

Literacy Promises



**The Thirty-Third Yearbook
A Doubled Peer Reviewed Publication
of the
Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers**

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As always, we have many people to THANK for the completion of this volume. First, we wish to thank all those authors who worked diligently through the editing process in order to share their research, thoughts, and stories of their good work to add to the body of literacy knowledge. Second, we wish to thank the keynote speakers for their inspirational and motivational words of wisdom both at the conference and in their article. Third, we would like to thank our editorial board members, as they continue to provide detailed editing suggests to both the new and the seasoned authors with ideas for revision. This helps to create many high quality articles and continues to add rigor to this Yearbook's publication. Finally, we are grateful to the members of the Board of Directors who have continually supported the editorial team and the publication of the Yearbook, as well as Janelle Mathis, the Publication Committee Chairperson.

Our 'production crew' consisted of Leslie Haas, Debbie Raney, Blake Shaw and cover designer Crystal Britton. As our graduate assistant is working on her dissertation, and the budget cuts did not allow us to hire a new graduate assistant, Leslie Haas, our former G.A. volunteered to help with the final editing process. Debbie turned the documents into PDF files and created our book while Blake corresponded with the printers. In addition, Crystal designed the colorful front cover that links to our theme. Her unique portrayal of the Yearbook's theme beckons the readers to check out what's inside.

In addition, we are very fortunate and grateful for the ongoing support provided by our individual universities. At Brigham Young University, we wish to thank Dean K. Richard Young of the McKay School of Education and Dr. Nancy Wentworth, chair of the Department of Teacher Education, for freeing up time and providing support. Special thanks go to Nataly Arce and Rebecca Burningham, student staff members, whose help on many occasions was much appreciated and needed.

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SS, TM, MB, & LM

Introduction

For our 54th annual meeting, the Association of Educators and Researchers met in Omaha, Nebraska at the Hilton Omaha. Our conference attracts attendees from within the United States and beyond its borders. Attendees come from an array of educational settings, hold various roles, and assume numerous types of responsibilities. Our annual conference provides chances to learn from and with each other, as well as being recognized for its congeniality and camaraderie among the attendees. The conference allows us to make connections, to learn from each other and to push our thinking as we grow both as professionals and people. This year's conference theme was Literacy Promises, which we also used as the title for this year's Yearbook, Volume 33.

This organization has long been the home of some of our nation's most notable literacy experts. At the Omaha conference, these literacy professionals once again engaged us in dialogue of the utmost importance through their presentations and informal conversations throughout the conference. The articles included in this volume are representative of these dialogues that can lead to transformation, possibilities, and risk.

The Yearbook begins with the article representing Laurie Elish-Piper's presentation to the membership. In her presidential address, Laurie shared with the membership literacy lessons she has learned from research, theory and practice. In her speech, entitled, *Literacy Lessons for a Lifetime*, Laurie talks about five important lessons she has learned and offers insights and directions for the future of the field of literacy and ALER.

The second section reveals the specifics of a special group of presenters, the invited keynote addresses. In *Literacy Promises and Making Curriculum Together*, Brian Schultz talked about how students and teachers can theorize to develop an integrated curriculum based on the students' concerns. Brian's presentation talked about how his students learning soared when he challenged them to solve a community problem. The students elected to focus on replacing their decaying school. He talked about how this approach helped his students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers. The second speaker was Mary Beth Sampson, who addressed the attendees at the annual Newcomers Luncheon. Her presentation was entitled *Working ALER*. She encouraged all the attendees, both old and new members, to become active members of ALER, to network with colleagues, to become familiar with the ALER webpage, and to attend the various sessions, as well as to attend the publication sessions in order to become reviewers and writers for ALER's publications. Finally, Nancy Padak was the J. Estill Alexander Forum speaker. Her *New Rules' for Literacy Learning* were developed by asking ALER members to answer, "If you could make only one new rule for literacy, what would it be and why? After analyzing the data, she found five categories, which she shared with the listeners.

The third section of the Yearbook contains our award winners' research. The dissertation winner, Jennifer Anne Cowgill from Washington State Uni-

versity, did her research on *Opportunities around Text and the Responses They Elicit From Middle Level English Language Learners*. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the opportunities that English language learners have to talk about text in their middle level reading classrooms, their responses to these opportunities, and how they explain and regard the talk opportunities they receive and their participation in them. Results showed that teachers and students in this study most often enacted classroom recitations rather than discussions. Whether teachers asked assessment or authentic questions, the students' responses were usually limited to a single word or phrase. Students reported several reasons for their limited talk: They did not understand the text, they were scared and embarrassed, the pace was too quick, they felt peers excluded them, and/or the teacher was too controlling. The thesis winner was Elizabeth Shirley Bernfeld from Brigham Young University. Her study was entitled *Examining Reliability of Reading Comprehension Ratings of Fifth-Grade Students' Oral Retellings*. The purpose of this study was to rate the oral retellings to determine to what degree passages, raters, and rating occasions affect those ratings and to identify what combination of those elements will produce reliable ratings. It was found that the largest sources of variation were students, passages, and student-by-passage interaction. In addition, results showed at least two raters should rate retellings of a minimum of four passages on one occasion.

The remaining sections of the volume contain articles that have been sorted into three overarching categories: *Promising Literacy Activities to help K-12 Teachers*, *Promising Literacy Activities to help Preservice Teachers and Alternative Certification Teachers*, and *Promising Literacy Activities to help K-12 learners*. The articles within each of these categories are a great read.

It is our hope that the "scholarship of teaching" represented by our keynote speakers, our award winners, and our authors will provide new insights and possibilities that will support and extend literacy research.

SS, TM, MB, & LM

**PRESIDENTIAL
ADDRESS**

LITERACY LESSONS FOR A LIFETIME

Laurie Elish-Poper

Northern Illinois University

Presidential Address

Abstract

Laurie Elish-Poper is a Presidential Teaching Professor and Literacy Clinic Director in the Department of Literacy Education. Prior to her current position in higher education, Laurie worked as an elementary and middle school teacher and an educational therapist in a clinical setting. Laurie's research, publications, and presentations focus on literacy coaching, readers' rights, family literacy, and parent involvement. Her recent research has focused primarily on the relationship between literacy coaching and student reading and writing achievement and has resulted in multiple publications and presentations with her colleagues. In her presidential address, Laurie shared the literacy lessons she has learned from research, theory, and practice that cut across the lifespan. Based on these lessons, she will offer insights and directions for the future of the field of literacy and ALER.



I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for allowing me the privilege of serving as the Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers (ALER) president for the past year. As I stand before you today, it is hard to believe that I've been a member of this wonderful organization for 18 years. Who knew when I came to my first conference as a doctoral student to co-present with Pat Linder and our professors Barb Moss and Martha Collins, that I would one day be elected to serve as the organization's president. My first day at my first College Reading Association (CRA) conference, a kind, well-dressed gentleman introduced himself to me as "Jerry Johns." When I realized that it was THE Jerry Johns, I was star-struck because I had used his *Basic Reading Inventory* (Johns, 2008) for years. The last day of that conference, while waiting in front of the hotel with Pat Linder for what seemed to be a lifetime for a cab, Norm Stahl, CRA President, turned and eloquently invited, in the way that only Norm can, "What the hell, do you want to share this cab?" With an offer like that, we

could not refuse, and as I recall he inquired if Pat and I were graduate students, and when we responded that we were, he insisted on paying for the cab.

Little did I know that a mere two years later, with my newly minted Ph.D. in hand, that I would be offered a position as an assistant professor at Northern Illinois University, and my department chair would be Norm Stahl and my mentor would be Jerry Johns. All roads of my professional career have grown from the roots planted in CRA/ALER. To those of you who are new members, welcome, you have chosen the right organization in which to get involved. To those of you who are long-time members, welcome home!

Over the years, I have given more presentations than I can count. I know how to give presentations. I focus on the research or the specific topic, and I share the relevant information in a clear and hopefully interesting manner. I pride myself at being pretty good at giving presentations. I have never given an address, however, and I must admit I was a bit intimidated when Mary Roe asked me for the title of my address back in the early summer so she could add it to the pre-conference planner. I decided to use the age-old strategy of deflection and over-generalization, and I gave her the title *Literacy Lessons for a Lifetime*. I reasoned with myself—I could talk about anything during my address because the title was so broad. I then convinced myself that the title had a literary tone with the alliteration, and it also sounded a bit like a National Public Radio (NPR) program or even a book title, which I figured had to be a good sign. Pleased with my decision, I embarked on several months of reflection, soul searching, and deep thinking regarding what I would say in my address.

I drive vast expanses of mid-western country roads to and from the university, schools, and off-campus sites on an almost daily basis. It is the type of driving that promotes deep reflection as I can literally see forever across the flat prairie and farm fields, especially once the corn has been cut in the fall. Seeing the vast expanses of the heartland, I often find myself reflecting on the enormity of the world, of literacy, and of the challenges facing the field of education. It is on these drives that I have pondered and learned from the five literacy lessons I will share with you today. As we embark on a journey through these literacy lessons, I hope you will find connections, “a-ha’s,” provocative ideas to ponder, and invitations to take action.

Lesson 1: Never judge a student or a parent by first impression.

Henry was a student in my fifth grade classroom over twenty years ago when I taught in Indiana. Henry was very overweight, and as our class walked down the hall to the gym, he would often have to stop to catch his breath, falling far behind the rest of the class, typically arriving at least a minute or two behind his classmates. Henry was a disengaged student—one who rarely participated, rarely did his homework, or rarely scored well on tests. Henry did, however,

always have a ready smile for me and stories of his summer and weekend trips with his father, a long-haul truck driver. On more than one occasion, Henry politely but firmly told me, “Miss Elish, I’m gonna be a trucker so this school stuff don’t really matter for me.” Always the devoted teacher, I’d often respond with pearls of wisdom such as, “Well, you’ll need to read maps, fill out paperwork, and make schedules. Those are things we learn in school.” Henry would just politely smile and nod his head, not looking convinced. Every day, I worried about Henry. I talked to other teachers in the building who had taught Henry in the earlier grades. They generally discounted Henry by saying things such as, “Well, have you seen his parents?” or “He will just be a trucker like his dad so why worry about him?” Always the eternal optimist, I thought, if Henry wanted to be a trucker, that was great, but it was my job to teach him as much as possible so he’d be a well-educated trucker.

In one of my graduate classes I was taking that year, we were learning how to program computers using a simple language for children called Logo. I had developed several simple programs, on 5 ¼ inch floppy disks for use in the Apple computer in my classrooms. At the suggestion of my professor, I decided to bring the programs into my classroom to use with my students. Henry was smitten with the programs; staying after school to ask me, “How did you make those?” I gave him a brief answer, and he politely but firmly followed up saying, “But HOW did you make those? Can you show me?” I promised him I would and scribbled a note to his parents asking if he could stay after school the following day.

The next morning, Henry bounded into the classroom (I must admit it was the first time I knew that Henry could even bound) with the note bearing his mother’s signature. Over the next week, Henry and I worked after school several times until he was able to create a simple Logo program that he wanted to share with his classmates. I agreed, and the next day, Henry demonstrated the program as his classmates crowded around the one computer in the back of our classroom. Henry glowed. He stood taller, and he offered to teach other children how to create their own Logo programs.

At parent-teacher conferences later that year, both Henry’s mother and father attended. They told me of their hopes and dreams for Henry. His mother tearfully explained that no teacher had ever taken a special interest in Henry before, and she explained how it touched her heart that I had done so. His father explained that trucking had been a good steady job for him, but that he hoped Henry would be able to go to college and have an easier time making ends meet as an adult. I thanked Henry’s parents for their support and promised I would do my best to make sure that the rest of Henry’s fifth grade year would be productive.

I’m not saying it was all roses—Henry still “forgot” his homework on a pretty regular basis, but he began to show a real interest in science, and I worked to nurture that. He also asked to stay after school to write new Logo programs and play educational computer games from our school library.

In sixth through eighth grades, Henry stopped by to see me at least 2-3 times each year. I was pleased to see that he had trimmed down and grown at least a foot since he was in my class. He told me of his trips with his father and of his special projects in school. He beamed with pride when he told me he was taking computer classes at school.

I then moved to Ohio to begin my Doctoral program. I almost forgot about Henry for a time, until one winter break when I was visiting in Indiana, I had lunch with a teacher friend with whom I had taught. She pulled a newspaper clipping from her purse with a story about how Henry, a high school junior at the time, had won a county-wide computer software design contest. From that moment on, I saw Henry as I read the research and theory in my doctoral program—Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Words* (1983), *Unfulfilled Expectations: Home and School Influences on Literacy* (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991), *Family Literacy: Young Children Learning to Read and Write* (Taylor, 1983), and *Growing Up Literate: Learning from Inner City Families* (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Coupled with my teaching experiences, these texts expanded my views of reading, literacy, and students.

At that point, I vowed NEVER to judge a student by first impressions, by what others tell me, or by what his or her weaknesses seem to be at first glance. I learned that all students have great potential, and as educators, we just need to find it, celebrate it, and nurture it. Doing so is essential to their future and to our future as a nation. We can't waste our most precious resource—our youth.

Let me tell you another story from long ago that formed the foundation of the lesson that we must **never judge a parent by the first impression**.

George was born in the U.S. as the sixth child of Romanian immigrant parents. His parents never learned to read or write in any language, and George's father signed his paychecks until the day he died with an "X" because he never learned to sign his own name. Nick, the father, was 35 when he arrived at Ellis Island, and Leticia or Lottie as she came to be called in the U.S., the mother, was 14 when she arrived. Lottie spoke three languages—Romanian, Hungarian, and Serbian—but she had never attended school due to the extreme poverty in her family, the need for her to care for her younger siblings, and World War I which raged through her homeland and its ever-changing borders. When Lottie came to Ellis Island, she had her infant sister in tow—having traveled by themselves in steerage to meet an older cousin who had established residence in East Chicago, Indiana. One arranged marriage later, and Nick and Lottie started their family.

George, their youngest child, didn't learn English until he started first grade, and Romanian was the only language spoken at home, at church, and on their block which was populated mostly with other recent immigrant families from Romania. George didn't attend kindergarten because no one had told his family it was available to them, and his mother loved having the children around to play

games, tell stories, take walks, sing rhymes, and care for the goats they kept in a small clearing behind their apartment building. George's father worked hard in a steel mill, eventually being promoted to a floor manager position for a crew of Romanian-speaking workers.

George's mother raised six children, cooking, cleaning, and encouraging them to do their homework and graduate from high school. His parents bought books and newspapers for their home even though they could not read them because they wanted their children to have access and learn what they had never been able to learn. They often asked their children to read the headlines or stories aloud to the family at the dinner table. George never got help from his parents on his schoolwork, but his older siblings occasionally helped when he asked. He relied on his teachers and classmates for help, the work ethic he learned from his parents, and his parents' encouragement to "do your homework, be good, and graduate from high school." George and all five of his siblings did graduate from high school. George went on to attend college, earn his Bachelor's and Master's degrees, and become my father.

I share this story because my Dad's parents weren't involved in his schooling in traditional ways, but they valued education so much that they traveled to the US as steerage passengers to start a new life and begin a family here. Those beliefs of hard work, the importance of education, and the value of literacy became and continue to be our most important family legacies.

While my grandparents certainly didn't look like the involved, engaged parents that we all wish for children, they WERE incredibly involved and engaged. They just did it in a different way—in a way that they could do. As we work with teachers and future teachers, we need to keep this lesson in mind—there is often much more to the story than what we see on the surface when it comes to family literacy and parent involvement. Because of my own family's experiences, I have learned the important lesson to never judge a parent or family by first impression.

Lesson 2: Literacy must be accessible to all.

Many of us take for granted that literacy, good instruction, interesting books, and expert teachers are available for all. Sadly, this is not the reality for many children. I have worked for many years in Even Start programs that serve low-income, low-literate families. The Rockford Even Start program where I have worked for 10 years served 60 families last year. Of these 60 families, 27% were homeless and 100% lived well below the federal poverty level. The majority of the families reported living on less than \$10,800.00 per year for a family of 4. In getting to know these families, I have learned over and over that survival is the primary consideration, and unfortunately, books are typically low on the list of priorities. Furthermore, unsafe neighborhoods and the cost of transportation make trips to the library unlikely. Bookmobiles were cut in Rockford over a

decade ago, making library access even more unlikely in many neighborhoods. This sad reality in Rockford correlates to Neuman and Celano's (2001) research on literacy access in various communities which concluded that low income neighborhoods do not provide the same access to literacy as middle or upper income neighborhoods. Sadly, the lack of access extends beyond libraries to bookstores, environmental print, and school and preschool libraries, making it almost impossible for children from low-income communities to have access to literacy resources. In cities like Rockford, there are neighborhoods that are literally "literacy deserts."

While your child or mine likely has owned hundreds of books and logged thousands of hours of lap reading before starting school, many children from low-income homes show up at the school house door as complete novices with books. Additionally, children from low income backgrounds tend to have less access to the rich conversations and experiences that foster vocabulary development. Hart and Risley's 1995 book *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children*, concluded that there was a difference of almost 300 words spoken per hour between families on welfare and middle income, professional families. Extrapolating this to a year, children in a professional family would hear 11 million words per year, while children whose families rely on public assistance would only hear 3 million words. Furthermore, the most alarming finding was that by the age of 3, the recorded spoken vocabularies of the children from the professional families were larger than those of the parents in the families on public assistance. This shocking legacy of the neglect to provide access to books, literacy support, and quality education continues to be passed from one generation to the next in poor communities across the country.

Unfortunately, funding for Even Start, one of the few programs that attempts to provide literacy support for parents, children, and the family unit, has been cut significantly. A decade ago in Illinois we had 57 Even Start programs operating across the state. Today a mere 17 programs are operating, with funding slashed so much that most programs are forced to serve significantly smaller numbers of families from one year to the next. At the federal level, Even Start funding has fallen from a high of \$250 million dollars in 2001 to a low of \$66 million for the current fiscal year, and it is on the chopping block for complete elimination (National Coalition for Literacy, 2010). Furthermore, access to early childhood education, the best chance for many children from low income homes to achieve literacy success, continues to vary widely from state to state. More specifically, according to the 2009 report of the National Institute for Early Education Research, 12 states have no state public preschool programs (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Sansanelli, & Hustdet, 2009). Only 4% of 3 year-olds nationwide and 25% of 4 year olds are enrolled in preschool programs. Clearly, we have much progress to make to provide access to preschool education

and early literacy instruction for all children, and most importantly for children from low-income homes.

The literacy access issue begins early—at birth—when children are in the literacy lottery—winning big by being born into your family or mine, and other children losing—being born into families and communities with fewer financial and community resources and greater family and community stressors, making literacy less accessible. Unfortunately, the access issue continues from childhood into adulthood. Children in poorly funded urban and rural schools are more likely to have teachers who lack certification in the areas where they are teaching. Turn-over rate for teachers is high so these same children are likely to have more new, less-prepared teachers who are less equipped to support these needy and fragile learners (Darling-Hammond, 1999).

For those adults who do not graduate from high school or who are English Language Learners, adult education programs are offered in community colleges, community agencies, and by volunteer groups. Unfortunately, minimal funding is provided for these programs, and that funding tends to be soft money so programs exist only when grant funding is available, interrupting the continuity and availability of services in many communities. Furthermore, the waiting lists for many programs outpaces the number of volunteer tutors or the seats in adult basic education, GED, or ESL classes, leaving many adults without the literacy instruction and support they need and want (Kutner, Greenberg, Jin, Boyle, Hsu, & Dunleavy, 2007).

As a profession, we must unite and demand literacy access for all. It is necessary for the preparation of the educated citizenry upon which our very democracy is built. The ALER White Paper on Literacy Leadership (Lewis-Spector & Jay, 2011) offers pathways to transform our schools to support all students. Additionally, as we select our elected officials, we must unite to demand universal preschool. We must demand library outreach services that truly reach out to families so books and other literacy and technology resources are accessible. We must demand that family support programs such as Even Start are expanded. We must prepare high quality teachers and reading specialists who want to work in challenging school settings to make a difference in the lives of poor children, their families, and their communities. Our very future depends on learning the lesson that literacy access is essential.

Lesson 3: Collaboration supports literacy learning.

Learning and literacy are both social processes. The work of Bandura (1977) and Vygotsky (1978) inform this view of literacy learning. However, many schools still ascribe to what Paulo Freire (2000) called the banking model of education wherein the teacher deposits knowledge into students who passively receive that information and reproduce it on command. With the current emphasis on skills, high stakes testing, and making adequate yearly progress

(AYP), many excellent teachers have abandoned practices such as cooperative learning, book clubs, and grand conversations in favor of teaching to the test, and skill and drill.

In the recent book, *Powerful learning: What we know about teaching for understanding* (Darling-Hammond, Barron, Pearson, Schoenfeld, Stage, Zimmerman, Cervetti, & Tilson, 2008) the authors concluded that the research on active learning practices is clear—it has a more significant impact on student performance than any other variable, including student background and prior achievement. Coupled with the demands from business and industry for workers who can work collaboratively, engage in higher level thinking, problem-solve, and think creatively and critically, we have a clear rationale for collaborative, active learning processes in our schools; however, we must convince K-12 educators and administrators that this route will pay off as well as if not better than skill and drill approaches.

While many schools shy away from collaborative models of instruction for children, this approach has become increasingly popular in K-12 schools for teachers, namely through professional learning communities (PLC) wherein teachers collaborate to focus on learning and engage in the cycle of continuous improvement (Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005). Teachers with whom I work, report being actively engaged in PLCs in their schools on topics as wide ranging as writing instruction, differentiation, the daily five, and teaching English language learners. They report that through PLCs, they have seen their schools transformed to focus more on learning, students, and best practices. Let us hope that through PLCs we can begin to see collaborative methods of learning, which are both research-based and favored by educators for their own learning, being implemented more frequently in K-12 schools.

Collaborative learning also plays out for many of us in our work as we collaborate with colleagues and students to engage in research, develop curriculum, and solve the problems that we face in our own teaching. I have come to realize that I learn more and am more effective and productive when I engage in collaborative research because of the exchanges, varied perspectives, and opportunities for discussion and debate. For example, for the past several years, I've been involved in collaborative research with Susan L'Allier on the relationship between literacy coaching and student reading and writing achievement. Susan and I have very different learning preferences, skills, and professional backgrounds, but when we work together, our processes and products are far superior to what either of us would or could do alone.

Over the past two and a half years, I've been involved in a new Center on my campus, the Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Language and Literacy (CISLL). We have 65 faculty affiliates from 9 departments and 3 colleges on our campus who are interested in language and literacy issues. The varying viewpoints on language and literacy run the gamut from psychology to education

to anthropology to linguistics to communicative disorders. Groups of us have collaborated on various research and outreach projects, and while we've never agreed on everything and on some days it seems like we can't agree on anything, the process has enriched all of us as we've expanded our understandings of language and literacy and started to think interdisciplinarily about the complex issues we face in our practice and research.

In all of these situations, having someone to think and problem solve with enhances learning, engagement, and outcomes; making the case for collaborative learning.

Lesson 4: Readers have rights.

About a decade ago, Jerry Johns shared a book, *Better than Life* by Daniel Pennac (1999) with several of us at the American Reading Forum Annual Conference. Pennac proposed that readers had rights such as the right to skip pages, the right to re-read, and the right to read anything. From his book sprang collaboration with Mona Matthews and Vicki Risko that has lasted for almost a decade. We have collaborated to survey and interview students in grades 5-12 about the rights they felt made a difference for them as readers, learners, and students. This project resulted in a book: *Declaration of Readers' Rights: Renewing Our Commitment to Students* (Bass, Dasinger, Elish-Piper, Matthews, & Risko, 2008) wherein we presented the 10 rights from our research. I want to share all 10 of the rights with you briefly because I have learned that they offer a viable answer to engaging, supporting, and teaching older readers.

The *Declaration of Readers' Rights* states:

All children and adolescents have the right to:

1. Be taught by a caring, competent, highly qualified teacher.

As we all know, the quality of the teacher is the single most important part of the education equation; therefore, all students need and deserve to have excellent teachers.

2. Be treated as competent individuals who are capable of reading.

Competence is a key aspect of learning. When a learner feels confident and competent to do something, that learner is more likely become engaged and be successful. When teachers create classrooms where students feel that they have what it takes to succeed, students do succeed. When teachers create classrooms where students feel incompetent, soon that perception becomes a reality.

3. Culturally relevant literacy instruction.

With the increasing diversity in today's classrooms, we must commit to providing culturally relevant instruction that builds a bridge from the students' funds of knowledge, experiences, and language to the curriculum. We can't expect students to sink or swim. We need to provide

the bridge to help them move ahead toward their goals and dreams, and culturally relevant instruction is a key ingredient in this process.

4. **Instruction that is individually appropriate.**

All students deserve high quality instruction, including those who excel; those who struggle; those who fall somewhere between; those of all SES, cultural, and racial groups; and those who are English Language Learners. Additionally, as educators, we teach students—individual students who are grouped into classes. By committing to know each student as an individual, we can provide differentiated instruction that “meets students where they are.”

5. **Access to a rich literate environment.**

This right was already discussed in lesson two, but I include it here to build in additional ideas about literacy access that pertain to older learners. These include access to technology, engaging texts, and meaningful opportunities for discussion and collaboration.

6. **Choose reading materials.**

Choice is a powerful motivator, especially for adolescent learners. Choice leads to intrinsic motivation to read. Choice also leads to more frequent reading, adoption of a competent reader identity, increased confidence as a reader, and less resistance to reading challenging texts. Furthermore, choice contributes to control and agency over one’s own education.

7. **Reading experiences that stir readers’ emotions and create a passion for reading.**

Affective aspects of reading are as important as cognitive considerations. Because lifelong reading is the goal, we must help students develop an appreciation for and enjoyment of reading.

8. **Appropriate reading assessments.**

This right could have been its own presentation or paper, but I will only share a few key ideas related to this right. As we know, assessment drives instruction. Different types of assessments have different purposes and audiences and one assessment can’t do it all. As the IRA Standards for Assessment of Reading and Writing (2010) states, “The interests of students must be paramount in all assessment and evaluation.” Sadly, the over-reliance on high stakes standardized tests, 1 minute fluency probes, and “teaching to the test” indicate that we have a long way to go in order to make this right a reality.

9. **Schools that create a climate for all to learn.**

School climate includes the physical facility, organization, relationships, safety, access to materials and technology, and sense of unity/belonging. School climate is related to student learning and well-being. Poor school climates are correlated with low achievement, negative

staff attitudes, and discipline problems. Therefore, we must strive to create positive school climates where students feel safe, connected, cared-for, and supported.

10. An education that involves families & communities in meaningful ways.

Students live in the nested contexts of home, community, and school. Additionally, cultural expectations influence students' school experiences and outcomes. A large corpus of research (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) has concluded that meaningful parent involvement is correlated to student achievement, attendance, attitude toward school, and high school completion; therefore, we must find ways to ensure that family involvement is a priority in our schools.

Over the years as Mona, Vicki, and I listened to the stories, hopes, dreams, and frustrations of students, parents, and teachers during our research on readers' rights, we became convinced that providing these rights to all older students is an obligation of every educator and a necessity for every student. As I have pondered this lesson, I have also started to question the need to develop a declaration of rights for parents and for teachers. I wonder what those lists of rights would declare?

Lesson 5: Time matters.

As educators we are slaves to time. As an elementary teacher, I knew that being even one minute late dismissing my students could result in missed buses, upset parents, and an even angrier principal. Worse yet, if I was even 5 seconds late picking up my class from music, I would have to endure frosty stares and awkward silence as the music teacher tapped her foot while simultaneously looking at her watch and then looking at me. As a middle school teacher, I knew that I only had a 41 minute period from start to finish, and once the bell rang, my students were literally out the door and off to the next class. There never seems to be enough time, but literacy learning and teaching take time.

A common practice in literacy education, however, has taken the time issue to the extreme. Many schools in northern Illinois are using 1 minute probes, sometimes called curriculum based measures (CBM), as the "be-all, end-all" measure of reading. These efficient assessments serve as a "dip stick" measure as Michael Pressley described them (2006). They can provide a quick idea of whether further assessment is needed, but they do not offer the same depth of information as a diagnostic assessment such as an informal reading inventory. When used in combination with other assessments, CBMs can be a very useful tool. When used excessively, they can be downright dangerous. Some children who come to the NIU Literacy Clinic which I direct have completed so many 1 minute fluency probes for progress monitoring that they ask when they are

reading with their tutors, “Are you timing me? Should I read as fast as I can?” An unintended consequence of the misuse of fluency CBMs is a whole generation of children (and maybe teachers and parents) who think that reading fast is THE goal (Johns, 2007).

Last week in one of my graduate classes, a reading specialist reported that her Response-to-Intervention (RTI) team would not approve providing a comprehension intervention for a 4th grade student who had difficulties making inferences. She was told that since there was not a good 1 minute comprehension CBM, there was no way to measure if the intervention was working; therefore, there would not be an intervention provided for this child. This teacher was shocked and has vowed to educate her RTI team that 1 minute probes are not the only type of assessment, but sadly, it looks as if she has an uphill battle facing her.

Last week, a colleague told me a story of his twin sons who are in first grade. He and his wife received notification the second week of school that their boys were behind in reading and that they would be receiving interventions and daily home reading practice books to catch them up in reading. My colleague, an educational anthropologist, asked me, “Why do we label and judge such young children?” While I think we all understand the value of preventing reading difficulties by intervening early, I think we also need to balance this proactive approach with an eye to the “wide range of normal” in child development and literacy development (Brown & Ferrara, 1999). If we allow time to be the focus rather than the student, we risk labeling students prematurely, causing teachers, parents, and students themselves to have lowered expectations for their literacy achievement and development.

On the other hand, sometimes we need to have a greater sense of urgency because the time we have in school is limited. For example, the amount of time wasted by taking attendance, collecting lunch money, packing up for dismissal, and making slow transitions from one activity to the next have been documented in research, and as Allington (2011) has reminded us, elementary teachers can easily lose 30 minutes or more of instructional time each day or up to 2 ½ hours per week! With one of the shortest school years lengths in the industrialized world, we are already putting our students and teachers at a disadvantage which can then be intensified by using time inefficiently.

One of the most gifted teachers I’ve ever worked with is a kindergarten teacher in DeKalb, Illinois. She is the master of time management. She uses 2 minutes here to sit with and work with an individual child, and 3 minutes there to provide extra modeling for several children who need more instruction, and she manages to make every single moment count in her classroom. While she teaches with a true sense of urgency, she never loses sight of the fact that her students are only 5 or 6 years old. She knows that she must teach her students how to be organized, how to transition from one activity to the next, how to work with partners, and how to work in cooperative groups. She spends time at the beginning of the school

year, usually up to 3 weeks, laying the foundation for this efficient approach to instruction. Some of her teaching colleagues question this approach calling it wasted time, but she stands firm. And each year, all of her kindergarten students exit at the end of the year as readers, writers, and learners. On district assessments, her students consistently score at the top of the scale, because she took the time to ensure that they were ready and able to learn.

Another recent phenomenon in literacy education is the double or even the triple dose of literacy instruction (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). While a second or in some cases a third dose of reading instruction or intervention may be needed, many educators have started to worry about time for science, social studies, the fine arts, and even recess. These are areas where many struggling readers excel and where they tend to be engaged, competent, and happy. However, these areas of the curriculum or school day are often not provided for struggling readers in the name of teaching reading.

Time is precious. It is a gift so we need to use it with care, but we need to care first for our students. While benchmarks, assessments, standards, and AYP are important considerations, students must be the primary concern and consideration in all instructional and assessment decisions. While we must use time wisely, we must also not use it as an excuse for inappropriate instructional or assessment practices.

Conclusion

As I shared these five literacy lessons that I've learned over the years, I am reminded of the old adage—with knowledge comes responsibility. Look at the membership of this organization. We have an amazing amount of knowledge, experience, and commitment in ALER. We can make a difference by heeding these five literacy lessons as we teach our own students and as we work in schools and communities. I invite us all to take the stance of advocates for sound literacy education for all. As members of ALER, we can and do make a difference. Thank you.

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**KEYNOTE
ADDRESS**

LITERACY PROMISES AND MAKING CURRICULUM TOGETHER KEYNOTE SPEAKER AT THE AWARDS BREAKFAST

Brian D. Schultz

Northeastern Illinois University

Keynote Address

Abstract

Brian's research focuses on students and teachers theorizing together to develop integrated curriculum based on the students' priority concerns. He also concentrates on curriculum as social action and public pedagogy. He is particularly interested in encouraging pre-service and practicing teachers to create democratic and progressive educational ideals in historically marginalized neighborhoods. Prior to his role at Northeastern, Brian taught middle level grades in Chicago's Cabrini Green neighborhood. His presentation was about his experiences when he challenged students from an urban housing project community to name a problem they wanted to solve. They unanimously decided to focus on replacing their dilapidated school. As students examined conditions of their school and researched causes of decay, they initiated a mission of remedy and repair through a contingent action plan that integrated the curriculum. The students' critical thinking and problem-posing powered profound self-transformations and remarkable achievement.



