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

Submitting Manuscripts: Manuscripts should be mailed to Editor Karen F. Thomas; 3514 Sangren Hall; Western Michigan University; Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5255. Please send four copies of the manuscript which then become the property of the journal. Authors’ manuscripts will be acknowledged within two weeks of their receipt and the editors will then determine if the manuscript will go out for review. Manuscripts must follow the fifth edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA). Manuscripts not written in this style can be returned without review.

Editorial Policies: After determination of a review process, manuscripts will be sent to three reviewers for a blind review, and results should be known within two to three months. Criteria used for evaluating and reviewing manuscripts are significance of their contribution to literacy/language arts research and instruction, clarity of writing, and sound methodological processes used.

Author Copies: Authors will receive three copies of the journal in which their articles appear.

Reading Horizons (ISSN 0034-0502) is published quarterly by the Dorothy J. McGinnis Reading Center and Clinic in the College of Education at Western Michigan University. Postmaster: Send address changes to Reading Horizons, 1903 W Michigan Ave, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5255.

Subscriptions: Please see back page for subscription information.

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
DOROTHY J. MCGINNIS READING CENTER AND CLINIC
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN
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What’s New in Children’s Books

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KALAMAZOO MI 49008
In December of 2006 and again in February of 2007, fifty Literacy Professors representing almost every college and university in Michigan met in a collegial forum to discuss and advocate for all students involved in reading instruction/education. This advocacy spans students from pre-kindergarten through college undergraduates and graduates. The many and varied issues and voices in the reading mix have become overwhelming for both the public at large and educators involved in reading instruction.

In an attempt to reach out to the families of Michigan whose lives are directly affected by all literacy instruction, the Michigan Alliance of Reading Professors (MARP) pledges to help make sense of the varied and numerous voices in the reading arena in a positive advocacy role. We support the following:

As the Michigan Alliance of Reading Professors, we dedicate ourselves to supporting and improving the lives of Michigan’s families through effective literacy instruction.

**OUR MISSION:**

- To ensure that every student in Michigan receives reading instruction that is based on rigorous research;
• To promote teacher expertise and professional decision making in literacy assessment and instruction;
• To communicate with families, educators, policy-makers, and others about literacy issues;
• To advocate for the rights of literacy professionals to identify and implement effective reading instruction, assessment, and research; and
• To collaborate with other professional organizations who share our goals.

With an eye to the reading and literacy instruction for the 21st century, MARP looks forward to the challenges posited in our mission statement. Reading instruction that matters and keeps curiosity alive can only take place in the classrooms of knowledgeable, prepared teachers who plan based on the needs of each learner. This teacher/student relationship is crucial to effective reading instruction and MARP's role is critical in forging these positive relationships.

For more information, MARP's contacts are:

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Teachers as Reflective Practitioners: Examining Teacher Stories of Curricular Change in a 4th Grade Classroom

William P. Bintz
Kent State University

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Cincinnati, Ohio

This article describes findings from a classroom-based action research project conducted by two in-school teachers, a literacy coach and a 4th grade teacher, implementing a new integrated literacy and social studies curriculum and the changes they made in curricular practices and beliefs over a three-year period of time. A university professor also served as an out-of-school researcher assisting with analyzing data, describing findings, and discussing implications. The project was based on the model of teacher as researcher asking two focused inquiry questions: 1) what can be learned about teaching by taking a reflective practitioner perspective as a way to think about our own teaching? and 2) what can be learned about curriculum and curriculum development from collaboratively implementing an integrated literacy and social studies curriculum in a 4th grade classroom? Research methods were grounded in principles of naturalistic inquiry and data collection and data analysis were driven by the methodology of grounded theory. Three stories of curricular change were constructed from the data. These stories illustrate how study reflected on and changed their practices about curriculum and curriculum development over time. Findings and implications indicate thinking more broadly and more deeply about curriculum and curriculum development.
As educators, we cannot make decisions about what we need to change if we do not step back and examine what we do (Barry, 1997, p. 524).

Teachers learn by doing, reading, and reflecting (just as students do); by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see. This kind of learning enables teachers to make the leap from theory to accomplished practice. In addition to a powerful base of theoretical knowledge, such learning requires settings that support teacher inquiry and collaboration and strategies grounded in teachers' questions and concerns (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 598).

Introduction

Teaching is an act of thoughtfulness (Barell, 1995). That is, teaching means being continuously thoughtful about how to support the learning of others, as well as our own (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1997; Fisher, 1995). Thoughtful teachers engage in reflective practice as a way to think about their teaching and about ways to continually develop and implement curriculum that is personally meaningful and culturally relevant to students (Allington, 2002).

Co-authors William, university professor, and Jill, literacy coach, valued the model of teacher as reflective practitioner and currently collaborate with a variety of teachers who value it as well. Our work with them focuses on describing and understanding the problems and pleasures teachers, who are intentionally thoughtful about their teaching, experience in the classroom. This article describes findings from a classroom-based action research project conducted by two teachers while implementing a new integrated literacy and social studies curriculum and the changes they made in curricular practices and beliefs over time. This project was based on the model of teacher as researcher (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996; Patterson, Santa, Short, & Smith, 1993; Patterson, Stansell, & Lee, 1990) and focused on two inquiry questions asked by the teachers: 1) what can be learned about teaching by taking a reflective practitioner perspective as a way to think about our own teaching? and 2)
what can be learned about curriculum and curriculum development by collaboratively implementing an integrated literacy and social studies curriculum in a 4th grade classroom?

We begin by situating this project within a larger conceptual framework grounded in the history of curriculum. Next, we identify different types of curriculum that have evolved over the past century. Then, we identify the conception of curriculum used in this project, *Curriculum as Belief System*, and situate it within a larger historical context of curriculum thought and practice. Next, we identify project participants and data sources and describe data collection and data analysis procedures. Then, we share three teacher stories of curricular change that illustrate how Jill and Sally (pseudonym), a 4th grade teacher, changed their practices and beliefs about curriculum and curriculum development over time. Finally, we discuss findings from these stories and discuss implications for thinking more deeply about curriculum and curriculum development.

**Background**

Almost all educational problems of any importance are problems that have a history, that have been addressed in the past, and that have import for the current state of affairs in education (Eisner, 1992, p. 30).

Historically, defining curriculum has been problematic in education. Much of the problem is that the meaning of the term has never been able to shake off its etymology (Austin, 1970). Originally, curriculum derives from the Latin word *currere*, meaning "the course to be run." This definition has a rich history and continues to significantly influence the field of curriculum. And yet, a review of the history of curriculum thought and practice suggests that curriculum has never had a uniform and monolithic definition (Bintz, 1995). A multiplicity of definitions has always existed, each one representing a complex value statement (Cremin, 1971) "consisting of practices and ideas that represent ways of addressing oneself to questions like what should be taught and why" (Kliebard, 1976, p. 245). Figure 1 illustrates a sample of multiple definitions.
### Figure 1. Conceptions and Definitions of Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conception</th>
<th>Definition of Curriculum</th>
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| As lived experience               | 1) Experience going on in school. It's content is identical to the content of the actual experience of the learners (Taba, 1932)  
2) The totality of student experiences in school, planned and unplanned (Tyler, 1975)  
3) A narrative of experience; a person's life experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) |
| As preparation for life           | 4) The way in which the school aids boys and girls to improve their daily living (Hopkins, 1936).  
5) A succession of experiences giving the learner that development most helpful in meeting life situations (Seguel, 1966)  
6) An expression of a covenant between the schools and society (Stenhouse, 1983). |
| As system or plan                 | 7) A series of plans expressive of the educational purposes of policy-makers on behalf of a specified group of learners (Snedden, 1927).  
8) The system within which decisions are made about what the curriculum will be and how it will be implemented (Beauchamp, 1961)  
9) The plans made for guiding learning in schools represented in retrievable documents of several levels of generality, and the implementation of those plans in the classroom (Glatthorn, 1987). |
| As course of study                | 10) The course of study which presents for the teacher the leanings which children should attain in her care (Melvin, 1931)  
11) A group of fields of study arranged in a particular sequence (Caswell & Campbell, 1935)  
12) A course of studies (Goodlad, Klein, & Tye, 1979) |
| As content                        | 13) Content that is to be employed in instruction, including the selection and arrangement of subjects, as well as the selection and arrangement of content in these subjects (Caswell & Campbell, 1935)  
14) Formal subject matter (facts, processes, principles) set out to be learned (Sequel, 1966)  
15) Course content in the form of data or information recorded in guides or textbooks (Tyler, 1975). |
Teachers as Reflective Practitioners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conception</th>
<th>Definition of Curriculum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As activity or opportunity</td>
<td>16) It is everything that the students and their teachers do, the activities, the things done, and the materials with which they are done (Rugg, 1926)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17) The pupil activities and the materials of instruction that arouse them (Sequel, 1966)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18) What students have an opportunity to learn in school, through both the overt and hidden curriculum, and what they do not have an opportunity to learn because certain matters were included in the curriculum (McCutcheon, 1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As tool for guiding teacher decision-making</td>
<td>19) All the experiences children have under the guidance of teachers (Caswell &amp; Campbell, 1935)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>20) Pedagogical directives, intended to provide assistance, advice, suggestions, and information to assist the teachers in carrying out his task successfully (Dottrens, 1962)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>21) A set of intended leanings (McCutcheon, 1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum as Belief System</td>
<td>22) A set of beliefs about how people learn, and the classroom contexts that best support that learning (Short &amp; Burke, 1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23) Curriculum evolves out of the transaction between a paper curriculum, an enacted curriculum, and an envisioned curriculum -- a triadic relationship that is dynamic, ongoing, and represents a shared process between teachers and students working together through negotiation (Short &amp; Burke, 1991)</td>
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</table>

Given this history it is ironic that continued attempts to define curriculum over the years have created significantly more, not considerably less, of what Hazlitt (1979) has termed "chronic definitional ambiguity." Today, more than ever before, the curriculum field is replete with many different curricularists who use different definitions and discourses to think and talk about curriculum. These different definitions and discourses have created a proliferation of different types of curriculum.

