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SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP OF IRA

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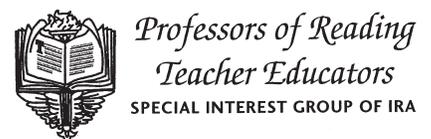
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ABOUT THE COVER -

The charming drawings on the cover of this issue are by Aubriella and Aiden who are elementary public school pupils. Their cross-grade assignment was to write and illustrate a book about Our Changing Seasons, an interdisciplinary exercise that incorporates their science lessons, writing instruction, and visual art.

A Recent IRA Position Statement

I applaud the 2014 IRA Position Statement, "Using High-Stakes Assessments for Grade Retention and Graduation Decisions," which recently was sent to the IRA membership. Jill D. Lewis-Spector chaired the Task Force, and Laurie A. Elish-Piper, Rona F. Flippo, Maryann Manning, and Suzanne N. Nakashima served as members. At the time of adoption, Maureen McLaughlin, Jill D. Lewis-Spector, Heather I. Bell, Steven L. Layne, William H. Teale, Douglas Fisher, Rona F. Flippo, Shelley Stagg Peterson, Bernadette Dwyer, Laurie A. Elish-Piper, and Julianne Scullen comprised the IRA Board of Directors.

IRA issued a "High-Stakes Assessments in Reading" Position Statement in 1999. Authors of the Statement wrote, "The Board of Directors of the International Reading Association is opposed to high-stakes testing. High-stakes testing means that one test is used to make important decisions about students, teachers, and schools. In a high-stakes testing situation, if students score high on a single test they could be placed in honors classes or a gifted program. On the other hand, if students score low on a high-stakes test, it could mean that they will be rejected by a particular college, and it could affect their teacher's salary and the rating of the school district as compared with others where the same test was given." Members of the Board of Directors at the time of the Statement adoption were Kathryn A. Ransom, Carol Minnick Santa, Carmelita K. Williams, Kathryn H. Au, Betsy M. Baker, Patricia A. Edwards, James V. Hoffman, Adria F. Klein, Diane L. Larson, John W. Logan, Lesley Mandel Morrow, and Timothy Shanahan.

Other literacy scholars have spoken and written against using a single test score to make high-impact decisions about students, their teachers, and their schools. These included IRA members Richard L. Allington, Scott G. Paris, and Dale D. Johnson who voiced their concerns long before high-stakes testing became commonplace. I have noted all the above names because these members were not fearful of speaking out against an injustice.

Absent from these names are some who have been given yearly visibility by IRA, but for reasons known only to them, have shied away from stating, at any respectable length verbally or in writing, that high-stakes tests punish children for being economically poor.

Journal Updates

Please note that The Reading Professor now conducts all of its business electronically. Manuscripts can be sent to Co-editor Bonnie Johnson (bonnie.johnson@snc.edu). Editorial Board Members and I strongly recommend that manuscripts be carefully reviewed for clarity and correct use of APA style before sending them to the Co-editor. Please refrain from using strong-arm tactics (via e-mail or other modes) to get an article published, and please be patient when waiting for the three reviewers' decisions. Reviewers' decisions are final.

The job of an Editorial Board Member is time-consuming and thankless. Some authors have complained that "typos" appeared in their published articles. Proofreading is a challenging task because the mind tends to correct mistakes. The Editorial Board Members do a laudatory job in catching errors. They deserve medals for their knowledge of the literature and perseverance in seeing an article through to the publication stage. The only way to be certain that "typos" do not appear in the Journal is for authors to submit manuscripts without them.

Best wishes for 2015.

Bonnie Johnson, Ph.D.

Literacy Leadership: A Perspective from Higher Education

Annemarie B. Jay

Current educational literature is replete with information about literacy leadership (Bean, 2009; Bean & Dagen, 2011; Jay & Strong, 2008; McAndrews, 2004; Taylor, 2004); however, most of it relates to K-12 education with little to none of the literature focusing on higher education. Instructional leadership, a concept often paralleled with literacy leadership, is a topic that surfaced in the 1980s and remains in the forefront of educational literature today (Jenkins, 2009; Smith & Andrews, 1989; Taylor & Gunter, 2006). Instructional leadership emphasizes the role of principals and other school district administrators as prioritizing instructional improvement rather than their managerial responsibilities.

Greater accountability to increase student performance in the 21st century is a common petition in today's educational and political arenas. Government mandates and public pleas demand that schools quickly step up to meet today's challenges as well as the challenges of the future. The importance of effective K-12 classroom teachers as necessary literacy leaders who are "essential first responders to facilitating literacy learning" (Lewis-Spector & Jay, 2011, p. 1) cannot be diminished. All children deserve a good education facilitated by highly qualified K-12 teachers. Yet the role of those teaching in higher education should not be ignored or minimized. University professors who prepare teachers play an essential leadership role in enhancing the skills and dispositions of their adult learners. I posit that leadership for improving both teaching and learning begins with the preparation teachers receive under the aegis of their professors; higher education plays a vital role in shaping literacy leadership across our nation's classrooms and within those teachers and administrators directly responsible for student engagement in learning, meeting the needs of today's diverse classrooms, and accurately assessing the outcomes of those endeavors. The purpose of this article is to share a perspective about the influence higher education can capably cast upon present and

future educators.

Defining Literacy Leadership

In order to provide a realistic perspective from higher education, a clear, inclusive definition of literacy leadership needs to be established. Those who have written about this topic typically shared the qualities and principles of literacy leadership, but rarely provided a concise, complete definition of the term. A fundamental goal of literacy leadership, both nationally and locally, is to promote reading and writing throughout our society. However, literacy leadership extends well beyond the promotion of reading and writing (Achterman, 2010). In addition to determining what literacy leadership is, today's educators need to focus on what it can be.

Literacy leadership is the ability to clearly and collaboratively convey one's expert knowledge of literacy processes and practices in guiding teachers, administrators, and all community stakeholders to make literacy education a priority by creating an environment in which all children succeed. Literacy leadership also includes the ability to inspire teachers to be reflective practitioners of their craft and to continuously seek learning related to child development and pedagogical best practices. Those who assume literacy leadership must be experts in the field of literacy (Lewis-Spector & Jay, 2011).

Multi-faceted Perspective

Why should literacy leadership include those who teach in higher education? Instructing undergraduates who aspire to teaching positions in K-12 classrooms requires strong knowledge of teaching processes, human development, and discipline-related content. Although it is admirable that many undergraduates consider a teaching career because they had a positive school experience and were influenced by at least one caring, nurturing teacher, those reasons are unsubstantial for entering the profession. As

course instructors, professors need to ensure that training soon-to-be and novice educators entails holding their students to high standards for their academic skills, decision-making, meeting required deadlines, appropriate peer interactions with the classroom, and respectful, professional interactions with children and school personnel during field experiences and student-teaching. Transforming teachers who enter graduate education programs from good to highly effective teachers is essential so that all students receive instruction from experts with child-centric views of learning that are crafted to meet their particular learners' needs. Assigning is not the same as teaching. We've known for a long time that a one-size fits all mentality about instruction creates gaps in children's learning; therefore, following publishers' instructional scripts with little thought about the people we are teaching is generally unproductive, and sadly, often futile.

Professors in undergraduate and graduate education programs have the capacity to dispel common misperceptions about instruction and to confirm sound theoretically-based practices by modeling good instruction in their own classrooms. Good teaching involves modeling followed by carefully guided practice before students are afforded the opportunity to apply newly learned skills on their own. These steps of the teaching act need to occur in college classrooms as well as in K-12 settings. Preparing teachers under our guidance before they work independently in classrooms is an auspicious undertaking with powerful outcomes for both teachers and their students. Those who teach in higher education represent a steadfast link in the continuum of literacy leadership. Imparting what we know, our literacy expertise, is paramount; imparting who we are, our committed professionalism to our students and our craft, is equally important. The following sections of this article discuss the literacy leadership perspective of higher education through example, participation, and scholarship.

Literacy Leadership by Example

As stated above, literacy leaders must be literacy experts. Content knowledge is foundational to both literacy and literacy leadership (Stein & Nelson, 2003). Higher education professionals who teach courses that prepare and strengthen teachers, need to consistently exhibit effective

pedagogy in addition to possessing knowledge of literacy processes. In addition, literacy leadership from higher education instructors should include: designing curriculum to meet the needs of students, self-reflection of instructional practices including lectures, activities, projects, and assessments, and collaborating with peers.

Reflecting. Having the chance to teach a course multiple times enables one to discern where one area of the curriculum may need more or less attention for the general good of the students. Students' oral and written feedback to their professors is often helpful in understanding how students conceptualized the processes and content of an education course, and assessed the worthiness of the course. One university recently used such feedback to adjust the reading/language arts field placements of their undergraduates: students in an Early Years Pre-K- 4 certification program clearly reported that they felt they had too many experiences in Pre-K and kindergarten classrooms to the detriment of experiences in other primary grades. Adjustments were made by the program's instructors to provide a balance of experiences across the grades. As literacy leaders, professors should particularly heed such feedback once their students are in the field.

Meeting students' needs. Individual students who experience difficulty during a course are recognized by their professors. Meeting with struggling students to determine specific needs is a professional obligation. Modeling for the struggling student what good teachers do to facilitate the learning of their students outside of a whole-class situation (i.e., identifying the learning need and targeting instruction to meet that need) is an opportunity to emulate one of the best practices these students will utilize one day in their own classrooms. It is also an opportunity for the professor to learn which adjustments might need to be made in his teaching techniques or resources used for the class.

Reflecting on students' feedback, whole-class and individual meetings with students, one's own perspectives on strengths and weaknesses of a course, the time and energy in preparing a course and each course session, and the use of technology as a teaching/ learning tool for the course are all important considerations for the practitioner in higher education. Self-reflection

is critical for all educators; the focus of literacy leadership remains on the core of teaching and learning.

Collaborating. Collaborating with peers is another way that literacy leadership is made evident by one's example. Department meetings, depending on the department size and level of formality of meetings, may or may not be the best gathering to delve into rich discussion about individual courses and overall education programs. When faculty make the time to discuss curriculum and the resources they've found to be of either great or little value, they help each other to grow as professionals. Honest, detailed collegial conversations also enrich the programs professors provide for their students. Additionally, inviting colleagues to observe us in person or electronically, and then provide feedback, is yet another way to strengthen our teaching skills and emerge as more able literacy leaders.

Literacy Leadership by Participation

A plethora of organizations function as conduits to professional dialogue, service, and camaraderie. It is essential for higher education professionals to participate in the larger educational community to share their expertise, exhibit leadership qualities, and enhance their own and other's instructional practices. Participation in professional organizations, regional school visits, university-sponsored conferences, and the mentoring of K-12 teachers are strongly encouraged.

Professional organizations. Higher educational professionals often belong to organizations that foster the participation of university scholars/researchers. Such membership is critical to the career of professors. However, university professors should also strive to participate in additional educational organizations that include K-12 practitioners and administrators. State and local council affiliates of the International Reading Association (IRA) are wonderful organizations that embrace the active participation of K-12 and university teachers. The sharing of ideas, forming of committees, collaborative work on projects, and co-presenting at conferences provide venues for professional interaction between higher education and compulsory education professionals. As direct outcomes of collaborative participation, the networks formed among these collective literacy

leaders are assets to professional growth.

Regional K-12 schools. Higher educational professionals should make it a point to establish relationships with the schools in which their adult students teach. Graduate students are wonderful liaisons between their professors and school administrators in extending invitations to schools for visiting classrooms, assisting in professional development, participating in book clubs (or even leading one), and collaborating on a service project. We learn not only within our classrooms, but outside of them as well. Having opportunities to spend time in regional schools is a tremendous experience for professors who otherwise might not have access to local schools. Professors who make school visits can observe instruction in classrooms, meet with principals about their school's literacy goals, and informally chat with teachers about the strong and weak issues they feel are present in the curriculum. Being able to see first-hand what practitioners typically do for literacy instruction and assessment is a golden opportunity for higher educational professionals. Such opportunities may even lead to collaborative research with teachers and administrators and enrich literacy leadership perspectives for all involved.

University-sponsored conferences. In addition to visiting schools, it is advantageous for higher education professionals to invite teachers and administrators to visit the university to attend conferences and seminars facilitated by the education department. Teachers and administrators welcome opportunities to attend these professional development sessions outside of their schools. With schools' current financial constraints or policies disallowing teachers to be away from the classroom for more than a day, it is difficult for teachers to attend national conferences (Jay, 2010). Reading specialists, literacy coaches, curriculum directors, and principals welcome opportunities to co-facilitate and co-present at local events sponsored by universities. When professors and their students share mutual respect, professional partnerships develop that may include writing and presenting together.

Mentoring practicing teachers. Another form of participation within literacy leadership is the mentoring of current and former students. In particular, as graduate students take on new roles

within their current schools or move on to different districts, a respected professor is often asked to meet with them to discuss both theoretical and practical considerations of the new role. There is an old saying: a teacher never knows where her influence ends. When mentoring educators who are reading professionals and/or who have administrative responsibility, one's influence may affect hundreds of teachers and students. Recently, I have participated in two such mentoring relationships. Jane, a former graduate student who achieved reading certification in addition to her master's degree, worked in a school close to the university where I teach. I had the opportunity to visit her first grade classroom many times and engage in discussions with Jane about the wonderful literacy lessons she provided her students. After a few years, Jane left that school for a leadership position in a school in another city. Although she still had some teaching responsibilities, Jane's primary focus became coaching teachers. She and I continue to meet monthly to discuss her current situations with instruction, time management, and professional interactions. Robin, a doctoral student very near completion of her program, recently applied for the position of curriculum director in the high school in which she has been teaching for almost a decade. We met three or four times to discuss interview topics, how the new position might alter her relationship with fellow teachers, and the demands of mapping curriculum and implementing curricular changes. These students sought my counsel as a literacy leader; I learned much from the discourse with them as they embarked on new leadership roles. Mentoring opportunities are mutually beneficial.

