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ABSTRACT

A case study showed how a third-year teacher modified the socialized culture of literature-based literacy instruction she found in her second-grade classroom and teacher education program to reach particular children who were having difficulty learning to read and write. Aaron, the subject of the case study, was a second-grade African-American student who could neither read nor write at the beginning of the study. At the start of the school year, the teacher incorporated a program for systematic, whole-class phonics/spelling instruction. She insisted that the children take responsibility for their own learning, for sharing their knowledge with others in cooperative tasks, for resolving conflicts, and for organizing and helping her run the classroom. Still, Aaron's "voice" could not be heard in the classroom. As a result of discussion with peers, the teacher included supplemental systematic instruction in linguistic analyses and phonemic awareness, in groups small enough to command teacher attention to individual children. At the end of the year, Aaron was promoted to the third grade, saw himself as successful, was anxious to tackle new material, felt his depression lifted, experienced less conflictive situations with his peers, and was able to read and write full, large letters and stories. Findings suggest that, regardless of socialized norms, the ethics of teaching require providing all children with the means of accessing literature independently. (Two tables are included; 21 references are attached.) (RS)

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Abstract

This is the story of Aaron, a second-grade African-American student, and his teacher, Leslie Minarik. Leslie, in her third year of teaching, is concerned because Aaron's strong voice cannot fully join his second-grade class: He cannot read and write. The story details Leslie's learning to go beyond socialized norms for teaching literacy to create a happy ending for Aaron's story.

LISTENING FOR AARON: A TEACHER'S STORY ABOUT MODIFYING A LITERATURE-BASED APPROACH TO LITERACY TO ACCOMMODATE A YOUNG MALE'S VOICE[1]

Sandra Hollingsworth with Leslie Minarik and Karen Teel[2]

I first noticed Aaron with his right cheek resting on a slightly crumpled piece of writing paper atop his desk, the stub of his pencil--gripped between two fingers of his left hand--was poised slightly above the three illegible letters he had printed a few minutes before. Suddenly he stood up, reversed the pencil and, his whole body arching over the paper, began rubbing out the letters (and the paper) until the desk was visible below. With a frown and an audible sigh and dropping of his eight-year-old shoulders, he pushed his first draft inside his desk, ran to his teacher--Leslie Minarik--and asked for another sheet of paper. Then Aaron began again. By the time my visit ended, he had added three new paper wads to his inner-desk collection.

The next time I came to visit Aaron's room, I noticed his participation in a choral reading of a class-composed story. The text was based on a familiar piece of children's literature and punctuated with a predictable refrain. Leslie used many such patterned activities in her language lessons. While other children were joining in the increasingly familiar chorus, Aaron was mouthing different and disjointed words, eyes fixed on the ceiling, but face knowingly directed toward the chart. If my attention had not been drawn to him earlier, I might have mistaken his behavior for reading.

On my third visit, Leslie asked me to sit and observe Aaron even more closely. His deep brown eyes questioned my presence at first, but soon we shared smiles and stories. I noted his vast oral knowledge on the Christmas theme the class was discussing through literature. I also

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[1]This paper was originally presented at the annual meeting of the International Reading Association, Atlanta, May 1990.

[2]Sandra Hollingsworth, an assistant professor of teacher education at Michigan State University, is a senior researcher with the Institute for Research on Teaching, working on the Students' Response to Literature Instruction Project. Leslie Minarik is a second-grade teacher at Highland Elementary School in Richmond, California. Karen Teel is a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, and a seventh-grade teacher at Portala Middle School in Richmond.

noted his skillful search for "Christmas" words listed both randomly and in sentences on hanging charts. He wanted to copy some of these words and "make a story." "I need 'reindeer,'" he said thoughtfully, standing by his chair for a better view as he scanned the walls. "Is that it?" His outstretched arm and fingers pointed toward "candy." "What's the first *sound* of [the word] *reindeer*?" My "reading teacher" stance became visible in the cue. Aaron shrugged his t-shirted shoulders. "D," he guessed, confusing the name of the letter with its sound. I gave him a hug (as one new friend to another) and helped him finish his work. (Fieldnotes, summary, 12/6/89, p. 7)

Leslie was beginning to have serious concerns about Aaron's failure to learn to read and write despite her efforts to engage him in a rich and full literature-based, process-writing classroom environment. In fact, she was worried about a dozen kids like Aaron in her classroom--males for the most part, but including some females--from various ethnic groups: African-American, Caucasian, Hispanic, and Filipino. Leslie primarily taught students to access literacy by attending to the processes of literacy such as emphasizing meaning, accepting meaningful errors, encouraging student responsibility for learning, using evaluation as feedback for learners, and integrating all of the language arts into literature lessons (Watson, 1990). In her third year of teaching, Leslie sensed something more was needed. She echoed Harste's (1990) suggestion that a holistic approach to literacy is more than just the integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The approach "is essentially a theory of voice that operates on the premise that all students must be heard" (p. 245). Aaron's voice--although he was working with familiar language in a collaborative classroom setting, chanting along to familiar rhymes, and "reading" his own words to classroom partners--was not heard strongly enough. To understand how Leslie listened and accommodated her lessons for Aaron's voice, it is necessary to look into her own story and how we recorded it.

