressed in prior questions. Again, Vermont and Michigan teachers raised similar issues
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(Gehsmann et al., 2005). In this paper, the voices of Michigan kindergarten teachers who responded to these survey questions are presented:

- What do you see as the major issues confronting kindergarten teachers in the area of literacy?
- What, if anything, would make a difference in your ability to provide the type of program you would like to provide?
- What are three areas of professional development from which you think kindergarten teachers would benefit?

**Context**

Surveys, postpaid return envelopes, and explanatory letters were mailed to public elementary school principals in six Michigan counties, requesting that they distribute the surveys and letters to kindergarten teachers. Fifty-two percent of the principals distributed them to their teachers. Based on the principals’ responses, approximately 500 Michigan kindergarten teachers received the surveys with 229 being actually completed and returned to the researchers. Although teachers identified their school districts on the survey, their responses were anonymous and the data were not disaggregated by school district for analysis. The six counties broadly-surveyed (Genesee, Lapeer, Oakland, Saginaw, Shiawassee, Tuscola) vary in population, diversity, and socioeconomics. The numbers of surveys returned from each county were somewhat proportionate to the county population.

Approximately one half of the schools represented in the survey reported that they offer exclusively half-day sessions. Twenty-three percent offer only full-day kindergarten, and 27% reported varied scheduling configurations. Thirteen percent reported multi-age groupings that included kindergarten. Sixty-five percent of the teachers reported that more than half of their students had participated in early education programs. Michigan children who attain the chronological age of five years by December 1 may enter kindergarten that prior September. Recent legislation has been introduced to raise the entrance date to June 1 and to make full-day kindergarten mandatory.

**Participants**

Teacher respondents reported a range of teaching experience from 1 to 38 years, with an average of 15 years of teaching experience. The average number of years respondents reported teaching kindergarten was nine. Over two-thirds of the teachers hold a masters level degree, 96% hold an elementary education
endorsement, 64% a ZA endorsement (early childhood specialization), and 18% a reading endorsement.

Using a 5-point Likert scale, teachers responded to a series of 24 statements designed to measure their beliefs about what constitutes best practice. The statements reflected issues related to structure (child-centered or systems-directed orientation) and theories of learning (maturationist, behaviorist, or interactionist view). Surveys were designed and analyzed using a cluster analysis method to determine teacher beliefs related to their practices (Lipson et al., 1994). Teachers most frequently reported (80-97%) that they believed that they should provide children with open-ended materials and experiences, encourage building with Legos and blocks, design the classroom for problem solving, expect children to be motivated if the curriculum is appropriate, and make teaching decisions based on children’s abilities and interests. Beliefs that were least often reported (12-34%) included involving children in whole class activities for most of the day, waiting for indicators of child’s maturational readiness to learn before making reading materials available, basing judgments on completion of behavior objectives, using prizes, rewards, or competitions to motivate children, and providing workbook or seatwork activity. These responses indicate that the beliefs of the Michigan kindergarten teachers who completed the survey tend to reflect a more child-centered orientation and an interactionist view of the learning process.

When Beliefs and Mandates Collide

Analysis

More than half of the teachers wrote lengthy, passionate responses to a prompt that asked them to identify major issues confronting kindergarten teachers in the area of literacy. A constant comparative thematic analysis was conducted on the participants’ written responses (Seale 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After transcribing the responses into files organized by county geographic location, responses were coded individually, creating labels for categories. Labels were compared and two overall categories were found: issues related to working conditions and issues related to literacy instruction. After sorting the responses into those two categories and an initial content analysis, the researchers agreed on the most prevalent themes. Tables were created to make comparisons within each theme more visible (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and responses were coded individually for placement in those
categories. Lists were compared, differences discussed and agreement was reached about the placement of those few on which we differed, creating one table for each theme. To present the results, selected direct quotes from their written responses are presented to convey the voices and to represent the types and range of responses.

**Issues Related to Working Conditions**

When Michigan teachers responded to the question that asked what would make a difference in their abilities to provide the type of programs they would like to provide, they emphatically expressed frustration with increasing academic expectations, and raised issues related to working conditions and resources: instructional time, class size, the need for additional adult support in the classroom, and availability of materials.

Teachers voiced a sense of responsibility for teaching kindergarteners more in less time. Their responses across districts highlighted inequities in the amount of classroom time to which kindergarteners have access. Teachers of full day programs (23% of respondents) noted they feared their programs would be reduced to half day, due to the state’s waning economy. Teachers of half-day programs and other configurations expressed frustration and pressure because they were expected to address the same curricular goals and achieve the same student outcomes as those who teach in full day programs. Almost unanimously, teachers in programs that were less than full days declared the need for more instructional time to address the rise in curricular demands, and lamented that there was little time for exploration and play. For example, some teachers noted the following:

- Half days are way too limiting based on current State Benchmarks and Standards. Kindergarten should be a full day and mandatory. If I had all-day kindergarten, I could teach more appropriately and fulfill school’s curriculum without cramming information down these young children! I am trying to teach a full-time curriculum in a part-time program.

- I teach half-day kindergarten. I always find it difficult to teach everything I would like to teach in our short day. I am not sure if all-day kindergarten is the answer. I would like an extended day – I always feel like I am rushing the children.

- Too much curriculum to cover in too little time! Standardized tests are putting pressure into the lower grades to drop “play” and replace it with more “sit down” work and worksheets to prove learning. If I had
all-day kindergarten, I could teach more appropriately and fulfill cur-
riculum without cramming info down these young children.

• The one thing that would make a difference would be more time with
the students. An all-day, everyday kindergarten program is needed to
give the children more time to play and learn. Too much of our day
is spent on required curriculum. The children need time to play with
materials so they fully understand the concepts presented.

• In half the time (3 hours) we are expected to teach the letters, sounds,
reading (and administer DRA) and writing. Not to mention math, sci-
ence, and social studies has to fit into our day. It is very difficult to
have the kindergarten day become more academic. There is less time
for playtime – unstructured.

Teachers reported kindergarten class sizes ranging from 13-31 students with
over 75% indicating class sizes between 24 and 29. Several teachers suggested that
capping class sizes to 20 students or less would make a difference in allowing them
to address the broad range of developmental differences and the increasing cur-
ricular expectations. Related to the issue of class size, teachers expressed a need for
additional adult support (i.e., paraprofessionals, literacy specialists, psychologists,
social workers) to address student needs. Some voiced the following concerns:

• With my 27 4.5 to 6-year-olds, so much time is spent on social skills,
appropriate school behaviors and expectations and classroom manage-
ment. The progressive curriculum & grade-level expectations from state
and district levels do not consider or allow for developmental differ-
ences. It only makes sense. If there are less students in each class, the
teacher has more time for small groups and individual needs.

• Our classes are too large. You cannot provide enough individual sup-
port with 30 children in your class. Our children come to us with very
little background knowledge, language concerns, and behavior prob-
lems. It is extremely difficult to move them ahead as fast and as far as
the state expects.

• I need more classroom support— a teaching assistant assigned full-time
to my classroom. It enables the teacher to work at greater intensity with
at-risk children. This was the case in prior years. Kindergarten assistants
were cut from our programs this year. A **major** mistake!
• Our program has a lot of strengths, being an all-day, 5-day-a-week kindergarten. Our program would be stronger with reading instruction for all levels and abilities and having support staff incorporated into every classroom (Reading groups: teacher w/small group, para w/small group).

• More involvement of specialists in the building (i.e. psychologist for evaluation of individual strengths & weaknesses of students who are not making expected progress. A social worker to work with students and families in need. Additional “certified” support for at-risk students and literacy specialists would make a difference).

Although with less emphasis than their impassioned comments about time and class size, the issue of a need for more instructional materials warrants attention. More than half of the teachers reported a lack of materials to address curricular expectations, and felt that access to more and better instructional materials would help them to provide the type of program they want. This need for better materials is a resource issue that, of course, directly affects literacy instruction as they noted:

• I would like more materials. I spend a great deal of my own money in order to make learning fun in my classroom.

• I would also like to see more literacy resources available to kindergarten teachers: big books, leveled readers, trade books, appropriate library materials. Many resources are for grades 1 and 2. The foundations of literacy start now in kindergarten!

• I need more developmentally appropriate materials for hands-on activities and centers in the classroom.

Issues Related to Literacy Instruction

Their responses related to literacy instruction revealed concerns about their decreasing autonomy to make curricular decisions, tension between imposed curricular changes and what they perceived as developmentally appropriate practices, readiness levels of students who enter kindergarten, and the need for parental involvement in literacy activities outside of school. With increased academic expectations, they expressed a need for professional development to teach literacy more effectively, and identified the types of professional development that would be helpful.
 Teachers ranked their perceived levels of flexibility or autonomy in daily curricular decisions on a 5-point scale from “very much” to “almost none.” Fifty-nine percent reported that they had “much” or “very much” flexibility. Over 40 percent of the respondents, however, reported a low level of flexibility in making curricular decisions. This contrasts significantly with the 1992 study in Vermont, in which 95% of the teachers reported total autonomy over their programs (Lipson et al., 1994). Teachers frequently used words like required and forced when they described their current roles. Some raised questions about the qualifications of the policy makers who are making the decisions about the kindergarten curriculum and noted the following pressures these curricular decisions have on their young students:

- We’re being required to do so much more assessing and teaching of academics and moving away from all the other aspects of kindergarten. My kindergarten of today is what first grade used to be just a few years ago.

- Kindergarten curriculum has been forced to become too academic in order to prepare for state tests. Now kindergarten students are expected to enter first grade reading and writing to some degree. This is too much pressure to put on such young children. We should be able to explore and play with language without forcing students to unlock the door to reading and writing a complex language.

- Why are educators forced to be driven by people in power with no educational background? Why can’t we as educators take back our profession and do what is best for the whole child? Who is making grade level expectation policy, and why aren’t early childhood educators involved?

- I would have the Michigan Benchmarks and District benchmarks re-written. This second try would include teachers already using developmentally appropriate practice who would work alongside early childhood experts to come up with realistic expectations for young students.

In another survey question, again using a 5-point Likert scale from most to least influential, teachers ranked and reported the extent to which various sources have been influential in determining the way they teach kindergarten children. These sources included administration of programs, the context of education, children, educational practices, colleagues, professional preparation, and experience.
The following sources of influence were ranked either “most influential” or “considerably influential:” state and federal mandates (78%), availability of materials (78%), children’s preschool experiences (73%), first grade expectations (72%), classroom-based tests (67%), changes in the teaching profession (67%), societal changes in the family (66%), graduate courses (62%), and professional literature (58%). The lowest ranked influences were local boards of education (24%), superintendents (26%), special mentors (39%), undergraduate courses (33%), and teacher evaluations (43%).