Literacy Leadership through Scholarship

The scholarship of university professors is evident through their research, writing, and presenting. These scholarly areas can influence other educators by the theory-practice connections they offer. Collaborative work with either university colleagues or classroom teachers engages others in leadership roles and expands the body of knowledge on literacy teaching and learning. A recent issue of an educational journal themed *How Not to Go it Alone* stressed the importance of collaborative cultures and continuous improvement within schools. One author (Anrig, 2013) addressed collaboration in the

Common Core Era by reminding us that there is a "growing body of research" (p. 12) demonstrating the positive outcomes of collaborative educational relationships.

As mentioned earlier, joint efforts between higher education teachers and K-12 teachers through membership in professional organizations is a good way to collaborate on scholarly work. This is especially true when position papers are commissioned by professional organizations and invitees engage in scholarly discussion and writing to meet the goal of addressing focused areas collaboratively. None of us learn in isolation; when scholarship is a collaborative endeavor among literacy leaders, the potential for learning is exponential.

Current Trends and Issues

In addition to the aspects of literacy leadership mentioned here, it is important for those in higher education to keep up-to-date with the trends and issues that are realities for today's teachers. Three major trends and issues drive many of the decisions made in our nation's schools: Common Core Standards (CCSS), data-driven instruction, and teacher evaluations. A basic reality for today's teachers is that these three areas are inter-connected.

Massey (2013) cautions educators to translate CCSS into effective instructional practices "while avoiding frustration and failure among teachers and students" (p. 67). The translation and implementation of CCSS in K-12 classrooms has implications for literacy leadership from higher education. Undergraduate and graduate programs need to explore CCSS so that teachers understand the targeted outcomes of the standards and are prepared for the collaborative work they will need to participate in within their schools. What, if any, are the differences between state standards and CCSS? What resources are particularly helpful for teachers to access? How can university faculty be a part of the translation and implementation of CCSS for schools within their region?

Higher education personnel can help facilitate professional discussions about CCSS in their classrooms as well as in the local school districts surrounding them. Professional development of teachers within their graduate/certification programs and on-site in their own schools should be a major focus of educators

within the higher education community.

Of course, another layer of literacy leadership will need to be found at the school level where leaders guide their teachers through the process of thoughtfully incorporating the standards into the curriculum. School leaders also need to ensure that teachers have adequate time and materials to aptly deliver standards-based instruction. When higher education faculty and school districts combine efforts to assist teachers in substantive learning about CCSS, professors gain the practical knowledge of the implementation process that must occur in the schools. School faculty receives support from literacy experts who provide feedback consistently tied to the ongoing implementation efforts and professional conversations. University faculty can help provide the framework schools need to initiative, implement, and assess their standards-based projects. In such endeavors, literacy leaders learn from crossing paths with each other for the common purpose of ensuring that children are prepared for college and their future careers.

Data-driven instruction is at the forefront of educational accountability. The term is hardly uttered without standards and teacher evaluation being mentioned in the same sentence. Higher education professionals can provide their literacy expertise by sharing their knowledge of relevant data sources and helping teachers analyze the data so that more effective instruction is provided to their students. Valid and reliable data are tools that should be used to determine what teaching methods are best for each student (Decker, 2003). Higher education literacy experts can guide teachers to incorporate the appropriate methods based on students' needs. Alleviating large chunks of time between the time data is gathered and when modifications are made to teaching methods is a huge factor in maximizing student improvement. The interpretation and use of data is an area where strong literacy leadership is warranted. Conceptualizing the adoption of instructional improvement as a standard, James-Ward, Fisher, Frey and Lapp (2013) encourage collaboration and interaction among educators. Teacher evaluations are changing to align with CCSS.

According to the Danielson Group (2013), the philosophy of CCSS and the underlying

concepts of the framework for teaching evaluation are very similar. Many states are adopting the framework since they are implementing CCSS or a modified version of the standards. Danielson's four domains (Danielson, 1996; 2008) are core elements of effective instruction regardless of the grade or age grouping of the students. University professors should also recognize each of Danielson's domains as germane to their pedagogical goals. The four areas include: (1) planning and preparation; (2) classroom environment; (3) instruction; and (4) professional responsibility. The domains, which should be obvious to any administrator observing and interacting with teachers, are easily evaluated. However, a portion of the new teacher evaluation framework is strongly tied to data based on student achievement. The four domains are not the only variables that affect student achievement. Evaluating fairly is dependent on recognizing the complexity of teaching and the range of variables that affect every decision a teacher makes. University professors must ensure that those they are preparing to educate children are clearly grounded in Danielson's four domains as a result of their university training. Also, professors must ensure that future and practicing teachers recognize the multiple variables related to student achievement and publicly advocate to stakeholders that schools need the support of families and communities to diminish the causes of negative variables and increase positive ones. Fair evaluation of teachers is critical; those who are repeatedly rated poorly after support should be counseled out of teaching. However, many teachers, especially those in urban settings, work in schools where poverty, crime, medical issues, or other major societal concerns beyond their prevue, need the support of other additional entities. A higher education perspective on literacy leadership needs to include advocacy for strong inclusion of agencies that will help children achieve in school and beyond.

Concluding Comments

The term literacy is bantered about in today's parlance and attached to topics that are both directly and remotely related to skillful reading and writing (information literacy, political literacy, financial literacy, moral literacy). As educators, each of us is a leader in the nation-wide (and global) promotion of literacy. Literacy leadership,

the ability to collaboratively convey one's expert knowledge of literacy processes and practices in guiding others to make literacy education a priority for all learners, may be conceptualized as a transactional responsibility of higher education professionals. University professors should not be discounted as literacy leaders because they are not K-12 practitioners. Most professors are seasoned teachers with a wealth of expert knowledge that can (and should be) translated into effective instructional practices in K-12 classrooms. Whether through teaching, writing, presenting, consulting, or collaborating, education professors have an obligation to lead adult learners to enhance their skills so that the improvement of literacy instruction is prioritized in all educational settings.

When higher education faculty and school districts forge relationships in which they collaborate in professional development, all participants benefit. All become more capable of leading literacy learning. The perspective of literacy leadership from higher education is not a top-down paradigm, but rather a collaborative, inclusive model of educators pursuing the goal of maximizing the literacy potential of all citizens. It is this author's sincere hope that literacy leadership is not a short-lived hot topic, but rather an honored, lasting component of effective instruction. Broadening the concept of literacy leadership beyond K-12 classrooms into higher education will reshape the context of literacy leadership and embrace expertise from the university level to inform all educators.

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Providing Preservice and Inservice Teachers with Virtual Field Experiences Using Interactive Videoconferencing

Lunetta M. Williams, Katrina W. Hall, Nicholas Eastham, Wanda B. Hedrick, and Danielle Boller

As literacy professors, naturally we support providing high quality literacy field experiences to preservice and inservice teachers in our university courses. Field experiences can increase preservice and inservice teachers' abilities to apply class content to the real world, awareness of diverse backgrounds and needs of students, and cooperative teaching skills (Johnson, Maring, Doty, & Fickle, 2006). Most importantly, the virtual field experiences we describe in this article allowed students enrolled in a reading practicum course to embed technology into lesson plans, preparing them to teach in a digital age (Larson, 2008). Additionally, field experiences at a distant site can cause hardships, particularly if the preservice or inservice teachers have a class at another site immediately before or after the session. A virtual field experience such as this can alleviate some of the hardships associated with traveling to schools located some distance from the university, providing instructional benefits to the elementary students attending those schools. While not always true, many universities are not located in areas convenient to schools serving low-income neighborhoods.

The virtual field experiences allowed the preservice and inservice teachers and the professor to be in one location so that the professor could monitor and coach as necessary. Debriefing and reflection could occur immediately after tutoring. Further, each preservice and inservice teacher's session was recorded so that the professor could view the sessions at a later time and provide thorough feedback. This article provides information on implementing virtual field experiences for preservice and inservice teachers so that they can offer individualized instruction to elementary students.

Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework draws heavily on the ideas of John Dewey and Lev Vygotsky with regard to providing learning events that include social interaction, scaffolding, and mentoring for students at all levels, from elementary to graduate school. Dewey believed that teachers should plan learning experiences that are based on students' interests and their experience (Tanner, 1997). Similarly, Vygotsky noted that teachers should plan lessons that are challenging and will stretch students' learning and competence, asserting that interactive situations allow students to "stretch and grow mentally" (Mooney, 2000, p. 91). Specifically, Vygotsky highlighted the importance of social interaction and problem solving with adults or with more capable peers on cognitive learning. Connecting this with virtual experiences, researchers have found that the "scaffolding or mediated learning from those more knowledgeable is important in helping these preservice teachers achieve these cognitive understandings and is an essential component of the cybermentoring learning experience" (Johnson, et al., 2006, p. 60).

In our project, Vygotsky's theories were also evidenced through the preservice and inservice teachers' learning. The

professor was onsite with the teachers and was not only able to help the teachers plan, she also coached during the sessions, scaffolded their teaching, and provided immediate feedback. The preservice and inservice teachers were able to provide suggestions and feedback to each other during their class sessions, which provided the social interaction that Vygotsky noted was necessary for deep learning. As such, the teachers were able to develop their own competency in providing literacy instruction to their students in a safe and nurturing environment.

Background

In our review of the literature, we found that videoconferencing has had a positive impact on students' motivation for reading, which aligns with Vygotsky's idea of social interaction (Mooney, 2000). Houge and Geier (2009) studied the impact of videoconferencing on struggling readers. A main finding indicated that the social nature of tutoring offered an atmosphere that prompted the students to be active learners and motivated them to want to participate during tutoring sessions.

In the remainder of this section, we share previous studies that have used virtual field experiences with preservice and inservice teachers, particularly focusing on the technology set up and instructional framework used during sessions. Kent and Simpson (2010) used interactive videoconferencing (IVC) with preservice teachers participating in interactive field experiences. Candidates met in an auditorium to observe an elementary classroom with a camera positioned so that they could see and hear the classroom teacher and elementary students during regular classroom instruction. In order to further bridge theory and practice, the preservice teachers purposefully observed during IVC, completed guided reflections, and discussed the lesson with the university professor and classroom teacher.

Johnson et al. (2006) focused on cybermentoring collaborations using high-end video conferencing. Two preservice teachers were paired with a first grader and used video conferencing as well as a tutorial guide to increase the student's reading fluency. Also focusing on oral reading fluency, Vasquez, Forbush, Mason, Lockwood, and Glead (2011) used Adobe Connect Internet Protocol Video software to allow undergraduate college tutors and elementary students to see one another and practice reading. Real-time communication and document sharing as well as the ability to write on documents digitally occurred within the virtual tutoring room. During each session, tutors established rapport by discussing average words read daily at home, assessed oral reading fluency using Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), provided reading instruction at the child's reading level, completed Corrective Reading program activities, and conducted comprehension checks.

In 2007, Houge, Peyton, Geier and Petrie found that the use of webcam technology with preservice teachers paired with adolescent readers did not sacrifice the integrity of regular reading and writing tutoring sessions. In later studies, the researchers continued their exploration of one-to-one literacy instruction using webcamera technology (Houge & Geier, 2009; Houge, Geier, & Peyton, 2008). Preservice teachers delivered literacy instruction to adolescent participants in their home or school settings using videoconferencing. During each session, pairs used two copies of the same contemporary Young Adult Literature, and the instructional framework consisted of fluency and vocabulary instruction, guided reading with direct and explicit comprehension instruction, writing activities, and read-alouds.

Our project differed from the aforementioned studies in a number of ways. First, we used a videoconferencing application, Blackboard Collaborate, during the virtual field experiences. Second, we encouraged the preservice and inservice teachers to provide an informal atmosphere during sessions by being more of a book buddy who facilitated discussion and deeper understanding of text than a tutor who followed a scripted program. Last, nonfiction e-books were used in each session.

Context

In this section, we discuss our project participants, implementation of the virtual field experiences, and the instructional framework used during sessions.

Participants.

There were two sets of participants involved in this project: the university students and the elementary students. The 10 university participants were enrolled in a reading practicum course and were practicing full-time classroom teachers (inservice teachers) or preservice teachers. Prior to enrolling in this course, the preservice teachers had recently completed a Bachelor's degree in elementary education, which included 12 credit hours of literacy coursework.

The elementary school participants included 10 students in third through fifth grade who attended an urban, public charter school with a free and reduced lunch population of 87%. Students were selected for the project based on the following criteria: 1) regular attendance in the after school program, 2) knowledge that the student's parents typically picked him or her up from the program later in the day, and 3) the classroom teacher's judgment that the student was a strong reader. Because the sessions took place in the late afternoon, during the university's class meeting, we needed students who would be reliably present from week to week. Our choice to select students who were considered strong readers was because our primary goal was to test the functionality of the technology. It would have been too difficult to work with struggling readers while working out the technology application. Since the preservice and inservice teachers were completing their requirements for a reading endorsement, they had already gained extensive experience with struggling readers. As such, this course could in part focus on advancing the reading skills of the strong readers, giving the preservice and inservice teachers a broader range of experience while mastering the use of the technology.

