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This volume of the *Language and Literacy Spectrum* promises to have something for everyone. We have separated our offerings into three broad categories: Issues in Literacy, Focus on Practice, and Teacher Education. Issues in Literacy should be of special interest to those concerned with school change at the building level as well as at a policy level. The lead article authored by Kathleen Hinchman, past president of NYSRA, “How School Principals Can Foster Effective Literacy Instruction in Their Schools: A Ten-Step Plan” provides numerous suggestions that principals, literacy coaches and other literacy leaders can draw upon in their work of making their school a literacy-rich environment.

“Creating Illiteracy: Why Johnny Can’t (only) Read,” is an opinion piece by doctoral student Jennifer Davis-Durr calling for the inclusion of media literacy, known also as the new literacies, in upcoming policy, instead of the monolithic five pillars of literacy instruction we have all come to know so well.

In fact, the new literacies is a recurring theme in many of the articles in this edition, including all three of the articles in our second category: Focus on Practice. These articles describe the development of adolescent reading and writing through the use of media, which is an integral part of the lives of middle and high school students. “Reading and Writing Connections Using Media: Addressing the Literacy Needs of Students in Intermediate and Middle Level Classrooms” provides practical information on integrating media into standard literacy activities.

“Lessons From the Literacy Club: Hamlet Meets the Lion King after School” describes a unique academic intervention and support program designed for struggling readers. While the focus is on providing opportunities for students to regain a sense of competency as readers, media is an important element in the Literacy Club support program. The last article in the Focus on Practice category, “Using Writing Projects in a High School Classroom to Support Students’ Literacy Development and Foster Student Engagement”, describes the process used by a high school English teacher who modified her curriculum so that students could engage in online research.

The final section, Focus on Teacher Education, includes “Heightening New Teacher Sensitivity Toward Families Using Children’s Literature as a Tool,” which offers guidelines for selecting culturally responsive multicultural children’s literature, and also provides some interesting examples. This section finishes with “Evidence of Sway”, a study which investigates the way in which college students grow toward a more fully developed understanding of what it is to teach and learn.

We hope you enjoy this diverse collection.
How School Principals Can Foster Effective Literacy Instruction: A Ten-Step Plan

Kathleen A. Hinchman

ABSTRACT
School principals can foster effective literacy instruction by orchestrating community collaboration in an ongoing cycle of literacy program development, implementation, evaluation, and revision outlined in this ten-step plan. The steps address forming a community advisory board, appointing a building literacy leader, forming a literacy team, conducting a literacy audit and purchasing materials, fostering professional development, and preparing a literacy plan for assessment-based literacy instruction suitable to developing all students’ print and digital literacy.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY
Kathleen A. Hinchman is a Professor in the Reading and Language Arts Center at Syracuse University. Once a middle school teacher, her research explores youths’ and teachers’ perspectives toward literacy and instruction. She has published in many journals and co-authored or edited numerous texts. She has served as President of the Central New York Reading Council and the New York State Reading Association, and she is currently President of the National Reading Conference.
digital literacies needed for life success. Young people who lack the means to develop such connections outside of school are, sadly, out of luck.

School principals can foster effective literacy instruction, first, by remembering that they, or that any teacher acting alone, cannot sufficiently model the multiple facets of literacy for young people in a school. Instead, the entire school community is needed to mount a successful effort. Thus, school principals can foster effective literacy instruction by orchestrating community collaboration in an ongoing cycle of literacy program development, implementation, evaluation, and revision.

Anders (Hinchman & Anders, 2009) suggests that such grounding—in community interests, expertise, issues, and plans—is the best way to send the message that school is the best place to develop needed literacy and, in turn, that young people’s literacy is of paramount importance to the community. Such grounding makes instructional expectations explicit and improves literacy-related problem-solving capacity, increasing the chance of eliminating the achievement gap for students of color or in poverty, or for new speakers of English or other students with special needs. Fullan (2001, p. 3) explained:

Leadership… is not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but to help them to confront problems that have never yet been successfully addressed.

I’ve worked with dozens of elementary, secondary, and district-level urban, suburban, and rural school leaders since I left my position as public school reading specialist almost 30 years ago. My collaborations with these remarkable individuals, typically in school for at least 12 hours each day, are the inspiration for this ten-step plan, suitable for supporting literacy instruction school-wide at the elementary or secondary school level.

1. Form a community advisory board.

The first step a principal should take in developing a community-based literacy program is to develop a community literacy advisory board. Such a board can brainstorm regarding the vision for such a program. It can then meet at least quarterly to review, advise, advertise, and bring community resources to the school literacy plan—purchasing books and digital resources, offering classroom volunteers, internships, and extracurricular support, and representing community literacy during student inquiries. Board members are also expected to review literacy program reports and participate in exhibitions of student work (Fullan, 2001).

The community literacy advisory board should not be the same as an elected school board, although the community literacy advisory board must, of course, report to this board; a school board will not have time to keep literacy in the spotlight amidst its other concerns. The community advisory board may include one or two school board members. In addition, an effective community literacy advisory board should include parent and high school student representatives. It should also include such community representatives as bank managers, business owners, not-for-profit directors, media representatives, and higher education faculty.
Local literacy professors may be interested in negotiating a quid pro quo advisory board relationship when schools with a literacy focus become sites for teacher education fieldwork, a move that can breathe considerable energy into school programs. Also helpful may be literacy experts from outside the community. Depending on school resources, such individuals can become frequent or occasional visitors, and as outsiders, they may be able to see strengths and needs that are not visible to locals. Beware of outsiders’ expertise, though, since they cannot be in your building each day. Unless one is purchasing an entire professional development program, such as Literacy Collaborative (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007) or Reading Apprenticeship (et al., 1999) at the elementary or secondary level respectively, it is typically better to invite more than one outside expert for synergy and ideological balance.

2. Appoint a building literacy leader.

Principals have long been promoted as instructional leaders who can infuse members of school communities with mission and energy. Yet there are many brush fires in a day in the life of the building principal: concerned parents, swine flu, staff illness, and myriad deadlines are just a few of the emergencies that can make it difficult to retain focus on a literacy program. I have worked in several schools whose administrators marked my arrival with, “We’re so glad you’re here to remind us of what’s important.” Reminders that arrive with the outside consultant may not be frequent enough to keep a school sufficiently focused on literacy.

To avoid letting such distraction interfere with a building’s focus on literacy instruction, step two of the plan involves the principal in appointing a building literacy leader. This individual’s job is to keep the constituents focused on literacy instruction. It is important that she or he be knowledgeable about literacy development, with at least an M. S. in reading or literacy education and evidence that she or he knows about assessment, instruction, coaching, and program development at the appropriate grade levels. This literacy leader should also be an enthusiastic, upbeat person who recognizes and understands print and digital literacies beyond what’s tested, as well as the expertise and perspectives of everyone on the staff. She or he should know how to monitor students’ literacy development and collaborate with others on interventions, enhancements, and exhibitions of students’ work (Allen, 2006).

Such an appointment does not mean that the principal turns all authority for literacy instruction over to the appointed literacy leader; the principal remains the literacy program’s chief advisor, cheerleader, and participant, as well as the one individual who is in a position to evaluate teachers’ literacy instruction. This suggests that the principal should be careful of her or his relationship with the appointed literacy leader. It is critical that the literacy leader gains the confidence of the literacy program’s constituents, especially the instructional staff, and this will not happen if the staff sees the literacy leader as the principal’s confidante. When the building literacy leader can speak with other staff members confidentially, she or he can orchestrate collaborations among widely different kinds of people for a community advisory board, literacy team, study groups, progress monitoring, and coaching. She or he will be able to mediate
compromises as well as help those who might not want it known that they do not know how to address certain student needs.

3. **Form a building literacy team.**

   Once a building literacy leader has been appointed, the successful principal will then help this individual to form a literacy team. This representative group is important so that neither the principal nor the appointed building literacy leader is left alone to promote a literacy plan that staff will undermine because they do not understand it. Also, involving more people means the development of a realistic, context-specific plan that represents the wide array of community print and digital literacy practices (Anders et al., 2000).

   This collaborative group completes the rest of the plan steps, facilitated by the building literacy leader and the principal. It should include representatives from all constituents, including library media specialists, school psychologists, parents, and students, depending on grade level, as well as the principal. So that the plan includes attention to literacy-related interventions for young people who struggle with literacy, as well as instructional ideas for all students, the team should include representatives of regular and special education classrooms, all grade levels, and all subject-areas.

   I have seen successful literacy teams that were either appointed or selected by those they represent. It is more important that members of the team be willing to work with the building literacy leader on tasks distributed equally among members. It is also important to select well-respected individuals so that they can discuss new instructional ideas with enthusiasm and confidence. Please note that literacy team members are not turnkey trainers; each constituency also needs professional development specific to their needs from the building literacy leader, other coaches, or outside consultants.

4. **Conduct a literacy audit.**

   The literacy team should orchestrate a building literacy audit, facilitated by the literacy leader and the principal. The purpose of this audit is to assess constituents’ ideas about literacy program needs and possible solutions, and to uncover the human and capital resources that are available within the building and community. It will likely find useful texts, technology, and human resources to help with the literacy program.

   Anders and Guzzetti (2005) suggest that the literacy audit should begin with a summary of available formal and informal testing data. The group should also survey all constituents for confidential suggestions and observe in classrooms to capture the range of current literacy practices—again confidentially. A number of observational checklists are available to help with such observations; two popular checklists—by Taylor and her colleagues (Taylor et al., 2000) at the elementary level and by Irvin and her colleagues (Irvin et al., 2007) at the secondary level—may be adapted to suit specific school purposes.

   The literacy audit should also take inventory of available texts, including books that might be suitable for literacy instruction or content-area study, as well as media, technology, and materials buried in individuals’ closets and other storage areas. Finally, it
should endeavor to locate staff members with graduate degrees in literacy and other human resources, such as good rapport with a particular group of students or organizational abilities that will facilitate program implementation.

5. Foster professional development.

Before developing a literacy plan, the principal and rest of the literacy team should study how young people develop reading, writing, and digital skills in and out of school. *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (1998), by Catherine Snow, M. Susan Burns, and Peg Griffin, offers a nuanced explanation of the psychology of language acquisition and development, and the New London Group’s (1996) “Multiliteracies: A Pedagogy of Social Futures” offers explanation of what’s needed for effective instruction of print and digital literacies. The literacy team will also want to have a detailed understanding of state reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and technology standards.

The literacy team should also read about and visit successful programs from within and outside their state, acknowledging differences in state standards and assessments. In consultation with the community advisory board, members of the team should talk with colleagues in nearby school districts, attend state and national conferences, comb the Internet for ideas, and consult with literacy experts from around the country to identify suitable program components. The United States Department of Education, International Reading Association, and National Council of Teachers of English websites are excellent sources of study group materials, journals, and program reviews that can be helpful to literacy teams involved in program planning. Figure 1 (see appendix) presents a list of my favorite resources for such a task. Please note: my list represents an array of program philosophies; a knowledgeable literacy leader can help the literacy team weigh these philosophies given the schools’ interests and needs.

The literacy team’s initial study should be a model for later professional development by all program constituents, with team members making their professional learning visible to colleagues through ongoing discussion. The literacy team will want to plan for various kinds of professional development to suit the varied needs of all instructional staff and other program constituents. Depending on their out-of-school lives, some teachers may appreciate the support of the learning community (Wenger, 1998) offered by early morning or after school professional book clubs or study groups, and others may respond better to the online camaraderie of webinars or other networking sites. Teachers can also be encouraged to conduct action research or inquiry, systematically studying their influence on students’ schoolwork.

Staff members’ self-selected professional development can richly inform initial and ongoing building literacy plans. Well-regarded one-time speakers from outside the district can also motivate teachers. However, those who hire such speakers should be wary about speakers who don’t know a school’s knowledge base: a social studies teacher with a literacy education masters degree can only be expected to hear the same instructional recommendations once or twice before losing enthusiasm for professional development initiatives.
As a vision for the school literacy program concretizes, the building literacy team will want to encourage more systematic opportunities for staff to read about and study identified core literacy program components (Taylor et al., 2000; Sturtevant, 2004). The team will need to plan for classroom coaching by the building literacy leader, other coaches, or outside consultants as well as study key constructs and instructional ideas. Systematic study typically involves as many as 60 to 100 hours across school years, and should begin with volunteers who offer insights to, in turn, strengthen professional development opportunities for later participants. Special plans should be made for teachers new to the building so that they can learn and be coached in the specific expectations of the school literacy program. The principal will want to participate as a learner in as many of the varied professional development forums as possible, fostering a climate that encourages an individual’s willingness to take part without critiquing those who are wary about going first.

The principal should typically tread with caution regarding staff members’ professional development. The principal can orchestrate informal and formal observations to advise areas identified by staff members. I have also seen principals focus on one student through a class period or drop in to ask students what they’re working on, and share observations with teachers in an invitation to problem-solving with words like, “I wonder why…” and “What do you think about…,” recognizing that collegial conversations can result in more extensive problem-solving than accusations and ultimatums. In some cases, a principal will need to become involved in more direct intervention with a staff member. In such cases, reference to observations made with published observation tools, such as those cited in the description of the literacy audit, above, or to understandings demonstrated in student work samples can be helpful grounding for discussions focused on accountability--to the literacy plan and student performance--and not personality (e.g., How can I help you organize x? What resources do you need so that you can help students to do y?).

6. Develop a long-term plan.

The principal, literacy leader, literacy team, and community advisory board should articulate a vision for the literacy program, addressing such questions as, what will people see when they walk into the building?, and with what literacy will students leave the building? Following this, they should develop a long-term literacy plan in consultation with the community literacy advisory board and colleagues from throughout the school. The literacy plan contains goals and objectives for all program constituents, mapping from state standards and district goals for all teachers and students at each grade level. The plan should involve parents and community in various aspects of delivery. Professional development, building culture, student assessment, program evaluation, and annual plan revision should also be addressed in this blueprint (Irvin et al., 2007).

The plan should describe core instructional components that involve all staff and community volunteers, and it should explain how these components are to be modified for differentiated instruction across grade levels. Team members can consider what young people should be expected to know and do at the end of each school year, and then
determine the kinds of instructional actions needed during different parts of the school year to help students reach these performance goals. The team can then develop essential questions to provide instructional focus and a concrete vision for student outcomes that teachers can use in their more detailed yearlong backward and day-to-day planning and decision-making. Horizontal, or within grade level, and vertical, or across grade level, collaborations will bring coherence to such plans (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The team should also plan for gradual implementation of the literacy plan. This will mean choosing instructional components and/or classrooms within which to begin, as well as developing a timeline for full implementation. Drafts of the plan should also be shared with all program constituents and the community literacy advisory board for periodic feedback during development and implementation. Feedback from these groups should also be taken into account when the five-year plan is updated annually.

7. **Create a literate building culture.**

Imagine yourself in a perfect primary grade school. One walks in any door and the building screams the message that the business of the building is about literacy. There are book displays throughout the school, names of books read printed on cards throughout the hallways in the shape of a railroad track, reading and writing going on in every classroom. Student work is everywhere, representing various manifestations of students’ stories and reports, including essays, books, visual representations, and multimedia presentations. The building fairly shouts literacy from every crevice, sending daily messages leaving no doubt about the literacy focus in the school.

Any school at any grade level that wants to have an effective literacy program can plan activities and displays to create a similar effect. A monthly calendar of class work exhibitions, poetry slams, plays, digital storytelling festivals, author visits, student-led morning announcements and book talks, all-school reads, all school inquiries, and book trades, with different staff members in charge of coordinating each event, will go a long way toward creating such a culture. Regular building walkthroughs that notice classrooms engaged in extended, meaningful reading and writing, along with monthly changes in hallway and classroom displays of student work, can also help to create such a climate.

Frequent interactions with students around current reading and writing are most important in establishing such a culture. Calkins Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (Calkins, 2003) has long recommended that all teachers across grade levels have regular conferences with each student in any classroom. Discussion of current reading, particular aspects of students’ writing, that which is most appreciated about a young person’s class participation, and student interests are all pertinent subjects for such conferences. Such daily meetings should primarily address students’ strengths and interests, with teachers picking single aspects of reading or writing processes to talk about or model in ways that will help the young person learn something he or she feels she will benefit from learning.
8. Foster instructional approaches that help young people to engage in multiple facets of literacy in increasingly sophisticated ways.

The literacy plan will contain a vision for the development of literacy instruction, building culture, and professional development. The principal’s job is to work with the literacy leader and team and the community advisory board, to develop this plan and to ensure that everyone has the support needed to move forward with it. Such planning often produces collisions of individuals’ quite varying visions for the same recommendations. Thus, the principal’s multiple roles of cheerleader and study group, literacy team, and community advisory board member are critical—not so that the principal dominates discussion, but, instead, so that she or he can help the literacy leader develop shared ideas about the plan implementation. Such participation is also important so that the principal can talk with teachers about their own goals for implementation of the literacy plan with knowledgeable insights regarding differences of opinion among staff members.

To better understand the subtexts of colleagues’ recommendations and visions for the literacy plan, the principal will want to have an understanding of the recent history and politics associated with United States literacy instruction. For most of the 1990s, schools implemented programs derived from research and theories of literacy development in what came to be called a balanced literacy approach. At the elementary level, such evidence-based programs combined decoding, vocabulary, comprehension, and composition instruction with the reading of children’s literature and the writing of stories or responses to reading (Pressley, 2005). At the secondary level, programs combined pre-reading, reading, and post-reading support activities across the curriculum with writing-to-think (journals, quick writes) and subject-specific genre instruction (lab report, literary analysis). Many schools took a long-term approach to study and implementation of such popular instructional frameworks as guided reading, word work, writing workshop, or literature circles from such programs as Four Blocks (Cunningham et al., 2000), Literacy Collaborative (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007), Public Education Business Coalition (PEBC, 2009), or Reading and Writing Workshop (Calkins, 2003) at the elementary level. In the upper grades, schools were more likely to turn to Project CRISS (Santa et al., 2004), Reading Apprenticeship (Schoenbach et al., 1999), or the Best Practice Cluster Schools (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004) approaches.

However, at the turn of the century the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009) continued to indicate an achievement gap for young people of color and from poverty, as well as for speakers of English as a second language. In response, legislators created the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S.P.L. 107-110). The Reading First component of this act required that primary teachers in high needs schools engage in intensive study and implementation of scientifically-based reading research in alphabets, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension that had been reviewed by the National Reading Panel Report (2000). NCLB also required annual state-level reading (and mathematics) testing in grades 3 through 8 with results disaggregated by gender, race, class, and special education status. Recognizing the lack of NCLB support for adolescent literacy, Striving Readers was added to NCLB initiatives in 2005, inviting a handful of high needs secondary schools to
implement scientifically-based school-wide literacy instruction and interventions. The Federal Institutes for Education Sciences and the private Carnegie Corporation (2008) are among the agencies that have sponsored additional studies to augment research evidence related to adolescent literacy.

As I write this, predictions abound regarding upcoming directions for Federal and private literacy funding, the driving force behind many recent literacy initiatives. With widespread gratitude for added resources, accompanied by equivocal reading comprehension gains and corrupt program administration, the Reading First initiative has been abandoned (Manzo, 2009). Instead, monies available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 are being used for programs that drive results for students, increase educators’ capacity, accelerate reform, improve productivity, and foster continuous improvement (United States Department of Education, 2009). Current rumors also suggest possible increases in funding for Striving Readers and other school improvement activities that reference what is now called scientifically-valid reading research, as well as monies to be redirected to a new literacy initiative and/or to linking teacher evaluation with student outcomes (Manzo, 2009; Pearson, 2009; Wells, 2009). In addition, United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently announced that 46 states and the District of Columbia agreed to develop common K-12 education standards for reading and mathematics. This will begin with the release of readiness standards for high school graduates in July 2009. However, “There will be no prescription for how teachers get there” (Glod, 2009, ¶15).

Without such prescription, school literacy teams will want to develop literacy instructional components with an eye toward what has been learned from earlier initiatives and adding attention to the multiliteracies represented by today’s evolving technology, sometimes referred to as New Literacies by researchers (Leu, 2000). Especially important will be invitations for young people to bridge out-of-school and in-school literacies with community collaborations for problem-based learning that also involve attention to vocabulary development and cross-curricular connections (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Moje, 2008).

At a recent International Reading Association conference, Pearson (2009) reviewed what we have learned from research that should inform our coming work in literacy education. Citing several important reviews of the last 20 years, he noted that research supports early attention to young children’s decoding within a balanced approach that includes vocabulary and comprehension instruction, reading, and writing. He also explained that comprehension benefits from explicit teaching of strategies, rich discussion of ideas and genre, and attention to motivation and identity. However, he also identified several areas of needed further study, including “the other side of the knowledge-comprehension nexus,” the “right mix of explicitness in strategy instruction,” and why “reading begets reading” (Pearson, 2009, slides 63-64).

Instruction will benefit when the literacy plan includes standing frequent opportunities for review of assessment results by grade-level teams and the literacy leader, and, somewhat less frequently, the literacy team and community advisory board. Such collaboration should focus on how to modify instruction to address all students’
literacy strengths and needs. Research suggests that such instruction is most efficiently and effectively provided in small group, responsive strategy instruction (Pressley, 2002), with planned gradual release of teacher responsibility as students demonstrate independence (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Such instruction should begin with texts that young people can and want to read with reasonable fluency, adding more complex print and digital texts with instruction in new genres and texts with added complexity.

Additional research-based interventions should be referenced in the school literacy plan to address the wide-ranging needs of students who struggle with literacy, and in a way that invites them to be seen as viable contributors to ongoing classroom problem-solving, whether they are receiving instruction from the classroom teacher or from a literacy specialist (Greenleaf & Hinchman, in press). Current government emphasis on student performance suggests that a problem-solving model of response to intervention that allows for individually tailored interventions will be far more useful than current models that use off-the-shelf programs without modification (Lipson & Wixson, 2009). Taken together, the preceding components align well with the prescriptions overt instruction, situated practice, critical framing, and transformed practice suggested as important at all levels of literacy development by the multiliteracies theorists (New London Group, 1996).

9. Implement an assessment system.

Effective principals know that monitoring student progress is central to providing effective literacy instruction (Marzano et al., 1993), and our movement toward national standards and linking teacher evaluation with student outcomes suggests that data-driven decision-making should be a day-to-day component of a school literacy plan. Principals will want to participate in discussions of how to orchestrate this work, and to be involved in sharing all levels of assessment results with the community advisory and school boards.