Given the preponderance of self-reported child-centered, interactionist beliefs among our respondents, and their expressed stress from external pressures on their autonomy to make curricular decisions, it is not surprising that teachers spoke more frequently and passionately about the tension between curricular changes and developmentally appropriate practice than any other issue. They frequently voiced their perceptions that the literacy curriculum was being “pushed down” and that young children were asked to do “too much.” Although 2 of the 229 teachers voiced that the state standards and benchmarks were achievable by most of their students, all other respondents described them as developmentally inappropriate for many kindergarten students and a source of pressure for both students and teachers. In responses related to this issue, teachers raised red flags about the long-term effects of escalating expectations on children:

- Some students are just not ready for all of this info/skills we are pushing at them right now. I hope we’re not burning them out at too early of an age. It will be interesting to see where and how these students are doing 10-15 years from now!

- Curriculum is being pushed down. Just because a child may be able to accomplish something (by being pushed by a teacher) doesn’t mean he/she should. When learning takes place in one’s “own time” the event is more meaningful and less stressful on the child. The kids can only take so much. But we have to push to reach our objectives.

- I am so glad that someone is taking a look at what kindergarteners are now being required to do. Children are losing their childhood too soon. I hope this helps legislators and others see that childhood is being lost. Children are capable of doing so much, but the very fun of being a kid is being lost.
• Too much, too soon, too fast! There will be a cost to all of this push down curriculum. I am already seeing children with anxiety disorders.

• I really struggle with developmentally appropriate teaching and the progressive, curriculum-driven expectations of my district and the state! Children are not allowed to be children anymore with such high expectations (What used to be first and second-grade creative writing skills are now expected of kindergarteners). We don’t have time for large motor activities, dramatic play, and centers every day, which I believe is necessary at this young age. It’s sad that we are accountable to teach the curriculum that is not appropriate for 4 and 5-year-olds.

Related to their concerns about the developmental appropriateness of the curriculum, teachers expressed concerns that kindergarteners enter school with a broad spectrum of readiness levels, often depending on the socioeconomic status of the community. Within these comments about readiness, the theme of long-term effects on students’ self-efficacy also emerged. Some suggested changing the school entry dates and noted the connection between parental involvement and readiness:

• Children are coming to school with fewer skills and yet expectations that they will read in kindergarten is a given. It is just not happening in high-risk communities.

• Many students, because of their backgrounds, are not developmentally ready for what is expected because of state and federal mandates. Many children feel defeated at an early age. As a result, more feel like failures and eventually qualify for special education and or support services. Once someone feels like a failure, it’s difficult to convince him or her otherwise.

• Too many children begin kindergarten too young to meet the demands of them today. The State of Michigan needs to change the entry age. I believe a June 1st cut off date instead of December 1st would be best. I have students that are 4 for the entire first semester. Our expectations have changed. We expect children to be able to read & write coming out of kindergarten. Many of these young children are unsuccessful in these areas because they are not developmentally ready. This lowers their confidence in their abilities, and, I believe, affects them throughout their education.
• More and more kindergarteners have not been read to. They seem to have fewer experiences such as going to museums, concerts, plays, or trips to see free things in their communities. They do not play interactive games (board games or card games). Too many individual activities (computer, television, Gameboy).

• Many families/parents are not reading to children. Lack of time families have for children, inconsistent family dynamics/structures, the number of students who go between different homes, caregivers, one or both parents do not live with them on a consistent basis—all this is staggering. We need to teach all students, but this does make it more difficult.

Many teachers raised the issue of professional development when asked what would help them offer the type of program they wished to provide. The survey also asked teachers in a separate question to list three areas of professional development from which they would benefit. They listed some general topics: early childhood training, understanding child development and milestones, working with parents, classroom management, time management, classroom organization, behavior management, motivation, working with at-risk students and struggling readers, developmentally appropriate instruction, learning through structured play, differentiating instruction, selecting materials, making materials, integration of content areas, small motor skills and movement, and technology.

They also identified topics related especially to literacy instruction that reflect current approaches to literacy instructional programs and content: balanced literacy approach, guided reading, grouping for literacy instruction, shared reading, developmental writing techniques, interactive writing, writer’s workshop for kindergarteners, literacy centers (development and implementation), phonics instruction, phonemic awareness instruction and development, and using children’s literature, language acquisition, brain-based learning, and literacy assessment techniques. Some teachers requested training and information directly related to state and national initiatives: “Playful Literacy” training, how NCLB affects kindergarten, appropriate practices for NCLB and state goals, instructional activities for Grade Level Content Expectations, and how to develop appropriate lessons and centers for teaching benchmarks and standards.

Within their lists, many requested professional development in which they could spend time exclusively with other kindergarten teachers to share best
instructional practices, have group discussions about topics of importance to them, and for collaboration. Several noted that they would benefit from observations in other kindergarten classrooms and that they prefer attending conferences and workshops that relate specifically to kindergarten age children and best teaching practices for kindergarten. This suggests a view that kindergarten teaching practices fall into a separate category than those of first grade and above.

Conclusion

Kindergarten is an important policy issue. A child’s access to kindergarten, and ultimately the level of resources and initiatives available, depends on residency within a particular state, school district, or local school. This study reveals great variability in the delivery of kindergarten programs: the unequal provision of half and full day programs, the number of children served in classrooms, and the school-based assistance that children receive from adults other than the teacher. Inequities related to access and instructional time exist in kindergartens that do not exist at any other grade level in our schools. Despite the differences in the provision and structure of kindergarten programs across individual schools, the rigorous standards and assessment policies of recent years apply to all kindergartens, regardless of the amount of time children have access to instruction. These differences need to be analyzed more deeply in terms of school context and socioeconomic status and the barriers to solving these problems need to be identified and resolved.

But the teachers’ voices reveal more than policy issues. Kindergarten classrooms and teachers are in flux. In this era of accountability, marked by articulated rigorous state and national literacy standards and high-stakes literacy testing pushed down into the third grade, it is not surprising to learn from kindergarten teachers that tension about student performance flows into the kindergarten and influences practice. Teachers note that an emphasis on reading and writing instruction is now rapidly supplanting a former focus on socialization, play, and exploration, and that they are struggling to address these changes. Teachers are worried about their students getting “too much, too soon, too fast” in kindergarten, and raise red flags about both the immediate and long term emotional and academic consequences to our young children.

Although this is cause for great concern, what also of the professional and emotional consequences for kindergarten teachers? Their written remarks indicate that they feel disempowered and pushed by administrators to improve kindergarteners’
literacy performance. They warn that the standards they are required to attain do not consider children’s varied abilities and styles and are often developmentally inappropriate, and they are asked to work contrary to their own beliefs. What might happen to professionals who feel less empowered and more stressed in their jobs? The level of job satisfaction for kindergarten teachers is likely to diminish. If even a smaller percentage of kindergarten teachers feel disgruntled and disempowered than this study suggests, the quality of the kindergarten experience for both teachers and children may decline. We need to listen to and support our kindergarten teachers. Their voices matter because they are at the heart of the experience for children.

Are these changes “too much, too soon, too fast” for teachers? Teachers’ written comments at the end of some surveys indicated a feeling of isolation and being left behind:

- It is nice to know that someone else is concerned about kindergarten! Everyday more is being handed down to us and I worry that students and teachers are feeling the pressure. I hope you gain a lot of information from this survey, and I hope that superintendents along with principals take a close look at the results. Thanks for asking... Sure wish there was a coalition to stop the runaway train of kindergarten being 1st and 2nd grade!

This quote represents a theme that permeates a majority of their responses: kindergarten has become like first grade. The academic expectations to read and write have increased, schools are increasing from half-day to full-day programs, and entrance age criteria may be raised to exclude the youngest of those who currently can attend.

Teachers in this study seem to hold the notion that children need to be “ready” for kindergarten, that they need to get kindergarteners “ready” for first grade and “ready” for tests, and that kindergarten should be dramatically different than first grade. They even suggest unique professional development, apart from teachers of other grades. Why? Their statements are grounded in a readiness perspective, rather than an emergent literacy perspective (Clay, 1966; 1975; Teale, 1986). An emergent literacy perspective assumes that children acquire some knowledge about language, reading, and writing prior to entering school. From this perspective, teachers accept children at whatever level of literacy they are functioning, and provide a program based on the individual strengths of the child. The grade level distinctions in instruction would not be rigid. Why would we do this differently in
kindergarten than in first grade? The idea is not for the child to be ready. They are already ready (Wood-Ray & Glover, 2008).

Surveyed teachers expressed the idea of “developmentally appropriate” through a readiness perspective. They conveyed a strong sense that current practices are not developmentally appropriate for students who are not at a certain level of readiness. Educators who embrace an emergent literacy perspective, however, would be less concerned with school entrance dates and levels of readiness, and more concerned with providing continuous instruction across grade levels based on children’s strengths. Kindergarten teachers who hold an emergent literacy perspective would also not see a need for professional development that is separate from other primary grades.

Most teachers who responded to the survey perceived a dichotomy between play/exploration and reading and writing instruction — as if one excludes the other. This perception can be changed by new information that is grounded in an emergent literacy perspective. Well-planned professional development grounded in emergent literacy theories and research can help teachers plan instruction in which children can achieve literacy standards through research-based instructional strategies that capitalize on children’s penchant for learning through exploration, play, and social interaction.

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What Does TV Viewing Have to do with Internet Reading?: Readers, Television ‘Texts’, and Intertextual Links to Companion Websites

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Abstract

A growing number of television programs direct their viewers to access an Internet website for further information on a presented topic. The explicit link between television programs and companion Internet websites, both of which communicate information through multiple modes, can be considered a form of intertextuality. Do college students actually avail themselves of TV-Internet connections? Do they believe that this type of intertextuality influences their reading practices? This article reports research on these questions and then explores the implications of TV-Internet intertextuality for literacy and pedagogy.

Intertextuality occurs when actual or implied connections are made between and across texts (Chandler, 2003). These associations fall along a continuum of links intentionally inserted by the author and those constructed independently by the text’s reader (New London Group, 1996). In recent years, a new form of intertextuality has appeared, one in which a television show not only includes a variety of multimedia elements but also references a website linked to its programming. For example, in a C-Span program called Washington Journal, a newscaster reads aloud a portion of a printed article, highlighted in yellow. This is followed by video footage, an interview excerpt, and conversations with individuals who call in comments. The remainder of the program threads images, print, sounds, and speech
into a seamless whole (an example of a multimodal text; New London Group, 1996). Then, the program encourages the audience to access a secondary text, a companion webpage on the Internet, where they can locate further information on presented topics.

This type of TV-Internet intertextuality derives from pervasive and accelerating changes in new information and communication technologies. From Oprah to Masterpiece Theater, television programs explicitly and increasingly reference websites that link to their programming.