Sessions.

The first session was conducted face-to-face at the charter school to allow each preservice or inservice teacher to meet the randomly assigned elementary student. During this visit, each determined the student's instructional level when reading informational text in the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2012), and discovered nonfiction topics for the student, based on interests reported in a reading interest survey (Johns & Lenski, 2012). The remaining sessions were each 45 minutes in length and conducted online using an interactive videoconferencing program, Blackboard Collaborate (referred to as Collaborate in the remainder of the article), which is discussed in the next section. In the elementary school's computer lab, the students used microphone headsets and webcams to videoconference about e-books with the preservice and inservice teachers, who used the same technology in the university computer lab.

Videoconferencing Technology.

We used Collaborate, a browser-based system that allows university students and instructors to meet and collaborate with a web camera and microphone. We explored the option of using other videoconferencing applications for the project, including Skype and OoVoo. Those applications would have required creating user accounts for all participants, and lacked several tools available in Collaborate, including a text chat area, an interactive whiteboard, application sharing and website sharing. Users can meet in the main room of a Collaborate session, or move to break out rooms in small, assigned groups. Collaborate is integrated with the Blackboard Learning Management System, where the preservice and inservice teachers had existing accounts. Activity in the main room can be recorded for asynchronous delivery. We opted not to use every feature for various reasons discussed below.

For safety and logistical reasons, we opted not to use the website sharing tool and the application sharing tool. While instructors can take participants to a website by entering a URL in the web sharing tool, once the participants arrive at the site, the instructor has no control over what they do. Participants are able to click on links within the site, or leave the site altogether. This made the option of sharing existing e-books available on a number of websites impractical. The application sharing tool could have been used to deliver the book content, but the tool required more bandwidth than was available for a satisfactory experience.

The Collaborate Interactive Whiteboard seemed to be the best feature available for the delivery of content because it allowed us to show pages of e-books and check for understanding. Pages could be marked up with shapes, text or the freeform drawing tool.

On several occasions, elementary students were not able to attend their reading sessions. In these cases, the preservice and inservice teachers who had absent buddies were able to unobtrusively join another reading session as an observer, and later provide constructive feedback to the peer they joined.

The participating university professor was able to effectively assess and assist with lesson adjustment by watching individual session recordings, which included all video, audio and text interactions, as well as the PowerPoint screen mark ups created during the sessions. The preservice and inservice teachers benefited from this individualized feedback which may not have been possible in a larger, face to face group setting. Acting on the feedback ultimately resulted in richer reading experiences for the elementary students.

Logistical Considerations.

In order to make sure that there was enough bandwidth at both sites to conduct multiple Collaborate sessions synchronously, we conducted a practice session. Several adults were in the university and charter school computer labs to turn on computers, plug in web cameras and headsets, and practice using Collaborate. During the initial test session, we discovered that some of the webcams we had were not compatible with Collaborate, so we had to purchase a set of cameras that we knew would work. The elementary school's bandwidth nearly reached the maximum amount, so we determined that only 10 Collaborate sessions could occur at the same time. We also found that some web browsers worked more smoothly with Collaborate. Browser updates either improved or diminished Collaborate functionality, so it was useful to launch Collaborate prior to the sessions to make sure all the features worked properly. If one browser did not work, invariably, another could be used.

Our next step was introducing the preservice and inservice teachers enrolled in the practicum to Collaborate, as only one student had previous, limited exposure to it. One of the coauthors whose specialty is educational technology provided an introductory session to Collaborate, and some of this information is provided in the next section of the article. Another coauthor presented a PowerPoint displaying an example of a lesson that could be completed during a tutoring session. Using information from both sessions, the professor paired the preservice and inservice teachers and let them role-play as tutor and tutee to practice for future sessions.

Initiating a Collaborate Session.

Prior to initiating a Collaborate session, we made sure that the computers were powered on, both the microphone headset and webcam were plugged in, and that all equipment was functioning properly. Once the physical equipment was set up, preservice and inservice teachers followed a set of procedures to enter Collaborate and begin the session. As session moderators, the preservice and inservice teachers would be in control of all content and accessibility of features, but they first needed to open the computer's web browser and log in to their course Blackboard site. From there, they selected the Collaborate Sessions tab from the left side menu and clicked on their previously assigned Collaborate session (e.g., Student 4). If the computer's Java application was not current, the computer prompted them to update it before running the program. Once Java was operating correctly, Collaborate opened and prompted them to select their desired Internet speed. In our case, they selected "Local Area Network." After officially entering the session as the moderator, they uploaded their slide presentation containing

the e-book and activities, clicked the "Load Content" icon near the top of the window and selected their document from the hard drive. Once they enabled audio and video permissions for their child, they were ready to begin the lesson. These steps were necessary for every new Collaborate session.

Entering a Collaborate session as a participant followed nearly the same procedures but rather than logging in through Blackboard, the child clicked a hyperlink that automatically started the Collaborate application. Once Collaborate was open, the student would not be able to interact with the features until their university monitor gave them permission. It is important to note that both participants had to go into the Collaborate settings menu and ensure that the headset microphone was selected as the audio input before initiating communication. Often the computer would automatically set the webcam's microphone as the default audio input, which we learned would lead to problems with background noise.

Instructional Framework for Sessions.

In response to the recent state endorsement of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) we offered the elementary students a selection of high-interest, nonfiction e-books and focused lessons on the expository reading skills described in the CCSS for Reading. While the sessions involved reading strategies that will be further discussed, the primary goal was for the participants to spend a majority of the allotted time reading and engaging in authentic discussions about informational texts (Allington, 2013). Our goal was for the student to view the preservice and inservice teacher as a book buddy or fellow reader rather than a teacher or tutor, which created a more relaxed atmosphere where conversation flowed naturally. Our choice to promote this type of learning environment is supported by findings from previous book club studies which reported positive effects on students' reading attitudes (Whittingham & Huffman, 2009) and critical thinking abilities (Moreillon, Hunt, & Ewing, 2009).

Taking the student's assessment data and e-book selection into account, each preservice and inservice teacher selected before, during, and after reading strategies to use during sessions. They were encouraged to select one strategy or method for each section so as to not disrupt the continuity of the reading experience. The instructional framework can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Instructional Framework

Lesson Plan			
Student Name			
Instructional Reading Level			
Area(s) of need based on BRI data			
Text Selected by Student	Title	Author	Reading Level
Description			
Before			Source:
During			Source:
After			Source:
Three book choices for next session	Title	Author	Reading Level

Examples of some activities included graphic organizers to learn about new vocabulary, higher-order questions, content-related videos, and partially completed diagrams. A particularly effective strategy was using an anticipation guide to check understanding before and after reading (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Screenshot of Anticipation Guide

What do you know?		
Question	Before Reading	After Reading
There are animals who don't have eyes.	TRUE I'm not sure FALSE	TRUE I'm not sure FALSE
Each cave has 4 zones.	TRUE I'm not sure FALSE	TRUE I'm not sure FALSE
Adaptation means that the animal never changes.	TRUE I'm not sure FALSE	TRUE I'm not sure FALSE
Some fish have vibration sensors on their bodies.	TRUE I'm not sure FALSE	TRUE I'm not sure FALSE

The preservice and inservice teachers selected an e-book for the first session based on student responses to a reading interest survey. (E-book resources are provided in the Appendix.) At the conclusion of the remaining sessions,

students were given a choice of three nonfiction e-books (tailored to the individual's instructional reading level and reading interests) to read the following week. We found the most compatible digital format to use with Collaborate to be PowerPoint presentations. Therefore, the preservice and inservice teachers imported their e-book selections into PowerPoint as slide presentations, placing one page on each slide. (A photograph of a Collaborate session can be found in Figure 3.) Using this format allowed them to easily add in blank slides at strategic points throughout the book for their before, during, and after reading strategies. Additionally, for the first session, the preservice and inservice teachers inserted a few slides at the start of the lesson to give the students a brief orientation to the Collaborate interactive tools. After completing their PowerPoints, the preservice and inservice teachers shared their presentations on the university's Sky Drive with the professor, who could provide feedback on the lesson design prior to the live session.

Figure 3. Photo of Collaborate Session (Photo courtesy of Tiger Academy—permission form received by The Reading Professor.)



This instructional framework not only allowed the preservice and inservice teachers to model effective reading of nonfiction texts and overall enthusiasm for reading, it gave them hands-on experience with more pedagogical skills such as planning and executing lessons, utilizing technology for literacy purposes, and using assessment data to inform instruction.

Successes

Based on the feedback from the elementary students and the preservice and inservice teachers, the virtual experiences were successful. Both groups liked the e-book format so that they could draw or highlight sections of the text. They also enjoyed seeing the book and being able to make eye contact with their partners at the same time. Perhaps because it was a novel experience, the elementary students remained engaged and focused, even when there were technical glitches or problems. Finally, the preservice and inservice teachers liked learning a new technology that they could use in their current and future classrooms.

Future Considerations

In this section, we discuss some of the challenges of implementing videoconferencing as well as potential solutions. First, we noted that the elementary students' keyboarding skills varied, and struggling students took longer to complete typed responses, which affected the pacing of the lesson. More time was spent searching for and typing letters than reading, discussing, and thinking about text. An informal assessment of the elementary students' keyboarding skills might be conducted during the first session to determine if accommodations are needed such as dictating answers and limiting activities that require the young students to type.

The teachers mentioned that some students seemed more interested in adjusting the camera than on reading. In most cases, this adjusting was prompted by the camera sliding on the monitor. The students felt that they had to adjust the camera lens to keep their image from being off-kilter. During the last session, we responded to this distraction by limiting the use of video to a brief hello in the beginning and good-bye at the end. The preservice and inservice teachers provided mixed feedback on this final session, however. While some said that their students seemed more focused on reading, others reported a decrease in their own engagement because they could not see the students, which limited their ability to view and interpret their nonverbal behaviors. We wondered if the students' increased focus on reading was a result of eliminating video distractions, which research has shown can cause a split attention effect, ultimately resulting in increased cognitive load and less learning (Mayer & Moreno, 1998). In addition, we wondered if the fidelity offered by the small video screen was sufficient for the teachers to reliably and consistently interpret the students' understanding of the reading. As such, video use might be an optional tool, based on individual preferences.

Finally, some preservice and inservice teachers felt rushed to discuss an e-book and implement before, during, and after reading strategies in 45-minutes. Shorter e-books or articles from websites such as newsela.com might assist in providing a balance between reading time, discussion, and the use of reading strategies.

Final Thoughts

The virtual field experiences allowed preservice and inservice teachers to receive immediate feedback from the professor and offer individualized instruction with elementary students who attend a school in a challenged area of poverty located some distance from the university. The social interactions during the individualized instruction provided the opportunity for the child and preservice or inservice teacher to personally connect and further engage in text (Coffey, 2012; Day & Kroon, 2010; Houge & Geier, 2009). Additionally, the virtual field experiences allowed the preservice and inservice teachers to move beyond the notion of using technology for free time or centers (Larson, 2008) and integrate technology in instruction.

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Appendix

Resources for E-books

<http://www.wegivebooks.org>

<http://www.amazon.com/kindle-ebooks/>

<http://magickeys.com>

<http://freekidsbooks.org>

<http://oxfordowl.co.uk>

<http://epubbud.com>

<http://mycapstonelibrary.com/login/index.html>

<http://store.scholastic.com/microsite/storia/about>

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Promoting Literacy Growth through Literature Circles in Second Grade

Divonna M. Stebick, Becki McCullough, and Jenell McKowen

Purposes

In order to demonstrate the value of understanding the social context and taking advantage of opportunities for children to utilize this in their learning and development, the researchers investigated literacy as a social practice. Street and Lefstein (2007) viewed literacy as a social practice, the “general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives” (p. 143). In a school setting literacy practices exist in relations between children, within groups including shared cognitions visible in social identities. Schools are social institutions endorsing such practices, “regardless of children’s culture, ethnicity, gender, language, race, or social class, their learning is profoundly social” (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 8). Dynamic teaching is steeped in self-critical inquiry, hence, our research while focusing on classroom teaching and learning, uncovered the interrelationships of second graders’ oral and written language development (Strieb, 1985). The findings contributed both to our growing body of knowledge and aimed to address some of the language of interaction and social processes in second grade classrooms.

Current literacy policies support changes in the instructional context that would significantly alter teaching and learning in primary classrooms (McMahon, Raphael, Goatley, & Pardo, 1997). In the past, analyzed discourse patterns in classrooms showcased that single types of speech genre dominate the discourse in many classrooms (McMahon et al., 1997). When instructional plans are altered and children are given more opportunities to interact and express themselves, they are able to use language while negotiating their perspectives and actively engage in texts to comprehend deeply. Literature discussion circles is one such venue where children can “articulate, clarify, and expand” their ideas (McMahon et al., 1997, p. 19). While much research has been conducted on literature circles in intermediate grades (Bower, 2002; Maloch, 2004), there are few studies that have explored this issue in primary classrooms. The present study analyzed two second-grade classes as they participated in twelve literature discussion circles over a period of three months during the spring of the school year. The paper will discuss the relevance of being reflective practitioners in the field, as well as into the students’ learning and identities. For the purposes of this paper, two related research questions will be explored.