Types of Curriculum

Different definitions reflect different types of curriculum (Weisz, 1989). The following is a partial list (Glatthorn, 1987):
social curriculum (the social interactions and practices occurring in classrooms);

- recommended curriculum (the ideal curriculum consisting of basic competencies acquired through academic subjects developed by scholars or committees of subject specialists);

- written curriculum (a document consisting of scope and sequence charts, curriculum guides, etc.);

- mastery curriculum (a subdivision of the written curriculum in that it specified knowledge deemed essential to all students, and inculcated through carefully sequenced and highly structured objectives);

- organic curriculum (a curriculum that contains essential knowledge, but doesn’t require tightly structured organization, focused teaching, and detailed evaluation);

- taught curriculum (the curriculum that teachers end up teaching, i.e. the observable curriculum); and

- supported curriculum (the resources (texts, time space, staff) provided to support curriculum implementation or delivery).

This list suggests that reaching any consensus about a common definition of curriculum remains, as it has for almost a century, one of the most fundamental conceptual problems in the field (Kliebard, 1989). It also indicates that many perspectives are used to understand the nature of curriculum. In the following section we discuss Curriculum as Belief System, describing it as one perspective on curriculum and the one we used as a conceptual lens to analyze data from this inquiry project.

Curriculum as Belief System

Historically much research has been conducted on curriculum as lived experience, content, activity or opportunity, preparation for life, system or plan, course of study, and tool for guiding teacher decision-making (Figure 1). Less research, however, has been conducted on curriculum as belief system. This is partially due to the fact that the notion of curriculum as belief system is a radical departure from traditional views of curriculum. This perspective defines curriculum as "a set of beliefs about how people learn, and the classroom contexts that best support that learning" (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 6), and curriculum
development as the process of teachers putting these beliefs into action through the construction of curricular frameworks. These frameworks are organizational devices which enable teachers to create curriculum, implement instruction, collect assessment data in the form of anecdotal records, vignettes, and other "kidwatching" (Goodman, 1978) strategies, and reflect on these data in order to make more informed curricular decisions. The phrase "more informed" (Short, K., Harste, J., with Burke, C., 1996) means teachers using children as informants to constantly create and revise curricular engagements, instructional strategies, and assessment procedures so they reflect the best we currently know about how people learn (Harste, 1986; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988). Simply stated, curricular frameworks help teachers connect what they believe and what they practice (Short, 1997).

Curriculum as belief system is grounded in research on teacher thinking (Clark, 1988; Brousseau, Book, & Byers, 1988; Fang, 1996). Jackson (1968) was one of the first to study the thought processes of teachers, and the relationship between teacher thinking and teacher instruction. He documented that how and what teachers think about significantly influences their instructional effectiveness. Similarly, Gove (1981) found that teacher thinking and teacher behavior are guided by an organized set of beliefs or theories which are often implicit, as did Nespor (1987, p. 323) who found that "to understand teaching from teachers' perspectives we have to understand the beliefs with which they define their work."

Curriculum as belief system is also rooted in literacy education, particularly reading education. Research indicates that teacher-decision-making is influenced by personally held belief systems (Harste & Burke, 1977; Harste & Burke, 1980; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991; Sturtevant, 1996). Specifically, what students and teachers believe about literacy and literacy development powerfully affects teaching and learning in the classroom (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987). In reading education, belief systems are often characterized as theoretical orientations (DeFord, 1985). These orientations are systems of knowledge that control expectations and daily decision making; they are based on deep philosophical principles that guide teachers in making decisions about reading instruction. Harste & Burke (1980) found that
both teachers and learners hold particular and identifiable theoretical orientations about reading which in turn significantly effect expectancies, goals, behavior, and outcomes at all levels. Similarly, Reutzel & Sabey (1996) found that teachers' theoretical orientations about literacy, especially reading, are generally aligned with classroom practices.

At this point it might be helpful to ask: How is curriculum as belief system an alternative from, say, curriculum as preparation for life and curriculum as a fixed course of study? A major difference is that they ask very different curricular questions. For example, *curriculum as preparation for life* might ask: How do we as teachers prepare students for the workplace? And *curriculum as course of study* might ask: How can we as teachers identify and teach the facts, processes, and principles in a given content area that students should know? Curriculum as belief system, however, asks questions like:

- What do we currently understand about natural learners?;
- What contexts best support and enhance natural learners?;
- How do natural learners gain and maintain perspective on their learning?; and
- What understandings are learners constructing out of classroom experiences? (Short & Burke, 1991).

Central to this perspective is the belief that curriculum does not consist of hierarchically arranged scope and sequence charts, or teacher, school, and state curriculum guides developed by curriculum specialists and implemented by teachers. Rather, curriculum evolves out of the transaction between a paper curriculum (beliefs about how people learn, and classroom contexts that best support learning) an enacted curriculum (actual learning engagements which reflect those beliefs and occur both in and outside classrooms), and an envisioned curriculum (potential new curriculum based on student and teacher reflections of learning engagements) (Short & Burke, 1991). This triadic relationship is dynamic and ongoing, and represents a shared process between teachers and students working together through negotiation. Similarly, curricular change occurs when teachers change their beliefs and shift their instructional practices based on what they are constantly learning from observations of and conversations with students.
Given this historical and conceptual background, in the following section we identify the project method, as well as describe participants, data sources, and data collection and data analysis procedures involved in this teacher inquiry project.

Method

Participants. A total of three educators participated in this project: Sally, (pseudonym), a four grade teacher in a school district located in a large Midwestern city; Jill, co-author and reading and writing specialist working as a literacy coach across the curriculum at the same elementary school. Sally and Jill collaborated because they shared common interests including the reading and writing connection and literature-based reading and writing instruction. Most importantly, they shared an interest in thinking about their own teaching from a teacher as reflective practitioner point of view. The third participant, William, co-author and a university professor in literacy education at a large Midwestern university, participated as an out-of-school researcher assisting with analyzing data, describing findings and implications.

Data Sources. This project included three data sources: 1) Jill and Sally recording ongoing classroom observations, 2) Jill and Sally conducting ongoing reflective conversations in debriefing sessions, and 3) Jill and Sally sharing a journal. The journal consisted of notes Jill recorded and shared with Sally in debriefing sessions about their collaborative teaching based on classroom observations and reflective conversations with each other. These conversations focused on the question: “What are we learning about ourselves as teachers?”

Data Collection. Jill and Sally worked together for three years. During this time, they planned, implemented, and assessed a variety of classroom projects. Jill worked in Sally’s room on average twice a week. Typically, Jill was in the classroom for approximately sixty to ninety minutes each session. In addition, they met for approximately twenty minutes in Sally’s room to debrief, reflect and plan. These debriefing sessions centered around focused inquiry questions such as, “I think today went really well, what did you think?”; “Where are we going next?” While talking, Jill recorded reflective and planning notes in the
Data Analysis. Data-analysis was grounded in principles of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and driven by the methodology of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). Sally and Jill used the following questions to guide data analysis: 1) what are we learning about ourselves as teachers? and 2) what are we learning about curriculum and curriculum development by implementing an integrated literacy and social studies curriculum? Jill wrote results of this analysis for each year in narrative form and afterwards shared them with Sally for her feedback on accuracy, clarity, and revision. Based on this feedback, Jill wrote the following narratives intentionally in the first person in order to capture and describe her and Sally's personal and collaborative stories of curricular change.

Teacher Stories of Curricular Change

Year 1

The district had adopted a new curriculum guide for reading and language designed to allow teachers with a literature-based philosophy to have freedom. The objective regarding research in the new curriculum guide simply stated that students needed to experience the research process. The fourth graders needed to read and learn about their state history so we decided to invite students to read and research Ohio history. Sally and I sat and brainstormed 26 topics related to Ohio history that we believed would be motivating to students. Sally thought we should use the Ohio History textbook, but that we would need additional resources so students could explore their topics more thoroughly. After school, we searched through newspapers, magazines, and old history textbooks. Lucky for us, it was a bicentennial year for our city an we had access to some recently published written recounts of the past. We gathered everything we could find and grouped the information by topic.

The next day we announced to the students that everyone in the class was going to become an expert on one particular aspect of Ohio history. We explained that after reading about a topic and writing about
it, each person would share what was learned with everyone else and we would all become experts on many things in Ohio history when we finished. We talked about steamboats, Marietta, Indian mounds, Tecumseh, Garfield, canals, and more. As Sally read the 26 topics we had identified for students to choose from, I wrote the topics on the board. After each student selected one topic to research, we selected one, too. Sally and I believe that the teacher should participate in the research with the students. By doing the same work the students do, we demonstrated that we were readers and writers, too, and that it was important for all of us to be learners. Experiencing the work with the students would also enable us to feel what was working and if changes needed to be made to better facilitate learning.

To begin, we asked students to list all they knew about their selected topics and what other things they wanted to know about them. Even though students had been asking questions all of their lives, they had not been asking questions as a way of wondering, at least at school. Students had a hard time deciding what they wanted to know further about the topic, so Sally and I divided the class in half so that each student could be met with in an individual conference. One student, for example, could not think of anything he wanted to know about barges so we made suggestions. We asked: do you want to know what a barge looks like? do you wonder what barges were used for? are you curious about how barges helped Ohio? As we talked, students wrote down our questions.

Sally and I gave students photocopied sections of text relating to their topics to read and invited them to find and use other sources of information, including interviews with grandparents and museum curators, films, etc.

All the while, Sally and I did whole class minilessons at the start of each class session on aspects of the research process. We did minilessons on how to find relevant information, how to make note cards, how to put information in "your own words," how to create bibliography, and so on. In a ten minute attention-getting minilesson, I demonstrated how I put information I was reading about into my own words. I read a paragraph from an encyclopedia, stopped, closed the book and then wrote out the
information on a giant sized note card I had made so all students could see. Then, I continued reading another paragraph, stopped, closed the book and put the text into my own words once more. Finally, I read another paragraph, closed the book and invited students in the classroom to put the text into their own words.

Sally and I held conferences with students all during the writing process. We looked over their note cards to see if they were gathering enough information on the topics and if they were putting the information they read into their own words. We met with students over rough drafts to help them write clearly and write enough to satisfy their research questions. Sally and I did final editing of students drafts after students checked for meaning, spelling and punctuation individually and in peer conferences. Students read their final drafts to each other one at a time in front of the classroom. As they finished, students turned their papers in to Sally and me for grades. Points were awarded for writing note cards, making a rough draft and a final draft. We all agreed we had learned a lot about Ohio history.