**What Does This Out-of-School Web-Based Intertextuality Have to do With Literacy Learning?**

The rapid rate of technological change is generating a host of new literacy practices (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). Particularly outside of school, students of all ages explore a wide array of popular culture media and new information and communication technologies. For example, adolescents and adults surf the web at home, contribute to fan-fiction websites, submit to on-line magazines, read and write in digital microworlds, and chat during instant-messaging (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Dudfield, 1999; Guzzetti, Campbell, Duke, & Irving, 2003; Lewis & Fabos, 2005).

The multimedia and digital texts students experience regularly outside of academic settings communicate information via multiple channels or modes including sound, images, and video streaming as well as conventional print. These hybrid, multimodal texts require the use of additional literacies to decipher their meaning. Yet, conventional print still reigns supreme in today’s classrooms (Hobbs & Frost, 2003; King & O’Brien, 2002). As such, there is a mismatch between students’ out-of-school and in-school literacy practices at all levels of education (Hagood, Stevens, & Reinking, 2002). To counter this situation and to prepare students to be active participants in our technologically rich world, they need more ongoing and explicit instruction in multiple literacies (Leu et al., 2004; New London Group, 1996).

To provide such instruction, educators need to attend more closely to new literacy practices, such as those afforded by the Internet. There is no question that Internet usage is on the rise; in 2000, 66.9% of Americans of all ages who participated in a large-scale, national survey reported accessing the Internet an average of 10.25 hours per week (UCLA Center for Communication Policy, 2000). In comparison, in the fifth year of the survey, 78.6 of respondents claimed they
accessed the Internet an average of 13.3 hours per week (Center for the Digital Future, 2005).

What does the increasing availability of the World Wide Web mean for instruction in academic settings? Many of those who research new literacy practices maintain that students need further instruction in comprehending and using information contained in nonprint media (Coiro, 2003; Leu, et al., 2004). They also suggest that students learn to evaluate the quality of information available on webpages and to critique the hidden biases and stereotypes within them (Eagleton & Dobler, 2006; Henry, 2006). Furthermore, they stress the importance of teaching the dynamic interplay of multiple representational forms within a single text, such as when print, visuals, audio, and video elements work together to communicate meaning. However, just as importantly, classroom teachers can explore the notion of intertextuality. That is, teachers can focus on the inserted or implied connections among multimodal texts that cut across varied media.

The widespread use of the Internet suggests that readers form explicit intertextual connections between printed text and Internet content. Moreover, the ever-increasing availability and use of the Internet at home sets the stage for other types of intertextual crossovers, such as when links are made between TV shows and Internet webpages. These associations have probably come about because of the rapid rise in TV websites as in 1995, fewer than 100 television stations had companion Internet websites (Bates, Chambers, Emery, Jones, McClug, & Park, 1997) and by 2003, this number had swelled to over a thousand (Always, n.d.).

This growth in TV websites, along with frequent exhortations for viewers to visit these sites, prompted this study of television-Internet intertextuality. This article begins with a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings for this work then reports research that explored whether college students actually made intertextual connections between TV and the Internet and whether that type of intertextuality impacted their professed reading practices. The article concludes by considering the potential implications of the research.

Theoretical Context for this Research

The term “intertextuality” is not new; theorists, educators, and researchers from varied disciplines, including literary theory and media studies, have explored the construct for years (Allen, 2000; Shuart-Faris & Bloome, 2004). At its most basic, intertextuality refers to the act of understanding a text in relation to at least
one other broadly defined textual source (Chandler, 2003). While some discuss intertextuality from the perspective of the writer (e.g., how a writer references one text in another), others focus more on the role of the reader (e.g. how a reader constructs meaning by associating something in the new text to something similar in a known text).

This construct has evolved over time. Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993), for example, summarize the multiple ways the term has been used in the past:

Intertextuality has been located primarily in literary texts, in the readers
of literary texts, in language, in the cognitive-linguistic strategies that
readers and writers employ, and in the educational environments in
which students read and write...[and as] a social construction, located
in the social interactions that people have with each other. (p. 308)

The term “intertextuality” was introduced by the literary theorist Julia Kristeva
in Word, Dialogue, and the Novel (1986), where she discussed the interdependent
connections that exist between a primary text and the reader, and the primary
text and other texts that comprise our literary legacy. Kristeva (1986) believed that
every text is a reworking of previous texts. That is, no text can ever be unique,
nor can it be truly original (Barthes, 1977). Rather, Kristeva (1986) claims every
text is inherently intertextual, an “absorption and transformation of another” (p.
37). Moreover, she broke with past notions that meaning resides in the text to be
extracted by the reader. Instead, she attributed importance to the active role of
the reader in constructing text meaning (Kristeva, 1986). This notion is familiar to
literacy educators since it also figures significantly in Louise Rosenblatt’s (1978)
work. Rosenblatt explains how the squiggles on the page remain dormant until the
reader enlivens them during reading. This process of bringing words to life occurs
when readers link their knowledge of past events and texts to their interpretation of
present texts (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Some contemporary literary theorists expand past notions of intertextuality
when they discuss newer digital varieties, such as hypertext, which is the text type
associated with Internet webpages that enables readers to connect non linearly and
expeditiously to other multimodal sites when they click on embedded links (Bolter,
1992; Schmar-Dobler, 2003). Thus, hypertexts, such as Internet webpages, are thought
to explode traditional conceptions of a text and are perceived by some to be quintes-
sentially intertextual (Landow, 1992). For example, readers can link to other texts (e.g.
definition boxes, annotations, images, video, snippets of sound) within the body of
the primary document. Or, they can make explicit intertextual connections as they move from one hypertext to another on the World Wide Web.

Although literary theorists and educational researchers have long reckoned with intertextuality, they are not the only ones who have adopted the construct. The next section explores how those in media studies also take up the notion.

**Media Studies and Intertextuality**

Intertextuality continues to receive considerable attention in its own right within media studies (Chandler, 2003). Within the field, intertextuality tends to be dually defined as on the one hand, it refers to allusions that media authors intentionally embed in their media texts for stylistic and other purposes; on the other, it relates to the unconscious way that audiences bring meaning to a specific media text by considering it in relation to others that have preceded it (Ott & Walter, 2000).

If one thinks of a TV show as a visual medium to be “read,” then intertextuality describes how one program can be interpreted relative to others. According to Agger (1999),

Intertextuality can be discussed on many different levels. The choice of a specific title, a certain kind of music, or a particular way of moving a camera in TV fiction all provide examples of intertextuality when analyzed closely and with an eye to the relevant relations. Genre, cultural traditions, and national and international relations constitute a broader notion of intertextuality, which is practically indispensable in the interpretation of works’ significant relational features and the traditions to which they belong. (¶5)

Fiske (1989) extends Kristeva’s (1986) work on intertextuality. Similar to Kristeva, he sees intertextuality as the interpretive process through which a viewer applies prior knowledge to make sense of a particular TV text. Fiske (1989) also accepts Kristeva’s notion that all symbol systems contain traces of previous texts. This intertextual interweaving of voices, conventions, codes, ideas and other texts occurs whether information is encoded in print or some other signifying medium.

Unquestionably, literary and media studies provide helpful theories in illuminating various notions of intertextuality. However, multiliteracies theory provides a unifying frame for understanding intertextuality in relation to television programs, Internet hypertext, and other multimodal, multimedia texts that occur in off- and on-line formats.
Multiliteracies Perspective and Intertextuality

Multiliteracies theorists hold that literacy practices are in rapid flux (New London Group, 1996). For one, innovative information and communications technologies are prompting new literacy practices. Second, individuals, more than ever, encounter diverse cultural and linguistic texts as a function of increased globalization and technological advances (New London Group, 1996). From a multiliteracies perspective, these societal and technological changes demand a new pedagogy (Luke, 2003; New London Group, 1996). A multiliteracy pedagogy, in part, provides explicit instruction, as well as a common language, for learning about linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and multimodal ways for communicating and constructing meaning (e.g. designs). Moreover, students learn to reflect critically about how these modes operate in various social contexts for diverse purposes (New London Group, 1996). This perspective also forefronts the concept of intertextuality. According to a multiliteracies framework, intertextuality describes the way readers construct meaning of multimodal, multimedia texts when they draw upon their knowledge of different genres, language conventions, and socially, culturally, and historically situated meanings (New London Group, 1996).

In summary, theoretical precedents exist for studying intertextuality within the traditions of both literary theory and media studies. In recent times, a multiliteracies perspective serves as an effective means for grounding work on intertextuality and the framework provides an explanation for how engagement with innovative technologies engenders new literacy practices. Furthermore, proponents of this framework argue that educators and researchers need to become aware of the implication of these new practices for pedagogy.

Informed by a multiliteracies perspective, this research studies a new literacy practice, the intertextual links college students make or fail to make when they view TV programs and then access companion websites. Moreover, like Mackey (2003), this research considers the implications of cross-media intertextuality and its impact on literacy practices:

Just as we need to take a broad view of the complex context in which texts are supplied to their users, similarly, it is essential to take account of changing practices among these users of text. For example, many people’s viewing behaviors (going to a movie, switching on the television) are now hugely enlarged to include an enormous amount of reading and writing (checking out Internet sites, signing onto a chat room), all directly related to the viewed texts. (p. 405)
This exploratory work is focused on three broad questions:
1. Do students actually access TV program websites after being directed to do so during television viewing?
2. Do students make connections between TV programs and associated websites for specific reasons?
3. Do students believe that making intertextual TV-Internet connections impacts their reading?

**Description of the Study**

Participants were undergraduate and graduate students who attended a private university in the northeastern United States. Four hundred and thirty-eight (438) students agreed to participate. Of the total, 378 were undergraduates and 60 were graduate students, with the majority of all students falling between the ages of 17-22 (371) and 23-35 (54). The participants were enrolled in either the School of Education or the Media Studies program in the School of Public Communication. These schools were chosen intentionally because, in light of intertextuality’s long history with education-related and media studies, it was hoped that students in these schools might be more inclined to complete the survey, given a suspected interest in the topic. Despite the fact that these students might be more familiar with the concept, the word “intertextuality” was not used explicitly in the survey just in case respondents were unfamiliar with the term.

It was necessary to design a survey since no measure of TV-Internet intertextuality existed. The overall survey reflected a multiliteracies perspective; the questions were constructed based on the belief that literacy practices might be changed (or, in the case of this study, be perceived as changed) as a result of engagement with television websites. Although theory informed item writing, the construction of the survey drew on the researcher’s informal discussions with students regarding their use of television websites as well. These discussions helped to identify possible reasons for why students might (or might not) access television websites.

Based on these sources, a five page, 24-item survey consisting of three parts was created. In Part I (12 items), students were asked to provide information about themselves and their use of technology. All of these items were close-ended, requiring individuals to select from provided alternatives (Example: Do you own a computer with access to the Internet? □ Yes □ No). In Part II (11 items), respondents
were asked to describe their purposes for linking to a TV website during or after watching a TV program. This section consisted of seven close-ended items (Example: How much time, ON AVERAGE, did you spend reading/seeking information on a TV website after viewing the show that referred you to that site? □ Less than 15 minutes □ 16-30 minutes □ 30-60 minutes □ More than an hour). This part also included three multi-part items which asked students to check off all provided options that applied, and one open-ended item that asked for examples of TV website viewing. In Part III, students responded to one multi-part item to identify reasons why they never accessed a TV website.