1. Does participation in literature circles lead to increased student engagement in reading as measured by the Elementary Reading Assessment (McKenna & Kear, 1990)?

2. Does participation in literature circles help students increase reading comprehension as captured

through anecdotal records and through the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (2011)?

Theoretical Framework

Rosenblatt (1978) developed the “reader response” school of literacy. Rosenblatt concluded that text is simply ink on a page until a reader engages with the print to bring the words to life. There is not simply one correct interpretation of literary work, but multiple interpretations, each of them profoundly dependent on the prior experiences brought to the text by each reader (Daniels, 1994). In order for literature discussions to be successful, students need to actively engage with other readers to enhance comprehension (Stebick & Dain, 2007).

Vygotsky (1978) placed social interaction at the heart of a sociocultural examination of literacy. The present study, rooted in the sociocultural context of second-grade classrooms, delved into the phenomenon that language is a living, socially influenced entity. Three aspects of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory directly influenced this research: the idea of internalization, the zone of proximal development, and his notion of child development. These aspects are explained within two other theoretical constructs that influenced the current study, namely Bandura’s (1977) idea of social learning in which Gee’s (2004) notion of identity and role-taking is embedded (internalization), and Rosenblatt’s (1978) transactional theory of reader response (ZPD and child development).

Bandura (1977) emphasized that learning was inherently a social process, stating that “most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” (p. 22). Bandura identified that a “vast amount of social learning occurs among peers” within groups (1997, p. 9). Second-grade classrooms are filled with such efforts made by students talking, thinking, and role taking in groups.

Bandura’s (1977) theory reflects Vygotsky’s (1978) approach to child development that advocated a child’s cognitive development was structured by the wider social and cultural relationships within which the child is located. Vygotsky discussed “human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88). A concept Vygotsky used to explain this was that of internalization, that every “function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level: first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological).

Since conversation is essential in literature discussions,

the social structure of such groups assumes a collaborative relationship among its members. In the twelve discussions circles, the task was one of verbal exchange, where at times the group reached some kind of a peripheral consensus and even entertained different viewpoints demonstrating inferential comprehension.

The dialogue between and among the second graders as they talked about books in this study reinforced Bandura's (1977) argument for an expanded conception of the social context as defined by a sociocultural, social learning perspective to include the personal experiences of the students. According to Gee (1996), a "big Discourse" is a socially accepted way of "using language," and other "artifacts of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting" that were used to recognize a child as a member of a "socially meaningful group or 'social network,' or to signal a socially meaningful" role (p. 131).

A person's way of talking makes up his/her personal communication. When literature discussion circles are encouraged in classrooms, both formal and informal talk occurs using the speakers' own conversational devices. Delving into young children's language production during these discussions highlights conversations used by the groups and shows that these are context dependent. Whenever communication is shared, an underlying message of rapport emerges while exercising comprehension skills. Further, when children understand each other's ways of understanding, it shows shared background and context. Hence, due to the paradoxical nature of communication, speakers constantly observe the need for involvement and show consideration and understanding. This was evidenced in this study.

Mode of Inquiry

Two second-grade inclusion classrooms with a total of forty-eight students participated in this project. The students' reading abilities on the Fountas and Pinnell scale at the beginning of the study ranged from Level I to Level Q. The two classroom teachers participating in the study determined that all students, regardless of instructional reading level, would participate. A third researcher, a professor of literacy, participated in the project by modeling instruction, co-facilitating literature discussions, and coaching the teachers through reflective practice. Prior to the project, the three action researchers discussed how the project would be structured and executed. The three agreed that the literature circle groups would be held weekly using texts that were leveled between J and M on the Fountas and Pinnell scale. Each group would have no more than seven participants and would last approximately fifteen minutes.

Prior to the start of the study and again at the end of the study, the classroom teachers administered the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System to identify the current reading levels of each second grader (2011). (This assessment is a leveled running record including oral and silent reading.) Since it is a one-on-one assessment, valuable information about each student's reading process, fluency, and comprehension was gathered. In addition, the classroom

teachers administered the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990) to all student participants in order to determine how students felt about recreational reading outside of the school environment and their feelings about academic reading.

Prior to beginning the literature circles, the researchers conducted lessons about questioning before, during, and after reading. The researchers explicitly modeled how asking a good question would look and sound before, during, and after reading. After several lessons, instruction moved to the social portion of literature circles. The researchers modeled how to make eye contact while asking and answering questions. Students paired with partners and took turns asking and answering questions.

After the students demonstrated proficiency generating and answering questions as gathered through systematic anecdotal record keeping, the researchers introduced the literature circle model. The researchers modeled a literature circle while the students observed. The students observed how the literature circle participants looked each other in the eye while asking or answering questions and actively listened to each other. The students also noted the types of questions the researchers asked during the literature discussion.

In the following days, a group of students from a higher ability-reading group demonstrated the literature circles while the other students observed, a "fishbowl" observation strategy. The observing students provided feedback of what they heard and saw to the literature circle participants. Next, all second graders participated in literature circles for twelve discussions. Initially, the researchers organized the literature circles homogeneously by guided reading groups. The groups used texts at their instructional reading level. Students were divided into eight groups, four groups engaged in literature circles and four groups observed the separate circles, using the "fishbowl" observation strategy. In the beginning, an adult facilitated each group. All discussions were videotaped throughout the study. Each discussion ranged in length from eight minutes to twelve minutes in length. After each circle, the group watching the circle shared their cheers and coaching with the group that had been discussing the literature.

In an effort to shift the focus from the social aspects of the literature circles to active engagement in the discussion, the researchers used reflective practice methods to collaboratively plan, execute lessons, examine lessons via video recordings, debrief on student success and instruction to plan subsequent lessons. The researchers continued to refine instructional practices over the next twelve weeks, while the classroom literacy instruction continued to include whole group skill lessons, guided reading instruction, and independent literacy workstations. The students read the books for literature discussions during silent reading time and/or at home.

Data Sources

In action research studies, data collection is a result of the systematic and intentional study of one's own practice

with the goal of improving that practice (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). A related methodological goal of the present inquiry was to base documentation upon evidence taken from the daily life within the second grade classrooms. Different types of data collection techniques were used throughout the course of this study, so that the multiple data sources could be used to validate the findings (Maxwell, 1996). The different methods of data collection identified possible findings to the two research questions discussed in this paper. The instruments included (a) videotaped observations, (b) field notes, (c) interviews, (d) reading motivation surveys, (e) reading assessments, and (f) collection of artifacts in the form of the students' notes.

Results

Based on an initial analysis of our findings, we found that the literature circles developed into a more natural conversation, students generated higher-level questions to engage more participants within their discussion circle (see Table 1.), and students' reading attitude increased slightly over the three-month period (see Table 3.).

Table 1. Evolution of Questioning Skills Over the Course of Twelve Literature Discussions

Samantha (reading below grade level)	Why did Frederick say to close his eyes? (from Frederick)	Do they like the gift that connects them to the world? (from The Magic Box)
Timmy (reading on grade level)	How did the rock slide begin? (from The Magic Box)	How does an earthworm survive downpours through the night?(from Earthworms)
Ryan (reading above grade level)	When Miss Rumphius went to the island, did she go to visit someone? (from Miss Rumphius)	Why would Mario keep the cricket? (from Cricket in Times Square)

After reviewing the taped discussions, we found that students relied less on prompting, engaged in a conversation about the book read, and demonstrated various types of comprehension strategies throughout the conversations. The conversations not only included higher-level questions but also connections and inferences about the text. This increase means that students actively engaged in comprehension strategies while reading and discussing the text (see Table 2.).

Table 2. Evolution of Thinking Skills Over the Course of Twelve Literature Discussions

Samantha (reading below grade level)	I think Frederick is cute ? (from Frederick)	I think it would be weird to live without a T.V. I can't imagine not having a magic box. (from The Magic Box)
Timmy (reading on grade level)	I think the family is poor. (from The Magic Box)	I wonder how many times you tear an earthworm. If you could tear it many times and it would still grow back, you could grow your own fish bait. (from Earthworms)
Ryan (reading above grade level)	Miss Rumphius dresses funny. ? (from Miss Rumphius)	I am not sure it is very smart for Mario to be friends with a Cricket who is friends with a mouse. Mario needs to find real friends so he can play real games. (from Cricket in Times Square)

Table 3. Elementary Reading Attitude Survey Results

February	38.11	44.8	40.26
May	39.63	46.63	41.61

A more significant result included a transfer of the discussion behaviors to other areas of the school day. One example included a reading intervention group of students who began to engage in discussions about their thoughts and opinions without the teacher's facilitation. Normally, these five boys do not contribute to a conversation unless asked directly. One of the boys asked a question, "What would happen if they didn't change the color of the ball?" The boys began an impromptu literature discussion. They piggybacked, questioned, concurred, disagreed, justified answers by quoting the book, without planning, and without adult participation for a full twelve minutes. The teacher actively listened, observed, and waited. Finally when the discussion stopped, another boy commented, "We just did some piggybacking like lit discussions!" The attitudes and comments of the others reflected his realization;

"That was awesome."

"He showed where it was in the book."

These responses are atypical for this intervention group.

Scholarly Significance

The findings of this research support the theoretical rationale presented earlier in this paper. All the suggested implications for teaching, while being grounded in the sociocultural framework, drew from the theorists that influenced the current study. The present study highlights the complexity of classroom interactions that are social by nature. Each year, every teacher inherits a group of children with very different and numerous social experiences that influence how they understand literacy. It is thus important for educators to provide venues that would allow our children to interact with one another and test out their knowledge and experiences. As teachers it is our professional commitment to work toward creating such experiences for our students.

Although educational institutions and teachers "talk about and teach separate interpretive activities," reading, viewing, listening and so on, children "actually live in whole cultures and bring insights from one medium into their approach to another" (Mackey, 2002, p. 50). Children, "today actually read within the framework of a sophisticated context that includes numerous forms of media, multimedia, and cross-media engagement" (p. 51). Against such a backdrop, this study generated six implications for teaching that will be of relevance to future research: (a) use of think strips prior to discussions, (b) teaching social skills prior to launching discussions, (c) bringing out-of-school interests to discussions, (d) student selection of books, (e) transferring discussion skills to other contexts, and (f) orally sharing thinking prior to writing responses to reading.

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Moving Beyond Print: What Do the New Literacies Mean for Teacher Education?

Heather Casey

Introduction

Ryan prepares to start his day of classes, ear buds firmly in place, last week's podcast from class streaming in his ears. Toting his tablet, he checks to see that he has uploaded his video of himself teaching as well as the required post on the class site. A quick stop at the computer lab and he grabs a hard copy of the paper due today.

Ryan's approach to text represents many of the students we work with as literacy educators. The rapidly evolving and readily accessible media tools are expanding perceptions of what counts as text and what it means to be literate. Many of the current pre-service teacher demographic have developed their social identities and their literate selves alongside this technological evolution (Lenhard, Arafeh, Smith, & Macgill, 2008). As these pre-service teachers prepare to become K-12 educators it is important that the teacher educators who mentor their work help this population examine what youth and adolescent literacy development means in a multimodal world (Plomp, 2013; Spiegel, 2012).

Becoming Literate in a Multimodal World

21st century readers and writers move across different modes and text types with a scroll and a click, often working across multiple screens and devices in this process (Casey, Lenski & Hryniuk-Adamov, in press). Navigating the "scroll and click" text offers an alternative type of comprehension experience as different modes are navigated simultaneously and recursively in ways that traditional linear conception of print resist (Freebody & Luke, 1999; Jenkins & Kelly, 2013; Spires, Hervey, Morris & Stefflug, 2012). The high stakes assessments in the US, PARCC (The Partnership for Readiness for College and Careers) that began in 2014 ask students to "drag and drop" answers as tablets and computers replace #2 pencils and scantron sheets and machines (PARCCOnline). The vocabulary of what it means to read and write is expanding.

Research documents how navigating web based material with its range of pop ups and ease of moving away from a search influences cognitive experiences with text (Gao & Mager, 2013). Teacher educators have both an opportunity and a responsibility to help the next generation of educators understand this phenomenon and make use of this strategically in their own work to motivate, engage and support K-12 students' literacy development. One way to do this is to involve pre-service teachers in these tools in ways that prompt them to reflect on how their own practices with these modes is supporting learning and, in turn, may influence youth and adolescent learning as well (Casey, 2011; Karchmer & Klein, 2012).

Building Bridges: Using Virtual Spaces to Support Developing Pedagogies

The rapidly evolving use of digital tools to support the functional procedures of teaching (e.g., hosting websites for class information) as well as cognitive learning goals (e.g., using e-books and mixed media to support those learning goals) has implications for the literacy development of the children pre-service and practicing teachers support. For teacher educators, integrating these tools into teacher preparation courses has the opportunity to heighten reflection and offers teacher candidates the opportunity to contemplate the integration of these resources prior to beginning their formal work with children (Gao & Mager, 2013; Jenkins & Kelly, 2013).