Methodological Background

Leslie has been talking to me, Sam Hollingsworth--and to Karen Teel, a doctoral student and research assistant--about her learning to teach since she began her graduate-level credential program in 1986 at the University of California, Berkeley. Leslie, Karen, 27 other elementary

and secondary teachers (the latter in math and science), and I were supported by the U.S. Department of Education (Office of Educational Research and Improvement) to document beginning teachers' learning about literacy instruction (see Hollingsworth, 1989). After graduation, eight teachers, roughly representative of the whole group, decided to continue our research and mutual support. Karen and I have visited teachers' classrooms twice a month, collecting data in the form of running narratives of reading and writing lessons, videotapes, audiotaped interviews, teachers' written summaries, and periodic collection of target students' work. We also met once a month in a social setting to talk about learning to teach. Those conversations (collaborative meetings) were taped and transcribed; they became rich sources of information about finding voice.

Because Leslie and the other teachers used the data and analyses to improve their work, data were coded and summarized as we went along using a constant comparison method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Case and cross-case summaries were prepared on subtheme analyses. This paper is an example: It is intended to show how Leslie modified the socialized culture of literacy instruction she found in her school and teacher education program to reach particular children--like Aaron--who were having difficulty learning to read and write.

Leslie's Socialization to Literacy Instruction

Leslie had believed in creating a literature-based approach to reading and writing even before she began her classroom career. The data that Karen and I had collected during her student teaching experiences showed that Leslie had come to value the use of literature discussions and experientially based process writing as motivational means to literacy and subject matter knowledge. Karen summarized Leslie's views from an interview transcript near the end of her student teaching program:

> Leslie thinks that writing should always be tied in with the reading assignment. She says that writing is a great reading comprehension assessment tool. . . . As far as reading materials are concerned, Leslie is definitely in favor of a literature-based . . . program. She . . . thinks literature, like the [books] her cooperating teacher is using, are excellent. . . . She believes in an integrated approach and would tie in the reading materials with the social studies units wherever possible. (KT: 5/18/87, pp. 2-3)

To further convince Leslie of the value of this instructional approach, most of her experiences before graduation were in classes of students who *could* read and write, but who were sometimes *reluctant* to do so. Reading literature and writing about stories they'd experienced seemed to help motivate them. Leslie commented to Karen about what she saw in those classrooms:

> It was quite amazing . . . the students were anxious to read! . . . It was remarked [by the teacher whose class I visited] that there had been a great change in enthusiasm for reading when one group, who had used a basal, was put into a literature program. (KT: 5/18/87, p. 3)

The summer following graduation, Leslie prepared for her first teaching assignment in fifth grade. She assembled literature and expository texts (from her experiences in sixth-grade social studies) and created lessons from the textual selections. However, she was forced to make new plans at the last minute. She wrote about the experience.

> I found out the week before school started that I was now to teach 2nd grade. . . . They handed me a key and pointed me towards the room. The previous teacher had left all her materials in the room in disorder. I spent the first three days cleaning out cupboards and scrubbing. I eventually got the room squared away.
>
> Then I began to look for books. I realized I had no idea of what the second grade curriculum was. No one had ever mentioned this much less gone over it or given me a handout. What I found were basal readers, grammar books, and spelling books. There seemed to be no other books in which to build my print rich environment. There were no literature books to use for my reading program.
>
> Despite my feelings about basals, there was pressure to use them as they were the district-adopted program and there didn't seem to be anything else readily available. One advantage to the basal, in the beginning, was that the teacher's manual did outline the skills that second graders were to cover. It was a start. . . .
>
> Soon the basal became noticeably boring for the children and for me. The stories seemed unrelated to the children's natural interests or backgrounds. . . . At this point, about halfway through the year, I decided to take a step in developing my own "reading curriculum" [in place of] the district's. This change was strongly influenced by 1) the reading model referred to in my teacher education program; 2) a very supportive and knowledgeable staff who shared and encouraged me to venture away from the district's policy; and 3) my own strong sense from watching the children that they needed something else. The reading model that I have mentioned probably was so strongly internalized because it correlated with my own personal views of how one should interact with text. (Minarik, 1990, pp. 1-3)

As a professor who taught Leslie in her credential program, I also agreed with the motivating factor and theoretical grounds for using literature and experienced-based writing as a basis for learning to read and write. I also believed in the constructivist stance and potential for academic freedom a literature approach provided teachers for creating their own instructional lessons. But I

cautioned them about adopting this approach as defined and practiced in many Bay Area schools. When visiting Leslie and her peers in their student teaching classrooms, I sometimes noticed children who were not reading and writing and who were silent during whole-class literature discussions. I observed that they were girls and boys of every cultural background--children who demonstrated strong voices and presence in other settings, but who seemed to be almost invisible in this one. The *clearest* contrast between the rich, full voices I heard during recess and the silence during reading lessons occurred with the young African-American males--like Aaron. I learned that cooperating teachers often reconciled the silent voices with the process approach underlying literature-based instruction. It was "O.K."--they told me--that these students weren't reading because they were getting the meaning of the story by listening to the other students' discussions. They were achieving the purpose of reading: to understand the meaning of the text--not to decode.