Professors in the Schools of Education and Media Studies were contacted asking for volunteers and those who agreed to participate distributed the surveys in class. Participation was totally voluntary and students who agreed to participate completed their surveys anonymously.

Results of the Study

To analyze the data, totals were calculated for each survey item and then converted to percentages. Although ownership patterns were high for both TV and computer, more students owned computers (99% of total respondents) than televisions (89%). Virtually all students accessed the Internet both from school (99%) and from home (97%), with the vast majority (85%) spending more than 7 hours per week on the Internet. In comparison, 44% of the students viewed television more than 7 hours per week. Thus, students tended to spend more time reading on the Internet than watching television (see Table 1).

The percentages presented in the results section do not necessarily sum to 100% because students could check off more than one response for some items and they sometimes opted to leave items blank. The findings were organized relative to the three research questions established at the outset of the study. These were: 1) Do students make TV-Internet connections?; 2) Do students make these intertextual connections for specific reasons?; and 3) Do students believe that this form of intertextuality impacts their reading practices?
Table 1. Patterns of Usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership and Access Patterns</th>
<th>Totals</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students who own a television</td>
<td>390/438</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours viewing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 7 hours</td>
<td>222/438</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 7 and 15 hours</td>
<td>141/438</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 15 hours</td>
<td>51/438</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who own a computer</td>
<td>433/438</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Internet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From home</td>
<td>425/438</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From school</td>
<td>435/438</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours using Internet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 7 hours</td>
<td>67/438</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 7 and 15 hours</td>
<td>180/438</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 15 hours</td>
<td>191/438</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency of TV-Internet Access

| Students who accessed companion TV website | 243/438 | 55%   |
| Access frequency                       |         |       |
| Few times a year                       | 178/243 | 73%   |
| Few times a month                      | 40/243  | 17%   |
| Few times a week                       | 11/243  | 5%    |
| Everyday                                | 2/243   | 1%    |

Impact of TV-Internet Access

| Time spent reading when companion TV website is accessed | 219/243 | 90%   |
| Additional time reading when other, related website(s) is accessed | 205/243 | 84%   |
| Additional time accessing other sources |         |       |
| Never accessed related book            | 91/243  | 37%   |
| Seldom accessed related book           | 96/243  | 40%   |
| Sometimes or often accessed related book | 45/243 | 19%   |
| Never accessed related printed source  | 41/243  | 17%   |
| Seldom accessed related book           | 95/243  | 39%   |
| Sometimes or often accessed related printed source | 98/243 | 40%   |
| Students electing to return to site     |         |       |
| At some future point                   | 207/243 | 85%   |
| Bookmarking site                       | 113/243 | 47%   |

Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because of items left blank by students or because of responses from separate survey items arranged together in the table for ease of comparison.

Frequency of TV-Internet Access

When respondents were asked if they accessed a website after seeing its address embedded in a television show, 55% of the 438 students (N=243) said that
they had made such TV-Internet connections within the past year. Of those who linked to a TV website, 73% (178/243) said they connected a few times a year, 17% (40/243) a few times a month, and only 5% (11/243) a few times a week. In comparison, 45% of all 438 (N=195) respondents said they had never accessed a television website after being directly referred to it during or after watching a television program. Forty-four percent of the non-accessing students claimed that they did not make TV-Internet linkages because they never thought to make such a connection. Another key reason for not accessing companion TV websites related to having insufficient time due to work or other pressing obligations (41%; N=80).

Time constraints could impact accessing TV websites in several ways. For one, participants ordinarily might have linked to TV websites given more time and secondly, study participants might have preferred to reserve their limited time for accessing the Internet for purposes other than linking to companion TV websites. Finally, according to the Center for the Digital Future Report (2005), television viewing apparently declines as Internet usage increases. Paralleling the report’s results, participants in this study spent more time reading on the Internet than watching TV (see Table 1). It is therefore possible that less time watching television meant fewer opportunities for viewing programs that contained embedded intertextual links.

When asked in an open-ended item to explain why they did not link to the Internet, a sizeable number of non-accessing students wrote in a response. Most of these students expressed no interest in connecting to TV websites after an explicit referral. A few mentioned that they had “better things to do” or considered such connections a “waste of time.” Others felt that TV programming sufficiently provided all the information that they needed. Several students claimed that they were “too lazy” to follow through on a connection. Finally, a number wrote that they believed the information provided on these sites to be “useless garbage” because the providers used them to sell ads, to promote their own programming, or to bias readers. This stance indicates critical multiliteracies awareness on the part of at least some students, who recognize that technology is never value-free; they elected to resist what they perceived as negative messages in companion TV websites (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000).

Thus, a sizeable group never looked up TV websites because of lack of motivation or constraints due to work. Also, many of these readers never considered logging onto a website after being encouraged to do so. However, more than half the sample (55%; 243/438) did look up a television website after an explicit reference to it during television viewing. The next section explores what happened to those students who did, in fact, make intertextual connections.
Reasons for TV-Internet Access

Students who accessed companion TV websites said they did so for a variety of reasons (See Figure 1). They most frequently went online to entertain themselves (83%) and to obtain information about a news event (81%). These results coincide with University of Southern California’s national study of Internet usage; their top ten online activities reflect accessing the Internet for both information-seeking and entertainment purposes (Center for the Digital Future, 2005).

![Figure 1. Reasons for Accessing Television Website (N=243)](image)

Several students wrote in additional reasons for accessing TV-websites after explicit referrals with responses ranging from general activities such as watching clips of shows, getting more information on a reported story, or catching up on missed programs to more specific purposes, such as voting or obtaining house floor plans. As one individual wrote, a primary inducement to connect to these sites was the ability to “satisfy curiosity” and to provide information access that was “so easy.”

Impact of TV-Internet Access

Most readers claimed that once they went online, they took time to learn more about a topic. For example, the majority of respondents who access TV websites (90% of 243 students) claimed they spent up to 30 minutes reading or seeking information once they made the initial TV-Internet connection. In addition, 96%
of accessing students said they subsequently linked to additional websites to learn more about a topic that was first introduced by the companion TV website, with 84% of these students reading up to 30 minutes per topic.

When asked whether accessing students ever sought follow-up information from books on a topic initially covered in a TV website, a large majority of these participants (77% of the 55% who accessed the related television website) responded that they seldom or never followed up using books. However, a greater number of respondents (79% of the accessing 55%) at least occasionally sought additional information from other print resources (e.g., journals, magazines or newspapers) on a topic initially brought to their attention by a TV website. Eight-five percent said they independently returned to a TV website after their first contact, with 47% bookmarking the website. These survey items suggest that students, curious to obtain further information on a topic first presented on a television program, are more likely to read about it on the Internet than in a printed text. This occurrence may be due in part to what Luke (1997) refers to as “space-time compression” (¶ 1). That means that students no longer are restricted by traditional time and space constraints, such as having to go to a library during specific hours to obtain additional materials. This ease of access fosters intertextuality.

In addition, students who accessed companion TV websites were asked whether they believed that their reading practices had changed relative to their use of television websites. They were asked to complete the following survey question by checking all of the responses that they believed applied to them (221 of 243 students completed the question).

What changes, if any, have you noted in your reading habits as a result of your use of television websites? Check all that apply.

- I now spend more time reading on-line and less time reading printed materials. (40%)
- I read as many print sources as before (books, magazines, journal articles, etc.) but now I supplement this with additional reading on the Internet. (31%)
- I think I read more for entertainment purposes than I did before. (38%)
- I think I read more for informational or research purposes than I did before. (39%)
- I think there are no changes in my reading habits. (15%)

Overall, most students who said they did connect to television websites believed that changes occurred in their breadth and depth of reading. Even when questioning
the reliability of self-reported data in that stated beliefs may not parallel actual behaviors, the fact that a total of 85% of accessing students said they noted changes in reading practices suggests that this type of intertextuality merits further study.

What do These Results Tell us About TV-Internet Intertextuality?

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) (2007) recently released its latest report, which summarized research findings on American reading trends from 40 sources. According to this report, teenagers and young adults are reading less frequently, are less inclined to read, and are comprehending less effectively. Of marked concern is the following conclusion: “both reading ability and the habit of regular reading have greatly declined among college graduates” (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007, p. 3). Among other items, cited evidence in support of this claim include the following: a) 65% of college freshmen never or sporadically read for fun; b) reading, when it occurs, vies with other media; and c) youth and young adults ages 15 to 24 spend almost 42% of their weekday leisure time on watching television (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007).

Yet, is the situation as bleak as depicted for adolescents and college students? Perhaps not, if one understands that young adults’ engagement with digital texts helps to broaden the notion of reading. For example, a decline in the reading of printed texts may actually mean that students of all ages are reallocating some of their discretionary time for recreational and other reading online. Thus, as multimodal and multimedia texts increasingly share the stage with traditional print, those of us in literacy studies need to better understand how engagement with the new technologies impacts the way we and our students read and how it causes us to rethink our definition of reading (Leu et al., 2004). If, as it is argued, long-term participation in the new technologies transforms us (Reinking, 1998), it is not improbable that individuals who make TV-Internet intertextual connections perceive a change in their reading practices, as suggested by this study.

Some hints of changes appeared in the results. More than half the students claimed they, at least periodically, connected to TV websites after an explicit TV referral. Although the vast majority of students stated they only logged onto these TV websites a few times a year, almost a quarter of them connected at least a few times a month. This number may seem low relative to the entire sample. However, the reduced number may be due, in part, to respondents’ busy schedules. Moreover, the results imply that those who infrequently or never accessed companion TV websites...
may not have been sufficiently motivated to make regular connections. However, this figure does not take into account individuals who access TV websites on their own, without explicit television referrals. Moreover, many television shows do not post an explicit website address for viewers. Thus these results may underestimate the actual number of connections students voluntarily make on their own – or would make, if explicit referrals to companion websites appeared more frequently.

That said, most students who made intertextual connections thought that their reading practices changed in response to Internet reading. They claimed they changed in their breadth of reading; they examined the same amount of printed text as before but now supplemented this activity with hypertext reading. Students also indicated that their depth of reading changed; they sometimes pursued a topic initially introduced on a website by reading more about it in additional websites, magazines, newspapers, and less so in books. In fact, only 15% maintained that their reading habits did not change as a result of intertextual linkages between TV and companion websites.