To be effective, progress monitoring that informs instructional decision-making and evaluation should occur at multiple levels with multiple constituents—including students as they age and begin to understand their literacy performance. The principal and literacy team will, of course, need to monitor annual performance on mandated state assessments as a primary piece of program evaluation data. Such data are also reported to the community literacy advisory board, the school community, and the state and federal government. School districts that are especially concerned with improving test scores may be inclined to purchase expensive assessment systems to monitor students’ progress with added frequency, but the current state of the art is such that group-administered assessments provide little useful added information while reducing important instructional time (Afflerbach, 2004).

At another level, the principal will want to ensure that the literacy leader and literacy team monitor individual student performance on a regular basis, especially for those young people who seem to be struggling with literacy. The scores produced by group-administered tests typically mask variability in youth’s reading and writing performance. Item analysis yields limited useful data when an individual struggles with
reading in significant enough ways to guess at answers. Individually administered fluency assessments are similarly limited at most grade levels (Pressley et al., 2006). Needed insights are better gleaned with less formal observation and interest inventories whose reliability is derived from multiple administrations and collaborative interpretation (Buly & Valencia, 2002). Thus, the literacy plan should ensure that teachers discuss classroom literacy data for all students at regular grade-level meetings and to report results of these discussions to the building literacy leader and team in an ongoing cycle of feedback and support.

Informal reading inventories (IRIs) can be used to learn more specifically about individuals’ reading strengths and needs. IRIs require that a student reads aloud passages from a variety of text passages while a teacher notes and, later, analyzes the student’s oral reading miscues to determine needed areas for instruction (Johnson & Kress, 1965). IRIs can be completed with any available text or with published IRIs whose passages are organized according to text readability, structure, or content (e.g., Leslie & Caldwell, 2005), although their relatively short passages may also not align well with a youth’s day-to-day or future literacy needs (Paris & Carpenter, 2003).

Teachers and instructional leaders should monitor students’ word-level, comprehension, and composition strategies in multiple ways on a day-to-day basis—during orchestration of each component of the literacy program. Such monitoring allows the testing of developing hypotheses about students’ literacy understandings and monitoring of students’ response to intervention as required by evolving special education identification mandates (Lipson & Wixson, 2009). Teachers can ask students to think aloud about their problem solving during reading and writing (Van Someren et al., 1994), invite young people to listen to recordings of their reading and then collaborate with a teacher or other youth to discern and address miscue patterns (Goodman & Marek, 1996; Wilson, 2005), and learn about word knowledge, during oral reading of graded word lists, such as the San Diego Quick Assessment (Ekwall & Shanker, 1999), or with the developmental spelling assessment described by Donald Bear and his colleagues (2003). Some schools also use writing rubrics combined with think alouds to measure changes in students’ composition insights (Culham, 2003), as well as study videotape of students’ classroom discussion about texts to note changes in vocabulary use and comprehension (Lipson & Wixson, 2009).

10. Choose commercial materials carefully.

Publishers’ sales representatives have long lured customers with talk about the research-base of their programs. Reading First invited teachers to study results of experimental research on various aspects of reading instruction, but often within the context of published programs whose selection was so riddled with conflict of interest that discussion about the lack of empirical support for the actual programs was silenced. What counted as the research base for such programs were often over-generalized replications of research; the programs themselves had not been researched with peer-reviewed experimental studies or even compelling case studies. Salespeople produced white papers sponsored by their employers and depended on buzz between school
personnel and state education department liaisons who also monitored grant performance. Principals should be wary during “hot topic” discussions of commercial materials to stick to their school’s vision for its literacy program in considering whether and what to bring back to their buildings for review.

Interestingly, research documenting instructional practices of excellent teachers in both elementary and secondary classrooms discovered elements of balanced literacy instruction have largely been overlooked in recent years. Such work suggests that effective teachers orchestrate reading and writing for authentic purposes, explicit instruction in needed skills and strategies, integrated but explicit attention to test preparation, and collaborative text problem-solving (Langer, 2001; Pearson, 2004; Taylor et al., 2000; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). Indeed, listed instructional components echo the pedagogical concerns of multiliteracies theorists described earlier.

No commercial literacy program has research proving that it meets all students’ needs. Moreover, as Goodman pointed out long ago (1988), because such programs are developed to appeal to the widest possible audience, they cannot address any one school’s, classroom’s, or individual’s literacy needs. Indeed, the nature of effective literacy instruction is such that, even the most extensively researched and piloted program could not contain generalizations that speak to all teachers or students in specific contexts. As adopters of well-regarded programs know, teachers learn to organize literature-based, workshop, or content-area literacy programs only with the right combination of study, classroom coaching, and collaboration.

At the same time, I have worked with many new teachers, especially at the elementary level, who “don’t know where to start” in designing classroom literacy instruction that applies what they have learned in classes to a specific context and curriculum. Published literacy programs that are selected to align with a program’s vision with a comprehensive review, pilot, and staff vote can be most helpful as an introduction to teaching for such individuals. Good programs offer thematically related texts representing a variety of genres, along with before-, during-, and after-reading decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension activities, as well as reading and writing strategy instruction that teachers can vary according to students’ needs. Some also offer supplemental intervention materials and multi-leveled trade book text sets to be used for guided or independent reading of more extended texts. Coaches can help teachers focus on managing the use of the materials effectively, including using assessment data to vary use of such materials to address students’ needs.

The principal’s role here is to facilitate the literacy team’s selection of commercial materials, reminding people to look for the materials that will provide the most resources for the investment that will be used by the most people. The principal can remind the team to supplement the inventory of materials discovered during the literacy audit so that teachers have a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts to be used along with the Internet during subject-specific inquiry projects. This can also include supplementing technology hardware and software so that every classroom is equipped with such common equipment as a smart board, LCD projector, computer station for 4 or 5
students, printers, and laptop for the teacher, along with word processing, spreadsheet, presentational, database, and publishing software and Internet access.

The literacy team may also want to invest in a variety of intervention programs and accompanying teacher training so that the school has a repertoire of offerings for young people who struggle with literacy. Principals can help the team to proceed with caution here: many interventions are on the market that promise more results than they can actually deliver, and these may not be cost effective. For instance, if most young people who struggle at the intermediate level in a school can decode but struggle with inferential comprehension, then purchase of an expensive computer-based language development program may not be a good investment. The team would do well to remember that teachers interacting with young people in small groups to model and support students’ attempts at reading and writing, coupled with connections to young people’s out-of-school literacies and high expectation for progress, will likely make more of a difference in such situations, and in a shorter amount of time.

Conclusion

School principals will do well to remember to draw on all the resources of the community when they want to foster effective literacy instruction in their elementary and secondary schools. Orchestrating community collaboration in ongoing development of research-based literacy plan that includes program development, implementation, evaluation, and revision tells our young people that their development of print and digital literacies is key to all of our futures. Literacy-focused collaboration with a community advisory board, building literacy leader, and literacy team will help to ensure that we enact a literacy instructional plan that eliminates the achievement gap and invites all young people to develop needed schools and strategies for success in an information age. When our young people join our breakfast book discussion—or, better, when they design the next generation of businesses in evolved discussion forms prompted by shared high-powered print and digital literacies—we’ll know that our community collaboration has been a success.

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Kathy’s Favorite Program Development Resources

1. Alliance for Excellent Education: www.all4ed.org


5. International Reading Association: www.reading.org


Creating Illiteracy: Why Johnny Can’t (Only) Read; New Literacies versus Old Policies

Jennifer Davis-Durr

ABSTRACT
Although the United States federal government has attempted to extinguish the gaps among various populations (socioeconomic, racial, etc.) through educational policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act, such policies may in fact create further divisions among these groups within American society. I base my argument on inadequacies in the formation of the policy, such as the procedures used by the NRP contributing to formation of NCLB, the outdated and narrow conceptions of literacy used by both the NRP and within NCLB, and the strict adherence to the NRP report and NCLB standards. In order to truly extinguish the gaps and create a democratic nation in which all citizens can contribute, I argue for transformation of federal education policies to reflect current definitions of literacy including New Literacies, which reflect the ongoing advancement of information communication technologies.

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According to a vast array of sources found among research, media editorials, and sensational news reports, a great number of American children and young adults are suffering from a reading crisis, and have been for over thirty years. Although statistics in education, especially in the field of reading, vary and are being produced at every moment we turn our heads, the tale appears to be looking up for some citizens of our nation. For example, one recent publication of data states that United States’ fourth graders scored higher in tests of reading in 2007 than in all previous years. Furthermore, eighth graders also appear to have made minor improvements, though these improvements remain limited to a basic proficiency level. Of greatest significance is that although students within minority groups did show improvements, these “did not always result in the narrowing of the achievement gaps with white students” (U.S. Department of Education (USDE, 2007c). Furthermore, The Nation’s Report Card: Reading 2007 reports significant gaps between students eligible for the National School Lunch program and those not eligible. On average, fourth grade students in the lower socioeconomic class scored 20.4 points lower than their peers, and eighth grade students in the lower socioeconomic class scored an average of 17.4 points lower than their peers (USDE, 2007c). For many of us, this message from the National Assessment of Educational
Progress (NAEP) is far from startling. We’ve seen the government’s attempts to remedy these achievement gaps among ethnic and socioeconomic groups with far reaching and controversial policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act. This act was originally passed in 2001 and the current legislation under the direction of President Barack Obama is now seeking to reform it, with little more attention to literacy than revising assessment procedures.

It is in the wake of these reports that I present the following arguments within this article. First, the policies in education targeted at improving reading skills (of minority and low socioeconomic students, in particular) were formed using a narrow set of procedures. Second, the recommendations provided by these governmental policies do not correspond to the needs of the populations affected by them or the literacy demands of all citizens in present day society. Third, strict adherence to these policies creates further separation and gaps between socioeconomic and racial groups as they result in minimal proficiencies at best, which limit opportunities and democratic participation. Finally, in order to create citizens who have skills necessary to advance personal, social, political, and economic positions as well as to participate in our democracy, federal policies must be transformed to reflect advances in various forms of literacy, including information communication technologies (ICTs), particularly standards in New Literacies with a focus in critical multiliteracies.

To best understand the need for transformation, we first need to look at one aspect of current federal policies (i.e., NCLB), the Reading First program. In short, Reading First is a means of providing guidance to states and districts regarding research based reading instruction and/or programs as well as to allocate funds to support these chosen programs. As stated by the U.S. Department of Education, “Reading First is designed to help the children who need it the most” (USDE 2007b). This assistance is provided through the distribution of funds by a formula that takes into account the number of children living in poverty in each state. Funds are then allocated to local education agencies through competitive subgrants provided by state education agencies. These state education agencies grant funds to assist the schools in greatest need to improve student achievement, provided that these funds contribute to establishing scientifically based reading programs backed by the NRP findings. And what influence has this multi-billion dollar program had on the Reading Crisis? Unfortunately, reports published in January of 2009 profess the absence of any statistically significant positive impact on reading comprehension test scores (Gamse, Jacob, Horst, Boulay, & Unlu, 2008). One can’t help but wonder at the obvious discord between the aims of the Reading First program and the outcomes, including statistics presented earlier pointing to the lack of significant progress toward closing the gap between minorities and whites as well as other socioeconomic groups. What is the cause of this lack of progress, and what remedies should be considered?

Aside from this discord, let us consider the design and goals of Reading First to better understand the need to transform such a policy. The Reading First initiative was built on the work of the National Reading Panel (NRP). This panel of fifteen, some of whom were not contributors to the field of reading, joined together in 1998-1999 to
review research in some areas of reading. As a result of their review, five areas of reading instruction were highlighted as “essential components” of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (USDE, 2007). These five areas have been coined the Five Pillars of effective reading instruction and shape curriculum and research decisions all across the nation. Pillars aside, there are limitations of the current application of the NRP findings:

- The narrow focus on reading, rather than literacy (i.e., viewing, listening, speaking, reading, and writing)
- The elimination of massive quantities of information derived from qualitative methods
- The omission of topics of reading and/or literacy that had a limited number of studies
- The ten year old research that did not address New Literacy skills

Surprisingly, the proposal for reauthorization of NCLB presented in January of 2007 (USDE, 2007a) and President Barack Obama and Vice-President Joe Biden’s plans for education reform assert no attention to the above factors (Obama for America, 2009). Even more disturbing is that instructional programs strictly adhering to these policies often focus on the narrow scope of the state standardized assessments, which are directed by the state standards, and are greatly shaped by the NRP report. Furthermore, regardless of a particular philosophy or currently held belief regarding best practices for literacy instruction backed by a variety of research in the field, standardized assessment scores reign supreme in holding administrators and teachers accountable. Although the current administration has claimed forthcoming revision of assessment models, educators anxiously await the specifics of these plans. Having spent years contending with the pervasive use of one assessment score which neglects the outside influences affecting scores and the shortcomings of the NRP report, educators remain wary.

**Which Comes First, Democracy or Literacy?**

As we consider transforming federal policies in literacy education, we need to consider the relationship that education has with a democratic society. John Dewey presented numerous theories and understandings of this relationship, though of greatest interest here is his idea of the reciprocal relationship between critical thinking and a democratic society. Briefly, Dewey noted that in order for a democratic society to function, there must be active, critical thinking. And, in order for critical thinking to occur, there must be a democratic society (Dewey, 1966). Dewey’s theories resonate with two proponents of New Literacies and more specifically critical multiliteracies, Michele Anstey and Geoff Bull (2006) explain the need for this burgeoning concept:

> Multiliteracies means being cognitively and socially literate with paper, live and electronic texts. We must be aware that the texts that we access or are exposed to have been consciously constructed to shape particular information in particular ways, shaping our attitudes, values, and behaviors. Therefore, being multiliterate must also involve being critically literate, that is having the ability to analyze
texts, identify their origins and authenticity, and understand how they have been constructed in order to perceive their gaps, silences, and biases. (p. 23)

As applied to the current argument, citizens that do not have critical multiliteracy skills are unable or ill equipped to critically analyze and utilize the massive amount of information available to them through ICTs (i.e., the internet).

Furthermore, although the need for integration of ICTs through engaging in critical multiliteracies is clear, Street’s cautionary words focusing on the process employed in the acquisition of literacy warrant attention (1995). Specifically, Street’s notion of creating a dominant literacy, therefore controlling and limiting the multitude of ways ICTs can be used is relevant here. The insidious dismissal of local literacies engaged in beyond the walls of schools gives rise to the creation and reification of dominant literacies. The limited scope of research utilized by the NRP, which excludes the types of ethnographic studies revealing local literacies, further exacerbates this objectification of literacy and absence of critical thinking applied to speaking, listening, reading, writing, and viewing.

Consequently, citizens are not likely to actively participate in the construction and reconstruction of society through the use of critical multiliteracies. They are at risk of falling victim to those that are empowered with such skills. When we continuously focus our attentions on the minimal literacy skills produced by Reading First or exclusively focus on the Five Pillars of reading instruction, we are in effect disempowering many of our citizens, and eliminating opportunities for active participation in our democratic society locally and globally.

There is a wide acceptance of the idea that all citizens, regardless of race, socioeconomic class, disability, and language have a right to an education that affords opportunities for advancement and empowerment. Yet, the Internet, a tool that could provide more opportunity for these achievements than any other in the history of the world, is not even considered within education policies. In fact, the gaps both in achievement and in various aspects of participation in our democratic society are exacerbated by the lack of some students’ exposure to such technology. Findings from the Pew Internet & American Life Project (2007) are helpful in illustrating this point. According to their report, although 48% of white (not Hispanic) Americans have access to broadband internet access from home, only 40% of African Americans, and 29% of Hispanics boast the same. In addition, only 30% of Americans with an average yearly income below thirty thousand have broadband internet access from home, as compared to 46% with a $30-50K annual salary, 58% with a $50-75K annual salary, and 76% with an annual salary over $75K (Horrigan & Smith, 2007).

These findings, correlated with the NAEP report, further illustrate the gaps evident among ethnic and socioeconomic groups. They also underscore the argument for transforming federal policies to include skills in the use of ICTs. While many middle and upper socioeconomic class citizens stand ready to gain at least rudimentary critical multiliteracy skills by simple exposure and home use of ICTs, many other demographic groups will not be awarded such opportunities. One cannot help but lament the
government’s naïveté, if the government truly wants all citizens to fully participate in either democracy and/or literacy.

The Need for Purpose to Empower

An investigation into NCLB, Reading First, and the NRP also leads one to question their understanding of the purpose of reading, and more important, of literacy. Within the field of education, five aspects of literacy are closely intertwined: viewing, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As we study the development of children, we see advances in their communication skills through advances in each of these aspects of literacy. Yet, policies to educate these same children have attended to just one aspect of a complex interrelated collection of developing characteristics of the child. Attempting to isolate this aspect (reading) in hopes of creating proficiency is ineffective, yet pervasive. This is evident through the absence of meaningful and purposeful context driven instruction of interconnected processes of literacy development. As Papen asserts in her investigation of local and global dimensions of reading and writing, “Learning literacy is part and parcel of learning the skills necessary to carry out the task in question...learning literacy, in these instances, is a by-product not the main purpose”, (p. 172-173). Unfortunately, reading is seen quite literally as a task in and of itself when approached through many curricula used in schools today.

Furthermore, parents, numerous educators, and countless researchers know that there is a reciprocal relationship between reading and writing development. For example, the authors of The Beginnings of Writing (Temple, Nathan, & Burris, 1988) state, “Research shows unequivocally that early writing helps children develop concepts about written language they need in order to read, and reading makes children familiar with language structures they need in order to write” (p. xi). This quotation is representative of many case studies and other published writing/reading research (Holdaway, 1979; Routman, 1988; Kroll & Wells, 1983; Jaggar & Smith-Burke, 1985; Bissex, 1980). Clearly, our attempts to support student progress in reading through only scientifically based research in reading casts aside this relationship. Instead, we focus on five pillars, most often in a disconnected manner. In essence, we are creating five free-standing pillars (a proficiency in the isolated areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) in hopes that students will show progress on federally mandated assessments. What is the point of five free-standing pillars, or progress in a series of mandated assessments? Children within Reading First programs might well ask that same question but would be left to their own for a plausible answer, which is especially worrisome based on the recent reports revealing the disconnect between alphabetics and the pillar of comprehension (Gamse, Jacob, Horst, Boulay, & Unlu, 2008).

One way we could help children build the foundations of enduring literacy is through an application of Paulo Freire’s ideas. He constructed much more than free-standing pillars as he investigated the relationship between literacy and empowerment. Freire’s conception of literacy argues that a person could not be characterized as ‘truly’ literate unless he or she has learned something more than simply how to inscribe and
interpret symbols on a piece of paper (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Simply teaching students to read and comprehend at basic levels equates reading as an end in itself. Freire advocates for a broader definition and use of literacy that includes social, institutional, and cultural relationships. In his words, “Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world” (p. 29).

Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel (2003), two New Literacies proponents, echo Freire’s definition by stating, “Proper literacy enhances people’s control over their lives and their capacity for dealing rationally with decisions by enabling them to identify, understand, and to act to transform, social relations and practices in which power is structured unequally” (p. 74). This contention is further supported through Kincheloe and Steinberg’s (1997) call for critical multiculturalism, characterized by an understanding of the perspectives of those marginalized citizens of our society, thus replacing ‘Truth’ with multiple accounts and viewpoints. However, Yagelski (2000) leads educators to first reexamine our own attitudes toward literacy, literacy instruction, and the roles we have in facilitating students’ construction of themselves through critical awareness in literacy practices. Therefore, transformations in classrooms through the work of individual teachers and students can and should reflect such critical awareness if literacy is to influence democracy and society.

These expanded views of literacy lead one to question how some appear to accept purposes of literacy as defined by the federal policies in education. Adhering to policies that require basic proficiencies within print text only do not take into account these expanded views of literacy. Society is inundated with influence from ICTs, for which our current policies are not preparing our citizens. Instead, reading is seen as the means to proficiency on standardized state assessments. The isolation of reading from literacy along with a loss of the understanding of its associated empowerment purposes within the context of our society stands to widen societal gaps and divisions.

We appear to be enabling and encouraging illiteracy by embracing a narrow view of what it means to be literate, focusing only on print text reading proficiencies. Advances in ICTs (the internet, in particular) continue to transform how we write, read, view, and listen. In order to succeed in our culture, work, and democracy, one must have some level of proficiency with multiple literacies, and these technologies in particular. We have no choice but to revise policies in education so as to enable all citizens to acquire New Literacy and specifically critical multiliteracy skills. Doing so will better ensure their participation in a democratic society.

**Guiding Principles of Transforming Federal Policies in Education**

So what might we do in light of current circumstances? At least four principles come to mind. First, the policies in education must adhere to currently held definitions of literacy as supported by current research. This includes a shift from the formerly accepted psychological definitions of reading, proposing a particular set of skills within a single context, to a currently developing sociocultural definition of literacy. This would require that policies incorporate not only all five aspects of literacy (viewing, listening, speaking,
reading, and writing), but would also require that these aspects be considered within the social, institutional, and cultural contexts in which they serve purposeful means.

Second, new policies must prioritize New Literacies including critical multiliteracies in both instruction and further research endeavors. If the United States desires to retain and advance global economic and political power, our citizens must be prepared to actively participate in our democratic state, while utilizing, evaluating, and creating ICTs. As of December 2007, The Internet World Stats (2008) reports 20% of the world total population is using the Internet. And, the growth rate is approximately 265.6%. Therefore, some estimate that at least 50% of the world population will be users of the internet in less than four years. The compilation of statistics throughout this article, as compared with our current instructional practices, shows the glaring necessity for New Literacies and critical multiliteracies within our federal policies in education.

Finally, unlike many U.S. governmental policies, those that influence educational practices and research must be responsive to the concept of change as the new constant (Anstey & Bull, 2006). Not only is internet usage growing at an incredible rate, but the technologies used are constantly developing, which causes changes in necessary skills and therefore instruction. We can no longer focus exclusively on a particular set of skills applicable to print text, but must instead begin to educate our citizens to independently acquire skills to adapt to new technologies. There is no possible way that curriculum within schools can keep up with the pace of change, but there is also no possible way that our citizens can continue to actively participate in society without preparation in New Literacies.