So, theoretically at least, teachers believed all was well. The literacy approach encompassing the use of literature and process writing was further translated in practice to mean that--with enough exposure to "natural" reading and writing activities--even the children who were reluctant to do so would eventually acquire written literacy. The teachers were philosophically opposed to grouping children by ability or giving those who were struggling with print easier reading materials or alternative approaches to literacy; they were fearful of the stigmatizing effects of such instructional procedures.

Because of her concern for children not doing well and her personal experiences and beliefs about reading, Leslie moved away from the basal during her first year and found other teachers in her building who were using literature. She explained her instructional changes to Karen:

> I've been using a "big book" called a *House is a House*. It's great to find some wonderful, fanciful books that can be adapted to language instruction. The problem with a big book, and I had never used one before. . . . Well the ESL teacher just got them in and she was sharing them with everybody and she uses them really well with small groups, and I was working with a whole group. This meant that anyone who manages to get in the middle can see fine, the others on the periphery have to just rely on the repetition of the words. That's not reading. Obviously I think I would have done better to use smaller groups. But I'm really getting so that I really enjoy big group work. I think part of it is for selfish reasons. It's just so much easier for me to do projects with the whole class--as recommended for regular classroom teachers. Then I'm doing fewer lesson plans and I have more control, it's

less draining, and I don't have remember which group is in which book when I do an extension project. It's just a lot nicer. The whole class gets a momentum when they work on something together. I think an alternative might be to copy the text into a computer and print a copy for each child. Maybe then we can use the big book for the pictures and the printout for the reading. I've been doing that with some other things. I've got three pieces now that I've transferred to computer and have used for language manipulation.

Karen: What do you mean by language manipulation?

Leslie: Well, I took *The Big Tidy Up* and I dropped words out. Then we would read it with the blanks and the children would become the authors and fill in the words. Then as a group they would share the words they'd come up with and then decide as a group which words they liked best. The second aspect never did work very successfully. [The young children usually voted for the most popular word instead of their own favorites.] But everyone came up with something. The idea was learning which words would make sense in the context. They were really successful with that part. In other stories I had them anticipate what the characters were going to say, or have it stop and have them write what happened next.

Karen: Did these ideas on manipulating language come from a teachers manual, or . . . ?

Leslie: No, they came from Sam [Hollingsworth in the teacher education program] pretty much. It's pretty amazing that the basic sort of philosophy that she presented really stuck with me, and I feel really comfortable with it now. (LM: 10/25/88, p. 7)

By the beginning her her second year, Leslie was integrating familiar songs, sign language, drama, and poetry into the reading and writing experiences. She modified the whole class norm to include time and structure for individually listening to taped books, writing with partners in journals, participating in variously composed readers' theaters, conducting small-group research projects, and composing class books. During most of her classroom language interactions, though, Leslie and her students worked in a whole-class format--for both philosophical and organizational reasons. Leslie was satisfied with her literacy program:

> I was feeling confident that my search had ended. I had found the "best way" to teach reading. Next year I would expand my material and refine my skills. I felt happy that my new discovery appealed to my holistic view of how one should teach skills and that it supported the reading model mentioned in the teaching education program. It felt good to me. Obviously, my assessment skills at this point were rather weak. If the children were on task, in other words engaged in reading and seeming happy, it felt comfortable. (Minarik, 1990, p. 3)

Refining the Literacy Approach for Specific Students

While she focused on developing literacy structures and activities, Leslie's attention to individual students' performances in those activities was necessarily lessened. (See related studies

of cognitive attention, such as LaBerge & Samuels, 1974, or Leinhardt & Greeno, 1983, and early studies on Leslie's peer group as student teachers in Hollingsworth, 1989). Once her own program was confidently in place, the topic of students as a theme in our data on Leslie's learning took prominence. Here she began to notice some dissonance in the literature program philosophy and the children's various performances.