I made a few reflective notes to help me remember what worked and what did not.

Year 2

Sally and I remembered our students' lack of enthusiasm, and the skimpy, boring papers they wrote. We felt our students would become more involved in the research process if the subject they were researching could be more exciting to them so we selected endangered animals for study. We went on a book search and checked out books from three different libraries in the area. There were books on tigers, gorillas, grizzlies, pandas, and so on. Based on the resources available, we created a topic choice list and invited students to select an animal to investigate from the list.

We wanted students to really own the topic, so we allowed them to double up with a partner or we let one student research the same animal as another. They could make additions and substitutions to the list. We gave them voice in their choice rather than match students to animals
listed on the board. If students did share a topic or partner up on their research, we gave them the responsibility of determining how to share the reading materials as well as the workload. They could collaborate on drafts or do individual reports. The room buzzed with excitement as students set about their work. Sally and I heard students reading to each other and observed them pointing to pictures and sharing captions of information from the pages.

After three reading workshop sessions, students excitedly created webs and easily recorded knowledge of their selected animals when we asked them to share what they knew. We felt we had successfully immersed them in print and had given them sufficient time to wonder about the animals they had been reading and talking about. Sally and I began to hold conferences. In our conferences we asked the students to tell us three things they wanted to know about their selected animals that they did not already know. Because our students were so invested, we were quickly surprised when we found it difficult for students to jot down or even orally compose three questions as they sat with one or the other of us. Sally and I began to offer assistance. We would ask, “Do you want to know what your animal eats?” “Are you interested in knowing your animal’s life span?” “Would it be interesting to find out why your animal is on the endangered list?” The same as last year, we felt like we were putting words in students’ mouths and questions on their papers. There was lots of uneasiness about how our conferencing was going, but we had to help students determine questions so they could move forward and begin reading to research and write what they learned.

We referred to our lesson plans from the year before and repeated many of the same minilessons we had done during last year’s research unit. We felt that the minilesson on how to put information in “your own words” was very important to the research process so I demonstrated once more how I read a section, close the book, say in my own words what I just read, and write it on a note card. We added a minilesson on how to work together since we could see the need. Some twosomes were not sharing the work so Sally and I pretended and role-played a student scene. She put a big bow in her hair and I wore a baseball cap. I sat back and doodled on my paper while Sally did all the reading and note taking. Sally sighed and told me that it was not fair for her to do all the work.
She asked me if I would take a turn taking notes if she would read so we both could hear. Together we negotiated the work and shared the assignment so students could see ways readers and writers can collaborate on assignments. Because we felt we created more confusion than what it was worth last year when we tried to show our students how to write bibliographic data, we omitted the minilesson on how to write a bibliography.

Sally and I tried to help students be successful and complete their research reports on time. We created deadlines for note cards and finish lines for rough drafts. To help students keep track of their knowledge and facilitate their writing, we invited students on two occasions to pick a friend in the room and write a letter to the friend telling the classmate all they knew about the animal they were studying. These fun and quick writings helped students organize their ideas for their research reports and discover what else they needed to know. Students, also, held peer conferences and served to help each other revise and move toward final drafts and finished research reports.

When final drafts were finished, students shared their reports in an open read-in and then, stored them with other final drafts in their portfolios. When assessments were to be made, students were invited to choose the piece they wanted to be evaluated from several final drafts they had collected in their writing folders. On a monthly basis, students selected a draft from their portfolios to be evaluated for content, clarity, and flow. Sally and I determined the scores and wrote individual notes to each student expressing our feelings about various aspects of the writing. We wrote to each student telling about several things we liked about the research report, and in an effort to encourage future writing, we never offered more than one suggestion to each student for improvement.

Year 3

Sally and I had been reading and talking about using text sets and decided to explore this as a way of introducing the research unit this year. We still believed that students would be more involved in their reading and writing if they were studying something of interest to them. Sally and I decided her class, like any class, would turn on to dinosaurs.
We selected two books on the theme and read them aloud to students. One day Sally read, *Life Story* (Burton, 1962), and I read, *Digging Up Dinosaurs* (Aliki, 1988). We simply read. We did not review or ask students questions regarding the text. Upon completing the second book, we asked students to think about the information in the two books and asked, "Where can you go from here?" For a few moments, there was silence, but then students began to volunteer ideas and we began to interconnect them in a web on the board. They listed Egypt, spiders, fossils, early man, dinosaurs, rocks, and more.

The next day we invited students to pick a topic they found interesting. We wanted to know what they wanted to know about. We suggested that it could be from the list or from elsewhere and we all began to locate resources. Students found information at the school library, at the community library, and information at home. They began to bring in books, Egyptian games, art, fossils, tools and various other related items.

There were students who easily determined their questions this year, while others had difficulty putting their concerns into questions. It wasn't that they did not know a lot about their topics, but rather that they did not know what they specifically wanted to know about their topics. Sally and I talked about this on several occasions and decided to give them much more time exploring, talking, and reading. We did a variation on the "in my own words" minilesson that we later came to call $1 + 2 + 3$ is the key. We told the students they had one minute to find something they wanted to read about. This meant finding a section in a book. We suggested they look for segments of text introduced by subtitles in bold lettering, thinking the subtitles might thrust out and put questions in minds. Students were then given two minutes to read their selections and three minutes to write what they read in their own words. The best questions came up as students interacted. Students Carla and Jen began wondering where dinosaurs were first found. As they read, they studied maps and their first question led to questions of how one dinosaur was discovered in one place rather than another. Like landmasses, their questions shifted and they started asking about continental drift.
More students than not chose to work with partners. There was lots of noise in the classroom as students researched and wrote notes. Learning within partnerships was noisy. Sally felt the need to leave the room on occasion and go into the hall in order to remain calm. The noise bothered her but she did not want to disturb the collaborative climate.

The reading, talking, and exploring went on for two weeks. At this point, Sally and I decided that we observed a great deal of learning taking place. We had overheard meaningful student conversations and found the majority of students engaged in their work throughout our workshop time. Sally and I wondered if a written product had to be the end result of a research unit. We invited students to choose how they would share what they had learned with us and their classmates. We talked about options, but let the possibilities abound.

The students put their heads together and created a framework that gave the information students shared a very creative sense of order. They pretended they were on a field trip. A make-believe school bus picked them up and took them to the natural history museum. One student assumed the role of curator and went from one display to another in the museum. At each stop, a student posing as a museum official gave a report. Most students gave oral reports. Some students used their note cards to help them as they reported while other students used prepared written reports to assist them as they spoke. One student created a poster of Egyptian hieroglyphic writing; another brought in props and did a demonstration of the mummification process.

In the moment, we were all participants in the evaluation of this research unit and were very satisfied with learning for learning's sake. There were no grades. There was learning and knowledge that could not be measured. We all simply applauded and celebrated the experience.

Limitations of the Project

There are several limitations in this project. No formal evaluation instruments were used to assess student achievement. Rather, Sally and Jill collected a variety of informal assessment data including classroom observations, teacher notes, anecdotal records, and short vignettes based
on their informal observations of and interactions with students. Sally and Jill evaluated, discussed and reflected on these data in debriefing sessions to reevaluate past lessons and plan future ones. However, analysis of these data was informal with Sally and Jill focusing on changes in their thinking over time and the relationship of these changes to curriculum and curriculum development. They did not focus on documenting the relationship between changes in teacher thinking and impact on student achievement. Given this limitation, this project is best viewed as a starting point for conducting a line of research that investigates: 1) the relationship between teacher beliefs on curriculum and student achievement; 2) the effect of different models of curriculum on student achievement; and 3) the effect of different models of curriculum on reducing the student “achievement gap” (Singham, 2003).

Findings

In this section we discuss findings that describe how Sally and Jill changed their practices and beliefs about curriculum and curriculum development over time. Specifically, we discuss changes across five areas: curriculum control, curriculum source, curriculum choice, curriculum content, and curriculum evaluation. Figure 2 illustrates these changes.

Curriculum Control. This area is based on the question, Who decides the curriculum? In Year 1 Sally and Jill clearly decided the curriculum, and were heavily influenced by a new curriculum guide adopted the school district. In Year 2 they still controlled much of the curriculum, but used the guide less and less to make curricular decisions. Rather, they used their experiences and reflections from Year 1 to make more informed curricular changes and instructional decisions. Curriculum control was changing from the external to the internal. That is, Sally and Jill were starting to collaboratively create curriculum from the inside the classroom, rather than follow a curriculum guide prepared by “experts” and produced outside the classroom. Finally, in Year 3 they and the students collaboratively created the curriculum altogether. They read and discussed different reading materials and, afterwards, explored and recorded potential inquiry topics these materials offered. Then, students selected, some individually and others in pairs, an interesting
topic to research. In the end curriculum control had changed almost totally away from a curriculum guide and replaced by topics socially constructed by teachers and students.

**Figure 2. Teacher Stories and Curricular Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curricular Beliefs</th>
<th>Curricular Practices Year 1</th>
<th>Curricular Practices Year 2</th>
<th>Curricular Practices Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Control</td>
<td>Teachers decided what would be researched</td>
<td>Teachers decided what would be researched, but reflected on Year 1 experiences to decide</td>
<td>Curriculum generated as teachers and students interacted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Source</td>
<td>Teachers selected Ohio History</td>
<td>Teachers selected science-based area of study, but branch into societal values, concerns, and human interest</td>
<td>Student-selected topics and questions determined the discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Choice</td>
<td>Teachers determined topics and methods of exploration</td>
<td>Teachers open to additions/substitutions to topics, and to collaboration and exploration of topics by means other than reading &amp; writing</td>
<td>The curricular invitation enabled choice of topics, disciplines, ways of exploring, question-asking, and forms of sharing knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Evaluation</td>
<td>Teachers determined curricular objectives and assessment criteria</td>
<td>Students select the draft to be evaluated, and teachers evaluate</td>
<td>Sharing knowledge from multiple perspectives, through different sign systems, and celebrating learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Curriculum Source. This area is based on the question, *Who selects what themes and topics to be studied?* In Year 1 Sally and Jill unilaterally decided the theme (Ohio History) and the topics within that theme. In Year 2 they still decided the theme (Endangered Animals), but this time based it more on student interest than district mandate. They hoped that offering more “exciting subject matter” would enable students to assume more ownership over the research process than they did in Year 1. Curriculum source was changing from themes that students were expected to know to topics that they were interested in knowing something about. Finally, in Year 3 students selected their own topics and generated their own inquiry questions which, in turn, determined the academic discipline they pursued, i.e. Egypt - social studies; spiders, fossils, early man - Science. In the end curriculum source, as in curriculum control, changed from a “one size fits all” theme (Ohio History) decided solely by teachers to inquiry topics socially constructed by teachers and students.