Research on teacher education describes the process of learning "teaching" as a multi-tiered process that includes the understanding of content, connecting this understanding to learned pedagogy, and having the opportunity to reflect on that integration so that pre-service teachers can integrate the experience(s) into their developing professional identity (Britzman, 2003). Research on teacher-identity suggests that beliefs are influenced when pre-service teachers have the opportunity to reflect on new teaching practices and integrate these experiences into their own developing professional identity (Casey, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The framework of the study was used to understand how pre-service teacher's beliefs and practices about using technology in their professional work are influenced by the opportunity to integrate selected tools in methods courses and student teaching. Over the course of an academic year, pre-service teachers in three elementary and one middle school literacy-methods level class, and a student teaching seminar participated in video reflections of their work inside the classroom and built interactive virtual portfolios to describe their learning journey and professional development (total students n = 82). Specifically, through the use of blogs, wikispaces, and video reflections students engaged in multiple opportunities using mixed modes to reflect on their practice and to begin to develop a professional identity. I was interested in understanding how working with this technology influenced these pre-service teachers' beliefs about integrating multimodal text into their teaching. What is being discovered and potential implications for teacher-education is described in this article.

Situating the Work: A Look Inside Relevant Theory and Research

Theoretical Framework – Locating CHAT inside Multimodality.

Multimodality, recognizing that meaning emerges from the integration of multiple types of text, has deep historical and theoretical roots (Seigel, 2013). CHAT (Cultural-Historical-Activity-Theory) suggests that text is understood as any artifact that serves to communicate information. Gee (2007) wrote:

...language is not the only important communicational

system. Images, symbols, graphs, diagrams, artifacts, and many other visual symbols are significant, more so today than ever...In such multimodal texts (texts that mix words and images), then, the images often communicate different things from the words. Further, the combination of the two modes communicates things that neither of the modes does separately. And, indeed, multimodality goes far beyond images and words to include sounds, music, movement, and bodily sensations. (pp. 2-3)

According to this paradigm, what we view, what we say, what we image as well as what we write contributes to the rapidly expanding and evolving body of knowledge that is defined and often celebrated by the very democratic open access "rules" that govern the World Wide Web. Lave and Wenger (1991) in their discussion of literacy acquisition as "legitimate peripheral participation," argue for the need to engage in the cultural tools (in this case these multimodal forms of representation) in order to build knowledge that is connected to the cultural communities we inhabit. This argument was made long before the rapidly evolving list of technological gadgets and interactive web based platforms made it into our pockets and our palms. This framework, however, supports a definition of text that is inclusive of the rapidly evolving text types available for comprehension and construction of meaning (Luke & Freebody, 1999). Invention and adaptation challenges traditional conceptions of literacy (Casey, 2011; IRA, 2012, Siegel, 2012).

Pursuing Literacy.

The accessibility of information and the amount of fixed and moving text we navigate moment to moment has, according to some scholars, expanded what text is and how it comes to exist (Clinton, Jenkins, & McWilliams, 2013; Gee, 2007; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008, 2012; Morrell, Duenas, Gacia, & Lopez, 2013). Web 2.0 platforms invite the active participation in the construction of new knowledge in a relatively open environment with accessible audiences (Wells & Claxton, 2002; Lankshear & Knobel, 2012). These "new literacies" include the construction and comprehension of both print and non-print materials often with multiple portable digital devices. It is not uncommon, for example, to scroll from email to PDF file to image to video to social networking sites and so on as both reader and writer for both social and academic purposes (Casey, 2012a; 2012b).

This ease with which many interact with multimodal texts for social and academic purposes, defined here as the use of print and non-print materials by authors and readers to construct and comprehend information is shifting how children and adolescents engage with text (Hinchman & Moore, 2013; Lenski, in press). The increasing accessibility of tools that provide ready access to multiple modes is influencing children and adolescent literacy development. (Casey, 2012a; Casey, 2012; Casey, 2011). Clinton, Jenkins, and McWilliams (2013) draw on the work of neuroscientists who offer a view of development as the evolution of "semantic representational system" (Bolter, 1991, cited in Clinton, Jenkins & McWilliams, 2013, p. 160) suggest that new media is another step in this continuum. They wrote:

Since capacities linked to each previous semantic

representation system (mimesis, language) are still with us today, there is no reason to believe that the unique thought patterns and capacities enabled by the technology of writing will be lost. New media have absorbed and enhanced many pre-existing communication capacities, allowing us to deploy sounds and images alongside printed texts, for example, to create a new kind of "writing space." (Bolter, 1991, cited in Clinton, Jenkins & McWilliams, 2013, p. 13).

This has important implications for teacher education. Being "tool literate," developing the ability to use particular platforms and technological gadgets is often confused with new literacies, the act of considering how using these platforms to comprehend and construct information requires different comprehension and composing processes than typically associated with traditional print (Coire & Dobbler, 2007). Helping emerging teachers identify this distinction and work with this new description as it relates to children's and adolescent's literacy development is becoming an important responsibility of teacher educators (Corio, Knoble, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008).

When working with pre-service and practicing teachers it is important to move beyond this understanding of how to use technological tools towards a critical examination of what these new literacies mean for the comprehension and construction of ideas across academic, professional and social worlds.

Looking inside Teacher Education.

There are layers of exploration of integrating technology in teacher education programs. It is not uncommon, for example, for teacher preparation programs to offer courses on how to work with the equipment of the time. Courses in working with film projectors and overhead transparencies have been replaced by those that offer instruction on how to work with Interactive White Boards, build websites, using social media in the classroom, among others. The advent of the participatory culture that the Web 2.0 experience is offering many has required a shift to a more conceptual understanding. It is still important to understand how to work with the tools, but what is becoming increasingly clear is the importance of helping developing teachers examines how these shifting literacy experiences impacts students' learning, particularly in the area of strategic reading and writing.

There is the business of education to consider as well. Technology and teacher education follow multiple pathways. For some, technology offers a convenience for course offerings that is better suited to our participatory culture (Jenkins & Kelley, 2013). Many teacher education programs have begun offering online courses as part of their students' learning program. This is arguably a function of business as well as pedagogical opportunity as many 21st century pre-service and practicing teachers are looking for alternate arrangements to the typical class structure as Universities look for ways to increase revenue. Research on online learning suggests that the hybrid framework, which is a mix of face-face and asynchronous and synchronous online learning experience offers an optimal learning experience for students (Boling, 2008; Campbell & Parr, 2013).

Within the literacy teacher education courses themselves, whether online, hybrid or a traditional framework is the

opportunity to consider how technology contributes to children's learning. Research suggests that the most effective approach allows pre-service and practicing teachers to engage with the tools themselves while offering opportunity for critical examination of the pedagogical implications (Boling, 2008; Spires et al., 2012). Schools of Education can become places to support the development of critical media pedagogy (Morrell et al., 2013).

Methodology

The 82 pre-service teachers involved in this study are from three elementary literacy methods classes, one middle school literacy methods class and one student teaching seminar. The students are all undergraduates in a small, private north-eastern college. The average age of the participants is 20; 81% of the students are white, 5% are Hispanic, 9% are African American and 3% are Asian; 75% of this sample are women.

To understand how these developing teachers are integrating technology into their developing professional identities the digital tools (video reflection and accompanying digital platforms – i.e., blogs, wikispaces, weebly sites) students used were analyzed for both form and content. When studying form, I looked at the type of text these pre-service teachers included on their digital platform. Four modes were identified: fixed images, moving images, written text, and the integration of one or more of these which was coded as multimodal. I then looked into the content of each mode to identify what each of these modes offered about the pre-service teachers' beliefs about the use of technology in their developing teacher identity. What emerged were three categories that describe the level of technological integration this population of pre-service teachers used to chart their developing professional identity. The monomodal, defined here as primarily containing written text, the collage which includes evidence of multiple modes that exist separate from each other, and multimodal integration which is the integration of multiple modes to describe the professional journey. Informal interviews were conducted with students throughout the experience to offer another voice to their work and all participants completed an anonymous survey at the conclusion.

Findings

As the students worked with these tools to tell their professional story some were quite monomodal including artifacts that were heavily text dependent. For these students, the online space was a portal to share the written word and while it widened the audience, it did not, in their mind, shift their approach to text. Students working from this monomodal approach were also those who were quick to note their displeasure with multimodality and their preference for more traditional approaches to text. This is in line with previous research (Casey, 2011). When students whose work was described as monomodal were asked to reflect on the experience of integrating technology they noted:

Mary: It let me write my ideas down and edit them as needed.

Lance: I am not sure because I am not big on technology in the classroom.

Some students, however, approached their work as a

collage, a "scrapbook" of sorts of their professional journey. Those who collaged their experience used mixed media but these pieces were often in isolation. For example, Ricki included images of a bulletin board as well as reflections of her teaching but while the two tell a piece of her professional story, they are not synthesized in a way that creates a deeper reflection. When students who collaged their work reflected on the experience they noted the following:

Riki:

These tools support my own professional development because they never go away and since I can always go back to review them and edit them, I can add pictures, videos, lesson plans, etc. to my eportfolio so when I am on an interview I have proof of my teaching. Also, this is something I have to look back on when I need references for lesson planning, or to be reminded of elementary literacy development.

Ben:

It taught me two things. First, it showed me that information can be presented in much better ways than just writing a paper. Not only was it more interesting, but it allowed me to better express my ideas and get more of my point across. Second, it showed me great tools I could use in my future classroom.

A third approach is described as a multimodal integration where the modes that students used were dependent on one another to describe the professional story. For example, in Jan's portfolio it is through her sound bite on her home page that she shares her belief system which is then contextualized by fixed and moving images of her work with children. Jan composes her teaching journey by drawing on multiple tools in order to make meaning that only the digital platform makes possible. When asked to comment on their work and experience students who developed a multimodal integration of their professional journey noted:

Sandy:

I networked through these resources to fellow teachers and education organizations. Specifically through twitter, I follow edutopia and education world and am informed this way of new tools in education. I used these when writing lessons and gathering resources. Links to those places are on my site.

Eric:

I was able to reflect on my professional development and work with peers and share ideas. It was cool to link a video to a strategy and then get feedback from my twitter followers.

Margaret:

Voki's were something I focused on and then shared with the kids in my field site because I like the different ways children can use them in order to convey ideas. I will also use wikispaces in order to get children to organize their thoughts and work, in a fun interactive way. My field site teacher was really interested in what we were doing and it felt good to be able to share since he shares so much with me.

These three categories, monomodal, collage, and multimodal integration offer a continuum of how technological tools support professional teacher identity (Casey, 2011). Multimodal integration offers a level of critical analysis that is

arguably deeper than using any one mode in isolation or side by side (Morrell et. al., 2013).

When these students were asked about using the value of the virtual portfolio and the examination of the related tools 50% of the students surveyed reported that engaging with the multimodal tools supported their professional development “a lot,” and 42.9 % report “somewhat.” When asked about the importance of including these tools in the K-12 classroom, 35.7% reported it is “very important” while 64.3% reported it is “somewhat important.” This was further contextualized by focus group interviews with the students who noted the following:

- It helped me see ways in which children can be engaged and motivated to participate in the literacy process. It also helped me see different ways to have children present information or discuss topics, all of which would be literacy related since they need to write and type information.

- I was able to gain a better experience of 21st century learning and how to use this to develop and understand literacy instruction.

- I watched videos that modeled how I wanted to teach, communicated with paraprofessionals and other teachers via these networks, and received some great lesson ideas and plans through blogs and wikis including those for the strategy share and the class share of wikispaces.

Discussion and Implications

This study of four methods courses and one student teaching seminar offers a small sampling of the types of challenges and opportunities technology offers pre-service teachers and the teacher-educators who support their work in the 21st century. The continuum that grew out of this work requires further investigation with additional groups of students from multiple contexts to determine how this can be used to understand strategies for supporting the developing pedagogies of pre-service teachers. Considering this as a continuum has the potential to support pre-service teachers own understanding of their work with technology. Asking pre-service (and possibly practicing) educators to reflect on where they situate themselves on this continuum may prompt a level of reflection that is described in the research as important in developing a professional identity as a teacher (Doering, Beach, & O'Brien, 2007; Gao & Mager, 2013). Self-identifying as someone who approaches technological tools with a monomodal, collage, or multimodal integration mindset may further support these developing teachers ability to be thoughtful and purposeful users of this technology that surrounds their future and current K-12 students. It is this reflection that can, in turn, prompt thoughtful integration of these tools into the future (and possibly current) classrooms of the developing teachers.

As teacher-education grows alongside the tools of the 21st century, what it means to “practice pedagogy” is shifting rapidly. The rise of online courses and digital tools to construct and convey knowledge raises important questions for how we support our next generation of teachers. Central to our work as teacher educators is the need to build bridges between the known and the new within this rapidly expanding pool of technological resources and significant policy shifts at the

state and national level. The following recommendations are designed to support our developing teachers as they navigate this sometimes slippery slope.

- Integrate technology into teacher education courses purposefully so that teacher candidates experience the purposeful integration of technology to support learning.

- Teacher educators need to have opportunities to participate in professional development opportunities that support an understanding of technology.

- Technology sessions/classes in higher education and professional development experiences need to move beyond learning the tool to include a critical examination of how the new tools support learning.

- Connect new courses and initiatives to research-informed promising practices.

- Consider the importance of hybrid learning experiences.

- Be careful that a chosen tool does not emulate/connect to a poor practice.

- Examine how area K-12 schools are using technology.

- Maintain responsible and effective pedagogy over convenience.

- Investigate alternative, project-based platforms for online course work.