Although admittedly scarce, the resources to impart such skills even at the most primary levels are becoming available. Evans (2000) supplies a multitude of practical ideas, such as incorporating multimedia (i.e. digital photos, slide show, etc.) in the creation and sharing of personal narratives. Following or in conjunction with sharing such stories, teachers might consider whole group discussions focused on critical analysis of the author’s process of creating the story. Another valuable idea proposed in this pioneering work addresses the perseverance of popular culture, an influential factor in children’s lives from the ages of Teletubbies and Bob the Builder to The Simpsons and Playstation. Using video clips and packaging materials, Evans (2000) advises extending discussions of intended audience to the creation of students’ own slogans and logos using multimedia sources. Finally, the slight modification of a fairly traditional activity in which students view the film derived from a novel or other print text can provide opportunities for students to apply critical multiliteracies. Simply asking students to go beyond literal compare and contrast to critical considerations of interpretation on behalf of the film directors, producers, and/or writers results in students considering their own perspective as well as the formation of others’ perspectives.

At the outset of this article, my goal was to present an argument for the transformation of federal policies in education. I argue that the transformations need to reflect the current pervasive existence of information communication technologies and their connection to literacy and democracy beginning in the elementary classroom. I stand by my convictions and advocate for continued discussion and investigation into
changes in understanding literacy and the roles of government and education in influencing democracy.

References


Reading and Writing Connections Using Media: Addressing the Literacy Needs of Students in Intermediate and Middle Level Classrooms

Francine Falk-Ross and Roberta Linder

ABSTRACT

Students in intermediate and middle level grades are often caught up in the exciting visual images and auditory stimuli that are a part of all their everyday communication and learning experiences. As a group of students who are growing intellectually and socially in the midst of, and through, predominantly media messages, they require reading and writing activities that integrate these forms and support connections between their in and out of school experiences. Research indicates that media can be used to facilitate literacy learning. It is important for preservice and practicing teachers to consider the reasons and framework for including media in literacy activities, the forms and applications that are most productive for learning, and the processes for integrating media for reading and writing lessons. The purpose of this article is to provide insight into planning everyday literacy instruction using media forms.

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Traditional language arts curricula often tend to restrict their reading selections to print texts, frequently limited to works from the literary canon. However, some teachers are beginning to integrate both print and non-print texts into their instruction (Falk-Ross, Rajski-Dzuryak, Rogers, Waste, Rizzato, & Alarcon, 2008; Hobbs, 2007). When adopting this expanded view of literacy resources, texts encompass non-print forms of material, or media, that communicate messages, including visual and aural media (i.e., television programs, movies, music), electronic sources (i.e., websites, instant messages, video games, text messages), student-generated texts (i.e., zines, school publications, notes in class), as well as people’s life experiences and social/cultural events (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Semali & Watts Pailliotet, 1999). These forms of text are not neutral; they are complex constructions with print, images, color, gestures, sounds, facial expressions, motion, music, and camera angles which transmit selected cultural, economic, political, and historical meanings and values. Construction of media’s
meaning occurs when readers encounter texts and form their idiosyncratic interpretations based on variables such as gender, age, social class, race, sexual orientation, and familiarity with other texts (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Buckingham, 2003; Mackey, 2007; Moje, Dillon, & O’Brien, 2000; Semali, 2003).

Media literacy can be defined as “the process of critically analyzing and learning to create one’s own messages in print, audio, video, and multimedia” (Hobbs, 1998, p. 16). When teachers incorporate instruction with media texts, they deepen their students’ cognitive development by increasing their knowledge of key concepts or terms and helping them to become critical thinkers (Scharrer, 2003). Approaches to integrating media activities into literacy lessons include those that use reading and reflection to evaluate media in the classroom and those that use media to support reading and writing events. The former provides critical lenses for young adolescents to understand the subtle messages that may be conveyed through non-print resources and their influences on our interpretation of the text. The latter approach incorporates popular culture forms that have become second nature to most young adolescents. These approaches are explained in more detail in the next sections.

**Questions for Critiquing Media**

More specific to the study of media, Thoman (n.d.) suggested that questioning is at the heart of examining media, “What is important for media literacy is not to know all the answers, but to raise the right questions about what you watch, read, or listen to…” (italics in original, p.4). For example, Hobbs and Frost (2003) guided teachers’ media instruction by using the Five Key Questions (Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2007) developed by the Center for Media Literacy.

- Who created this message?
- What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
- How might different people understand this message differently?
- What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
- Why is the message being sent?

These five questions were designed to be used by teachers to help guide students as they seek answers related to the authorship, format, audience, content, and purposes of media messages.

McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) provided similar questions which they developed to help students critically analyze texts and enhance their comprehension. Their questions also focused on authorship, audience, and purpose, but they additionally examined voice, alternative representations, and the use of content information for promoting equity.

- Who is in the text/picture/situation? Who is missing?
- Whose voices are represented? Whose voices are marginalized or discounted?
- What are the intentions of the author? What does the author want the reader to think?
- What would an alternative text/picture/situation say?
How can the reader use this information to promote equity? (p. 41)

Kempe (2001) posed questions that asked readers to examine their thoughts and feelings and to think about how their interpretations were mediated by their backgrounds as they read popular magazines. These types of questions required students to acknowledge the manner in which media texts create emotional responses and to take notice of the cultural values and lifestyles being promoted.

- What are you thinking about or feeling while you are reading? How are these thoughts and feelings influenced by your background, your experiences, and other texts you have read?
- What is the text asking you to think or feel? Do you agree with the point of view offered by the text? Why or why not?
- What view of men/women does this particular magazine promote? How is this different from the views constructed in other magazines? Why is it different?

All these questions have the similar intent of helping readers look more deeply into the authors’ purposes and readers’ responses. A good example of using questions to guide thinking during reading is provided in descriptions of classroom activities by Linder (2007, 2008b) focusing on the design of an advertisement web (Appendix A).

**An Application of Questioning Strategy Using Media**

These types of questions provided the basis for design of an advertisement web (Linder, 2007, 2008b) that was constructed by students as part of their study of magazine advertisements, and that provides an example of integrating media into classroom literacy frames. Prior to the advertisement web project, the students had viewed videos and engaged in activities which provided background knowledge in advertising (e.g., vocabulary, advertisement techniques, target audience). First, to introduce the project, the author presented a web that she had completed using an advertisement featuring a candy bar that was being advertised by a celebrity basketball player. She described each element of the web, explaining how she had analyzed and responded to the advertisement. Next, using a cologne advertisement taken from a popular teen magazine, she then went through the process with her classes, using students’ comments as examples for each part of the web. Both advertisement webs were kept on display as models for the students.

For the project, each student was assigned a partner. The intent was to pair up students who had different backgrounds, interests, or genders in order to set up the conditions for differing interpretations of the same advertisement. Next, the students selected their own advertisements and sketched their rough drafts on notebook paper, writing the responses they would include on their webs. After the author had checked the rough drafts, the students transferred their ideas onto posters. Finally, the completed webs were shared with the classes and displayed in the classroom.

Overall, the students’ webs reflected a solid understanding of the intended audiences and advertising techniques, but they found it more difficult to identify elements that were omitted from the advertisement. As anticipated, the pairing of the partners produced some differing interpretations of the ads. For example, in one project featuring the rapper 50 Cent in an ad for milk, the African-American girl wrote, “What a hottie!
Love the muscles,” but her Mexican-American male partner responded, “Put a shirt on, don’t like it.” These revealed very different reactions to the same milk advertisement. The advertisement web activity allowed these seventh grade readers the opportunity to examine popular magazine advertisements in a more critical manner and to compare/contrast their reactions to the selected ads. (The web activity may be found in Appendix A).

**Other Suggestions to Spur Media Integration in Literacy Events**

Other representative activities follow that may be applied to individual classrooms to enhance critical thinking within reading and writing classroom-based activities. Each uses different media forms to enhance students’ learning.

*Online information networks.* Students could utilize sites that provide specific vocabulary for content areas of specific interest to middle school students and are necessary for literacy activities typical of grades 4-9. Examples would include almost-encyclopedic reviews of social studies information on the History Channel ([http://www.history.com/](http://www.history.com/)) and earth science information on NASA’s site, For Kids Only: Earth Science Enterprise ([http://kids.earth.nasa.gov/](http://kids.earth.nasa.gov/)). Another suggestion is this area would be use of Internet Workshop (Leu, 2002), which provides a research frame for posing questions, locating information, sifting through text for important facts, and composing a solution or resolution. Students later share their work, questions, and new insights.

*Magazines, newspapers, and printed texts.* Students can be encouraged to critique printed texts using the types of questions listed previously in this article. The texts could include magazines and newspapers of their selection but could also extend to the novels, textbooks, and other printed materials used in their classes. Students can also compare and contrast the print and electronic versions of newspapers and magazines. An examination of the amount and content of advertisements would allow students to document and discuss the pervasiveness of marketing in their lives. A sample format (Linder, 2008b) is provided in Appendix B. Writing activities could include the production of student-generated magazines, newspapers, or advertisements for the class or the school. Students concerned about the content of magazine advertisements may want to enter the Bad Ad Contest sponsored annually by the New Mexico Media Literacy Project ([http://www.nmmlp.org/what_we_do/contests.html](http://www.nmmlp.org/what_we_do/contests.html)). Additional resources for teachers’ professional development and activity ideas for the classroom are provided by Media Literacy.Com ([http://www1.medialiteracy.com/home.jsp](http://www1.medialiteracy.com/home.jsp)) or by EdSelect’s Media Literacy site ([http://edselect.com/media.htm](http://edselect.com/media.htm)).
Films / Videos. Options for reading and writing activities might include videotaping activities, such as interviews or performances for language interaction/individual conferencing using specific question routines and vocabulary enrichment activities. Another use of a popular print-based strategy could be applied to media. RAFT activities are a great way to help young adolescents examine and respond to texts from multiple perspectives (Linder, 2008a). The example provided in Appendix c utilizes a television program, but this could be adapted for other visual media forms as well. First, preview a television show that you will share with the class. Next, construct a RAFT template to supply students with choices for their responses. The Role selections provided on the RAFT template represent many different perspectives in relation to the television show that will be viewed, and the Format selections offer different modes for presenting responses (e.g., writing, role playing, demonstrating). Refer to the example in Appendix C. Finally, view the program with the class and then have the students select the perspective they wish to write about or present.

CDs and MP3 devices. Students can use musical compositions (e.g., songs, raps) of their own creation or previously recorded material to analyze or summarize the content. For example, have each student print out the lyrics from a popular song using a website such as Song Meanings at http://www.songmeanings.net. The lyrics can serve as a basis for a number of reading and writing activities. Students can then write their interpretations of the messages they believe are being conveyed by the authors of the lyrics. A more critical approach would be to have the students examine what values and lifestyles are being communicated through the words, what feelings the song evokes in them as the listener, and explain why they chose this particular song. As a follow-up activity, they could write additional stanzas to the songs, or compare/contrast the pieces with other songs by the same artist, a song by a different artist, or a song from a different period of time such as the 1980s.

Discussion

It becomes the teacher’s responsibility to intercede and mediate the deeper (i.e., socially and politically charged) thinking and understanding of text by all students (Luke & Freebody, 1997; Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000). Giroux (2000) argues that “…educators’ responsibilities cannot be separated from the consequences of the knowledge they produce, the social relations they legitimate, and the ideologies they disseminate” (p. 25). To this end, the integration of critical thinking incorporating media strategies to develop reading and writing competencies is an important endeavor. Critical framing of text and the knowledge within that text has been suggested by the New London Group (2000); the applications are left to the discretion of each teacher. As important as these activities are for upper intermediate and middle level students, they also provide several engaging approaches to meeting students at points of interest. Students need to connect to the reading and writing of text, i.e., feel comfortable and challenged by its form and content, in order to engage in deeper consideration of the content. Integrating media in the lesson applications will facilitate this critical thinking and set them on the path to lifelong learning.
References


Share, J., Jolls, T., & Thoman, E. (2007). *Five key questions that can change the world: Lesson plans for media literacy*. Center for Media Literacy.

# Appendix A

## ADVERTISEMENT WEB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advertising technique</th>
<th>Name of one student &amp; his/her reaction to the ad.</th>
<th>Name of another student &amp; his/her reaction to the ad.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>magazine advertisement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Message of the advertisement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(What does this ad want you to think or feel? What values, lifestyles, and points of view are being promoted?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Target Audience</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(What group of people is being sought out as consumers for this product?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Information omitted from the advertisement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(What product information is being left out by the creators of the ad?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Portrayal of males/females</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(What view of males/females is pictured? Do you agree or disagree with the portrayals?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Linder, 2008)*
Appendix B

DATA COLLECTION SHEET FOR MAGAZINES AND THEIR ADVERTISEMENTS

Student ____________________________

Title of magazine ____________________________ Date ______________

Number of pages ________________ Date ______________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of page covered by ad(s)</th>
<th>Tally</th>
<th>Your math computations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¼ page</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ page</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¾ page</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 page</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more pages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type of product featured in ad  Tally  Your math computations

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

Type of people featured in ad  Tally  Your math computations

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

(Linder, 2008)
Appendix C

RAFT Activities for a TV Show

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE</th>
<th>AUDIENCE</th>
<th>FORMAT</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male teenage viewer</td>
<td>Male friends</td>
<td>E-mails</td>
<td>Responses to the show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female teenage viewer</td>
<td>Female friends</td>
<td>Instant Messages</td>
<td>Responses to the show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-year old sibling</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Begging/whining to parents</td>
<td>Wants to be allowed to view the show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Other parents of teenagers</td>
<td>Letter to the Editor</td>
<td>Want the show cancelled due to the content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creator(s) of the show</td>
<td>TV station executive</td>
<td>Oral presentation explaining why the station should run the program</td>
<td>How the show appeals to today’s teens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV station manager</td>
<td>Concerned parents</td>
<td>Response to the parents who are concerned about the program being shown on the station</td>
<td>Freedom of speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star(s) of the show</td>
<td>Fans</td>
<td>Interview published in popular teen magazine</td>
<td>Topics of interest to the fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company who wants to advertise during the show</td>
<td>TV station executive</td>
<td>Demonstration of an idea for a commercial</td>
<td>Popular brand of clothing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Linder, 2008)
Lessons from the Literacy Club: 
Hamlet Meets the Lion King After-School

Jacqueline Darvin

ABSTRACT
The purpose of this article is to provide a model of an academic intervention and support program in literacy that focuses on the needs of individual students and revalues them as readers, goals that are of extreme importance when working with adolescents who have repeatedly experienced academic failure and view themselves as poor readers. This article describes the key elements and strategies of an academic intervention and support program called the Literacy Club that was designed for struggling high school readers and their literacy tutors. This article supplies a literacy-focused lesson plan format that teachers from the Literacy Club deemed successful for integrating literacy objectives and strategies into the teaching of Hamlet and concludes with the three reading strategies that were considered the most helpful by the students.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY
Jacqueline Darvin is an Assistant Professor of Literacy Education at Queens College of the City University of New York. Her publications include several articles in English Journal and the Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, the secondary journal of the International Reading Association.

Introduction
Sung (a pseudonym) is an English Language Learner from Korea who was attending high school in Flushing, Queens in 2006. At that time, he had already failed the New York State English Regents Examination on six occasions and was preparing to sit for it for the seventh time. He had passed all of his high school courses successfully, including English, plus the other six required Regents exams. Due to his struggles with academic reading and writing in English, he was having tremendous difficulty passing the English Regents. He had not been permitted to graduate with his class in 2005, and at age twenty, he was still attending high school every day, strictly for English Regents test preparation.

Day after day, Sung was given practice English Regents exams and told that he would need to pass the exam before he would be allowed to graduate. He expressed an interest in attending John Jay College in Manhattan to study criminal justice, but could not apply without his high school diploma. He would have one last opportunity to take the exam before turning 21, the age at which he would be exited from the system.
meaning that New York State would no longer be responsible for paying for his high school education. His only hopes of achieving a high school diploma at that point would be to pursue a GED. During this final high-stakes year, Sung was given the opportunity to try something different, a new after-school program called the Literacy Club. This program was a collaborative effort between the Graduate Secondary Literacy Program at Queens College of the City University of New York and his high school.

Much has been written in the educational literature about the value of literacy clubs (Beers, 2003; Smith, 1997; Goodman, 1996), literacy discourse communities (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Gee, 2000), and literacy communities of practice (Pahl & Roswell, 2005; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Two of the many benefits of literacy clubs and communities include that “members see themselves as readers and writers” and “are concerned with each other’s interests and welfare” (Smith, 1997, p.115). Additionally, in literacy clubs, “mistakes are expected, not frowned upon or punished as undesirable behavior” (Smith, 1997, p. 114). These are just a few of the theoretical underpinnings of the Literacy Club, as it was conceptualized for secondary students like Sung who have experienced intense feelings of failure with regard to their literacy experiences in school.

This article describes the key elements and pedagogical strategies of this academic intervention and support program. These facets of the Literacy Club can be adapted to enhance the teaching of literacy in a wide variety of academic intervention and support programs, such as “extra help” programs that take place before, during or after the regular school day, resource room or reading lab settings for special education students, English Language Learners or students with reading difficulties or disabilities, private tutoring sessions that take place in students’ homes, “push-in” or “pull-out” reading services for secondary students, and settings in which Literacy Coaches work with individual students or small groups to provide literacy support. This article also supplies a literacy-focused lesson plan format that teachers from the Literacy Club deemed successful for integrating literacy objectives and strategies and concludes with the three reading strategies that were considered the most helpful by the students. The purpose of this article is to provide a model of an academic intervention and support program in literacy that focuses on the needs of individual students and revalues them as readers, goals that are of extreme importance when working with adolescents that have repeatedly experienced academic failure and view themselves as poor readers and writers.

**How Students and Teachers Become Members of the Literacy Club**

Students are first identified and recommended by the school guidance department based on their records indicating difficulties with reading and/or failing or low scores on standardized tests, particularly the New York State Regents Examinations in English, Global Studies, and American History. In New York State, these Regents exams are high stakes tests because without passing marks, students are not able to graduate from high school. The tests rely very heavily on reading comprehension and the ability to write essays based on difficult readings. Many of the students that are identified by their guidance counselors for the Literacy Club have failed the English Regents two or three
times already. The exam is normally given to students in January or June of their junior year, which gives them four or five opportunities to re-take it before graduation. The exam is given in January, June, and August of each year.

Once students are identified by the guidance counselors, letters go home to students and their parents from the principal’s office stating that they have been identified as students who would benefit from academic support services in literacy and that a local college will be providing individual and small group tutoring to students who choose to join and attend the Literacy Club sessions. In the letter, students and parents are told that joining the Literacy Club is completely voluntary, but is a serious commitment. The letter emphasizes that if they join, they must be present at every session. The students and their parents are asked to sign “contracts” stating that they agree to this and understand that their attendance every week is necessary in order to see improvement. This is also important to the graduate students who are doing the tutoring because they collect data on their individual students and create Biographic Literacy Profiles as part of their final grades for their course.

The tutors in the Literacy Club are graduate students of literacy education who are already certified secondary teachers of English, social studies, science, mathematics, etc.. These graduate students, as part of their master’s degree program in secondary literacy education, are required to engage in a hands-on literacy practicum experience during which they work with struggling and/or reluctant readers doing targeted reading instruction. New York State requires that teachers seeking certification as secondary reading specialists have practicum experiences with students at both the middle and high school levels. The Literacy Club rotates between a high school and middle school setting every semester so that the graduate students can meet this requirement. They are supervised by a professor from the university and attend a half-hour long seminar after each Literacy Club session. During the seminar, the graduate students share their questions and concerns about the students and discuss required readings for the course.

How the Literacy Club Operates

The Literacy Club meets every Wednesday for two hours after school for the length of a college semester (approximately 15 weeks). Prior to beginning the tutoring sessions themselves, the students and teachers share a snack together and students are encouraged to talk about any problems they may be having in their classes, particularly related to readings that they don’t understand and writing assignments with which they are struggling. The time that is set aside for rapport building is an important part of beginning the club process (Beers, 2003; Smith, 1997) and promotes trust and facilitates communication between the high school students and their tutors.

For the first hour of the Literacy Club, students meet with their tutors individually. During the first session or two, the teachers normally do some “getting-to-know-you” activities with the students, administer an informal reading questionnaire that asks students about the genres they like/dislike and other personal questions about their reading, and solicit writing samples from students. During the second or third session, the teachers administer the Qualitative Reading Inventory 4 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006), a
reading assessment that was chosen for its focus on assessment of word identification, fluency, and comprehension. The QRI also provides suggestions for intervention instruction, procedures for assessment of strategic reading, and inclusion of results in classroom portfolios. The QRI is later used as a post-test near the conclusion of the Literacy Club sessions in order to evaluate student growth. During the sessions in between the pre and post tests, the tutors focus on the areas of literacy learning that the students need to improve, as indicated by the QRI. Much of the time that students spend with their individual tutors is spent on learning and applying strategies to help improve their reading, including Coding the Text, Making Connections While You Read, Visualizing and Taking Episodic Notes. These strategies are discussed in detail in subsequent sections of this article.

After students meet with their individual tutors for one hour, they are given a short break and return for whole group instruction. During the remaining fifty minutes of the Literacy Club, all of the students and teachers work together on a literary selection that is chosen by both the students and the teachers at the beginning of the semester. The lessons that are taught during the whole group portion of the literacy club are created and team-taught by two teachers each week on a rotating schedule. While the two teachers are presenting their lesson, the other teachers present in the room sit with the students and assist them with individual questions and difficulties as the lesson unfolds.

In 2006, the whole class text that the students and teachers chose was an annotated version of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (Gorman, 2003). Other literacy selections that were considered but not chosen included *The Color Purple*, *Les Miserables*, and *Wicked*. These literary selections were considered primarily because of their connections to Broadway theatre productions that were running in New York City in 2006. Both the students and tutors were told by the college supervisor that they would be attending a Broadway performance as a culminating activity, therefore that knowledge helped to guide their text selection for the Literacy Club.

**Key Elements of “The Literacy Club”**

1. **Create a community of learners in which students have many opportunities for social interaction that depart from the norm and give them different classroom experiences than they’ve had in the past.**

One of the key elements of the Literacy Club is based upon the powerful social component of language and literacy learning. Smith (1997) discusses the potent connection between social activities and literacy development when he writes about people seeking entry into what he terms “literacy clubs.” When discussing membership in these clubs, he writes that “members occupy themselves with whatever activities the group has formed itself to promote, constantly demonstrating the value and utility of these activities to the new members, helping them to participate in these activities themselves when they want, but never forcing their involvement” (p. 114). Vygotsky (1978) also wrote extensively about what he called the “cultural method” of thinking. He went so far as to say that without a social component, learning would not occur at all. Vygotsky’s concept of the Zone of Proximal Development also applies directly to the
Literacy Club because an important aspect of the ZPD involves how learners make use of the help of others as they gradually take over more control and direction of their own thinking and learning (McNamee, 1990).