Curriculum Choice. This area is based on the question, *Who decides how learning is conducted?* In Year 1 Sally and Jill were also influenced by the district curriculum guide that indicated students “needed to experience the research process.” So, they taught formal aspects of the research process including finding resources, making note cards, paraphrasing information, creating bibliographies, writing rough drafts, and submitting final copies. In year 2, however, they opened up more possibilities. Specifically, they were more open to students making additions and changes to topics based on students ongoing readings about endangered animals. In addition, they were more amenable to students learning about their topics through means other than reading and writing. Curriculum choice was gradually changing from teachers to students; that is, from others to self-selection. Finally, in Year 3 they created a series of curricular invitations that enabled students to engage in different forms of question-asking, choose from a variety of potential topics, consider different ways of exploring topics, and participating in different ways of sharing their knowledge. In the end curriculum choice changed from teachers delivering curriculum mandates to offering curricular invitations.
Curriculum Content. This area is based on the question, Who decides what questions get asked and answered? In Year 1 Sally and Jill identified what topics within Ohio History would be addressed, and guided students in asking individual research questions after observing that they were having difficulty deciding what they wanted to know about the topic. In Year 2 they continued to help students generate and write research questions, but this time the process was much more social and collaborative. Instead of students asking individual research questions, they were invited to “double up with a partner” to explore interesting endangered animals and even “do the same animal as another.” Curriculum content was changing from individually produced products to socially constructed explorations. Finally, in Year 3 they adapted their instructional practices based on students’ evolving inquiry questions. For instance, with students who were having difficulty finding a topic, they helped them locate more resources. With other students who were having difficulty selecting from a growing list of topics, they helped them fine tune their questions. In the end curriculum content changed from teachers predetermining research questions to supporting students in question-asking and adjusting their instructional practices to enhance the process.

Curriculum Evaluation. This area is based on the question, How is learning evaluated and assessed? In Year 1 Sally and Jill once again used the district guide as a primary resource to predetermine curricular objectives and identify assessment criteria for this project. Students’ final drafts were the primary basis for evaluation. In Year 2 they still required some formal aspects of research papers (note cards) and deadlines for work, especially rough draft writing. But this time they allowed students to explore alternative ways to share their learning. These opportunities included participating in peer conferences and writing letters to friends in the room describing what they were learning about their selected animal. Curriculum evaluation was changing from a focus on an individual final product to a series of social experiences. Finally, in Year 3 they invited students to explore different ways that they can share their knowledge, engaging them in oral reports, decorative posters, and active demonstrations. In the end curriculum evaluation changing from grading a final written product to celebrating learning in many different ways and from many different perspectives.
Discussion

These teacher stories of curricular change have challenged us to think more broadly and more deeply about curriculum and curriculum development. They also have reminded us that creating challenging and meaningful curriculum is very thoughtful work. As Sally and Jill would claim, it is also very hard work.

At one level these stories illustrate that curricular change is a highly complex process that can take place when teachers are reflective practitioners. By reflective practitioners, we mean teachers who are continually observant, thoughtful, and reflective about the nature of learning and the art of teaching. Teachers as reflective practitioners continually try to understand what they currently believe about learning, articulate to themselves and others why they believe what they do, and use teaching as a powerful tool to enhance student learning and promote their own growth. We hypothesize that it is because the teachers involved in this project were reflective practitioners that meaningful curricular change took place over time.

These teacher stories have also taught us several important lessons about teacher thinking and its relationship to curriculum and curriculum development. We have a renewed appreciation of and respect for the difficulty and complexity involved when teachers create curricular change in the classroom. It is very demanding work. We have also learned that what teachers believe makes a difference. Specifically, what teachers assume about knowledge, learning, learners, curriculum, and themselves as teachers can really make a difference in the lives of students, as well as in their own lives as teachers. In the end, we have learned that if classrooms are to become a community of learners, then teachers must see themselves and their students as creators of curriculum, as reflective practitioners, and as collaborative inquirers. The teachers in this project and their stories of curricular change offer us a good starting point.
References


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Direct Instruction with Playful Skill Extensions: Action Research in Emergent Literacy Development

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Karen R. Nicholas
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Florida State University

Direct instruction teaching methods have been found to promote the acquisition of literacy in developing readers. Equally important, learning strategies that allow children to construct knowledge through active participation increase their motivation for reading and writing. This action research was designed to explore the effectiveness of direct instruction with playful extensions in developing emergent literacy in a kindergarten classroom. The intent of the project was to connect developmentally appropriate practices with direct instruction teaching. The systematic approach of Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) was followed using only the teacher directed lessons; playful extensions of the PALS lessons were integrated throughout to maintain the children’s interest and to provide motivation for learning. Results indicated that the students who initially were the lowest performers in letter-sound correspondence and writing performance made the greatest gains in identifying letters-sounds and in applying letter-sound knowledge to making spelling approximations in writing. Kindergarten students with the highest academic abilities made the greatest gains in sight word recognition.
Let us offer you a glimpse into the first days of kindergarten where excitement and curiosity abound, sprinkled with a touch of anxiousness. This mix of emotions encompasses the entire classroom and in this new learning environment, the scene is set to observe the students' literacy behaviors. The children have just settled themselves into their various learning centers—art, phonemic awareness activities, alphabet games, puzzles, reading, computers, and writing—creating windows through which to view the types and quality of literary experiences they have encountered prior to this eventful day. Follow us!

Beginning at the Reading Center, we will quietly observe Sam and Erica (pseudonyms used throughout the paper) as they become immersed in the world of books. Take note of the casual book behaviors exhibited by these two youngsters. Sam holds his book confidently, pointing to the words in the story and following the sentences from left to right. The smile on his face, coupled with his obvious sense of satisfaction as he turns each page of his self-selected book, clearly demonstrates his previous experiences and enjoyment with literature. Erica is sitting next to Sam. Unlike Sam, she is holding her book upside down and turning the pages backwards. While Erica is apparently content with her book, it is evident that her literacy experiences have been limited compared to Sam's, which in all likelihood total thousands of hours.

In the Writing Center, Mary, Morgan, and Carl are drawing pictures and attempting to write about their new artistic creations. Having been encouraged to include something special about herself, Mary has drawn a picture of her home, and she has written the letter "M" for Mary and "hm" for home. As evidenced in her writing, Mary is making connections between letters and sounds although at this stage she is typically leaving out letters that represent vowel-sounds. Meanwhile, Morgan has illustrated a picture of her cat and is in the process of applying her letter-sound knowledge to make spelling approximations to write the word "cat." From her actions, we can surmise that she is developing knowledge of the alphabetic principle and an understanding of the need and purpose of print. Next to Morgan sits Carl. He has
scribbled a picture and is now telling Mary that he drew his mom. Mary encourages him to write some letters; however, he continues to scribble. From these informal observations, it is discernable that Sam, Erica, Mary, Morgan, and Carl have started school with varying levels of emergent literacy skills. Sam, Mary, and Morgan’s richer background experiences have better prepared them for further literacy instruction. In contrast, Erica and Carl may need more focused direct instruction in print awareness before moving forward as developing readers and writers. When we are sensitive to our students’ literacy needs we will be aware that all children bring with them, on the very first day of school, varying degrees of emergent literacy development. It is then our job as teachers to implement activities and teacher-led lessons that are aligned with specific instructional goals, thereby scaffolding each student’s knowledge and abilities in reading and writing.

Review of Related Literature

Research findings indicate that the amount of time children spend engaged in reading and writing activities prior to formal instruction influences their emergent literacy development (Adams, 1990; Hall, 1987; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). These literacy experiences form the foundation upon which teachers can scaffold students’ reading and writing abilities (Vygotsky, 1962). As witnessed in the foregoing vignette, students bring to school with them varied levels of literacy strengths. An observant teacher can gain insight into each child’s emergent literacy abilities by gathering informal and formal assessments and immediately using the results to plan appropriate reading instruction. These early assessments assist teachers in planning lessons aligned with students’ academic needs. Moreover, it is essential that early reading instruction assists children in developing the skills shown to predict reading success, specifically; the ability to rapidly identify the letters of the alphabet, knowledge of letter-sound association, and phonemic awareness (Adams, 1990; Ehri, 1999; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Following this, kindergarten students require an engaging and challenging literacy curriculum aligned with meaningful reading and writing experiences (National Association for the Education of Young
Consequently, it is crucial that teachers determine the most effective way of implementing instruction. Research in the area of emergent literacy has influenced the way reading and writing are taught in today's elementary schools (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). It was once believed that children had to reach a "readiness level" in order to understand concepts related to reading; this was usually held to be approximately the age of seven. Countering this, findings indicate that mental age does not constrain what children learn, but rather determines the ways in which they can effectively be taught (Yopp & Singer, 1985).

Clearly, the appropriate level of instruction matched with the children receiving the instruction (Torgesen, 1998) will help to ensure that optimal literacy learning will take place for each student. With this knowledge in hand, it is advantageous to examine Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) and direct instruction teaching methods. Connecting the practices of each may be beneficial in creating an effective literacy program for kindergarten students.

**Developmentally Appropriate Practices**

When considering literacy programs, teachers who endorse developmentally appropriate practices seek curricula that allow children to be activity engaged in constructive learning. Strategies that provide children with ample opportunities to construct their own knowledge through active participation in learning enhance cognitive development (Piaget, 1974). Using these strategies, the teacher guides the students through areas that cause confusion or difficulty by scaffolding learning to higher levels (Vygotsky, 1978). Classroom teachers who support this assertion create learning environments that provide opportunities for children to engage in a multitude of hands-on learning experiences; as a result, these children are purposely and meaningfully engaged in learning. From a Vygotskian perspective, the guided interaction is used to encourage individuals to move to their next stage of development; scaffolding can be gradually reduced as students practice and apply what
they have learned (Dixon-Krauss, 1996).