Also, TV-Internet connections occasion more expansive thinking about explicit intertextuality. First, TV shows often reference companion websites by explicitly attaching an Internet address to a TV program to induce intertextual linking. In effect, the included website address scaffolds viewers to make intertextual links. Consequently, the association between TV show and Internet website becomes highly visible. Second, viewers/readers make conscious choices about which intertextual links to pursue. Consciously chosen intertextual connections work in tandem with the implicit ones that individuals make when they interpret text relative to conventions, genres, social codes and practices, styles, voices, and other texts previously experienced and internalized. Thus, as Kristeva (1986) noted, readers play an active, and in fact, interactive role when constructing the meaning (and structure) of an Internet text by selecting links of interest in a preferred sequence. Third, explicit intertextuality occurs within companion TV websites, as in other online hypertexts, when authors intentionally and explicitly incorporate links to encourage intertextual connections both within and across texts. The explicit interweaving of texts on the part of media authors comes quite close to embodying Kristeva’s (1986) idea that any single text represents the absorption and transformation of other texts.

In addition to enlarging the concept of explicit intertextuality, TV-Internet associations make us think more about the directionality of connections. That is, in the past, intertextuality typically meant applying prior knowledge to new texts. With TV-Internet intertextuality, viewers make intertextual connections to Internet
texts not yet encountered. That is not to say that a viewer might not pick up a related book from the library at some point later in time. For example, students in this study stated that they did obtain books or other printed material on a related topic from time to time. However, the ease of linking to other resources on the World Wide Web facilitates frontward intertextuality.

**What are the Implications of this Out-of-School Practice for Pedagogy?**

Respondents in this study included individuals enrolled in teacher preparation programs who eventually will work closely with students who engage in new literacy practices outside of school. To be prepared for this challenge, future teachers, as well as practicing teachers of adolescents and college students, can benefit from learning more about how to explicitly instruct their students to construct meaning from multimodal, multimedia sources and to reflect critically on the social practices and contexts associated with them (New London Group, 1996). Also, teachers need to become aware of their own literacy practices related to various media and digital texts in order to serve as effective models and to engage in authentic conversations with students (Hagood, 2003). Just as importantly, they need to learn that providing such instruction does not mean providing an occasional mini-lesson on multimodality. A better approach entails planning and blending multiliteracies instruction into teaching and course design in such a way that it parallels the integrated use and production of these texts in our daily lives.

Moreover, in preparation for such instruction, pre-service teachers could benefit from learning more about intertextuality. Instruction could include teaching students about media authors’ intentional insertion of intertextual references and readers’ implicit use of prior knowledge (e.g., different genres, language conventions, and social codes) across diverse text types. Instruction could also address explicit, intertextual connections across media and texts not yet read. For, if we agree with one aspect of Luke’s (2000) pedagogical view, teaching intertextuality is becoming increasingly important in our multimedia, multimodal world:

Today, the expert is the one who sees and seeks the connection among related pieces of information. Hence, electronic reading and writing, a sense of intertextual connectivity, relational knowledge and, thinking laterally across associations are fundamental to ... information sourcing. (p. 73)
Conclusion

Without question, more work is needed to better understand how intertextuality varies given differences in age, class, ethnic backgrounds, and gender. Future investigations could include analysis of individuals’ actual practices, and not just their professed beliefs. Of great value, too, would be an in-depth analysis of the types of intertextual connections readers make when obtaining additional texts both on and off the computer after they follow up television viewing with a related website.

Although this line of research is still evolving, it brings to light yet another literacy practice linked to the new information and communication technologies. This work also encourages educators and researchers to think more broadly about the nature of intertextuality and its relationship to the rich array of multimodal, multimedia texts that readers now experience every day.

References


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An Analysis of Feedback Given to Strong and Weak Student Writers

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Abstract

Improvement-oriented feedback has been shown to be more effective at raising writing achievement than simple evaluative feedback. This study investigates whether teachers differ in the feedback they give to weak and strong writers as well as how feedback differs across grades. Interviews were conducted with 15 teachers about the feedback they gave students on their writing. Contrary to expectations, analyses indicate that both weak and strong writers received minimal improvement-oriented feedback. However, strong writers received more positive evaluative feedback while weak writers received more negative evaluative feedback. This research has implications for both teacher education and the professional development of teachers.

“Writing today is not a frill of the few, but an essential skill for the many” (The National Commission on Writing, 2003, p. 11), sums up the importance of writing in our society today. The July 2005 report by the National Commission on Writing maintains that over 90% of state agencies surveyed acknowledged that writing is a key factor that determines whether one is hired or promoted. The pervasiveness of standardized assessments measuring progress, particularly the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, provides another example of the need to improve student writing. Research suggests formative assessment is effective in raising student
achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998). While formative assessment has been defined in multiple ways (Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Sadler, 1998), it is commonly conceived of as that which measures student knowledge and skills and is used by teachers to appropriately modify instruction to improve student understanding.

One way to help student achievement improve is by giving effective feedback as it serves as a way in which a teacher communicates to students the difference between his or her actual level of performance with the standard or goal. This study investigates whether teachers differ in the feedback they give to weak and strong writers as well as how feedback differs across grades. Sadler (1989) suggests, “The learner has to (a) possess a concept of the standard being aimed for, (b) compare the actual level of performance with the standard, and (c) engage in appropriate action which leads to some closure of the gap” (p. 121). Similarly, Hattie and Timperley (2007) describe formative feedback in the form of questions: Where am I going; How am I going; and Where to next?

**Theoretical Framework**

Inherent in the concept of formative assessment is Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of development where feedback has not only been considered an element of formative assessment, but also as a means for moving students into the zone of proximal development where learning takes place. According to Vygotsky (1978), the zone of proximal development includes the skills and understandings that are not yet reached but are in the process of being achieved. Simply put, the zone of proximal development is the difference between a student’s potential level when assisted by adults and his or her current level of performance. Feedback serves as a way to scaffold students (Shepard, 2005), move them into the zone of proximal development, and complete a task that they were previously unable to complete on their own (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005). Bangert-Drowns, et al., (1991) explain that students construct their knowledge after receiving feedback as they respond to that feedback, evaluate the responses after receiving feedback, and adjust accordingly.

When learning has been scaffolded, students show increased achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In a study conducted by Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, and Schuder (1996), low-achieving second grade students were provided additional coaching and modeling; this group showed improvement over students who were instructed using more traditional means. When teachers ask questions to scaffold a student’s efforts, student achievement improves again suggesting a link between
types of feedback and raised student achievement (Elawar & Corno, 1985). Research also indicates that a few, clear goals and objectives can guide scaffolding so it is more effective because by providing scaffolding that more often focuses on fewer topics, the effectiveness of scaffolding is more saturated, and thus, more effective (Many, Taylor, Wang, Sachs, & Schreiber, 2007).

Students may have different levels of actual and potential development, which indicates that they may need different feedback to move into the zone of proximal development. Studies describe forms of feedback that are effective at scaffolding students. Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) meta-analysis suggested that feedback that scaffolds students’ understanding and is related to learning goals was most effective at raising student achievement. In discussing the use of feedback to move students into the zone of proximal development, one study addresses the use of feedback for learners of different ability levels (Tzuriel, 2000). This research, reflective of Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of cognitive development, suggests that while students may seem to have the same level of actual development, they may have extremely different levels of potential development at that instance. This means that, given the same situation, teachers may need to give students who seem to have lower levels of potential development more feedback in order to make gains similar to students with higher levels of potential development (Tzuriel, 2000).

**Types of Feedback**

Studies suggest that there are certain types of feedback that are more or less effective at raising student achievement (Elawar & Corno, 1985; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The effectiveness depends on the approach taken in giving the feedback as well as the content of feedback.

**Approach** is defined as feedback that is evaluative versus descriptive, task-oriented versus student-oriented, and improvement-oriented versus achievement-oriented (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996). While students received feedback that was evaluative and descriptive in its approach (Cho, Schunn, & Charney, 2006) research has found that descriptive feedback is more effective at raising student achievement than feedback that merely evaluates the extent to which something is right or wrong (Bangert-Drowns et al., 1991; Elawar & Corno, 1985; Kulhavy, 1977). Evaluative feedback is corrective in nature and typically tells a student whether something is right or wrong. Descriptive feedback tends to explain why something is incorrect and then explains how to improve. Not only is descriptive feedback more helpful
at increasing student achievement, students also reported it is more helpful in improving their writing (Cowie, 2005).

While teachers give feedback related to the task and to the student (Dixon, 2005), studies suggest that feedback that focuses on the task is more effective at raising student achievement than feedback oriented towards the student (Crooks, 1988; Sadler, 1989). In fact, student oriented feedback has been shown to be ineffective at raising student achievement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). This relates back to how feedback serves as an element in formative assessment as feedback on the person will not help students to compare their actual performance to the standard or expectation and thus is ineffective at scaffolding student learning.

Improvement-oriented feedback has been shown to be more effective at increasing student achievement than achievement-oriented feedback (Cho et al., 2006). Improvement-oriented feedback is more closely related to mastery learning whereas achievement-orientated feedback has a stronger relationship to performance learning. In other words, feedback that suggests ways to improve is more effective at raising student achievement than feedback that describes whether or not one has been successful. As Fuchs and Fuchs (1986) found, when teachers give improvement-oriented feedback, that which discusses what is wrong and how to improve it, student achievement increases. In addition, studies indicate that students appreciate feedback that offered ways to improve rather than feedback that focused on correctness (Burnett, 2003; Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2002).

**Content** feedback refers to the substance of the feedback. Matsumura, Patthey-Chavez, Valdes, and Garnier (2002) found that feedback on the ideas within writing helped improve the quality of student writing more than feedback on conventions. Both the lower- and higher-achieving schools included in the study gave minimal content feedback, and results suggested that students’ content did not improve significantly on their final drafts. Not only is content feedback effective at raising student achievement, but students did not appreciate feedback that merely provided feedback on conventions (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2002).

**Feedback that Raises Achievement in Specific Groups**

Different types of feedback may be more effective for different groups of students. For example, lower-achieving students may actually be hindered by self-oriented feedback that takes the form of praise (Cowie, 2005; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Though knowing that feedback has been shown to raise student achievement in certain student groups, there have, unfortunately, been few studies in this area.
The current study aims to identify the content and approach of feedback given to weak and strong writers which may help to fill the gap in the literature. By understanding the feedback strong and weak writers receive, one may come closer to identifying what feedback is most useful at improving the writing of these students. Specifically, this study examines the feedback teachers provide lower- and higher-achieving student writers in their classrooms and answers the research questions, “What feedback do teachers give lower- and higher-achieving student writers?” and “How does feedback differ across grade levels?”

Methods

Participants

The participants were teachers from a suburban, Catholic, K through 8 school in the Midwest. The school is currently integrating the Six Traits Analytic Writing (6 + 1 Writing, 2008; Spandel, 2001) model into all grades and subject areas, which coincides with the archdiocese’s curriculum standards. The model offers a common vocabulary and rubrics with criteria that support grade level expectations, formative assessment, and improvement-oriented feedback on the characteristics of good writing. As a result of a 3-year effort to improve student writing, all teachers participated in professional development on the Six Traits Model. Teachers present for a staff development meeting were invited to participate in the research study which consisted of 15 teacher participants with at least two teachers interviewed in each grade level band (i.e., PreK-2; 3-4; 5-6; 7-8). Participants represented all grade level and subject areas.