The importance of the relationships between the high school students, their tutors, one another, and the university supervisor is emphasized and encouraged in the Literacy Club to maximize the social component of learning. In this program, struggling high school readers are tutored in an environment that models a community of learners, one that they don’t often experience in their traditional high school courses. Examples of how this community of learners is achieved include both students and teachers calling each other by their first names, teachers sharing their own reading struggles with students through think-alouds and read-alouds, students and teachers sharing a snack together before the tutoring sessions begin, and students being encouraged to ask a lot of questions, particularly when they are confused or having trouble comprehending what they are reading. This departure from the norm is extremely important when working with at-risk or struggling students who rarely benefit from remediation that is simply ―more of the same.‖ Greene, a fierce proponent of the arts in education, writes, “In many respects, teaching and learning are matters of breaking through barriers – of expectation, of boredom, of predefinition. To teach, at least in one dimension, is to provide persons with the knacks and know-how they need in order to teach themselves” (Greene, 1995, p.14).

2. Allow the students to take active roles in their learning and be involved in decision-making at many levels in order to combat passivity.

A second key element of the Literacy Club is to encourage the high school students to take active roles in their learning and to be involved in decision-making with the teachers on many levels. For example, through an innovative teaching projects grant that I received from the president of my college, the Literacy Club was able to provide the opportunity and monetary resources for the students to attend a Broadway play with their Literacy Club tutors and to use the aesthetic experience as a springboard for many instructional literacy activities. Members of the Literacy Club in the fall of 2006 attended a performance of Disney’s The Lion King after reading an annotated version of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, a play that contains many similar thematic elements that are also present in the tragedy. In order to teach Hamlet in a different way than most high school English classes, it was taught using its connections to Disney’s The Lion King, an animated film with which the students were already familiar. Because the high school where the program is housed is in Queens, New York, the Literacy Club also had the opportunity to see the Broadway production of The Lion King in Manhattan at the end of the semester. From the very first day of the Hamlet/Lion King unit, students were encouraged to make connections between the characters, themes and plots of the two works. Additionally, the Mel Gibson film version of Hamlet was shown so that students could see yet another rendering of this powerful tragedy.

The Literacy Club tutors and high school students chose the play and corresponding text collaboratively at the beginning of the semester. This ability to choose
the play and text together helped combat the passivity that teachers often encounter when working with adolescents, particularly ones that struggle academically. In Its Never Too Late: Leading Adolescents to Lifelong Literacy, Allen writes,

“It is this very passivity, at least in terms of academics, that I have found often characterizes students in special programs or resource classes. They wait for work. They wait for something to happen. They wait to get out of school. As passive nonreaders, they wait for reading to happen to them, not knowing that reading doesn’t work that way” (1995, p.155).

This emphasis on combating student passivity is an element of the Literacy Club that encourages students to be more responsible for their own learning and view reading as a more active transaction between a reader and text.

3. Re-value the students as readers using miscue analysis and make them more aware of the kinds of miscues they make and the strengths they already possess.

A third key element of the Literacy Club is re-valuing the high school students as readers and writers and making them more aware of their strengths in these areas. As a former high school teacher for twelve years, I know that this is particularly important when working with at-risk adolescents because they have often experienced years of failure and are reluctant to engage in school-related experiences that will cause them to feel unsuccessful again. Recall the example of the Korean-born student that failed the English Regents exam six times. How must he have felt about himself as a reader?

One way that this re-valuing is done in the Literacy Club is through miscue analysis (Wilde, 2000; Goodman, 1976; Goodman, 1973), a diagnostic procedure that helps identify “miscues,” rather than mistakes in reading. This procedure can also be used to identify what readers do well. Retrospective miscue analysis (RMA) has proven effective in re-valuing readers because as part of the process, readers come to understand why all errors aren’t bad and the difference between miscues that preserve meaning in text and those that don’t (Goodman & Marek, 1996). The process of looking at the kind of miscues that they make also shows readers their abilities to self-correct and apply a range of strategies when they need to do so.

The tutors in the Literacy Club chose miscue analysis and retrospective miscue analysis as means of assessment for the high school students because they are two of the best ways to show readers, in very specific ways, what they do well as they read and to pinpoint the kinds of errors that impact meaning and those that don’t. An example of this might be a reader that substitutes the word “bunny” for “rabbit” in a text. This miscue is one that preserves meaning in the reading, even though the word substitution itself is incorrect. After completing the RMAs, the tutors discuss the types of miscues that the students make with them, allowing them to see that not all of the miscues they make affect their ability to comprehend text. This is an eye-opening experience for high school students that are accustomed to simply being told how many mistakes they made, with no discussion about the graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic acceptability of their miscues and the extent to which they affect meaning. Discussing not only the quantity but the quality of a reader’s miscues is also helpful for adults and English Language Learners
because the process acts as a confidence builder and a perfect segue for introducing reading strategies that will be helpful in targeting specific weak areas in their reading. An excellent, easy-to-use resource for teachers to learn about using miscue analysis in this way is *Miscue Analysis Made Easy: Building on Student Strengths* (Wilde, 2000).

4. **Teach challenging content-area texts through a lens of literacy and include reading objectives, strategies and rationales for how and why the methods chosen will help the students become better readers.**

The last and most important key element of the Literacy Club is to teach literature and other kinds of texts first and foremost through a lens of literacy. When the tutors, who are all New York State certified teachers working toward master’s degrees in secondary literacy, design their lessons for the Literacy Club, they are required to include literacy objectives, strategies and rationales for how and why the methods that they are using in the lesson will help the students become better readers. The teachers are asked to try and view the texts that are being studied through the eyes of struggling readers and to do things in their lessons to make the texts more user friendly for them. The lessons and activities are created with the explicit intention of enabling the struggling reader to make visible things that proficient readers see and do naturally and unconsciously. These include strategies such as coding the text, visualizing, making connections, questioning, inferring, evaluating, analyzing, recalling, and self-monitoring (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004).

**Literacy-Focused Lesson Plans**

When the tutors design lessons for the whole group sessions of the Literacy Club, one of the required elements is at least one “literacy objective” for every lesson. This objective is written just below the content objective(s), and is written in the form of a “Students will...” statement. Examples of literacy objectives can include things like: “Students will visualize ideas and situations in the text,” “Students will be able to evaluate the reading and determine what is important,” or “Students will self-monitor while reading and indicate problematic passages in the text.” These differ from content area objectives, such as “Students will be able to explain why *Hamlet* was a tragic hero,” “Students will write a paragraph with supporting details comparing Claudius from *Hamlet* with Scar from *The Lion King,*” or “Students will be able to define the word procrastination and provide an example.”

Another element that is required in the lesson is a rationale for how and why the lesson will help the students to reach the literacy objective and a description of the method(s) that will be used. Adopting this literacy-focused lesson plan design obliges teachers to really think about how they teach literacy skills to their struggling readers and allows them to be more reflective about their practices when particular methods are effective or unsuccessful. What’s innovative about this lesson plan is that it makes literacy and content area objectives equally important and views lessons as “works in progress,” rather than finished products that are set in stone. It requires teachers to be
introspective about their lessons and to articulate clearly their plans for future improvement. A sample lesson plan can be found in Appendix A.

Although this lesson plan may be too labor intensive to be used daily, it can be used periodically by teachers to ensure that literacy objectives are being integrated with the teaching of content, particularly when students’ difficulties with reading are preventing them from accessing the content necessary to complete lessons or assignments. Most secondary teachers have encountered this situation, particularly when working with challenging texts. If students can’t read and understand the text, then all learning stops.

It is also an excellent lesson plan for reading specialists, special education and content-area teachers to use when demonstrating to administrators, parents or university supervisors that they are, in fact, integrating the teaching of literacy into content area lessons. At the conclusion of the lesson, teachers record how successful they believe the methods chosen were in helping students to achieve both the content and literacy objectives and possible suggestions for improvement the next time the lesson or a similarly-designed one is used. This reflective component can be used by teachers as a form of self-analysis, and it can also be shared in discussions with colleagues, administrators or university supervisors as part of program evaluation.

**Successful Reading Strategy One: Coding the Text**

One of the three most successful reading strategies (as reported by students in the Literacy Club) used during the *Hamlet/Lion King* unit was Coding the Text (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004). Students were told to record their mental responses and thoughts about the text as they were reading and were provided with a list of symbols and Post-its on which to mark these symbols in the text itself. The symbols included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>This part of the text seems strange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>??</td>
<td>This part completely confuses me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>This strikes me as being important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>!</td>
<td>This confirms what I thought would happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>This contradicts what I thought would happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~</td>
<td>New or interesting information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the students read *Hamlet*, they placed Post-its on various sections of the text containing the symbols above as well as one or two sentence explanations of the thought processes behind their uses of the symbols. During group discussions, the students were encouraged to share their Coding of the Text with others and make visible their thought processes as they were reading. As the students became comfortable with this strategy, they were not only able to share their thoughts with one another and with their Literacy Club tutors, they were also better able to understand their own thought processes as they read, a worthy goal for struggling readers who often have difficulty articulating their
reading behaviors in such explicit ways. This strategy can be employed in many different ways, but this particular version was adapted from Daniels & Zemelman (2004).

In a reflection about the Coding the Text strategy, a high school student named Mandy (pseudonym) wrote, ―Now when I read, I know how to notice specific things in the story and ask questions. If I come to a word and don’t know what it means, I look at the words around it to help figure it out. Before, I would just skip it and then the sentence wouldn’t make any sense.‖ This same student had written in her introductory writing sample during the first Literacy Club session,

One of the things I would like to work on is remembering what I read. I don’t like school that much, but I want to be somebody when I grow up, so I’m trying hard to pass. I’m not that good of a student. I don’t pass that many tests and I get confused easily. My attitude towards my work is I try my best. Even if I don’t know something, I write anything down to show I did some work.

This transformation in Mandy’s view of herself as a reader shows how differently adolescent struggling readers feel toward themselves when they are given literacy strategies that work and are re-valued as readers who possess strengths and abilities in reading, not just shortcomings.

**Successful Reading Strategy Two: Making Connections While You Read**

Another reading strategy that was embedded into many of the *Hamlet/Lion King* literacy-focused lessons and deemed helpful by the students involved asking them to make a variety of connections as they read. The Literacy Club tutors emphasized the Transactional Theory of Reading (Rosenblatt, 1978) in which the reader and the text interact with one another in the process of meaning-making, a process during which the reader is taking an active, rather than passive, stance toward the material. Students were taught about the three most common textual connections, text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world (Tovani, 2004), and encouraged to make all three during the reading of *Hamlet*. This was done in several different ways throughout the course of the semester.

For example, in Act III, students were provided with actual quotes from the text and asked to read the quotes, make one of the three types of connections listed above, and then explain their connections in detail to the group. In another lesson about tragic heroes (such as Hamlet and Simba in *The Lion King*), students were asked to consider people in their own lives that they consider to be tragic heroes. They were asked to articulate in writing how and why the tragic heroes were trapped in situations where they could not win, what their tragic flaws were, how they fell from greatness, and how they won a moral victory and their spirits lived on.

In a lesson at the end of the unit, students were asked to record connections between the written text of *Hamlet*, the Mel Gibson film, the animated version of *The Lion King* and the Broadway play on a graphic organizer. The conversation that followed included an in-depth analysis by the students as to why the endings of the various versions may have been different, what stylistic choices were made by the creators of the different adaptations, and what effects these choices have on a reader or viewer. These
lessons about connections made the text far more accessible to the students and broke down some of the barriers that they felt about reading a Shakespearean tragedy. Making connections to the text also enabled the students to get to know each other better and make the text into more of a living entity.

**Successful Reading Strategy Three: Visualization and Episodic Notes**

A third reading strategy that proved to be beneficial to the students in the reading of *Hamlet* was visualization (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000), followed by the taking of Episodic Notes (Burke, 2000). One of the problems that many struggling readers face with texts is that they have difficulty visualizing elements of the text in their minds’ eyes. This is a skill that proficient readers develop naturally and for the most part, unconsciously. This may account for why it is common for proficient readers to like the written version of stories, such as books, more than the film versions of the same stories. Such people often complain that the characters in the film were not like the ones they pictured in their minds or the setting of the movie didn’t look the way they thought it should. For struggling readers, however, the film version of a literary work often has the opposite effect, providing them with visual representations of characters, settings, or other story elements that they have difficulty envisioning on their own. It is for this reason that struggling readers must be given opportunities to practice the skill of visualization during reading and understand that their ability to do this is an important part of proficient reading.

Periodically throughout the reading of *Hamlet*, the students were asked to stop and illustrate what they visualized during the reading of that scene. They were provided with sheets that contained blank boxes for drawing on the left and blank lines for writing on the right. The boxes and lines were labeled Act I, Scene I; Act I, Scene II; and so forth. After the reading of each scene, students drew what they visualized in the boxes and on the lines provided, summarized the events of the scene and explained why they Organizers for your Classroom. A sample of a blank form that was provided to the students appears in Appendix B.

The Episodic Notes were later compared and contrasted with those of other members of the group, and students became better able to express, both in writing and verbally, why they visualized particular aspects of the text in certain ways. They also were asked to look over their Episodic Notes when they were reviewing the scenes that had been read the previous week and used them to help remember what they had read. Remembering what has been read is another challenge that many struggling readers face, and Episodic Notes are an excellent way to combat this problem. One reason why the Episodic Notes help readers to remember what they’ve read is because they are pictorial and textual representations of meaning that are created by the readers themselves. They are the products of their highly unique and personal transactions with the text. Also, the fact that the Episodic Notes contain drawings or other symbolic representations of thought means that the creator of them must interact with the text on a highly complex level, one that involves analysis, synthesis, and interpretation. It is much harder for readers to forget material with which they have interacted in these multifaceted ways.
When reading Act 1, Scenes 1 and 2 of *Hamlet*, Tom (pseudonym) visualized and interpreted the information as shown in Figure 1:

**Figure 1: Tom’s Episodic Notes**
For Act 1, Scene 1, Tom wrote,
“Bernardo, Horatio, and Marcellus were doing their shift taking watch when a ghost came to them. They had encountered it once before, but Horatio didn’t see it. They believed it was King Hamlet who died before because he was wearing the robe and the crown. They tried to speak to it, but a rooster crowed and it went away.”

For Act 1, Scene II, he summarized,
“After the king and queen talk with Hamlet, all leave the room except for Hamlet who stays to say how he is mad at his mother for marrying after his father’s death. Then Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo come in and tell Hamlet how they saw his father’s ghost figure when they did their guard watch.”

In the box that contains Tom’s drawing for Act I, Scene II, Bernardo, Horatio and Marcellus, the three guards, are drawn as three stick figures beneath a text bubble that says, “We saw you Pops.” To this, the stick figure wearing the crown (Hamlet) replies, “Oh, for real?” This example is representative of many of the students’ Episodic Notes. When using this strategy, it is important to emphasize to students that they don’t have to be good artists, and that they can interpret the text using any language that will help them comprehend and remember what occurred in the scene. Tom’s example illustrates both of these points nicely by his use of stick figures and vernacular language in his Episodic Notes.

Effectiveness of the Literacy Club
At the conclusion of the Literacy Club, all of the high school students and their literacy tutors completed questionnaires and reflections about their experiences in the program. Students were asked what they found the most and least beneficial about their tutoring sessions, how the Literacy Club was different from other tutoring/extra help that they have received in the past, and whether or not they believed the program would help them with the New York State Regents Examination in English (why or why not). They were also asked what suggestions they had for improving the program, to provide examples of how the Literacy Club helped improve their reading and writing, what strategies they learned, what they learned in the Hamlet/Lion King lessons, and what connections they could make between Hamlet and The Lion King. In all of the questionnaires, the students responded favorably.

One of the questions that provided telling information about the students’ perceived effectiveness of the program was the question about how the Literacy Club was different from other tutoring/extra help they had received in the past. All of the following names of students have been changed to pseudonyms. A student named Cindy wrote, “It [the Literacy Club] has been different because all of the tutors actually took some type of time to get to know us, which made me enjoy coming every week.” Eric responded, “The Literacy Club was one-to-one, rather than the usual tutoring with ten or eleven kids. That made me feel a lot more comfortable.” Mandy stated, “I haven’t received any tutoring since elementary school. I do remember that there was only one teacher with about
twelve students and none of the attention was focused on me and my needs.” Oscar agreed, “They [his past tutors] never sat with me and showed me step-by-step. I learned so many new things with my Literacy Club tutor.” These comments speak to the fact that the individual attention and rapport between the Literacy Club tutors and high school students made them feel valued and more comfortable with the learning process. It was different from the academic intervention services that they had received in the past and increased their desire to attend.

Another question that yielded valuable information about the students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the program was the question about how the Literacy Club has helped improve the students’ reading and writing skills. Randi responded, “The Literacy Club helped me to improve my writing by following an outline and taking my time. I also learned that when I have trouble with vocabulary, I can read it in that sentence and figure it out from the context.” Eric wrote, “My reading has improved because now I notice connections and more of the literary elements. I now know what a tragic hero is too.” Finally, Mandy wrote, “Before, I was having issues comprehending what I was reading. I feel as if the individual help and focus that I learned in the Literacy Club will help me with all of my reading and classes in school.” These responses are promising with regard to the ways in which the students viewed the transfer of the strategies that they learned in the Literacy Club to other learning contexts and classes. They learned strategies that they could use in situations beyond the Literacy Club setting and were becoming more confident in their abilities as readers and writers.

At the conclusion of the semester, the tutors also completed questionnaires and detailed reflections about the Literacy Club experience. Questions included: What did you find the most/least beneficial about your individual tutoring sessions and why? What suggestions do you have for improving the program? How has the Literacy Club helped you grow as a literacy specialist? Describe what you learned by teaching the Hamlet/Lion King lessons.

One of the things that all ten of the tutors believed benefited them was using the literacy-focused lesson planning. Michelle, a graduate literacy student who teaches high school social studies wrote,

“My student, Mandy, has effectively learned how to make connections when she reads, specifically text to text and text to self. This has helped her comprehension skills during our sessions. My skills have improved when it comes to assessing a student’s reading level and pinpointing specific problems that need to be dealt with during the sessions. I feel more comfortable teaching literacy strategies. I feel more like a ‘reading specialist.’”

Amanda, a middle school drama teacher wrote, “By teaching the Hamlet/Lion King literacy lessons I learned that even classic literature like Shakespeare can be taught from a ‘reading’ point of view, and that it’s essential to connect older, more difficult literature with a hook like a popular film. It really helps the kids a lot.” These comments by the tutors indicate that the Literacy Club sessions and Literacy-focused lesson planning increased their professional knowledge and added to their expertise as reading
specialists. They took pleasure in the successes of their tutees and learned pedagogical methods that they could bring to their own classrooms and school communities.

Finally, Sung, the Korean student mentioned in the introduction, did go on to pass the Regents Exam in English at the conclusion of the semester. He is currently attending college and is pursuing his dream of becoming a police officer. In addition to the services that he was already receiving during the school day, the Literacy Club offered him an opportunity to practice his literacy skills in new and different ways. This may have boosted both his academic literacy skills and self-concept as a reader and writer of English and contributed to his eventual success.

Conclusion

NCLB and the continued emphasis on high-stakes, standardized testing have made high schools in the United States into places that allow classroom teachers very little time and energy to spend building relationships with individual students. Teachers are responsible for hundreds of students each day, and the curricula in most courses have been limited to teaching for the tests. When students are not successful on national and state exams, electives are replaced with additional periods of core courses in an effort to get them to pass. Student choice has been eliminated almost entirely, as high school kids are forced into academic intervention and support programs that simply give them more of the same instruction that they already receive during the normal school day. The underlying belief behind this kind of academic intervention and support is if we teach the material to students enough times, they will eventually learn it.

Unfortunately, however, this has not proven to be the case. The drop-out rate for high school students is escalating, and many that remain in school feel disenfranchised and neglected by the system. What is needed in academic intervention and support programs in literacy is a shift from business as usual. Students need learning experiences that depart from the norm and give them opportunities to recognize their strengths and grow as individual readers. Programs such as the Literacy Club described in this article are built upon the belief that reading is a highly individualized collection of mental and emotional processes that people engage in as they interact with texts. They provide students with the chance to be part of a community of learners and allow them to take active roles in their learning and decision-making. Although the key elements and strategies of the Literacy Club may not all be practical in traditional whole class settings, they can be adapted in academic intervention and support programs that that take place both outside and within the school day, resource room or reading lab settings, private tutoring sessions, individual reading services for secondary students, or settings in which Literacy Coaches work with individual students or small groups. If we truly want to make sure that no child is left behind in this country, we need to find times and spaces to identify, nurture and support them, one child at a time.
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Appendix A

Literacy Focused Lesson Plan Format

**Literacy-Focused Lesson Plan Format**

**Topic & Unit of Study:** The topic is the smaller subject within the larger unit of study

**NY State Learning Standards Addressed:** List the standards addressed in this lesson

**Content Objective(s):** (The student will be able to…)

**Literacy Objective(s):** (The student will be able to…)

**Rationale:** How and why the lesson will help the student reach the literacy objective(s)

**Anticipatory Set/Do Now:** What you will do at the beginning of the lesson to grab the students’ attention and get them into the topic

**Materials Used:** Books, photos, videos, computer software, posters, etc.

**Teacher Input:** What you (the teacher) will say and do to facilitate the lesson.

**Method:** A description of the methods used in the lesson; i.e., small group discussion, individualized practice, collaborative learning, silent reading, etc.

**Reading Strategies Employed:** Episodic notes, vocabulary tree, read-aloud/think aloud, etc.

**Assessment:** How you (the teacher) will assess whether students have achieved both the content and literacy objective(s) of the lesson as outlined above

**Follow Up:** What will come next? Includes homework assignments & a brief description of the next lesson, topic, assessment, etc. in the unit of study

**Reflection:** *(completed after the lesson):* How effective was the lesson in helping students achieve both the content and literacy objectives? What possible suggestions do you have for improvement for next time?
Appendix B

Episodic Notes

Name: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Book Title: *Hamlet* (Act I) Author: William Shakespeare

Episodic Notes

**Directions:** After each scene of Act I, we will stop periodically. In the space provided, you will illustrate what you visualized while you were reading that scene. On the lines, you will summarize the events of that scene. Explain the most important events that occurred and why they are important.