This approach supports the principles set forth by the NAEYC, stating that instructional strategies need to include “goals and expectations for young children’s achievement in reading and writing that are developmentally appropriate” (1998, p. 1). Developmentally Appropriate Practices are based on the beliefs that children are active learners, drawing on social and physical experiences to construct knowledge (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). For example, phonemic awareness skills (hearing, identifying, and manipulating sounds in words) have been shown to increase through developmentally appropriate strategies based around play (Regush, Anderson, & Lee, 2002). Moreover, using manipulative materials to engage children in high-level play is recognized as an instructional strategy that effectively develops language and cognitive skills necessary for literacy acquisition (Christensen & Kelly, 2003). Once again, these practices make learning meaningful and purposeful for children thereby establishing effective reading instruction (Rayner, Perfetti, Pesetsky, & Seidenberg, 2001, p. 57).

Direct Instruction

In contrast to the above beliefs, researchers advocate that children who are behind in reading and writing need immediate, direct, explicit instruction in the alphabetic principle (symbols representing sounds) as well as immersion in print awareness activities (Adams, 1990; Liberman, Shankweiler, & Liberman, 1989; Torgesen, 1998). That is, children who begin school showing low performance in language skills benefit more from direct teaching approaches than children who are high performers (Xue & Meis, 2004). In Direct Instruction, children are divided into small ability groups. Each group is then engaged in approximately 15-20 minutes of intense, fast paced instruction with a strong emphasis on verbal responses. Across all academic areas students have shown success when their teachers used a direct, systematic approach that taught specific strategies for academic problem solving and schemata development (Carnine, Silbert, & Kameenui, 1997).
In summary, evaluating emergent literacy research, DAP, and direct instruction methods assists teachers in designing effective literacy programs. It is critical to recognize that “Children who get off to a poor start in reading rarely catch up” (Torgesen, 1998, p. 1). Bridging the gap between young students’ literacy abilities while meeting their instructional and developmental needs becomes a formidable task for even the most experienced teacher.

Methodology

“A Spoonful of Direct Instruction,” an action research project was conducted in a classroom during spring semester of the students’ kindergarten year; 15 of 20 children in the classroom participated. During the fall term, students had ample opportunities to participate in a variety of literacy activities, including literacy centers, shared reading, alphabet songs (including letter-sound associations), teacher read alouds, and creative writing activities.

Action research enables the classroom teacher to purposefully and systematically contemplate new teaching practices (Arhar, Holly & Kasten, 2001) using five phases of inquiry. The first phase is to identify a problem or an area for investigation. The goal of this action research project, “A Spoonful of Direct Instruction”, is to connect developmentally appropriate practices with direct instruction teaching. The question addressed is: Does direct instruction teaching in letter-sound associations, blending sounds, and segmenting sounds in words, followed by playful extensions assists students in identifying letter sounds, developing a sight vocabulary, and in increasing the number of correct spelling approximations in writing?

The remaining four phases of this action research are as follows: collecting data, interpreting the data, implementing a plan, and last, analyzing the results. This process allows the teacher to become a reflective practitioner with the intent of improving instructional techniques.
Materials

For the purpose of this action research, we followed the systematic approach of the Peer Assisted Learning Strategies for First-Grade Readers (PALS) (Mathes, Grek, Howard, Allen, & Babyak, 1999) using only the teacher directed lessons. The PALS strategies provide letter-sound correspondence efficiently, using the students’ and teacher’s time effectively to maximize learning (Mathes, Howard, Allen, & Fuchs, 1998). The First-Grade PALS Program was used in this action research study because it specifically addressed the instructional needs of the kindergarten students and employed a direct instruction strategy to teach specific literacy skills. Playful extensions of the lessons were integrated throughout the study to maintain the children’s interest and to provide motivation for learning. The playful extensions included the following activities: an alphabet manipulative game, dry erase marker boards, overhead alphabet tiles, and blackboard blending games. Big Books, language experience charts, and independent reading were also used to enhance the direct instruction lessons.

Participants

The elementary school chosen for the study is located in an affluent neighborhood drawing students from upper-income homes as well as from middle-and low-income families in the surrounding area. The school has approximately 793 students enrolled from pre-kindergarten to grade 5. Ethnic make-up of the school is 78% White, 15% Black, 1% Hispanic, 3.5% Asian, and 2.5% Other. Roughly 50 students in the school receive free lunch and 15 students receive reduced-priced lunch.

The inclusion kindergarten classroom had 20 students enrolled, 13 regular education students, seven Exceptional Education Students (ESE), a regular education teacher, an ESE teacher, and a part-time instructional aide. Five of these lowest performing ESE students were involved in daily direct instruction reading lessons conducted by the ESE teacher. Therefore, in order to allow these ESE students time to participate with the regular education students at literacy centers, they were not included in this action research. Thus, this sample included regular education
students (n=13) and Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students (n=2).

Procedure

Data Collection

The second phase of the action research plan consisted of collecting data. Students were assessed in their skills of alphabet recognition, letter-sound associations, sight word recognition, and specific stages of writing development. One-on-one assessments were conducted: each letter was presented in isolation and the student was asked to identify it and produce a corresponding sound. Next, sight words on the district kindergarten word list (15 words) were presented to the student on flash cards and credit was given for each word the student identified in two seconds or less. If a student mastered the kindergarten sight word list, the Dolch word list was then used. Assessment was discontinued after 5 words were missed. Writing samples were evaluated according to the Five Stages of Writing Development (Gentry, 1982) to determine the specific stage of writing for each student.

Data Interpretation

Pre-test results for the students participating in this project are as follows: the alphabet recognition assessments indicated that 14 of the 15 students had successfully identified 26 upper-and lower-case letters and one student identified 23 upper-and lower-case letters. Each student had knowledge of at least 16 letter sounds, with 9 students having mastered 26 sounds. Students were at varying stages in writing development; 12 attempted to use letter-sound associations to make spelling approximations in writing, and 3 students were using random letters at the pre-communicative stage of writing. The academic levels of the 15 students indicated that they were ready to receive further instruction in applying letter-sound associations to reading and writing tasks. They all required additional practice in blending sounds to form words. These skills are directly taught and practiced in the teacher directed lessons of the First-Grade PALS Program (Mathes et al., 1999). Three groups,
containing five students each, were formed according to ability. The high, average and low performing groups will be referred to as groups A, B, and C, respectively (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

**Table 1.** Measures of Participants' Alphabet Recognition, Alphabet Sounds, Sight Word Recognition and Stages of Writing Prior to Direct Instruction and Skill Extensions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Alphabet Recognition (# of letters)</th>
<th>Letter-Sounds (# of sounds)</th>
<th>Sight Words (# of sight words)</th>
<th>Stage of Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Howard</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Mary</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Jen</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Sam</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Morgan</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>31.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Isabelle</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Lynn</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Scott</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Peter</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Stephanie</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>25.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>14.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Carl</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>7 Matthew</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>9 Erica</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 Ben</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
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<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pre-Instruction Means**

| 25.8 | 24.1 | 15.8 | 2.4 |
Figure 1. Five Stages of Writing Development by Richard Gentry (1982), “An analysis of developmental spelling in GNYS AT WRK.”

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Phonetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Transitional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Correct</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Plan Implementation**

Teacher-directed lessons were conducted for groups A, B, and C three times a week for 15 to 20 minutes per lesson between January and March of the second semester for 12 weeks of the school year. These direct instruction lessons were initiated along with extension activities that incorporated the use of manipulative materials. The addition of hands-on activities encouraged student participation and served as motivational tools for learning. The five activities presented during the lessons were as follows: (1) Letter-Sound Practice, (2) Phonological Segmentation and Blending, (3) More Letter-Sound Practice, (4) Sounding Out, and (5) Reading Words Fast. In order to keep the students on task to complete lessons, the pace of the activities moved along rapidly. The playful extensions “hands-on activities” for the reinforcement of target skills followed each lesson. As mentioned earlier, the extensions included the following activities: an alphabet manipulative game, dry erase marker boards, overhead alphabet tiles,
and blackboard blending games. Big Books, language experience charts, and independent reading were also used to enhance the direct instruction lessons. These activities are described below.

The alphabet manipulative game included small plastic objects such as a pig, bat, cat, a magnetic board, and magnetic letters. The children chose an object, stated the name, segmented the sounds, selected the corresponding letters and spelled the word by placing the letters on the magnetic board. Primarily, the objects represented words that are spelled with three phonemes and follow the CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) spelling pattern. The children were praised for any letter-sound association they correctly represented and for all attempts made to spell words. For example, Jen selected the pig, said the /p/ sound, and placed the letter “p” on her magnetic board. The teacher encouraged her to continue by stating, “Fantastic! Jen, you heard the /p/ sound and found the letter “p.” Playfulness was maintained during the lessons as the children shared the objects, helped each other with letter-sound associations, and continued to work together selecting magnetic letters to spell words. The children’s enjoyment and interest in the lessons were observed as they took great pride in finding the correct letters and blending the sounds to read the words.

Dry erase marker boards were used by the children to practice segmenting and blending sounds to spell words and to illustrate corresponding pictures. They were encouraged to add detail, to develop a story line associated with their drawings, and to extend the activity by writing a story in their journals; with teacher assistance, they prepared their stories for publication.

Big Books containing verses with repetition and rhyme were used to engage the children in choral reading. The books reinforced the sounds introduced in the direct instruction lessons and the children practiced these sounds while reading aloud together. The stories were engaging; the children enjoyed the rhythm of language and frequently requested to re-read a Big Book. Language experience charts were used for blending sounds to make words, expanding language skills, and teaching story sequence. Additionally, the teacher provided books in
each student's independent reading range in order to scaffold sight word development. Blackboard blending games provided practice in segmenting and blending sounds to make words. These extensions were created for a playful, engaging environment allowing the students to practice the skills taught in the direct instruction lessons, to interact with each other, to share knowledge, and to create meaningful learning experiences.

Results

In the final phase of the action research, we analyzed the results and reflected on the implications for future instruction. Although the three groups had varying responses to the direct instruction lessons, each group showed growth during the three months of instruction. Groups A and B made greater gains in the development of sight words than group C. After examining the results of groups A and B, it was difficult to ascertain if the moderate growth achieved in writing, as well as sight word development, was due to standard classroom practices or an outcome of the direct instruction lessons. Group C, however, showed the greatest growth in both identifying letter sounds and in increasing the number of correct spelling approximations in writing (see Table 2).