Today, I have the pleasure of sharing a story with you about my experiences on a journey with young people from Chicago's Cabrini Green neighborhood. The quintessential point of what I want you to walk away with here is that, for me, curriculum is not all about what state boards of education decide is important for us to do with children. It's certainly not what a teacher is going to construct alone. It's certainly not fixed or finite. It's a journey of co-creation and looking to the students for what's worthwhile—what's worth knowing, doing, being,

becoming, thinking about, pondering, wondering, and pondering some more (Schubert, 1986/1997).

For me, that was what I wanted to do with the 10- to 12-year-olds in my classroom. What I plan to do this morning is to introduce this idea, let you hear from the students themselves through a video documentary they produced, and then come back to speak about how this idea of *making curriculum together* evolved with the students. Through my discussion of this emergent curriculum, I will share many of the theoretical tenets that I drew on to think about how to build curriculum with young people. My hope is that you may subsequently connect this work to your efforts within the professional development schools and the school-university partnerships you are cultivating.

Solving Community Problems as Curriculum

First, I'd like you to think about a problem you may have in your community. How you define your community is totally up to you. It could be your local community or you could be thinking about the neighborhood park that may not be in as good condition as it should be, or it could be about your global carbon footprint and how you can make sure that you're not wasting so much energy.

Take a moment. I'll give you five seconds or so to think about that. I won't quiz you or anything. But as you're thinking about this idea, I want you to think about how working to solve the problem that you identified could be considered a curriculum.

Okay, so time's up. When you think about this problem and how you would potentially solve it, how then do you envision a solution amidst all the high-stakes accountability that we have? All the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) requirements, all this "über-testing" phenomenon that we have today? How would you take the identified problem, something that was important for you, and then how you're thinking about solving it, and how it would work as a curriculum within the frameworks as far as teaching within the United States? This process is exactly what I tried with the young people in my classroom. I looked to them to identify and solve a problem that was important to them.

Rather than me deciding what that problem would be, I posed the question to the fifth grader students in my classroom. Within one hour, the students came up with 89 different issues that affected them in their community, everything from litter in the park to teenage pregnancy to wanting a kid president. They came up with all different sorts of ideas, some more serious than others.

But when the students actually looked at the list of unique issues, they realized that about half of them had to do with the shameful state—the dreadful inadequacy—of their learning environment. They wanted a whole new school. That's what they decided to focus on. That one question became the epicenter, the nexus, for an entire year's curriculum (Schultz, 2008).

Against the Backdrop of Cabrini Green

I would be doing a disservice, though, if I didn't speak about myself, my own social location and my positionality against the backdrop of Cabrini Green. Cabrini Green is a neighborhood housing project in downtown Chicago that is currently in the midst of massive gentrification. Because my race, my class, my privilege—a middle class, white male walking into a 99.9 percent African-American community that has been historically marginalized—is critical to understanding and making meaning about the journey my students and I were on together. Importantly, naming this reality is not about trying to figure out whether this is good or bad or right or wrong, but wrestling with this complexity is part of the bigger picture of teaching and learning with students (Delpit, 2006).

That positionality—who I am—bears a lot on how I must think about my relationships with the children, with the curriculum, with the community, with my colleagues, and school administrators. Oftentimes, when we think about places like Cabrini Green, the script is (unfortunately) already written. There are low expectations for the young people in the community, as well as, low expectations for the adults in the community.

For me, I was very frustrated by this idea, but I was also in touch with this situation. For me, I needed to problematize my positionality. I needed to trouble it, not in order to arrive at some conclusion, but because that process was part of what teaching, to me, is all about.

How could I start to think about—start to muddy those waters? Because rather than coming in with received wisdom and, “I know what's right for all of you,” I needed to deliberate these issues with the young people.

So how can we try to create rigorous, high expectations for young people when we already know what the storyline will be? With that frame in mind, I'm going to show a short video to all of you that my fifth grade students produced. And, as I am no expert in documentary videos, the students actually looked to outside help because of my inadequate skills.

They produced this video and it's gone through several iterations even past the fifth-grade year because, among other things, they were invited to speak at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference two years ago, and they decided to go back and do a compilation of multiple videos (with the assistance of a graduate student). This video was the result of their efforts.

I do have to say, though, I am always a little bit uncomfortable sharing the video with a group of educators—especially literacy experts—because you'll see my teaching in action. Honestly, I'm doing some awful reading instruction. I have to put this out there, right? Because I'm sure that some of you will say, “Oh my gosh, he's doing popcorn reading and he's correcting the children out loud in front of their peers.” Reflecting on my teaching, I now see that I used some pretty inadequate teaching methods, and I now know there are better ways to do it. I am constantly learning those approaches and trying to help my future teachers think about the multiplicity of ways they can reach their students.

In this case, my method of reading instruction happened to work. What you're going to hear at one point is my students reading an article from the *Chicago Tribune* that had just come off the presses that morning. They're struggling through it. I had vastly different reading levels in my classroom, from non-readers in this fifth-grade classroom to readers at a ninth-grade level.

The point that I bring out here is that my students were struggling. You'll hear it, but I also want to point out that I was struggling as a teacher, too. I think that that's important. There are other issues that arise in the video, too, but I will allow you to think about them as you watch and reflect on it. This is my set up for the video and for my attempt at teaching in ways that are "in the making" with students. [To see the video documentary, go to the following web address: <http://www.neiu.edu/~bschultz/images/activist/activist.html>]

No Accident: Constructing Spaces for an Emergent Curriculum

Every time I see this video, I'm a bit dismayed—it's like shame on us, right? Like students need to show other people that they deserve a new school rather than the expectation that everybody deserves a safe learning environment—a place to flourish and to learn. Every time I see my former students say that, I get really frustrated.

The idea here is that numerous things came into play to make this effort a reality, and it didn't happen by accident. It wasn't that I was trying to develop this yearlong curriculum that integrated all the subjects in fluid ways. It was a situation where I thought about the curriculum studies literature that I had been studying in my doctoral program and was wondering how I could bring it to life. Doctoral coursework was so theoretical and often disconnected to the reality of teaching in a school, let alone a school that served the Cabrini Green neighborhood.

I was wondering about a lot of different things, one of which was the idea that teachers could be theorizers. I liked this stuff, but I was like, "What does this look like?" As I thought about the idea of teachers as theorizers, the idea that teachers constantly adjust and adapt and tailor the situation to the students in their classroom, to their abilities, to their interests—the students' interests—that made a lot of sense to me (Schubert, 1992; Schwab, 1978).

Teachers are certainly theorizers. I aspired to be a theorizer in the classroom, to conceive of a classroom that was culturally relevant and responsive to the students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). At the same time, I said, "Well, wait a second. If I could be a theorizer, why, too, couldn't my students theorize alongside me?" Why couldn't we theorize together? Because who was I to say what we should focus on—I was wrestling with these issues in many ways. I was a teacher teaching into the complexities of all that reality, amidst all of those contextual

factors. I wondered, “What does it look like when we theorize together?”

These questions led me to this whole body of literature about integrated, emergent, and authentic curriculum. I was fascinated by this because I had heard all this rhetoric around integrated curriculum. At the beginning I thought that it was that kind of curriculum where you connected math and science and threw a little bit of music in there and it is “called” an integrated curriculum. Certainly, this is an attempt at integrated curriculum.

However, going back to the literature from 100 years ago when John Dewey (1902) started writing about this and then looking to L. Thomas Hopkins (1937; 1976), for instance, and more recently to James Beane (1997; 2005) and Michael Apple (Apple & Beane, 2007), and the idea of integrated curriculum actually says that the people most invested in it, the stake holders in that classroom, is where the integration comes.

It’s within these spaces that you look to the students for what’s most interesting to them. You ask them about their needs, what their wants and their desires are. From there, all those disciplines of knowledge, all those subject areas that we only do in school—we only arbitrarily separate the disciplines of knowledge in the school setting—come together. From that point, if you’re following the students’ interests, you can connect all those subject areas. Not in artificial ways, not in pre-planned ways, but because they emerge. They’re emergent from that centerpiece, the children.

Then, if there’s an integrated and emergent curriculum, you’re naturally doing things in authentic ways. You’re not trying to create that authenticity. You’re not contriving situations for authenticity. The authenticity happens. For me, I was so intrigued by the literature I was reading at the time that I felt guided toward this notion of democratic classrooms and democratic schools (Apple & Beane, 2007; Ayers, 2004, 2010; Meier, 2002).

But the problem was that when I got first into the classroom in Cabrini Green, I thought I needed to be the boss. I needed to be the one in charge. I needed to keep my students busy, right? My role as the teacher was to keep my students busy, right? If I could have them all sitting down together and quiet and listening to me, I was doing my job. But I didn’t really feel very comfortable with that.

Actually, I felt extremely uncomfortable with that kind of teaching. It challenged many of the creative ideals that I wanted to have. What did it look like to share authority (Oyler, 1996) with the young people in my classroom? I had to be vulnerable. If I was on this pursuit of an emergent curriculum based on students’ concerns, in this case, trying to appeal to the City of Chicago and the Board of Education to make good on that erstwhile promise of a new school, what does it look like to share authority?

I didn’t know where we were headed. I didn’t know what kind of barriers or obstacles we were going to have to overcome together. That put me in a precari-

ous situation as a teacher. But it also had my students wholly invested in what was happening. Many came to school early and stayed late after school. Some even came in on the weekends. Why? Because they had an important problem that they wanted to solve.

I'll never forget when one of my students in the classroom was approached by a colleague saying, "I've never seen you do such amazing school work." He looked at him and quickly retorted, "This ain't no school work. This is important." I mean, it says a lot, right? It says a lot about how we think about education and what we do to our students or what we give to our students. And it certainly says a lot about what our students think.

That's what the public rhetoric right now focuses on, where teachers "give" knowledge to their students. The "bunch o' facts" curriculum, as Alfie Kohn (2004) refers to it, focuses on decontextualized, benign pieces of information rather than seeing the students as able beings and knowledge creators. These deficit orientations perpetuate the idea that students cannot assist or even create the curriculum. It devalues their humanity, and it's just wrong. It's completely inconceivable that this is the way that we so often approach schooling and education today.

For me, I pondered how I could work to develop those shared authority spaces (Schultz & Oyler, 2006) and trust that the students were going to pursue with rigor, with the same high expectations that I had of them and that they'll have of each other so that they can then try to solve a problem, try to reach a goal?

The goal that we're aspiring towards is a big one. It's a big social issue. It has to do with school funding. It has to do with inequity. It has to do with justice. But the children in my classroom in Room 405 had a vested interest in the ideas. I didn't have to figure out a way to motivate them. They were already self-motivated. I didn't need to bribe them with a pizza party at the end of the week in order to get through all of our problems because they wanted to be there. They wanted to do it, as it was important to them.

This process led to questions about why these progressive educational ideals do not readily happen in historically marginalized places? I tried to dig through the literature but although I did find some examples (see, for example, Horton, Kohl & Kohl, 1997; Wood, 2005), they were few and far between.

Most of the examples of this sort of progressive education, looking to the students for what was worthwhile, happened in more affluent communities. Not in places like Cabrini Green. Not in places where the mantras and public rhetoric was all about "back to the basics" in skills and deficit orientations, focusing on pathology and despair, rather than potential, possibility, and hopefulness, a hopefulness that I certainly saw with the 10- to 12-year-olds in my classroom.

But others did not. How could we challenge that? How could we write a counter narrative through our pursuits? Not because we wanted to write a counter

narrative, but because we were performing one inevitably by resisting common assumptions. This was all about what I call inverting the curriculum: the idea of looking to the students to answer their own needs, their wants and desires, rather than telling them what was in their best interest.

Pizza Things and Inverting the Curriculum

My fifth-grade students saw value in learning the skills. Let me characterize a couple examples. For instance, one of my students, when we were knee-deep in our contingent action plan, came into school and said—well, we were having a discussion. It was a brainstorming thing about different ways that we could keep on “getting the word out,” as the students said, to try to influence people with power to get us a new school building.

So, this student came in and argued, “We need them pizza things.” I did what lots of teachers do. I ignored him because I didn’t understand what he was talking about and I went on to the next student. He kept on saying it. He was persistent. He said, “We need to have them pizza things.” It wasn’t me that figured it out, but it was one of his peers that said, “You mean pie charts?” Because he started to explain that they’re in the newspapers, that they’re important, and that they prove things.

I said, “Well, what do they prove?” He explained, “I don’t know, but people look at them in the newspapers and they’re important. We need them to prove our case.”

From that point on, the class tried to create them pizza things, and that became an opportunity for us, right? What do we do to create pie charts? Well, certainly I could have gone and created a lesson plan, right? I could have figured out all the materials required and written it up myself, but instead we started to think out loud and think out loud together. So the students developed a questionnaire. Immediately, they took that questionnaire, before I even had a say in it, down to the fourth-grade classroom.

They took it and they started aggregating the results of the questionnaire. They didn’t understand when they got their results back how they were going to create them pizza things. As they learned firsthand, it turns out that their questionnaire included all open-ended questions. Had I seen that before several of the children were down on the third floor of the school, I probably would have intervened, and said, “Oh no, no. If you want to do that, you need to control the situation. We need to have closed-end responses.” But I didn’t have that opportunity.

Instead, it was an opportunity to do what I have called falling forward. It wasn’t a failure, because now we had an opportunity. The students re-created that questionnaire with closed-ended responses and took it out to some 300 people. The video included images of the pie charts they created.

Now they had all this data from all these questionnaires that they had collected. What to do with that? We talked about it. The students had used a program on the computer before, a survey tool. They decided to enter all their collected data into this survey tool.

I'll never forget the moment when one of the students was in the computer lab, and he's cursing out his computer, yelling at it, swearing at it. I didn't understand. He's mad because he says, "The girls won." I didn't understand what he was saying. He brings me over to his computer screen. I looked at the monitor and he's mad. He's very upset. Looking at that pie chart, there was a bigger piece of the pie for girls than boys. The first question on their questionnaire was, "Are you a boy or a girl?"

I explained to him—it was an opportunity again, right, that teachable moment. I said, "When you have the most of something when we're analyzing data, we call that the mode." He looked at me like I was crazy. He proceeded to be upset. But from the back of the room, the student with, according to the state standardized test, one of the lowest achievement scores in mathematics, said, "The biggest problem with the school is the lunchroom. The lunchroom is the mode for the biggest problem that we have."

He was looking at the data and he was understanding it. It wasn't Chapter 10 in our math book where I would have made them memorize mean, median, and mode, which they had done in fourth grade and third grade as well, right? But now we were applying the data that belonged to them. The questions were theirs. The data collection was theirs. The input was theirs. Now it had purpose. It had a purpose to solving a problem they were invested in. Now they needed to disseminate that information with them *pizza things* so that they could prove it to others as they had argued earlier.

The idea here is to think about how to cover the state standards, but not for their own sake. So often, we try to cover standards because that's what we're supposed to do. In Illinois, the number one reading standard for fifth grade students' states that students should be able to "read with understanding." I don't know of any teacher, good, bad, or indifferent that gets up in front of a classroom and says, "Today, class, we're going to read without understanding." Right? The idea of "reads with understanding" is a goal we're aspiring towards. The question is how do we create the spaces and the opportunities in our classroom, challenge the students with the responsibility to get to that goal, rather than—and this happens in Chicago Public Schools all the time—the instance where a teacher is expected to write something like Standard 1A on the board, "reads with understanding," and that's what we're going to cover today. Why? Only because the book says we're supposed to cover that today, not because our students are struggling and we're trying to make sure that they have comprehension of the material.

I didn't need to fight with my students to cover these standards. Why? Because they wanted reach them on their own. The desire was there. They helped them solve

their identified problem. For instance, later the students invited local legislators to visit their classroom and view the building, based on a letter that the students themselves had written saying, “We would like you to come see for yourself. We don’t think you’d send your kids to a school that’s falling apart like ours.”

With those kinds of invitations, local legislators came in. I’ll never forget this one boy, Demetrius, had done a lot of research on what it takes to get a new school and the cost involved. At the time, State Senator Miguel del Valle was in the classroom and he said to the students, “I don’t think you all understand what it takes. I agree with you. You need a better place for learning. I agree with this, but,” and he reached into his breast pocket of his sport coat to take out some materials.

He started to say, “You know what it costs to get a new school building?” Demetrius interrupted him and said, “Yeah, exactly. In Chicago public schools, it costs \$18 million to get a new school building. The capital improvement program for the school allocates this money.” Quickly the state senator tucked the info away, acknowledging to the student, “You actually know more than me.”

The point was that the students took this on themselves, not because of any requirements I was forcing on them as their teacher, but because the cause was important to them. I didn’t need to force them to do things. They wanted to do it. That’s what inverting the curriculum and providing spaces for a curriculum in the making with students is all about. We were able to cover these standards. We were able to produce something—a website or a video documentary—because the students saw value in it. Outsiders saw value in it.

We all saw value in reaching beyond the tired walls of the schoolhouse and entering the public sphere, where there are natural obstacles and barriers to overcome, where the mayor doesn’t respond to you, or the CEO of the public schools keeps dismissing you every time you call and say, “We need you to come to our school. If you’re in charge of the schools, you surely can come to our school, right? Isn’t that what you do?”

But that wasn’t what was happening. The young people were pushing back on a broken system. Clearly, in Chicago there’s a broken system where we only graduate about 50 percent of students that start ninth grade. The students were intimately aware of situations like this. They were posing questions back that I think all of us should be posing back.

Teaching as Relationship Building: Keys for Finding Support and Success

When we think about this sort of curriculum, though, as I mentioned earlier, it’s not something that happens by accident. But a teacher also needs to think about how to strategize in order to sustain and support this kind of teaching and thinking among instructors and students alike. We need to find administrators

that are willing to let us do that. The key is that you have to think seriously about it. You have to theorize as a teacher or a teacher-educator encouraging future teachers to do such things.

This process was about building relationships. If I could sum up my philosophy of teaching and education into one sentence, it's about building relationships. Maybe those relationships are with the children or with the parents or with the community or with the curriculum or with my colleagues and administrators. But it's the relationships that matter.

I had to find allies across the board, whether it was with my colleagues, with people in the broader community, or with my administration. Because so many people ask me, "How did you throw out the curriculum?" Then, as now, someone who studies curriculum, I say, "Well, what is curriculum, right?" It comes back to that definition I offered earlier, in terms of answering the big, broad question of what's worthwhile, not necessarily what we're going to do tomorrow at 10 o'clock.

When we think about developing those relationships, how did I figure out how to get my principal or my assistant principal to buy in? I had several different strategies, whether it was writing narrative reports for my principal that were a paragraph or two about what was happening, or it was never missing turning in my lesson plans even though they might have been embellished. It was doing those sorts of things so I didn't bring all this undue attention on me so that we could pursue what we needed to do.

It was about finding those allies and making sure to satisfy expectations in various ways, which I think was really key to following through on this sort of approach to developing curricula with students.

Quite honestly, when they picked the issue of getting a new school, I thought the students were going to pick a simpler problem like fruit punch at lunch or recess every day. I thought their chosen concern was going to be localized within the immediate school and its respective decision makers. But the students decided to push well beyond that immediacy into areas where all those natural obstacles occur.

Learning From, With, and Alongside Students

It's all fine and good for me to talk about this and share this experience and really relish in it for myself as a teacher, but we need to look further to what the students now say. They're seniors in high school now, a fact I share with you because only about half the students from Chicago tend to graduate, but this particular group of students sees the value in their education, sees the value in learning and as far as I understand have stuck it out.

Recently, several of the students have been writing with me a lot and they've also been presenting. They talk about a lot of different things that are really im-

portant to them and I think that I would not be doing them justice if I didn't share their big ideas and what they're now trying to teach teachers and teacher-educators about how they can engage and motivate city kids. In other places I have referred to this (only) semi-jokingly as "kids as teacher educators."

I'll mention these student-generated ideas briefly, which I think certainly reciprocate many of the ideas in the literature I discussed earlier and that served as the underpinnings for how I was attempting to theorize and make curriculum with them.

One of the big things the students talk about is the idea of choice. Having choices in the classroom is key to them. Recently, when one of the students was speaking at a conference, she said, "You know, never before in school have I had the opportunity to really choose what I wanted to study. Usually, it's about somebody kind of giving me some choices, maybe, but not really what I'm fascinated by, what I'm interested in, what I would like to take on."

I thought the idea of choice was intriguing, particularly in light of their next point: the idea of flexibility. If I go back to the literature myself, I look to the literature on choice and flexibility and they're often intertwined. The students have a different definition. They're complementary, but they're different. Flexibility is the opportunity, as the students say, to be able to self-select the different roles that you have in the classroom.

For instance, the video documentary that you saw, you saw the students that decided to conceive of it, to storyboard it, to edit it. I would have thought that all the children in the classroom would have wanted to do a video documentary. They would have thought it was a great opportunity, right? But the idea is that I thought they *would've*—but not everybody did. Was my role as the teacher to force everybody to do the same thing? That's often something that we deliberate about as teacher-educators.

We talk about the idea of, should everybody have the same stuff? I know all of you will walk away with different things, even from the same ideas I'm sketching out for you right now. Different people, based on his or her life experiences, based on his or her own interests, based on things that he or she likes to do, are going to take away different ideas here. Isn't that the same thing that happens in a fifth-grade classroom? Should we force everybody to do petitions because we identified that as one of the action-planned components? Or, can we allow the students to teach each other after those that are most interested in it, engage in it more deeply?

I think those notions of choice and flexibility is very interesting because if I started to force students to do things, I think I would have lost them. I think that their interest and their motivation behind pursuing something that was especially important to them, not only because they just wanted to see a brand new school building, which they did, but also more so because they didn't want their little brothers and sisters to have to endure the same "dump of a school,"

as they had to. The project therefore was bigger than each individual. It was about reaching higher moral ground because the space, the opportunity, and the responsibility were theirs.

I've mentioned two big things the students speak about. The third idea that the students talk about is the notion of community—of getting the community involved in the school and getting the school involved in the community. A student and I were writing a piece for a journal together. He was a tenth grader at the time. We were talking out loud and he was telling me what he valued most. His thoughts echoed John Dewey (1915) about the importance of community. He was right on. The idea of bringing experts in, no matter what they held their expertise in, was key. Notions of how schooling and learning environments relate to the broader community were just as important. This tenth grader got it and he's telling everybody in this room or those who read that journal article exactly how important that was to him.

He said that it was the first time he had experienced people other than his parents or teachers caring about him and his fellow classmates. It was the first time, and he actually said, "It was better than getting candy at the candy store, which is something us fifth graders really like to do." The experience of feeling cared for was as valuable; even as adults we can see how much of an impact caring, nurturing and interest from outsiders makes on our experience of learning.

The idea was fascinating to me. It related to the next point the students brought up, which was the notion of parents being involved in the classroom. So often, I work with my future teachers or practicing teachers who are working on master's degrees, and they talk about the idea that parents are part of the problem. "If only the parents were more involved."

I hear that so often. I respond, "It's your responsibility not to just educate the children in your classroom, but it's to find ways to connect with the parents and bring the parents into the learning process. If you see it as a problem, then instead of having despair about it or complaining about it, let's work to solve it. How do we bridge those relationships? How do we find a way to connect the parents?"

I tried to reach out to the parents of every child on a regular basis, not just for the "Edward's doing something wrong in the classroom," but for the opportunity to share updates, to explain what sorts of things we're engaged with, and perhaps address how the expertise of a parent could help us in our pursuit.

I tried to let the parents know they had an open door. It wasn't just the parent-teacher conference or when the child was acting up. It was much different than that, which was really key. The support of the parents for this sort of alternative way of thinking about curriculum was very important, as was having them not only have my back but also wanting their children to be successful in my classroom.

Related to all this, though, and for me it's a foundational piece here, is the idea of problem posing. One student in particular has been talking about it at every opportunity that he has whether as a guest lecturer in my college classes or at a

conference. He says that schools should not be about what the teacher wants to teach or what the teacher is supposed to teach. School needs to be about what the kids want to know. Why don't you let the kids start asking questions, he queries, that are important to them rather than telling them what should be important to them?

For me, as a curriculum studies scholar, that's a Paulo Freirian idea, right? (Freire, 2000). It's that idea of challenging banking notions of education and instead looking to the immediate participants for what they believe can help them. It's that notion of critical literacy, being able to read the world rather than just read the word. This particular student always talks about this problem posing and how he finds affirmation in the problem posing. But, he also tells folks that if you think what they did in this particular fifth-grade classroom was full of goodness, as something that you would maybe want to tell other people about, that's great. But don't miss the point here.

Because if you think that this is a good situation, that what this particular fifth-grade classroom did was important, what will you do when you leave this room? After hearing these remarks, what do you make of the situation? Because I would be willing to bet, he says, that in your communities and in your neighborhoods, there are schools just like our old school that are falling apart, that the kids are expected to perform on tests without a safe and respectable place to learn.

They're supposed to perform equally but they don't necessarily have the resources equally.

So, he asks, what will you do? I'll leave that question to all of you. Thank you.

Questions From the Audience and Schultz's Answers

Mary Roe: Brian is willing to have a few questions and responses to them should you hold any.

Question: I was curious. Did the kids end up at Jenner or did they have to go to schools outside of the area?

Schultz: Most of the kids transferred to Jenner School—in the video, that was that nice, new building right across the baseball field as opposed to, as the students said “the big, ugly one” that we were forced to learn in. To provide a little bit of context, there was a turf line in between that ball field. Chicago Public Schools decided to close down the Byrd School at the end of the year citing low enrollment—not the inadequate conditions of the school—and transferred the student body over to Jenner School, and with no interventions whatsoever to support that transfer. Since that time, the students have matriculated throughout

Chicago Public Schools to high schools. What I've learned over the five years was that the property of Byrd School was on the auction block for \$58 Million. That amount is just a footprint of the school. On and off it was used for some administrative offices and then just recently I learned, just this past summer, the Chicago Board of Education approved an \$8 million capital improvement to the building. Not for the children of Cabrini Green to have better environment but for a swap, but for a property swap with the Archdiocese of Chicago to add on to the Walter Payton High School, one of the flagship, selective enrollment Chicago public schools. This elite school had already taken over an archdiocese building just down the street from Byrd. After CPS spends \$8 million to add a gym, a lunchroom, an auditorium, improving the windows and heat system and basically giving the school a facelift, the Board of Education and the Archdiocese are swapping these properties.

Question: Do the students that you had in Room 405 still live in Cabrini or have they been relocated due to the gentrification of the housing project community?

Schultz: Yeah, so almost all the high-rise buildings have been taken down in Cabrini Green. But there were three different developments in Cabrini since it was built in the 1940s: the row houses, the red tenement buildings, and the white tenement buildings. As of today, there are only three of the high rise tenement buildings still standing, but the row houses will always exist and are not going to be demolished.

Some of the students live in the row houses or in the remaining buildings and then many have been dispersed throughout the city and some of them—actually as of just the past couple of years—have returned back to the Cabrini Green area, which is now called Old Town Village. Those of you familiar with Chicago know that Old Town is one of the highest property value zip codes in the country. The city had to re-brand what they called the area to make the area desirable for market rate condominiums and townhomes that sell for more than half a million dollars or more.

Question: The students that were in your fifth-grade class and now are about to graduate from high school, what do you think was the sustaining motivation with this group of children? Because

obviously that's a large span in school and there's all kinds of detractors that could come their way. What's your take on what has kept them going?

Schultz: I think one of the things they saw was that education and learning even in a school environment can be empowering. I don't think that this just happened in this particular fifth-grade classroom, but I think there were other opportunities that happened along that continuum that caused them to value the journey. I think that that's the biggest key—piece of the puzzle is that they see value in it. They see that other people value them pursuing (and creating) knowledge.

I think there's another piece, too. Since I maintain fairly regular contact with several of the students from the classroom, I know they are really eager to now share their knowledge with others and to talk about their experiences. My former students really resonate the idea of kids teaching teachers. That powerful notion that kids can be teacher educators, too, is something that we have been theorizing together quite a bit. I think that's pretty powerful for a lot of them. Don't get me wrong, though. There are still those detractors and having to negotiate very complex spaces, certainly is something that I struggle to relate to based on my own educational upbringing and experience.

Question: How did the curriculum that you and your students put together mesh with standardized testing?

Schultz: It's funny because Mary brought this up before with me, and I usually don't discuss my take on standardized testing in depth unless somebody asks me a direct question. There are several reasons I don't like to talk about testing including their inherent biases, the ways that they are used to measure learning as sole indicators, and the high stakes and pressure associated with them. But since you asked, let's take it piece by piece here and look to the curriculum and standards. First, I was challenged by a colleague about approaching the curriculum with students in this way. She asked all sorts of probing questions: Was I doing a disservice (to students)? Was I covering the standards? How were students going to be prepared for sixth grade? As a result, that teacher and I sat down with the Illinois State Standards associated with fifth grade and, lo and behold, we were able to see how this curriculum was covering all of the

standards for this grade level across all of the subject areas. I got real excited, right? I said, “Can we go on to the sixth grade standards?” That conversation was supposed to last an hour but it lasted several, because we went all the way through eighth grade. We were touching all the standards from fifth to eighth grade in this integrated curriculum. This is not to say that all the students were always exceeding the benchmarks, but the curriculum certainly involved all of these areas. That’s the first part of your question. The curriculum completely aligns to state standards but in that backward mapping sort of way; the standards were not done for their own sake.

The other piece of it, though, is that many of the students’ standardized test scores significantly improved—many students that were not at the national norm achieved that benchmark. Then, as far as attendance, another big indicator especially in Chicago Public Schools, there was a class aggregate of 98 percent attendance.

Question: Regarding colleagues in your building, there’s certainly—we all know that all teachers are not as forward globally thinking as obviously you have been in this. What was your reaction from your colleagues? Obviously, you were challenged by others. Did you see change in some of your faculty colleagues?

Schultz: I think there were a couple different things. One of the things that I was really quick to realize was important was that I had a lot to learn from my colleagues even though they might not have been teaching in progressive and democratic ways. That was really important. Lots of the teachers had been at the school for years if not decades. They intimately knew the community. They had immersed themselves in the community, and I really learned a lot from them.

Many of them—I remember one colleague in particular talking to me about how she had never learned this kind of approach in her teacher preparation. She wanted to learn and asked lots of questions. It was about unpacking some of the theoretical stuff to make it practical for them. Because I was in a different space studying for a doctorate at the time, immersed in much different literature than we often see in terms of our teacher preparation program that are so often focused on methods of teaching, rather than thinking much more globally as you had indicated. I did see lots of little changes.

Question: What about your students that were on IEPs?

Schultz: Actually, I had a lot. Perhaps I should have been required to have a special education certificate because so many students in my classroom had IEPs. That was sort of interesting in many respects. Many of the students fought going outside of the classroom, and did not want to be pulled out for special education because they wanted to be in the classroom.

I would argue that a lot of this was because the curriculum allowed for them to be focused on their situational needs and their situational interests and development. The classroom revolved around a very low-stakes environment rather than a punitive environment focused on grades. There was a lot of discussion that happened between the students and their special education teachers and between my colleagues who were the special education teachers and me.

I don't know that we always agreed on things. I'm trying to show the messiness of this, right? It's not something where I have some received wisdom here that it all worked out perfectly. But I noticed that after that particular year, two of the students with IEPs were able to get some of the interventions focused on remediation and behavior removed. Many of the students had been labeled with their IEPs.

This was a 100 percent African American class and only two girls in this entire class. It just happened to be that way. We understand the research that's out there on the amount of African American boys that get placed in special education along with the alphabet soup that gets attached to their name, sometimes correctly and oftentimes incorrectly.

Question: These were your fifth-grade students and they left you at the end of the year. How did they then survive the more traditional curriculum the next year?

Schultz: They sat in rows, they folded their hands, they nodded and smiled. I joke, because I think that that's a really good question; I had a lot of hand wringing and angst wondering throughout the entire year about this very question. Was I setting my students up for a failure? Was I a disservice or causing them to be frustrated in the future? I think that I stayed in touch with many of the students for several years and now maintain contact with about half of them. From what I understand, they did struggle with the

disconnect sometimes, but also found the cracks, found the opportunities and found the teachers that allowed them to keep on naming issues that were important to them. I think that one of the things I always wondered was that—the trajectory of this. Where does this take them? Do they get so fed up with school because school becomes that busy work mentality of running in place and underlining the noun and circling the verb on worksheets over and over again? I think that for many of the students, they saw that value in a more creative curriculum and could find it in other places. I know for some of the students, they resonate with the opportunity to talk to others now about what they find to be valuable in the classroom.

But, to be honest I'm not sure about it all. It's kind of a push and pull. There are lots of rough edges with this, and I don't necessarily have a clean answer. I think that that's something we should all be thinking about as we are working with future teachers or practicing teachers in classrooms. What kinds of situations are we allowing our students to be able to wrestle with in the future?

Question: If President Obama were in the room and our Secretary of Education, formerly of the Chicago Public Schools, what would you say to them? What do you think they most need to know about educating America's children?

Schultz: Wow! Somebody's videotaping this. Let me tell you something, Mr. President, right?

Well, I think first off is their blueprint for reform is egregious and totally misguided based on a push for privatization of public education that's been co-opted, first in Chicago and now across the county.