Though the instructional approach to literacy was familiar to Leslie because of her own background and her preservice teacher education experiences, the school where she taught was unlike those she had visited while student teaching and also unlike her own middle-class Caucasian school experiences. She described her class to Karen in her second year of teaching:

> I think they're the best bunch in the whole school, I'm scared I'll never get such a good group again. They're really enthusiastic about learning. They want to know about everything. . . . They say "Oh, we get to do our journals today! Oh, it's spelling today! Oh, great!, It's math time!" They just love to discuss. . . . Most of them live in drug-selling neighborhoods where life is chaotic. . . . They're so dear. They really take care of each other. . . . They really need a stable environment at school where the rules are really clear. I have to understand individual cases and make sure my rules, like tardy rules, are benefitting kids, not hurting them. . . . I had one little girl whose mom was always on drugs and [the child] used to try to wake her mom up in the morning to tell her she needed to go to school--but she couldn't get her mom going. The mother ended up in jail.
>
> I like teaching. I would much rather work here than [the school where I student taught] with those gifted children. They all know everything. The teacher was semi-irrelevant. (LM: 4/18/89, pp. 16-17)

Aaron and her other students in her third year were part of a school community composed primarily of Black, Hispanic, and Filipino children. Aaron, like many of his peers, did not live with both parents, nor did he have an abundance of economic resources, but he was well cared-for. He lived with his mother--who worked evenings so that she could spend more time with Aaron and her other children--a teen-age brother who helped support the family by working part time, and a teen-age sister who helped him with his schoolwork. He was brought to school by a babysitter who was *not* related to him but commented to Leslie frequently about his lack of intelligence (compared to her own children).

Leslie did *not* agree. She found Aaron to be wise, capable, and a good problem solver. He could comprehend oral information and describe what he knew quite well verbally. He simply had a hard time with printed text:

> He is actually quite bright, very verbal, and has good auditory skills. So bright, in fact, that he compares himself to what other students are doing in the classroom and then he becomes more depressed when he sees other kids around him being able to handle the text fairly easily. (KT: 4/6/90, p. 1)

I supported Leslie's assessment. Aaron *was* bright. He did listen to what was going on and could repeat, paraphrase, analyze, and discuss verbally. He could talk about what he wanted to write. On my third visit to his class, he decided to write a "Christmas story about Santa bringing candy canes and toys to my house." His small body moved in happy anticipation as he told me his plan. And then he changed postures when it was time to begin the work. His eyes dulled and he became visibly frustrated, shaking his dark curls and looking around the room for cues. When I probed for the source of his frustration, I learned, among other things, that he didn't know whether "candy canes" was one word or two, began with a "c" or a "d" or an "n." Later, provided the words, he had trouble reading back his own cramped written version of the story. I learned that this was not an isolated occasion. Aaron's bright eyes were often sad. Leslie talked to Karen about his first semester of second grade:

> Well . . . he didn't read. . . . I think he had more skills than he thought he had, but because he was so depressed and his esteem was so low, I think he just didn't try. He didn't make any effort. So I think he pretty much decided that he couldn't read. (LM: 4/6/90, p. 1)

Leslie didn't blame Aaron or the other boys and girls who seemed frozen in classroom time. In a previous interview, Leslie had reflected on possible instructional reasons for nonreaders' low self-esteem.

> Leslie: In a large, whole-class group, [the nonreaders] were very frustrated, very unhappy. Their attention span was really limited.
>
> Karen: They were totally lost?
>
> Leslie: Yes!
>
> Karen: Wow! and [its those kids] who get labeled *learning disabled*. . .

> Leslie: And they're rarely on task and they rarely finish anything because they're never really involved, and you can't successfully call on them because they can't independently answer anything. You can tell them over and over again to pay attention, but what good is paying attention when they don't have a clue as to what's going on. [The whole-class program] was very unsuccessful [for those children]. (LM: 12/14/89, p. 22)

Leslie's Critical Perspective

In addition to a basic belief in literature-based instruction, Leslie also had a philosophy and a history of doing whatever was necessary to support children instead of standard requirements:

> It really bothers me when kids come in thinking that they're dumb or knowing that they can't read. They get so "blocked" on different subjects. They just stop and give up. It's not the whole class but almost a dozen, which is too many. They just don't feel real good about themselves. . . . The preponderance of what I see is that they underestimate themselves. We don't do a lot to empower kids. We don't let them loose. (LM: 2/23/90, pp. 3-5)

In an effort to give Aaron and his nonreading peers additional opportunities to add their voices to the literature discussions and to share their broad knowledge in their print interactions, Leslie went beyond the currently popular or socialized norms for "natural" learning (Cambourne & Turbill, 1990). She had children reread stories a second and third time. She also incorporated a program for systematic, whole-class phonics/spelling instruction she had learned at an inservice workshop in previous years. Using a commercial program, Leslie had the whole class take dictation from words composed of patterned suffixes, such as -ing, -ong, -ung. The children then checked their responses with partners and wrote the words in "scratch books."

In addition to those modifications, Leslie continued a cooperative theme in the social organization of her classroom. She insisted that the children take responsibility for their own learning, for sharing their knowledge with others in cooperative tasks, for resolving conflicts, and for organizing and helping her run the classroom. I noticed some of the Asian girls checking in library books and returning them to the library. I saw Filipino, Hispanic, and Caucasian boys and girls in various conflict-resolving roles. The cooperative rather than competitive atmosphere seemed especially relevant for her children of color.