Act I, Scene 1: 

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

Act I, Scene 2: 

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
Using Writing Projects in a High School Classroom to Support Students’ Literacy Development and Foster Student Engagement

Salika A. Lawrence and Maureen Harrison

ABSTRACT

This article describes the process used by one high school teacher to incorporate writing into her classroom. The teacher made several modifications to her curriculum to provide her students with opportunities to engage in online research, and produce text for real-world audiences. The students’ comments indicate that although they were initially apprehensive they were ultimately excited to work on the project. The writing project provided an opportunity for students to use English language arts skills and interact with various nonfiction texts.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Salika A. Lawrence, PhD is Assistant Professor of Literacy in the Department of Secondary and Middle School Education at William Paterson University of New Jersey. She specializes in adolescent literacy, content literacy instruction, and teacher education. Salika previously worked with the New York City Department of Education in a variety of roles: middle school Social Studies teacher, literacy coach, staff developer, and high school history teacher.

Maureen Harrison is an English teacher with Passaic Public Schools, Passaic, NJ. She holds a dual B.A. in Communications/Writing and Literature from Ramapo College, Mahwah, NJ. In addition, she has a M.A degree in English with a concentration in Writing from Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ.

Students in the U.S. are constantly bombarded with a plethora of information and texts from different sources. Some educators have called for more student interaction with nonfiction texts such as biographies and maps, starting as early as elementary school (Schachter, 2006). These educators also believe that teachers should incorporate more informational texts into the curriculum (Schachter, 2006).

The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (1996) English Language Arts Standards, which are aligned to state assessments, suggest that reading and writing require distinct processes of learning. Secondary-school students are expected to read books from a variety of genres, to produce a report of information, to write persuasively, to work with peers and teachers, to study literature, and to interpret texts. Throughout the reading process, students are expected to provide examples from their interpretation of text, to make connections between texts and their personal experiences, to apply what they have learned from text, and to examine text critically (National Council of Teachers of English & International Reading Association, 1996). The effectiveness of informational and nonfiction texts is currently a hot topic (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2008) in the area of literacy.
With regard to writing, secondary-school students are expected to engage in a writing process through which they receive feedback from peers to revise their work, to write for various audiences, and to develop style, tone, and stance (National Council of Teachers of English & International Reading Association, 1996). Although these literacy practices, which focus on the process of literacy development, are not feasible during a timed, standardized test, several factors influence the feasibility of these practices in secondary classrooms, the most significant of which is the classroom environment itself: that it is conducive for literacy instruction.

Research on Secondary Literacy Instruction

Secondary literacy instruction is complex. When students produce text in academic contexts, they can be influenced by teacher expectations for writing. These expectations may be narrow characterizations of what it means to be a proficient writer. Even more problematic is that much of the writing instruction in secondary schools is shaped by standardized testing, and many of the instructional choices made by today’s teachers frequently contradict those teachers’ beliefs about literacy (Lawrence, 2007). Although studies reveal that teachers continue to struggle for ways to integrate literacy instruction into their curriculum within the current context of high stakes testing (Kern, Andre, Schilke, Barton, & McGuire, 2003; Klecker & Pollock, 2005; Lester, 2000; White, Strutvant, & Dunlap, 2003), research on teachers’ instructional choices (Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002), as well as teacher and student reports on the workshop model, suggests that when teachers integrate multiple approaches for literacy instruction into their repertoire, students benefit (Allen, 1995; Mueller, 2001).

Graham and Perin (2007) stated: “modern writing instruction in the United States recognizes that students need to write clearly and for a wide variety of real-life purposes” (p. 22). In-school writing experiences are often not flexible enough to support students’ literacy development in this area. Research shows that teachers must use a process writing approach to improve students’ writing skills, which requires that teachers interweave “a number of writing instruction activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities” (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 4).

When Ball (1995, 1996) examined the expository writing samples of four academically successful African-American high school students, she claimed that students’ culture and literacy experiences outside of school, especially within their local discourse communities, have a significant impact on the student’s academic success. According to Ball, student writing was directly linked to cultural influences. Ball’s (1995, 1996) research documents that African-American students tend to use the following elements in writing: rhythmic language, anecdotes, parables, and patterns of repetition and call and response—linguistic features that help the students produce successful literary pieces (such as rap lyrics) in the local community. Instead of educators noting the cultural influences evident in the texts African-American students produced in school as strengths, Ball (1995, 1996) learned that teachers labeled the writing by African-American students as limited in proficiency or below the standard in school contexts. Ball’s inquiries suggest that the students in her study were successful in school largely because they were able to codeswitch. The students who successfully completed
writing assignments indicated that assignments were completed to fit the teacher’s expectations, which included writing for a particular audience and changing grammar to fit the persona created for the narrative. Students who lacked the know-how to make the linguistic adjustments when transferring from nonacademic to academic contexts, however, failed to meet expectations.

Cummins (2000) asserts that the acquisition of an academic language is a developmental process. For academic language learners, “language and content will be acquired most successfully when students are challenged cognitively but provided with the contextual and linguistic supports or scaffolds required for successful task completion” (p. 71). These kinds of academic expectations, namely writing essays and reading lengthy expository texts, can reduce student motivation and engagement with academic tasks. Researchers have documented that adolescents are more engaged in school when they have choices, learning experiences that are connected to other aspects of their lives, and exposure to a wide variety of texts (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik 1999; Mueller, 2001; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). For example, “allowing student choice in writing tasks and genres can improve motivation. At the same time, writing choice must be balanced with a recognition that adolescents also need to learn the literacy practices that will support academic success” (National Council of Teachers of English, 2007, p. 4). Teachers have reported that students are engaged and motivated to complete assignments when they are provided with texts connected to their lives, given clear expectations before beginning assignments, provided examples, and given in-class time to work on assignments (Lawrence, 2007). A report by the National Council of Teachers of English (2007) states: “the number of students who are not engaged with or motivated by school learning grows at every grade level, reaching epidemic proportions in high school” (p. 4). One solution may be to find ways to bridge the gaps between students’ outside-of-school literacy practices and their in-school expectations (Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo, & Vacca, 2003/2004).

Alvermann (2004) reported that “alliterate” adolescents choose not to participate or interact with texts encountered in school because the texts do not connect to their lives and the students do not see the purpose of their in-school activities. Researchers have identified interest and engagement as the key factors when considering the impact of school literacy assessments on students’ long-term academic success (Collins, 1996; Guthrie & Solomon, 1997; Irwin, 2003; Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004).

Despite the literature referenced above, little research has been done to document the instructional practices most frequently used in high school classrooms. Specifically, there is scarce research in the practices of English language arts and reading, where students are expected to interact with a wide variety of texts to support their literacy development. In this article, we describe the impact on students’ writing, of two areas in secondary instruction often overlooked: literacy and student engagement. All names in the article are pseudonyms.

**Description of the Context and Writing Project**

The research project was implemented at Premier High School, a large urban high school in northern New Jersey with almost 3,000 students. Sixty-one percent of the
students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Students attending the Premier High School identify themselves as White (2%), Black or African American (12%), Asian (6%), and Hispanic (81%) (www.publicschoolreview.com/school_ov/school_id/52705).

Rebecca teaches level 1 reading classes at the high school. Students are placed in Rebecca’s class because they failed the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA), which is taken in grade 8, and the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), taken in grade 11. These exams are the standardized English tests in New Jersey.

The research project unit was implemented in all of Rebecca’s classes in May 2008, at which time she taught level 1 reading to freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. The students ranged in ability but shared some similar characteristics. Most of the students did not have any significant difficulties with reading and writing, but they were unmotivated.

On the extreme ends of the group, Rebecca noted Raymond, a freshman who struggled in numerous classes this year. He had difficulty paying attention and staying on task. In addition, Raymond often missed assignments. Raymond passed his classes during the 2007–2008 school year with a low D and did not pass his English class. Although personable, Raymond did not appear to see the need to work hard to address the issues he faced with reading and writing skills. On the opposite end of the spectrum was another freshman, Tamara, who was confident and very outspoken, highly motivated, and will take higher-level English courses in the fall. The skill and motivation of the other students fell somewhere between Raymond and Tamara; some of the other students were highly motivated and completed all assignments. Other students, such as those previously in the ESL program, were motivated but struggled with oral communication in English and rarely indicated that they were having difficulty with assignments. Some students in Rebecca’s classes could be characterized as apathetic and disinterested.

Working in collaboration with a university professor, Johanna, Rebecca implemented a research unit with the high school students. The unit, which was developed by Johanna, focused on providing students with an authentic writing experience that fosters interaction with nonfiction texts and further develops an understanding of the research process. During implementation of the research unit, Johanna visited Rebecca’s classes to observe lessons, to teach demonstration lessons, to co-plan, and to assist Rebecca by facilitating activities in the computer lab. Rebecca and Johanna also did a lot of the co-planning electronically via email.

For this project, Rebecca instructed 32 high school students to write a fictitious interview with a person of their choice in the style of a newspaper article. She asked the students to select any person from a specific list. Rebecca provided interview questions and the students also generated additional questions for the interview on their own. To obtain answers to these questions, the students conducted Internet research to learn as much as possible about the interviewee. The students summarized and paraphrased the information they obtained from the research into an interview format where the interviewee answered the questions posed by the student. The students were required to type the final draft of the project using Microsoft Publisher.

Rebecca modified the curriculum used in previous years to teach research and note-taking, which had included instruction in isolating specific information. For this research project, Rebecca instructed the students to highlight facts and unfamiliar words. She also
instructed the students in strategies for deciphering the meaning of a word based on its use in a sentence. Additionally, students were introduced to the following research process:

1. Use a Know, Want to Know, Learned (KWL) chart to develop questions before looking for information. Rebecca provided the class with five questions and the students had to create four questions of their own.
2. Look for information on the Internet by locating a variety of sources.
3. Take notes from the sources to answer the questions on the KWL chart. The students were encouraged and reminded to synthesize or paraphrase the information from the sources to answer the question.

Table 1a provides an overview of the steps used during roughly the first week and one half of the interview research project.

Table 1a. Implementation of Week One of the Interview Research Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1. Introduce project—give students an overview of the project and of the objective. Provide students with packet that includes project description, timeline for project completion, checklist, KWL chart, rubric, and list of <em>Time's 100</em>.&lt;br&gt;2. Give students time to review list of <em>Time's 100</em> (approx. 10–15 minutes).&lt;br&gt;3. During silent review, students choose a number from a cup. The number designates the order in which students will choose their interview subject. Instruct students to be ready with three choices as each name may be chosen only once. Inform students that they may be allowed to select an interviewee that is not on the list but the name will be subject to approval.&lt;br&gt;4. Students choose interview subjects and document choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1. Students begin KWL chart on their chosen subject. Complete a sample chart together on the board with a student-recommended person from the list.&lt;br&gt;2. Students fill in KWL charts on interviewee.&lt;br&gt;3. Assist students with finding information. Additionally, students may help each other find information. Inform students that no information is trivial and all information should be noted on chart.&lt;br&gt;4. Instruct students to strive to note at least three pieces of information. Some students will have full charts while others will have less information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1. Provide students with five interview questions and instruct them to make up four questions of their own.&lt;br&gt;2. Students brainstorm additional questions and share their ideas. Required questions:&lt;br&gt;What was the most difficult obstacle you had to overcome?&lt;br&gt;What accomplishments are you most proud of?&lt;br&gt;What would you most like to be remembered for?&lt;br&gt;What was the best decision you ever made?&lt;br&gt;What is the most important issue facing our society? (What is our biggest problem?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–8</td>
<td>1. Students begin research in computer lab and print material about their interviewee.&lt;br&gt;2. If students locate all potential material before computer lab time is complete, they can use the time to read the material and highlight potential answers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of the second and third weeks of the project (days 9 through 19) were spent in the classroom. During these two weeks if students reported difficulty finding the answers to specific questions, Rebecca reviewed the specific issue and advised the students. For example, with the question, “What is the most important issue facing society?” the students had to create an answer that reflected the personality of the interviewee. Essentially they had to deduce or infer the answer based on the details they learned about the person, and then consider what issue that person would find important. In certain instances questions were amended as necessary. Table 1b provides an overview of how the last four weeks spent on the project were scheduled.

Table 1b. Implementation of the Interview Research Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9–19</td>
<td>1. Students review material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Highlight answers to questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Note answers on KWL chart (column three).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Handwrite first draft of the interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Proofread first draft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Teacher review of first draft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Students write second draft. Teacher review of second draft.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 20–25 | 1. Guide students through using Microsoft Publisher in the computer lab. Use the newsletter template to create the desired layout. Instruction time to introduce students to the software should take approx. one class period. |
|       | 2. Use flash drives to save work. |
|       | 3. In the lab students type the project into the selected Microsoft Publisher template. |
|       | 4. Students select graphics to insert in program. |
|       | 5. After students have created the newspaper, they must proofread their material. Students review the project checklist and submit finished project. |

**Student English Language Arts Proficiencies**

This writing project developed students’ English language arts skills. Students wrote fictional narratives from the first person point of view and demonstrated through their writing that they could proficiently address their audience, adjust tone, and manipulate font and text in the final project. For example, students adopted the persona—voice and tone—of the interviewee. In some cases, students whom Rebecca previously observed reading contemporary teen fiction regularly adapted the language of the interview to the style of adolescent literature.

Students summarized and paraphrased information in their own words. Rebecca observed that she did not have to “push” students to put the information in their own words. She also recalled that students incorporated writing conventions: they asked questions about writing, punctuation, and grammar. In some cases students made dialect shifts during the interview. For example, during the interview with Jay-Z, Frank asked “Who are you “Beefin” with right now?” (Figure 1).
Figure 1. Frank’s article on Jay-Z.
Some students found it easier to look for information because they had developed the focus questions in advance. One participant would recommend that other students "make your own questions first." Other students realized that it was okay to change their questions. One student said she changed her questions because she realized that "once you find the right research then you would find the answer for the question." In a similar comment, another student said "...don't try killing yourself on answering one question. Just do the next question." Some students found it difficult to answer the questions. One student said it was a challenge "answering the questions that wasn't in my notes," "finding out the right information," or "making my own answer because I didn't find enough information."

At the conclusion of the project, when students evaluated their work they noted strengths and weaknesses with English language arts skills and how they would improve in those areas on a similar assignment. For example, two students reported that they would "put more information" or put "more details in [the] answers" because the article was not fully developed. Another student recommended that someone working on this project should "write in complete sentences" and "organize [their] work." The students suggested fitting "everything in one page" and "write the article first then do the pictures." One student said he would format the article differently and that he wished he knew "how to end the interview... [because he] wanted a good closing sentence." These comments suggest that students evaluated their finished product by critiquing the grammar, style, format for the genre, organization, planning, and writing process they used, specifically the editing and organizational strategies. Rebecca recalls students asking questions regarding the appropriate way to use quotation marks, to write dialogue, and to identify movie titles.

**Student Perceptions of the Project**

Although some students wished they knew more about the software so they could work more on the project or so they could use the software sooner in the process—and a few students wished they had more time to work on the project—overall the students said they enjoyed working on the project. Students said they liked learning about the person, "researching all the answers," and "making up the questions.” These students also indicated that they liked the flexibility of developing and answering their own questions, and of selecting their research subject. One student reported "the best part of the project was when [he] was surfing the web for information and pictures." Some students lamented that they were not assigned a project like this in previous classes throughout the years. At the end of the project, all of the students were excited to receive color copies of their final publication.

Many students indicated they did not enjoy various aspects of the research process. Several students, 46%, said it was difficult to develop their own research questions and 38% said it was difficult identifying sources and searching for information that would help them answer their research questions, to summarize or to put information into their own words, and to determine what information to quote from different sources. A few of the students (8%) held negative views of developing questions, of identifying sources and searching for information, and of finding answers to their questions. A closer
look at the research areas that caused the most difficulty shows that students had difficulty generating questions, answering the questions, locating information to answer their questions, and putting the information they found in their own words (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component of Research Process</th>
<th>Number of Students who Expressed Difficulty in Each Area (N=34)</th>
<th>Students’ Comments Indicating Difficulties in Each Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing questions (includes changing or refining questions)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>• com[ing] up [with] four of our own questions and answer[ing] them too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing, synthesizing, or paraphrasing information</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>• [answering] questions that wasn't [sic] in my notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying sources or finding information to answer questions posed</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>• finding out the right information&lt;br&gt;• making my own answer because I didn't find enough information&lt;br&gt;• research[ing] his exact words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A few students, 38%, commented about making up answers because they couldn’t find information. For example one student said it was difficult “making up some of the things Coco Chanel did because not [sic] information is out about her.” An examination of students’ folders and collected information suggests that students could not synthesize information to answer their questions. If the answer were not explicitly available in a source, it appears the students felt they could not answer that question, or had to change the question. It seems students had difficulty inferring or synthesizing information to "create" a hypothetical answer the person would give in response to the question they asked.

**A Modified Writing Process**

Students used a modified writing process to write their news article. Many of the students used the KWL chart as a graphic organizer for preplanning and generating research questions (see Figure 2).
Figure 2. Simone’s KWL chart.

After the students identified and selected online information sources, they had to summarize and paraphrase information they obtained. When taking notes, students had to identify the source of the information on the KWL chart, as indicated in Figure 2. The students were also required to use highlighters to identify information they could use to answer the questions generated on the KWL chart.

After extrapolating information from the different sources, students summarized or paraphrased the information and wrote it in the third column of the KWL chart (Figure 2). Then students used their notes to write a handwritten draft of their article.

The students typed the final draft of the article in the format of a news article using publishing software. Some students indicated that they did not like that they were required to write a draft of their article by hand before going back to the computer lab. One student said: "one of the parts [of the project] I least liked was writing the rough draft."

When the students were in the computer lab, they selected the templates to lay out their article. As illustrated in Figures 3 and 4, both Simone and Althea researched Coco Chanel but Althea chose a different template from Simone.
Figure 3 Final draft of article on Coco Chanel by Simone.
Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel is remembered for introducing black as a fashion color. Most of her fashion material was known for being stronger, most of it was sewn, or quilted, which is what kept the material strong. Coco and Diane Boulting-Cassely-Vandelli, got together with Coco and made Chanel more popular and known in Europe.

Gabrielle Chanel was born 1883 in Saumur, but she lied and claimed she was born 1893 in Auvergne. From the day she was born she was a poor young girl, her mother worked in a poorhouse which was where Gabrielle was born. Six years later Gabrielle’s mother passed away leaving six of her children to their father. He abandoned all of the children, leaving them with relatives. Things didn’t work out with Gabrielle living with her relatives, so she became an orphan. Gabrielle did not attend college, during those times because it was unusual for an orphan to attend college. Once Gabrielle was old enough to live by herself and not an orphan anymore she started having affairs with wealthy men to boost up her career in fashion. Soon after her affairs with the wealthy men she started working in shops, and that’s when the “Little Black Dress”, and now I am going to start with the interview with Gabrielle Coco Chanel.

Q: How did you get the idea of the clothing line Chanel?
A: I started dating wealthy men and they started putting me in shops to work and that’s when I got the idea of being a fashion designers, so I thought long and hard about it, and that’s when I made up my mind, and of course I got the name from my last name.

Q: What materials are used for the products?
A: Many different materials are used for Chanel, we use quilted pattern, quilted fabric, “secret” which is sewn in the back, and which keep the material is strong.

Q: Why is your product so expensive?
A: I don’t necessarily want my products to be expensive because I would love for everyone to wear it, but it may be expensive because the material is real, as well the material we have to buy and it is expensive on air behalf so we have to make the profit, we also use leather, and real leather is quite expensive.

Q: What accomplishments are you most proud of?

A: The most things I’m proud of for Chanel is most of the items we have made, from handbags, jewelry and shoes, we also make haute couture, casual clothing, pea jackets and bell bottom jeans.

Q: What would you most likely to be remembered for?
A: I would love to be remembered for being one of the big fashion designers during this time, also I would love to be remembered for turning women clothing more casual, and making black a fashion color.

Figure 4: Final layout of article on Coco Chanel by Althea.
Students demonstrated increased knowledge of technology and software but maintained a disconnection between using technology as part of the writing process. For example, one student said, "I liked the typing part of the project." It appears that the students did not consider typing the article part of the writing process. It is also possible that the students held negative perceptions of writing by hand but preferred to write or type on the computer and did not see the purpose of writing by hand before going to the computer.

**A Range of Instructional Strategies**

The teacher used various strategies to support students’ literacy development, including modeling, in-class instruction time, and hands-on practice. Writing instruction emphasized note-taking, summarizing, identifying different sources of information, and using software. The teacher placed little emphasis on citing and quoting sources.

At the beginning of the project the teacher modeled how to complete the KWL chart and generate questions before looking for information. She used her knowledge of Kanye West, a rapper familiar to the students, to show students this initial step in the research process.

The teacher also introduced students to a variety of note-taking and summarization strategies. One frequent lesson taught during the project was summarization. During this lesson the teacher showed students how to take an article and summarize it in five lines.

The teacher instructed students on how to read and highlight important information. During these lessons the teacher asked students to underline or highlight fact and opinion, and highlight words they did not know in the newspaper articles. The teacher would then show the students how to determine the meanings of these words while reading. The teacher also created open-ended comprehension questions for the students to answer.

Johanna and Rebecca co-taught sessions in the computer lab to introduce students to Microsoft Publisher. Most of the instructional time in the computer lab was one-on-one time, with both teachers rotating around the room to provide guidance and answer students’ questions. During the introductory session, Johanna taught students the following approaches for working with the software:

- how to find and select templates for their article;
- how to resize the page to change the layout of the text;
- how to change the font to capture attention with the headline and distinguish it from the byline; and
- how to find pictures on the Internet and then cut, paste, and resize the pictures into the article.

**Student Engagement and Motivation**

The students showed increased motivation, engagement, creativity, curiosity, and collaboration while working on the project. Students selected a range of subjects for their interview. Some of the popular candidates included Bruce Lee, Pele, Coco Chanel, Dane
Cook, Alicia Keys, Tyra Banks, Will Smith, Anne Frank, Muhammed Ali, and Kanye West. They also selected people such as Lil’ Wayne, Memo Ochoa, Walt Disney, and Theodore Roosevelt. Students offered several explanations for the selections they made. Most of the students indicated that they selected the person because they admired them or were curious to learn more about the individual. For example, one student who said she liked Angelina Jolie because of her humanitarian work said she learned that Jolie was also a good ambassador. This student believed the project was fun because she picked her “favorite person to work on.” In some instances, students selected interview subjects who were unfamiliar to them, but they selected their subject based on a particular category of interest, namely fashion or entertainment. One student indicated “this project is a fun project to do because you learned a lot about someone you knew nothing about.” Another student recommended that other students completing the project should "pick someone you know least about [because] it makes the project work a whole lot more." All of the students said they enjoyed learning about the person they researched.