Conclusion

As I write this piece, I am in the process of developing a hybrid new literacies course for our undergraduate students as well as for practicing teachers enrolled in a teacher-leadership program. A primary goal of these courses is to allow participants to explore the sometimes competing conceptions of text by considering what these new literacies mean for their own work as readers and writers across the varied disciplines and social settings in which they engage as well as how we make sense of the information that streams across bound books, digital devices, and visual landscapes.

In the process of course development, I have also been researching practices for supporting online learning. The research suggests that one effective approach is the use of hybrid or blended meetings (a carefully mediated blend of face-face meetings and purposeful online connections) with focused projects to support the online component that make use of the digital tools available in a virtual classroom. For the goals of this particular course, this approach has the potential to deepen the learning experience for all (Lave & Wenger, 2012). In the context of the course the pre-service and practicing teachers will make use of the very tools they are meant to critically deconstruct in an effort to help these developing educators begin to craft a framework for supporting children and adolescent literacy development within a participatory culture. There is a need to develop a critical media pedagogy habit of mind among educators as we integrate these multiple modes (Jenkins, 2013, Morrell et. al., 2013). As we step into this new territory, I plan to learn right along with them.

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Redefining Literacy and Instruction for Contemporary Classrooms: Reflections on Literacy Teacher Education and the Work of Dr. David Booth

Susan E. Elliott-Johns

This article is the result of reflections over time on developing pedagogy and practice as a literacy teacher educator engaged in preparing teachers for contemporary classrooms and the significant influence on this practice of the work of my colleague, friend and mentor,

Dr. David Booth.

Introducing Dr. David Booth

Dr. David Booth (David) is Professor Emeritus and Scholar in Residence at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, Canada and his passion as teacher educator and scholar has always been the promotion of the arts in education and literacy education.

As a classroom teacher, language arts consultant, professor, speaker and author, David's career as an educator spans more than fifty years. Most recently, his students include teachers and administrators enrolled in Pre-service, Master's and Doctoral programs in education. Most summers find him teaching courses in different universities throughout Canada and the United States, and he draws on all these experiences with dedicated teachers in his published writing.

A prolific author, David has written and published numerous books for teachers and texts (e.g., reading series and anthologies) for use in classrooms across broad areas of language development: early literacy, reading, writing, speaking and listening, boys and literacy, drama and media. (A list of David's books are included in the Appendix). David continues to find time to offer generous support and guidance on writing and publishing to his colleagues; I consider myself fortunate to have learned so much from him and am privileged to call him a colleague, mentor and friend.

A well-known national and international speaker, David's work has also been recognized with prestigious awards. He has addressed educators and parents in every province of Canada, across the United States, in the UK, Germany, Asia, the Mid East, New Zealand and Australia, and received Lifetime Achievement Awards for his contributions to Drama Education from national organizations in Great Britain, the United States and Canada; David was also recognized with an Honorary Doctorate from Nipissing University in 2008 and, in 2011, was honoured with the Distinguished Educator of the Year Award from the Toronto Chapter of Phi Delta Kappan (PDK).

During his term as inaugural Chair of the Elizabeth Thorn Centre for Literacy at Nipissing University (2008-2012), we were fortunate to have David working with us on-campus at Nipissing University in North Bay (three hours North of his home-base in Toronto). I capitalized on opportunities to have him speak with teacher candidates in my B.Ed classes. First-hand observations of his work with teacher candidates in my classes (especially his engaging presentations with titles like, "Why is my blackberry sitting on this pile of books?"), our ongoing conversations about literacy

teaching and learning, and continuing not only to read David's work but also to write with him, have all made significant contributions to my developing pedagogy for literacy teacher education—and efforts to keep my practice current, rigorous and relevant. David's influence on our thinking about literacy for contemporary classrooms (as evidenced by his extensive record of publications and speaking engagements) and, more specifically, on my own work as a literacy teacher educator, becomes evident in explorations of my reflections over time. As someone who works hard to "walk the talk," I believe explorations of this nature may also offer students of teaching more appreciation of the vast potential inherent in a willingness to learn from our colleagues. Suffice to say, I continue to gain rich insights into my own thinking about redefining literacy and instruction from my colleague, friend and mentor, Dr. David Booth.

Reflections on Re-defining Literacy Instruction in Practice

The relationship of new technologies to the literacy development of young people is an increasingly significant aspect of language arts/literacy instruction in schools today. For example, understanding dispositions and attitudes toward reading and writing, choices of texts on-line and in print, and the power of technology to promote and encourage authentic inquiry, research and social action within and across different areas of the curriculum must all be part of literacy and instruction. What are the implications of "technology as literacy" for instructional practices today? Ideas shared in a conversation with David explore some of these implications: "McLuhan told us years ago that the medium is the message and as students explore issues through research with the Internet, we see both the truth of his statement and how youngsters are learning about how technology works as they learn how research works too. Students have to be concerned with the message, manage the literacies involved with the source, the content, the genre, the language, and the form of the onscreen code. Technological literacy - the ease of access to information, the data storage, the speed of revision, the formatting, the programs... all these support and enhance the work of student readers/writers/filmmakers in constructing meaning."

In my work with teacher candidates I continue to underscore the importance of appreciating the power of technology to promote and encourage research and social action within and across curriculum – we need to articulate this with and for our students. In other words, how do we convey the importance of contemporary critical literacy and empower teachers and students to take responsibility for their critical literacy lives?

How do teachers learn how to empower their students with reading and writing stamina and the ability to read both nonfiction and fiction in various genres, intensively and extensively, in print and on screen? And how do they approach teaching research skills and the construction of significant

written and visual compositions that also demonstrate careful revision and editing strategies? These are important questions for literacy teacher educators to reflect upon; they go to the heart of successfully supporting beginning teachers to develop instructional practice for contemporary classrooms.

Choosing Texts for Literacy Instruction in Contemporary Classrooms

We must ensure the selections available in schools and classrooms for both reading and writing represent relevance and authenticity in our students' lives, while opening up extensive opportunities to explore literature, information texts, and issues that deepen and broaden their life experiences. But where to start? And how do we get to know the kinds of selections that will resonate deeply with students in our classes? Advice I give to my teacher candidates about this includes.... "Just ask them!" Further support in this regard is found in one of David's recent resources, *Caught in the Middle* (2011). In this book, he shares information and insights from a writing project conducted with 35 middle school teachers who wrote about the literacy events in their classrooms they found most effective and rewarding for both students and their teachers. Frameworks to support the 35 teacher-writers and their experiences in creating significant literacy events with their students were created in the context of findings of researchers, educators and other writers. The resource presents a wide ranging and multifaceted collection of pieces from different classrooms filled with middle years students and thoughtful, articulate and professional teachers—providing many authentic samples teachers and teacher educators can work with as part of classroom literacy and instruction "re-defined".

With each text we select (and encourage our students to participate in selecting with us), teachers need to learn as much as possible about the backgrounds our students bring (Cambourne, 2002; 2001/2002; Bainbridge & Heydon, 2013), to talk with them and clarify the challenges they may meet; to support them as they explore the text, to offer them all the strategies that can expand their meaning making; to share their discoveries and puzzlements with the text, to build bridges toward more meaning making; and to use what they have discovered to add to their growing repertoire of how texts function. All of these considerations apply to everything children write, compose, create....

To address another important question, how do we best approach teaching research skills and encourage the construction of significant written and visual compositions - compositions that also demonstrate the use of careful revision and editing strategies? In my work with teacher candidates I frequently demonstrate the integration of very necessary and effective coaching in the hard work of writing (i.e., revising and editing processes) with equally vital support for crafting ideas in writing and sustaining the author's enthusiasm for conveying a message (i.e., ideas, information, creativity et al). When they are struggling (Wilhelm, 2014) with writing for their own purposes – e.g. completing a writing assignment – it is an ideal time to remind beginning teachers how their own students may struggle with their writing too. It is also very important we present assignments that model the

kinds of learning experiences we, as teacher educators, are advocating for students in 21C classrooms. For example, teacher candidates in my classes are currently engaged in preparing a major assignment that I became interested in after reading about another colleague's work (Peterson, 2013). It requires the completion of a "composition on a self-selected literacy topic in a genre of their own choice" and the rationale for this work is summarized in my course syllabus, as follows:

As a J/I teacher, you will need to understand the processes of teaching and assessing writing. This assignment will model processes of selecting a meaningful topic, extended periods of time to write, the importance of clear criteria, ongoing feedback on drafts of writing, and approaches to conferencing (e.g., how to support improvements in the quality of students' writing by providing students constructive feedback during completion of their writing projects, including expectations for revisions).

This assignment was devised as a result of my contacting Shelley (Peterson) and her willingness to share, "Thanks for your interest in my assignment. Here are the instructions I give to students. The scoring guide is one that I published in my book, *Writing across the Curriculum*, published by Portage & Main Press. (S. Stagg Peterson, Personal Communication, April 24, 2014). One important thing to note in the criteria I share with teacher candidates is that their composition can be in any chosen genre except a traditional paper or an essay:

You will begin the writing assignment in class and will be writing several drafts of your project. Your writing will be on any topic related to J/I literacy (broadly defined), written in a genre of your choice. For example, you may apply your knowledge of media and digital technology and write a handbook/website/newsletter/wiki/blog/PPT presentation for teachers or parents, or a Comic Life or Bit-strips generated graphic knowledge. You may use any genre and form to best achieve your purpose except an essay. There will be time for peer feedback and for consultation with me to support your writing. Please use APA style to reference readings used.

(excerpt from Syllabus, J/I Language Arts, 2014-2015, SEJ)

The very essence of this assignment enables me to enact authentic approaches to writing instruction consistent with broader definitions of 'what counts' as literacy in contemporary classrooms, while furthering teacher candidates' learning about literacy and instruction for the classrooms in which they will teach.

What 'Counts' as Literacy Today?

Definitions of "What Counts?" as literacy today continue to expand and educators may find it challenging at times to plan classroom instruction that reflects these broader definitions of literacy. We have, undoubtedly, redefined literacy in our contemporary world and it is critical that teachers understand this – and, in turn, understand how to plan for instruction. Literacy (and instruction) is no longer concerned only with the ability to read and write; rather, it is about making the most meaning possible with a particular text in the context of the reader's/writer's life. The texts we "read" have also changed to include printed texts, screen texts, graphics and visuals,

speeches and conversations, sound recordings, signs, icons and ads, and even include 'live' texts (e.g., dramatic or dance performances).

It is essential we teach research skills too—but understand these should also look a little different in contemporary classrooms. That is, along with more conventional research 'strategies', teachers need to include instruction that enables students to competently handle a wide variety of text forms. We must ensure we are teaching strategies for making meaning through content, structure, vocabulary, conventions, syntax, bias – and accomplish this by having students work with the many different texts and modalities they encounter in their lives. The more issues, structures and vocabulary they can experience and understand, the better students' chances of making sense of the texts they need to or want to read. Students' literacy learning that results from instructional practices like these will also serve them well across other areas of the curriculum – i.e., authentic literacy across the curriculum.

Another recurring strand in my thinking as a literacy teacher educator, and something I frequently talk about with colleagues (including David), concerns how we work to mobilize "school literacy" (or traditional literacy events and practices) beyond school settings and, just as importantly, how do we effectively incorporate the literacies of the community, both local and global literacies, within school settings?

Schools can have so much to offer students in helping them to acquire literacy strategies and skills that will strengthen their attempts at meaning making with all kinds of texts with which they may be familiar. Contemporary approaches to classroom literacy instruction are needed that thoughtfully expand and explore issues, resources, ideas and modalities, as well as instruction that explicitly offers frameworks/structures that can mediate what might be missed or ignored (e.g., conferencing with the teacher; students working as partners or in small groups).

We must also ensure the sharing of texts that students may have little or no awareness of, explicitly teaching them how to critically examine texts they may have taken for granted, reveal assumptions and biases that were invisible, and to become increasingly aware of the perceptions of others through research and conversation. In this way, as teachers, we can work collaboratively alongside our students, thus facilitating shared responsibility for honing their abilities as proficient readers and writers.

Advice for Beginning (and Experienced) Teachers

In a discussion about my work-in-process on this piece, I asked David what kinds of advice he might offer new teachers seeking greater understandings of redefining literacy and instruction for contemporary classrooms. Four main ideas he suggested were as follows:

1. Gather all the resources you can find—technological, print, image, sound. Seek them out! Suzanne has her all-boys grade seven class read the newspaper every morning for ten minutes, and each student follows one particular news story all week and reports his findings at the end of the week. Multi-

modal resources enhance instructional practice.

2. Teachers matter. How teachers feel about literacy and what they do to promote literacies, in classrooms and learning environments beyond classrooms, matters. We want to assist our students on the journey towards increasing their literacy levels and accomplishing self-confidence with as many different modes as possible. We grow increasingly proficient when we care about what we are reading and writing. Modeling purposeful literacy practices enhances instructional practice.

3. Students matter. We must not waste students' time with literacy material that has little or no impact on their lives; our job is to engage readers and writers in literacy events that are worthwhile in their eyes. Respect for students needs and interests enhances instructional practice.

4. Continue to ask questions. Whether a teacher or a teacher educator it is critical we continue to interrogate our own practice: e.g., How will I help my students to construct meaning with words and images so that their messages are clear and available to the reader/viewer/listener? Can they represent their thoughts and feelings? And how do I know? How will I continue to build passionate readers and writers who can fulfill the imperative of making meaning with the texts of their lives? Being and becoming a reflective practitioner enhances instructional practice.