On a spring visit to Leslie's room, I saw three groups of two children each working on cooperative reports in expository text. The task required that the six children (four African-

Americans, one Hispanic, and one Filipino) share the six books. While Aaron and his partner were discussing one book, their second book was "borrowed" by a child from another group who refused to give it back when Aaron's partner requested it. Instead of going to Leslie for help, the other children discussed options for handling the problem themselves. Within minutes, books were traded and all children went back to the work at hand (Fieldnotes, summary, 3/6/90).

Leslie respected her students, thereby earning their respect in return. Her classroom was a warm and safe environment in which to learn, full of rich language and varied activities, replete with gender and racial equity, and fun! The atmosphere was ecologically rich. Still Aaron's voice couldn't be heard in the program.

Asking for Support: The Importance of Time and Context

Leslie talked about the problem with a group of her peers who had completed credential programs at University of California, Berkeley, with her and who met with us once a month to discuss learning to teach reading (see Hollingsworth, 1990).

> Several people have mentioned a fear of having to deal with nonreaders and feeling very unprepared. The [teacher education] program never really mentioned it. We spent our time focusing on kids who *could* read. So I was really scared, too--in fact, panicked. I felt that I didn't have any skills whatsoever. This is my third year of teaching second grade, and I have a whole-class environment again, but this year I have about 10 kids who just don't seem to be able to read really well. So many that I couldn't ignore it any more. This was exacerbated by the fact that [the new] reading books . . . made it more evident that the kids couldn't read. When we did whole language it wasn't as evident. (Transcripts, Collaborative Meetings, CM: 2/1/90, pp. 12,13)

In actuality, teaching nonreaders and writers to read *was* discussed in her teacher education program. I had taught principles of instruction for beginning readers in conjunction with my concern that multiple approaches were important for giving all children equal opportunities to join in the literacy conversation. However my exhortations were overshadowed by contextual factors. Not only did a socialized faith in the literature-based, process-writing approach--as modeled by teachers in the Bay Area--block my single voice which cautioned against *any* single approach as appropriate for all children but Leslie's and her peers' experiences as student teachers were (a) primarily in classrooms where children could read or (b) with nonreaders for such a limited amount

of time that they did not experience children's long-term failure. Although we had read Lisa Delpit's articles (Delpit, 1986; 1988) on the potential dangers of failing to provide explicit instruction to children of color, Leslie did not work with any teachers who modeled that approach. Thus, during her first two years of teaching, she basically trusted that the whole-class approach to her expanded version of a literature-based program would eventually work.

In her third year, she adopted a different perspective:

> My third year of teaching began dramatically different than year one or two. The district had adopted a new basal text, had us go to training sessions, and sent out strong memos stating that we were to use the text as the basis for our reading program. Because the text was literature based there was interest in it on the part of the teachers. At the primary level the stories looked very good. They were the kind we might have picked to read to the children.
>
> While waiting for the textbooks to arrive, I continued to use my own literature-based program. However, I noticed as did my friend/colleague/researcher from the university, that a significant number of students were not attending to the text. The wonderful rhyming stories were not engaging them. I continued thinking they needed more time to adjust to school. However, I began to worry.
>
> Out of curiosity I wanted to try this new literature-based reading program, but thought that I had better start with the end of first-grade reader. The district wouldn't let me. [Administrative] response was that the students should be reading at grade level. Perhaps this was my second clue that a new approach should be taken. Obviously the students in our district didn't read at grade level as evidenced by our yearly test scores, so I lost confidence in the district's ability to judge what would be best in my classroom. . . . At this point I did a formal miscue analysis with the students, reading from both the first-grade and second-grade readers. The results confirmed my feelings. I had to find some "new" program for about 1/3 of my students if they were going to learn to read and not spend a year in failure.
>
> There was no support from the district with this problem. The other teachers at my school [usually a good resource] were also in a quandary and couldn't help. I had reached a point where I had no answers. Even my own philosophy of learning from literature didn't help. (Minarik, 1990, p. 4)

The shift in Leslie's district to a system which "labeled" grade-level expectations, her loss of faith in school-based solutions, and her regular conversations in our beginning teacher group with other teachers whose students were not learning to read and write either, prompted Leslie to ask for outside help. A corresponding change in the manner in which we studied Leslie's learning to teach--to a much more collaborative relationship between teachers and the research team (see Teel & Minarik, 1990)--also provided an opportunity and the resources for seeking more support. The immediate stimulus for Leslie's actual request for advice to find a new way to reach her

nonreaders, though, was her *own research* following a staff development presentation in "support" of the new basal program.