Group A, composed of students with the highest academic skills, was initially enthusiastic about the direct instruction activities as evidenced by their active participation in each lesson. However, after several weeks, it became apparent that the group had tired quickly of this method. Lack of interest in the direct instruction lessons began as demonstrated by off-task behaviors of Group A. For example, Mary had a sight vocabulary of at least 40 words in January. She was usually on-task and productive when working during center and circle time. However, during direct instruction group lesson, off-task behaviors, such as fidgeting with hair or shoelaces, indicated a detachment from the lessons. After several lessons, obvious inattentiveness continued. Informal assessments indicated that Mary had mastered the skills presented in the lessons. Therefore, she was given the opportunity to read independently when the remainder of the group received direct instruction. During the next few months, Mary's sight vocabulary
increased to about 200 words. For the remainder of the students in the group, the pace of the lesson was accelerated in order to hold the groups’ attention and to allow a greater length of time for independent reading. When given time to explore new books, the students in this group actively engaged in learning to decode as they attempted to sound out words. Occasionally, Mary showed an eagerness to rejoin the group, yet her interactions with the other students indicated that this was more likely for social reasons than for academic needs.

Group B exhibited a similar reaction to direct instruction as Group A. Student enthusiasm at the onset of the program for this group was brief. As in Group A, it was necessary to maintain a fast pace to keep the group focused. Stephanie, observed to be a very active member of the group displayed an obvious displeasure with the lessons. Despite a sight vocabulary of only 13 words when this project began, recall of her sight words steadily grew as the lessons progressed. When called to the group, Stephanie would exclaim, “Not this again!” We concluded that the lessons were not addressing specific academic needs for this student. She was excused from the group’s direct instruction lessons, as Mary was in group A, and encouraged to read independently. Lessons continued as prescribed for Group B. When the students appeared restless, activities were changed to redirect their attention. This happened frequently as the students were mastering the skills. They experienced success as they used their decoding skills to sound out words. It was evident from their oral reading that they were building sight vocabularies along with phonetic skills. Sensitivity to students’ academic and social needs continued to be the priority in guiding the students’ literacy development during these lessons.

Group C engaged in the direct instruction lessons and the hands-on activities more readily than groups A or B. Motivation to participate in these activities increased over time for this group. This was informally observed as the students’ eagerness to participate in the activities became more apparent as they displayed confidence in their abilities (by applying letter-sound knowledge to decoding words and spelling), worked cooperatively with group members, and remained on-task during each lesson.
Table 2. Measures of Participants’ Alphabet Recognition, Alphabet Sounds, Sight Word Recognition, and Stages of Writing Following Direct Instruction and Skill Extensions.

March Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student # and Name</th>
<th>Alphabet Recognition (# of letters)</th>
<th>Letter-Sounds (# of sounds)</th>
<th>Sight Words (# of sight words)</th>
<th>Stage of Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group A</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Howard</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Mary</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Jen</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Sam</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Morgan</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>84.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.7</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group B</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Isabelle</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<td>12 Lynn</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 Scott</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>14 Peter</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<td>20 Stephanie</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>26.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group C</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Carl</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Erica</td>
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<td>26</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 Ben</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>25.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>24.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.4</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Post-Instruction Means | 25.8 | 25.9 | 39.1 | 3.1 |
The instructional levels of the First-Grade PALS direct teaching lessons addressed the academic needs of the students in Group C more directly than those of the students in groups A and B. At the onset of these lessons, the students in Group C had little knowledge of blending sounds to make words. When comparing growth over time of Groups A, B, and C, Group C showed the greatest gains in letter-sound associations and writing. Each student in Group C advanced at least one step in the stages of writing (see Figure 2).

For example, when observing Matthew and Ben in the writing group, it was evident that they had successfully attempted to write about their illustrations. Although Matthew completed only one sentence when describing his picture, his use of letter-sound associations became more consistent. When evaluating his writing, we noted that Matthew’s abilities had advanced considerably (see Figure 3). Prior to this study,
Matthew was writing at the pre-communicative stage, representing words by using symbols of the alphabet. By the completion of direct instruction and extended skill activities, his writing samples indicated that he was using some letter-sound associations; however, he was not representing the entire sound structure of words. To reinforce his correct approximations, the teacher then modeled the correct spellings of the words (see Figure 3).

On a slightly higher level, Ben's writing indicated that he was moving from the semi-phonetic stage to the phonetic stage, representing the entire sound structure of words. His letter-sound knowledge enabled him to blend sounds to write two and three phoneme words. He attempted to use letter-sound association to make spelling
approximations (as shown in his spelling of the word “eating”) although he lacked knowledge of the various graphemes that correspond to the long /e/ sound (see Figure 4). The teacher then modeled the correct spelling scaffolding Ben’s spelling ability. Additionally, as seen in the writing of his friend’s name, Will, he was developing a sight word vocabulary (see Figure 4).

Overall, the First-Grade PALS Program with the addition of playful extensions was an effective teaching method for the children in Group C. The instructional level met their academic needs, thereby engaging them in group lessons and activities.
Discussion

A "spoonful" of direct instruction, if "sweetened" with just the right amount of complimentary, playful, extended lessons, can be beneficial in early literacy development. The goal of this action research project, "A Spoonful of Direct Instruction," is to connect developmentally appropriate practices with direct instruction teaching. The question addressed is: Does direct instruction teaching in letter-sound associations, blending sounds, and segmenting sounds in words, followed by playful extensions assist students in identifying letter sounds, developing a sight vocabulary, and in increasing the number of correct spelling approximations in writing? We advocate that the kindergarten children who participated in this study did demonstrate an increase in reading and/or writing. Groups A and B made greater gains in sight vocabulary, while Group C showed the greatest growth in identifying letter sounds and in increasing the number of correct spelling approximations in writing. While we cannot say that the growth was entirely due to the direct instruction lessons and playful extensions; we can say that there appeared to be a direct correlation between the skills taught as part of the PALS program and practiced by the "hand-on activities", and the children's application of those skills in classroom literacy activities.

Effective lessons should be taught in an active and challenging manner that create an atmosphere where children are able to engage in meaningful learning. Successful teaching is contingent on lesson designs that meet each child in his/her "zone of proximal development" (ZPD). The ZPD is the range between the students' independent working level and dependent level where he needs support from an adult or capable peer (Vygotsky, 1978). This is crucial in scaffolding learning, providing motivation for engagement in activities, and creating meaningful experiences for all students. The PALS lessons scaffolded the children's learning by teaching them specific skills. When the children moved into the independent level of their ZPDs, their attention to the lessons waned; therefore, the lessons were either adjusted to match their new level of knowledge within their ZPDs or the children were allowed to move from the group. The children who moved from the group used the skills
learned in the direct instruction lessons to self-scaffold, thus continuing the effectiveness of the literacy instruction. For example, Mary and Stephanie moved from their groups and read independently; they chose books that were pre-selected by the teacher to meet students’ independent reading levels. This proved to be productive time spent reading as shown by their growth in sight word vocabulary. Sam was very confident in his reading ability as observed during the first days of school. The January assessment indicated that he had a sight word vocabulary of 36 words similar to Mary’s 40 words. Perhaps if Sam had been excused and encouraged to read independently as Mary and Stephanie had been, we would have seen a greater increase in his sight word vocabulary. Although this is just speculation concerning Sam’s reading growth, as other factors may have contributed to Mary and Stephanie’s reading progress, such as reading outside the school day. Erica, who was observed during the first days of school holding her book upside down, benefited from the continued scaffolding of the teacher-led direct instruction lessons. Initial assessments indicated that she was writing at the precommunicative stage using symbols of the alphabet but not connecting letter-sound associations. The March assessments revealed that she was using letter-sound correspondence as she moved to the semiphonetic stage of writing.

Meeting the children’s specific literacy skills needs was successful using a direct instruction approach. However, the children were working within their individual ZPDs using self-scaffolding and other mediators such as the puzzles, magnetic letters, dry erase boards, and creative writing to practice the skills learned. Thus, a learning environment was created that successfully connected direct instruction with developmentally appropriate practices.

Implication for Teachers and Teacher Educators

Effective classroom teachers need a variety of instructional methods to meet the diverse needs of their students. It is imperative that teachers utilize formal and informal assessments at the beginning of the school year and use data obtained to immediately plan appropriate literacy instruction. Most reading/language arts programs in schools
today provide a variety of assessment tools that are readily available for use. Many teachers implement more naturalistic assessments, such as observations conducted while children are in centers or working with small groups of children in a variety of activities. It is clear that assessment needs to drive instruction in order to provide quality literacy activities for all children.

An additional implication of the study is the need for varied classroom instruction. Because no two children learn exactly the same way, meeting the needs of all children in today's classroom can be daunting. This study attempted to illustrate a classroom that involved centers, small group direct instruction, independent learning, and creative and critical thinking extension activities. As demonstrated in the study, children need a variety of learning designs—one size does not fit all—to maintain their motivation and attention.

In summary, implementing literacy programs aligned with meaningful reading and writing experiences, providing opportunities for children to engage in a multitude of "hands-on" literacy activities, and incorporating lessons that scaffold each student's knowledge and abilities in reading and writing will help to establish challenging and supportive literacy programs. Thus creating classrooms that are reflections of "joyful" learning environments that stimulate the continued development of literacy.

References


International Reading Association (IRA) and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1998). Learning to read and write: developmentally appropriate practices for young children—A joint position statement of the IRA and NAEYC, DC.


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Who's Reading and Why: 
Reading Habits of 1st Grade through Graduate Students

Deanne Camp
Missouri State University

The habit of reading develops over a period of time. This study explored reading habits across a wide range of students. An open-ended survey of reading habits involved 242 participants from grades 1, 4, 6, 8, 11, undergraduate non-education majors, undergraduate elementary majors, and graduate reading majors. As data were analyzed, themes emerged to categorize participant responses. Discussion of data offers suggestion to both teacher educators and classroom teachers about ways to develop and maintain the habit of reading.
The habit of reading, like other habits, develops over a period of time. Motivation and the ability to read are only two aspects of a complex series of factors contributing to the habit of reading. Why is it, educators, politicians, and parents ask, some students love to read and do so every chance they have and other students—often in the same family or classroom—dislike the whole idea of reading anything. Perhaps, because “reading is an effortful activity that often involves choice, motivation is crucial to reading engagement” (Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004, p. 299).