When students reflected on their work they commented on their motivation, work ethic, and perceptions of the project based on their history with other academic assignments. Seventeen students recommended that other students either “work hard,” “stay on task so they’ll be able to finish by the last day,” “focus on the project,” “don’t waste time” and "stop complaining and just do it because it will be fun.” One student stated that she liked the project because it allowed the class to be creative. The comments of four students suggest that they did not initially want to do the work because they anticipated it would be difficult or they didn’t think they would get any value from it. One student said: "I learned that whatever project you get you should do it not [sic] matter how boring it could be." Another student said: "I will tell [other students working on this project] to put a lot of effort and to finish it because it's easy."

Twenty-four students, 71% of the participants who commented on their own work ethic during the project said the next time they work on a similar project they wouldn’t "waste time" and they would "do good," and two students said they wish they had more time to finish the project. One student said: “something I learned about myself is I really could do anything I put my mind to." Some students recommended that others should "put a lot … [of] effort to it and pick someone you are interested in."

The teacher observed that students were excited to share their work with others. Even those students who worked past the deadline for the project approached the teacher to ask if she would still accept the project. In the lab the professor noted that students made recommendations about the layout and pictures being selected by peers and commented “that doesn’t go with the interview.”

**Teacher Reflection**

There was little explicit connection between reading and students’ interaction with nonfiction in the study, so although the students had increased interaction with nonfiction text, there was little instruction in that area. Future research would need to place more emphasis on reading and extrapolating information from expository text.
This project can be used to aid in teaching the concept of elaboration. For instance, in many cases students included statements in the interview that left the reader longing for more information.

Teachers should also assign students specific tasks for their daily work on this project. Students should have specific due dates for daily work on the project. This will ensure that each component of the project is completed in a timely manner. For example, students can be advised to complete a minimum of four questions and write headlines on day three of the project. Without these explicit guidelines, some students may not manage time effectively.

One alternative to using Microsoft Publisher is to use Microsoft Word. This word-processing software can be formatted into columns and students can lay out their text in the form of an article.

While working on the project the teacher encountered several challenges, namely limited computer lab access, issues with the printer (e.g., no ink), and few working computers. To overcome these challenges, the teacher asked students to email her their projects. The teacher then printed some projects on her own and forwarded some projects to the university so the professor could print them. The lab sessions were held in the library and not the computer lab classroom.

Rebecca stated that if she were to conduct the project again, she would make the following changes:

1. Teach more writing conventions by incorporating them into the project—schedule more time to review proofreading and editing with students before they publish the final product. This conversation could include a discussion about being an author. Several students forgot to put names on the completed projects. This item should be added to the project checklist.

2. Prep the students more before they go to the computer lab. It is important to ensure that all of the students have log-ins for the lab and flash drives, or that the teacher has his or her own system early in the process because it was often difficult to quickly save student work.

3. Plan ahead and have contingencies against unexpected issues. For example, if the computer lab is double-booked or the printers run out of ink, it would be helpful to have a flash drive to save students’ work or have them email the work to the teacher. It is also helpful to have students submit their topics as soon as possible. This way the teacher can print out some hard copies of resources to keep in the classroom in case it is not possible to go to the computer lab.

4. Teach students about the genre of newswriting. The students made some formatting errors in completed projects. A formatting cheat sheet and lessons in formatting newspaper articles could help to circumvent this issue.
5. Use some of the one-on-one conferencing time to help students paraphrase. Some students struggled with vocabulary and had difficulty paraphrasing. These students need help decoding some words from the text and summarizing the information into their own words.

6. Show the students samples of completed projects at the onset. This would help convey the overall project concept.

Conclusions

Research shows that “engaged adolescents demonstrate internal motivation, self-efficacy, and a desire for mastery” (National Council of Teachers of English, 2007, p. 4). We found that when the students were provided with opportunities to read and write in class, in a variety of genres, and when we addressed their vocabulary needs, students were more engaged and confident as readers, and demonstrated more proficient skills on various literacy assessments.

This project can inform practice in secondary education. The outcomes from this project can highlight the need for reforms in secondary education, curriculum development and implementation, and demonstrate how technology can be a more integral part of teaching and learning in secondary classrooms. The information from this article will also be useful to other university–school partnerships seeking to address the declining results on statewide standardized assessments at the secondary level and to address the increasing number of high school dropouts.

References


Heightening New Teacher Sensitivity Toward Families
Using Children’s Literature as a Tool

Kathy B. Grant and Joyce Goddard

ABSTRACT
Many elementary teachers include a thematic unit on families as a part of their yearly curriculum. During student teaching new practitioners may be tempted to choose only family-themed books within their experiential background and comfort level (Gay, 2002). However, culturally responsive teachers entering our highly diverse classrooms need to develop sensitivity toward families of diversity. Children’s literature can be an effective tool to heighten new teacher sensitivity toward families. This article provides a direction for supporting teacher candidates in becoming more culturally open-minded through reflective engagement. We provide a checklist for evaluating culturally diverse literature on families, and close with some examples of children’s literature that help to heighten sensitivity toward families.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES
Kathy B. Grant, Ed.D. is an Associate Professor at SUNY Plattsburgh. Her research interests include culturally responsive family involvement and children’s literature, teacher candidate dispositions, and using literature circles in teacher education.

Joyce Goddard, M. Ed is a reading/literacy specialist in Harnett County, North Carolina. She has taught literacy to all ages - kindergarten through university. Her research interest includes multicultural children's literature promoting a deeper understanding of families of diversity.

Many elementary teachers include a thematic unit on families as a part of their yearly curriculum. During student teaching new practitioners may be tempted to choose only family-themed books within their experiential background and comfort level (Gay, 2002). However, culturally responsive teachers entering our highly diverse classrooms need to develop sensitivity toward families of diversity. Novice teachers who view the families of their students in an “affirming light acknowledge the existence and validity of a plurality of ways” of family values and traditions, communication, structure, daily family interactions, and family literacy (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 23). One effective method is to heighten new teacher sensitivity toward families using children’s literature as a tool.

New teachers may harbor commonly accepted assumptions about minority families based on negative portrayals via the media (Compton-Lilly, 2004). For example, in the throes of critical literacy discussions, Van Sluys, Legan, Laman, and Lewison (2006) found undergraduate students reluctant to engage in conversations on issues of homelessness, racism, and equity. By acknowledging and accepting families of diversity, new teachers can step into the role of proactive family advocates.
**Teacher Standards**

Teacher accreditation organizations wrestle with the complex issue of preparing majority teachers to effectively work with increasing numbers of minority students and their families. NCATE (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education) standard number four under diversity (2002) mandates in-school experiences that help candidates explore diversity as it impacts teaching and student learning. Under INTASC (Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium) principle number three, dispositions to be nurtured include respect of differing family backgrounds and sensitivity to community and cultural norms (1992). The act of evaluating, considering, and ultimately selecting high quality family themed multicultural literature enables teacher candidates to fairly present culturally accurate family issues during literacy instruction. Furthermore, INTASC principle number nine (1992) urges the teacher to be a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others.

**Reflective Engagement**

When engaging with children’s literature, key questions we need to ask are:
1. Does the book broaden vision and invite reflection about families for students?
2. Does the text help the student identify with his/her own culture positively?
3. Does the text aid students in connecting with cultures of other students around the world?
4. Does the text engage the teacher in self-reflection about differing family dynamics and configurations? (Hancock, 2004)

**Becoming Culturally Open-Minded**

Becoming culturally open-minded is a complex process involving self-evaluation and reflection. Grant and Gillette (2006) describe culturally receptive teachers as “willing to be introspective about themselves and their teaching, monitor their beliefs and actions for bias and prejudice” (p. 294). Gestwicki (2004) believes teachers must take the initiative in understanding cultural backgrounds of families. Reading multicultural literature about families brings people together through increased understanding and respect. She notes families maintain their own specific interpretation of the key elements of their culture. However, reading and reflecting upon the daily lives of families might circumvent misperceptions about “patterns of behavior and communication styles that might otherwise be misinterpreted or even offensive” (p. 112).

**Checklist for Evaluating Culturally Diverse Literature on Families**

The Checklist for Evaluating Culturally Diverse Literature on Families (Figure 1) provides a starting point for beginning teachers. This heuristic may serve as a framework for (a) reflective exploration of quality children’s literature, (b) a vehicle to promote self-reflection on family-teacher relationships, and (c) a springboard for classroom discussions on social equity, anti-racism, and changing family dynamics. Applying this template to children’s literature will aid teachers in selecting quality family-themed books.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential Questions:</th>
<th>Teacher Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Are family members portrayed avoiding stereotypical roles?</td>
<td>Teacher is alerted to stereotypical family roles and provides a balanced portrayal of a culture through literature discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Minority versus dominant nuances are highlighted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Roles assumed by family members are different from traditional roles, yet work for family portrayed.</td>
<td>Teacher develops an understanding of the critical process of choosing authentic literature depicting accurate community and cultural mores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Gender roles authentically depicted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Is the quality of the family’s cultural content authentic and accurate?</td>
<td>Teacher strives to establish respectful and productive relationships with parents and guardians from diverse home and community situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Contemporary or historical settings in text are authentically representative of a particular cultural group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Family traditions, actions, and beliefs are presented positively and represent a clear understanding of the culture.</td>
<td>Teacher seeks to foster culturally sensitive communication with parents from differing cultural backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does the book make positive impact towards understanding family relationships within the culture?</td>
<td>Teacher, by transcending family member stereotypes, develops effective partnerships with family members in the learners’ other environments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Socio-cultural relationships are treated honestly and openly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Every character is seen as a unique individual supporting the family within a cultural milieu.</td>
<td>Teacher assumes an active role as an advocate for families by better understanding cultural traditions of diverse families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Does the language used in the book reflect the cultural group usage correctly?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Dialect or patterns of speech should be considered an authentic form of discourse.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Distinctive vocabulary adds to appeal of the book.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Derogatory terms are avoided.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Does the variety of changing roles across families add to the realism of the text?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Differing family configuration may be explored including “grand” parenthood, siblings raising siblings, and extended family configurations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Challenges of single parenting and the emerging roles of fathers are highlighted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Does the book broaden vision and invite reflection?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Critical analysis is possible in inviting connection with self and world.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Checklist for Evaluating Culturally Diverse Literature (Hancock, 2004)
Books Heightening Sensitivity Toward Families

The following books are recommended as exemplary sources of children’s literature exploring the major premises of cultural family support outlined in the checklist. Teachers should seek out realistic portrayals of families challenged by racism, language barriers, immigration obstacles, economic survival, health problems, or child-raising issues. Only through exposure to “family stories” can we hope to develop empathy through an awareness of their daily struggles.

Does the language used in the book reflect the cultural group usage correctly?

In *Going North* authored by Janice Harrington (2004), Jessie, a young African American girl, and her family leave their home in Alabama to head for Nebraska seeking a better life. But traveling through the segregated South is not easy in the 1960’s—most restaurants and filling stations are reserved for “whites only.” The lyrical text and evocative illustrations resonate in the girl’s thoughts; the dialect is natural and the vocabulary appealing. Family relationships are believable: Big Mama, uncles, aunts and cousins come to say goodbye as they depart, Jessie’s Momma, Daddy, brother, and baby sister share cold chicken and lemonade as they watch the gas gauge running out and hope the North will be better. When they reach Lincoln, together they vow, “Be brave. We’re together. Pioneers.”

Are family members portrayed avoiding stereotypical roles?

A young Chinese girl charmingly tells an immigrant’s story in *Hannah is My Name* by Belle Yang (2004). Her family tries their best to assimilate into their San Francisco neighborhood while anxiously awaiting their green cards. Family conflicts, traditions, and beliefs are presented positively within the accurate historical setting. Family relationships are believable as they work and hope to make America their home. Hannah must adjust to a new language, a new school…even a new name. When the green cards arrive, they celebrate by eating pot stickers, a favorite.

Is the quality of the family’s cultural content authentic and accurate?

*Coming to America: A Muslim Family’s Story* by Bernard Wolf (2003) chronicles an Egyptian family’s struggles and triumphs in moving to Queens, New York City. This non-fiction photo essay underscores the importance of preservation of cultural and religious identity. In the Islam religion, men and women are separated during Friday prayer in the mosque, something contrary to the American belief of equality of the sexes. The book also presents a realistic picture of the difficulties of transitioning to life in America. The father works night shift for four years to bring the family to the US while the mother struggles at Hunter College to master English with the daughter remaining homesick for the sights and sounds of Egypt.

Does the variety of changing roles across families add to the realism of the text?

* Becoming Naomi Leon* by Pam Munoz Ryan (2004) is a chapter book telling the story of a young girl and her brother abandoned by their mother being raised by
grandmother in a California trailer park. Although of Mexican heritage, Naomi and Owen speak no Spanish, and only after a visit to Mexico, to locate their father, are they connected with the Mexican custom of vegetable carving as art. This book presents an authentic family scenario; mother abandons children, later returning to claim only the adolescent daughter not the disabled brother. Fortunately, a savvy court judge rejects the mother’s plea to take Naomi only--citing the fact that siblings should remain together--and the grandmother and father in Mexico share custody of the children.

**Does the book make a positive impact towards understanding family relationships within the culture?**

American Indian author Joseph Bruchac (1998), in his *Heart of a Chief*, positions his sixth grade character Chris Nicola in the midst of a school controversy; utilizing Indian names for sports teams. His disabled grandfather regales him with Penacook moral-based stories while his great-aunt is the true caretaker for the family. Mito, a Harvard MBA, Chris’ father, struggles through an alcohol rehabilitation program with the hopes of rejoining the reservation as their leader. The book addresses the “circle of giving” and his family “always being known as a family that works for the people,” as the best hunters they feed all the tribal members before they ate. *The Heart of a Chief* sensitively portrays family situations for other adolescents on the reservation and the hardships these young people endure.

**Embracing Cultural Receptivity**

An openness towards families fights the “deficit” model; a model which is the antithesis of a stance affirming the innate strengths of families (Family Resource Coalition of America, n. d.). Beginning teachers must embrace cultural receptivity through a reflective response based on a deep exploration of family stories of striving for social equity, fighting racism, and changing family dynamics.

Dong (2005) notes, “Multicultural literature can serve as an entry point to validate expression of cultural knowledge, perspective, and differences that their diverse students live by everyday (p. 381). Furthermore, the authors believe that a commitment on the part of the beginning teacher to connect and explore multicultural children’s literature daily adds to the richness of classroom discourse extending student learning about various cultures.

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Family Resource Coalition of America (n. d.). *Premises of Family Support*. Chicago, IL


**Additional Sources of Children’s Literature: Books Heightening Sensitivity towards Families**


Evidence of Sway

Carolyn Chryst, Zanna McKay, and Cynthia Lassonde

ABSTRACT
This paper uses the metaphor of trees and their tendency to sway with the wind and grow new leaves and branches to represent teacher candidates as diverse learners who come to our classes with their own experiences and understandings. This collaborative research study analyzed a particular cohort of candidates’ evidence of sway and how the sway influenced these candidates’ ideas about teaching and learning. According to the data, we found most candidates showed signs of sway—subtle changes in their thinking. We propose that some candidates may resist swaying because it can feel disloyal to question, in an inquiring way, the ways you were taught.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY
Carolyn F. Chryst, PhD. is an Assistant Professor of Education for SUNY College at Oneonta. She teaches a wide range of education and educational psychology courses. Her research interests center around teacher preparation and education reform.

Zanna McKay is an Assistant Professor at SUNY College at Oneonta. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in diversity in the elementary education and reading department.

Cynthia A. Lassonde is an Associate Professor at SUNY College at Oneonta. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in literacy in the elementary education and reading department.

Picture, if you will, a woodland forest with a variety of trees—elm, oak, birch, and evergreens. Some trees are fragile saplings pushing out new branches and inching their roots into the soil to ensure their continued growth, stability, and survival; others are in their prime with their roots securely grounded. Note that even the strongest of trees will sway with the wind.

This paper uses the metaphor of trees and their tendency to sway with the wind and grow new leaves and branches to represent teacher candidates as diverse types of learners who come to our classes with their experiences and understandings. As they move from one education course to another, they grow and sway as they develop cognitively and professionally.

Here, we define sway as candidates’ oscillation in thinking as they contemplate what they perceive as their certainties and uncertainties in their understandings about teaching and learning. In a forest, trees sway more or less depending on various factors, such as the power of the wind and the strength of the tree. In a classroom, candidates’ thinking sways depending on many factors also, such as the instruction, the assignments, professional experiences, and the candidates’ willingness to consider and learn from others. In this article, when we talk of others, we include peers, instructors, K-12 classroom teachers and their students, and authors of multi-modal texts.
As teacher educators in an undergraduate childhood education program in a small, upstate New York teacher preparation college, the authors were interested in exploring how candidates’ ideas about teaching and learning developed as they participated in the first of their education courses, *Issues in Education*. This course, typically taken in the sophomore year of the Bachelor of Arts program, introduces candidates to fundamental topics and critical issues in education while inviting them to examine their forming professional philosophies as they learn content and take an inquiry stance. Typically, one of the important functions of this course is to act as a gateway; it encourages candidates to evaluate career choices. However, the cohort in this study were juniors in a 2 + 2 program, where two years of community college courses are followed by two years of teacher preparation and upper division course work at a four year college. These 2 + 2 program students are firmly rooted in their career choice as elementary educators.

The goal of this collaborative research study was to analyze this particular cohort of candidates’ deeply held beliefs about teaching and learning and to determine if course content influenced or changed their beliefs. This research examined the course instructors’ aim to provide opportunities for candidates to grow new branches of understanding and to contemplate their perspectives and positions on issues. Instructors encouraged candidates to rely on their past experiences as learners and what they think they know about teaching—the firmness of their roots—to allow them to sway securely and comfortably among the perspectives—trunks—of others.

### Theoretical Background

This was a collaborative study among three colleagues-- a Piagetian developmentalist, a post-structuralist, and a literacy deconstructionist. As a result, each researcher brought with her various and diverse readings and experiences. Interestingly, this led to discussions around the table that created connections and comparisons among theorists that we previously had not considered. These connections and comparisons allowed an understanding of the data we could not have reached individually. As evidence was examined, we each saw different ideas emerging from the data. This section describes the theories that grounded our individual interpretations and how our collaborative discussions grew and melded into what we termed mutually conceived interpretations—we swayed (and continue to sway) as researchers and academics through this process just as we found our students doing.

Specifically, this study looked to learning theories proposed by Piaget. We also refer to discussions by Wortham, Fecho, and McLean (2001) about the representational powers of narration and how we develop substantive teacher beliefs. We drew on Bakhtin’s (1986) contributions to understanding of the forces within language that impact knowledge acquisition. We used each theorist’s premise to explore how our teacher candidates’ recollection of the ideal teacher influences shapes what they attend to and retain when faced with new visions and definitions of what it means to teach and to learn.

Piaget’s theories regarding epistemology provided insight into the thinking processes exhibited by the teacher candidates in the course upon which this study focuses. As Piaget noted (in Gruber & Voneche, 1995), an organized system will attempt
to absorb or assimilate anything it encounters. He postulated that it is the same when
humans encounter new ideas and behaviors. If we are unable to absorb or assimilate a
new phenomenon, then we must adapt or change. Moreover, Piaget noted this change is
neither spontaneous nor straightforward. This unpredictability of reflection mirrors our
concept of sway as a non-linear developmental phenomena.

Furthermore, Piaget (in Gruber & Voneche, 1995) determined that the act of
reflection on our own thinking actually drives cognitive development. One of the ways
thinking moves is through a type of reflective practice. Piaget observed that individuals
engage in three types of reflection that he referred to as abstractions: reflective
abstractions, empirical abstractions, and pseudo-empirical abstractions. These reflective
abstractions move through various stages of no change, some change, and complete
change. The stage of some change seems to parallel our concept of sway. Our thinking
oscillates or—we would propose—sways, between our certainties and uncertainties.

In the analysis of candidates’ narratives, it is important to note that these self-
reported responses are part of the candidates’ ongoing negotiation of themselves and who
they are becoming as teaching professionals. Wortham (2001) referred to this negotiation
through discourse as foregrounding, or using the transformative and representational
powers of narration to construct identities as teachers and learners. In other words, as
learners speak or write, they use their voices through narratives to listen to how various
positions, or stances, sound and to consider what it might be like to take on a particular
stance. They foreground what their voice sounds like against the backdrop of their current
perspectives and those of their readers. By listening or attending to their voices in this
way, along with the responsive voices of their listeners and readers, they are sometimes
able to re-evaluate and re-negotiate their understandings and perspectives. The process is
something like dipping your toe into the water to see how cold it is. If you like the feel of
the water, you might dive right in. However, if the water is too cold, you might quickly
withdraw your toe, at least until the water temperature (or the perspectives of
listeners/readers) is more agreeable. In this study, candidates’ responses were co-
constructed as they wrote to clarify and determine their positions with the instructor as
their intended audience.

Our preliminary analysis of the teacher candidates’ reflective writing brought us
to Fecho and McLean’s (2006) construct of wobble as a way to frame our thinking.
Working with preservice secondary education majors, Fecho and McLean proposed that
teacher educators should nudge both candidates and themselves into a state of wobble
(disequilibrium in Piagetian terms) where they are thrown off-center to collectively
examine current stances, question those stances, seek further dialogue, and come to an
informed stance. Fecho and McLean found that it is through this state of wobble—being
pulled away from your core beliefs-- that we grow to consider possibilities and develop
substantive beliefs related to teaching and learning.

When discussing this construct of wobble the authors of this study came to realize
that perhaps the image of swaying was more illustrative for the novice education student.
We found that their deeply rooted beliefs about teaching and learning allowed our
students to bend their thinking but not shift off-center as the metaphor of wobble would
The idea of *wobble* (imagine a child gymnast on a balance beam faltering and falling to the floor) in our minds misses the strength of deeply rooted beliefs (envision a tree bending but not breaking in the wind). The instructors in this study intended to act as wind pushing against candidates’ rooted beliefs through assignments and discussions designed to create states of disequilibrium.

Because Fecho and McLean’s (2006) construct of *wobble* drew on the work of Bahktin (1986) we explored his constructs in relation to our developing notion of *sway*. For Bahktin the process of making meaning is an outcome of resolving the tensions created in discourse. This process of meaning making is as constant as the wind. Our current understandings are shaped by our codified past responses, which in turn position, define, and/or limit our future responses. Heteroglossia describes the co-existence of distinct varieties within a single linguistic code, translated literally from Russian “different-speech-ness.” Bakhtin distinguishes centripetal linguistic forces, exerted by official, cultural, or established forms, from the intent of centrifugal forces to serve the existence of unofficial, dialectal forms. The centripetal forces that normalize linguistic forms, monoglossia, carry strong ideological conventions of the dominant class. We propose that the instructors push to have teacher candidates question linguistic and socio-cultural school conventions initiates *sway*, whether grammatically, semantically, or ideologically. The need to make meaning of the created tension results in a swaying of beliefs, an examination of dominate conventions’ worth and effectiveness, and a recodification of previous understandings.