> [The basal representative] convinced me of that old philosophy--if you hear and read it and spend enough time with it it will happen. I think that the other second-grade teacher and I thought that for a while and thought, "Oh, good, this solves a lot of our problems. And we just have to have faith that this will work." Except that I went back to the classroom and watched and some kids were engaged and interested, but there were a lot of kids that weren't even on the page that they were supposed to be on and were staring up at the ceiling.
>
> And at the same time I had been teaching a foreign language at this school too, and a woman said, 'You know, you can say something slow, fast, loud, 12 times, and if they don't understand it, they don't understand it, it doesn't make any difference how you do it.'
>
> So, the fact is that they were supposed to learn to read by looking at the pictures. And these are little tiny ones that don't know [letter sounds] don't know how to begin. That's how bad it was.
>
> So I asked Sam, and she was the one who got me started on this additional approach. And I've had some time to use it and think of some pros and cons and ways I can adapt it to my classroom, and also think of some alternative things that need to be done. (CM: 2/1/90, pp. 15,16)

A Suggested Addition

What I recommended that Leslie try was a supplemental approach that worked well for me as a primary grade and Chapter I teacher of migrant children (see Hollingsworth, 1988). The basic difference between my recommendations and Leslie's approach was the inclusion of systematic instruction in linguistic analyses and phonemic awareness, in groups small enough to command teacher attention to individual children. The format was based on a program initially developed by Jim Guszak (1985). It supported many of the instructional features Leslie was using with an additional emphasis on specific letter-sound practice for children who needed that sort of practice to access text fully. For children like Aaron, a strong listening comprehension coupled with weak decoding skills located a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). A perfect opportunity for teaching and learning rested in the discrepancy.

Providing the scaffolding for Aaron and the others to figure out those processes themselves and to transfer their new understanding to other materials was close enough to Leslie's beliefs about learning literacy to give it a try. However, the practice materials and the notion of teacher

intervention to assess individual literacy performance in less-than-meaningful text were clearly dissonant. Leslie talked to our group about the addition to her literacy program:

> Leslie: What Sam [suggested] was to help them with the idea of sound-letter correspondence and short vowels. So they start off with word lists, some of the words are [nonsense words]--but they're all rhyming words. The [words are] systematically arranged in that the children only change one sound at a time. You start with the very basic things and move to the complex things. So the easiest thing to do is to take one sound and it's usually the beginning consonant.
>
> [Aaron] joins a group of nonreaders [to work on this program] about four days a week for about 20 or 25 minutes. They work with my classroom aide or I go back with the group and she takes the rest of the class.
>
> Mary: [Looking at a list of linguistically sequenced, rhyming words] They read this?
>
> Leslie: Yes.
>
> Mary: Out of context, just the list?
>
> Leslie: Yes.
>
> Sam: They read them to each other. What I did was put them on a sheet of paper and cover up everything but one word to begin with [then move down]. They read them to each other, they read them chorally. They read in timed situations, they read with partners, they read up and down the list, they read across the list. You've got to vary the instructions. The point is to [help] them begin to see that the process of how sound and print go together. Because you see, nonreaders don't know what to look at. They have no idea what to focus on.
>
> Lisa: Did you find that any kids--what if the kid doesn't even know any sound-letter correspondences?
>
> Sam: Then you start with just one sound change. Start with a word like "an" and add a"d" -- "and." Those would be the only two words on their list. Teach them to blend the sounds together. "Aaann. AAAnnndd." They need to be successful so you don't give them more than they can handle. Every day build in a little bit more.
>
> Leslie: Then the second step is that there is actually a story in which the words are found. Sam said she spent a long time coming up with these stories using the words.
>
> Sam: That's why some of the letters are capitalized on the list. If [the change formed a nonsense] word, I turned it into a name. (CM: 2/1/90, pp. 17-18)

The continuous support Leslie received while attempting to incorporate this alternative approach into her literature program proved to be important. Unlike most staff development or inservice programs, Leslie could ask for help with specific features of the new approach she did not understand, watch me model the approach with her children, and get specific feedback for her

own teaching. The nonjudgmental support encouraged Leslie to develop her own variations on the approach which better corresponded to both her teaching philosophy and her children's learning needs.

> They really like it, and it does help them make progress. Then they start really reading their trade and literature books. But [the linguistic texts] make it hard for them to get a handle on what's happening because of so much rhyming and such short stories. And so in addition to using Sam's suggestion, I alternate now with similar books [like Dr. Seuss] that have pictures already drawn, are lengthier, and that have more easily comprehensible story lines. (CM: 2/1/90, pp. 18, 20)

Aaron and the other nonreaders progressed from their playing and experimenting with the less literary material, a freedom Leslie didn't feel she had using the more serious "real" literature. She began to find other material more suitable for language manipulation and play.

> [This is a book] I bought in a toy store. [Leslie shows it to Karen.] The words [in this story about peanut butter] rhyme--"sweet, eat, street, meat, eat, beet, treat." The book is somewhat contrived compared to the literature-based program, but contrived in such a way as to allow the kids to anticipate and remember. It lends itself beautifully to incorporating writing projects. It's not "real" literature, so we can change the language and even the topic--say, to the kids' favorite foods. You can play with it. I think that's the difference. (LM: 2/23/90, p. 10)

Aaron's Story Continued

I went back to visit Aaron again near the end of the school year. His eyes stayed bright the whole morning. His voice was clear and strong as he read me a class-composed book, all of his classmates' names, and a book in his class library authored by "Debra, Jerry, Aaron, and Sam." It was entitled *Donatello Fights with Crag* and contained vivid illustrations:

> Donatello the turtle went for a fight across the slimy, dark, nasty sewer, and around the tin, cold pipes. Over the disgusting pizza crusts [in the] water, past the dead rats, through the gooey dark green slime. Under the hanging black, hairy, wiggly, spiders. And [Donatello] got back for pizza.