Data Collection

Teachers participated in 30-minute interviews and were asked to bring two student writing samples: one of a “strong” writer and one of a “weak” writer. Most of the questions related specifically to the feedback teachers gave to students on these writing samples. The interview questions asked teachers to refer directly to the feedback given on student writing, ensuring that teachers discussed the feedback they actually provided to students. Using the writing samples to guide the interview helped limit social desirability biases from teachers. In addition to discussing particular feedback given to students, teachers responded about ways they used feedback to inform students of the gap between their actual development and the
learning goals. Teachers were also asked about the extent to which students seemed to use feedback as well as any criteria given to students that related to teacher expectations and learning goals. In addition, teachers discussed the frequency with which they gave feedback on student writing and on using rubrics and examples to demonstrate learning goals (see Appendix A for interview protocol).

All but one teacher interview was recorded and transcribed as the one preferred that notes be taken by hand rather than being audiotaped. The student writing samples shared by the teachers were copied as well. Audiotapes of interviews were transcribed and analyzed through NVivo 7 (QSR International, 2006), a qualitative software package.

Data Analysis

Initial predefined coding categories were guided by the research question and the literature review (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Accordingly, segments of teachers’ feedback on students’ writing were coded twice, for both the approach to feedback and the content of feedback. Codes and their operational definitions were revised once data were initially coded. Approach feedback is divided into two main categories: improvement-oriented and evaluative. Improvement-oriented feedback refers to feedback that guides a student to improve while evaluative feedback informs students whether they were right or wrong. Evaluative feedback can be further divided into two categories: positive and negative.

In addition to categorizing feedback by its approach, this study also categorized feedback by content, or the substance of student writing. Content feedback refers to the actual substance of feedback and can be divided into seven categories: ideas, sentence fluency, voice, conventions, word choice, organization, and directions. The first six categories of content feedback were guided by the literature review and are commonly noted as traits found in good writing. The last content category, following directions, was added after reviewing the interview transcripts and noticing that several teachers provided content feedback in this area. “They didn’t really follow directions here,” was a comment heard from multiple teachers across all grade-level bands. Frequencies and percentages in each category were calculated. This study also compared the content feedback given by teachers to the content expected in each grade-level band by the archdiocese.

Each piece of feedback given by the teacher was described by both its content and approach. For example, feedback communicating that the student did not follow grammar rules would be categorized by the following content and approach of
feedback, respectively: conventions and negative evaluative. Data were first coded according to the categories identified from the literature review and adjusted to account for additional categories. A second rater verified the codes from a selection of sample data. Data were again reviewed to ensure coding remained consistent. Less than 4 instances were re-coded out of a total of 84 (see Appendix B for definitions and examples of the coding categories).

Results

By Approach

Results suggest that both strong and weak student writers receive minimal amounts of improvement-oriented feedback—the approach of feedback that is more effective at improving student writing. Table 1 shows the percentage of approach feedback received by strong writers and by weak writers. Strong student writers received over 50% more positive feedback than weak student writers while weak writers received 35% more negative feedback than strong writers. Weak writers also received over 17% more improvement-oriented feedback. In general, both strong and weak student writers received less improvement-oriented feedback. The use of evaluative feedback was summed up by one teacher, “I always give feedback... even if it’s small like ‘good’ or ‘nice’ job,” both examples of evaluative, rather than improvement-oriented, feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback approach</th>
<th>Writer</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, teachers emphasized different approaches of feedback for weak and strong writers in each of the content categories. The approach of feedback can be analyzed further by trait to provide a more refined analysis (See Figures 1 and 2). Sixty-six percent of the feedback on ideas given to strong writers was positive while 50% of the feedback on ideas given to weak writers was improvement-oriented. Strong writers received only positive feedback on organization while nearly 67% of
organization feedback was negative for weak writers. One teacher positively noted the organization of a strong student writer stating, “She had a good beginning—this is what happened—she told me a little about the middle and now she’s going towards the end.” In general, strong and weak writers received little, if any, feedback on voice. Of the feedback given to strong writers on word choice, 75% of it was positive. Weak writers received the same amount of word choice feedback for all three approaches: positive, negative, and improvement-oriented. A teacher, reading excerpts from a student’s story, commented on a student’s poor word choice: “Look at the word use. It’s vague: ‘They didn’t want to kill us…They shot us…’ We forget who ‘they’ is.” In general, there was little feedback given to either student group in sentence fluency.

While strong writers received only positive sentence fluency feedback, weak writers received no feedback in sentence fluency. In terms of feedback on conventions, over 77% of strong writers’ feedback in this category was positive as compared to only 42% for weak student writers. Nearly 36% of weak writers received negative feedback on conventions. Strong writers received only positive feedback on following directions while nearly 67% of weak student writers received feedback on directions that was negative.

![Figure 1](image-url)  
**Figure 1.** Content feedback by approach given to strong student writers.
By Content

Both students groups received feedback on the more basic content categories but less feedback on the more complex content categories. The percentage of feedback given to students in each content category is detailed in Figure 3. Both groups received the most content feedback in conventions, ideas, and organization—the more basic traits of good writing. Sentence fluency, voice, and word choice were the content categories in which both strong and weak writers received the least feedback and are typically thought of as the more complex traits of good writing.

Figure 3. Percentage of feedback given to strong and weak students by content category.
In addition to looking at how content feedback differed between strong and weak writers, this study looked at whether content feedback differed across grades. These data are organized in Table 2. The majority of feedback given was in the more basic content categories of conventions, ideas, and following directions. Twenty-five percent of content feedback given in this study was on conventions. Feedback on ideas was given 23% of the time. Twenty-two percent of feedback was on following directions. A little over 10% of the total feedback given was on the more complex content categories like sentence fluency, voice, and word choice. A little over 1% of feedback was on sentence fluency, nearly 2% of feedback was on voice, and about 8% of feedback was on word choice.

Table 2. Percentages of the Types of Content Feedback by Grade Level Band

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade band</th>
<th>Conventions</th>
<th>Ideas</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Word choice</th>
<th>Directions</th>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Sentence fluency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary (K-2)</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate I (3-4)</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate II (5-6)</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior High (7-8)</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percent represents the amount of each content category of feedback given at each grade level band. Total represents the total percent of feedback in each content category.

In analyzing the content feedback by grade-level bands, this study found that 55% of the feedback given to the student samples in pre-K through Grade 2 was on conventions, or the grammar and mechanics of writing. In Intermediate I, Grades 3 and 4, almost 45% of the feedback was on following directions and 33% was on ideas. Students in these grades received no feedback on voice, word choice, and sentence fluency. By Grades 5 and 6, nearly 28% of feedback was given in ideas, organization, and conventions. There was no feedback given on following directions. Nearly 39% of feedback in the junior high grades was on following directions and no feedback was given on voice or sentence fluency.

When compared with the archdiocese’s scope and sequence for writing (see Figure 4), the content of feedback did not align consistently. The curriculum standards suggest that basic traits of good writing—conventions and ideas—should be
covered across all grade levels. The more complex traits of good writing (e.g. sentence fluency and voice) should be introduced in the higher grades. The sequence suggests that, in each grade, students build upon what they have learned in earlier grades as well as learn one or more traits so that, by the junior high grades, they have worked with all six traits. The data suggest that while students across all grade-level bands received feedback on the basic traits of good writing, the more complex traits of good writing were minimal, especially in the higher grades. In Intermediate II (grades 5 and 6), only 6% of feedback was on sentence fluency and voice. Contrary to the archdiocese curriculum standards, no feedback was given on voice or sentence fluency in Intermediate I (grades 3 and 4) and junior high (grades 7 and 8).

Figure 4. Difference between the archdiocese graded course of study (below arrow) and actual feedback given to students across grade level bands (above arrow).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether teachers gave the same feedback to strong and weak student writers both in terms of approach and content. In investigating this, the study also looked at how feedback differed across grade levels. Research in these areas is necessary in determining how the type of teacher feedback affects learning of strong and weak writers.
By Approach

Teachers differed in the approach of feedback they gave to strong and weak writers. Strong student writers received more positive evaluative feedback than weak student writers. This seems reasonable since strong student writers most likely have more positive aspects in their writing than negative aspects, which is why they are considered to be “strong” student writers. Weak student writers received more negative evaluative feedback, as they tended to have more incorrect elements in their writing. Weak student writers received more improvement-oriented feedback. One teacher, for example, provided improvement-oriented feedback to a weak student writer, saying, “I told [the student] ‘you have good ideas, try to develop them with more details and explanation.’” The notion that weak writers received more improvement-oriented feedback is reasonable since weak student writers have more errors in their writing and would need to grow more than a strong student writer to reach the same learning goal.

Teachers in the primary grades avoided giving negative feedback. One teacher explained that she provided only positive feedback because negative feedback had the potential to stunt a student’s motivation to succeed in writing, maintaining that elementary teachers “encourage feedback but do not edit.” The data suggest that this belief may be common as students in the primary grades receive more positive and improvement-oriented feedback than negative feedback in each of the six traits; only in feedback regarding directions did students in primary grades receive more negative feedback than positive or improvement-oriented feedback.

While weak writers tend to make more errors in their writing, thus explaining why they receive negative evaluative feedback, research suggests that evaluative feedback, whether negative or positive, is not very effective in helping students make the positive changes in their writing (Cho, Schunn, & Charney, 2006). Research (Bangert-Drowns et al., 1991; Elawar & Corno, 1985; Kulhavy, 1977) has also shown that evaluative feedback is less effective at improving student writing than improvement-oriented feedback, yet both strong and weak student writers received significantly more evaluative feedback than improvement-oriented feedback. This finding is especially important considering improvement-oriented feedback is more effective at raising student achievement.

By Content

Data indicate that content feedback on student writing differed across grades. The more complex traits of good writing like voice and sentence fluency are taught
in later years and the more basic traits like ideas and conventions are taught early on. Feedback on conventions, ideas, organization, and directions was seen most often across all grades while feedback on sentence fluency, voice, and word choice was seen least often. Conventions, ideas, organization, and directions were seen most consistently through the grades and thus it makes sense that they received the most feedback.

The school has worked to align its curriculum to the archdiocese’s curriculum standards, which provides a recommended progression of writing skills from kindergarten through eighth grade. While the more basic categories of content feedback are seen across the grades, the more complex categories of content feedback are missing. This finding seems contrary to the standards in the archdiocese’s graded course of study where the more basic traits are taught earlier and the more complex traits are taught later. For example, while it makes sense that the more basic traits like conventions and ideas are taught earlier on, the data suggest that the more complex traits like voice and sentence fluency were rarely addressed in the feedback given to students in junior high grades. While much of this study’s data make sense when understanding the curriculum standards followed by the school, there are a few important points to note where the content feedback does not follow the general sequence (see Figure 3).