That's the first thing. I have to critique where they're at right now. Then what can we learn, right? What do they need to know? They need to understand the complexity of teaching. They need to know that Arne Duncan has a bachelor's degree in sociology and the most education experience that he did was volunteering in his mother's after school tutoring program. He doesn't understand what it means to be a teacher. I think that we all have some appreciation of that

The second thing is understanding what kinds of resources it takes to be an excellent teacher and an excellent student. I

think that we're missing the point when we have notions of competition for federal dollars rather than investment in our children, teachers, schools, and communities. And, I'm pretty skeptical of how we organize school funding especially with a federal law that dictates what we need to do in individual states. Last time I checked states still had this right.

I think we need to have a re-thinking. Are we trying to create social stratification? Are we trying to allow certain students to be able to ask the questions and be creative and other students to give the right answers and follow the rules so that we can promote cultural reproduction? Or, are we trying to provide opportunities for everybody?

I think I'd have a lot more questions for them to ponder than answers to give. I think that we all need to collectively, as society, as teacher educators, be asking those questions. I think that it's our responsibility. Because if we're not doing it, who's going to do it?

I often talk to my future teachers about this, and how they need to see their roles as change agents. What that change agency means is going to be different for everybody depending on their comfort and where they teach and how they teach. At the same time, we need to be asking those broad questions. We need to push these questions into public sphere as teachers and teacher educators, not shackled into the mediocrity that's set up by all these guidelines right now.

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WORKING ALER

Mary Beth Sampson

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Keynote Address

Abstract

The Newcomers Luncheon is where veteran members, division chairs, and journal editors welcome newcomers to the organization. This year's speaker was Mary Beth Sampson, long-time member of ALER and a current Board member. In her speech, she encouraged new members to Network with various ALER colleagues and to become life-long friends.



Welcome to the Association of Literacy Educators and Researcher (ALER)—(formerly known as CRA)! When I was asked to give an address entitled “Working ALER” for the Newcomer Luncheon, I had several responses. My first thought was “What an honor!” and the second was “Oh my—if I’m speaking to the newcomers...this must mean I’m considered an oldcomer!”

After much reflection, research, and time spent in trying to pull together something that would share some of the wonders of ALER and going through both the ALER and my own professional history, I realized I am an oldcomer! And the truth of the matter is, that’s a cause for celebration! ALER is the professional organization that has had the most impact in my life, both personally and professionally. ALER is my professional home and the members are my professional family. In addition, many ALER members have become my dear friends and part of my personal “family of choice.”

So let me revise my welcome and say, “Welcome to ALER and let me introduce you to your family.”

Who are we?? We are a diverse group. If you go to the webpage, you will find the following description of the organization:

ALER prides itself on being a ‘family’ of literacy educators. Members include: key scholars in the field of literacy education, past and present; literacy leaders; prominent researchers; authors; editors of national and

international professional journals; teachers; graduate students; and publishers (<http://www.aleronline.org/>).

So, if you are one or more of the above (or even if you're not), welcome! Since ALER is an organization of literacy educators and researchers, we as members know that research documents that we are most effective if we ensure the content we are teaching or learning has meaningful connections to real life. So, when I started pulling together thoughts about what you needed as new members of the ALER family, I began to think about the newest member of my family, my first grandchild who was born August 25, 2010. And, I might as well warn you, since we're now family, I am going to share pictures.



Just as we welcomed my new grandson into his personal family, we in ALER welcome you into your professional family.

Getting to Know Your New Professional Family

So you're brand new to the family—what do you do?? As with any newcomer to a family, you need to study to find out what's going on around you (and how to thrive)!

Your question as a new member of ALER is what do I need to do??

First, be sure you pronounce the family name correctly. According to the Minutes of the Board of Directors Spring Meeting Chicago, IL; April 24, 2010, THE PRONOUNCIATION is:

- A (long a)
- L (L)
- E (long e)
- R (R)

Now...say it out loud...A-L-E-R.

Second, you should leverage your reticular activating system!! What does that mean? Well, let's think about it this way. When we drive, we should all be paying attention to the vehicles around us. And, I always thought I did. However,

I've recently started looking for a new vehicle and am interested in finding a small SUV. Suddenly, I am surprised at how many small SUVs I see on the road, in the parking lot, in driveways, wherever I go! My Reticular Activating System has been activated for small SUVs!

And, sometimes, I go to great lengths to find out more about them. I recently stopped a woman in the University parking lot and to find out more about her Subaru Outback. I have pulled up probably too close to vehicles on the interstate to try to see what they are. And, I must confess, I have actually circled the Wal-Mart parking lot a little too long scanning the vehicles to see if one catches my eye. Every time I turn on the TV, look in a magazine, or surf the web, I notice small SUVs and search out more information. In addition, those around me seem to have also activated their Reticular Activating Systems. Friends and family often tell me about small SUVs they have noticed that they think I would like.

So—what is the Reticular Activating System (RAS)?? According to word-netweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn it is “the network in the reticular formation that serves an alerting or arousal function.” It is the part of the brain that is activated by your “conscious mind to filter out specific information and pass it to your subconscious mind” (<http://www.make-your-goals-happen.com/reticular-activating-system.html>). For example, in my case and the case of my family and friends it was, “check out small SUVs that might be appropriate for Mary Beth.” As a result, we all began to notice small SUVs everywhere!

And, with your Reticular Activating System activated within ALER, you will discover that professional opportunities are everywhere!! Now, obviously, my Reticular Activating System could be thoroughly activated, but if I never go anywhere or never turn on the TV or look in a magazine or surf the web or talk to anyone I still wouldn't find much information. So, what do you need to do?

You need to go to places where information is available. For instance, explore the website (frequently)!! When you go to <http://www.aleronline.org> you will find a wealth of updated information.



On the webpage you will find information about opportunities such as the *Literacy Teacher Education Research Grant* which provides funds up to \$2,500 for “promising research that addresses significant questions in literacy teacher education” (“Guidelines for 2010 Award Year,” 2010). Membership is required for eligibility. In addition, applicants must be a full-time faculty member at a College or University, have a doctorate degree or its equivalent, and have not received the grant with five years of the current submission date.

If you look at the links on the left side of the webpage, you will find information about the organization. Information includes how to sign-up for the Listserv, in addition to information about conferences, and publications.

Be sure to sign up for the *ALER Listserv*. By doing so, you will have access to the latest information and a venue to communicate with the members of the organization. Currently, to subscribe to the list, send a message to: ***alerlist-[subscribe@aleronline.org](mailto:alerlist-subscribe@aleronline.org)***. However, the website will provide the most current information regarding the listserv.

When you are on the website, you will be able to find information regarding publication opportunities. ALER’s professional journal is *Literacy Research and Instruction*. As described on the website, *Literacy Research and Instruction* is an international refereed professional journal that is published quarterly, with approximately 1,000 to 2,000 copies per issue and an acceptance rate of 15-20%. As indicated by the journal’s name, the focus is on research and instruction in reading education and related literacy fields. The Journal is ERIC indexed and articles are reported in *Research in Education*. The current editors are Parker C. Fawson, Sylvia Read, and Brad Wilcox.

Receiving *Literacy Research and Instruction* as a member is a valuable professional resource. Even more, since the review process is currently approximately two to three months, you have access to some of the most current research and instructional knowledge. In addition, you should consider submitting a manuscript to the journal. The submission guidelines are detailed on the web.

However, even before you complete a manuscript to submit, I would encourage you to apply to be a peer reviewer. The *Call for Reviewers* is on the web. Since the journal is published four times a year, you will have the opportunity to review anywhere from one to six manuscripts per year. As an ALER member, you are qualified to apply. I encourage you to do so, for the process of reviewing improves your writing. Since you are using the Review form for the publication as you complete your review, you have the opportunity to begin to look at manuscripts from the perspective of the editors. The experience will cause you to look at your own writing differently. The editors conduct a session at each conference to provide information and tips for potential authors and reviewers.

Another publishing opportunity is found in the *ALER Yearbook*. If you are presenting at this conference, you are eligible to submit a manuscript for publica-

tion in the *ALER Yearbook*. The *Yearbook* is peer reviewed and ERIC indexed with a 30-40% acceptance rate. However, when you consider that in order to be eligible to submit a manuscript for the *Yearbook*, you must be writing about a presentation that was accepted for a session at the conference, you realize the manuscripts are really double peer reviewed. Current editors are Susan Szabo, Timothy Morrison, Merry Boggs, and Linda Martin. Since the *ALER Yearbook* is published once a year, the *Call for Manuscripts* for the early November conference typically has a due date of mid January of the following year.

As with *Literacy Research and Instruction*, the opportunity to review submissions is available for members. Since all of the submissions have a mid-January due date, reviewers typically have two to three manuscripts to review in February. Sometimes reviewers are asked to review resubmissions in mid-April. Once again, reviewing provides a valuable opportunity to receive and use the framework the editors are using to evaluate submissions and make decisions regarding whether or not they should be accepted for publication. As with the *Journal of Literacy Research and Instruction*, the editors of the *Yearbook* always conduct sessions for prospective authors and reviewers at each conference. These sessions are valuable venues to learn about the editors' perspectives regarding the review process and the keys to submission of a manuscript. As a new member, I urge you to check your program and make plans to attend all sessions providing information about publishing or reviewing.

Another publication of the organization is the newsletter, *Literacy News*. It is published three times per year, Fall, Winter, and Spring/Summer. You receive the newsletter via the listserve and you are also able to access the current issue as well as back issues on the web (see <http://www.aleronline.org/news.html>). Larkin Page is the current editor and is currently featuring a new member in each issue. Therefore, not only is the newsletter a valuable opportunity to learn about the organization, it is also an opportunity for other members to learn about you and your professional strengths.

And since you are attending this conference, one of the most important things to do is *write*—your name on your conference program!! You must explore your program and find the various sessions that will help you be successful. Symposiums, Sessions, Workshops, and roundtables abound. As mentioned earlier, sessions are available to enhance your knowledge and ability regarding publication. In addition, the ALER Dissertation and Thesis Award Winners share their work in a session. Regardless of whether you are a graduate student or a faculty member working with graduate students, you will want to hear these award winners and learn how you or your students can apply for the award. Information regarding eligibility and deadlines for the awards is always available on the ALER website.

In addition, valuable knowledge and networking opportunities are present in the Division meetings. ALER has four divisions. Adult Learning is currently

chaired by Dianna Baycich , Clinical Research and Practice by Nina Nilsson, College Literacy by Frances Shapiro-Skrobe and Teacher Education by Jill Lewis-Spector. The four session titles of *Transitions to Postsecondary and the Workplace*, *What's New in the World of Literacy Clinics*, *Exchange Presentations: Best Practices in College Literacy*, and *Clinical Research and Practice, and Award Winning Teacher Preparation Programs for Teaching Reading* are evidence of the wide array of information available.

The conference program and the website always have proposal information for the upcoming conference and as well as applications for the Program Committee. As a newcomer, be sure to both propose for next year **and** become a member of the Program Committee so you will have the valuable experience of reviewing proposals and have your name listed in next year's program!

However, the most important thing to learn about ALER is—MAKE IT PERSONAL. If you haven't found out by now, it's a tough world out there and everyone needs a family. Family is the place to find your role models, your mentors, and your support system. Family provides opportunities, to grow, to expand your knowledge and to enjoy those around you in a nurturing environment. That is the type of atmosphere you will find in ALER, for while there are multiple opportunities for growth, to expand your knowledge and expertise, to network, to develop professional colleagues, you will also find that you will have the opportunity to just have fun and develop lifelong friends. And because you are a newcomer to our ALER family, you will have the same care as my new grandchild.



We will nurture and even carry you at times.



We will provide opportunities for new encounters.



We will see that you have chances to go new places.



We will even hang on to you when you try to get away!

However, we will also have very high expectations and when there are challenges we will cheer you on!!

So—it is true—ALER is an organization that you can and should “work.” Being part of the family provides countless opportunities for collaboration,

networking, publishing, service, knowledge, and growth. Active membership and participation will help provide visibility, enhance your vita, and advance you professionally. We all know that in this profession, you must publish; you must present; you must be involved in national and international professional organizations; you must demonstrate continual growth in research and teaching, and much more. Professional endeavors such as these are not options; they are requirements to not only advance, but to obtain and keep employment.

However, I must be honest. While there are countless opportunities available in ALER, I sincerely hope that your individual professional gain is not the primary reason you are a new member. For as in any healthy, functional family, it's not ALL about you! You're part of something much bigger than just you.

ALER History

Let's look at the beginnings. This organization began in 1958 when the Committee for a College Reading Association composed of 10 college teachers from Pennsylvania met at Temple University to "discuss the feasibility beginning of an organization for professionals in the northeastern and mid-Atlantic states who were interested in the teaching and administration of college reading programs" (Linek, 2010, p. 12). Obviously, as you look around this room and as you attend this conference, you realize the idea was feasible!

If you examine where those who started this organization were professionally at the time they began investing so much time and effort into beginning something new, you will discover something interesting. They were already well established professionally. Those ten college teachers were not on the way up; they were there. Those professionals did not need to do anything extra to advance their careers, particularly something as labor intensive as beginning a new organization. If you read the history of this organization, you will discover the motivation for those early founders. They believed in what they were doing and that their profession made a difference in the lives of learners of all ages. Most importantly, they were passionately committed to those who were coming after them. Perhaps Plato described these early founders and their motivation when he said, "Those who have torches pass them on."

After being involved for many years, I have seen those same passions, beliefs, and commitments demonstrated over and over in the leaders and members of this organization. The qualities and actions of those around me in this organization are what drew me to CRA many years ago and makes me committed to ALER today. I have seen over and over that this is an organization of professionals who are more interested in giving back than in getting; in mentoring rather than professional gain; in doing all within their power ensure the best future possible for all learners. So, with multiple apologies to Plato, based on my experiences in this organization, I would like to expand on his

statement and say that in ALER, “Those who have torches light the torches of others and burn even brighter.”

And, I know everyone of you, as a new member, has a torch. I urge you to add your torch to the flame. For regardless of the name of this address, I’ll be honest, it should never have been entitled “Working ALER.” The focus of this organization and hopefully of my comments is “ALER working” to make a positive impact on the lives of all learners. You are a member of an organization that exists not just to serve you, but to provide you with opportunities to serve others!

Once again, welcome to your family. You now have the opportunity to become part of “ALER working” and to make a difference. I urge you to light the torches of others—and burn even brighter!

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“NEW RULES” FOR LITERACY LEARNING

Nancy Padak

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Keynote Address

Abstract

If you’ve watched Bill Maher’s HBO show Real Time, you are probably familiar with his “New Rules” segment. Bill’s “New Rules” take aim at a wide range of subjects. Nancy’s “New Rules” took aim at literacy teaching and learning. Nancy asked several ALER leaders to suggest “New Rules” for literacy learning by posing this question: If you could make only one change in literacy education, what would it be? In this speech, she shared what colleagues suggested and offer a few “New Rules” of her own.



When Mary Roe asked me for a title to this speech, I thought about two of my lifelong loves: politics and humor. Good combination, right? Think Jon Stewart or Stephen Colbert. They are hilarious, but much as I like them, they don’t offer much in the way of speech-making.

But Bill Maher? That’s another story. This guy is funny and thought-provoking. Gary and I watch *Real Time with Bill Maher* on HBO pretty regularly. Before that, we watched his show *Politically Incorrect*. (Clips from that show surfaced during the fall, 2010 election because Christine O’Donnell, who ran for Senate in Delaware, was a guest years ago and mentioned that she had dabbled in witchcraft. Maher ran the clip, and other media picked it up. This caused Christine O’Donnell to make a commercial during her Senate campaign in which she said, “I am not a witch.” Talk about politics and humor!)

One of my favorite parts of *Real Time* is a bit near the end of the show called “New Rules.” In it, Bill takes aim at the serious and the silly. Here are a few of Bill’s New Rules:

- **NEW RULE:** Mount St. Helens has to either blow up or shut up. We get it—you're America's celebrity volcano. I say we kill two divas with one stone, and the next time Mount St. Helens starts to blow, we throw Paris Hilt in it (Maher, 2005, p. 8).
- **NEW RULE:** Give arrested celebrities a chance to comb before their mug shots are taken. Not allowing fallen icons to wash up gives the impression that they're, well, washed up. And we'd hate for that to happen (Maher, 2005, p. 61).
- **NEW RULE:** There's no such thing as smart water. Hollywood starlets and models are being photographed these days holding electrolyte-enhanced water called *smart water*. Because nothing reads *smart* like Hollywood starlets and models (Maher, 2005, p. 234).
- **NEW RULE:** News organizations have to stop using the phrase "We go beyond the headlines." That's your job, dummy. You don't see American Airlines saying, "We land our jets on the runway" (Maher, 2005, p. 140).

Sometimes a New Rule has an edge to it:

- **NEW RULE:** If America can't get its act together, it must lose the bald eagle as our symbol and replace it with the YouTube video of the puppy that can't get up. As long as we're pathetic, we might as well act like it's cute. I don't care about the president's birth certificate, I do want to know what happened to "Yes we can." Can we get out of...Afghanistan? No. Fix health care? No. Close Gitmo? No. Cap-and-trade carbon emissions? No. The Obamas have been in Washington for ten months and it seems like the only thing they've gotten is a dog (Huffington Post, 2009).

And Bill has even taken on education:

- **NEW RULE:** Stop believing slogans, especially the ones that come out of the White House. Twinkies aren't wholesome goodness, and the "Clear Skies Initiative" isn't really going to bring clear skies. And it turns out the "No Child Left Behind" law actually leaves lots of children behind. It leaves so many behind, in fact, that they have a name for them now: "pushouts," as in "we're pushing you out of school so that our cumulative test scores will be higher" (Maher, 2005, p. 25).

Yes, that's what this is all about. Our "No Child Left Behind" (2002) law is written like this: As a state, you get federal money for your schools, but only when

two main things happen—you make test scores go up and dropout rates go down. How to achieve both of these goals? By making [some] kids disappear!

For the 2000 election, Houston’s dropout rate was given as 1.5%. After the election, it was revised to 40 percent. I don’t need a degree in fuzzy math to know that 40 percent is not “no child left behind” (Maher, 2005, p. 25).

ALER Members’ New Rules

The idea of Bill Maher’s New Rules got me thinking. What if we, as literacy educators and researchers, had the chance to make New Rules? What would they be? So I committed myself to a title for this speech—*New Rules for Literacy Learning*—and I sent an email to some ALER friends. I asked them this: If you could make only one “New Rule” for literacy learning, what would it be? Why?

I got 17 responses. Being the good qualitative researcher that I am, I categorized the responses. After analysis, I found five categories:

• Category 1: Schools

- **NEW RULE:** Anyone whose only experience with schools has been attending them should never be prescriptive about them (Bill Henk).
- **NEW RULE:** The whole education system needs to be started over from the ground up with no politicians allowed (Diana Baycich).
- **NEW RULE:** Policy makers must recognize that it is not reasonable to believe that children can be dropped off in kindergarten and then picked up thirteen years later as fully developed human beings. In other words, the tired, but ever-present mantras of “hold teachers accountable” and “raise test scores” must be balanced by policy discussions and policy decisions that reflect the fact that teachers should no longer be asked to cure problems that are, as Berliner says, “outside of their zone of influence.” The educational challenges of our times are broader than teacher accountability and test scores. The solutions should be broader as well (Maryann Mraz).
- **NEW RULE:** All schools should have teachers and administrators who understand students and families from diverse cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. Schools are becoming more diverse across the U.S., and all teachers need to understand the basics related to the needs of children and adolescents learning English. They also need to develop a comfort level so that they are not afraid to interact with parents and families.

Schools need to provide support and opportunities, such as back to school nights and other events with translators. These supports are considered “normal” in some districts but are rare in other districts (Betty Sturtevant).

- Ruth Oswald is a teacher, through and through. So she asked the question at a graduate class. Here’s a response from one of her students:
- **NEW RULE:** Change class size! I truly believe that you should have only 10-12 students in a classroom for optimal teaching; not only does it help in classroom management, but also for writing and reading conferences and one-on-one help. In classrooms of 25-28 students, how often does a teacher get to sit down with each student or even three students at a time? (Megan Mullet).
- **NEW RULE:** Building administrators have to know curriculum, instructional research and practice so that they can serve as instructional leaders and facilitators. Too many principals have extremely limited C&I work (mainly from their undergrad or alternative certification studies). Even with best intentions, they often have a negative impact on students and teachers as they seek the magic bullet through scripted programs, test prep materials, and/or creating a lockstep curricular atmosphere for teachers.

On the positive side, principals who [know about] C&I have a tremendously positive impact on school climate, students, teachers, and the community without kill and drill test prep, and with appropriate faculty development and differentiated supervision students’ achievement--test scores improve significantly—I’ve seen this over and over in elementary, middle, and secondary schools (Wayne Linek).

- **Category 2: Teachers**

- **NEW RULE:** The first instant that teachers admit to counting down the days to retirement, they should be terminated (Bill Henk).
- **NEW RULE:** Be paranoid about everyone around you. Then teach as if it’s your last day as a school (Rich Vacca).
- **NEW RULE:** Teachers must like children and learning. (If they don’t, they should run from the profession as fast as they can). (Laurie Elish-Piper)

- **Rationales:**

- We often say that liking children is not enough to be a teacher, but it is the foundational piece. It breaks my heart to see students, teachers, and parents who are miserable because a teacher does not like children or certain types of children in his/her classroom. Yes, it is true that liking children is not enough to be an effective teacher, but without it, all of the best practices will be worthless because teaching is a relationship. Without a caring relationship, effective teaching and learning are unlikely to occur.

If teachers don't like to learn (and we all know some who fit into this category...sadly), they can't convey the joy of learning to their students. They can't be role models for their students to become life-long readers, learners, problem-solvers, etc. Furthermore, this type of teacher doesn't pursue his/her own professional learning, which results in out-of-date, folk teaching rather than current evidence-based best practices. (Laurie Elish-Piper)

NEW RULE: Teachers must live their lives as active learners (Denise Morgan).

- **Category 3: Students**

- NEW RULE: Make KIDS the focus for all we do in schools. Not materials and methods, not rules and policies, not assessments and reports and ratings, not teachers/ parents/ administrators. Kids. I remember that Frank Smith had a list of 10 ways to make reading difficult. His "One Difficult Rule to Follow" at the end of that list was, "Respond to what the child is trying to do." My rule is along those lines (Bob Rickelman).
- NEW RULE: [Show] "respect for the learner." I think we human beings have a fundamental drive to make sense of the world. We have natural curiosity about other people and about the world around us and because of that we just have an innate desire to learn. For example: we learn language (as Cambourne, 1988, reminded us decades ago) without coercion because we need language to make sense of the world and to be connected with other people. And as children are taking those steps into language, parents encourage them and invite them to lead the way, supporting them as they make those first steps at language learning by "respecting" and furthering their efforts. But the CHILDREN lead the way. If schools could trust in

this natural inclination to learn and respect learners enough to allow them to lead the way, I believe they would learn/ grow! (Evangeline Newton).

• **Category 4: Instruction**

- NEW RULE: All students should be instructed in materials that are at their instructional levels. Why? Students would experience many more successes with text, solidify what is being taught, develop more favorable attitudes toward reading ([learn that] reading is not too hard), learn content, and have a much greater opportunity to become efficient and effective readers (Jerry Johns).
- NEW RULE: There are no do overs in life’s classroom, so always do the next right thing (JoAnne Vacca).
- NEW RULE: [Let’s] banish the word “activities” from elementary schools. Instead I have the radical idea we should replace activities with lessons and instruction...I know; it is too darn radical. (Ray Reutzel)
- NEW RULE: You MUST bring your handheld communication devices to class. You will use them to learn! (Jackie Peck)

Some of these new rules aren’t new at all. The concept of instructional level, for example, is more than 60 years old (Betts, 1946). And how far back in American education can we find ideas about putting the child at the center of what we do, or showing respect for the learner? Colonel Francis W. Parker in the mid-1800s (Rippa, 1992)? To me, this is vexing—why haven’t we learned these things? Why are they not old practices instead of new rules? I don’t have any answers to these questions, but I think they’re important to ask.

These new rules also bring connections to mind. Can the right kinds of connections help us solve some of our educational problems? What kinds of connections with policy makers and politicians are best for learning? How can we develop partnerships with our educational administration colleagues to enhance literacy learning? What is our role in ensuring that *all* children and families, including those who are new to the U.S., find success in literacy learning? I will elaborate on this connections idea below, but first—the fifth category: Dogs.

NEW RULE: Every classroom should have a dog. Rationale: Dogs are good listeners. Dogs like to hear stories (especially *Shiloh* [Naylor, 2000], *Officer Buckle and Gloria* [Rathmann, 1995], and *Walter the Farting Dog* [Murray, 2001]. Not so much *Old Yeller* [Gipson, 2001] and *Where the Red Fern Grows* [Rawls, 1996]). Dogs don’t call out words when a reader is having difficulty in word recognition. Dogs are good at teaching kids about r-controlled vowels. Dogs don’t ask dumb comprehension questions. Dogs like schools and classrooms and kids and reading teachers (Tim Rasinski).

Nancy's New Rule

Here is my New Rule: Let's get serious about developing close home-school relationships. A first step toward achieving this goal is to learn to respect the culture of literacy in families. Here are two stories that underscore this point.

This first story is from our family. Back before we even moved to Kent, we had a Friday night ritual with our three children. We'd get in our jammies, make microwave popcorn, pour juice, and watch "Family Classics" on a local Chicago TV station. It was nice, except that I wouldn't let our youngest child, 2-year-old Matthew, eat popcorn. I was afraid he'd choke on it. Matthew didn't like this—he wanted to eat popcorn like his sister and brother-- not cheerios. So for a few weeks, we went back and forth about this—him begging and me denying—until finally, one Friday, I just gave up. He was in the kitchen with me while the popcorn popped. I gave him popcorn "rules"—told him I knew he was a big boy, that he should take only one piece at a time and chew it up completely—stuff like that.

A few minutes later, Matthew walked into the living room holding the popcorn bag and REALLY smiling. His dad, who had overheard the kitchen conversation, said, "Matthew, what do you have there?" And Matthew said, "I'll read it to you." And then he drew his chubby fingers over "Orville Redenbacher" on the bag and said, "Not for babies. Chew very carefully."

Here's another story—this one is about Mariska Ropog, whose mom, Marty, directs the Ohio Literacy Resource Center. Marty is a wonderful administrator and a technology geek. She also enjoys fantasy football, although she typically only picks Cleveland Browns for her teams each week, so she hasn't been terribly successful over the years. I am Mariska's honorary grandma, and when she was two, we got her a toy computer for Christmas. Like mother, like daughter in the geeky department, we thought.

The day after we gave her the gift, Marty called. She said she and Mariska had been sitting side-by-side on their couch. They were both on their computers, Marty making her fantasy football picks, and Mariska intently punching the keys on her new computer. Eventually, Marty asked Mariska what she was doing. Mariska said, "Be quiet,...I doing my picks."

Family literacy has been defined as the interactions of parents and children using language—talking, playing, exploring, limiting, soothing, explaining, encouraging, and nurturing...[W]hether spontaneous or promoted by formal programs, [family literacy] is a process of incorporating the spoken and written word into meaningful activities within the family unit. This becomes the legacy of language practices that passes from one generation to the next. (Sapin, Padak, & Baycich, 2008)

Consider the stories of Matthew and Mariska in light of this definition. What do the stories tell us about the culture of literacy in their families? How do the stories reflect the definition of family literacy provided above? Reading

and writing is what most families do. It's natural, and it varies. Not all 2-year-olds will like computers and do "picks" or "read" popcorn bags. Families plant the seeds of literacy well before children come to us in school. Families play a critical role in young children's literacy development.

This conclusion, which seems so logical and commonplace to us, is relatively new on the educational scene. Until the mid-1970s, teachers were taught to keep parents at arm's length, to discourage parental involvement in children's reading development. Here are a couple of excerpts from methods textbooks; these are part of an historical review of advice about working with families that Betty Sturtevant and Wayne Linek conducted in 1995:

- From the early 20th century: "Parents will find it hard to realize that irreparable harm might be done if their child is forced to tackle [reading] before reliable tests indicate that he is ready to do so" (p. 235).
- And from the 1970s: "Children who come from homes of low cultural level do not have normal opportunities to develop adequate language background. They often find it hard to progress in reading even when they have normal intelligence. If they are dull—and many of them are—they are doubly handicapped." (p. 238)

It's amazing that this is what we used to think. Those who learned to teach (or went to school) in the 1970s probably didn't learn about the importance of family involvement in methods classes or in elementary classrooms.

What do we know now? Aside from anecdotes, like the stories about Mariska and Matt, we have what I think is a mountain of evidence pointing to the power of family involvement. The three examples that follow underscore this conclusion.

Postlethwaite and Ross did an international study of students in grades 2 and 8 some years ago. They were interested in finding variables that significantly affected students' reading achievement. They found more than four dozen variables, but the two most powerful were the amount of reading children did at home and parental involvement (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992).

In 2006, the PIRLS—Progress in Reading and Literacy Study—assessed the reading achievement of 215,000 students from 40 countries (Mullin, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007). Here are some selected findings:

- Children from homes fostering literacy had higher achievement.
- Access to books at home was positively related to achievement.
- Children whose parents were avid readers had higher achievement.
- Children whose families had positive attitudes about reading had higher achievement.

Starting in the 1990s and continuing through 2003, Tim Rasinski and I have been chronicling the specific effects of family literacy programs. The result was a massive research review. Here's our conclusion:

Family literacy programs do work, and their benefits are widespread and significant. The existing body of research points to the enormous potential of high quality family literacy programs to influence the lives of parents and children positively through family support and education (Padak & Rasinski, 2003).

How to Create Welcoming Schools

We can best achieve the goal of rich home-school relationships by addressing two broad issues: ensuring that parents feel welcomed at school and fostering parents' involvement in their children's education. I have focused considerable professional energy on the second issue over the years, but the idea of welcoming schools is somewhat new to me. I've been thinking a lot about it lately, though, because of my involvement with the Cuyahoga County State Support Team Parent Engagement Committee, which serves the greater Cleveland area. Parents constitute about half of this group. These are well meaning, committed people who really want the best for their own children and all the children who attend their children's schools. They organize volunteer efforts, provide support for other families, and do a whole host of things to make schools better. Unfortunately, they also occasionally tell of frustrations: feeling invisible at school, phone calls and other attempts at communication that are ignored, sitting in committee meetings where educators are either using acronyms the parents don't understand or using parents as a sort of rubber stamp to agree with something teachers/schools have already decided to do. These actions are unacceptable. We need to help teachers find ways to welcome family members into schools.

The first step toward creating welcoming schools may be to diagnose the status quo. In *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* (2007), Henderson and her colleagues define family involvement along four dimensions: focus on academic achievement, school climate, communications and information, and school-wide practices and policies to engage families. They also identify four partnership models: the partnership school, the open-door school, the come-if-we-call school, and the fortress school. Considering either the dimensions or the models could help a committee begin to understand how welcoming a school currently is.

Obviously, true partnership schools are the goal. Yet I don't think I've ever seen one. This means, I think, that we all have room for growth. This is a critical focus for our attention and action. As Henderson, Johnson, Mapp & Davies (2007) note, partnership and student academic achievement are closely linked. In addition, partnerships help build and sustain public support for education.

Henderson et al.'s book is full of practical ideas about how to foster a feeling of welcome in schools. Many of these are what Tim Rasinski and I call "small changes that can make a big difference" (Padak & Rasinski, 2010). Such actions

as ensuring that parents have school information, written in their home languages if necessary and examining policies and practices related to greeting visitors and answering phones can lead to a feeling of welcome.

How to Foster Parental Involvement

Finally, let's explore how we can foster parents' involvement in their children's education. To address this issue, we need to think about how children develop as readers, to be sure; but it also makes sense to heed parents' own questions. A few years ago, a Kent State research team (Mraz, Grushler, Padak, Peck, Kinner, McKeon & Newton, 2001) became interested in the questions parents have about reading. We sent surveys to all elementary and middle school principals—public and private—throughout Ohio. We asked principals to list the questions parents ask them about reading. And then we sorted the 1679 responses; we were surprised to find that fully 12% of them revolved around two related issues: How can I encourage love of reading at home? How can I help my child become a better reader? So to foster parents' involvement in their children's reading development, it makes sense to try to answer these two important and authentic questions.

One answer to these questions can be found in the stories about Mariska and Matt: being an enthusiastic model. We've known since the mid-1960s, when Dolores Durkin (1966) published her landmark book, *Children Who Read Early*, that this informal modeling and encouragement pays off. Durkin's case studies of 49 spontaneous early readers showed no relationship between early reading and either IQ or socioeconomic background. What seemed to make the difference? Parents' attitudes! The children she studied, who maintained their early advantage over time, benefitted from the presence of parents who spend time with their children; who read to them; who answer their questions and requests for help; and who demonstrate in their own lives that reading is a rich source of relaxation, information, and contentment.