I sat beside Aaron and 10 others who were called to work in a special group in a side area of the room. Aaron and his friends began reading the word lists even before Leslie divided them into two smaller groups and asked one group to read chorally. This week's list contained the names "Cin" and "Kin." Aaron, like all the others in his group, followed along as the first group read. He noticed the others struggle over whether "Cin" should have an /s/ or a /k/ sound and rehearsed the difference under his breath. When it was his group's turn, he read both the list and the story

flawlessly several times. The rhyming text had the ring of a currently popular "rap." Leslie then asked questions about the text. Aaron went back to the story to find clues that would help him volunteer answers.

Later in the morning, I saw Aaron poring over three expository trade books about snakes which he and his partner, Debra, were using to write a research paper. His new skills and confidence allowed him to fully cooperate in searching through the texts for "important" information on snakes. He proudly read me something he'd learned that was part of their cooperatively authored paper. "Some snakes have up to 100 babies at a time!" He smiled up at me, and his eyes matched the excitement in his voice: "That's a lot of brothers and sisters!"

Leslie reported the results to our group about Aaron and the other nonreaders. They are summarized on Table 1.

> In general I feel really happy about it. I haven't tested them, I've listened. I haven't given them any formal test and I probably won't do that. What I've used for assessment is their changes in attitude. They tend to be kids that wouldn't interact with print, and were pretty depressed and exhibited behavior problems.
>
> [Aaron and his friends] engage in print a lot more during silent reading time. They'll go up and try to find books. I've listened to them read and it's a lot better. I pull them into whole class reading out of the basal sometimes. There are a couple that still can't do it, but there are a lot that are following along with their fingers now.
>
> And they seem really happy. They have little smiles on their faces. They seem really anxious to do it. Nobody says "Oh, do I have to go back there?" We never "called" it anything, never gave it a name or explained why we were doing it, we just did it. So now we have some kids from the [rest of the class] ask to go back there. Now, I'm not sure why they want to go back there. It's obvious that they think something fun or good is happening back there, but I don't exactly know. (CM: 2/1/90, p. 19)

At the end of the year, Aaron was was promoted to third grade. His confidence improved, he returns to Leslie's classroom often to visit and read to her. Today Aaron might still not do well on a standardized test of reading. Nor would most of the children at the school where Leslie teaches. However, that is not her primary goal. Aaron's response to reading and writing, seeing himself as successful, anxious to tackle new material, the lifting of his depression, his less conflictive interaction with his peers, and his ability to read and write full, large letters and stories on clean sheets of paper and read them back is both the process to literacy and the goal itself. His success *is* cause for celebration.

Table 1

Aaron's Literacy Progress

October (Predata)	April (Postdata)
Good auditory skills	Good auditory skills
Good oral story development	Good oral story development
Good listening comprehension	Good listening comprehension
Few consistent letter-sound correspondences	Full knowledge of letter correspondences (nonsense words rapidly blended)
Could not read independent of the whole-class context	Reads independently (self-composed text, literature, expository text)
Cramped, copied writing	Broad, full writing (isolated words and 6-10 word sentences)
Depressed when asked to engage in activities	Engages happily in literacy activities
Low self-esteem	Improved self-esteem shows in other academic and social activities

What We Learned From Aaron's Story

So what can be learned from Leslie's story of listening for Aaron? Not that a rich, literate environment is harmful for him and others who struggle with school-measured success. Clearly one lesson is to consider challenging the politics of *any* popular system which limits children's opportunities for learning. We might use Aaron's story to remember that, regardless of socialized norms, the ethics of teaching require us to provide all children with the means of accessing literature independently. Coming from outside of mainstream culture and language of power, Aaron well understood the *meaning* in language, but he had less opportunity to acquire the basic processes in learning to read and write in the dominant language.

While the linguistic materials he used might have been considered "meaningless" to many teachers and scholars in mainstream American culture, and certainly would not have been classified as "real literature," the texts may even have opened a window into the more familiar "rap literature" of the African-American culture. In any event, the brief but pointed practice in text which was challenging but accessible due to its structure redirected Aaron's attention to the text--in a playfully meaningful manner. Even his occasional lack of "comprehension" did not appear seriously problematic in the short term. By suspending attention momentarily to plot and story line, he learned another process into reading. (See Table 2 for a summary of why the limited but systematic focus on print seemed to work.)