Final Thoughts

"A Great Teacher Inspires." (Arthur William Ward)

In summary, Dr. David Booth is a truly outstanding literacy educator who continues to inspire teachers, students, administrators, parents, university teachers and researchers across Canada and across the globe. David's eloquent words of wisdom about redefining literacy and instruction for contemporary classrooms perpetually resonate in my own reflective practice as a teacher educator and researcher – and in the work of so many teacher candidates who will also become inspirational teachers. Thank you, David.

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Emergent Literacy and Cognition

Christopher Meidl

Introduction

Teaching children the act of thinking, also known as cerebration, is at the foundation of constructivist pedagogy. This research was designed to increase understanding of the intersection of cognition, language development, and pedagogy. The overarching question driving this study was: How does cognitive processing influence emergent literacy skills in toddlers? Two sub-questions to inform the overarching question were: 1) How is oral language development an indicator of cognitive processing? and 2) How do emergent-literacy teachers and parents provide stimulation to promote cerebration? The four pedagogical strategies utilized for the investigation of cerebration included questioning, problem solving, environmental stimulation, and communication.

Cognition in Young Children

The process of thinking is a hallmark of several theorists of childhood education and cognitive development (e.g., Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey). Constructivist theorists explain that children gain knowledge and skills from increasingly more complex experiences and environments rather than through stimulus designed for conditioning. Johnson and Johnson (2005) explained, "Speaking and writing are the productive processes of language through which we encode the meanings, experiences, or feelings that we want to express to others" (p. 695). Adults serve an integral role in language development, "Youngsters' acquisition of linguistic forms and rules grows out of their interactions with parents or caretakers. Under this theory [social- communicative theory] the caregiver and child play highly active roles in the development of language" (Johnson and Johnson, 2005, p. 699).

Infants demonstrate thinking as a process of learning. In describing Vygotsky's theory about the relationship between cognition and language, "The purpose drives what they learn" (Johnson and Johnson, 2005, p. 699). For instance, babies cry when they are hungry, wet, tired, or in need of human interaction. Jablon, Dombro, and Dichtelmiller (1999) discussed the need to closely observe young children in context to understand how they process information and tasks. Contextualizing what is being observed is necessary to understand prior knowledge and experiences when making sense of what children do and say. This means that, "Naturalistic settings such as home or a room equipped with toys, and with other children or adults present, are best for sampling children's spontaneous language" (Johnson and Johnson, 2005, p. 695).

While the environment provides context to develop schema, the brain itself is designed to develop cognitive processing and language development as part of a continuing process. Neurological research has shown that specific areas of the brain develop in the early years. Twardosz (2012) pointed out, "The individual's experiences with the environment play a critical role in continuing to form

connections among the billions of neurons produced during the prenatal period, particularly in the cerebral cortex" (p. 98). Sensorimotor function is controlled by the cortical and subcortical regions of the brain, so even at birth, cognition is vital to a child's functioning. Later, at about eight months, the frontal cortex begins to be more stimulated as infants learn to "regulate and express emotion, as well as to think and to plan" (Shore, 1997). As children's thinking becomes more advanced, adults are able to use materials and experiences to stimulate cognitive development. Twardosz (2012) explained:

Experience-expectant plasticity refers to the overproduction of synapses in specific areas of the brain at specific times, which are then organized and pruned by experiences that are expected or common to the human species, such as patterned light, sound, language, opportunities to move and manipulate objects, and responsive caregivers. (p. 98) The environment is important for brain and therefore cognitive development.

As children grow become toddlers, they start to learn to communicate verbally. Children learn through mimicking and through understanding how sounds, made by others and by themselves, are necessary to interact with the world. In the next stage, they start to use verbal and nonverbal language through increasingly advanced forms. As Scott-Phillips (2008) wrote,

Communicative behaviours do not simply come into being fully formed and functional but rather tend to emerge from non-communicative behaviours. There will, therefore, be instances where behaviours are in the process of becoming communicative but do not yet satisfy the definition of communication. (p. 394)

When sounds have meaning, thinking begins to be expressed with language. Johnson and Johnson (2005) noted, "Communicative competence is a term used to describe an array of language strategies appropriately used for different purposes in different situations" (p. 703). It is primarily through language and action, simultaneously, that adults scaffold learning. Rushton and Larkin (2001) made a compelling argument to connect developmentally appropriate practices to brain research, "Enriched environments increase dendritic branching and synaptic responses" (p. 28).

Higher Order Thinking, Pedagogy, and Language

A question that arises is: What do analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, the three highest levels of thinking according to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), look like in relation to the emergent-literacy development of children? Distinguishing between children's repetition of modeled behavior and their demonstrating cognition as a component of literacy is a difficult proposition. It is important that children are placed in environments where higher order thinking is developed (Geist & Hohn, 2009). This often occurs with a parent, teacher, caretaker, or other children communicating verbally

and non-verbally.

Higher order thinking has been linked to pedagogy since Bloom introduced it. As a teacher, I taught in two different school districts with different curricula, leading to different expectations of instructional techniques. When teaching emergent literacy skills in a prekindergarten classroom in Louisiana, HighScope curriculum was adopted at the state level for the preschool program. HighScope emphasized cognitive development, utilizing centers as the foundation of learning based on child-driven learning and peer interaction; also, small group and large group activities, and gross motor activities were part of the HighScope curriculum. Anecdotal notes were applied to a rubric and used for assessment. Academics and socialization were both assessed through the rubric (HighScope, 2009). The program was child-centered and stressed the idea of emergent literacy and cerebration, especially as a pre- and post-center learning strategy.

In contrast, while teaching pre-kindergarten and kindergarten in Texas, the curriculum and expectations for instructional techniques were teacher-centered and direct-instruction based. The notion was that if there wasn't direct teaching, rote learning, and "time on task," then the students weren't learning. The primary focus was on the memorization of "readiness" skills such as the alphabetic principal, number identification and counting, the colors, etc. These isolated kernels of knowledge lacked real meaning for the young children in my classroom. In trying to counter the "drill and kill" teaching culture, I incorporated many higher level thinking activities through student choice and student directed learning (e.g., free choice centers, exploratory science, small group story creation). With increased amounts of accountability in public schools, pedagogy in many school districts has become increasing more focused on rote learning at the expense of constructing meaningful knowledge and language development.

This reflection has led to the not so profound idea that students learned much more, academically and socially, while engaged in higher order thinking activities, especially in to literacy development. As a means to stimulate cognitive growth, the following categories evolved as personal approaches to incorporate higher order thinking into my pedagogy: questioning, problem solving, environmental stimulus, and language interaction (especially discussing cause and effect with children).

Methods

This research investigated how cognition and the act of thinking, focusing on verbal and non-verbal communication, is observed and understood in the development of emergent literacy. This qualitative research used a cross-comparative case study format to explore various aspects of how language development occurs during the early childhood years (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995). Johnson and Johnson (2005) reported that "Youngsters have been observed and recorded in naturalistic settings at home and at play. Researchers use the diaries kept by parents that document the words and sentences spoken by their child to understand language development" (p. 695). The methods of my research are observation based on time sampling and interviews (Wiersma,

2000). The subjects were a twenty-month old female toddler and a three-year old male, based on a convenient sample.

Wolcott (2001) explained that researchers interpret an environment from a subjective viewpoint; the methods for data collection in this study were predominantly observational field notes taken over 3 months as the children were interacting with various environmental learning materials (i.e., blocks, Wiggles videos, games, puzzles, toys, books, etc.). Anecdotal notes were taken throughout the day as the children interacted with the environment focused on the following questions: 1) What are the problems children face in the situation and how do they solve them? 2) What environmental materials and contexts promote children to think, to problem solve, and develop emergent literacy skills? and 3) How do children communicate and use/develop their own emerging language? Summaries of interaction were written during the subjects' naptime and at the end of the day.

Questioning was the primary tool used to elicit responses from the children. The practice of using questioning to promote thinking originates from the Socratic Method. The Socratic Method is defined as, "the pedagogical technique of asking leading questions to stimulate rational thinking and illuminate ideas" (Socratic Method, n.d.).

It was also necessary to see how problems and their solutions occur from a child's perspective. Problem solving, as defined by Krulik and Rudnik (1987) is the, "Means by which an individual uses previously acquired knowledge, skills, and understanding to satisfy the demands of an unfamiliar situation. The student must synthesize what he or she has learned, and apply it to a new and different situation" (p. 4). John Dewey framed inquiry and problem-based learning as a pedagogical approach in the early 1900s (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Dewey believed problem solving is part of the natural learning process.

Although a variety of environmental materials and contexts promote children to think, to problem solve, to be creative, and to develop language, a limited scope was used for this research. Gardner's (1990) theory of multiple intelligences guided much of the environmental design meant to foster a variety of contexts for cerebration. A variety of children's toys and other objects were intended to provide an opportunity for multiple intelligences to be displayed.

Vygotsky (2011) and Gardner (1990) advocated for language development as a form of cognition. It is also through language that children are most often taught higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In describing Vygotsky's theory, Fox and Riconscente (2008) wrote, "Children master the rules for directing their own attention, thought, and behavior and internalize this direction in the form of verbal self-stimuli" (p. 384). Observations and note taking occurred as a means to explore how and when children learn in relation to aspects of language including: sounds, words, phrases, and context.

There is one major threat of validity for this research on emergent literacy and cognition. This threat occurs as a result of the ethnographic methodology where the participant-observer includes the investigator's personal influence on the environment and activities designed to encourage cognition.

Creswell (1998) noted that as a participant-observer, “the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people” (p. 58).

Results

Results of data analysis are expressed through Yin’s (2003) “explanation building” (p. 120) and “time-series analysis” (p. 123). The explanation building technique provides a framework to describe how the children use cognition in relation to questioning, problem solving, environmental stimulation, and language/communication. The time-series analysis focuses on how children’s cognition and language development occurs over time.

Toddler

Johnson & Johnson (2005) explained, “There is a human predisposition to language learning, although this predisposition must be nurtured by ample oral interaction” (p. 701). As the intent of this research was to relate cognitive development with emergent literacy skills, the 20-month old toddler’s limited language proficiency made it difficult to elicit responses through verbal communication at the beginning of the study. As the study progressed, I observed increased cognitive processing emerge through oral language. The toddler began asking “why” questions in the correct context. For example, when the subject wanted to watch a Wiggles music video, I said, “No Wiggles.” In response, she looked up and asked, “Why?” I explained to her that she had already danced to it once that day. As that answer did not satisfy her, she continued with “why,” and questioned almost daily why do we do this or that. This emergent literacy skill of questioning follows along with Johnson and Johnson’s (2005) idea that, “Children have innate cognitive bases for language acquisition, the actual learning begins with functions that children want to express” (p. 699).

Most of the language expression from the toddler was made up of a few short words and phrases, with occasional sentences. With further development of oral language, the child began saying, “I want...” (e.g., bacon, a cookie, candy, milk). Using the correct language in specific contexts demonstrated thinking. When the subject said, “please,” “thank you,” “you’re welcome,” and “bless you” (after a sneeze), there was undoubtedly celebration when she applied verbal responses to fit the context. On one occasion, the toddler said, “I want horse” and pointed for the other adult present to get down on her hands and knees so the toddler could have a “horse back” ride. Giving directions shows that there is a thought of wanting to do something and then thinking through what needs to happen in order for that activity to occur. This aligns with Johnson and Johnson’s (2005) work when they described “syntactic production and comprehension” leading to longer sentences in which “their communication intentions expand” (p. 697).

Most of the subject’s problem solving occurred as she explored her physical environment. Opening the cabinets and turning knobs were frequent examples of where the subject deployed problem-solving skills. She would draw on white boards, notebooks, paper, walls, and books. Tools for drawing included permanent markers, pencils, pens, chalk, crayons, and colored pencils. Most of the subject’s drawings were lines

going back and forth in a scribbling sense with occasional circle-like forms. But when asked what she was doing in her “writing” or “drawing,” she would answer, “I don’t know.” Without explicit communication, it was difficult to figure out whether she was just scribbling or thinking about something or somebody and drawing.

While the toddler interacted with multiple materials in a variety of ways, it was difficult to understand how she was thinking because language was limited. It was challenging to gather data on her cognitive processing and emergent literacy because she didn’t speak as she explored the materials.

Preschooler

The preschooler was 3½ years old and provided more data points. When the subject was asked to produce questions, he appeared uncomfortable. Questions such as “how,” “why,” and “what” were modeled for him and he would repeat, but he would have a hard time making up his own questions. The subject was asked, “Why do we eat?” and “How do you tie your shoes?” When he was asked, “Who is your favorite Wiggle?,” he replied, “Murray.” I said, “Why?” His response was, “I don’t know.” I tried to scaffold a response that eventually led to the understanding that “Murray” plays a guitar, which the researcher knew was the child’s reason because the subject played the “air guitar.” Later in the investigation, the subject began to ask some questions with “why.” “Why do you write?” he asked after seeing me write a message. The preschooler did not pick up questioning right away, but over time he began to use questions to make sense of things he didn’t understand.

New vocabulary words were added to the subject’s language expressiveness, indicating he was extending his thinking with language. He would talk about musical instruments such as the bass or the flute. “Spiderman, spiders, and webs” were discussed with great enthusiasm. His natural use of language to express his cognition occurred as he responded to questions about evening and weekend activities and demonstrated his thoughts about various events.