So we can encourage parents to be enthusiastic models of what we might call the literate life. Here's another easy thing parents can do: talk to their kids. In the early 1990s, Betty Hart and Todd Risley (1995) studied parent-child interactions in 42 families who had 7-9-month old children at the beginning of their 2 ½-year study. Hart and Risley spent an hour each month recording families' talk. They found that parents were models of language for their children, in terms of syntax, interaction styles, and vocabulary use. They also found vast differences in language interaction that appeared to be related to socioeconomic status. Compared to their more affluent counterparts, poor children heard 30,000,000 fewer words by age 3. This difference made a difference: Hart and Risley located and tested 29 of the original 42 children as third graders. Children's rate of vocabulary growth and vocabulary use at age 3 was strongly

associated with their grade 3 standardized test scores in receptive vocabulary, listening comprehension, speaking abilities, syntactical knowledge, and reading comprehension (Hart & Risley, 1995, 2003).

So, we now have two pieces to this puzzle—helping parents see their importance as enthusiastic models and encouraging parents to talk a lot, to engage their children in conversation. Here’s a third; it applies to at-home reading suggestions. In 2006 Monique Senechal did a meta-analysis of a number of experimental studies that looked at the effects of three kinds of parent involvement on children’s reading growth—parents reading to children, parents listening to children read, and parents following either of these up with word play or work on “literacy skills.” Nearly 1200 families were included in the studies she analyzed. Senechal found that the addition of word play or other “literacy skills” was two times more effective than having parents simply listen to their children read and six times more effective than when parents simply read to their children.

The power of parental involvement is not restricted to the elementary school; it is a pre-K-12 issue. NAEP (2000) results show reading achievement at grades 4, 8, and 12 associated with several at-home variables. The design principles for successful parent involvement programs that follow can be used with programs for students of any age. Tim Rasinski and I developed these principles as a result of our work on many family involvement projects.

- **Use proven and effective strategies:** family time is precious. We need to recommend at-home activities that are directly related to literacy achievement.
- **Provide training, communication, and support:** launch the program with meetings and print/online directions. Make the initial trainings simple; include demonstrations (live or video; videos can also be posted online for future reference). Also, develop a follow-up mechanism, both to answer parents’ questions and to serve as a gentle reminder to keep at it.
- **Real reading:** Providing reading materials for families to use will ensure that difficulty level is appropriate. It also removes the “find materials” task from parents—it has been done for them.
- **Make activities easy, consistent and enjoyable:** 10-15-minute routines work well. Teachers can introduce variety through changing texts or changing follow-up activities. Activities must be enjoyable and play-like; children’s success must be guaranteed. Given Senechal’s (2006) findings, teachers may want to provide parents with simple lists of generic follow-up activities.
- **Provide easy ways to document:** something as simple as a time sheet to post on the frig can provide tacit encouragement for families. Gathering these time sheets, determining who is consistently working at home, and looking at children’s reading growth allows teachers to evaluate program impact.

New Rules

What kinds of ‘new rules’ should we think about? We may want to begin by focusing on making connections

- between and among teachers to foster professional development
- between and among fields of research (e.g., C&I, educational administration)
- between and among teachers, students, and families

If we can make these connections, I think we can make a difference in reading for our students.

That sounded like a concluding statement, didn’t it? But since we began with Bill Maher, I want to end with him too:

People say education is the cornerstone of our democracy—they’re wrong, of course. The cornerstone of our democracy is campaign cash, and lots of it. But shouldn’t education still count for something? As President [Bush] might say, “We can do gooder.” (Maher, 2005, p. 26)

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**RESEARCH
AWARDS**

TALK OPPORTUNITIES AROUND TEXT AND THE RESPONSES THEY ELICIT FROM MIDDLE LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the opportunities that English language learners have to talk about text in their middle level reading classrooms, their responses to these opportunities, and how they explain and regarded the talk opportunities they received and their participation in them. Results found that teachers and students in this study most often enacted classroom recitations rather than discussions. Whether teachers asked assessment or authentic questions, the students' responses were usually limited to a single word or phrase. Students reported several reasons for their limited talk: They did not understand the text, they were scared and embarrassed, the pace was too quick; they felt peers excluded them; and/or the teacher was too controlling.

Schools across the nation face two indisputable facts. First, classroom composition is changing dramatically as the English language learner (ELL) population grows at unprecedented rates. Second, a significant and persistent gap exists between the literacy achievement of these children and their English only (EO) peers (Goldenberg, 2008; Short & Echevarria, 2005; Strickland & Alvermann, 2004; Waxman & Tellez, 2002). This gap is particularly evident in grades 4-12 (Au, 2006; Cummins, 2003; Strickland & Alvermann, 2004; Vacca & Vacca, 2005). The educational community gives serious and sustained attention to this difference, but as Jimenez (2004) notes, "we are far from final answers"

(p. 6). The literacy achievement gap is rooted in complex and dynamic factors, many of which fall beyond the school's realm of influence. However, as Jimenez explains, "much of the low achievement of language-minority students may be pedagogically induced or exacerbated and therefore amenable to change" (p. 9). Clearly, what we do inside the world of school matters tremendously. English language learners need literacy instruction that promotes the higher-level thinking and discourse skills required for school success. Research pinpoints a variety of instructional contexts and practices that foster these skills. Meaningful talk around text constitutes one such practice. Thus, in this qualitative study, the role of talk around text by English language learners in their middle level reading classrooms was explored.

Theoretical Perspective

Theory, research, and practice posit the vital role of talk in shaping both higher-level thinking and higher level discourse. Vygotsky (1994) proposes that one's thought does not merely express itself in words, but rather realizes itself in them. Gee and Green (1998) suggest that we literally talk knowledge, understanding, and meaning into being. Swain (2000) explains that when language learners participate in collaborative dialogue, defined as knowledge-building and problem-solving dialogue, they co-construct linguistic knowledge as language use mediates language learning. According to Mercer (1995), "if we encourage and enable children to use language in certain ways to ask certain kinds of questions, to clearly describe events, to account for outcomes and consolidate what they have learned in words, we are helping them understand and gain access to educated discourse" (pp. 106-107).

The opportunities that English language learners receive to talk are largely determined by the talk structures that teachers employ in the classroom. These talk structures carry certain expectations for both the students and the teachers and foster distinct responses. These responses can be considered in light of the epistemic functions they engender or constrain. For example, in response to certain talk opportunities, students might consider alternate possibilities, reflect upon preconceived notions, and question existing beliefs. In response to other talk opportunities, they may repeat, remember, or recite previously learned information. Classroom talk structures, and the responses they elicit, shape students' relationship with learning. Educators must carefully consider the kinds of talk that foster higher-level thinking and higher-level discourse and the contexts in which these critical abilities flourish.

Literature Review

Researchers believe that discussion facilitates meaning making, higher-order thinking, and academic language acquisition (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, &

Gamoran, 2003; Freedman & Delp, 2007; Nystrand, 1997; Purdy, 2008). It provides learners an opportunity to produce and transform knowledge and understanding, and offers extended turns at talk (Alvermann, Young, Weaver, Hinchman, Moore, Phelp, Thrash & Zalewski, 1996; Boyd & Rubin, 2002; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997). Longer responses provide greater opportunities to develop elaborated and substantive thinking and language. In classrooms that foster discussion, teaching and learning is about the co-construction and sharing of knowledge. Many voices, not just the teacher's, "come together and intermingle to organize and support learning" (Freedman & Delp, 2007, p. 260).

Hosts of studies examined the role that discussion assumes for English language learners at the elementary level and for middle level learners in general. Three elementary studies (Garcia, 1991; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999; Van den Branden, 2000) and three middle level studies (Applebee et al., 2003; Kucan & Beck, 2003; Sandora, Beck, & McKeown, 1999) revealed that talk about text, in the form of discussion in diverse grouping conditions, promotes deeper understanding of text as evidenced by higher scores on measures of literacy achievement. Four elementary level studies (Frank, Dixon, & Brandts, 1998; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Purdy, 2008; Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006) and two middle level studies (Morocco & Hindin, 2002; Seidnestricker, 2000) connected discussion of text with second language development. Eight elementary studies (Almasi, O'Flavahan, & Ayra, 2001; Boyd & Rubin, 2002; Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Maloch, 2002; Martinez-Roldan, 2003; Peralta-Nash & Dutch, 2000; Van Sluys et al., 2006) and two middle level studies (Kucan & Beck, 2003; Seidnestricker, 2000) demonstrated how opportunities to talk about text produce higher level thinking and discourse. Five middle level studies (Alvermann, 1995; Alvermann et al., 1996; Carico, 2001; Phelps & Weaver, 1999) revealed the dual nature of small-group discussions at the middle level. On the one hand, they draw students in and open opportunities to talk, and lead to increased text comprehension, higher-level thinking, and language development. On the other hand, peer-led discussions in particular can exclude students based on a number of factors such as gender, ethnicity, culture, and status.

A wide search produced one study (Morocco & Hindin, 2002) that directly explored the role of talk around text for middle level English language learners in their reading classrooms. This significant gap in the literature helped to create the following three research questions:

1. What kinds of talk opportunities around text do middle level English language learners (ELLs) receive in a reading classroom setting?
2. How do English language learners (ELLs) respond to these various opportunities?
3. How do English language learners (ELLs) explain and regard the talk opportunities they receive and their participation in them?

Methods

Setting

This study took place in a middle school located in Eastern Washington. School enrollment totaled 594, with 194 students in sixth, 198 students in seventh, and 202 students in eighth grade. Forty-five percent of the students were Hispanic, 51% were White, and 4% were Black, Asian, or American Indian. At the time of this study, 64% of Hispanic students and 92% of ELLs in seventh grade did not meet benchmark on the statewide reading exam. Depending on language proficiency levels, seventh-grade ELLs in this school attended one of three reading classes: an ESL reading class for beginning-level ELLs, an intensive reading class for intermediate-level ELLs, or a mainstream reading class for advanced-level ELLs.

Participants

ESL Reading Class. Ten native Spanish-speakers (six girls and four boys) attended the ESL reading class designed for beginning-level English language learners. Eight of the 10 students were recent immigrants (within the past one and one half years) and two had been in U.S. schools since first grade. The teacher of the ESL reading class, Mrs. Karr (all names are pseudonyms), spoke English only and was in her second year of teaching in the district. In addition to the teacher, two full-time bilingual instructional assistants, Mrs. Garcia and Miss Milton, worked with these students daily. Aside from a daily read-aloud from a chapter book, instruction in this class occurred almost exclusively in English around leveled books in three small, adult-led groups.

Intensive Reading Class. Seventeen students (eight girls and nine boys) attended the intensive reading class designed for intermediate-level English language learners. Fifteen of the 17 students were of Mexican origin and two were of Russian descent. Students in this class began schooling in the U.S. during elementary school. Their English-only (EO) speaking teacher, Mrs. Olsen (all names are pseudonyms), was completing her sixteenth year with the district. An EO instructional assistant, Mrs. Lyle, worked in this classroom two days per week. Three days a week Mrs. Olsen engaged students in whole-group, teacher-led instruction characterized by frequent small-group, student-led sessions around an audiotaped chapter book (all students had a paper copy). Two days a week, students participated in word study activities as they rotated between one small student-led group and two small groups led by the teacher and instructional assistant.

Mainstream Reading Class. Four U.S. born English language learners of Mexican descent (three girls and one boy) attended a mainstream reading class along with 22 other students. While these ELLs had transitioned into mainstream classes, they still qualified for English language services. Their English-only teacher, Mrs. Anderson (all names are pseudonyms), was in her eighth year of teaching with the district. Mrs. Anderson used whole-group, teacher-led

instruction almost exclusively and did not receive outside help. Students read short stories from a literature anthology and brief, photocopied comprehension passages.

Data Collection

Observation field notes were taken in the three classrooms over a six-week period in February and March of 2006 on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays. The field notes contained detailed renderings of what the teacher and students said and did during each one-hour class period (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). In addition to handwritten notes, each session was audiotaped so the notes could be double-checked. All field-notes were typed and audiotapes were transcribed verbatim. In addition to recording classroom happenings, the researcher made notes about first impressions and general thoughts in the margins, using what Maxwell (1996) calls researcher memos. The field notes and memos were used to shape semi-structured interview questions for 16 students. Five of the interviewed students were in the ESL reading class, seven were in the intensive reading class, and four were in the mainstream reading class. Each individual interview lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. All Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Whenever possible, the classroom texts used by teachers and students were copied or borrowed so they could be examined.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using a coding process outlined by Strauss & Corbin (1998). This helped to generate a detailed rendering of the talk opportunities available around text and the responses that were elicited from middle level English language learners. A small number of themes emerged that occurred in individual cases and across cases as well. These themes became the major findings, or “the lessons learned” (Cresswell, 2003, p. 194).

Initially, open-coding was used to examine data by line, sentence, or paragraph for similarities and differences. The data was then grouped together by similar concepts and given a code that represented the grouped ideas. Next, these concepts were collapsed into categories and subcategories. Subcategories explained the when, where, why, how, and with what consequence of a category. Categories and subcategories were developed until new data no longer provided insight into them. Categories and subcategories represented multiple voices rather than the experience of just one person in the study (Brott & Meyers, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Next, axial coding was used to reassemble fractured data by linking, or relating, the various categories, and subcategories formed through open coding. During this phase, the conditions in which categories were situated, and the actions and interactions resulting from these conditions, were analyzed. Finally, axial coding was used to present data as a set of interrelated concepts, not just a listing of themes or categories. Combining data sources, the talk opportunities

around text that these middle level English language learners experienced in their reading classrooms, their responses to and perspectives around them, and the intersections, or lack thereof, with the types of interactions that scholars propose for English language learners were unveiled.

Selective coding constituted the final step of data analysis. At this juncture, the researcher diverged slightly from an entirely inductive analysis of data. Data analysis was approached with certain categories in mind, driven by the theoretical framework and existing scholarship, but emerging categories and themes were identified as well. Specifically, opportunities to talk, in light of talk structures, were examined. Within these opportunities, indications of deeper understanding of text, higher-level thinking, and academic language proficiency as presented and defined in the literature review were sought. Finally, selective coding was used to discover and represent the main theme of the study. Both emergent and existing categories were woven together to reveal a central experience of all participants in terms of talk opportunities around text and their responses to them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Findings

Contextual differences matter. At a basic level, they impact the choices teachers make about classroom instruction. The actions teachers take, based in part upon diverse classroom contexts, drive teaching and learning. In this study, contextual differences played a role in shaping the opportunities that students received to talk about text and their responses to these opportunities. Despite obvious contextual differences, the classrooms observed shared one noteworthy characteristic: Students rarely engaged in the kinds of talk and interactions that researchers propose matter most for English language learners.

Opportunities to Talk and Students' Responses to Them

Discussion seldom occurred in these classes. Instead, opportunities to talk most often presented themselves within a traditional recitation framework. Students and teachers followed recitation's strict participatory structure in which teachers initiate a topic (I), students respond (R), and teachers evaluate (E) the student's response (IRE) (Cazden, 2001). Teachers typically initiated classroom talk with assessment questions about story content. These questions usually had single, textually explicit, factual or knowledge level answers. In the ESL and mainstream reading classes, teachers asked these questions in rapid succession. For example, in one instance, the teacher asked 140 assessment questions in a 20-minute period. Students responded with brief, often one-word replies. Under these conditions, students had little time or need to engage in expanded, substantive talk about text.

Teachers also initiated talk with leading questions connected to story content. Leading questions had pre-specified answers known to the teacher, but

not the student. To complicate matters further, the answers did not necessarily reside in the text. Leading questions generated tentative and uncertain answers from students, often posed as questions, as demonstrated below.

Mrs. Karr: *Tell me one more thing you think is yummy, yummy.*

Josué: *Corn?*

Mrs. Karr: *Say something that's in your stomach right now that you told me was good. That you had for lunch. And you said you're gonna bring me one on Monday. What did you say you were gonna bring on Monday?*

Josué: *Soda?*

Libardo: *Food!*

Mrs. Karr: *Can you tell us? What did you have for lunch today?*

Josué: *Um, milk?*

This example illustrates the back-and-forth dialogue that leading questions created between teacher and students. In this back-and-forth exchange, students continually shaped and reshaped their responses in an effort to meet the teacher's expectation or interpretation.

Less frequently, teachers asked authentic content-related questions. These questions did not have pre-specified answers and seemed designed to bring student voices into the conversation. They could have resulted in elaborated and substantive responses, but often did not. In the following example, Mrs. Karr asks 12-year-old Humberto how he felt when he saw his parents for the first time after a year apart. *"How did you feel when you got home? After not seeing your mom and dad for a year? Nothing? Okay, well let's see how Anna [a character in the story] feels."* At this point, Humberto says that he felt happy to which his teacher responded, *"You were happy? Okay. Can you read with me?"* As this example demonstrates, teachers and students treated authentic questions in much the same way as assessment questions. Teachers moved quickly from one question to the next, and seldom encouraged in-depth answers or used the students' responses to further discussion. Students' answers did not rise-up to the elaborated and extended responses associated with authentic questions.

Students sometimes posed content-related questions. Their questions were virtually always authentic, but rarely resulted in substantive talk, as the following example demonstrates. Students in the intensive reading class read about a boy who burned down a building and was consequently sent to an alternative school. Mariel did not believe that anyone could burn down a school and not be punished. She asked, *"Does he ever go to juvy?"* When her question went unanswered, Mariel persisted. *"This story is so fake. How can you burn down a house and not go to juvy?"* Her question went unaddressed again. Four days later, she asked her question again to no avail. *"Why won't Jake go to juvy if he does all that stuff?"* As these examples show, authentic questions, both teacher-

and student-generated, held promise to open talk opportunities around text. However, these opportunities and possibilities were often missed.

Teachers and students engaged in frequent question-answer strings around vocabulary. The following example illustrates a typical exchange. When a student in the mainstream reading class read the word *subdued*, Mrs. Anderson said, “*Subdued. Do you know what that means?*” In unison, students responded with “*No.*” Mrs. Anderson provided a quick definition. Seconds later, the student read *mourners*. “*Mourners. Who are they?*” asked the teacher. A few students said, “*They are people who mourn.*” One said, “*Lament,*” to which the teacher replied, “*Good. You used a vocabulary word.*” When teachers asked vocabulary questions, as Mrs. Anderson did here, students’ responses tended to be brief and superficial.

On the other hand, when students generated their own vocabulary questions, as they did frequently in Mrs. Karr’s class and somewhat less frequently in Mrs. Olsen’s class, they engaged in what Anderson and Roit (1996) call *real talk*. Students in these classes asked critical and authentic language-learning questions like, “*¿Cómo se dice ____? [How do you say ____?]*” and “*¿Qué significa ____? [What does ____ mean?]*” They asked about word meanings and sought English labels for known words in Spanish, as the following example with Ms. Milton, an instructional assistant, illustrates.

Humberto: *Y estos, ¿qué son “tears?” [And these, what are “tears?”]*

Ms. Milton: *Tears. Tears are what’s in your eyes, the water. The liquid. So, “tears streaming down her cheeks”, what does that mean?*

Aida: *Cry?*

Ms. Milton: *So what is she doing? She’s crying...*

Aida: *Crying.*

Humberto: *Llorando [Crying].*

Ms. Milton: *Crying and working. She’s working hard and she’s crying and crying. Good.*

Students in Mrs. Olsen’s class signaled their own problem words as well. For example, when Ignacio said that there could be a Vietnamese dad in the story, Mariel asked, “*What does that Vietnamese mean?*” Ignacio responded with, “*From Vietnam.*” In addition, students in Mrs. Olsen’s class met regularly in small student-led groups to engage in *vocabulary clarifications*. Their teacher chose the words to be clarified, but did not give upfront definitions nor did her word choices have simple *right there* definitions in the text. Although students struggled to connect with or build upon the ideas of others, vocabulary clarifications resulted in extended turns at talk and collective attempts to create meaning.

Finally, teachers and students engaged in story retells. Morrow (1996) explains that retelling “indicates a reader’s or listener’s assimilation and reconstruction of text information, and it reflects comprehension” (p. 267). She described

retelling as an active process that: (a) involves the learner in text reconstruction; (b) allows interactive behavior between teacher and students; and (c) allows the learner to provide not only literal, but also personal interpretations of text. In all three classrooms, retelling was a site for students to talk about text, but it did not always reach the potential described by Morrow. In most cases, the teacher summarized, analyzed, interpreted, and synthesized story content and students inserted occasional words or phrases from the text, fill-in-the-blank style. To illustrate this point, during a typical retell session, one teacher uttered 536 words compared to the 64 words uttered by 12 of her students. Consequently, students missed opportunities to produce and negotiate elaborated content, language, and thought, and in so doing, encounter and confront their problems, misunderstandings, and gaps.

When teachers altered the participatory structure, as sometimes happened in the ESL and intensive reading classes, retelling resulted in extended and substantive talk. For example, when Mrs. Karr's students orchestrated the retelling, rather than the teacher, story reconstruction exposed their language struggles, stretched their language capabilities, and resulted in lengthier, co-created utterances. The teacher accepted their efforts and provided corrective feedback by revoicing, recasting, and/or modeling single words or entire sentences with correct grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary (Gass, 1997). On many occasions, students appropriated these words or phrases into subsequent turns. Retelling provided a safe and supported opportunity to collaboratively shape and test their growing language and comprehension skills in English. When students in the intensive reading class made personal connections with the text, they engaged with the story and each other on a deeper level and developed their English language skills beyond the one word or fill-in-the-blank reply. In these instances, the teacher's voice was one among many and retelling facilitated a multi-vocal, substantive, and extended conversation.

Students' Perception of the Opportunity and Their Response

ELLs in these classrooms *wanted* to talk, but rarely went beyond one-word or simple-phrase responses. They gave several reasons for their limited talk. First, students did not understand the text or the teacher and therefore could not answer questions or contribute to discussion. When Mrs. Karr asked Andrés story-related questions, he did not respond. In his own words, "*Cuando hablan a mi, como me pongo rojito. No entiendo nada y my quedo callado nada más [When they talk to me, I get all red. I don't understand anything and I stay quiet, that's all].*"

Second, they did not want to be embarrassed. They were unsure of their understanding, answers, and English pronunciation. They had been laughed at, teased, and ridiculed before, and were unwilling to risk it again. Marishka, a student in Mrs. Olsen's class, reported feeling nervous when asked to speak in front of classmates because she gets words wrong and the other students laugh

at her. *“Like I would say something and they laugh at me and then the teacher would say the word right and then they would make fun of me after class.”* To make matters worse, she said, *“I never get help when I need it ‘cause I’m always embarrassed that people will make fun of me.”*

Third, the conversational pace was simply too quick. English language learners need time to formulate both their ideas and the language to express them. For ELLs, both factors require equal attention. During six weeks of observation, two ELLs in the mainstream reading class, Yesenia and Lili, never said a word. They were not called upon, nor did they ask or answer any questions. Yesenia explained her silence like this: *“Like, I’m gonna say something and sometimes some people already said it. Like we had the same idea. Or you think that it’s not the right answer and then it was.”*

Fourth, there were power differentials at play even within classrooms composed entirely of English language learners. In particular, students were excluded based on gender and native language differences. Marishka, a native speaker of Russian, said that Spanish speakers ignored her. She found it easier to work alone and to not talk. Many students preferred not talking when in small groups with members of the opposite sex, as two students from Mrs. Olsen’s class demonstrated. Anita said that being the only girl in a group *“makes me more quiet”* and Juan said that being the only boy in a group is *“just not cool.”*

Finally, students were silenced by teacher practices that limited their freedom and desire to participate. For example, Humberto wanted to speak English and Spanish. He liked to help his classmates by translating and answering questions in Spanish. He got frustrated when teachers told him to say it in English or ignored him because he was speaking in Spanish. In fact, he felt the relationship with Mrs. Karr had worsened due to his use of Spanish. Students resented the restricted talk opportunities and tight procedural control imposed by teachers. When not allowed to move at their own pace, they felt frustrated, annoyed, and bored.

Research findings lead to the following overall understandings. Contextual variations aside, the talk that occurred across all three classrooms was remarkably similar. Almost without fail, teachers and students enacted classroom recitations rather than discussions. While students in the ESL reading class and intensive reading class talked more, their responses, like those of the other students, were generally brief, textually explicit, tentative, or superficial. Students reported several reasons for their limited talk: They did not understand the text, they were scared and embarrassed, the pace was too quick, they were excluded by peers, and/or the teacher was too controlling. In general, teachers asked and students told, teachers led and students followed, teachers produced and students reproduced.

Discussion and Implications

The middle level students in this study shared a central experience: They had relatively few opportunities to talk about text in ways that foster higher-level thinking and discourse. The question-answer strings characteristic of recitation provided frequent opportunities for students to talk, but the responses they engendered did not rise up to the meaning-making talk associated with discussion. If higher-level language and thought are realized through talk as Vygotsky (1994) proposes, and we literally talk knowledge into being as Gee and Green (1998) propose, then we must find ways to move beyond traditional speech exchange systems that limit and constrain students' opportunities to talk. Students need different ways of interacting with knowledge if they are to develop cognitive and linguistic flexibility. Mercer (1995) explains that "the problem is how to provide learners with the right balance of different kinds of opportunities and guidance" (p. 19). While recitation certainly has a place in education, it should not be the primary talk opportunity.

English language learners need opportunities to talk in ways that foster higher-level thinking and discourse. Authentic questions provide one such opportunity. However, as this study showed, ELLs do not necessarily engage with these questions in meaning-making ways. On most occasions, the students in this study answered authentic questions with the same brief and relatively superficial responses that assessment questions inspired. This could be explained by lack of experience or limited English proficiency. However, another explanation is that when teachers allowed questions to go unanswered or minimally answered, without probing or coaxing for more information or incorporating students' ideas into subsequent dialogue, students did not see their voice as important. English language learners need to know that what they have to say matters.

English language learners should be expected to answer complicated questions because these kinds of questions cultivate complex thinking and language. But, they must be helped along the way. Rather than ignore student silence, provide the answer, or proceed to a new question, teachers can scaffold the authentic question event. Meyer (2000) proposes that students' lack of participation in events like answering authentic questions could be due to heavy "language load" and heavy "learning load." Teachers need to consider both the language and learning loads that their expectations, including questions, place on ELLs. Teachers also need to evaluate if students can be successful at what they are being asked to do or say, given their developing proficiency and literacy in English.

Some might consider this "just good teaching." No doubt, this is true. It is beneficial and important for all learners. However, teaching like this, in which language and learning loads and supportive actions are seriously considered, is critical for English language learners, who are learning not only content, but also the language through which content is being delivered. When they respond to

authentic questions, they must give equal attention to both content and language. This involves word consciousness at both surface and deep levels, facility with everyday and complex grammatical constructions, awareness of social and cultural discourse conventions, and more. To be responsive to ELLs' additional learning needs, teachers must adapt and implement principles of learning in thoughtful, reflective, and informed ways.

In conclusion, English language learners face the extraordinarily complex challenge of acquiring English and learning academic content at a level on par with their native-English speaking peers. It is important to become critically aware of the ways language is used (Mercer, 1995) and determine if they provide the learning opportunities ELLs need to succeed. There is little doubt that talk holds potential to facilitate understanding, cognitive development, and linguistic growth. However, not just any talk will do. To truly make sense of their world, English language learners need opportunities to engage in elaborated and extended utterances that push both thinking and language far beyond the confines of a single word response. Teachers must understand, create, and sustain the kinds of classroom conditions that bring about the most effective language and content learning. This will happen in part when we move beyond traditional talk structures that constrain students' cognitive and linguistic knowledge and flexibility. With ever increasing populations of English language learners, the transition to educational methods that best serve this population is critical. Effective classroom talk will enable English language learners to develop the content, language, and critical thinking skills needed to meet the educational goals we expect of all students.

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EXAMINING RELIABILITY OF READING COMPREHENSION RATINGS OF FIFTH-GRADE STUDENTS' ORAL RETELLINGS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to rate the oral retellings of fifth-grade students to determine to what degree passages, raters, and rating occasions affect those ratings, and to identify what combination of those elements will produce reliable ratings. Thirty-six fifth-grade students read and orally retold three passages. Two raters rated these retellings on two occasions using the Reader Retelling Rating Scale. These ratings were analyzed quantitatively using generalizability software that investigated the percentages of the total variation. It was found that the largest sources of variation were students, passages, and student-by-passage interaction. In addition, results showed at least two raters should rate retellings of a minimum of four passages on one occasion.

As teachers help children learn how to read and comprehend, and researchers study the process, it is vital to be able to assess reliably students' reading comprehension. The most widespread method involves students reading passages and then answering questions about the content of each passage (Afflerbach, 2007). This procedure is used in informal reading inventories (Afflerbach; Bell & McCallum 2008; Morrow, 2005), criterion referenced tests (Bell & McCallum), and standardized tests (Afflerbach; Morrow). Though valuable information can be obtained about a student's reading comprehension through this method, other information is excluded, leaving teachers and researchers unable to gain a complete picture of a student's understanding.

Another method to assess comprehension has been the cloze procedure (Taylor, 1953), which involves students reading a passage where words have been systematically omitted. Students then try to fill in the blanks with the exact words that are missing. Though easy to administer, the cloze procedure has many limitations, especially when used to assess students' understanding of connected text (Shanahan, Kamil, & Tobin, 1982).

However, due to the potential drawbacks to both of these procedures, some educators are turning to retelling, sometimes referred to as free-recall (Johnston, 1983). Retelling requires students to recall and then reconstruct their understandings of the text without being prompted in order to retell the story. The retelling process allows students to include more information about their comprehension than with other measures (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005). However, there are limitations with this method as well. Students may have limited verbal or written communication skills and, consequently, they may be unable to communicate completely their understandings (Johnston). In addition, retelling is not a natural process for children. However, given instruction and practice retelling stories, students can retell stories more easily and with greater skill (Morrow, 1996).

Common methods of judging the quality of retellings include rubrics and scales based on story grammar (Mandler & Johnson, 1977), which include major story elements and their sequence in passages. Examples of measures based on story grammar are the Sense of Story Structure (Morrow, 2005) and the Reading Miscue Inventory: Construction of Meaning (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005). Other scales, such as the Richness of Retellings scale (Irwin & Mitchell, 1983), rate retellings using additional factors, including connections students make between the text and their own experiences, inferences students make from the text, and students' ability to summarize.

Regardless of the instrument used, ratings of retellings encounter challenges. Rating retellings involves individuals making decisions about the quality of each retelling. Many rating methods are quite subjective and reliability can be hard to establish.

Several potential sources of inconsistency in the ratings need to be considered when examining the reliability of retellings. These include the raters, the passages, and the rating occasions. The rating of a retelling requires one or more raters. If only one rater is involved, it is impossible to determine if the ratings would be consistent if a different rater were to rate the same retelling. When additional raters are involved, interrater reliability is an issue. If an individual rates a retelling on any one occasion, intrarater reliability (reliability of scores by the same rater on more than one rating occasion) also presents a challenge.

Characteristics of passages can also affect ratings of students' reading comprehension. Passage content, structure, and length can influence retellings, and subsequently the ratings of those retellings. Students who are already familiar

with the subject matter of particular passages or have experience with a particular text structure may score differently than students with limited knowledge or experience. Some passages may be too short to contain enough information for a complete assessment or may be so long that the student is overwhelmed with so much to remember.

One crucial purpose of comprehension assessment is to learn about students as readers and comprehenders, not simply to see how many pieces of a particular text can be recalled. A retelling should be analyzed for more than story element correspondence to the original text, but as a text itself. Students' interpretations, inferences, and conclusions about texts they have read reveal a great deal about them as readers (Kalmbach, 1986).

Considering the many negative factors mentioned above when using retellings, determining how to gauge accurately a child's comprehension is difficult. However, with the wealth of information that may be gained about students as readers from retellings, the challenge may be worth the effort.

The purpose of this study was to rate the oral retellings of fifth-grade students to determine to what degree passages, raters, and rating occasions affect those ratings and to identify what combination of those elements will produce reliable retelling ratings. The research questions for this study were:

1. What percentage of the variation in ratings of oral retellings can be attributed to passages, inconsistencies between raters, inconsistencies across rating occasions, and interactions among these facets?
2. How many passages, raters, and rating occasions are needed in order to obtain a mean rating that provides a dependable estimate of how well an English-speaking elementary student would perform on other retellings?

Review of Literature

Retelling, either oral or written, can be used as an instructional strategy or as an assessment tool (Morrow, 1996). According to Johnston (1983), retelling is "the most straightforward assessment of the result of text/reader interaction" (p. 54). Retelling leaves students free to express the depth of their understanding without boundaries. Lack of understanding is readily evident because no information is available to students to use as a crutch during the retellings. A researcher or teacher may be certain that a student's retelling is owned by the student, and not some outside source.

Retelling both requires and allows students to reconstruct understanding from a text within their own minds and then present information about the text, as they understand it (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005; Morrow, 1996). "Retelling encourages both integration and personalization of content, helping children see how parts of the text interrelate and how they mesh with their own

experiences,” (Morrow, p. 268). Analysis of a child’s retelling can reveal his or her ability for literal (remembering facts and details) and inferential (cause and effect relationships and sequencing of events) understanding. In addition, they allow students to generalize, interpret feelings, or relate ideas to their own experiences (Irwin & Mitchell, 1983).