While the sample size was small, this preliminary study suggests that there are some important findings that need to be investigated more expansively. The data did support the curriculum standards’ sequence for teaching writing and the approach to take when giving feedback. This study also found that little emphasis was placed on the more complex traits like sentence fluency and voice in upper grades. It also indicates that improvement-oriented feedback was limited despite research that suggests it to be more effective at producing achievement (Bangert-Drowns et al., 1991; Elawar & Corno, 1985; Kulhavy, 1977). Strong writers also received less improvement-oriented feedback than weak writers.

**Future Research**

After considering both the conclusions and limitation of this study, we would make three recommendations for further investigation in this area. To make findings generalizable, the sample size could be expanded significantly to include more participants in more schools. Second, while this study looked at strong and weak student writing samples at one point in time, it would be useful to analyze how
students use feedback to improve their writing over time. This might reveal what forms of feedback students use to improve their writing most effectively. Third, while research suggests types of feedback that are effective at improving student writing, there is little information on how best to support teachers as they learn to give effective feedback to students. By helping teachers to better understand the forms of feedback most useful for the weak, average, and strong writer, they will be able to more effectively help student writing to improve.

References


Appendix A

Interview Protocol

IF TEACHER DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN SIX TRAITS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, THEN:

A. What subject(s) do you teach?
B. What grade(s) do you teach?
C. How many years have you been teaching (including this year)?
D. What is your degree in?
   a. Bachelors? Masters? Doctorate?
E. CONTINUE WITH INTERVIEW AT 1 BELOW

IF TEACHER DID PARTICIPATE IN SIX TRAITS PD, START INTERVIEW HERE:

1. Thank you for bringing in these samples of student writing! Can we start with the ‘strong’ student writing sample?
   a. What was the purpose of this assignment?
   b. Let’s walk through this writing assignment. What feedback did you give to this student?
   c. Why was it important to give this particular feedback to this specific student?
   d. What happened to this student’s learning after he/she received this feedback?
      i. How do you know?

2. Great! Let’s move on to the weak student writer.
   a. IF ASSIGNMENT DIFFERENT FROM ABOVE: What was the purpose of this assignment?
   b. Let’s walk through this writing assignment. What feedback did you give to this student?
   c. Why was it important to give this particular feedback to this specific student?
   d. What happened to this student’s learning after he/she received this feedback?
      i. How do you know?
3. Were there other occasions in which you gave additional feedback to students on this particular writing assignment?

4. This is a more general question. When do you typically choose not to give written or verbal feedback on student writing? (What sorts of assignments?)
   Example? Why?

5. What types of writing assignments do you almost always give feedback on?
   Why?

6. In the last two weeks, were there other types of feedback that you have given students on their writing other than the types we have already talked about?
   Verbal? Written? Via Conference?

IF ATTENDED SIX TRAITS, THEN:

7. Has what you learned from the Six Traits Professional Development affected how you assessed student writing this year?
   Example?

8. Thanks. The last part of the interview looks at other forms of assessment. I know that some teachers choose to use self-assessment or peer-assessment in their classroom. Are either of these strategies that you choose to use in your classroom?

IF NO, THEN:

9. Is there a reason why you do not use either? This is helpful to me as a Teacher Education major when I decide whether or not to use these types of assessment.

IF YES, THEN:

10a. What is the purpose of using (peer/self) assessment?

10b. What types of feedback do (peers/student) give the student writer?
Appendix B

Coding Definitions and Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT DEFINITION EXAMPLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sentence Fluency</strong>&lt;br&gt;Well-built and varied sentences, easy flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventions (6 Trait)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, usage, paragraphing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voice (6 Trait)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Writing in a way that is individual and engaging, aware of audience and purpose of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word Choice (6 Trait)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Precise and natural use of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideas (6 Trait)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Details enhance the theme of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization (6 Trait)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Appropriate order, structure, and emphasizes central idea/theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Followed Directions</strong>&lt;br&gt;Related to directions</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPROACH DEFINITION EXAMPLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improvement-Oriented Focusing on areas to strengthen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative Focusing on evaluation of work as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative Bad</td>
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About the Authors:
Janet L. D. Dinnen is a graduate of the University of Dayton. She is currently a social studies teacher at the Cheyenne Mountain Charter Academy in Colorado Springs where she continues to explore strategies for improving student learning. She can be contacted at janet.dinnen@gmail.com.

Rachel M. B. Collopy, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of education at the University of Dayton in Dayton, OH. Her research interests include the use of data to improve student learning and professional development of pre-service and in-service teachers through school-university partnerships.
Today’s teachers need to choose texts that provide strong role models for young readers, both male and female. When choosing a book for a girl, merely reaching for any old book with female characters isn’t enough. Care should be taken to find books that feature strong female literary role models, allowing girls to explore their own identities, claim their own voices, and gain confidence, particularly during the adolescent years. The expectations of society and peers often prompt girls to assume false identities. In addition, finding and becoming true to oneself is an arduous task that can be made easier through books with excellent female protagonists.

While books that feature female protagonists may be enticing to girls, teachers should take care to choose books with protagonists that aren’t merely window dressing or arm candy on a male character’s arm. They should instead carefully consider books with fully developed female characters who have a sense of humor about themselves. By exploring the different ways girls navigate the world around them, readers can expand their expectations of the females in their lives and erase their own stereotypes about them. The words of reader response theorist Louise Rosenblatt (1938) still ring true: Through books readers may explore their own nature, becoming aware of “potentialities for thought and feeling within himself [or herself], acquire clearer perspective and develop aims and a new sense of direction” (p. 106). This is especially true when it comes to books for girls. For your reading pleasure, here are some of our current favorite books exploring the world from a female perspective. Don’t be surprised if some of your male students enjoy reading them as well!

Grades K-2


Have you ever wondered what happened before the “Little Red Riding Hood” story? This clever book provides that information, relating how the wolf contacted Little Red Riding Hood, the most popular
character in the forest, for help in becoming good. At first Little Red Riding Hood was delighted with the wolf’s progress, but after awhile the wolf’s good behavior begins to seem a bit annoying. Soon she sets him up to be the “Big Bad Wolf.” This clever, colorful book includes pop-ups, pull tabs, removable letters and newspapers, and much more to engage readers in enjoying this hilarious spoof on a beloved fairytale.


A tiny girl lives inside a castle, which is inside a toy museum, which is inside a snow globe. Visitors can see her if they press their faces against the glass. Although the girl wants nothing, she becomes lonely once the museum visitors leave. The acrylic illustrations provide a sense of eerie fantasy and otherworldliness as the mysterious tiny girl enters the dreams of others in a world she can visit only vicariously. Who knows when she might visit one of us?


As time for the spring dance recital draws near, Katie Duck practices her dance steps and poses, confident that a starring role will be hers. Imagine her surprise when dance teacher Mr. Tutu gives her the part of the caterpillar who wriggles across the stage. But Katie makes the best of her part in this colorful picture book, and her caterpillar’s metamorphosis leaves her triumphant on center stage in the end. Young readers and parents will certainly relate to her initial disappointment and palpable joy when her inner butterfly is released.


In this retelling of the familiar Brothers Grimm tale set somewhere in Africa, the stepmother of Hansel and Gretel, portrayed as a woman who could eat much more than her fair share of any meal, decides that the only solution to the family’s empty food stores is to get rid of the children. On two different occasions, their father reluctantly leads them into the forest. The first time they find their way home using
stones dropped by Hansel, but the second time hunger drives them to a yummy-tasting witch’s house where she imprisons them and plans to have them both for dinner. After Hansel uses a bone to trick the practically blind witch into thinking he remains scrawny and Gretel uses her wits to persuade the witch into the kitchen stove, the two siblings return home to their father’s loving arms. The gorgeous geometric prints against abundant white space add to the specialness and scariness of this version of the story. Readers will feel as though there are all sorts of frightening creatures in the jungle as well as inside the witch’s house.


Lolo, the baby of the family, is used to everyone paying attention to her. But on the day of her sister’s *quinceanera*, the entire family is distracted, leaving Lolo to her own devices. When, thanks to Lolo’s inattention, the family dog gets loose and steals her sister’s sash, it’s up to her fast thinking and speedy feet to save the day. The acrylic and watercolor illustrations of this lovely picture book capture the family members’ individual personalities vividly, and the inclusion of a dictionary of Spanish terms sprinkled throughout the story add to its delight.


Everyone just loves Nancy, and in the latest installment of her adventures, she takes her unique personality and fancy vocabulary out of the house and into the great outdoors. Nancy and her friend Bree explore wildflowers, trees, and leaves in this continuation of the popular *Fancy Nancy* series. Readers will want to try out the recipes for pine cone bird feeders and extra-fancy lemonade, and the book just may prompt some young couch potato to adventure outside her front door.
Lady Winter covers Sister Spring with a magical white blanket that keeps the world icy and cold. After all, if Spring never wakes up, it will always remain Winter, which she loves. Longing for a warmer season, Robin calls on all his forest friends to awaken Spring, but no one is successful. Finally, Robin bravely flies to Mother Sun for help. Although her intervention awakens Spring, Robin pays a price, with his tummy forever more changed to a brighter color. The words and the paintings in this picture book are memorable, and readers will be grateful for Robin’s bravery.


Disappointed over the contents of her supper, a young girl makes her annoyance known to her mother in this wordless picture book. When her mother sends her to her room, she turns to her teddy bear for solace. Her stuffed animal friend takes her on an overnight adventure into the forest, but both end up safe in their own beds the next morning. The linoleum block artwork, combined with the artist’s painstaking brushstrokes, make this a memorable picture book, one that prompts more than a second look. There is unexpected depth to the images that allows them to carry the plot of the story and reveal emotions perfectly. Young readers will surely relate to the protagonist’s disappointment over what has been served for dinner as well as her short-lived anger.

Grades 3-5


Sometimes it is difficult to fit in and to live up to the expectations of others. Even fairies such as Elly, who attends the Mossy Blossom Academy for Young Fairies, worry about fitting in. Elly hates the itchy tutus and flowered wreathes around her head that she is expected to wear. Her wand is rarely charged—she hates being a
fairy. She would much rather wear jeans and ride her cool skateboard. Her parents have threatened her with no fairy license if she is not successful at her current school since she has been expelled from two fairy academies (it was an accident that she turned her teacher purple!). Readers will enjoy the well developed characters and Elly’s escapades with her family and her human friend in this fantastic adventure.