In our discussions we concluded that each of these theorists, coming from dramatically different contexts, seemed to reflect on the point at which learning occurs. It is in the purposeful creation of tension, disequilibrium/wobble, swaying, centralizing, and diversifying forces that the role of instruction takes shape and takes place. The instructor must be the wind in the woods strengthening the young saplings by providing opportunities to sway safely without fear of being uprooted.

**Methodology**

**The Participants**

The cohort of 21 teacher candidates being followed was a subset of junior teacher candidates who had transferred into the bachelor’s program of our four-year college from a two-plus-two joint teacher preparation program offered at a nearby community college affiliate. A joint two-plus-two program typically has a cohort of candidates that spends two years at a community college taking a prescribed set of courses that they then transfer to a four-year program where they complete their junior and senior years. Due to scheduling, these teacher candidates are required to take this introductory course in a four-week summer session. Though instructional time remains the same—37.5 hours— instructors report that the amount of time for concepts to grow and develop into personal philosophies within the context of other education courses and related fieldwork experienced simultaneously is undeniably truncated.

These teacher candidates typically continue through their junior and senior years in the bachelor’s program as a cohort. Statistically, 79% of the group is nontraditional, choosing not to attend college directly following high school or pursuing a second career.
as a teacher. Twenty-one percent are of traditional college age but chose to attend the community college near home for personal or financial reasons. Half of the teacher candidates in the joint program have had in-school experiences, such as working as a substitute teacher or a teacher’s aide (with one to five years of experience) or working in after-school or preschool programs. Perhaps due to these circumstances, another unique attribute of this summer section of the course, according to instructors’ observations, is that this course does not function, as intended, as a gateway for teacher candidates in the joint program. These teacher candidates typically express a deep commitment to their career path by this point in their programs.

Two of the authors taught sections of the course in the summer of 2005. Both used the same syllabus to ensure course content and objectives were consistent. The third author’s role was that of an outside researcher, to lend an objective perspective.

**Data Collection**

Data for this study consisted of pre- and post-instruction written responses to the same set of questions designed to probe teacher candidates’ knowledge and understanding of what it means to teach and to learn (Figure 1).

1. How would you describe your current teaching philosophy and beliefs?

2. How do you learn best?

3. How do you think children learn best?

4. What teaching approaches or methods do you know of? Which fits your philosophy best? Why?

5. Tell me what it means to teach someone something.

6. What does it mean to learn something?

7. Is there anything else you’d like to say about teaching and learning?

Figure 1. Prompts used for the pre- and post-instruction written responses.

The questions used for the written responses were selected to gather information about the teacher candidates’ thoughts on their 1) personal philosophy of education, 2) comprehension of what constitutes best practice, and 3) schemata for teaching and learning. Other data sources included teacher candidate, researcher, and instructors’ journals; the course syllabus; follow-up interviews with select candidates; and writing samples from class assignments and essay/short-answer examinations. It was felt that a collection of data from each participant across assignments and from the beginning to the end of the semester would allow us to determine how students were foregrounding their ability to sway through narratives (Wortham, 2001), how participants were working
through Piaget’s (in Gruber & Voneche, 1995) stages of reflection, and how their language reflected their growth (Bahktin, 1986).

**Data Analysis**

The methodology used for analyzing data was based on Sepstrup’s (1993) procedure for conducting content analysis. This procedure adheres to the following steps to determine categories of thought: a) grouping like responses; b) making assumptions regarding the meanings of these groups; c) verifying assumptions against existing research; d) defining group membership; and e) re-visiting the original data set and regrouping material based on existing literature and definition of group membership.

This was a collaborative study and data analysis was managed in a way that would best lead to triangulated results. After organizing our data to ensure anonymity of candidates’ data sets, we each took complete sets of data to analyze. Following Sepstrup’s procedure, we initially grouped responses and noted our assumptions and the meanings we made independently of each other. We drew from theories with which we were familiar to verify assumptions and define group membership. Then, we met several times to discuss our insights and interpretations.

These meetings led to a melding of our thoughts and a swaying of our understandings as we considered how each of us had worked our way through Sepstrup’s procedure and what this meant to our own interpretations. To clarify our understandings, we re-examined data pieces and discussed how theory played into our interpretations. We listened to each other’s ideas and shared readings to explain how we had negotiated meanings from the data. This spurred the re-negotiation of some assumptions and sparked the swaying metaphor as a way to help us create meaning for the results we were seeing. In many ways our system of data analysis acted as a Litmus test of our own ability and willingness to sway as we held to familiar theories and studies to ground our work, shared our perspectives with each other, and used what we learned from our narratives to foreground and adapt understandings for our data sets (Bahktin, 1986; Wortham, 2001). By experiencing sway within our collaboration, we were better able to connect to what the candidates had experienced.

**Results**

According to the data, we found most candidates showed signs of sway—subtle changes—in their thinking to varying degrees. Several appeared to be moving toward wobble (Fecho & McLean, 2006) by demonstrating distinctive changes in their understandings. A few were unable to attempt to sway at that moment in time. Interestingly, when we individually analyzed our data sets following Sepstrup’s (1993) procedure, each researcher initially came upon that result in a different way basing her findings on theories and research with which she was most familiar. We see this result as a strength in our study because we all arrived at the same conclusions even though we used different recipes, so to speak. First, we will share our individual perspectives of how we viewed the data, offering salient and representative quotes/reflections from the teacher
candidates. Second, we will provide a synthesis of our mutual consensus of interpretations based on our collaborative swaying.

Researcher A’s Initial Analysis

The data, based on the use of language by the teacher candidates, led me to the conclusion that most candidates did indeed transition through the three Piagetian levels of abstraction (in Gruber & Voneche, 1995), which I saw as evidence of sway. The teacher candidates’ transitioning was reflected in their developing ability to understand and think using professional language.

Our candidates struggled to maintain equilibration when faced with the need to change their schemata of what is meant by “to learn” or “to teach” through reflective exercises. These candidates were asked to look back upon the activities, discussions, and projects intended to help them see perspectives that differed from those they held when starting their formal teacher education program.

An example of what the instructors of the course have found to be a purposeful and effective series of reflective exercises appears in a four-part assignment that was linked to candidates’ first field experience in the program. First, as an introduction to research techniques, the teacher candidates collectively wrote a survey of education issues that mattered most to them. The second step in this project was to administer the survey with practicing teachers, then analyze the results for salient themes. The next step served as an introduction to the use of professional journals. Each teacher candidate did background research on the salient ideas found in their teachers’ responses. In the last step of this assignment, the teacher candidates reflected in writing on the relationship between their raw data and the literature on best teaching practices. The teacher candidates, after having manipulated the concepts through discussion, analysis, and written reflection came to realize the complexity of the relationship between teachers and learners.

It is within the context of this assignment that I first noted evidence in the data that some candidates began to reframe their initial beliefs, or to sway. Using Piaget’s (in Gruber & Voneche, 1995) three types of reflection/abstraction, I noted examples of some change (i.e., sway). The first type of reflective abstraction is empirical abstraction, in which the learner attends only to observable characteristics. This may be followed by reflective abstractions, in which learners build upon their understanding by seeing the relationships that sustain their established understandings. Some individuals went directly to the level of pseudo-empirical abstractions. At this level, insight occurs the moment learners have manipulated a concept in some way and come to understand something new about the basic essence of the concept.

I found in candidates’ written reflections a transition from empirical abstractions (just give me the facts) to pseudo-empirical abstractions (seeing the relationship between and among ideas). I interpreted this evidence as strong proof of sway. See how Candidate D, in the data that follows, moves from observations and stating facts in May (empirical abstraction) to connecting how a teacher builds relationships with the need for a teacher...
to reflect on practice and try new methods when others are not successful (pseudo-empirical abstraction).

*May 24*

I have been exposed to many lectures over the years. Some were very interesting, many were not. Group discussions/projects are another way I have been instructed.

*June 24*

I feel the most important approach a teacher can have is to build a relationship with your candidates and let them know you really care about them. We need to let them know that we are real and imperfect and that we have faults. Failure is an opportunity to learn. When one approach doesn’t work, we need to try another and another until we are successful.

One candidate fully exemplified the third level of reflective abstraction—the acknowledgement that ideas that had previously gone unnoticed or were viewed as incidental or meaningless were important and critical. This candidate discovered through reflection that there was a powerful connection between the death of his sibling and his motivation to be a teacher. Others came close to reflective abstraction when they dug deeply into their life stories and emerged with a certainty that learning and lessons taught were not confined to school buildings. Others demonstrated movement toward this third level of reflection as their ability to articulate their understanding of the student/teacher relationship improved. Many initially remarked that “teaching and learning go hand-in-hand.” After four weeks they began to grasp the complexity of the student/teacher relationship as demonstrated in their choice of words to describe it (i.e., “reciprocal” and “students and teachers learn from each other”).

The emergence of consistent use of pseudo-empirical abstractions is the hallmark of individuals who have fully embraced comfort in swaying. Most candidates’ initial responses produced reflections that were not quite within the realm of pseudo-empirical abstractions. After four weeks, half of the participants showed progress toward reflection at the formal operational level, albeit inconsistently, which lends weight to the notion of sway in their cognitive development.

There were a few students, however, who were more resistant and showed little progress in their willingness to sway throughout the course. For example, Candidate I’s philosophy on teaching at the beginning of the semester was

… I feel I have a very good head on my shoulders. Since I have already substituted, I have received a good idea of how I want my classroom set up, the do’s and don’ts and what really works best in teaching, imagination.

She has in her mind a list of behaviors she has observed—the empirical abstraction phase. At the end of the semester Candidate I wrote a lengthy paragraph discussing her philosophy on teaching. Her understanding had grown to include the idea of teacher as facilitator, the role of choice in learning outcomes, and the power of reflective practice as the pathway to a “…much more permanent type of learning.” There was no use of these terms in her initial reflections; however, her final reflections did not exhibit the candidate was able to make connections among ideas or that she had added
these concepts to her personal or professional philosophy. She stated, “…I will provide the students the most education I can give them. Every student will have learned as much as I can offer.” To us, this demonstrates the candidate’s need to cling to her original list of understandings about what teaching entails.

**Researcher B’s Initial Analysis**

This class is the first education class most of these candidates take. It offers an especially fertile ground to consider the unifying centripetal and the stratifying centrifugal forces of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1986) as they intersect from candidate to candidate and in spaces among the identities the candidates are creating. In other words, candidates often come with a strong voice and a position from which to speak about education. It is, moreover, the voices and positions of candidates—often candidates who identified a teacher from their experience as their ideal—that act as the motivating factor that influenced their move to become a teacher.

In analyzing candidates’ uses of language, initially one finds they identify their philosophy of education with personal attributes. **Enthusiastic, positive, upbeat, and trustworthy** were some of the most common terms used. They do not want to become teachers, in a general sense; they want to become that particular teacher from their past. They want to be loved and respected and have a place in the community by becoming who that teacher was. When we ask our candidates to develop a critical inquiry stance around their educational philosophy, it is like asking them to critique apple pie and mom. For some, it just isn’t done. It may be, however, that this position has less to do with their inability to participate in critical dialogue and more to do with their identification of what the dialogue is about and perhaps even more to do with their developmental level.

This creates an interesting tension in education classes where the professor hopes to move candidates away from centripetal, official forms of discourse by requiring a critical stance on official established ways of thinking and being. Requiring teacher candidates to critique their beloved teacher positions the professor as a centripetal force of the new dominate culture. The positions of nostalgically remembered teachers from the past represent the unofficial, the centrifugal forces of change (Bakhtin, 1986). This “Ghost Teacher’s” voice and position of supreme authority would over-ride any discourse or suggestion of critique by the new dominate culture (professors, practicing teacher interviews and research literature). Because the time frame of a summer course and often even a full semester does not allow the growth required for some undergraduates to develop a critical stance that allows them to reflect on the forces of heteroglossia maturely, a compromise is required. The compromise we see is that they come to possess the vocabulary of the foundations, philosophies, and theories of learning and are able to position themselves in conversations about these. However, it is not clear that they buy the need to question their desire to recreate the world from which they came, the world of their favorite teacher, yet.

I noted at least three levels of change between the first date of questions and the last when analyzing the language candidates used, particularly the development of the foundational vocabulary of philosophy and teaching and learning. The first level is
actually the level of no change; the candidate feels no tension, as she believes her voice is the unifying centripetal (Bakhtin, 1986). A demonstration of this is a remark overheard by one of the authors—one candidate’s advice regarding another candidate’s frustration with critical thinking requirements was to, “Just sit in your chair and smile and nod.” This is a clear demonstration of a candidate unwilling to engage in the process of self-reflection.

The second level is when the candidates move to focusing on students in their educational philosophy by including a sort of grocery list of educational philosophies. Early in the semester one candidate stated, “I believe students deserve a very upbeat, easygoing teacher, [who] can be tough when she needs to be.” This develops into, “I believe in progressivism, constructivism, behaviorism, and positivism. Students need to be free to develop naturally. The process of teaching should be based around the students.” We noted that candidates tended to use a grocery-list approach when overwhelmed by trying to understand the various philosophies. However, this candidate is beginning to focus on what her philosophy of education means for students rather than the personal characteristics she wants to have as a teacher.

A third group of candidates moved away from identifying personal characteristics. For example, one candidate stated, “I would describe my current teaching philosophy and beliefs as being eager and optimistic” but then later reflected on a more in-depth commitment to what she actually understood and believed about teaching and learning when she said, “Currently, I would describe my teaching philosophy and beliefs as being constructivist. I think that each student is a unique individual, and each student should be exposed to an education that will be meaningful in his or her own life.” The term constructivist is used correctly and then defined through a new level of use.

I hypothesized that candidates’ use of the “grocery list” may sound like a regression in the strength of their writing, as they work to develop mastery of the complex terms and vocabulary of pedagogy and philosophy. In other words, they seem to be developing an understanding of the words and concepts of the philosophy of pedagogy, but their use of these words and concepts does not yet extend outside their preconceived view of the classroom. It also appears their ability to enter into a dialogue around the concept of heteroglossia—multiple views—is limited. They still feel the need to identify the “correct” voice or perspective rather than discussing the intersections of many voices and perspectives. The hegemonic focus of most schools does not provide experience in identifying or understanding “other” voices. With the exception of certain older, returning candidates, it appears as though an emphasis on multiple perspectives and view-points as valid has not reshaped candidates’ realities in any meaningful way. Conversations with selected students from this cohort in their senior year revealed that exposure to heteroglossia, constructivist and deconstructivist critical literacies made returning to these constructs easier with each ensuing course in education.

“We cried for a month, some of us thought about quitting, it was so hard all these new ideas… I was so afraid, you changed me in four weeks—what would you do with fifteen?” Candidate P
**Researcher C’s Initial Analysis**

As previously described, Fecho and McLean (2006) use the term *wobble* to identify a state of interrogation of ourselves and others that works to transform us as educators. However, our analysis of data did not yield evidence that this cohort of candidates realized this level of transformation. While Fecho and McLean’s data were rich with anecdotes of their candidates’ epiphanies, ours did not seem to reach that level of self-discovery. Instead, we noted subtle shifts and hints at candidates beginning to grasp a deeper understanding of the issues and constructs.

That is why I suggested the term *swaying* to describe our candidates’ progress. We agreed that *swaying* was a more subtle analogy in that it implies movement reliant upon the external force. Whether it is a gentle breeze or a gale-force wind, candidates respond to many factors: their instructor’s expectations, their readings, their prior experiences, their conversations with others, and their narrative writing in which they foreground their stances and positions (Wortham, 2001). Although we found candidates’ to be firmly rooted in their past educational experiences and trying to hold onto their belief systems, evidence indicates most were beginning to make subtle changes to their schemata. In some cases it was two steps forward and one step back, and in other cases there seemed to be little change at all. However, the majority did express budding shifts as seen in the following example from Candidate C:

*May 24*

I would describe my current teaching philosophy... as being eager and optimistic.

*June 24*

I would describe my teaching philosophy as being constructivist. Each student is an individual and should be exposed to information that is meaningful in their own lives.

While in May, the candidate’s response is enthusiastic and upbeat, it reflects little insight about forming a substantive teaching philosophy. However, in June it is evident that the candidate picked up some of the terminology related to forming a philosophy, such as “being constructivist” and “each student is an individual” and “meaningful in their own lives.” Clearly, this candidate is beginning to incorporate the new ideas and constructs the instructor introduced in class into his writing as he foregrounds a new professional identity. We believe that through this foregrounding and trying out this terminology, the writer is adopting a characteristic position that will edge him toward acting and becoming more like the teacher he describes (Wortham, 2001). Therefore, his writing becomes a force that encourages him to sway.

Evidence also indicates that several candidates resist this tendency to sway. Candidate O serves as an exemplar. Her work experience as a teacher’s aide had more power and weight than her experience in this truncated course. Her response to question seven, “Is there anything else you’d like to say about teaching and learning?” indicated there was no real movement from her initial teacher-centered approach.

*May 24*

Teaching is the opportunity to shape someone else’s mind. It is the opportunity to make an impression on someone.
June 24

From my experience as a teachers’ aide in a child care center, I find it very satisfying to see the smiles on those children’s faces with [sic] I have taught them something new to their world.

Further evidence of resistance is found in reactions to class-viewed documentaries, such as the PBS film “First Year.” In this film, cameras follow five teachers for their first year of teaching in South Central Los Angeles. The film depicts the realities teachers will encounter in their first years in the profession. However, each semester instructors have taught this course, approximately one-third of the candidates’ written reflections on the film indicate a determination not to allow new information to shake them from their certainties with comments such as, “that won’t be me,” and “I won’t have those problems here in (upstate New York).”

In the introduction we mentioned this course, on main campus, serves as a gateway course that tends to cull out candidates who may not be ready to meet the academic expectations or to develop the professional dispositions to become teachers. In some respects, it has had the opposite effect with this cohort and began to cull out individuals who were the brightest and most capable in an intellectual sense. Candidate K, who had the most startling transformation from empirical abstraction to reflective abstractions, and in subsequent semesters showed great promise, has left the program feeling disenchanted with her peers knowing they would be her colleagues if she continued. For Candidate K, her classmates’ “just do it and get it over with—to **&^% with learning” attitude was a significant factor in her leaving the program. Another candidate is choosing not to continue with her pursuit of a teaching degree citing her peers’ resistance to education reform as a primary cause for leaving. She has also declared in class discussions that she will be home-schooling her children (when she has them) as she sees no real effort to transform public education into an institution that celebrates learning and thinking. These two candidates could see a vision of education that was truly inclusive, creative, and democratic; however, they could not see how to survive in a system that they felt did not truly want to change.

Mutually Conceived Interpretations

As a collaborative team, we recognized candidates’ attempts to organize what they were learning through their language. Candidates organized through reflective transitions (Piaget in Gruber & Voneche, 1995), through heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1986), and through foregrounding within narrative discourse (Wortham, 2001) as described in the previous sections of this paper. As Piaget noted, an organized system helps learners absorb or assimilate what they encounter. We propose that candidates may resist swaying because it can feel disloyal to question, in an inquiring way, the ways they were taught. They do not quite know how to organize these thoughts yet to make sense of them. Yet, we did see candidates responding to instruction. Although they did not transform their thinking as Fecho and McLean (2006) described in their study of willingness to wobble, they did begin to use their narratives to foreground organization of their thinking. They learned to sway.
Implications for Teacher Education

Though this study focused on a specific cohort of candidates in upstate New York, several important generalities can be offered to teacher educators. First, with the increasingly popular use of reflective practice in the classroom, we as educators need to develop a critical understanding of how the reflective process works so we can best implement assignments and discussions that will foster candidates’ development as reflective educators. We must also be very careful that we not link high-stakes assessment scores to the individual components of the reflective process. For example, when candidates are asked to reflect about a lesson they observed, we need to contemplate how each response represents the developmental level of reflection to which the candidate has progressed. Is it fair to score two reflections differently if they have completed the assignment but one candidate demonstrates more highly developed reflection abilities? Perhaps our assessment tools should demonstrate candidates are showing evidence of making progress in the development of reflection rather than having achieved the highest standard or level of reflection?

How many of us assign reflective essays and are disappointed with our candidates’ grocery list of observations? Although this appears to be an essential phase of reflection, as teacher educators we need to take the time to structure reflective assignments and interactive discussions to prompt and push candidates to see the relationships among key factors they have observed. Each reflective assignment should walk candidates through the process of reflection. Reflection takes time and is a nonlinear process. As one candidate put it,

During the course of the struggle to arrive at an answer to an inquiry, one will often be forced to recognize the actual way in which they view the universe in order to accommodate the new knowledge, resulting in a much more permanent type of learning.

We believe candidates should be explicitly taught about reflective practices and how to self-assess their responses using Piaget’s three levels of reflection. If Candidate I, whose data is cited in this paper as evidence of resistance to swaying, had been taught and practiced pseudo-empirical abstraction, is it feasible that her ability to demonstrate metacognition and reflective practice would have facilitated her development of this high level of reflection through foregrounding (Wortham, 2001)? We think candidates are capable of achieving higher levels of reflection, but some just do not know how, do not value, or have not yet experienced effective reflection as they will through reflective practice in teaching. Models of various levels could be provided with instruction on the purposes and benefits of reflection and reflective practice.

Next, we need to examine our use and the candidates’ use of language as we each position ourselves in this landscape of learning. Recall what it feels like and how frustrating it can be to try on new ideas and vocabularies. For example, can you talk knowledgeably about the differences between laser and high-definition televisions? Would you be able to express how to use a jam cleat or jaws to hold a line when sailing? Perhaps this study offers evidence for the use and power of a portfolio assessment in
conjunction with nongraded feedback rubrics or assessment tools that value the progress made rather than mastery of the highest level of development.

Preservice teacher educators need to teach distinctions between approaches, theories, and philosophies. What does it mean for candidates’ grades if they are using the new words and language but not applying the concepts with complete accuracy? We propose this phase of language use should be recognized and groomed. Trying on the language should be valued even if candidates misuse or abuse terminology. Again, as with reflection assignments, we must be sure of what we are assessing in our assignments. Are we penalizing candidates by assigning low grades to written assignments because they are misusing concepts? If, as Wortham (2001) proposed, candidates are trying on a professional persona through narrative discourse, we must recognize the value in this process and candidates’ emergent stages of formal and critical thinking and use of professional language.