Two major types of retelling instruments and three assessment instruments are commonly used. However, questions remain about the reliability of the types of retelling and the instruments. These will be talked about in more detail below.

Types of Retellings

The two types of retellings are expressed in either writing or orally (Morrow, 1985, 1996, 2005). Written retellings require students to communicate their understanding and recall of a text through written responses. Oral retellings require students to vocalize their recall and comprehension of the text. Oral retelling does not require writing ability, but allows students to communicate in a modality that requires less time and effort for many, as they are able to use language that is familiar to them. Oral retellings are spontaneous and because of the spontaneous nature of oral retellings, they may be briefer, less thoughtful, and less organized. In addition, students may have a tendency to summarize, rather than to express their complete understandings.

However, whether the retellings are written or oral, students need to be taught how to retell and should be given practice in retelling. With training and practice, the quality and ease of student retellings should increase.

Retelling Assessment Instruments

Finding an instrument to use to assist with scoring retellings is often a concern. Three well-known instruments with contrasting perspectives have been used to assess oral retellings: Sense of Story Structure (Morrow, 2005), The Reading Miscue Inventory: Construction of Meaning (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005), and the Richness of Retellings Scale (Irwin & Mitchell, 1983).

Morrow’s (2005) Sense of Story Structure examines students’ understandings of story grammar that emphasize components of a narrative text. An advantage of this protocol is that it is relatively easy to use. However, the ratings may not reveal the degree to which each element was referred to or explained by the students. It does not describe the depth of readers’ comprehension and does not reveal ideas that are outside the story grammar frame, such as inferences, opinions, or associations, which researchers recommend should be scored (Irwin & Mitchell, 1983; Wilson, Martens, Arya, & Jin, 2007). Kalmbach (1986) suggested that recall is only part of a retelling.

Goodman, Watson, & Burke’s (2005) Reading Miscue Inventory (RMI) uses a retelling guide that is divided into character analysis and story events. These elements are then assigned point values. A benefit of the RMI is that it awards points, to a degree, for more extensive understandings of the characters and plot

episodes. Its rating, however, does not reflect readers' opinions, inferences, insights, and connections. An additional difficulty with this protocol is in the preparation of the retelling guide. Because each guide is unique to the passage, it is unclear how to decide how character or event importance in the story should translate into the point values (Wilson, et al., 2007).

Irwin and Mitchell's (1983) Richness of Retellings scale looks at retellings in a holistic manner. This rating guide distinguishes five separate levels of retellings, based on the ratings of eight characteristics. Once a rater has taken into account all of the eight characteristics, he or she assigns the student an overall score of 1 to 5, based on the depth and richness of the retelling as a whole. The Richness of Retellings scale has numerous benefits. It allows for the unique nature of retellings by individual students. It values students' ability to recall elements from the text, but also their inferences, connections, conclusions and higher level thinking. A drawback to this rating protocol is that, because each student receives an overall score between 1 and 5, it does not reveal details about what was and was not understood by the reader (Wilson, et al., 2007).

Reliability

Little information on the reliability of scores obtained using these assessment instruments are available. Because reading comprehension assessment is critical and oral retelling is a valuable way to assess comprehension, establishing the reliability of a tool to score oral retellings is an important undertaking.

Burton (2008) examined the variability in the ratings of fourth-grade students' oral retellings of expository texts. She investigated how much variability could be attributed to the students, passages, day of test administration, raters, rating occasions, and interactions among these factors. She found that to obtain the highest reliability coefficients teachers should have students read and retell at least two passages across two days, with at least two individuals rating the retellings.

A similar study conducted by Sudweeks, Glissmeyer, Morrison, Wilcox, and Tanner (2004) investigated how adult English language learners comprehended expository passages through use of oral retellings. Story grammar protocols and generalizability were used to determine what combinations of factors were necessary to yield consistent, reliable ratings. They found that raters should score at least four, but preferably six, retellings on one rating occasion to obtain high reliability coefficients. However, no research has sought to determine how those factors might come into play when assessing the oral retellings of narrative passages by English-speaking elementary students. Thus, this study seeks to gain information about the rating of fifth- grade students' oral retellings of narrative passages.

Methods

Participants

Participants included 36 students from three self-contained fifth-grade classes from a school in Utah. This K-6 school's student population of 965 students is 95% White, 2% Asian, 1% Latino, and 2% other. Three classes were selected in order to gain the target sample-size. Fifth-grade students were appropriate for this study because most students are beyond the decoding stage and are essentially fluent readers. This was to help ensure that the participants' comprehension was not diminished by decoding struggles. The students were randomly selected from the pool of consenting participants, without regard to academic performance. The participating students included 17 boys and 19 girls. Because the students were already accustomed to retelling passages, the researchers did not provide additional practice opportunities or instruction on retelling for the study participants.

Passages

Each student read three narrative passages that were taken directly from *Power Reading Pak 4-B* (Cole & Larkin, 2002) of the Power Reading program. These passages were selected because the program was already available to, and being used by the teachers at the school. The passages used for this study, however, had not been read by any of the study participants. The content of the three passages differed in topic, but were all from the contemporary realistic fiction genre. Passages at a fourth-grade level were selected to ensure that the students who were reading at a fifth-grade reading level would be less likely to have their comprehension hampered by having to focus on decoding text that was too difficult for them. Each passage was 400-600 words long. Passages of this length were long enough to allow for a self-contained, stand-alone story, but short enough that the reader could read each passage within a few minutes without becoming overwhelmed with too much information.

Rating Instrument

Because rating retellings is a rater-mediated process, the rater is the real instrument. However, to promote uniformity among multiple raters, an additional aid is needed. For the purposes of this study, the Reader Retelling Rating Scale was developed to guide in rating the retellings (see Appendix A). This measure is the researchers' adaptation of Morrow's (1988) Reader Retelling Profile, developed from Irwin and Mitchell's (1983) Richness of Retellings scale. This scale was developed because it not only rates a reader's recall of the story events, but it also takes into account the reader's background knowledge and deeper connections.

The Reader Retelling Rating Scale contained three rating items: content, relevance, and organization of the retellings. The content item specifically scored readers' abilities to include in their retellings information that was directly stated in or was inferred/summarized from the text. The relevance item dealt with the degree to which the readers provided relevant content and concepts. The organization item investigated the readers' abilities to organize or compose their retellings.

The two raters using this instrument assigned a score of 1 to 4 to each of these three items on the scale. A rating of 4 on an item suggests a high level of proficiency (90% or more) in the retelling. A rating of 3 indicates a moderate level of proficiency (75%-89%). A rating of 2 indicates a low level of proficiency (50%-74%). A rating of 1 indicated a very low level of proficiency (less than 50%). The percentages indicated above were agreed upon by the raters during the practice rating sessions and were used as a guide in rating the retellings.

Procedures

The students were asked to leave their classroom, one at a time, and come with the researcher to an empty room. Each student was individually introduced to the first passage and asked to read it silently to him- or herself. The student was then prompted by the researcher to retell what he/she recalled from the passage to the researcher without having access to the text. These retellings were audio-recorded for later rating by the researchers. Students were then introduced to a second and a third passage, following the same protocol. The script with the exact language used by the researcher may be found on the Reader Retelling Rating Scale in Appendix A. While the researcher was prepared to provide general prompts to encourage expanded retellings, no retelling session required their use. The same researcher collected all 108 retellings by the students. The students silently read and orally retold the three passages in one sitting, the session totaling 20-30 minutes in length. The stories were presented to the students in different orders to control for presentation effect.

Two researchers practiced rating retellings by fifth-grade students who were not selected as study participants. As they practiced rating, it became apparent that they also needed to agree upon the elements and events of each story that should be included in a complete retelling. Because the raters were each going to be rating the 108 retellings on two separate occasions, they created a list of story elements/events for reference during the rating sessions (see Appendix B). The researchers continued to practice until they had established 90% agreement on each practice passage. The ratings obtained during the practice sessions were used for establishing interrater reliability and were not included in the study results.

The researchers then rated the retellings of all 36 participants retelling three passages each on one rating occasion. While both raters were in the same room and listened to the recordings at the same time, each researcher rated the retellings independent of the other. Ratings of all 108 retellings again occurred on a separate occasion several days later, following the same procedures. The order of the presentation of the retellings to the raters was varied on each rating occasion. The data were then used to calculate inter-rater and intra-rater reliability.

Data Analysis

The statistical analysis procedure used to examine the retelling ratings was based on generalizability theory, which allows researchers to differentiate

among multiple sources of error in estimating reliability (Cronbach, Gleser, Nanda, & Rajaratnam, 1972; Brennan, 2001). This is in contrast to classical test theory, which decomposes a participant's score into the true score and an undifferentiated error term. While classical theory's concept of error term cannot differentiate among the multiple sources of error, generalizability theory is able to decompose the total error variance and attribute it to multiple sources of variance (called facets), the object of measurement, and interactions among those factors, with only a residual error value left to unidentified sources.

The generalizability study (G-study) in this research used the retelling ratings collected to estimate the percent of variance associated with each source of variability in the ratings. The decision study (D-study) extrapolated data from the G-study to investigate how changing the number of raters, rating occasions, and passages would produce highly reliable ratings.

The design of this study was a three-facet, fully-crossed design in which both raters rated all students' retellings of each passage on two rating occasions. After student retellings were rated by the researchers, those ratings were analyzed quantitatively, using the G- and D-studies of generalizability theory to answer the two research questions. GENOVA (Crick & Brennan, 1982) computer software was used.

Students (S) were the object of measurement in this study. The facets were identified as the raters (R), the rating occasions (O), and the passages (P). The G-study analyzed what percent of the variability could be attributed to the object of measurement and the three facets, as well as the amount of variance that could be attributed to interactions among these factors. The data from the G-study provided an answer to the first research question.

After the G-study had calculated the estimated variance components for each facet, the object of measurement, and possible interactions, the D-study calculated the reliability coefficients for a combination of factors. For example, the D-study estimated the change in reliability if two passages were used, versus four passages or six passages, or if one rater was used, versus two, three, or four raters. The data from the D-study answered the second research question.

Results

Generalizability Study

The results of the G-study answered the first research question: *What percentage of the variation in ratings of oral retellings can be attributed to passages, inconsistencies between raters, inconsistencies across rating occasions, and interactions among these facets?* These results are summarized in Table 1. The estimated variance component for students (S) was the largest. The variance components for the passages (P) and student-by-passage interaction (S x P) were also relatively large when compared to the other factors. The total variance among the students and passages accounted for approximately half

of the total variation in the retelling ratings. Variance components for raters and occasions were much lower, and interactions were low as well, except for student-by-passage interaction.

Table 1: Variability in Individual Passage Rating Totals Accounted for by Each Source of Variation and their Interactions

Source of Variation	Degrees of Freedom	Estimated Variance Component	Percent of Total Variation	Standard Error
Students	35	.9256	31.81	.2842
Occasions	1	.0404	1.39	.0451
Passages	2	.5284	18.16	.4179
Raters	1	.0298	1.02	.0588
S x O	35	.0000	0.00	.0458
S x P	70	.4762	16.36	.1266
S x R	35	.0000	0.00	.0584
O x P	2	.0076	0.26	.0114
O x R	1	.0129	0.44	.0171
P x R	2	.0743	2.56	.0606
S x O x P	70	.0804	2.76	.0539
S x O x R	35	.1515	5.21	.0671
S x P x R	70	.2127	7.31	.0731
O x P x R	2	.0002	0.00	.0076
Residual	70	.3702	12.72	.0617

Note: The negative variance component estimates were set to zero following Brennan's (1992; 2001) guideline.

Students

The variance component for students was larger than any other interaction in the study. It accounted for nearly 32% of the total variation. The high percentage of variation resulting from students was expected because the researchers assumed there would be differences in the reading and retelling skills in the individual students. Just as one would expect different students to perform differently on a series of given tasks, one would expect their retelling ratings to differ.

Passages

The passages accounted for 18% of the total variation. There was variability among the overall means of the three passages. This was not surprising, though care was taken to find passages with similar readability levels from the same genre. The inherent differences may have been due to differences in text structure, vocabulary, and concept load.

Raters and Occasions

The fact that the variance components for raters and rating occasion combined only accounted for approximately 2% of the total variation suggests that there was solid inter- and intra-rater reliability. Regardless of when the retelling was rated by an individual rater, the ratings were consistent. This proposes that a single rater on a single rating occasion would be sufficient in providing reliable ratings.

Interactions

The student-by-passage interaction accounted for approximately 16% of the total variation. This means that the relative ordering of the students was not the same from one passage to the next. This interaction may have been due to the way different students interacted with the passages, thereby producing variation in their retellings. Familiarity of the passage content, prior experience, text structure, and vocabulary may have affected such interactions.

The occasion-by-rater interaction accounted for less than one-half-of-one percent of the total variance. This negligible value indicates that the mean student ratings obtained were consistent between raters.

Results of the estimated variance components for two interactions—student x occasion and student x rater were reported as zero. These variance components may have actually had a negative value, but were automatically set to zero by Brennan's (1992; 2001) rule.

Decision Study

When the G-study was completed, a D-study was conducted to determine the reliability coefficients for all sources of variance using other configurations of raters, rating occasions, and passages. The results of the D-study answer the second research questions: *How many passages, raters, and rating occasions are needed in order to obtain a mean rating that provides a dependable estimate of how well an English-speaking elementary student would perform on other retellings?* It was found that in order to obtain high reliability coefficients, at least two raters should rate retellings of a minimum of four passages on one occasion.

The results shown in Figure 1 illustrates how increasing the number of raters or the number of passages students retell affects the coefficients for making relative and absolute decisions. Relative decisions would appropriately indicate reliability when students' ratings are being compared to one another. Absolute decisions, on the other hand, should be considered when students are being compared against a predetermined standard.

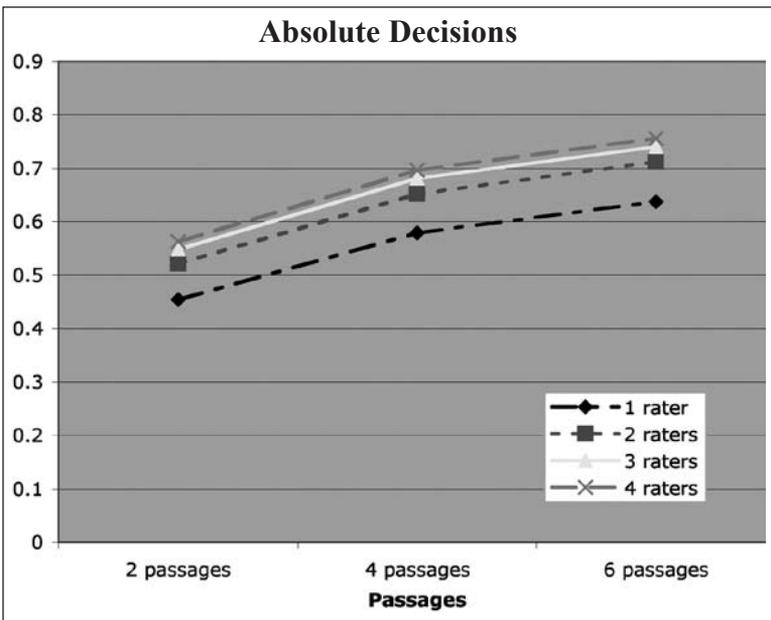
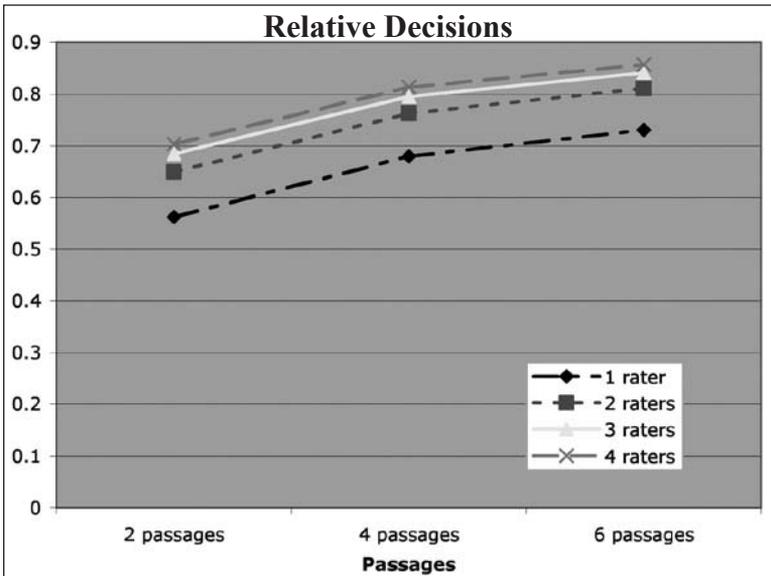


Figure 1. Reliability for Relative and Absolute Decisions by Number of Passages and Number of Raters

When examining the lines indicating the number of raters in the figure, there is a sizable increase in the reliability coefficients with two raters (.6494 for two passages, .7629 for four passages, and .8101 for six passages) compared to one rater (.5621, .6796, and .7306 for two, four, and six passages respectively). The increase is less when using two to three raters (.6849, .7953, .8405), and even less when moving from three to four raters (.7041, .8126, .8566). This same trend holds true in the figure for absolute decisions.

Likewise, the reliability coefficients increase significantly when four passages are rated, rather than two passages. There is also an increase in reliability coefficients when going to six passages, but the increase is less dramatic than when moving from two passages to four. These changes indicate that the benefits of increasing the number of passages level off somewhat.

Discussion

Use of the Reader Retelling Rating Scale

Trained raters used the Reader Retelling Rating Scale to obtain reliable scores of fifth- grade students' oral retellings of narrative texts. Researchers or educators wishing to use this scale should be trained. Additionally, based on the procedures of this study, it is presumed that a list of story elements and events should be created for each passage if the Reader Retelling Rating Scale is to be reliably used in the future.

Sources of Variability and Potential Variation of Assessment Conditions

As found in the G study, the largest sources of variance in this study were the students, the passages, and the student-by-passage interaction. These findings are similar to the results found by Sudweeks, et al. (2004).

The D-study results found that including additional raters is beneficial. When at least two raters are used to rate retellings, the relative increase in benefit is the greatest. In addition, when examining the number of passages that should be used to obtain acceptable reliability coefficients, there is a notable advantage in rating the retellings of four passages over two. These results are consistent with the findings of Sudweeks, et al. (2004).

In the context of this fully-crossed design, the greatest increase in reliability coefficients can be found when two raters rate the retellings from a minimum of four (preferably six) passages on a single rating occasion.

Future Research

The research questions in this study were answered in the context of a three facet, fully- crossed design. It is not always feasible outside of a research setting to use this design because of limitations in time and limited availability of multiple raters. Future studies could investigate the effects of these same sources

of variability in more feasible designs. A design in which retellings of different passages were nested in raters would mean that some raters w.

This study utilized the Reader Retelling Rating Scale that was designed specifically for use with retellings of contemporary realistic fiction passages. Students read a wider variety of passages in a classroom setting. Development and reliability testing of rating scales similar to the Reader Retelling Rating Scale, but for use with other kinds of text are needed.

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Appendix A: Rating Instrument and Administration

Protocol Reader Retelling Rating Scale

Student _____ Rater _____ Date _____

Introduction: The title of this story is _____. Have you ever read or heard this story before? (If yes: How familiar are you with this story?) What do you already know about (topic of story)? What do you think might happen in this story?

Please read this story silently to yourself. After you finish reading, I will ask you to retell the story to me.

Initial prompt: Now that you have read this story, I'd like to have you retell it as if you were a storyteller, telling this story to someone who has never read or heard it before.

1. Includes information that is directly stated or inferred/summarized from the text. (<i>Content</i>)				
2. Provides relevant content and concepts. (<i>Relevance</i>)				
3. Demonstrates ability to organize or compose the retelling. (<i>Organization</i>)				

Intermediate prompts: (indicate which prompts are used. Use only if student is unable to continue the retelling.)

Once there was... What comes next?	What was the main character's
Then what happened?	problem in the story?
Who was the story about?	How did he (or she) try to solve
When did the story happen?	the problem?
Where did the story happen?	What did he (or she) do first
	(second, next)?
	How was the problem solved?
	How did the story end?

Follow-up prompt: Can you tell me anything else about this story?

Appendix B: Story Element/Event Lists Used for Rating

Student Name: _____ Title: Finding Freddie Date: _____ Rater: _____

Story Elements:

Setting-at home, outside

Characters-Merilee, Freddie, Mom

Event 1- Merilee has to tend her little brother, Freddie, while their mom was gone. Merilee didn't want to.

Event 2- Merilee told Freddie to play inside with his fire engine while she beaded a necklace.

Event 3- After a while, she realized that Freddie was gone.

Event 4- The door was open and it was storming outside.

Event 5- Merilee went outside to look for Freddie.

Event 6- She was afraid that if Freddie was hiding in the culvert, it could fill with water from the storm and he could drown.

Event 7- After she heard his voice coming from the culvert, she dragged him out and took him home.

Event 8- Merilee told Freddie that he could have died, he didn't understand, and she explained what it means.

Student Name: _____ Title: The Bike Race Date: _____ Rater: _____

Story Elements:

Setting- home, store, race

Characters- Jillian, Mark, Mom, older girl

Event 1- Jillian received a bike that had been used by other members of her family

Event 2- She was disappointed because it was in poor condition and didn't have the features of a racing bike.

Event 3- Jillian wanted to win the 4th of July bike race.

Event 4- Mark showed off his racing bike and teased her.

Event 5- Jillian got her money and went to the store.

Event 6- She bought items to improve her bike, and fixed it up.

Event 7- She trained for the race.

Event 8- During the race, Mark looked back to mock her and crashed.

Event 9- She took 2nd place to an older girl, but decided that 2nd place wasn't bad.

Student Name: _____ **Title:** Skate-Park Stranger
Date: _____ **Rater:** _____

Story Elements:

Setting- Skate park, home

Characters- Miranda, Jamie, other boys

Event 1- Jamie's little sister, Miranda, wanted to skateboard at the skate park. Event 2- The boys teased her because she is a girl and wouldn't let her skate.

Event 3- Miranda had an idea and went home.

Event 4- She disguised herself as a boy.

Event 5- She returned to the skate-park, she was allowed to skate because the boys didn't recognize her.

Event 6- She performed some difficult skateboard tricks, making them look easy. The boys were impressed.

Event 7- She removed her disguise and the boys recognized her

**PROMISING LITERACY
ACTIVITIES
TO HELP K-12 TEACHERS**

INSTRUCTION AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS THAT SUPPORT PROCESS WRITING IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

This study conducted in eight Utah school districts documented the amount of time devoted to elementary writing instruction and described classroom physical environments related to that instruction. One-hundred-seventy-seven full-day observations were completed during a one-week period. Results indicated that process-writing time was dominated by explicit instruction from the teacher. Other elements of the writing workshop were implemented, but in a fragmented way. Classroom physical environments were generally not literacy rich. Process-oriented teachers had richer environments than those who focused on conventions.

Although writing is a basic and powerful aspect of education (Calkins, 2000; Graves & Kittle, 2005), the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges (2003) has referred to writing as the neglected "R." Applebee and Langer (2006) have shown a decline in classroom writing instruction and have called for more studies focused at the elementary grades based on careful observations of teacher practices. Additionally, Marinak and Gambrell (2010) have called for research focused on classroom literacy environments that are highly motivating for all children.

Some school districts adhere to principles and practices of process writing described by Graves (1983) and Calkins (2000), including pre-writing, drafting, conferencing, revising, editing, and publishing. This form of writing instruction has dominated teacher vocabulary for many years, yet it is still unclear what teachers mean by process writing and how they implement it in their classrooms (Applebee & Langer, 2006). Kara-Soteriou and Kaufman (2002) found that some teachers implemented this process in a rigid, formulaic fashion that does not reflect how writing naturally occurs. They also found teachers were not modeling writing practices for their students, providing time for student sharing, or allowing a choice of topics, although these are all requirements for a writers' workshop (Atwell, 1998).

Teachers need to plan writing instruction but they also need to create physical environments that promote writing. These classrooms should be "caring, thought-provoking, challenging, and exciting" (Wong & Wong, 1998, p. 3). Manning and Bucher (2003) suggested that one should first identify the desired classroom atmosphere and "then be sure that this atmosphere is reflected in the physical environment" (p. 278). Classroom environments should be created with relationships, structures, and resources that support learning (Atwell, 1998).

Roskos and Neuman (2003) point out that few studies have examined how classroom environments influence student learning, especially in early literacy settings. However, in a summary of their own research, they have shown that changing literacy environments has affected literacy outcomes. As they manipulated various elements of classroom environments they found that students performed better when classrooms were print rich, when students had close proximity to literacy tools, when print was placed at eye level, and when literacy props were portable. The impact of literacy-enriched classrooms was almost twice as great as in these same classrooms compared to before changes were made in the literacy environment. McGill-Franzen, Allington, Yokoi, and Brooks (1999) studied classroom libraries in kindergartens. They reported that the mere presence of quality literature and other supplies were not enough to increase children's literacy performance. However, when coupled with pedagogical changes linked to environmental elements, the positive results were substantial.

The purpose of this study was to observe elementary writing instruction and classroom physical environments in eight Utah school districts. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What selected aspects of writing instruction were observed in K–6 classrooms and for what amounts of time?
2. What evidences of writing products and writing instructional resources were observed in K–6 classroom physical environments?
3. How did observed K–6 teachers' classroom physical environments relate to their writing instructional practices?

Methods

In this study the researchers used a mixed method design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2010), because both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed. Given the quantitative dominance of this study, a Dominant-Less Dominant mixed methods research design was used (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Settings

Elementary schools located in eight suburban and rural school districts in Utah were selected to participate in the study. The districts have established partnerships with two local universities. Each of these districts expected and supported teachers in implementing process writing within a writing workshop at elementary levels. Despite these efforts, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2007) data ranked Utah in approximately the bottom 20 to 30% of states in writing ability. The only statewide elementary writing assessment occurs in fifth grade where students write a persuasive essay in response to a prompt and results are machine-scored.

A stratified random sample of the schools was chosen, representing the population of all elementary schools across these eight school districts. Schools were also designated as one of three socioeconomic levels (high, medium, and low), based on the number of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch.

Participants

A sample of 177 K–6 grade teachers were observed. Participants represented a proportional sample of teachers by grade level across the districts: 25 taught kindergarten; 28, first grade; 26, second grade; 22, third grade; 25, fourth grade; 26, fifth grade; and 25, sixth grade. All districts gave permission for the study to be conducted, and each teacher signed a consent form.

All participants were full-time public school teachers in regular K-6 elementary classrooms, with 90% female, 6% male, and 4% did not mark gender. A majority of the teachers (73%) held bachelor's degrees, while 24% held master's degrees. One teacher held a doctoral degree, one teacher had an education specialist degree, and one teacher did not report a degree. Licenses of 85% of the teachers included professional endorsements, with the majority in the areas of English as a second language, early childhood education, and mathematics. Seven reported endorsements related to literacy.

The teachers reported they had a range of teaching experience from 1-40 years with the average of 12 years, while six provided no response. Approximately half of the teachers were 45 years or older. Only six teachers were younger than 25 years old. Eight teachers did not report their age. Most of the teachers were white, with less than 1% from minority groups.

Instruments

To answer the research questions, two observation instruments were constructed. One focused on classroom writing instruction and the other on classroom physical environment related to writing instruction. Classroom observations were made by trained pre-service teacher-observers who used these researcher-designed observation forms.

Classroom instruction observation form. This form consisted of a series of boxes in which observers labeled and described instructional activities, as well as the duration of the activities and the number of students involved (see Appendix A). The observers provided a detailed running account of classroom events. The researchers prepared instructions for all observers, including guidelines for conducting observations. Based on professional literature, definitions and examples of typical classroom instructional practices and procedures observers would likely see in elementary classrooms were provided (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 2000; Graves & Kittle, 2005). This list of definitions was used in the training, as well as during the observations, and provided the activity labels they were expected to use for various aspects of writing, as well as other subject areas.

Classroom environment observation form. Based on the snapshot observation of classroom literacy and texts described by Hoffman, Sailors, Duffy, and Beretvas (2004), the researchers developed an observation form that focused specifically on writing environments (see Appendix B). The observation form guided the various preservice-teacher observers so they could stay focused on the recommended practices identified in the literature (e.g., Graves, 1983; Roskos & Neuman, 2003; Smith, 2005; Spandel, 2001).

Procedures

Observers were all elementary education majors in their senior year who were in their last semester prior to their student teaching. They were not required to sign consent forms but it was made clear to them that their participation as data collectors was voluntary. They were informed that they could opt out of this research project at any time without affecting their course assignments or grade for the course. While several chose not to participate in the full-day observation, the majority was willing to be included as data collectors.

The observers attended a 90-minute training session during a regular class period of a literacy course. All training sessions followed the identical format: explanation of the study objectives, description of the observation forms, practice with the forms using video clips, assessment using a video clip, and explanation

of instructions and procedures to follow on the observation day. The video clips were recorded in actual classrooms and represented a full range of instructional activities and environmental artifacts having to do with writing. As observers viewed an assessment video where various literacy events and environment items were shown, they used the activity labels and definitions to ensure consistency in use of terms. When researchers checked the completed observations forms, 85% of all items had been labeled the same.

Observers were then assigned specific classrooms, days, and times to complete their observations using both observation forms. They were instructed to refrain from participating in the class or helping individual students.

Prior to data collection, all teachers were sent a letter informing them of their selection to participate in the study. To ensure objectivity, the K-6 elementary classroom teachers were told that the observers would record a general distribution of time and practices in their classrooms and would note elements of the classroom environment. They were also given the day the observation would occur. If a selected teacher was absent, another teacher in the school was randomly selected to participate. Each of 194 observers completed a full-day observation during a one-week period in November: 36 were observed on Monday; 42, on Tuesday; 35, on Wednesday; 33, on Thursday; and 31, on Friday.

To assess the reliability of the observations, two observers were placed in 10% of classrooms (34 individuals in 17 classrooms). When data on their observation instruments were analyzed the agreement levels were high (Cohen's alpha inter-rater reliability of .95) This exceeded the level of agreement obtained in the training sessions. While all other classrooms had only one observer each, the high inter-rater reliability obtained in both the training and among the 34 paired observers led researchers to accept individual observations as reliable.

While each observer only spent one day in a single classroom, the large number of classrooms ($n=177$) observed allowed for a broad representation of classroom practice. Thus, this study may over- or under-estimate the amount of writing instruction and quality of classroom physical environments because only one observation was completed during a one-week period.

Data Analysis

Quantitative

Based on frequency of occurrence for each aspect of writing and the amount of time devoted to each on both observation forms, teachers were classified into one of four groups—process writing ($n=70$), non-process writing ($n=26$), conventions ($n=61$), and zero writing ($n=12$). The aspects of writing from the observation forms that were used by the researchers to determine group placement were as follows:

- Process writing group: mini-lesson, response to lesson, sustained silent writing, teacher conferencing, peer conferencing, shared and interactive writing, student sharing, and teacher sharing
- Non-process writing group: prompted writing, formula writing, morning message, response to read aloud, response to literature, and response to content instruction
- Conventions group: spelling, daily oral language, word wall, and hand-writing
- Zero writing group: no activities associated with writing

Many of the aspects from the observation forms could be categorized into different groups. For example, mini-lessons could be listed in any of the first three groups depending on the topic and purpose of the lesson. Grouping decisions were based on definitions in the literature and descriptions of observed activities on the instructional instrument. These groupings were not meant to represent the teachers' philosophical stances or overall approaches.

Groups created with data from the instructional form were then compared with selected items on the environment observation form: (a) evidence of teacher writing, (b) student writing, (c) group writing, (d) six traits, (e) writing workshop, and (f) student sharing. These items were selected because they were deemed to be more process-oriented than other items.

Qualitative

The environment form had an *other* section that was analyzed using qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2007). Codes were assigned that accurately described the comments and were then examined and collapsed into broader themes. In an effort to establish face validity and to check for clarity of definition (Johnson & Christensen, 2004), an additional researcher also read the forms and assigned code words separately. The entire group then met and came to full agreement on the themes to be used. No predetermined codes were assigned prior to the study.

Results and Discussion

Classroom Writing Instruction

During the full-day classroom observations, writing instruction of some type was observed in all classrooms except for 12 (7%). All kindergarten and fifth grade teachers included some aspect of writing, while at all other grade levels, some teachers did not engage their students in any writing activities.

On average, teachers in this study spent just under one hour a day on all aspects of writing (53.9 minutes). Third grade teachers spent the most time on writing (63.2 minutes) and kindergarten and first grade teachers spent the least (31.8 minutes and 47.7 minutes, respectively); however, most of the kindergarten classes met for only half a day. Fifth grade teachers spent an average of 59.9

minutes per day on writing. The statewide writing assessment is only given to fifth grade students in these districts.

The observers recorded many writing activities that were evident in teachers' instruction. Observed aspects of writing fell into three sections: activities associated with the writing workshop/writing process; various types of non-process writing, and mechanics/conventions. The aspects of writing that were observed and the average amount of time spent on each are seen in Table 1 and described below.