Learning to read is an essential aspect of one’s education, and literacy development is often compared to athletes who train for competition. The world’s greatest athletes do not achieve that ability quickly or without practice. They spend hours and hours in activities to stretch, develop, and maintain muscle tone and control. Such is the nature of learning to read, which includes development in phonemic awareness and phonics and maintenance in vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. However, knowing how to read does not complete the whole picture of the reading habit. Practical advice from Trelease (2001) is the more students read the better they read, and the better they read the more they read. Research published by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000), states, “The importance of reading as an avenue to improved reading has been stressed by theorists, researchers, and practitioners alike, no matter what their perspectives. There are few ideas more widely accepted than that reading is learned through reading” (p. 21). For various reasons, however, developing enthusiasm for reading is often as difficult for students as is mastering the vocabulary or comprehension of the text selection. Therefore, “both skill and will must be considered in the conceptualization of the ideal reader, the one with broad interests who samples widely and deeply from available sources of text and is motivated to read on a regular basis” (Applegate & Applegate, 2004, p. 554). So, readers need to both see themselves as readers and have the ability to read for the habit of reading to develop and be maintained.

Just as all teachers are teachers of reading, all teachers must also encourage and model the habit of lifelong reading and learning. Most teachers are effective at teaching their students how to read, but often
neglect teaching them to want to read. Armstrong, Johnston, Bridges, and Gessner (2003) state, “with today’s rapid technological advances, the scientific information explosion, the need for critical thinking and the advent of evidence-based practice, the professional” educator must promote lifelong learning (p. 20). These authors further point out, “A hallmark of professional behavior is the personal commitment to the ongoing acquisition of new knowledge” (p. 19). One ongoing way to acquire new knowledge is to develop the habit of reading, which “develops a capacity for focused attention and growth” (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004, p. 38).

Purpose of Study

A challenge for educators is to reinforce students who possess the reading habit, fueled by motivation, then encourage unmotivated students to acquire the lifelong habit of reading. The purpose of this study was to examine the reading habits of students across age groups. By analyzing the responses given by several academic levels of students, teacher educators reflect upon the developing and expanding areas of literacy development, preview how students see themselves as readers, and get a snapshot of reading habits of multi-age students.

Participants

There were 242 participants in this study from grades: 1 (n = 20), 4 (n= 24), 6 (n = 40), 8 (n = 36), 11 (n = 25), undergraduate non-education majors (consisting of math, business, and science majors) (n = 35), undergraduate elementary education majors (n = 41), and graduate reading education majors (n = 21). The participants in grades 1, 4, 6, 8, and 11 were from a large public school system, and the university students were from a large public university. Both the public school and the university were located in the mid-western United States. The targeted grade levels gave a varied perspective from emerging readers, then progressing readers, and up through professional educators who teach literacy to children.

Participation in the survey was on a voluntary basis, and all were informed their responses would remain anonymous. Parents signed
consent forms for students in grades 1, 4, 6, 8, and 11. The regular classroom teacher volunteered to conduct the survey in each of the classrooms in large-group fashion.

The Survey Instrument

For this study, an open-ended survey instrument was used rather than a Likert scale, which requires a forced answer from respondents. The researcher did not want to supply pre-conceived choices of language and terms that might influence the participants' responses. Applegate and Applegate (2004) supported this belief in their study by stating, "We used open-ended questions largely because we wanted to invite students to share their experiences...and provide us with as effective an opportunity [as possible] to listen to student voices" (p. 557). With a Likert scale, respondents typically indicate the extent of their reading habits. However, "with an open-ended instrument, respondents presumably are providing an explanation" of their reading habits (Allison, Okum, & Dutridge, 2002, p. 245).

All participants provided responses to the following questions:

1. Why do you read?
2. Who taught you to read?
3. What are your strengths as a reader/What do you do well as a reader?
4. What do you do when you come to a word you cannot pronounce?
5. What are your favorite books and/or authors?
6. Do you read at home? If so, how often?
7. How does reading make you feel?

Data Analysis

Emerging themes developed as data were organized and analyzed. The researcher and two graduate assistants in Reading Education evaluated each survey response independently creating categories into which comments were placed. After reading the surveys, the three readers discussed outlier responses that did not seem to fit into any
precise category, thus establishing intercoder reliability. Consensus was reached on placement of most of the outliers. For some responses, however, it seemed more appropriate to simply leave them as outliers and report the results of the majority of responses. Results of each survey question follows. Verbatim comments add to the rich store of anecdotal material and provide an affective perspective into the reading habits and unique experiences of the students.

Question 1 – Why do you read? - The purpose of this question was to discover students’ reasons for reading. Survey participants mentioned three reasons for reading most frequently: for fun, to learn something new, and because they had to (assigned in school or job-related). Results (see Figure 1) indicate students in grades 1, 4, 6, undergraduate elementary majors, and graduate reading majors read for fun at least fifty percent of the time. Students expressed their reasons in several ways. The exact words and spellings are used for emphasis. Grade 1: “Becos it is fn.” “Its fun too red.” Grade 4: “I read because it is very fun and intresting.” Grade 6: “Because some books are fun to read and keep me interested.” Undergraduate elementary major: “I read because it’s fun and it makes my brain feel good.” Graduate reading major: “Pure enjoyment for me personally and for my kids at school.”

One third of 11th graders indicated they read because they have to. Reasons they gave: “Because I was told to by the teacher.” “I don’t know. Teacher makes me.” “I don’t read at home that much unless I’m told to.” Students in grades 8, 11, and undergraduate non-education majors included being bored or just killing time as reasons for reading. Even though undergraduate non-education majors reported boredom or killing time as reasons for reading, they gave reading to learn as their highest percentage for reading.

Question 2 – Who taught you to read? - Most frequent responses indicated: teacher, family, teacher and family, and self. (see Figure 2). Evidence of teachers’ influence was noted as highest in grades 1, 8, 11, and graduate reading. Sample comments, Grade 1: “Mrs. Stapleton tot me.” Grade 8: “My kindergarten teacher taught me.” Grade 11: “I learned how to read in 2nd or 3rd grade.” Graduate reading: “In grade
school, I remember sitting in circles in Mrs. Messina’s room for reading groups.”

Figure 1. Question 1 – Why do you read?

Fourth graders noted family played a huge role in literacy instruction. Grade four comments were mainly related to mom and dad reading to them at home, the help given at home on school assignments, and making them read aloud at home. One comment in particular gave credit to mom “Mom read to me and taught me when I was 3 how to say the ABCs then she taught me to pronounce them then she taught me how to spell and say words.”

Undergraduate non-education and undergraduate elementary majors indicated teachers and family played an equally important role in teaching them to read. Some of the outlier statements not included in the percentages indicated they were “born with it,” “from the computer,” and “from TV.”

Self-taught reading rated the lowest in all grade levels except for grades one and four where it was equal to teacher and family. One fourth grade comment: “I taught myself cause nobody else wanted to do it.”
Who’s Reading and Why

Figure 2. Question 2 – Who taught you to read?

Question 3 – What are your strengths as a reader? What do you do well as a reader? The choices of participants for their strengths were comprehension, reading fast, and pronouncing words (see Figure 3). Graduate reading majors cited comprehension highest with comprehension cited lowest by 1st and 8th graders. Graduate reading majors used the term comprehension in their responses while first graders’ comments often focused on how good they were at reading. In their minds, that statement most likely meant they understood what they read. Eighth graders’ comments were often about reading aloud and studying for tests. Comprehension was also rated highest in grades 6, 11, undergraduate non-education, and undergraduate elementary.

Reading fast rated as the top choice only for eighth graders while fourth graders rated it as tied with comprehension. Most eighth grade comments about reading quickly referred to reading fast to complete assignments at home, and did not mention anything about reading fast to complete a recreational book.

Both first and fourth graders indicated their highest strength was in pronouncing the words. For first graders, at least, it makes sense based on their low percentage for comprehension. Many comments from first
graders were about sounding out words as a strength, for example: “Sowding owt wrs,” “I’m gud at wrds,” and “Sonding out wrds.”

**Figure 3.** Question 3 — What are your strengths as a reader/What do you do well as a reader?

![Graph showing comprehension, reading fast, and pronouncing]

**Question 4** — What do you do when you come to a word you cannot pronounce? Participants’ responses fell into one of these categories: sound it out, skip it, or ask someone (see Figure 4). In grades 1, 4, 6, 8, undergraduate non-education, and undergraduate elementary sounding it out was chosen more frequently than any other way of encountering unknown words. In all but eighth grade, these levels mentioned it more than twice as often as the other two choices. While first graders had great difficulty spelling the word sound (e.g., sowd, saldt, soit, sond), they certainly favored that choice for a word identification strategy. Fourth and sixth graders indicated they first separated the word into chunks (“brok it in parts”) then used the sounding out method.

Eleventh graders and graduate reading majors used the second method of skipping the word most frequently. First and sixth graders used this method least frequently.
The three lower levels used ask as their second choice. Two fourth grade responses: “If I can’t figurr it out I go ask somone older,” and “When I don’t no it I finly ask my teacher.”

**Figure 4.** Question 4 – What do you do when you come to a word you do not know?

![Bar chart showing the responses to the question.]

**Question 5 – What are your favorite books and/or authors?** Participants indicated the fiction genre as their overwhelming favorite. Following is a sampling of the most selected books for each grade level.

- **Grade 1:** The *Franklin* (Bourgeois & Clark) books, comments: “I lv the trtl boks.” “Fraklen boks.”
- **Grade 4:** *Harry Potter* (Rowling) books, comment: “Harry Potter is the oly won I lik.”
- **Grade 6:** *Goosebumps* (R.L. Stine) books, comment: “My abslute favorite is books by Stine.”
- **Grade 8:** There was a tie between books by S.E. Hinton and Gary Paulsen. Grade 11: More students indicated *none* than any particular title. However, those who offered a title chose books by J.R.R. Tolkien tied with newspapers and magazines. Undergraduate non-education majors indicated titles by John Grisham and any romance novel. One student listed nine books by Grisham. Undergraduate elementary majors overwhelmingly listed children’s books as their favorite followed by
mystery. For graduate reading majors, Mary Higgins Clark books tied with mystery novels.