Recommending an eclectic program for literacy is not a new concept (see Adams, 1990; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Chall, 1967) neither is the socializing effect of learning to teach news (see Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Nor are either the point of this paper. One lesson which is important to reiterate is the still prevalent tendency of teachers and administrators to either join the "top-down" or "bottom-up" camps to literacy. Such a practice is particularly dangerous in these days of increasing national diversity. Not all teachers are able to resist socialized norms as Leslie did to help children learn to become literate. Because of these socialized pressures to conform to existing programs which tend to support the language of the dominant

Table 2

Why the Limited Linguistic Focus on Print Amplified Aaron's Voice

-- The timing of our work together was correct. Leslie's attention was diverted from non-readers and writers as a student teacher. She found little believable support from traditional district sources in her third year of teaching.

-- The supplemental approach was partially congruent with Leslie's beliefs about what was acceptable for reading instruction, given her particular student population.

-- The continuing nonjudgmental support allowed her to modify the new approach in ways that were more congruent with her beliefs.

-- Aaron could stay in the classroom and become involved in various groups.

-- The text allowed Aaron to suspend attention to meaning (momentarily) and play with the mysterious process of getting print into meaning.

-- Aaron's attention didn't wander as it did with whole-class activities where his "reading" was dependent upon rich context (pictures, cues from other children, listening to discussion).

-- The small-group setting allowed Leslie to listen closely for the participating voice of Aaron and other beginning readers.

-- Aaron experienced continuing success--enough to want to stick with the process of learning to read--even though the text was sometimes hard to comprehend.

-- The text may have served as a culturally meaningful experience for Aaron. Learning to read it independently also taught him new strategies for making sense in literature-based texts and whole-class activities which were meaningful to the standard culture, but previously had been inaccessible to him.

-- Aaron began to see himself as a reader and writer.

-- Leslie began to see herself as a competent teacher of beginning readers and writers.

classes--many students, particularly African-American males, still fail to learn to become literate in school (Fraatz, 1987).

As teacher educators, we might stop promoting one approach or another and redouble our efforts in helping new teachers critique normative programs based on particular students' needs. We also need to remember that as long as curriculum development is the basis for our teacher education programs, attention to children will be diverted. It was only after Leslie had clarified her own beliefs about literacy, critiqued the recommended program, and satisfactorily developed her own that she was able to critique the program from students' perspectives. We might suggest that teachers be careful not to overrate students' literacy abilities hidden within popular whole-class settings nor to ignore alternative paths to literacy success--such as play. We might give new teachers the critical tools to reflect on and play with their own work and to look for alternative philosophical approaches which could provide appropriate and specific instruction so that all children's voices might be heard as they experience success in literacy.

It seems we might suggest that teachers worry less about "grouping" as stigmatizing, and more about lack of success in any instructional arrangement. Aaron appeared to suffer less when brought briefly but regularly into another type of classroom group than he did when he sat without sufficient support in the larger heterogeneous class structure. Rather than send him to a pull-out program, staying with his class and with his teacher to move among familiar groups was clearly beneficial. It is also important to mention that an in-class aide also provided regular support for Leslie. Aaron's progress might not have been so rapid without another teacher who could help Leslie with the smaller groups.

Further, it is important to acknowledge the timing of the support Leslie received for her continued learning to teach. Working with nonreaders and nonwriters was not important to her as a preservice teacher when her focus was on curriculum development. That fact doesn't seem to speak so much to the need to give up on preservice literacy instruction as it does to expand such instruction into the real world of beginning teaching. One way to bridge that gap might be to use

cases of beginning teachers' overcoming socialized obstacles to literature as part of preservice instruction.

Another extended suggestion from this work is to continue the development of educational partnerships between school and university faculties to support beginning teachers. Opportunities for open-ended discussions of such dilemmas in beginning literacy instruction seemed to be beneficial to Leslie's learning to hear and amplify Aaron's voice. Lacking a context to process the specifics of instruction for nonreaders as a student teacher, Leslie was able to use the teachers' group for conversational support when she was ready for it in her third year. Partially as a result of our continuous relationship, Leslie acquired a professional and critical sense of learning to teach. The approach she used was less important than the openness to try and evaluate alternative approaches. She told our group;

> The result of this is that I have a better grasp of what to do now for nonreaders and writers. From listening to me and my dilemma, the other second-grade teacher realizes now that her kids can't read either. However, she still has a little faith that if she just holds out a little bit longer [following the popular approach], something will happen. But she also realizes that this is a serious problem that no one will help us with--there's no resource person. So she's going to try another way. She's going to start an after-school reading club for kids. She's going to talk to other teachers and use all kinds of things--but just try to give them that extra time that we hope will work for them. (CM: 2/1/90, pp. 16,17)

Fortunately for Aaron, and for other young African-American, Caucasian, Filipino, and Hispanic males and females who are struggling in a system which demands independence in literacy for school success--yet which often fails to provide equal opportunities for that success--Leslie critically understood the danger of a single philosophical approach, listened to children as a guide for moving beyond it, and shared her self-created knowledge with others. Her story of listening for Aaron now belongs to us all.

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