Table 1: Average Minutes per Day Spent on Aspects of Writing Instruction

Aspects of Writing	K n=25	1 n=28	2 n=26	3 n=22	4 n=25	5 n=26	6 n=25	Total n=177
Writing Process Aspects								
Mini-lesson	1.8	4.0	7.3	10.6	4.1	9.8	6.9	6.3
Response to lesson	1.3	2.9	3.3	5.6	4.5	4.2	7.9	4.2
Sustained silent writing	2.4	2.3	1.3	2.7	.90	2.6	1.7	2.0
Student writing/teacher conferencing	2.4	1.8	4.1	3.6	10.4	5.0	1.6	4.1
Student writing/peer conferencing	0.0	0.7	0.2	0.7	0.8	0.2	.60	0.5
Shared/interactive	3.3	3.0	2.7	2.7	1.0	0.1	0.0	1.8
Student sharing	1.8	3.1	4.3	2.4	1.8	1.2	2.1	2.4
Teacher sharing	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	13.0	17.9	23.3	28.3	23.5	23.1	20.8	21.3
Non-process Aspects								
Prompted	6.4	7.0	13.9	4.4	2.0	6.4	4.8	6.9
Formula	0.0	1.3	1.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	2.4	0.8
Morning message	0.1	0.6	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.5	0.1	0.2
Response to read aloud	0.1	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.2
Response to literature	1.4	2.7	1.7	3.2	3.9	1.9	5.2	2.8
Response to content instruction	0.3	1.0	2.1	0.9	1.1	8.1	2.2	2.3
Total	8.3	12.6	19.5	8.6	8.0	16.9	14.7	13.2
Conventions Aspects								
Spelling	2.4	6.3	10.3	9.4	13.1	9.6	9.8	8.7
Daily oral language	0.8	2.9	2.9	8.1	6.7	8.5	8.0	5.3
Word wall	1.0	3.4	0.9	2.1	0.0	1.4	0.4	1.3
Handwriting	6.3	4.6	3.9	6.7	7.0	0.4	0.3	4.1
Total	10.5	17.2	18.0	26.3	26.8	19.9	18.5	19.4
Grand Total	31.8	47.7	60.8	63.2	58.3	59.9	54.0	53.9

Note. Number of minutes is rounded to the nearest tenth.

Writing process

Teachers participated in a variety of activities associated with the writing process: (a) mini-lessons, (b) response to lessons, (c) sustained silent writing, (d) student conferencing, (e) peer conferencing, (f) interactive writing, and (g) student sharing. Mini-lessons labeled whole-class instruction on a variety of concepts and skills—everything from idea selection, voice, and organization to conventions. Response to lessons referred to writing that students completed immediately following the lesson and related directly to the content of the lesson. Teachers sometimes helped individuals, but this was not considered conferencing because the writing was to practice the skill and the writing was not revised. Sustained silent writing had to do with student writing that included no teacher help or prompting.

In this study, the majority of independent student writing was completed in journals/writers' notebooks. Student writing/teacher conferencing labeled the time spent by students on various drafts of writing they generated on their own with the teacher providing support to individuals and small groups. Student writing/peer conferencing was similar, but with time allotted for students to confer with each other rather than with the teacher. Shared/interactive writing referred to a teacher working with the whole class or a small group to create a single text with varying levels of student participation. At times, the focus was on generating the text, but at other times, the focus was on revising, editing, and copyediting a final draft of the text. Student sharing had to do with students reading their own writing to the whole class or in small groups. Teachers sometimes call this author's chair. Teacher sharing is the teacher producing and/or reading examples of his or her own writing as a model for students.

Non-process writing. Various forms of non-process writing were observed: (a) prompted writing, (b) formula writing, (c) response to literature, and (d) response to instruction. These writing activities were assigned with no expectation of revising or editing. Prompted writing meant that the teacher gave the topic and provided no systematic support (e.g., "What did you do over the weekend," a thank you letter, things you are thankful for). In formula writing, students generated speech bubbles in cartoons, created outlines, and completed Mad-libs. If teachers spent time reading or commenting on student work, that interaction was recorded. Responses came in three forms. Some teachers had students respond in writing to a book that was read aloud. Others asked students to respond to literature that was read as a class or in small groups. Teachers also asked students to respond to instruction in content areas such as science, math, and social studies.

Mechanics/conventions. Many teachers assigned a number of activities associated with the mechanics of writing: (a) spelling, (b) daily oral language, (c) word walls, and (d) handwriting. Spelling was the label used for tests, activities or games, and study assignments. Daily oral language referred to the process of correcting text that was presented with deliberate mistakes having to do with mechanical aspects of writing (e.g., grammar, capitalization, and punctuation). Students completed the activity individually by rewriting the text and correcting the errors. The teacher then discussed orally the corrections with input from

students explaining the reasoning behind the changes. Word wall had to do with time spent focusing on words displayed alphabetically on a classroom wall or bulletin board. Some were high frequency words, while others related to a unit of content study (for example, discussing words like *hieroglyphic* and *pyramid* when the class was studying Egypt). Handwriting labeled time spent learning and practicing manuscript or cursive writing.

Time Spent on Writing Activities

Teachers who taught writing spent the most time on spelling, prompted writing, and mini-lessons. The writing aspects observed least often were teacher sharing, morning message, and response to a read aloud book.

Time was nearly evenly divided between the writing workshop/writing process and mechanics/conventions. Approximately half of the average process writing time (10.5 minutes out of 21.3) was spent on mini-lessons and responding to those lessons. The average time spent on the conventions of spelling and daily oral language was 14.0 out of 19.4 minutes. While many teachers used parts of the writing workshop (Atwell, 1998), only five teachers in the study were observed implementing the three major components of it on the same day: (a) mini-lessons, (b) students writing/teacher conferencing, and (c) student sharing.

Across grade levels, average times were seen to increase or decrease for various aspects of writing. For example, upper grade level students spent more time on responses to mini-lessons (K=1.3 minutes; sixth grade= 7.9), and daily oral language (K=0.8 minutes; sixth=8.0). The lower grade level students spent more time on shared writing (K=3.3 minutes; sixth grade= 0.0) and word walls (first grade= 3.4 minutes; sixth grade= 0.4). Handwriting was a focus in all grade levels until fourth grade (7.0 minutes), and dropped dramatically in fifth (0.4 minutes) and sixth (0.3 minutes). Prompted writing was much higher in second grade (13.9 minutes) than in any other grade. Student writing/teacher conferencing was dramatically higher in fourth grade (10.4 minutes) than any other grade level and was extremely low in first grade (1.8 minutes) and sixth grade (1.6 minutes).

In this study, teachers were sporadic in implementing all aspects of the writing process. Kara-Soteriou and Kaufman (2002) found that teachers implemented the writing process in a rigid and segmented fashion. This study draws into question Kara-Soteriou and Kaufman's finding. There was little structure binding their eclectic elements of writing instruction.

While many teachers used parts of the writing workshop, only five teachers in the study were observed implementing the three major components of the writing workshop—mini-lesson, students writing/teacher conferencing, and student sharing—on the same day. This fragmentation could be due to lack of training or a belief that a full writing workshop is unnecessary. It could also indicate that they are simply more comfortable implementing some aspects of the writing workshop than others.

Students frequently wrote pieces that required only one draft. While this engages students in writing, they are not involved with the thinking required by

completing the writing process. This is consistent with Applebee and Langer's (2006) concern that most students are not required to write lengthy or complex pieces. NAEP (2002) results showed that 40% of twelfth graders have never written papers more than three pages long. Fourteen percent have never been required to write a paper longer than two pages. The one-draft writing that was prevalent in this study limits students' engagement in pre-writing activities that are linked to writing achievement.

While mechanics of writing were taught by teachers in this study, they were largely covered in isolation. There was no indication that spelling, daily oral language, word walls, or handwriting were connected to authentic writing tasks. Observations revealed little integration of mechanics.

Classroom Physical Environments

Likert scale items. Researchers determined that higher averages indicated richer environments. Results showed evidence of more individual student writing (2.38) than group writing (1.82). The highest recorded display aspect was teacher-written directions and labels (2.81). The lowest recorded aspect was teacher-written morning messages (1.52) with very few grade level differences. Second-grade classrooms displayed the most individual student writings (2.57), and fifth-grade classrooms had the fewest (2.09). First-grade classrooms had the most group writings (2.27), and sixth grade the fewest (1.30). The mean scores of the Likert scale items are represented in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Evidences of Student and Teacher Writing

Evidences	K n=24	1 n=27	2 n=23	3 n=22	4 n=22	5 n=24	6 n=25	Total n=167
Displayed Student Writing								
Individual	2.54	2.48	2.57	2.41	2.36	2.09	2.20	2.38
Group	2.17	2.27	1.72	1.67	1.95	1.58	1.32	1.82
Displayed Teacher Writing								
Morning message	1.38	1.62	1.45	1.55	1.38	1.77	1.54	1.52
Directions/labels	2.83	2.85	3.00	2.84	2.64	2.91	2.64	2.81
Teacher's own writing	2.83	2.77	2.64	2.50	2.50	2.61	1.96	2.54
Daily schedule	1.44	1.96	1.73	2.10	2.25	2.22	2.28	1.99
Teacher modeling	2.29	2.69	2.25	2.34	2.09	2.21	2.04	2.27

Note. Likert scale 1-4 (1 indicates no evidence, 2 indicates 1-2 in evidence, 3 indicates 3-4 in evidence, 4 indicates evidence of five or more examples)

Yes/no items. On the yes/no items, the highest recorded evidence of displayed writing was charts and prompts created without student input (91%). This coincides with findings in Table 2 that show evidence of teachers' writings rather than displays of students' writings. The lowest recorded evidence was the traits of writing (40%), followed closely by evidence of the writing workshop/process (41%), and author's chair (41%). There was very little difference across grade levels; however, as grade level increased from primary grades to intermediate grades, so did the display of the six traits and elements of writing workshop. Primary grade teachers used more charts made with student input and word walls than their intermediate grade peers. Conversely, writing resources, such as dictionaries, thesauruses, and spelling books were more prevalent in the intermediate grades than in the primary grades. The yes/no items are represented in Table 3.

Table 3: Percentages of Classrooms Showing Evidences of Writing Support and Resources

Evidences	K n=24	1 n=27	2 n=23	3 n=22	4 n=22	5 n=24	6 n=25	Total n=167
	Displayed Student Writing							
Individual	2.54	2.48	2.57	2.41	2.36	2.09	2.20	2.38
Group	2.17	2.27	1.72	1.67	1.95	1.58	1.32	1.82
	Displayed Teacher Writing							
Morning message	1.38	1.62	1.45	1.55	1.38	1.77	1.54	1.52
Directions/labels	2.83	2.85	3.00	2.84	2.64	2.91	2.64	2.81
Teacher's own writing	2.83	2.77	2.64	2.50	2.50	2.61	1.96	2.54
Daily schedule	1.44	1.96	1.73	2.10	2.25	2.22	2.28	1.99
Teacher modeling	2.29	2.69	2.25	2.34	2.09	2.21	2.04	2.27

Other Items

Relatively few observers wrote additional evidences beyond those specified on the form. However, the comments they made were analyzed qualitatively and six themes emerged: content prompts, (n= 44; e.g., spelling charts and comprehension strategies), support books (n= 19; e.g., picture books and encyclopedias), writing helps (n= 17; e.g., idea charts and word collections), writing projects (n= 14; e.g., class books and thank you notes), organization

($n=10$; e.g., classroom helper charts and menus), and student recognition ($n=6$; e.g., star student displays, and birthday charts).

The results indicate that the observed classroom environments were generally not providing for writing rich activities to occur. While it appears that teachers' writing was prominently displayed and modeled, it consisted of teacher-made materials, instructions, and charts rather than indications of process writing representing "classrooms for children" (Calkins & Harwayne, 1991, p. 11). On the yes/no items, the highest recorded evidence of displayed writing was charts and prompts created without student input (91%). Reutzel and Cooter (2000) discuss the importance of having a literacy-rich environment with an array of different books and props for children. This was not seen in the observed classrooms. The physical classrooms seemed to be similar to the instruction: fragmented and non-process oriented.

Most classrooms were found to be dominated by teacher-made resources and teacher-directed instruction. This finding is consistent with other research in the field (Applebee & Langer, 2006). Although most observed classrooms in this study showed evidence of more traditional resources (e.g., dictionaries and textbooks), teachers whose classrooms also included displays of student writing and teacher writing to students spent more time in writing instruction.

Relationships between Writing Instruction and Physical Environments

As stated above, teachers were placed into one of four groups: process-oriented, non-process, conventions, and zero writing. Regression analyses revealed an insignificant beta value ($\beta = 0.486$, $p = 0.056$). This means that teacher categories based on time spent in writing instruction did not significantly predict the richness of the writing environment. However, because the regression approached significance, further investigation was warranted.

When a regression was performed looking at only those aspects of the literacy environment most closely associated with process-oriented classrooms (evidence of teacher writing, student writing, group writing, six traits, writing workshop, and student sharing), a significant difference was found for all four groups ($p = .003$). This means that the presence or lack of presence of these six items in a physical environment predicted the kind of writing that was done in that classroom on the observed day.

Using the average scores on the environment observation form, one-sample t tests were conducted on each of the four groups. Of the six possible comparisons, only one showed a significant difference. The process group, with a mean of 7.39, was significantly higher than the conventions group, with a mean of 6.14 ($p = .002$). Process-oriented teachers in this study had more evidences of teacher and student writing and resources to support writing than teachers more focused on conventions. A regression was performed to test whether amount of time spent on writing would predict classroom environment scores. No significant relationships were found. Time spent on writing did not predict classroom environment scores in this study.

Those teachers who were found to have process-oriented instruction were also found to have writing-rich classroom physical environments. The connection between a teacher's environment and instruction can perhaps be attributed to that teacher's foundational core beliefs about teaching and learning. Teacher beliefs can be defined as "unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught" (Kagan, 1992, p. 65). These findings show that these teachers' "unconsciously held assumptions" (p. 65) were evident and consistent in their instruction and classroom environments.

In this study, those who engaged in process writing did have literacy-rich environments. It does not appear that simply spending more time on writing will necessarily lead to richer environments. Reutzel and Cooter (2000) maintain that lasting change must go beyond the superficial and be based on philosophical changes. Both pre-service and professional teachers need to be engaged in on-going professional development that affects their beliefs about process writing. Results of this study suggest that current practices may be leading to fragmented forms of writing instruction and an eclectic gathering of environmental resources. The instruction and environments observed may be filling time and space, but may not be inspiring children and improving elementary writing.

Further research is needed to examine implications for those preparing and supporting teachers of writing. Such research could go beyond the snapshot presented here to include other parts of the country and observations over time. We also need to consider teachers' perceptions. Interviews with teachers could also provide more depth of understanding of their motivations and decision-making processes.

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Appendix A: Classroom Instruction Observation Form

Teacher #: _____ Observer #: _____ Date: _____

Activity Label	Start time	Stop time	# of studen

Description

Activity Label	Start time	Stop time	# of studen

Description

Appendix B: Classroom Environment Observation Form

District _____ School _____ Grade _____

Date _____ Teacher Number _____ Observer Number _____

1. Evidence of Student Writing Displayed in the Classroom

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| a. Individual Student Writing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b. Group Writing (Shared, Interactive Writing) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| c. Other: _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

1 = none 2 = 1-2 in evidence 3 = 3-4 in evidence 4 = 5 or more in evidence

2. Evidence of Teacher Writing To Students

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| a. Morning Message | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b. Directions/Labels | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| c. Teacher's Own Writing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| d. Daily Class Schedule | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| e. Teacher Modeling | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| f. Other: _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

1 = none 2 = 1-2 in evidence 3 = 3-4 in evidence 4 = 5 or more in evidence

3. Evidence of Writing Instruction/Support in the Classroom

- | | | |
|---|-----------|----------|
| a. Traits of Writing (e.g., Six Traits) | yes _____ | no _____ |
| b. Phases of Writing Workshop | yes _____ | no _____ |
| c. Author's Chair | yes _____ | no _____ |
| d. Charts or prompts- without student input | yes _____ | no _____ |
| e. Charts or prompts- with student input | yes _____ | no _____ |
| f. Writing Center (including publishing supplies/materials) | yes _____ | no _____ |
| g. Content Area Writing (including L.A. block) | yes _____ | no _____ |
| h. Word Walls | yes _____ | no _____ |
| i. Other: _____ | | |

4. Evidence of Writing Resources

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| a. Dictionaries | yes _____ | no _____ |
| b. Thesaurus | yes _____ | no _____ |
| c. Writing/Spelling Textbooks | yes _____ | no _____ |
| d. Other: _____ | | |

LITERACY COACHING ACROSS THE CONTENT AREAS: CURRENT CONTEXT AND EMERGING ROLES

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Abstract

Studying professional development support for literacy teaching in high school contexts, as well as the changing role of the literacy professional at this level, is important to improving literacy and learning across content areas. Using a case-study approach and a cross-case analysis, this study examined: 1) the contexts and roles of literacy professionals working in high schools, 2) the manner in which literacy professionals support teaching, and learning across the content areas, and 3) the challenges literacy coaches identified in supporting content area teaching and learning. Findings showed that, while the contexts and roles of the participants varied, they each fulfilled teaching and coaching roles in their schools, and they experienced challenges in terms of convincing content teachers of the value of their role and of the professional development initiatives they sought to implement.

It is widely accepted in the literacy community that secondary students who receive continued literacy support in reading, writing, and thinking critically across content areas will succeed in advanced coursework, and develop the multiple literacies skills they need to achieve personal goals (O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995; Sturtevant, Boyd, Brozo, Hinchman, Moore, & Alverman, 2006). Research has shown that professional development is most effective when it

- (1) is a sustained intensive process that focuses on appropriate content;
- (2) gives teachers opportunities for active, hands-on learning that is integrated into the daily life of the school; and
- (3) provides individual follow-up through supportive observation and feedback, staff dialogues, study groups, mentoring, and peer coaching (Bellanca, 2009; Birman, Desimore, Porter, & Garet, 2000; & Webster-Wright, 2009).

Literacy coaches can support the professional development process across content areas by enabling teachers to build on their existing knowledge of teaching and learning to improve their instructional practices (Vogt, & Shearer, 2007). Indeed, leaders in literacy education over the past several years (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2008; 2009; 2010) have identified literacy coaching as a “hot topic”.

Despite the support in professional circles for advancing adolescent literacy, funding and public interest in supporting adolescents’ literacy development has been uneven over the last century. During the economic downturn of the past several years, some states and districts have revised, reduced, and even eliminated adolescent literacy coaching positions in response to dwindling budgets. The preparation, roles, and expectations of literacy professionals who work with adolescents and teachers of adolescents have also varied, and individuals working in these roles have often felt like islands, without sufficient connections or support (Calo, 2008; Darwin, 2002; Sturtevant, 2003). This study explored the experiences and perspectives of two high school literacy professionals as they worked to navigate their evolving, and often complex, roles as literacy coaches.

Historical Perspective

As early as the late 1800s, educators were considering the role of literacy and communication in the secondary school. For example, in 1893 the National Education Association’s Committee of Ten, Subcommittee on Secondary Social Studies (Hertzberg, 1988) strongly advocated against instruction that emphasized only rote learning and suggested curriculum that included multiple textbooks, debates, discussions, and primary sources. Moore, Readence, and Rickelman (1983), in a historical review, noted that interest in content area literacy existed at least from the early part of the 20th century. For example, in 1930, McCallister advocated that secondary content area teachers provide reading assistance in their subject areas. However, few teachers took on this role. A comparison of principals’ reports on high school reading programs in the 1990s versus those in the 1940s (Barry, 1997) found that while in both time periods secondary teachers were encouraged by university professors to be “teachers of reading,” neither group had the additional “time, money, training or support to do so” (p. 530).

During the late 1960s through 1980s, literacy researchers developed many strategies for connecting literacy to content area topics (Alvermann & Moore,

1991). In addition, colleges/universities and school districts invested substantial effort and funds in teacher preparation and professional development programs related to reading in the secondary school (Farrell & Cirrincione, 1984). However, there was continuing concern that secondary teachers actually used literacy strategies infrequently for a variety of contextual, disciplinary, and personal reasons (e.g., O'Brien, Stewart & Moje, 1995). Research on this topic continues today (e.g., Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2009).

There also has been a growing body of literature related to the role of literacy professionals in secondary schools. The title *literacy coach* has come into recent use, particularly in reference to literacy educators who work primarily with other teachers rather than directly with students (International Reading Association, 2006). However, literacy professionals have worked in coaching roles for several decades under different names, such as *reading specialist* or *reading resource teacher* (Cassidy, 2007). At the secondary level, while reading teachers in coaching roles were hired in federally funded programs in the 1960s and 1970s, the role was later almost phased out due primarily to funding issues (Anders, 2002). Recent federal initiatives, such as the discretionary grant program *Striving Readers* (U.S. Dept. of Ed. 2009), have provided funding for programs that seek to raise the literacy levels of middle and high school students and build a scientific research base for developing and implementing strategies to improve adolescent literacy skills.

Some school districts have also continued to include literacy professionals who work directly with students or who have a combined role, working with both teachers and students, as part of their school's literacy team (Guth & Pratt-Fartro, 2010). Other school districts have shifted the role of reading specialist from that of teaching students to that of providing ongoing, consistent, and relevant professional development to teachers. Often, such schools rely on literacy coaches to continue to provide appropriate assistance for students who struggle with reading, even though the coach's primary role is to support teachers (Guth & Pettengill, 2005; IRA, 2006). Research on these programs is still in an emergent stage. Recent studies (e.g., Calo, 2008; Smith, 2006) have begun to explore a variety of issues related to middle and high school literacy professionals. For example, there appears to be a growing interest in supporting literacy coaches in their understanding of the needs of adult learners so that they can effectively offer support to teachers as both coach and teacher seek to refine literacy programs and instructional practices (Bean, Belcastro, Hathaway, Risko, Rosemary, & Roskos, 2008).

One aspect of recent research shows that scholars have expressed differing opinions on the ideal role of the literacy coach. For example, there is controversy about whether a combined role (teaching students and working with teachers), is advantageous or detrimental. Smith (2006), in a study of three middle school literacy coaches, found that, when the coach assumes too many

roles, the coaching process can become fragmented. However, Cassidy (2007), noted that coaches who “lack...sustained instruction with students” (p. 1), are at a disadvantage and should teach for at least 25% of their time, in order to provide services to struggling readers, reinforce their credibility with teachers, and refine their own skills. On the other hand, middle and high school coaches in another study (Sturtevant, Calo, Rutherford, & Pratt-Fartro, 2008) found that teaching part of each day in the secondary school context prevented coaches from meeting with teachers who had different planning periods and modeling in classrooms where times conflicted with their own teaching.

Current expectations for literacy coaches are multifaceted as they work to meet the diverse learning needs of adolescents and a growing range of policy mandates. High school literacy coaches may be expected to do a combination of the following: mentor individual teachers; model and observe in classrooms; work with study groups and teacher teams from different subject areas; lead a school wide literacy initiative; advise administrators on the progress of and directions for the school literacy program; administer and monitor literacy assessments; work with parents and community groups (Sturtevant, 2003; Toll, 2005).

While the changing role of the literacy professional in the elementary and middle school has been discussed extensively in publications and at conferences in the past 10 years (e.g., Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007), the literacy professional in the high school has been studied in a very limited way to date. The context of the high school is different from elementary and middle schools in significant ways, and thus literacy professionals in these settings may face unique challenges. The high school departmentalized structure; the generally large size of high schools; specific relationships between administrators, leadership teams, and teachers; cultural issues; and other concerns must be considered in developing successful programs at the high school level (Darwin, 2002; Puig & Froelich, 2007; Vogt & Shearer, 2007). Thus, continued study of literacy in high school contexts as well as the changing role of the literacy professional at this level is important to improving literacy and learning at this level.

This study explored the roles of high school literacy professionals in two southeastern U.S. states. The three research questions were:

1. What are the contexts and roles of literacy professionals working in high schools?
2. What or who influences these contexts and roles?
3. How do individual literacy professionals describe their positions, including their dilemmas and strategies they have found successful.

Methods

Participants and Contexts

Participants were two high school literacy professionals in two states on the east coast of the United States. The first participant, Pat (a pseudonym), holds the title “Literacy Coach” in a suburban/rural high school of about 1600 students. During the year of the study, the school served a population that was 58% Caucasian, 27% African American, 10% Hispanic, 4% Asian American, and 1% Native American. The school serves many military families, as it is next to a large Marine Corps base.

Pat was interviewed during her first year her position as a High School Literacy Coach. Prior to this position, Pat worked as a reading specialist in a middle school for one year and as middle school math/social studies and elementary teacher in the same district. She said she decided to move to the high school level when positions became open because she enjoys working with older students. She is licensed in her state as a K-12 Reading Specialist and in general education, grades K-6.

The second participant, Cora (a pseudonym), holds the title “Literacy Specialist” in an urban high school of 829 students in a low SES, south-eastern community. Her school serves a student population that is 47% African-American, 38% Hispanic, and 12% Caucasian. A literacy educator for over 25 years, Cora is certified in K-12 reading and has held a variety of positions in the Northeast and in the South including reading teacher, head of language arts, and literacy specialist.

Procedures

Each literacy professional was interviewed on two occasions using a semi-structured interview protocol. This protocol enabled the researchers to obtain an in-depth perspective of the views and experiences of each participant. Such an application of naturalistic inquiry can provide theoretically grounded accounts of events that occur in natural setting and the perspectives, insights, and descriptions of participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Burgess, 1985). The interviews sought to ascertain the participants’ perspectives on their roles and responsibilities as literacy professionals. The following topics were the starting place for the semi-structured interviews with each participant: preparation for their current job; the extent to which their roles and responsibilities are consistent with their expectations for their work; educators with whom they worked most frequently; their experiences and activities during the course of a so-called “normal” week; aspects of their job that they find most rewarding; and dilemmas or challenges in their work. The interview protocol included that the interviewer began each interview with prepared open-ended questions and then asked follow-up questions related to each topic.

The interviews were conducted at least 4 months apart to provide data from two points in time and to allow the interviewer to ask reflective questions related to what had occurred in the intervening months. Pat was interviewed in

October, soon after she started her position, and in July, after the end of her first full year. Cora was also interviewed at the beginning of the school year and then again at the end of the same school year. Interviews were 45 minutes to 1 hour. Analysis of qualitative data requires that the researcher establish a conceptual framework so that patterns and themes that emerge from the data can be identified. This allowed the researchers to discover patterns, suggest comparisons, and integrate and elaborate on the data gathered (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data collected in this study were transcribed and analyzed for themes related to the research questions. Cross-case analysis was conducted to identify similarities and differences across the two cases.

Results

Results are presented below as individual cases followed by a cross-case analysis in the discussion section.

Case One: Pat

First Interview. Pat was interviewed at the beginning and end of her first year as a high school Literacy Coach. In this position, Pat was responsible for teaching classes for about half of each day (four classes, two per day for 90 minutes each, on alternating days), in the morning. The classes she was assigned were for “ninth graders who have struggled with reading” and who did not do well on state and district mandated tests. The classes were comprised of 15 students each, for a total of 60 students. The rest of each day was reserved for planning and for working with other teachers in the building (n = 130).

In the first interview, conducted about 6 weeks into the school year, Pat indicated that she and her principal were working out the specifics of her role. For example, she stated that the day prior to the interview she had “talked to the principal...and we came up with dates that I am to meet with the departments.” She indicated that she would be receiving a professional leave day to attend all of the departmental meetings. Pat expressed appreciation for her principal’s support, stating, “*He’s wonderful...he just says, ‘what do you need?...’ He calls me in about once a week...He’ll just ask... ‘how’s it going?’ ...*” However, Pat also noted that she was surprised to learn when she came to the school that she would be teaching so many classes, as in her prior job at the middle school she only taught one class: “*It is not what I thought it would be...when I accepted the position, I didn’t think I [would be] teaching classes.*” Pat indicated that when she asked about this at the central office, she was told “*...no, we were able to get you into the high school and get literacy coaches because we were able to sell the superintendent...on getting a literacy coach in the high school [only] if you teach [classes].*”

Over the course of her first year, Pat faced a variety of challenges. During the first interview, she said that what was “*most challenging*” was being both “*a classroom teacher and a resource...*” In her own classroom, the biggest chal-

lenge was the time related to grading papers, while in her work as a resource teacher, the biggest challenge was “getting into the classroom[s]” and increasing content “teachers’ buy in.” In terms of early progress toward the second two goals (getting into classrooms and increasing teachers’ “buy in”), Pat mentioned that she was invited in September into math and science classes to conduct assessments. She also had been invited into a government classroom because the teacher felt students needed help with summarizing. Pat noted that this class “has an SOL,” meaning that the students were required to pass a state Standards of Learning (SOL) test at the end of the course. However, Pat also had a particularly difficult encounter with an AP history teacher who was extremely negative: “. . . my assistant principal introduced me to this man and he said, ‘I don’t care who she is...my kids can read and I have no interest in her.’”

When asked what was rewarding, the first thing Pat said was “*when I see kids use something that I’ve taught them in another class... that is the biggest reward ever.*” With regard to working with other teachers, she said, “I think it’s rewarding when teachers will ask you questions when they come to you for advice.”

Second Interview. In her second interview, Pat discussed in detail changes that had occurred over the first year. She stated that although the year “*didn’t go as well as the ideal in my head*” that “*people [other teachers] bought into the idea that I could be useful.... Lot[s] of apprehension at the beginning but as the year progressed...I found out what people were saying about me... [they were] asking [each other], ‘what did she do, how did she help you?’*”

A surprising example of change during the year was that the teacher who had rejected her earlier (the AP history teacher) had become her “number one fan.” Pat indicated that while this teacher had been “very rude, very, very rude” early in the year, he ended up having a “very challenging class, so he was pulling in every resource he possibly could and I was one of his resources.” Upon further probing, Pat shared that the school principal had started a committee of teachers from each department to explore ways to improve achievement, and that he had specifically included the AP history teacher on this committee. Pat was purposefully not included on this team, as the principal wanted the team to focus on literacy but wanted “*them [to] come out with the word literacy.*” The team was to explore “what [teachers] want to see [to help] students do better.” Over time, the team did begin to explore literacy, and eventually the AP history teacher also began to ask for Pat’s assistance. Pat did note, however, that not every teacher at the school asked for her assistance. For example, of the English department she said (with sarcasm), “*they don’t need me.*”

In terms of the future, in the final interview Pat was very hopeful about the next school year, in part because the principal had decided to reduce her class load to just one class, in order to provide more time for her work with teachers. She also had met with each department before school ended and given them

six (reading) strategies “so they would have them and think about them before the [next] school year.” Her intention was that each department would then select two strategies (of the six) to focus on first during the school year. She noted in closing that one goal was “*I don’t want them to roll their eyes when they hear my name...I want it to be positive.*”

Pat intends to continue in her current position, at least for the time being. When asked if there was something the university could do to assist literacy coaches, she gave the following suggestion: “*I think it would be great if there was a way we could talk with other literacy coaches, especially since we [are] new [at] having literacy coaches in the high school.*” She noted that in her district, there was one literacy coach at each of the five high schools and each was doing “*a completely different job.*” Therefore, Pat felt it would be beneficial to find a way to meet with high school literacy coaches in different districts to share ideas and concerns.

Case Two: Cora

First Interview. When asked to describe some of her duties as a literacy professional, Cora states, “*Many times, I have had to actually create my own job. Principals don’t always know what to do with me...[but, ultimately] administrators decide what the literacy person will be doing. Though, if you have an administrator that allows a certain level of creativity, you can have more flexibility in your role.*” Now in her 6th year at her present school, Cora teaches three reading and writing classes daily to 9th and 10th graders who have not yet achieved required scores on state mandated tests. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Cora is responsible for leading professional development initiatives for the school’s 58 teachers through co-teaching, planning, and mentoring.

When we first spoke with Cora in the spring, 2009, her literacy coaching work focused on implementing a program called *Red Hawks Write*, designed to improve writing across the curriculum by guiding content area teachers away from a traditional lecture model of instruction and toward “activity-based teaching.” Low student performance on the writing portion of state-mandated test prompted the initiative. Content area teachers were given writing prompts for their students to address, students wrote responses, and those responses were scored in a manner similar to that used to score the state writing test.