Question 6 – Do you read at home? If so, how often? - Participants indicated four levels of reading at home: daily, weekly, sometimes, and never (see Figure 5). Daily at home reading was indicated as the most frequent choice by participants in grades 1, 4, undergraduate non-education majors, undergraduate education majors, and graduate reading majors. Sample comments, Grade 1: “Yes, evre nit.” Grade 4: “I read 2 chapters a night.” Undergraduate non-education major: “I try to read 1-2 hours every night, but sometimes I get caught up in a book and read most of the night.” Undergraduate education majors: “Yes, I always have at least one book going.” Graduate reading majors: “Yes, I read every day to relax after teaching all day and taking care of my four children and husband.”

No grade level chose weekly as their top pick for reading at home. However, sixth graders indicated a tie between weekly and daily; and undergraduate elementary majors chose weekly almost as much as daily.

The selection of reading at home sometimes was chosen most frequently by 6th, 8th, and 11th graders. First graders made this their selection least frequently.

Fortunately, never reading at home was not the top selection of any grade level. However, both 6th and 11th graders did indicate never as one of their choices for at home reading. This choice was not indicated at all for 1st graders, undergraduate elementary majors, and graduate reading majors.

Question 7 – How does reading make you feel? - Participants’ responses (see Figure 6) were easily categorized into positive, neutral, and negative feelings. All grade levels except 11th responded most frequently with positive feelings. Sample comments, Grade 1: “happy in good.” “Hpe.” Grade 4: “Reading makes me fell happy and like I’m a charcter in the story.” Grade 6: “Warm and fussy inside.” Grade 8: “It makes me feel good because I know I did something for me.” Comments by undergraduate non-education majors included: Reading makes them
laugh and cry at the same time, great, warm, cultured. Undergraduate education majors: “Sometimes my brain says ‘read something so you can feel good.’” Graduate reading majors: “It takes me out of myself and lets me forget my troubles for a while. It makes me feel wonderful.” Eleventh graders rated positive feelings as their lowest and neutral as their highest. Several eighth grade comments indicated their feelings depended on the book.

**Figure 5. Question 6 – Do you read at home?**

![Bar chart showing reading frequency by grade and school level]

Students in grades 1, 8, 11, undergraduate elementary, and graduate reading rated negative feelings last. Boredom was the selected term for most who indicated a negative feeling toward reading.

**Discussion of Results**

*Question 1 - Why do you read?* Metsala, Sweet, and Guthrie (1996) studied children’s motivations for reading, and found, “A typical child possesses several motivations, but not all are equally powerful...[They] are multidimensional and diverse” (p. 660). The reasons and benefits of reading seem obvious to those who read. Without that ability, however, much of what goes on in the world is lost. Reading is important, not only in school-related activities but in all aspects of life. A classic document
written over twenty years ago stated, “Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success will inevitably be lost” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 1). Recreational reading improves reading comprehension, style of writing, vocabulary development, and spelling (Gallik, 1999; Krashen, 1993). Perhaps teachers need to offer reasons they read and continue to offer suggestions and purposes for students’ reading.

Figure 6. Question 7 – How does reading make you feel?

Question 2 - Who taught you to read? Results indicate the strong implications of teachers’ and parents’ role in children’s reading development. A study by Draper, Barksdale-Ladd, and Radencich (2000) found family members’ influence rated “equally among students who had both high and low motivation for reading” (p. 187). Parents and teachers were the main support of instruction in a study by Furi-Perry (2003). She continued by stating, “Reading to and with one’s children is likely to increase their reading success in the future” (p. 24).

Teachers should develop, promote, and support parental involvement programs and keep parents informed about what literacy skills children are learning. They can offer parents options in how to work with their child. Teacher educators should research effective
parental-involvement programs and teach inservice and preservice teachers how to establish those programs in their individual districts followed by continued support from the university level.

Question 3 - What are your strengths as a reader? Acknowledging and recognizing personal abilities in any given area is a strength. It is equally true in reading. Mature readers at all levels realize reading is more than saying words across a line of print. They know comprehension must be attained for real reading to occur. When comprehension breaks down, mature readers rely on fix-up strategies to regain meaning of the text selection. Immature readers, on the other hand, often believe reading is simply pronouncing the words one after the other until the selection is completed.

Data analysis for this question provides meaningful implications for primary grade teachers. Emerging readers from this study indicate their best attribute of reading is word calling. Primary grade teachers might ask themselves if there is a disparate amount of attention on phonics especially in first grade. Perhaps there should be more explicit attention on comprehension instruction. Teacher educators can help inservice and preservice teachers in learning strategies to improve comprehension at all grade levels.

Question 4 - What do you do when you come to a word you cannot pronounce? In maintaining the habit of reading, readers cannot always rely on someone to tell them an unknown word. That is a dependent word recognition strategy. Readers need independent word recognition strategies, such as phonics and context clues, to use when they encounter unknown words. Teachers must teach strategies to students to equip them to become fluent, independent readers. As both children and adults increase their experiences with written language, word development and ownership is increased. Nippold, Duthid, and Larsen (2005) found “a consistent link between amount of time spent reading and word knowledge in both children and adults” (p. 94).

Question 5 - What are your favorite books or authors? If, indeed, one becomes a better reader by reading more, then educators need to ascertain what students are reading recreationally and share that
information with all students. Reading for fun, of course, does not mean it must come from a book. There are other types of materials, such as selected magazines, newspapers, and websites that are effective models of language and grammar. Educators should also emphasize reading these forms of texts. Many magazines geared toward adults also have a teen version such as *Teen People* and *National Geographic Kids*.

Even though some may think teenagers do not like to read, Furi-Perry (2003) found, “Contrary to the common stereo-type, many young adults do enjoy reading in their free time” (p. 24). Fiction that relates to their lives is the most selected reading material. “Reading is how teenagers escape their bodies and enter new worlds, escape their minds and try out other ways of thinking, escape their environments and imagine other ways of being” (Aronson, 1999, pp. 29-30). Draper, Barksdale-Ladd, and Radencich (2000) found that university-aged students often made book selections based on recommendations from family, friends, and professors, with many students acknowledging their enthusiasm for discussing the books with those who recommended them.

*Question 6 - Do you read at home?* First graders responded with *daily* as their most frequent response to reading at home. Perhaps that was because emerging and developing readers are often assigned daily reading homework. The choice of *daily* for undergraduate non-education majors might reflect the large amount of reading required of undergraduates.

There is a relationship between reading at home and academic achievement. Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) found, “Among all the ways children spent their time, reading books [outside of class] was the best predictor of several measures of reading achievement” (p. 285). In addition, they stated, “The case can be made that reading books is a cause, not merely a reflection, of reading proficiency” (p. 302). Likewise, reading achievement was found to be a predictor of time spent reading books outside of class (Greaney, 1980).

A relationship also exists between the amount of recreational reading and scores on standardized reading tests. Morrow (2006) found that elementary students who read 5 minutes per day may score at the 50
percentile rank on a reading test. However, if that time is doubled to just 10 minutes per day, the percentile rank increases to 70. She takes it a step further to 20 minutes per day and a child has a percentile of 90.

*Question 7 - How does reading make you feel?* Survey data suggest a downward trend of student attitudes toward reading until grade 11 then begins upward, again. One explanation might be overall attitudes about school issues often decline toward the end of high school. Or perhaps students who lack interest in reading do not go to college, thus they are eliminated from the data pool of college respondents.

Early experiences with books should be enjoyable ones so, intrinsically, readers develop the habit of reading. “Intrinsic motivations are more likely to inspire long-term literacy commitments” (Metsala et al., 1996, p. 661). A positive encounter with books, of course, begins with parents and caregivers. However, teachers play a crucial role in “motivating children to read, [and] a lukewarm or task-oriented attitude toward reading can be problematic” (Applegate & Applegate, 2004, p. 556). They continue by stating, “Early success is of paramount importance to many children, particularly because early failures frequently evolve into permanent ones” (p. 561). Teachers must express excitement and enthusiasm for reading in the classroom.

*Conclusions*

Teachers and teacher educators have a huge influence on the reading habits of K-12 students, inservice, and preservice teachers. Teacher educators are “concerned about the reading and writing habits and attitudes of our preservice teachers and the implications that these habits and attitudes hold for their future practice as teachers and for their future students” (Draper et al., 2000, p. 190). In addition, teachers and teacher educators must find ways to encourage the enjoyment of reading and continue to be role models as lifelong readers and learners.

The teachers and data in this study revealed trends that both support and challenge teacher educators. Finding ways to promote the reading habit through professional development avenues is a challenge and will continue to be so as classroom teachers further their educational goals.
Educators acknowledge "Advanced literacy is a specific intellectual skill and social habit that depends on a great many educational, cultural, and economic factors" (NEA, 2004, p. 2).

As stated in many of the comments from the survey questions, acquiring the reading habit has positive benefits that continue throughout life. Particular benefits include growth and progress in academic learning, development of word knowledge, social development, and increased world knowledge.

Issues for future studies on reading habits might focus on: issues raised in the above discussions, gender differences, survey only one age group, use a more detailed survey instrument, survey different-sized school districts (public, private, urban, rural), interview participants to gain a richer understanding of each response, and include parent information for reading habits of preschool children.

References


*Deanne Camp is a faculty member at Missouri State University, Springfield, MO.*
Dear Reading Horizons Readers:

Look for a new feature starting with our March/April issue in Reading Horizons! This journal will be featuring On The Horizon in children's literature. In each issue, Barbara A. Ward and Terrell A. Young, as the featured authors of this column, will bring a wealth of literary and literacy knowledge in their reviews of children's books.

Each issue will feature a theme, strand or some correlative characteristic having to do with some timely topic. We are excited about this new column.

Meet our authors:

Barbara A. Ward is a visiting assistant professor at Washington State University, where she teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in literacy. She has 25 years of teaching experience in the public schools of New Orleans, Louisiana. A member of the International Reading Association's Notable Books for a Global Society and the National Council of Teachers of English Committee on Excellence in Poetry for Children, Dr. Ward reads voraciously.
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