He used problem solving in a similar way as the toddler when making sense of and exploring the physical environment. For the preschooler, it was not figuring out what different things “did” but rather his frustration when things did not operate like he knew they should. When he was unable to get his jacket on and needed help he became frustrated, but did not ask for help. As the caretaker I recognized he needed help and asked if he would like help, to which he said “Yes.” On one occasion, the preschooler demonstrated problem solving when he wanted to play with the tricycle as described in the following note:

Getting the working tricycle out from its parking spot proved a little difficult. The wheels were tangled up with the other broken tricycle’s wheels. He couldn’t just roll it back and out of the parking space in the living room. He went back to where the wheels were tangled up and pushed the tricycle that was working back and moved the wheel over so that it wouldn’t catch when he moved it back out.

With some oral guidance, I suggested he think about

trying something different than just pulling the bicycle back. Success came after rethinking what was preventing the tricycle from moving forward. At times, a child needs a verbal cue from an adult to rethink what he or she is doing. Drawings became a natural conduit to understand how he expressed his thoughts with language. After drawing a picture, he said, "That's Mommy. And that's Daddy." And when I pressed with, "What are they doing?" he said, "They are cooking." Identifying his cerebation was easiest to understand when he verbally responded to verbal and nonverbal communication.

The last area that the preschooler was very active in was interacting with environmental stimuli. He played with everything, but was especially fond of musical instruments. As one note explained, "He played on the keyboard, banged the drums, and blew in the flute." To stimulate oral language development, we would sing songs and nursery rhymes to the beats and sounds of his playing. His use of the different musical keys seemed very intentional at times. Another note described, "He appeared purposeful in his planning of designing and building a castle with the blocks." This behavior demonstrated cerebation because purposefulness is a clear demonstration of thinking.

Discussion

This research set out to explore how cerebation manifests itself through emergent literacy development in young children, but within that goal some problems emerged. Observing cerebation is a difficult task, especially when studying children who do not communicate verbally or who are still developing competence using verbal communication. The preschooler, due to the more advanced language development, exhibited a greater link of language and actions with cognition. Interpreting actions of young children requires the intuitiveness that comes from interacting with those children on a daily basis. This allows one to gain insight into their verbal and non-verbal communication and cognitive processing.

The toddler spent a lot of time manipulating objects and trying to figure them out. She and the preschooler spent most of their problem solving with physical attributes. There was a lot of pushing and pulling of things (mostly toys) with wheels. The toddler had not mastered all the physical parts of her environment yet, whereas the preschooler, for the most part, demonstrated that he had a firm understanding of how to manipulate the objects in his environment. The toddler predominantly used non-verbal communication to gain support in order to successfully move around or gain an object. Gestures like pointing and using her eyes to indicate wants were primary ways she expressed her thoughts.

The thinking processes of the toddler were more difficult to observe. A key missing piece was not being able to have explicit and in-depth dialogue, through descriptive vocabulary, with a child that directly explains her thoughts. The lack of language development prevented the sharing of the cognitive part of some behaviors. Without the child's input, one can only speculate at best.

The teaching of questioning is a pedagogical approach that must be developed like any other learning strategy. The foundation for learning to ask questions begins

with learning to answer questions. In my observations, I noted that when a subject started to ask questions, they were often trivial questions, and the subject's interest in the answers was slight. As young children are rooted in primarily concrete thinking, questioning beyond the clearly answerable might be beyond what many children are cognitively capable. "Why" is an important question young children ask. Adults must encourage this questioning and help children learn to expand this questioning style. An important part of questioning as cerebation is for children to learn to question as much as to answer questions.

Communication, verbal and nonverbal, needs to be encouraged both in the home and schools as a means to articulate children's ability to think. The acquisition of new vocabulary shows cognition, especially when used in context. Most importantly, until certain levels of language occur, it is difficult to identify cognitive processes. Verbal and nonverbal communication are necessary to understanding how children think.

Problem solving is most relevant to understanding physical objects for young children. "Teachable moments" are the most prevalent ways teachers of early learners can advance problem-solving abilities. An environment that is engaging encourages communication, interaction, and "teachable moments." This researcher observed that a stimulating environment establishes both natural learning and the opportunity for direct instruction of skills and cerebation.

Conclusion

Vygotsky wrote, "Education should pose the higher demands (for mental development) and should be based on currently developing rather than already matured functions" (Kozulin, trans. 2011, p. 207). Verbal communication is vital to validating thinking, especially higher order thinking. To create learning environments where verbal communication and cerebation thrives, classroom teachers must be allowed to implement multiple higher order thinking strategies that can become successful pedagogical tools.

This research has pointed to the realization that observations of cognition is at best speculative. Toddlers are at the beginning stages of communication, and therefore the depth of that communication is limited. This makes observing and discussing intentionality difficult. The research led to the conclusion that intentionality is one of the most important elements of observing cognition. Without a certain level of intentionality, it is hard to validate actions as having a cognitive element. There are signs that providing an interactive, dialogue-rich environment leads to communication skills and cognitive processing for intellectual growth. This concept of an interactive dialogue coordinates with Roberts and Burchinal's (2001) notion that, "Language development is believed to be enhanced in child-care settings in which caregivers speak frequently to children, ask open-ended questions, use decontextualized language, and scaffold interactions to match the developmental level of the child" (p. 237).

The preschool years are the first time when assessment of cognition becomes more explicit. Children have the language skills to show intentionality. This is where the difference between preschoolers and toddlers is clearly evident.

Preschoolers are able to describe intentionality whereas many times toddlers are unable to do so. Preschoolers, at times, are able to think through their own questioning and expressions which demonstrates cerebration.

Results of the study indicate there is clearly a connection between cognition, language development, and pedagogical approaches. Pedagogical approaches designed to increase the cerebration processes of young children directly impact the emergent literacy skills of children. Children are able to learn to questioning, problem solving, environmental stimulation, and communication over time and in context. Toddlers begin to use some forms of verbal communication but still demonstrate most of their thinking nonverbally. Preschoolers use language very functionally and have greater depth of emergent literacy skills (e.g., vocabulary, symbolic representation), which allows emergent-literacy teachers to apply pedagogical approaches that enhance children's ability to think. Literacy skills are vital to understanding the cognitive processes of children, and like everything else, require interactions designed to develop thinking skills.

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BOOK REVIEW

Close Reading in Elementary School: Bringing Readers and Texts Together

Authors: Diana Sisson and Betsy Sisson. (Routledge, 2014, ISBN: 978-0-415-74614-4)

Reviewer: Mary-Jo Morse

About the Authors:

Betsy Sisson and Diana Sisson each hold Educational Doctorates in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. The sisters are certified literacy specialists and own Sisson & Sisson Educational Consulting Services, LLC, which focuses on providing professional development and school improvement support. In addition to their consulting business, Diana and Betsy are adjunct professors at the University of Saint Joseph and Central Connecticut State University where they teach undergraduate and graduate courses in literacy, special education, and educational research.

Close Reading in the Elementary School

One of the recurring themes in the implementation of the CCSS in the Elementary ELA is the need for students to be able to engage in close reading of complex texts, both fiction and nonfiction. As other authors (Brock et al., 2014; Fisher & Frey, 2012) have indicated, implementing close reading lessons especially with nonfiction disciplinary texts, has presented several challenges for typical classroom teachers. The primary challenge rests in the here-to-fore lack of research and resources to support teachers in understanding not only what close reading entails, but also how to effectively design engaging and motivating close reading instruction for their elementary students. As a literacy educator, I am always on the look-out for new texts that will serve as touch-stone reference texts to help both my undergraduate and graduate students gain the support that they will need to develop the strong close reading instructional skills that the CCSS now requires of all teachers.

Close Reading in Elementary School: Bringing Readers and Texts Together by Betsy Sisson and Diana Sisson (2014), is a teacher friendly and accessible text that with its design and layout also makes it a perfect choice for use in a professional learning community or professional development setting. At the conclusion of each chapter, the authors have included a succinct summary of the chapter's main points as well as a series of self-reflection questions to be used for book study discussions, professional development groups, or self-evaluation of one's own understanding of the information provided.

Close Reading in Elementary School: Bringing Readers and Texts Together has 171 pages of running text

broken into eight chapters spread across three parts: Part I: "Understanding Close Reading" (chapters 1 & 2); Part II of the text: "Close Reading in the Classroom" (chapters 3 to 6); and Part III: "Linking Close Reading with Close Talks and Close Writes" (chapters 7 & 8). In Part I: "Understanding Close Reading" (chapters 1 & 2): the authors do an outstanding job of laying the groundwork for the importance of the information to follow in the last two sections. Sisson & Sisson provide the reader with the necessary background information explaining text complexity as well as the multitude of factors (qualitative, quantitative, and reader factors) that impact a text's complexity. This information is meant to assist the reader in not only determining a text's complexity, but to also provide the reader with a fuller understanding of the need for close reading strategies while using complex texts during their instruction designed to meet the expectations of the CCSS. Additionally, this initial section also provides the historical background of close reading thereby making it clear to new teachers as well as experienced teachers that close reading is not something that came into being with the development of the Common Core State Standards, but was in actuality introduced in the 1940s during the educational movement referred to as New Criticism.

Where Part I lays the important ground work, Part II of the text: "Close Reading in the Classroom" (chapters 3 to 6) is really the meat and heart of the text. It is the core around which the remaining parts of the text are built. It is within these 94 pages that the authors lay out and explain in considerable detail the 10 step structure of what they refer to as the Close Reading Framework, here-to-fore referred to as CRF, which in a nutshell has the following sequential components: 1) Choose the text, 2) determine purpose for reading, 3) choose a Close Reading Framework Model (provided and explained by the authors), 4) decide how students will initially interact with the text, 5) complete first textual interaction and provide students with task/question, 6) student discussion, 7) complete second textual interaction and task/questions, 8) student discussion, 9) complete third textual interaction and task/question, and 10) student discussion. Once Sisson & Sisson have presented their Close Reading Framework (here after referred to as CRF), it becomes apparent that the authors have considerable experience assisting teachers in meeting the close reading demands of the CCSS for ELA. The CRF becomes the springboard for CFR Models that cover teaching close reading in the genres associated with fictional literature (9 models presented), informational text

genres (6 models presented), as well as CRF models that are intended to assist teachers in helping their students meet the expectations of each of the CCSS Anchor Standards (13 models provided). Additionally, an entire chapter is relegated to CRF Models that are designed to help teachers move students deeper into levels of comprehension as delineated by Bloom's taxonomy and/or Webb's Depth of Knowledge Levels. In all cases, the CRF models are not presented as stand-alone reproducibles, rather each model is preceded by an in-depth explanation by the authors of critical background information associated with the topic of the model (e.g., descriptions of specific literary and informational genres, descriptions and explanations of specific CCSS Anchor Standards, and background information regarding both Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge Scales). Moreover, the authors' time spent working with teachers and students come shining through as the authors bring to the forefront the challenges that students face in reading, writing, and speaking about specific components in the typical ELA curriculum as connected with genre studies, expectations of the CCSS Anchor Standards, as well as the increasing cognitive demands of meeting the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. At every turn of the page in this section, the authors not only bring to light the issues students may experience with the specific CRF Models, but then offer support to the teacher by providing examples of scaffolded practices in each area. This portion of the text alone makes this resource an extremely useful book to have in one's professional library.

In Part III - "Linking Close Reading with Close Talks and Close Writes" (chapters 7 & 8), the authors help the reader make the critical connections between reading, writing and speaking. Chapter 7, "Using Close Talks to Deepen Understanding," provides the reader with an historic backdrop to the use of talk as learning via a discussion of Socrates and the various Socratic methods used to promote understanding. The authors provide a model framework for linking a close read lesson followed by a close talking session. As an additional resource the authors provide a table of question stems to help teachers begin to frame their questions to move from the literal to more evaluative and critical as is required by the CCSS standards for ELA K-5.

Whereas Chapter 7 focused on the use of talk as a follow-up to a close reading lesson, Chapter 8 focuses on writing. The framework is thoroughly explained, and the chapter includes fourteen model close writing frameworks for teachers to follow and utilize to engage students in post-close reading writing of the various types of texts such as narratives, expository, compare-contrast, opinion pieces, and argumentative texts, to name a few of the model frameworks supplied by the authors.

It is clear from the outset that this text is written by two reading consultants who have spent considerable time assisting teachers and observing in classrooms. It is packed full of useful resource information for the beginning teacher and veteran teacher alike, and as written is an excellent text for the teacher who may need support in developing and designing effective close reading lessons of complex texts as required for meeting the expectations of the Common

Core State Standards. If I have one criticism of the text, it is the over-whelming number of model frameworks that the authors provide. Regrettably, it may give the impression that conducting close reading, close talking and close writing lessons is like following a recipe. The reader needs to keep in mind that these frameworks are one of many recipes for conducting close reading lessons. On the other hand, the benefit of these multiple frameworks is that sometimes we all need a starting place and a model to follow when the way is not clear or familiar. For many elementary school teachers, implementing the CCSS through effective close reading lesson implementation is uncharted territory and outside of some teachers' comfort zone. For teachers for whom designing and implementing close reading lessons is a new addition to their teaching practice, then *Close Reading in Elementary School: Bringing Readers and Texts Together* is an excellent guide and resource that will provide the support necessary to make designing effective close reading lessons a less daunting and more fulfilling experience for both teachers and their students.

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