While the program was intended to improve specific writing skills and techniques, content area teachers often found it difficult to “fit” the program into their required curriculum. “*When I suggest reading and writing strategies to content area teachers,*” Cora explained, “*The response I often get is ‘I can’t take the time to do that. I have to stick to the pacing guide.’*” Cora observed that, while teachers had extensive knowledge about the content area they were teaching, they did not always have knowledge of how to effectively incorporate reading and writing into their content area. “*They think it’s the job of the English or literature department to focus on those things.*”

Second Interview. In response to teachers' feedback about the original *Red Hawks Write* program, adjustments were made to it in the fall of the new school year. When we interviewed her for the second time, Cora said that currently, content area teachers worked in teams led by an English teacher. Content area teachers were given "activity packets," an assortment of content area reading strategies, compiled by the literacy specialist and the English teachers, that linked to their curriculum and allowed teachers some degree of choice and adaptation. Once teachers had implemented a strategy from the packet, they completed a survey for the literacy specialist about the instructional process and the perceived usefulness of the strategy they chose to implement. Their feedback was used to inform the content of future activity packets. Cora observed that the current program is getting a better response than the one implemented the year before. She credited this to more teacher choice within the program, defined program goals, and instructional strategies that were more often seen as enhancing the content area curriculum rather than adding peripheral work to it. It is, as she explained, viewed as "*less of an infringement.*"

While the challenges of her job are many, Cora cited her biggest challenge as meeting the needs of English learners who are typically part of the low SES population in the school. "*They try their hardest,*" she explained, "*They have a lot of will to graduate, but, unfortunately, circumstances won't enable [many of] them to graduate. Our graduating class is so much smaller than our 9th grade class and that is a dilemma because you know that so many of these kids could be successful.*"

She also questioned the access that her students had to quality texts and wondered, "*whether the technologies being used were a help or a hindrance.*" She believes that, while technology can be beneficial, it concerns her that, while ELL students rely heavily on written communication through text messaging and e-mailing, they have fewer opportunities to see models of quality reading and writing. "*Their exposure to standard English seems to get getting more and more limited.*" Additionally, she pointed out that, while there is a school-wide focus on providing students with access to "high interest" texts, those were not necessarily always quality texts.

While the challenges inherent in the daily work of this literacy specialist abound, the rewards of Cora's work were evident as well. She noted, "*I enjoyed being with and seeing my students as they moved from 9th, 10th, to 11th grade. I see some students three or four times as my own students and see them mature as they get closer to adulthood and see them absorb all these things other teachers have been teaching them.*" Cora valued being part of an urban school that is, in many ways, also a community-based school. "*You see kids in the community; you see them in the drugstore, the grocery store. They kind of look at you like, 'Oh my gosh, that's my teacher in the grocery store?!' like we never go to the grocery store. However, they'll introduce their families and they are so respectful. It is a community atmosphere.*"

Discussion and Implications

Current research on literacy coaching supports the idea that, through job-embedded professional development literacy coaches can help to improve the quality of teacher instruction and student literacy achievement (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Lockwood, McCombs, & Marsh, 2010). As curriculum standards and assessment mandates have changed in recent years, those responsible for overseeing literacy programs are asked to support professional development that effectively responds to changing expectations and needs. Although professional organizations have established standards for the roles of high school literacy coaches (IRA, 2006), little is known about if and how these recommendations are put into practice by literacy professionals in schools. While the roles of literacy coaches have been documented and studied at the elementary level, little is known about the role of high school literacy professionals, despite the hiring of individuals for this position with the hope that they will provide significant benefits to schools and students (Walpole & McKenna, 2004; IRA, 2006). Researchers have found that the perspectives of literacy coaches and expectations for the role of the literacy coach vary widely (Smith, 2007; Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008).

This study sought to address the need to better understand the role of literacy coaches in high schools. While the contexts and roles of the participants in this study varied, there were similarities in their roles and experiences. Both participants fulfilled teaching and coaching roles in their schools. Both stated that students' performance on high-stakes assessments influenced the direction of the professional development they provided to teachers. Both experienced challenges in terms of convincing other teachers of the value of their role and of the professional development initiatives they sought to implement.

Between the two participants, differences were noted as well. In one program, a negotiation between the principal and the superintendent of schools affected the participant's daily role as a literacy professional. In the second case, the literacy professional negotiated her own role with only peripheral input from school administrators. Participants identified similar rewards of their work such as helping students, helping teachers, and facilitating change. They also identified significant challenges in interpersonal communication with teachers and administrators, data interpretation, and balancing a teaching and coaching role. Limitations of this study included the small number of participants and, subsequently, the limited variety of school settings in which they worked.

In terms of implications for future research, more research is needed to compare the experiences of high school literacy coaches across different school districts in different states. The implications of policy decisions, while often beyond the control of literacy professionals, need also to be examined in terms of the impact they may have on the hiring of high school literacy coaches and on the expectations for their roles. The professional development needs of content area

teachers, from the perspective of content area teachers, needs to be examined and defined so that literacy coaches, with the support of administrators, can effectively respond to these needs. There also is a need for research that examines how the contexts in which high school literacy coaches work affects the perceptions of and expectations for their roles.

This research has implications for practitioners as well. The high school literacy coaches who participated in this study performed a variety of tasks including mentoring teachers, observing classrooms, working with teacher teams, leading schoolwide literacy initiatives, advising administrators on the school literacy program, acquiring instructional resources and monitoring the use of those resources. They also faced dilemmas that could have been potentially be resolved if more information related to effective ways to structure their role was gathered from, and subsequently communicated to, all school personnel.

There is a need for increased clarification about what is expected of literacy coaches at the district and building level, with coaches, teachers, and administrators participating in that process. In addition, graduate, advanced licensure, and professional development programs that prepare high school literacy professionals could benefit from information related to expectations at the school and district levels. Currently, the standards developed by the International Reading Association (2005) advocate that literacy coaches have strong preparation in reading theory and practice and that their course work also include preparation in working with adult learners as a professional development provider (Mraz, Kissel, & Algozzine, in press). By better understanding how the ideals represented in these standards are translated into the daily work of coaches in schools, professional development programs for literacy coaches could be modified to better suit current needs and to address the challenges experienced in the reality of the coaches' work.

An important area of inquiry, which is just emerging, relates to connections between the work of literacy coaches in secondary schools and student achievement. While schools obviously employ literacy coaches with goals related to improved instruction and learning, establishing a research-based link between coaches' work with teachers and student achievement is difficult especially when literacy coaches are spread very thinly (e.g., often with only one literacy coach at a large secondary school). However, a few researchers have begun to make this link. Lockwood, McCombs, and March (2010), for example, found statistically significant improvements in average annual reading achievement gains for middle schools that included a literacy coach as part of their instruction team.

Another related avenue of research looks at the broader question of how the literacy-related professional development needs of teachers are addressed in schools without literacy coaches especially in light of recent budget cuts and the "great recession." In our preparation for this study, as we sought participants who were employed as full-time literacy coaches in high schools, we often found that the responsibility for addressing professional development on any topic remotely

related to literacy was informally delegated to the school's lead English teacher or reading specialist. In some schools these teachers were expected to take on a professional development role even while teaching a full load of high school classes. In other schools the professional development needs of teachers were addressed only by district-level personnel who occasionally visited schools or by sporadic staff development days without effective followup.

Finally, high school literacy coaches need opportunities to enhance their own professional development and to establish learning communities with other literacy coaches. Professional learning communities can provide a forum for members to reflect on teaching and learning, to share knowledge, to celebrate achievements, and to collaborate on solutions to challenges (DuFour, 2003; Marzano, 2003). There is a need for professional development initiatives that address the learning needs of literacy coaches and provide collaborative opportunities for coaches as they seek to navigate this largely uncharted, and often complex role.

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS, BELIEFS, AND ATTITUDES ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: THE IMPACT OF A REVISED GRADUATE COURSE IN CONTENT LITERACY

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Abstract

A graduate course in Content Literacy was revised to improve teachers' understanding of and work with English Language Learners (ELLs). Curriculum revisions included: An autobiography focused on prior content learning, confrontation of ELL myths and misconceptions, English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS), ELL case studies, funds of knowledge, comprehensible input, hands-on use of comprehension strategies, classroom application, collaborative discussion, a metacognitive framework for reflection, and social construction of knowledge. To assess changes in teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about ELLs, an action research study was conducted that employed mixed methods. Results indicated that personal and professional change occurred for most teachers. Factors that impacted change included: Assigned readings; class discussions; case studies; peer learning; collaboration; and reflective assignments.

According to the 2006 report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 11 percent of all students in U.S. public schools receive English Language Learner (ELL) services (NCES, 2006). As one of the fastest growing student populations in the country, ELLs require quality programs to serve their unique needs. Research indicates that academic programming for ELLs is needed at both the state and national level (Cortez & Villarreal, 2009).

The National Reading Panel Report (NRP, 2000) noted that vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency were foundational skills when reading to learn. These three skills have also been found critical to ELL's success by the National Literacy Panel for Language Minority Children and Youth (August, Shanahan, Escamilla, 2006). However, teaching these skills to ELLs is challenging, and many teachers do not perceive themselves to be well prepared.

The problem, explained by Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond (2000), is that students' acquisition of concepts in content areas (math, science, history, etc.) must be incorporated within the context of social language and cultural language. Gonzalez and Darling Hammond maintain that teacher education programs often spotlight a "parts to whole" approach to language. When language is broken down to its base components with meaning no longer intact, it becomes irrelevant to students, schools, and communities. This limited focus neglects the social nature of language through which metacognition can be developed. Thus, for teachers to be effective in the diverse classroom of today they must understand how their perceptions of multicultural students whose funds of knowledge differ, affect the education of ELLs (Easter, Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1999).

Change in teachers is the prerequisite to educational change because teachers tend to use instructional methods that mimic the way they were taught, regardless of the research base on effective instruction (Britzman, 1991; Lortie, 1975; Wells, 1994; Willis & Harris, 1997). Further, it is necessary for teachers to apply new learning and experience reflection (Elish-Piper, 2001; Kaplan, 2001) that results in a re-examination of knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about teaching and learning (Azjen, 1988; Festinger, 1957; Risko, Roller, Cummins, Bean, Block, Anders, & Flood, 2008; Whitbeck, 2000; Wolf, Hill, & Ballentine, 1999). Thus, methods courses should first help teachers examine their knowledge base concerning ELLs and their own experiences with learning concepts in content areas. Then new concepts and research based strategies should be modeled and discussed so that teachers can experience the thinking and learning processes involved. Next teachers should apply their new knowledge and reflect on their classroom implementation using a metacognitive framework to facilitate change in their perceptions of, beliefs about, and attitudes toward ELLs.

To address these issues in teacher education courses, the U.S. Department of Education Office of English Language Acquisition offered grants for teacher development. The university discussed in this research received a five-year \$1.2 million grant: *¡Listo! Sharp and Ready: Strategies for ELL Student Success* (Green, Foote, Walker, Shuman, 2010). Through this grant, the university embarked upon the challenge of developing teachers, both pre-service and in-service, in their ability to provide quality instruction for ELL students. The grant provided:

- Bi-monthly university faculty development sessions: Guest speakers such as Stephen Krashen, Phillip Schlecty, Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas presented a variety of topics that impact ELLs

- SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol): Training on the SIOP model was provided by MaryEllen Vogt
- Book studies: Small groups of faculty members read current books on ELLs and discussed the implications for teacher educators
- Curriculum revision and realignment: Groups of faculty members met to align curriculum within programs with English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) and discussed how to best adjust course content to better prepare teachers to work with ELLs
- Value added research: Small groups of faculty members assessed whether curriculum changes in specific courses were having an impact on students.

Faculty participation in these grant funded activities resulted in changes in curriculum in most courses taught in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (Green, Foote, Walker, Shuman, 2010). The current study investigated the impact of these curriculum revisions on graduate students enrolled in a Content Literacy Course. The specific purpose of this study was to examine how teachers' understanding of and work with ELLs developed and changed during a revised graduate content literacy course that employed a metacognitive framework where teachers worked collaboratively to socially construct knowledge about ELPS and research based strategies while confronting myths and misconceptions related to ELLs (See Appendix for Syllabus Excerpt).

The specific research questions that guided this study were:

1. How did teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about English Language Learners change after experiencing metacognitive teaching and learning strategies in graduate content literacy classes anchored in social constructivism?
2. What factors contributed to the change?

Theoretical Framework

The combination of a teacher's background knowledge and belief system along with the construction of a pedagogy shaped by previous educational interactions affect the perceptions and attitudes of teachers, both consciously and unconsciously, toward English language learners in content areas and mainstream classrooms. To study the development and change in teacher perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes, the graduate course was restructured using metacognitive (Baker & Brown, 1984; Flavell, 1971) and social constructivist (Vygotsky, 1978) theories as a foundation. Specifically, cooperative grouping was utilized during discussions, lesson development, and all presentations. Additionally, a metacognitive framework (Baker, 2002; Flavell, 1979; Israel, Block, Bauserman, & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2005) was presented and used for reflection after presentation of all strategies and assignments (see Appendix) to meet course goals.

Methods

This action research study utilized mixed methods within a one-group pre-test/posttest pre experimental design. Pre/post survey data were collected at the beginning and end of the spring 2010 semester.

Participants and Context

The participants in this study were graduate students at a university in North-east Texas. Thirty-six female students participated in this study. Of 36 participants 27 were classroom teachers, three were administrators, four classified themselves as specialists, one was a substitute teacher, and one was not professionally employed. Participants' years of experience ranged from 0-30 with a mean of 8.55. Employed participants worked mainly in urban and suburban school districts. Of the 36 participants, 35 cited English as their first language and 8 stated that they could speak a second language. Of eight bilingual participants, three felt they were advanced second language speakers, two felt they were intermediate, and three classified themselves as beginners. Of the 36 participants, 30 stated that they were currently working with English language learners. One of the authors served as instructor of record; the remaining researchers helped with collecting, masking, transcribing, and analyzing the data.

Survey Instrument and Data Collection

The researchers chose to use *ESL Students in Mainstream Classrooms: A Survey of Teachers* developed by Reeves (2002, 2006). This instrument provided both quantitative and qualitative data through a Likert-like survey and open-ended questions. The quantitative portion of the survey asked participants to respond to two Likert scales (see Tables 1-10). The first was a four-point scale with 1 as "Strongly Disagree" and 4 as "Strongly Agree." The second was a three-point scale with 1 as "Seldom or Never" and 3 as "Most of the Time." The survey consisted of five constructs (a) teacher attitude toward inclusion, (b) teacher attitude toward acquisition of English, (c) teacher perception of native language, (d) teacher perception of own self-efficacy toward working with ELL students, and (e) teacher perception of modification for ELLs.

The open ended questions on the survey focused on benefits and challenges of ELL inclusion as well as demographics. Answers to open ended questions on the qualitative portion of the survey were collected during the first and last class meetings. Collection of artifacts (see Appendix) in the form of projects, reflections, case study analyses, etc. was ongoing during the semester. Final reflections focusing on self-perceived change and factors in that change were collected at the end of the semester.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed by construct using descriptive statistics and paired samples *t*-tests. Qualitative data were analyzed using recursive processes similar to constant comparison (Glaser, 1994). First, a small group of doctoral students in a research design course individually read and coded all of the final

reflections. Then the small group met with the primary researcher, compared individual codings, and discussed how the final reflections were to be coded until consensus was reached. Using the codes developed by these doctoral students, the primary researcher then reread and coded all the data checking for discrepancies between the various data sources.

Results

Results for the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study are reported below. First, descriptive statistics are reported for the five constructs included in the survey. Second, results of the paired samples test are reported. Third, categories of change and factors in change are reported with supporting data.

Construct 1: Teacher Attitude toward Inclusion

When looking at the results from the *ESL Students in Mainstream Classrooms: A Survey of Teachers* (Reeves, 2006), several interesting discoveries were made. When participants were asked how they felt about inclusion (see Table 1), there was a 41% increase in those who strongly agreed that inclusion of English Language Learners (ELLs) as a Second Language (ELL) students in subject area classes created a positive educational atmosphere. Participants reported a 36% increase in the number of strongly agree responses when asked if inclusion of ELL students in subject area classes benefits all students. When asked if subject area teachers do not have enough time to deal with the needs of ELL students, participants strongly agree response increased by 8%. The pre and post course percentages stayed the same when participants were asked if they would welcome inclusion of ELL students into their classrooms. As seen in Table 2, the responses to questions asked about the inclusion of ELL students increasing teacher workload and slowing the progress of the entire class did not change much from the pre-course survey to the post course survey.

Table 1: Construct 1-Teacher Attitude toward Inclusion

Part A	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. ESL students should not be included in general education classes until they attain a minimum level of English proficiency.	31%	47%	19%	3%
	44%	42%	11%	3%
5. ESL students should be able to acquire English within two years of enrolling in U.S. schools.	31%	28%	39%	0%
	31%	44%	22%	0%
16. I would support legislation making English the official language of the United States.	3%	25%	47%	19%
	8%	33%	28%	28%

Note. In each box the top percentage = Pre and the bottom percentage = Post. Missing: Item 6 Pre n=1, Post n=2

Table 2: Construct 1-Teacher Attitude toward Inclusion

Part B	Seldom or never	Some of the time	Most of the Time
6. The inclusion of ESL student in my class increases my workload.	19% 28%	56% 42%	3% 11%
8. The inclusion of ESL students in my class slows the progress of the entire class.	50% 58%	22% 19%	3% 3%

Note. In each box the top percentage = Pre and the bottom percentage = Post. Missing: Item 6 Pre n=8, Post =7; Item 8 Pre n=9, Post n=7

Construct 2: Teacher Attitude toward Acquisition of English

The second construct reviewed in the survey looked at teacher attitudes toward acquisition of English (see Tables 3 and 4). When participants were asked if ESL students should not be included in general education classes until they attained a minimum level of English proficiency, views did not differ much from the pre and post surveys. However when asked if ESL students should be able to acquire English within two years of enrolling in U.S. schools, there was a 16% increase in the number of participants who disagreed and a 17% decrease in the number of participants who agreed. When asked if participants would support legislation making English the official language of the United States many changes were made. There was an 8% increase in those who disagreed and a 19% decrease in those who agreed. Participants' pre and post course survey answers did not change much when asked if effort is more important than achievement when grading ESL students.

Table 3: Construct 2- Teacher Attitude toward Acquisition of English

Part A	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. ESL students should not be included in general education classes until they attain a minimum level of English proficiency.	31% 44%	47% 42%	19% 11%	3% 3%
5. ESL students should be able to acquire English within two years of enrolling in U.S. schools.	31% 31%	28% 44%	39% 22%	0% 0%
16. I would support legislation making English the official language of the United States.	3% 8%	25% 33%	47% 28%	19% 28%

Note. In each box the top percentage = Pre and the bottom percentage = Post. Missing: Item 5 Pre n=1, Post =1; Item 16 Pre n=2, Post n=1

Table 4: Construct 2- Teacher Attitude toward Acquisition of English

Part B	Seldom or never	Some of the time	Most of the time
5. Effort is more important to me than achievement when I grade ESL students.	14% 8%	50% 53%	14% 19%

Note. In each box the top percentage = Pre and the bottom percentage = Post. Missing: Item 5 Pre n=8, Post =7

Construct 3: Teacher Perception of Native Language

The third construct dealt with teacher perception of native language. The first question asked if ESL students should avoid using their native language at school and results show little change (see Table 5). When asked if ESL students were allowed to use their native language in the participants' classes there was a 3% decrease in the answer seldom or never, a 3% decrease in the answer some of the time and an 8% increase in the answer most of the time (see Table 6). When asked if participants provide materials for ESL students in their native language there was a 7.7% increase in the answer some of the time.

Table 5: Construct 3-Teacher Perception of Native Language

Part A	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
4. ESL students should avoid using their native language while at school.	58% 64%	36% 33%	6% 3%	0% 0%

Note. In each box the top percentage = Pre and the bottom percentage = Post.

Table 6: Construct 3-Teacher Perception of Native Language

Part B	Seldom or never	Some of the time	Most of the time
3. I allow an ESL student to use her/his native language in my class.	11% 8%	42% 39%	25% 33%
4. I provide materials for ESL students in their native language.	48.7% 43.6%	17.9% 25.6%	10.3% 7.7%

Note. In each box the top percentage = Pre and the bottom percentage = Post. Missing: Item 3 Pre n=8, Post =7; Item 4 Pre=8, Post=7

Construct 4: Teacher Perception of Own Self-Efficacy toward working with ELL Students

Construct four of the survey was on teacher perception of own self-efficacy toward working with ELL students. The first question asked of participants was if they had adequate training to work with ESL students. There was a 28% decrease in the answers strongly disagree and disagree, a 22% increase in the answer agree, and a 6% increase in the answer strongly agree as shown in Table

7. The next question asked if participants were interested in receiving more training in working with ESL students, and there was a 14% increase in those who strongly agree. Table 8 shows several changes in participants’ perceptions. When asked if they received adequate support from school administrators when ELL students were enrolled in their classes, participants reported a 6% decrease in the answer seldom or never, a 20% increase in the answer some of the time, and a 12% decrease in the answer most of the time. When asked if they received adequate support from ESL staff when ELL students were enrolled in their classes, participants reported a 3% decrease in seldom or never, a 14% increase in some of the time, and an 8% decrease in most of the time.

Table 7: Teacher Perception of Own Self-Efficacy toward working with ELL Students

Part A	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
13. I have adequate training to work with ESL students.	6% 0%	39% 17%	36% 58%	19% 25%
14. I am interested in receiving more training in working with ESL students.	0% 0%	3% 3%	58% 44%	39% 53%

Note. In each box the top percentage = Pre and the bottom percentage = Post.

Table 8: Teacher Perception of Own Self-Efficacy toward working with ELL Students

Part B	Seldom or never	Some of the time	Most of the time
9. I received adequate support from school administration when ESL students are enrolled in my classes.	25% 19%	22% 42%	31% 19%

Note. In each box the top percentage = Pre and the bottom percentage = Post. Missing: Item 9 Pre n=8, Post =7; Item 10 Pre=8, Post=7

Construct 5: Teacher Perception of Modification for ELLs

The fifth and final construct of the survey was teacher perception of modification for ESL students. The results of this section are shown in Tables 9 and 10. When participants were asked if it is a good practice to lessen the quality of coursework for ESL students, if it is good practice to allow ESL students more time to complete coursework, and if teachers should not give ESL students a failing grade if the students displayed effort, few changes were shown. However when participants were asked if teachers should not modify assignments for ESL students enrolled in subject area classes there was a 28% increase in the answer strongly disagree, a 34% decrease in the answer disagree, and a 3% increase in the answer agree. When asked if modification of coursework for ESL students would

be difficult to justify to other students there was a 22% increase in the answer strongly disagree, an 11% decrease in the answer disagree, an 8 % decrease in the answer agree, and a 3% decrease in the answer strongly agree. When asked if they allowed ESL students more time to complete their coursework, participants reported a 3% decrease in seldom or never, a 6% decrease in some of the time, and an 11% increase in most of the time. When asked about giving ESL students less coursework than other students, results were fairly static. When asked if they provide materials to ESL students in their native language, participants reported a 6% decrease in seldom or never and an 8% increase in some of the time.

Table 9: Teacher Perception of Modification for ELLs

Part A	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
8. It is a good practice to lessen the quantity of coursework for ESL students.	11% 3%	42% 42%	44% 47%	3% 8%
9. It is a good practice to allow ESL students more time to complete coursework.	0% 0%	0% 0%	72% 75%	28% 25%
10. Teachers should not give ESL students a failing grade if the students display effort.	0% 6%	53% 50%	42% 39%	3% 0%
11. Teachers should not modify assignments for the ESL students enrolled in subject area classes.	19% 47%	78% 44%	3% 6%	0% 0%
12. The modification of coursework for ESL students would be difficult to justify to other students.	22% 44%	64% 53%	11% 3%	3% 0%

Note. In each box the top percentage = Pre and the bottom percentage = Post. Missing: Item 11 Post =1

Table 10: Teacher Perception of Modification for ELLs

Part B	Seldom or never	Some of the time	Most of the time
1. I allow ESL students more time to complete their coursework.	6% 3%	31% 25%	42% 53%
2. I give ESL students less coursework than other students.	33% 31%	42% 44%	3% 6%
4. I provide materials for ESL students in their native language.	53% 47%	17% 25%	8% 8%

Note. In each box the top percentage = Pre and the bottom percentage = Post. Missing: Item 1 Pre=8, Post=7; Item 2 Pre=8, Post=7; Item 4 Pre=8, Post=7

Paired Samples Test

When a paired sample test was run on the survey data no significant differences were found between pre and post means on individual constructs or the survey as a whole. Although not statistically significant, the paired difference between pre and post mean scores for Construct 1: Teacher Attitude toward Inclusion approached significance $M=-.12685$, $t=-1.963$, $p=.058$, 95% CI [-.25801, .00431].

Categories of Change and Factors in Change

The primary data source for determining categories of change and contributing course factors was teacher reflections. Participants were asked to reflect on their perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about ELLs as recorded on the pre and post surveys, then explain if and how they changed. They were also asked to identify course factors that contributed to their changes. Surveys were examined to verify categories of change and secondary data sources were reviewed to verify the factors.

Change

Three categories (no change, not much change, change) and two subcategories of change (personal and professional) emerged. First, a number of the participants who had previous ESL training and experience working with ELLs indicated that they did not change and their beliefs stayed the same. One participant said, *“My responses stayed the same. I strongly believe that ELL students should keep their native language and be given additional time to acquire the language with support.”* However, two participants who had taught for years but had little experience working with ELLs, continued to believe that English should be made the official language of the United States. One participant said, *“Passing this [law] would justify the need for children and other non-English speaking individuals to learn English, making American education much more successful.”* Although all participants in this category indicated that their answers didn’t change from the pre to the post survey, many indicated shifts in their thinking which are described below.

A second group of participants who also had previous ESL training and experience working with ELLs indicated that they changed, but not much. This group had an appreciation of diversity and understood the importance of inclusion. For example, one participant said, *“My analysis...did not change much. I believe it is very important to have ESL students in mainstream classrooms.”* Another stated, *“My analysis from the beginning to the end did not change much...the greatest benefit of including an ELL learner would be to not isolate the child.”* Although these participants indicated that their answers didn’t change much from the pre to the post survey, their reflections indicated various types of change which will be discussed below.

A third group of participants indicated a change in their perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes regarding ELLs. Some indicated a greater appreciation for the potential of ELL contributions to general education classes while others focused

on how many of their responses changed from the pre to the post survey. One participant said, *“My appreciation for an ELL’s contribution to a general education classroom has grown.”* Overall, changes from the above three groups fell into two subcategories, personal and professional.

Personal changes focused on how new learning in the course affected their beliefs, opinions, and self efficacy. One change consistently noted was strengthening previously held convictions about language acquisition and the value ELLs bring to the classroom. A participant stated, *“I became stronger in my convictions”* and another said, *“This class helped to strengthen the beliefs I had.”* Other attitude changes toward ELLs included more sensitivity and a new appreciation of diversity. For example, one participant declared:

“One of the most important things that I learned was how important it is to embrace the cultures of the children in your class. Not only is it important for children of various cultures to know that their culture is seen and valued, but other children need to learn how to respect the differences that others can bring.”

Similar changes occurred in self efficacy indicating greater confidence as a teacher of ELLs. One participant revealed, *“My attitude changed because of what I learned about teaching comprehension strategies, using technology to develop concepts, and ideas for improving the quality of my collaborative groups.”* Another said, *“I feel I am better prepared to help all students as well as the ELL students reach their potential.”*

Professional changes incorporated revisions to the participants’ personal beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and focused on their teaching that would impact the culture of their classroom learning environment. The valuing of diversity helped some participants to see how ELLs could contribute to classrooms. One participant explained, *“I now better understand and appreciate the need for helping ELL students, and incorporating their culture into the classroom.”* Another reflection indicated more awareness of the process of language acquisition, *“I did not know how important it was for ELLs to learn to read and write in their L1 before they begin to learn to read and write in L2.”* Others recognized the value of multiculturalism with the following comments, *“I am more open to the mainstreaming of diverse learners and heterogeneous grouping”* and *“I strongly advocate ELL student inclusion into the subject area classes as positive for both the ELL students and their classmates.”*

Modifications to teaching focused on more sophisticated changes teachers would make related to time and workload. One participant stated, *“The importance of ‘wait time’ or ‘think time’ is valuable for teachers of ELL students.”* Another noted:

“I have had ELLs in my classrooms...the only accommodation I made for them was more time and I did not grade as strongly on spelling. While I

have learned that what I did was good, it was not enough...I now see the value that they have to offer to the classroom and to other students.”

Other participants noted the workload issues. One explained, “*Having ELL students has increased my work load but in a positive way. I am doing a better job at differentiating my instruction as a result.*” Another said, “*A student centered classroom with less direct teaching will enable me to differentiate instruction to meet everyone’s academic needs.*” Finally, many focused on learning strategies and implementing them to facilitate language development and improve comprehension. One participant stated, “*I should not simplify their work because that is only enabling them. I should scaffold them more and give them the strategies to reach the goal I set for them.*”

Factors Contributing to Change

Six factors in the course (course structure, assigned readings, case studies, discussion, peer learning/collaboration, and reflective assignments/reflections) appeared to contribute to personal and professional changes. First, the structure of the course which included use of vocabulary/comprehension strategies for participants to learn course content and instructor modeling of strategies using a variety of disciplinary texts appeared to be critical. For example, one participant noted, “*This course facilitated my growth/change by concentrating on reading strategies that were new to me, and going through the actual experience of ‘hands-on’ demonstrations of these strategies.*”

Participants also found value in the assigned readings. These readings not only provided theory and research, they provided structures for lessons, a variety of strategies, and insight into working with ELLs. One participant commented, “*The Vacca chapter on Diverse Learners opened my eyes to the education of ELLs and forced me to reevaluate the way I have always taught ELL students.*” In addition to general reevaluation of teaching ELLs, some participants included in-depth reflections on the impact of particular case studies. Case in point:

“The case study in the Sturtevant text offered me so much insight into teaching ESL students and how it is so important to immerse students in language activities that they find interesting and relevant and as a result will build their communication skills and background knowledge. The teacher, Mark, used writing assignments that lead into reading assignments and he linked writing, reading and personal history through developing class books. The students took ownership of their own stories and the teacher created an environment where the students focused on the content of their writing at first and later on mechanics.”

Although valuable, these textbook and case study readings in and of themselves would not have provided the same degree of professional growth and understanding without several of the other factors. The structure of the course

engaged participants in strategies before, during, and after reading these texts to facilitate comprehension, discussion, and reflection.

Discussion was perceived as valuable by participants and occurred several ways. Discussion beforehand helped students activate prior knowledge while building background. Engaging in after reading strategies that involved discussion helped to improve understanding, solidify opinions, and prepare them to teach ELLs. Two reflections included, *“The many discussions in small groups/whole-class enhanced what I learned by allowing me to express my thoughts whether they were right or wrong (or in grey area)”* and *“After...discussing with the class, I feel better equipped to work with these students.”*

Collaboration with peers provided opportunities for learning and helped build teacher efficacy for working with ELLs. Case in point, one participant revealed, *“I learned new schema from practicing teachers who were my classmates, and listened to their experiences as teachers.”* Another noted, *“One of the most helpful things was talking to my peers about ESL students. They gave me first hand insights and made me feel more comfortable with attempting to assist these students.”* This collaborative peer learning is based on the concept of social construction, but would not have been as valuable without reflection.

Reflection was the final factor noted by participants as impacting their change and long term professional growth. A metacognitive framework focused on three types of knowledge (self, content, process), self monitoring, and self regulation was introduced during the first class. An initial assignment asked students to reflect on their own learning and teaching and the contexts in which they occurred. The value of reflective assignments was verified when one participant observed:

“I believe my views on ELL students grew and developed during this course due to...writing the cultural autobiography assignment...everyone has their own ‘funds of knowledge’ they bring to the classroom and as teachers we must understand the cultural differences of our students. I developed a greater understanding of this concept when I participated in the cultural autobiography assignment given to our class. After reading what other students in our class shared ‘the light bulb came on’ for me. We all have different backgrounds and cultural differences even if we all speak English. I know now that I must teach for cultural understanding as well as linguistic differences.”

In addition to individual reflective assignments that were shared in small groups, at the end of each class participants were asked to reflect on what they learned, how it could be applied in their teaching, and how their learning related to the metacognitive framework. Initial instructor support in the form of think alouds was needed for metacognitive connections. Confirmation that this form of reflection contributed to change is evidenced by the following comment,

“Doing the...[metacognitive] reflections helped me take a realistic review of what I know and now what I have learned.”

Discussion and Conclusions

Similar to previous findings (Elish-Piper, 2001; Kaplan, 2001; Risko, et al., 2008; Whitbeck, 2000; Wolf, Hill, & Ballentine, 1999), the current study indicates that most teachers who adopt metacognition as part of their schema, and experience reflection in a social constructivist environment, see attitude and perception changes by re-examining their knowledge and beliefs. Although results from the quantitative portion of this study were not statistically significant, some improvements in teacher attitude toward and perceptions of ELLs were noted. However, results from the qualitative portion of this study suggest that many changes took place for almost all participants regardless of their experience with or knowledge of ELL's and cultural diversity. Personal changes included stronger convictions, improved attitudes and new appreciation of diversity, increased sensitivity for ELL students, and more self confidence as a teacher. These personal changes indicate better understanding and revision of personal perceptions that will positively impact the education of ELL's (Easter, Shultz, Neyhart, and Peck, 1999). Professional changes included a better understanding of ELL's and how to work with them in a classroom learning environment. Specifically, appreciation and valuing of ELLs' first language and culture appears to have lead to a focus on inclusion and heterogeneous grouping. A greater understanding of how to differentiate and support ELL's by modifying time, workload, and employing a variety of reading strategies that support language development were other critical changes. These professional changes support the National Literacy Panel for Language Minority Children and Youth's three foundational reading skills that are crucial to ELL success (August, Shanahan, Escamilla, 2006). Specific course components contributing to change identified by participants included: assigned readings, hands-on demonstration of strategies, whole group and small group discussion, case studies of teachers dealing with ELL's, risk free reflections, reflective assignments such as cultural autobiographies, and collaboration with peers that provided for the social construction of knowledge.