When the Wild—where fairy tales and fairy tale characters live—unexpectedly expels Julie Marchen’s father Prince Charming, it is up to the 12-year-old daughter of Rapunzel to bring him up to speed about modern technology. But before she can complete her tutorial, things go awry with Zel being turned into a pumpkin, and Sleeping Beauty kidnapped. What is a prince or a princess to do? Julie and her dad set off on a cross-country fairy tale road trip with stops at Graceland, the Grand Canyon, and Disneyland along the way. This sequel to the delectable and highly original *Into the Wild* (2007) is quite a romp, filled with witty ruminations from the fairy tale characters and with the realization that while the Wild is almost unstoppable, it’s also necessary. After all, we all need a bit of magic in our lives. Durst’s skillful blending of reality and fantasy will leave readers wanting more.


Nine-year-old Piper and her two sisters have many adventures while their navy-man father is at sea. When her mother falls downstairs and breaks her leg, the three girls each write an e-mail message to their father explaining the event. The e-mails offer different perspectives about who caused the accident. As the Gypsy Club hosts its first pet show, Piper is determined that her dog Bruna will be the winner. Who would have imagined that her friend’s guinea pig could dance the tango? Piper Reed fans will love this title and want to watch for the forthcoming *Piper Reed Gets a Job.*
This moving tribute to the outspoken First Lady combines pitch-perfect prose and beautiful illustrations to introduce a new generation of readers to Eleanor, a woman who was decidedly not silent. But it wasn’t always so. Eleanor grew up quiet and lonely among a family of achievers. Despite her privileged upbringing, Eleanor somehow related with the underdogs and those whose lives were not as easy as hers had been. Unlike other women in her socio-economic class, she wasted little time on frivolity, choosing to use her position of influence to draw attention to poverty and civil rights, issues that mattered to her.

With powerful, quiet lines, this picture book takes readers back to the growing up days of Coretta Scott as she walked to school, determined to follow her own dream while also noting the unfairness of laws in those days. There is a hymn-like quality about the prose that almost evokes a call-and-response to the text. Nelson’s brushstrokes lovingly evoke the essence of this grande dame of the Civil Rights movement and capture her elegance, grace, and strength amid a tumultuous time. The cover itself is gasp-worthy, with Coretta’s elegant visage filling the entire front cover, her hair spreading gently but insistently across the back.

Thirteen-year-old Iman Bright has been taking dance lessons at The Ailey School in New York since she was four. This photo essay with close-up shots of her elegant poses, stretches, and moves highlights the hard work, struggle, and the rewards of this incredibly self-
disciplined young woman. The text follows her as she attends classes and balances her packed schedule, including Saturday violin lessons. Readers will draw inspiration from her dedication to her craft while also enjoying time with friends. Whether she chooses dance as a career, Iman has clearly used it to build her self-confidence.

Harris, Lewis. (2009). *A taste for red.*

Sixth grader Svetlana Grimm is certain that she is a vampire, and she knows the signs. She can only stomach red foods, and she must sleep under her bed because of her sensitivity to light and noise. When she realizes that she and her science teacher have quite a lot in common, she mistakenly thinks she has found a mentor into the vampire world until her odd new neighbor disillusions her. This is a delicious, quirky story destined to make its rounds rapidly through the middle grades and possibly prompt a surge in the consumption of all foods that are colored red.


Her courage was tested twice as a teenager in the battle for civil rights in Montgomery, and each time Claudette passed that test with flying colors. This account of a teen who decided she was tired of moving to the back of the bus, and that the time had come to fight for civil rights is based on several interviews the author conducted with Claudette, who now lives in New York. Readers will draw inspiration from her courage and be dismayed at the treatment she received from classmates and neighbors afterward, becoming barely a footnote in the nation’s history.


The fight for our nation’s independence provides the perfect backdrop for an exploration of freedom and fairness for slaves and women. The story of Deborah Sampson, an indentured servant who wanted more from life than what society considered appropriate in 1775, is told from her eyes in this engaging piece of historical fiction filled with details about a woman who wanted to serve her country. Particularly striking are the author’s description of how Deborah, who called herself Robert Shurtleff in order to serve her country, practiced the voice, gait, and mannerisms of a man.

Minli and her parents work long and hard every day, yet have little to show for their efforts or even little rice to eat. While her mother complains about their poor life, her father shares a wealth of stories with Minli. These enchanting folk stories prompt her to set out on a quest to meet the Old Man in the Moon to ask him to change her family’s fortune. On her epic quest, Minli is assisted by many, including a dragon and a talking goldfish. Readers will be captivated by both the stories and the rich illustrations in this novel.


Lina is known for being a “sock enthusiast,” an athlete, and a great science student. Her life seems to change drastically after her mother dies as her father retreats into books, her best friend seems more interested in her boyfriend than their friendship, and her recently divorced neighbor becomes obsessed with making *cascarones* (hollowed eggshells filled with confetti). As Lina learns to accept the consequences for some of her poor choices, readers will enjoy the satisfying ending.


Two seventh grades, Ivy June and Catherine, have been selected as partners in an exchange program for Kentucky girls. First, Ivy June spends a week in Lexington with Catherine and her family and attends school there. Then, Catherine goes to the mountains to do the same with Ivy June and her family. Though the girls have very different lives, they find they have much in common. They are drawn even closer together as they rely on their faith and hope to deal with untimely events.


On the edge of her eleventh birthday, Lucky is about to be honored at a party with all the quirky citizens of Hard Pan in attendance. Lucky’s familiar world
grows a bit unfamiliar with the arrival of several visiting geologists and Paloma, a
girl who might become her new friend. Much of the plot revolves around the intri-
cacies of friendship, and the breaks for Lucky aren’t always so lucky. In this sequel
to the Newbery-award winning *The Higher Power of Lucky* (2006), readers will be
reacquainted with Lucky and her extended family, and yes, the word “scrotum” ap-
ppears in the book. The sequel is satisfying, and the characters continue to grow in
honest and appealing ways.

New York: Henry Holt. 72 pages, $16.95,

The bond between a mother and a daughter lasts
long after death separates the two although time may
make the memories of their time together less sharp. In
31 evocative poems, the author explores the essential
nature of love and loss and makes the emptiness pal-
pable when the ties that bind are severed. Accompanied
by the author’s own folk-art illustrations, the text, while
leavened with precious memories, hope, and slow heal-
ing, also stings, reminding the reader of the precious-
ness of time and relationships.

Grades 9-12

New York: Viking. 288 pages, $17.99,

Lia and Cassie were friends, sharing secrets, but
at some point their lives took different paths. As the
novel opens, Cassie has died, having attempted to call
Lia 33 times while Lia ignores her calls. Despite their
estrangement, Lia may not be far behind Cassie since
she hides what she eats and, worse, what she doesn’t
eat. Fresh out of a treatment center for eating disorders,
Lia keeps a desperate accounting of every morsel eaten,
every calorie consumed, and her world is a place where
thinner is always better, and less is always more. While
this grim book lacks the spontaneous humor of Anderson’s singular *Speak* (1999), it brilliantly depicts life in the not-so-fat lane, and is populated by well-meaning but clueless adults and a protagonist who even edits her own thoughts as harshly as she restricts her own consumption of food.


Life is going well for eighteen-year-old Indigo Skye, and then it seems to get even better. Impressed with her genuineness, a wealthy diner leaves a $2.5 million tip at the restaurant where she works the morning shift. Although Indigo should have taken a clue from the diner’s own realization that enormous wealth hasn’t brought him happiness, despite her best intentions, she finds herself suckered into a world of conspicuous consumption, buying the latest products simply because they’re new, and growing increasingly mistrustful of those around her, who all seem to want whatever her money can buy. Confused, Indigo leaves home only to find that there is a whole culture of folks who want more, more, more, and that even the musician she has idolized is nothing like she dreamed. In a world where image is everything, Indigo becomes disoriented and confused. Readers will appreciate Indigo’s journey back to serenity and ponder their own need to have the latest name-brand products.


With one blue and one green eye, Katsa is different from the other girls, but that’s not her only unique characteristic. Her unusual eyes let anyone who looks at her know that she has been blessed with a grace — in her case, the ability to fight and kill efficiently. Although she is talented, Katsa resents being used as the king’s henchwoman and secretly involves herself in a rebel effort against the man who pays her wages. When she meets equally talented but gentle Po, a fledgling romance blossoms in this terrific tale of a woman who pushes herself to the end of her strength and finds there’s even more depth to herself than she ever imagined. Readers will love the fantasy elements of the story, especially the idea of a ruler with the ability to persuade everyone who hears him, even when he lies.

When her little sister wins the lottery to represent her section of the country in the Hunger Games, Katniss volunteers to take her place in a game with only one winner — the one survivor. To win, she knows that she will need intelligence, craftiness, and single-mindedness. Can she really rely on anyone else? The male portion of her team, Peeta, is a likeable but unlikely participant as well, and he and Katniss undergo grooming sessions and are paraded about in elaborate costumes in an attempt to gain support for the team and encourage a larger viewing audience for the Games. On the way to her unexpected victory, the cynical and mistrustful Katniss begins to change, questioning whether her survival will be worth all that it costs. Readers will root for Katniss and Peeta and be as troubled by her moral dilemma as she is. Due out in September, the second title, *Catching Fire*, will resolve some of the questions left unanswered by this book.


Fifteen-year-old Nina Khan finds herself plagued by three concerns during her junior year: the legacy of success her big sister left behind, body hair, and a crush on a guy who seems bewitched by her high school nemesis. Although Nina loves her family and its traditions, she abhors being the only South Asian Muslim in her school, and longs to find a way to be faithful to her family’s dictates while embracing a new culture. She doesn’t want to be exotic—in a bad way. Readers will laugh at Nina’s description of the love lives and misadventures of her best pals Helena and Bridget, and groan at her own attempts at normalcy in a novel that delivers a powerful message about living up to the expectations of others while trying to be true to oneself.

In April 2008, millions of Americans watched as Child Protection Services removed more than 400 children from a polygamous compound in Texas. Among those removed were many young girls who had been “plural wives” of older men. No doubt many wondered what would have happened to young girls who refused “the call” to marry old men. The novel tells such a story, describing the experiences Kyra, a 13-year-old who resists being forced to marry her father’s 60-year-old brother. Making the story even more complex, Kyra hides two secrets: her interest in one of the boys in the community and her visits to check out books from the book mobile. High school students will find this book difficult to put down!

Reference


About the Authors:

**Barbara A. Ward** and **Terrell A. Young** are on the faculty at Washington State University. Ward serves on the ALA Amelia Bloomer Award Committee.
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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Rachel Brown, Ph.D., Syracuse University

An Analysis of Feedback Given to Strong and Weak Student Writers
Janet L. D. Dinnen, Cheyenne Mountain Charter Academy and Rachel M. B. Collopy, Ph.D, University of Dayton

Brave, Determined, and Strong: Books for Girls (and Sometimes Boys)
Barbara A. Ward, Ph.D. and Terrell A. Young, Ed.D., Washington State University