Finally, we need to examine how our assignments are contributing to candidate resistance and burnout. How do we acknowledge their idealized vision of teacher as we reshape that vision without damaging their dream of becoming that teacher? This truncated course produces sway but very few examples of wobble, which we see as real learning or transformation. We need not reduce the rigor of the course—but does rigor mean 13 different course objectives and 20 different topics in four weeks of instruction? This workload may be reasonable over a 15-week semester—but appears to be counterproductive in this truncated summer class. Candidates burn out because we are trying to get them to sway without breaking. Wind can pass as a steady current over a period of time, making the trees (our candidates) stronger or as a gust in a shortened time—breaking the trees. Though we believe we function as a steady breeze, from the candidates’ perceptions we are blowing a gale-force wind their way. They—like damaged leaves—fall from the tree, not because they are questioning their career choice but because they feel overwhelmed with the disequilibrium experienced.

How can we compassionately and effectively help these candidates with the transitions from wanting to be the idealized teacher they carry in their hearts to valuing the work and all its elements? Perhaps there are less damaging ways to achieve the open space, the disequilibrium, that triggers lasting and healthy growth. We need to rethink the format of “summer school.” We professional educators need to challenge ourselves, as we challenge the candidates to think in truly innovative ways and reshape the landscape of the instructional environment. We need to cultivate the pedagogical forest to open up spaces to grow and sway without damaging the fragile buds and new branches of learning.

**Ending Thoughts**

We engendered for some a willingness to sway, a recognition in them that there was still much to learn. In this truncated course we realistically cannot expect new branches to grow from the core of the tree. The good news is that by their third semester in the program there are clear signs of growth and for some it will take their first year in the field to realize the value of what they learned in their time with us—as candidate D from the joint program recently remarked to one of the authors,
“I hate to admit this—but you were right, I actually did learn without being lectured to—when I tried some of your ideas with the kids—they loved it and did so much better on their next quiz—And all along, I thought you were just crazy. “

Candidate D

References
Book Review

Writing with young children: A review of *Already Ready* and *Talking, Drawing, Writing: Lessons for our Youngest Writers*

Elizabeth Yanoff, Julia Pyzik, Julie Hallenbeck, Pegeen Jensen, Anne MackNair, Juliet Novak, and Ann Roe

**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES**

Julie Hallenbeck and Ann Roe are kindergarten teachers at Rosendale and Craig Schools in Niskayuna. Pegeen Jensen is a first and second grade teacher and Anne MackNair is a speech and language therapist at Saddlewood Elementary School in the South Colonie School district in Albany. Juliet Novak is a literacy specialist for Questar BOCES in Castleton. Julia Pyzik is a kindergarten teacher at Elmer Avenue Elementary School in Schenectady. Elizabeth Yanoff is an assistant professor at The College of St. Rose in Albany, NY.


As current and former teachers of young children, we know that teaching writing in the primary grades presents unique challenges. We are regular and special education teachers, a college instructor, and a speech pathologist in the New York capital district who are interested in developmentally appropriate writing practices. We met in the summer 2008-2009 school year to discuss writing in the primary grades. We have found that our students come to school with a range of understandings of what it means to write and be a writer. We agree that “Young children possess knowledge about written language and a variety of forms of writing—stories, lists, signs—from an early age,” (NCTE, 2009, para 1) but this knowledge can take many forms from students who are proficient writers to students who don’t see themselves or others as writers. It is our responsibility then to take what children do know about writing when they come to school and create a bridge to the kinds of writing that school requires.

Yet, creating that bridge can be difficult. Our days are very full with requirements, and each child has a pace of his or her own. It was with these understandings that our early childhood writing group read *Already Ready* and *Talking, Drawing, Writing*, two recent publications which we hoped would help us better teach writing to our students in developmentally appropriate, meaningful, and joyous ways.
The competing challenges--to meet our student’s developmental needs as well as wanting writing to be significant and enjoyable for our students—were addressed in these informative texts, and we are excited to teach writing in new ways based on the suggestions of Ray, Glover, Horn, and Giacobbe.

**Already Ready: Nurturing Writers in Preschool and Kindergarten**

Many teachers are familiar with Katie Wood Ray’s texts on teaching writing (e.g. 1999, 2006). However, as early childhood teachers, these texts didn’t always speak to our experiences; we needed to back up and consider how these wonderful studies of writing would begin with very young children. In *About the Authors* (Ray & Cleaveland, 2004), Ray and first grade teacher Lisa Cleaveland provide helpful advice on how to envision writing workshop in first grade, and we have found this text useful in emphasizing that young children are writers and can create books of their own.

We were interested then to read Ray’s latest collaboration, this time with administrator Matt Glover. Glover is a principal at Creekside Early Childhood School in Ohio. Despite the title hinting at preschool and kindergarten, this text focuses almost exclusively on examples from Glover’s preschool classrooms, something that made the text somewhat less relevant for our teaching in elementary schools. For example in Glover’s preschool classrooms children could choose whether to visit the writing area, in our classrooms students must write during the school day, although we do offer choices to write in addition to our literacy block. However, we did find several key points that we will take forward into our own teaching.

From the beginning, we noticed Matt Glover’s role as principal in the school. While not an emphasis of the text, we each commented on how Glover seemed to be very active in the teaching and learning in his school. Ray and Glover describe Glover as the “instructional leader in his school” (p. xiii), and we saw this evidenced in the thoughtful way Glover wrote about young children and described his interactions with young writers. In the school, Glover shared leadership, gathered the right people for his staff, participated as an administrator/learner, promoted student driven instruction, and focused the professional development within his building. These are characteristics of principals who are literacy and professional development leaders (Sweeney, 2003).

The text is divided into two main sections: “Building understandings about young writers,” a detailed discussion of preschool writers’ knowledge and development, and “Teaching practices that nurture young writers,” a description of how the teachers in Glover’s school organize for writing instruction. The text includes an index as well as a valuable bibliography of children’s and professional texts. The first section of the book was useful for us in thinking about how young children develop as writers before kindergarten. Three points have been particularly influential in our rethinking of early childhood writers and the teaching of writing.

Described in the first chapter and written about throughout the text is the need for adults to view children as writers, not necessarily as “emergent writers,” but as writers who are in command of their own set of developmentally appropriate skills and understandings. Ray & Glover write, “What are the teaching implications of holding
these two understandings—Sean is a writer, and Sean is four years old—to be equally true at once?” (p. 7). As early childhood educators we find this question to be refreshing and as a challenge for our own practices.

We have seen our students as writers, but have found it difficult at times to explain this to the students themselves and especially to other adults. We envision our students as writers who are five years old (or other ages) and who are able to do the kinds of things that children their age can do. In our teaching we are adopting Ray and Glover’s helpful language with our students. For example, when responding to a young student who asked, “Does that look like an ear?,” Matt responded, “I think so. I think it looks just like a three-year-old would draw an ear” (p. 154). With Ray and Glover in mind, we are continually working towards helping our students and the adults in their lives understand the developmental journey of young writers. We want our students to take up literate identities as drawers, storytellers, readers, and writers in our classrooms, and we need to help the adults in student’s lives better understand this developmental journey.

Also intriguing for us in the first section of the book was Ray and Glover’s unique perspective on “composition development”. Teachers often think of composition as pertaining to the written text, but Ray and Glover thoughtfully describe how illustrations are also evidence of a child’s developing understanding of texts and story. We can incorporate Ray and Glover’s questions into our own teaching, questions about composition related to “understandings about texts,” “understanding about process,” and “understandings about what it means to be a writer” (useful summary of “composition dimensions” found in the appendix on p. 202). For example when looking at a child’s drawing, we might ask ourselves, “How has the child organized the book? Does it move through time (narrative) or through a list of ideas (nonnarrative)?” and “Is the child intentional about what is being represented on the page?” (p. 202).

Also in this first section of the text, Anne and Juliet were especially drawn to the focus on oral language in this text as well as in Horn and Giacobbe’s text. As a speech and language pathologist and a literacy specialist for special education students, they agreed with Ray and Glover that, “writing creates a template for talk where key language goals are addressed—retelling, answering questions about their written texts, sequencing, topic maintenance, extending the conversation, and vocabulary development” (p. 14). Anne supports her students by pushing in during writing workshop so she can extend students’ conversations to develop their speech and writing skills, and Juliet sees these opportunities as key for developing language and vocabulary with her students as well.

The second section of the book focuses on the teaching and learning in Glover’s preschool classrooms. While our elementary classrooms aren’t organized in the ways of preschool classrooms, we still related to this section regarding connecting our read-aloud to the teaching of writing, making the most of “side-by-side” teaching, and helping our young writers share their work. This wasn’t new information to us for the most part, but it did reinforce practices we knew to be important in our classrooms. Ray and Glover’s book was most helpful for us in thinking about the developmental nature of young
children’s writing. Horn and Giacobbe’s book has been more helpful in our thinking about how to actually teach writing in our own classrooms.

Talking, Drawing, Writing: Lessons for our Youngest Writers

In this text, Martha Horn and Mary Ellen Giacobbe report on their work for over seven years with the Writing in Kindergarten professional development project in Boston Public Schools. The focus on this text is on kindergarten, although Horn and Giacobbe indicate they’ve worked with first grade teachers as well. Horn and Giacobbe conducted workshops and demonstration lessons for kindergarten teachers and provided support across the school year to implement developmentally appropriate writing instruction. We were intrigued by this model of professional development and hope to integrate our writing group conversations with observations in each other’s classrooms as well.

Many of us felt that this text was the most useful text we have read about teaching writing in kindergarten, and we were able to make connections to other grades too. Because Horn and Giacobbe provided a strong mix of theoretical principles with classroom examples, we felt that we could successfully try these methods in our own classroom. This is not a “what to do on day 1” type of book, but it provides enough guidance that we could envision what we might do on the first day and beyond in writing workshop in our classrooms. Within almost every chapter, Horn and Giacobbe provide examples of minilessons that they have used in kindergarten classrooms so we felt we were sitting alongside of them in kindergarten. Throughout the text as well as in the appendices there are teacher friendly forms and useful suggestions for texts to use in the classroom and to extend our professional reading.

The book is basically organized as the year might progress in kindergarten from first introducing children to classroom writing to moving students along across the year. As the title suggests, Horn and Giacobbe emphasize the roles of talking, drawing, and writing in the writing workshop. Horn and Giacobbe suggest beginning the year with storytelling. Having students share their stories places a value on children and their own voices, helps students meet each other, reinforces connections between talk and writing, and helps young writers explore craft before they write (pp. 15-17). We see our students as storytellers and are excited to use their stories as a way to begin our school year and to then make connections to drawing and writing across the year. As we discussed in our review of Ray and Glover, we see the need for regular opportunities to talk as especially important for our struggling students. We want to work collaboratively as regular education teachers and specialists to plan classroom writing instruction to help all students to tell their own stories. Chapter one of the text has suggestions for how to encourage storytelling in classrooms such as telling stories ourselves as teachers and nurturing the stories our young students have to tell.

For example, in Julia’s kindergarten classroom, storytelling takes center stage. Julia used storytelling in the beginning of the year to model for students how to find their voice and their own story ideas. It also worked as a vehicle for everyone to get to know each other. Julia’s students listened to her stories for only a few days before they were completely ready (and excited) to take over storytelling time. This chance to hear their
stories helped her to learn what things they liked and liked to do. This has helped her to help them when they are stuck and can't think of anything to write about. She can easily mention something that they have talked about previously with such enthusiasm and this sparks another story.

Julia reports that giving the students the chance to tell their stories has also helped to make them feel important. Often students don't feel like they have any stories that anyone wants to hear and so classroom storytelling helps them to see themselves as people with important and funny stories that people will laugh at or connect to with their sad or happy feelings. Julia has found that it works well when she reads a book and then tells a story of her own that connects to the book. This suggestion from Horn and Giacobbe really helped her to draw connections for her students about the job of an author. As she began calling on her students more and more, they especially loved hearing comments on their stories, making connections to one another and sharing their feelings (Ex. "Oh my goodness that must have been so exciting" or "I went there too! I love Chuck-E-Cheese!"). Teacher and student comments lead to more opportunities for conversation, reading, and writing.

Chapter two is another great example of why we have found this book so useful. Horn and Giacobbe walk the reader through the introduction of the “drawing and writing book”, a book with blank pages for students to tell their stories through drawing and writing. Horn and Giacobbe clearly explain their system for organizing students’ work and provide examples of minilessons for introducing the drawing and writing books to students. While our organization systems may vary from Horn and Giacobbe's methods, we appreciated the attention to management issues in this text because we know so many times it is the details of “how” to teach something that can be a challenge.

For example, in kindergarten, Julie and Ann use a color system for storing the students’ drawing and writing books. Julie and Ann have wire racks with plastic bins in different colors. Each student has a colored sticker next to his or her name and the color of the bin that matches the sticker is where their book is kept. Students learn the color of their sticker and automatically go to that bin when it's time to write. This system teaches the children to store their books like library books, with the spine facing out. Like Horn & Giacobbe, Ann and Julie have emphasized treating the drawing and writing books of stories as they would any book of stories, with care and respect.

The next sections of the book take us into kindergarten classrooms as the teachers introduce drawing, writing words, and then writing books in kindergarten classrooms. As Ray and Glover helped us to see drawing in new ways, so do Horn and Giacobbe help us to envision a new role for drawing in our writing workshop. In chapters three and four Horn and Giacobbe describe how we can help our students develop their drawing skills so students can represent what they are trying to tell us in their stories. In first and second grade, Pegeen models the process she uses to get the details of her illustrations. By making her thinking process visible, she helps her young students see the steps to take in any drawing. For example, she notices and names the shapes she sees in an object she is trying to draw.
Chapter five provides insightful advice for how to help children add words to their drawings, and chapters seven and eight have suggestions for how to continue teaching writing skills while adding to the students’ repertoire the creation of longer texts which Horn and Giacobbe call “booklets”. Unlike Ray and Glover who seem to suggest making books from the start, Horn and Giacobbe have found more success with students building from the single drawings in their drawing and writing books towards writing longer texts. While we see Ray and Glover’s perspective about encouraging students to make books like the published books they are reading, we connected to Horn and Giacobbe’s experiences in helping kids to begin with telling a story in the drawing and writing book first and then moving towards telling a story in a book form.

Chapter six on assessment is placed in the midst of these descriptions of how to teach writing, perhaps in a way to reiterate the need for assessment across the school year. As with other chapters, this section is very practical giving teachers different ways to manage the assessment of a classroom of different writers. They share “looking in depth at the work of an individual student, looking at the work of a group of five students at a time on a regular basis, and taking a quick look at the whole class” (p. 126) as viable ways of examining what students know about writing. Examples from kindergarten classrooms help the reader to see how the assessments suggested would work in a classroom setting. From beginning to end, we found *Talking, Drawing, Writing* to be a useful resource for kindergarten and other early childhood teachers who want to rethink writing in their classrooms.

*Writing in early childhood classrooms*

We believe these two texts are different in their approach to writing instruction, but that both resources together will provide early childhood classroom teachers and support staff a clear view of how all young children can learn to write. Simply put: Ray and Glover provide the reasons for young students to be given the opportunity to write, and Horn and Giacobbe suggest a method for teaching young writers. As we’ve hinted at throughout this review, we’ve moved forward in our understanding of writing instruction with Ray, Glover, Horn, and Giacobbe as teaching mentors coaching us along the way. We encourage teachers to read these texts with colleagues so you too can benefit from powerful professional conversations about writing with young children.

References


When Harriet Met Sojourner by Catherine Clinton (Amistad, 2007) is a wonderful story of two women dreaming of freedom. The narrative compares the lives of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, tracing from early childhood their bravery and dedication as each waged a relentless fight to achieve freedom and equality. The illustrations are beautifully textured and dramatic, reflecting the nobility but also the emotional side of Harriet and Sojourner. This story would make a splendid read aloud. It honors appropriately two strong and incredible women.

The Down-to-Earth Guide to Global Warming (Orchard, ’07) is an absorbing book, divided into four parts. The first deals with the science of global warming. It explains how climate change happened and lists ways in which individuals can reduce their own carbon imprint. The second part deals with how global warming affects our weather systems. Hurricanes have become more violent and floods are now plaguing areas that have never flooded before. Warmer temperatures result from the fact that more rain than snow falls on the mountaintops. That rain runs off too rapidly, thus also being lost as a source of drinking water.

The third part focuses on global warming’s impact on plant and animal life—its effect on algae for example (which is a food source for many animals). The current plight of walruses, polar bears, penguins, whales, and butterflies is among the other topics discussed. The book’s final section outlines steps children, parents, and teachers can take to reverse global warming.

The Guide’s outstanding photographs, creative cartoons, and information-filled sidebars make this important book easy to read for students beyond third grade. Older readers—including adults—will also find much to engross them, in this thought-provoking book.

Jane Yolen’s new book, Johnny Appleseed: The Legend and the Truth (Harper Collins, ’08) distinguishes the myths from the truth about John Chapman, with Jim Burke’s colorful, layered illustrations serving as a vivid backdrop. Each page begins with a five-line poem reflecting a legendary aspect of Johnny Appleseed. The true history of Chapman follows, along with some often surprising facts about his life. The
legend of Johnny Appleseed has expanded widely through the years, but the true story of the real man who labored to change the landscape of America is in its own right inspiring, and in bringing the fables down to bed-rock reality this book reveals a figure very definitely worthy of emulation. It may also lead readers to view our trees—and nature—a different way; perhaps even stimulate them to plant….in the John Chapman (if not Johnny Appleseed) tradition.

Pinkalicious thinks pink is the most perfectly pleasing color. But one day at school the other girls decide black is the better color, and that only babies like pink. Their teasing upsets Pinkalicious, but she remains steadfast in her true pink self. The book ends when she meets another girl who also thinks pink is pretty and powerful—because it can change blue into a pretty purplicious color! Purplicious by Victoria and Elizabeth Kann (Harper Collins, 2007) is a great sequel to their earlier Pinkalicious, deftly portraying the range of emotions children go through when classmates tease; and also providing an important springboard for discussions about staying true to yourself.

It’s been eighty-six years since the Red Sox managed to win a World Series. Eighty-six years of being—“cursed.” In The Prince of Fenway Park (Harper Collins, ’09) twelve-year-old Oscar Egg believes he also is cursed. His real parents didn’t want him and now his adoptive mom has dropped him off to live with his strange, sickly step-dad. It turns out that dad lives under Fenway Park with a group of Cursed Creatures that have been doomed to live out their lives below the Park, until the famous Curse could be broken by a Red Sox victory.

Oscar is a mixed-race child who comes to feel the pain of being unwanted at home and left out when he enters Middle School…..and this is the “curse” he feels. Since the Red Sox did win the Series (in 2004, again in 2007), we know that their curse was indeed finally broken; but how it was broken, and the impact this has on the Cursed Creatures living under the Park, and how all of this relates back to Oscar and the “outsider curse” he feels—that’s the really interesting part in this novel. Author Julianna Baggott has interspersed the history of Fenway and of baseball itself throughout the novel—against the backdrop of Oscar’s story—in a clever and compelling way. This is a great read, appropriate for sports fans and students above fourth grade. Oscar is a likable child, seemingly trapped in an all too familiar web in his private life. Children will be drawn to him, and will especially enjoy the resolution at the end of the novel.

Children’s Literature Committee
Pat Shea-Bischoff, Faye Cohen, Debbie Dermady, Jan Peters, Kristen Gramlich-Regan, Alice Sample (Chairperson)
Call for Papers

Reading in Many Languages
International Reading Associations’ 2010 Conference Theme
Deadline: December 1, 2009

The term ‘language’ like ‘literacy’ has taken on connotations in the 21st century that reach far beyond fluency in geographic-based linguistic systems. Digital literacies, multiliteracies, ICT (Information Communication Technologies), NCLB, ELL, and RTI are just a few of the information systems that present new communicative challenges to teachers. In this issue we will predominantly explore: How reading teachers, literacy coaches, and classroom teachers keep current on the policies, trends, and procedures, as well as the policy specific language, that are evolving at an exponential rate? What literacy languages have had an impact on your classroom instruction and/or research? How has the language of on-line communication influenced classroom practice? How have mandated state assessments impacted ELL policies and practice? For this issue we invite you to submit articles that focus on the many languages that populate today’s classrooms and the impact they have on instruction. We also welcome articles from K-12 practitioner on how they negotiate the complexities of multiliteracies in their classroom. Research in ELL, digital literacies, and reading/literacy policy are also encouraged. As always, high quality papers on other topics are also welcome.

Student Work
Deadline: February 15, 2010

Please submit student work [K-16]. Poems, book reviews, editorials and artwork related to digital literacies, second language learning, and Information Communication Technologies are especially welcome. Of course student work on other topics will be considered. Please submit any artwork as high-resolution images.

Book Reviews
Deadline: February 15, 2010

The Language and Literacy Spectrum welcomes reviews of new fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and online resources for the K-16 classroom. In addition we welcome reviews of recent books on reading/literacy research, practice, and pedagogy.
Submission Guidelines

- Length requirements: no less than 500 and no more than 10,000 words depending on type of submission. We expect submissions will be well self-edited, and well-proofed prior to submission
- All submissions should follow APA format
- All submissions should be submitted as Word documents that are double-spaced and in 12pt Times New Roman font
- All submissions should include an author biography of 50 to 75 words that contains an email and or snail mail address where readers can contact them
- All article submissions should include an abstract of 150 words or less
- The Language and Literacy Spectrum is a peer-reviewed journal. All submissions will be sent to a minimum of two reviewers
- A blind copy of your submission should be included in your packet
- Queries may be sent to: mdrucker@utica.edu and Donna.Mahar@esc.edu
- Submissions should be sent to: mdrucker@utica.edu and Donna.Mahar@esc.edu

Call for Editorial Reviewers

The *Language and Literacy Spectrum* is a peer-reviewed publication. We invite K-12 teachers, teacher educators, and university researchers to join our editorial review board. Reviewers are asked to review several articles per year and provide feedback regarding suitability for publication.

The Editorial Review Board is essential to ensuring the high quality of the *Language and Literacy Spectrum*. With your help we can continue to publish a professional journal that provides relevant and timely information to the NYSRA community.

To become a member of the Editorial Review Board please send a letter of interest and current CV to Dr. Mary Drucker, mdrucker@utica.edu and Dr. Donna Mahar, Donna.Mahar@esc.edu

You can expect to receive articles for review and revision between August 2009 and February 2010.