Thus, the lack of statistically significant findings when using the survey does not appear to be supported by the qualitative data. The quantitative portion of the instrument (Reeves, 2002, 2006), although deemed valid and reliable, seemed to accurately assess participants who had little initial knowledge of ELL's or training on how to work with them. However, most experienced and knowledgeable participants who said they didn't change or that they didn't change much according to survey results identified in their reflections how their knowledge about ELLs and their ability to work with them improved. The same experienced and knowledgeable participants were also able to identify factors in the course that impacted their professional growth.

Consequently, several conclusions can be drawn. First, a metacognitive framework should be introduced and consistently utilized when asking teachers to engage in reflection. Second, teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of ELLs can be improved in teacher education courses by employing research based *Before*, *During*, and *After* comprehension strategies on carefully selected readings utilizing small group peer discussions and risk free whole group reflections. Third, valuing of ELL students' knowledge base and first language can be accomplished with readings that dispel myths and misconceptions about ELLs, collaboration with peers, and reflective assignments. Fourth, improving teacher self efficacy for working with ELLs can be achieved through modeling of vocabulary, concept development, and comprehension strategies with teachers assuming the roles of students, then reflecting on processes to increase understanding and independent learning using a metacognitive framework. Fifth, improving teacher perceptions of modification for ELLs can be accomplished by using case studies that characterize exemplary practice and model teacher thinking about how to modify and differentiate instruction; then having students collaboratively reflect on application in their own classrooms. Sixth, the identified course factors that impacted change should be employed simultaneously rather than in isolation to facilitate teacher change. Finally, it appears that a more sophisticated quantitative measure should be developed that is sensitive to sophisticated professional growth in understanding and working with ELLs.

Overall, using social construction and a metacognitive framework for reflection within a content area literacy graduate class had a positive impact on teachers' perceptions of, attitudes toward, and beliefs about English language learners. Thus, the philosophical basis of social constructivism partnered with metacognitive reflections to revise curriculum while providing more insight into dealing with ELLs appears to be an effective path to facilitate teacher change and professional growth.

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Appendix

Required Readings—Excerpts from Course Syllabus

- Vacca, R. & Vacca, J. (2008). *Content Area Reading: Literacy and Learning Across the Curriculum (9th Ed.)*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Sturtevant, E. G. & Linek, W. M. (2004). *Content Literacy: An Inquiry-Based Case Approach*. Columbus, OH: Pearson, Merrill, Prentice-Hall.
- TDSI Online Case Study—Engaging English Language Learners: **A First-Grade Teacher Searches for a Way to Group Her Students for Reading Instruction** http://www.tolerance.org/tdsi/grouping_premise
- TDSI Online Case Study—Engaging English Language Learners: A ninth-grade science teacher struggles to engage his English Language Learners http://www.tolerance.org/tdsi/ell_engage_premise
- TDSI Online Case Study—Engaging English Language Learners: A 10th-Grade Teacher Tackles a Classic http://www.tolerance.org/tdsi/culturally_relevant_premise
- Multiple handouts and individualized reading assignments.

Course Goals:

1. Reflect upon, understand, and appreciate the need for literacy instruction in content areas.
2. Reflect upon, understand, and appreciate the need for helping English Language Learners (ELLs).
3. Apply knowledge of the relationships among content, process, and affect in the development of literacy instruction in content areas.
4. Identify, interpret, and understand how to utilize standardized tests, informal assessments, text analysis instruments, and evaluation processes when selecting texts, planning, and teaching content area subjects.
5. Design, present, critique, revise, and reflect upon content reading lessons that incorporate before during, and after reading strategies.

6. Integrate metacognitive concepts into teaching so that learners can become independent.
7. Evidence reflective decision-making, critical self-evaluation, and an increasing degree of control over one's own learning and teaching.

Course Expectations and Requirements:

1. Attendance...

2. Preparation, Participation, and Professionalism...

3. Reflective Self Analysis and Autobiography: Complete a reflective self-analysis and create a written autobiography of learning in content areas that will be shared with your peers and the instructor.

4. Group Lesson Plan: Become a topic expert and discussion facilitator on one lesson by preparing and innovatively facilitating learning using unique research based before during, and after reading strategies. Each group (2-3 people) will develop a lesson on a chapter from the Vacca textbook. A lesson will consist of:

- key concepts
- before, during, and after strategies
- visual aids
- support material such as strategy frames, games, etc.
- references.

A hard copy of the lesson plan will be given to the instructor prior to the before reading presentation of the lesson to the class. Each group will present their chapter lesson to the class. Appropriate aid(s) for enhancing understanding should be used. Student prior knowledge should be activated, background information built, several strategies should be modeled, and the lesson should actively engage the class. All of this information may come from your textbooks or be obtained from other sources. The before reading presentation and during reading assignment should take approximately 15 to 20 minutes, the after reading discussion and closure should be approximately 40 to 50 minutes.

5. Choose one of the following individualized assignments:

- **Integrated Unit with Lesson Plans and Support Material:** Prepare an in depth conceptual unit that integrates various curricular areas and content reading strategies into one unit that you will use in your classroom. A format will be provided but suggestions for an alternative format that will work better for you in your classroom will be considered. Alternate formats must have instructor approval. This unit will be shared with peers

and the instructor.

- **Strategy Resource File:** Create a teaching/learning strategy resource file that you can use in your content area or grade level (minimum of 25 strategies). Record the “what, when, and why” for teaching each strategy to students. A form will be provided but suggestions for an alternative format that will work better for you in your classroom will be considered. Alternate formats must have instructor approval. This file will be shared with peers and the instructor.
- **Strategy Application Log:** Implement 5 content learning strategies in your classroom. Create a log that includes lesson plans, a journal entry on how implementing each strategy impacted your teaching and your students’ learning, provide ideas on how to adjust the strategy for future use, and include samples of student work. This log will be shared with peers and the instructor.
- **Prepare a dialogue journal** for a special interest book or books that you selected and have had approved by the instructor. On the first page of the journal write an introduction for the book/s that includes your rationale for selection. While reading complete your dialogue journal. At the end of the journal write a book review including a critique of the content and explain how you will apply what you have learned to your current or future practice. You will present your “end of journal” book review as a handout to seminar participants during the gallery walk.

6. Individual and Cross Case Analyses: Analyze eight case studies using the format provided in Chapter 1 of the Sturtevant book. Share your finding for each case with your peers and supplement your analysis. After all cases are analyzed, conduct a cross case analysis using the format provided in Chapter 9 of the Sturtevant book. Share your findings with your peers and supplement your analysis. All individual case analyses and the cross case analysis are to be stapled together in sequential order and handed in.

7. Final Synthesis Presentation: this can be a group (maximum 4 people) or individual effort that creatively demonstrates your understanding of course goals and reviews course content.

8. Final Written Evaluation: Prepare a final written evaluation that addresses each course goal, evaluates each expectation/requirement, and suggests a final grade for the course.

Suggested Books on English Language Learners for Individual Project Dialogue Journal Option:

- Ariza, E. N. W. (2006). *Not for ESOL teachers: What every classroom teacher needs to know about the linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse student*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Boyd-Batstone, P. (2006). *Differentiated early literacy for English language learners: Practical strategies*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
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PROMISING LITERACY ACTIVITIES
WITH
PRESERVICE TEACHER AND
ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION
TEACHERS

ONLINE CLASS VERSUS FACE-TO-FACE CLASS: HOW DO UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION STUDENTS PERFORM?

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Abstract

College courses continue to evolve to include more digital learning and online platforms. However, many faculty members are skeptical that online learning does not provide as powerful a learning experience as face-to-face learning provides (Maguire, 2000). Therefore, this study compared the learning achievement of two different groups of education students. The students from one class were enrolled in an online section and the other group of students was enrolled in the same course using a face-to-face format. Even though the students were more mature in the online course, there were no significant differences in the participants' teacher knowledge at the end of the semester, as shown by a pre/post test. However, when examining the instructors comments, as a whole, the attitudes toward learning were more positive with the online students. In addition, at the end of the semester, the online instructor showed that his students earned A-B course grades while the f2f instructor had students who earned A-D course grades.

Recently professors in the College of Education (COE) at a traditional four-year university have been strongly encouraged to transfer education courses from a face-to-face (f2f) format to an online format. However, like many other faculty members across the nation, they have been reluctant to do so (Maguire, 2005). With backgrounds as K-12 classroom teachers, many COE professors agree with educational researchers and policy-makers that believe

students need good teachers in the classroom (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). Researchers have compared many aspects of online universities and courses to traditional universities and f2f delivery (Sancho-Vinuesa, 2010; Wang & Newlin, 2000; Young, Kyu, & Eun, 2011). However, regardless of the instructional delivery method, teacher educators usually focus on student achievement and the rigor of instruction. Thus, this study examined the achievement of two different groups of university students who were enrolled in the same introductory education course: one group of students taking the course f2f on the university campus, and the other group of students taking the course entirely online.

Purpose of the Study

Today's learners tend to be comfortable and adept with technology (Prensky, 2005). However, the perceived convenience of an online university course may not always offer the best results for all learners. Research has shown that students need to be more mature, more self-motivated, and more self-directed to achieve success with online learning (McCaslin & Hickey, 2001). Computer-mediated education shifts much of the responsibility for learning from the instructor to the student. This process can help students become more self-regulated learners (Winnie, 2001). Students who are actively engaged in the learning process tend to have a more positive perception of themselves as learners (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; Elliot & Thrash, 2001). However, this description of online learners may also apply to students who participate in f2f coursework that employs effective instructional strategies.

In 2009, the United States Department of Education (DOE) conducted a meta-analysis examining various studies that compared online learning with f2f learning. The DOE found that online learning appears to "offer only modest advantage over conventional classroom instruction (p. xvii) and they concluded that the studies "did not demonstrate that online learning was a superior medium" (p. xvii). While these studies looked at the effectiveness of instruction, they did not appear to examine the course content knowledge of the students. This study examined both the type of students enrolled in their first education course and the pre/post test scores posted by students in both a f2f class and an online class. The following questions guided this research.

1. How does the achievement of learners in preservice teacher education taking an online course compare with that of a face-to-face instruction?
2. What impact do the learning aptitudes of the learner have on achievement for the two types of delivery systems?

Literature Review

Digital Natives

The students of today have grown up on the ‘twitch speed’ of video games, MTV and the internet. They are accustomed to the instantaneity of hyper-text, downloaded music, phones in their pockets, a library on their laptops, beamed messages, e-books, and instant communication. They have been networked most or all of their lives. They have little patience for lectures, step-by-step logic, or tell-test instruction (p. 3, Prensky, 2001).

Digital Natives are conditioned to receiving information incredibly fast.

They like to parallel process and multi-task. They prefer graphics to texts. They function best when networked. They thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards. They prefer games to ‘serious’ work” (p. 2, Prensky, 2001).

In addition, they prefer random access (like hypertext) to traditional research (Alvermann, Phelps, & Ridgeway, 2009).

This generation of digital learners is called the Net Generation or Net Geners (Tapscott, 2008). They are currently between the ages of 11-30. The Net Geners have grown up using technology and are not afraid of experimenting with its multiple usages. They want the most up-to-date iPhone, iPad, or Blackberry, because the new one offers more features than the previous model. This group appears to have an unquenchable desire for the newest, fastest, and flashiest pocket technology.

Instruction

Instructors teaching either online courses or f2f courses need to consider the diversity of the students and content being taught when planning lessons. In addition, the type of learner and their experience with technology have to be taken into account. In short, both types of instruction should resist the simple transmission of knowledge (Johnson & Aragon, 2002). Both delivery methods need to provide motivation to the students by addressing issues such as the variability in student learning styles, providing active learning experiences and building collaboration among learners. These aspects are supported by learning theory, which suggests that learning takes place (1) when students are actively involved in the learning, (2) when the course assignments reflect real-life contexts and experiences, and (3) when critical thinking is promoted through applied and reflective activities (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Driscoll, 2002). Gardner’s (1983) theory of Multiple Intelligences echoes this point with his call for a “curriculum tailored to meet the needs of each child” (p. 56).

Active learning

One strategy to meet the desired goals for instruction and learning is active learning. This approach provides students with real-world context and interac-

tive experiences that have students doing but more importantly thinking about their learning. Numerous studies have shown that active learning enhances the knowledge gained by students (Benek-Rivera & Matthew, 2001; Driscoll & Carliner, 2005; Sarason & Banbury, 2004; Picciano, 2002; Watkins, 2005).

To be truly effective, learners must have a sense of ownership for the learning goals of a course (Savery & Duffy, 1995). They must be both willing and able to receive instructional messages. Salomon (as cited in Saettler, 1990) reported that the amount of mental effort exerted by a student depended both on the relevance of the message, and on the student's ability to create meaning from the material presented.

In addition, active learning requires critical thinking and reflection (Scriven & Paul, 2004). Students need to have an opportunity to perform tasks, to reflect on their effectiveness, and to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the information while constructing knowledge (Driscoll & Carliner, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

This study is posited in several theories: 1) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT, Miller, & Dollard, 1941); 2) Transformation Learning Theory (TLT); and 3) Constructivism.

According to Bandura (1989), SCT has three factors that work together to improve an individual's learning: (1) develop an understanding through mastery; (2) strengthen the individual's belief in their ability to be successful; and (3) cultivate self-motivated to learn. Language threads through all three factors, as communications are necessary in the learning process. Notably, for the f2f class, language is accomplished through class discussion. In contrast, language in the online class is accomplished through the reading of others' written messages within discussion responses.

Transformational Learning Theory (TLT), as with SCT, requires learners to be active participants in their learning. In transformational learning, the learners reevaluate their experiences, pre-knowledge, and beliefs. This reevaluation may lead to a more thoughtful change during reflection resulting in a deeper understanding. Adult learners, like those in this study, learn differently from children (Lee, 1998). As all learners, adults need to actively participate in their own learning, and they also need to have a sense of controlling the content and structure of their own learning environment (Galbo, 1998; Reardon, 1999). Adult learners tend to desire quality learning tools from which they can see results (Andrews, 1997) that relate to their prior learning (Fishback, 1998; Garmston, 1996). Mezirow (1997) and Grabove (1997) insist that adult education must be learner-centered and foster critical reflective thought, imaginative problem solving, and critical thinking in order to take action to adjust or change any unproductive cognitive directions. Instructional materials must reflect real-life

experiences of the learners paralleling what will occur in their own lives (Fenwick & Parsons, 1998).

Mezirow (1991) continues by saying that for an adult to learn, a transformation must exist. Sokol and Cranton (1998) note that transformative learning revises viewpoints, examines new practices, and helps learners act based on new perspectives. When adult students learn to make their own interpretations, they discover they not only have the technical skills to be successful, but also the intelligence. Only then does transformative learning takes place. Transformative learning should be the principal goal of adult education (Cohen, 1997; Grabove, 1997; Mezirow, 1997; Scott & Markert, 1994). As the first step in reaching this goal, an instructor must construct a risk-free environment (Fishback, 1998) where students have the opportunity to reexamine their perspectives and assess their critical thinking abilities (Cohen, 1997). Accordingly, constructivism suggests that when one constructs knowledge by linking the new knowledge to one's existing knowledge the learner is actively engaged in the learning transformation process (Huitt, 2003).

In a constructivist classroom, students continually try out new ideas and practices for themselves and see where they work and where they prove inadequate. The models that an individual constructs in his or her mind are crucial to understanding or nonunderstanding" (Scherer, 1999, p. 1).

Methods

For this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. Data were collected from the students' test scores to examine any change that may have taken place in their knowledge about teaching during the course. Interviews with the two instructors examined their perceptions of their student's learning aptitude.

Setting

The study was done at a four-year, regional, state university in Texas with students majoring in education. The students were enrolled in a 16-week introductory methods education course where they learned the fundamentals of teaching. These students self-selected the delivery system for the course by enrolling in either the f2f or online sections. The f2f section met two days a week for an hour and a half and had 30 students enrolled in the course. The online class had the students work at their own pace, as long as they met assignment deadlines, and had 15 students enrolled.

Two experienced instructors taught the courses. In addition, both instructors had taught this same course for several years and were familiar with the curriculum and the assignments of the course. In addition, the online instructor was adept at using technology to enhance the learning of students while teaching/leading an online course.

The syllabi and textbooks were the same for both sections of this introductory education class. The only notable difference between the two course

sections was the delivery method: f2f and online. However, when the f2f class did an oral presentation, the online class created a PowerPoint presentation that was uploaded for the class to view. The PowerPoint author then became the facilitator of the online class discussion about the presentation. In addition, the prompts were used for both settings where the f2f class held oral conversations while the online class used a written discussion forum.

Participants

Forty-five undergraduate education students (44 female and 1 male) participated in the study. The ethnicity of the participants were mostly Caucasian (n=37; 84%) while the majority of the participants were in their junior year of university course work (n=34; 77%). The f2f class had participants who were considered traditional students, with the majority of them being 19-24 years of age. In contrast, online participants were older, non-traditional students, who were parents, and jobholders. The majority of the students were working on their EC-4 education degree, while none were working on an 8-12 certification. The demographics of the membership of the two classes were markedly different. The table below provides more detailed information on the participants.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants

	f2f class	Online class
Female	30	14
Male	0	1
White American	23	14
Asian American	1	0
African American	1	0
Hispanic	5	1
Sophomore	4	1
Junior	21	13
Senior	5	1
EC-4 certification	27	14
4-8 certification	3	1
8-12 certification	0	0
All level certification	0	1
19-24 age range	26	1
25-30 age range	2	8
31-35 age range	1	3
36-40 age range	0	2
40+ age range	1	1
Yes I am a parent	8	13
No I am not a parent	22	1
Yes, I have substituted	3	5
No, I have not substituted	27	10
Total Number of Students	30	15

Survey Material

The students participated voluntarily in the study. They were all given the same two survey instruments to fill out. There was a 100% participation rate, as all students completed the two surveys. These documents included the demographic sheet and the twenty-five multiple-choice questions taken from the Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities (PPR) Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES) Preparation Manual.

Demographic Sheet. The researchers created the demographic sheet, which asked the participants the information reported in Table 1.

PPR TExES Preparation Manual Test. One researcher used the internet to access the questions from the various levels of the PPR preparation manuals. Twenty-five questions were chosen that were common to all three levels of certification (EC-4, 4-8, & 8-12). These questions were then used for the pre/post design. Since these are practice questions from the state, it is assumed that they are both valid and reliable.

The questions were chosen from this particular preparation manual for two reasons. First, the introductory education course the students were taking was aligned with the state domains and competencies for teacher certification. Texas uses those domains and competencies as a basis for their certification test. Second, the college of education students are required by the university to take the online teacher preparation test during this course and again before graduation. These scores are used by the university to measure student achievement growth throughout their education courses.

Teacher Interview Questions. At the end of the course, the two instructors were asked several questions to obtain their perceptions of their students' performances in the courses.

The following questions were used:

1. How well do you think your student participated?
2. Did all the students equally participate in class discuss?
3. Do you think all of your students were good students?
4. Overall, what grades did your students receive at the end of course completion?

Procedure

Students. For the pretest, two survey instruments were administered anonymously and taken voluntarily. Each preservice teacher, during the first week of class was asked to fill out the demographic information sheet and the 25-item multiple-choice test questions that were gathered from the three-certification levels from the TExES preparation manuals. The students who attended the f2f class were given paper copies so they could be filled out by hand. The students who attended the online class received an electronic copy.

For the posttest, the same 25-item multiple-choice test questions were given to the undergraduate education students. This posttest was given the second-to-

the-last week of the semester. At that point, the students had completed all of the semester's course work and they were studying for their final exam

Teachers. Both instructors were interviewed at the end of the semester using a semi-structured interview protocol. This protocol enabled the researchers to obtain some understanding of the teachers' perceptions they had developed about their students throughout the semester (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Data Analysis

Students. First, pre/post multiple-choice 25-item tests were graded to determine the number of correct items of the test. Once the test scores were determined, the resulting data were analyzed using SPSS software. This analysis compared the scores of the pre/post tests for each group. A *t*-test was run to determine if the mean growth was significant.

Teachers. The qualitative data collected during the interview process were transcribed and then reviewed. Analysis was directed toward examination of any common or contrasting statements to give insight to the dynamics of the two classes. (Creswell, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

The student knowledge data was collected by a pre/post multiple-choice assessment. To gain teacher understanding of these student, open-ended oral questions were used. The data was created by analyzing the data within and between groups.

PPR Preparation Manual Practice Questions.

To compensate for the different number of students enrolled in the two classes (30 in the f2f & 15 in the online), the students' scores were examined as percentages. In addition, if the mean of the scores were different, a *t*-test was run to determine if the differences were significant. As a whole, the results showed that 10 f2f students (35%) and nine online students (65%) scored higher on their posttest than they did on their pretest. In addition, 13 f2f students (45%) and three online students (21%) posted lower scores on their posttest than they did on their pretest. Therefore, both the online and f2f classes had large percentages for both increased and decreased test scores. The next sections provide more detailed information for each delivery method.

F2f Class. The median score for the pretest was 19 (range 14-24) while the median score for the posttest was 18 (range 4-22). In addition, the mean for the pretest was 18 (SD = 3.1) while the mean for the posttest was 17 (SD=4.8). With the change in the mean, even though it was downward, a *t*-test was conducted. It was found that the differences between the pretest and posttest were not significant.

Online Class. The median score for the pretest was 18 (range 15-23) while the median score for the posttest was 21 range (17-25). In addition, the mean for

the pretest was 19 (SD=2.6) while the mean for the posttest was 22 (SD=2.9). There was an upward change in the mean scores so a *t*-test was conducted. However, even though there was an apparent growth in knowledge, the differences between the pretest and posttest were not statistically significant.

Comparison of Face-to-face vs. Online. After determining there was no significant difference within the groups, the data between the groups were explored. The f2f mean for the pretest was 18 while the online pretest mean was 19. Even though there was a difference, the difference was not statistically significant. In addition, looking at the posttest scores, even though there was a difference in the mean, f2f of 17 and online of 22, this difference was also not significant.

Teacher Interview Questions

The four open-ended questions were given to the two teachers to frame their oral response. Though the test score differences in the two classes were not significant, there was some difference in the raw scores. The respective comments of each teacher gave insights to the behavioral differences, which aligned with the test scores reported in the student data.

Online Teacher. “The students were great. We had many grand conversations with our online discussion. I developed beginning posts, but students also posted their own questions. Even though they were required to respond three times weekly, the majority of students responded more than that. In addition, their written assignments were well done and thoughtful. After determining grades, the students earned either an A or B for the course” (Instructor responses to the oral questions).

Face-to-Face Teacher. “For the most part, they did okay. There were some that I felt did not put much effort into their assignments. Most of them were active participants in the classroom but sometimes they wanted to argue about what they felt was right instead of listening to others’ viewpoints or opinion. On their writing assignments, they did not appear to use the writing process, as many editing errors were present in the papers that they were required to write. Two of the students decided at the end of the semester that teaching was not for them and changed their major. In addition, after determining the final grades, the students had earned grades that ranged from A to “D (Instructor responses to the oral questions).

Comparison of Teacher Comments. All of the comments of the online teacher in response to the four questions were positive. The students had participated more than was required by submitting their own postings and responding more than the required number. Additionally, the postings and responses were considered thoughtful and well produced. At the end of the course, all of the students had earned an A or B grade. The grade assignment was supported by the posttest range scores of 17-25.

In contrast to the online course, the comments of the f2f teacher were much less positive reflecting less effort on the part of the students compared to the expectations of the course objectives and teacher. Oral discussions seemed to be built around point of view but did not seem to move beyond asserting one's own view. Some of the written assignments lacked the discipline of correct writing conventions as expected of a college student and future teacher. Assignment of final grades in the f2f class ranged from A to D. The grade assignment aligned with the posttest range of 4-22. As with many education courses, some students may decide teaching is not the profession for them and stop producing in the midst of a course.

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted. First, this study utilized a very small sample, since only 45 students participated and there were twice as many f2f students than online students. The results may vary for studies with a larger student population and different configuration of students. Second, this study took place in a 4-year state university in Texas. Thus, the results may be different for different regions of the state and the nation, as well as types of universities. Third, it was believed that the PPR manual preparation practice test questions were reliable and valid. A different test and format may be more consistent in comparing the outcome of coursework with different formats. Fourth, it was assumed that all the students in the online class were comfortable with the online format, were computer literate, had suitable equipment, and had adequate internet connections. Fifth, all students were working on a major that they chose, so all the students would be internally motivated to achieve and produce quality assignments.

Discussion

As measured by the differences in the scores on the PPR manual practice test, neither delivery method appears to be superior over the other, as there was no significant differences on student achievement in this introductory education course. While there were no significant differences in the PPR achievement, there were differences in the population of the two courses. Research shows that the digital natives range from age 11-30 (Tapscott, 2008). The students in the online courses were older and more mature than the students in the f2f course. In addition, the students in the f2f course had a wider range of abilities than the students in the online class. This was supported by the posttest scores, and in the final semester grades reported by the instructors. The posttest scores showed that the online mean score was 22 and the f2f mean score was 17. The teacher who taught the f2f course reported that the students had earned a range of grades from A to D, while the teacher who taught the online course reported that the students had earned a range of grades from A to B. These individual course

grades substantiate the validity of the PPR test measures and gives credence to the appropriate rigor of the introductory course.

Implications

This study created some interesting factors for consideration. These factors included student decision making in choosing education courses as a field of study and the selection of specific courses when choices were provided. An open-ended questionnaire concerning the selection of online, hybrid (a combination of f2f and online sessions), or f2f course sections would add to understanding the factors of student choice and thus administrative scheduling of courses conducive to optimal instruction and learning.

The question of student self-assessment of technology skills prior to course enrollment needs to be investigated. It is probable that students in online courses consider more carefully the course requirements and their ability to meet the requirements than do f2f students. Being anonymous may be of help for online students to ask questions and respond to others. Online students may be more motivated to participate since they “have to be heard to be seen” and have the option of working at their optimal time or adjust their learning schedule. The benefit of a smaller class was experienced by the online students by receiving more one-on-one time with the instructor. Finally, age related maturity and being parents often has a positive impact on learning and motivation to complete coursework and turn in quality assignments. In addition, future research could be done to determine if different settings and different participants had similar or unique results.

Conclusion

The data seems to suggest two conclusions for these participants. First, the majority of these online students were nontraditional, older, more mature students who were working and had families. Thus, by offering these two course formats as options, the university is meeting the needs of different types of students. This is important knowledge for those university administrators who deal with course scheduling issues. Second, as many university faculty members are leery of the rigor of online instruction, this study showed that there is no apparent difference in the achievement of the students in the two delivery methods. It appears that the learning of the students in both a f2f course and an online course structured as this particular course was is at least equivalent.

Recommendations

The results from this study suggest that some education courses can be effectively delivered in an online format. Faculty members in education departments face the arduous task of determining which courses should be taught all

online, which should be taught as hybrid versions (a combination of f2f and online sessions), and which should be f2f classes. However, there are many factors for a college or department to consider when offering a course online. These factors include who authors the course, who administers the course, and the technology available to the university instructors and to their students.

The approach in which the course is authored and the design of the online assignments is vitally important (York & Marsick, 2000). In all education courses the course objectives need to be standards based and the implementation of those standards and proficiencies need to be relevant and challenging. The flexibility of the choice of assignments should not compromise the essence and substance of the curriculum, nor should student achievement be compromised. The instructors who either author or administer the courses have to use every means available within their technological capacity to discover the students' strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles in an effort to meet individual needs. This is a factor in facilitating student achievement. The delivery system needs to be taken into account, as there are pros and cons for all delivery systems, including eCollege and Blackboard. Online formats need to take advantage of every available online technology such as voice-over PowerPoint, Jing video, video of the instructor teaching and answering questions, WebQuests, and Skype.

Technology is evolving so rapidly that what is available today is enhanced tomorrow; what is new today is obsolete within a few years. Therefore, the authors of this article contend that as universities offer more online and hybrid courses, there needs to be on-going professional development for those instructors who author and teach online courses. Instructor proficiency in technology is one way to enhance student achievement in online courses.

Additional research on the formats of online classes versus the formats of f2f classes is needed. The course size is a definite factor. It is as hard for an online instructor to be totally committed with an overloaded online class, just as it is for a f2f instructor who struggles with a large class size. More studies are needed to compare the optimal size of classes, the best delivery methods, and the manner in which the courses are authored.

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**PROMISING LITERACY
ACTIVITIES
TO HELP K-12 LEARNERS**

TEXT FORMAT, TEXT COMPREHENSION, AND RELATED READER VARIABLES

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Abstract

This investigation explored relationships between format of text (electronic or print-based) and reading comprehension of adolescent readers. Also in question were potential influences on comprehension from related measures including academic placement of participants, gender, and prior knowledge. Influences were measured through an unaided text retell and a constructed-response assessment with traditional questioning. Findings from regression analyses revealed that format of the text was not a significant predictor of reading comprehension for seventh grade students. Conversely, participants' academic placements were significant predictors of comprehension, as measured by both retell and constructed-response assessments. Having prior knowledge of the subject content was advantageous for participants on retell measures but did not appear to impact performance on the constructed response assessment. Gender, however, significantly predicted comprehension on the constructed -response assessment but did not impact retell measures.

Nearly a decade ago, the RAND Reading Study Group, in their report on reading comprehension stated, "Ensuring advanced literacy achievement for all students is no longer a luxury but an economic necessity" (RAND, 2002, p. 4). This bold statement indicates that today's high school graduates must be competent at reading and comprehending various formats of high-level text in order to be employable in an ever-changing, competitive workforce. Global economic competition makes learning to read and use information sources more important

to success than ever before; therefore, students who cannot read proficiently are at a distinct disadvantage in social settings, as civil participants, and in the working world (Alliance for Education, 2006). Educators thus face the daunting task of ensuring that every child advances beyond the fundamental literacy skills of the elementary grades to the more challenging literacy demands of the middle and high school years; however, in an era where new technologies for information and communication are continually redefining what it means to be literate, this charge is even more critical to educators (Castek, Hartman, Leu, Coiro, Henry, & Zawilinski, n.d.).

Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, and Cammack (2004) describe literacy as a moving target, continually changing its meaning depending on what society expects literate individuals to be able to do. In this view, the definition of what it means to be literate is continually evolving as new technologies of literacy quickly emerge in this age of information. With the Internet becoming the defining technology for literacy learning (Leu, McVerry, O'Bryne, Zawilinski, Castek, & Hartman, 2009), it is evident that definitions of literacy must now include the electronic environment. This has provoked researchers and practitioners to seek novel ways of addressing the complexities of reading comprehension. Electronic texts that incorporate hyperlinks and hypermedia introduce some complications in defining comprehension because they require skills and abilities beyond those required for comprehension of conventional, linear print. Consequently, literacy educators have been working towards re-conceptualizing literacy in ways that reflect emerging perspectives on the communicative competencies required for 21st century learning, including the ability to read and comprehend electronic text (Hobbs, 2006).

Review of Literature

A significant base of research, developed over many years, is available to inform educators about effective approaches to comprehension instruction. However, research on the use of multimedia digital technologies to enhance reading instruction, or assess comprehension, is in its infancy. The research currently available is somewhat inconclusive, thus strengthening the need for further research. While the majority of the literature reviewed reports the students' comprehension of electronic text to be superior to their comprehension of conventionally printed materials (Fry, 2007; Alvarez, 2006; Joly, Capovilla, Bighetti, & Nicolau, 2005; Reinking, 1993), a study conducted by Matthew (1997) found contrasting results. It is critical to note, however, that several of the studies finding reading comprehension of electronic text to be superior included narration with the text, which is essentially assessing listening comprehension as opposed to reading comprehension. In studies conducted by Dungworth, McKnight, and Morris (2004), Standish (1992), Casteel (1988-1989), Helfeldt and Henk (1985), and Manzo (1985) there were no statistically significant differences in reading comprehension between

the two formats of text. Until more research can be carried out that systematically confronts differences between reading print and electronic text, it will be difficult to move forward in our understanding of how technology expands options for reading and learning from text (Reinking, as cited in Matthew, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this research study was to investigate the relationship between the format of text and reading comprehension of seventh grade students. Through this study, print and electronic versions of the same social studies text were read by seventh grade students and their subsequent comprehension outcomes were compared in an effort to determine which format, if either, led to higher levels of comprehension. Additionally, a variety of other co-variables that could influence comprehension including prior knowledge of the subject matter, gender, and students' academic placements were also included in the analysis of findings.

Methods

Participants

One hundred and twenty-five seventh grade students enrolled in a rural middle school in western Maryland, from a variety of academic placement levels, participated in the study. Students' academic placements were based upon Maryland School Assessment (MSA) scores, Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores, report card grades, and teacher recommendations. The study included representation from each of the following academic placements: Honors ($n=36$), Merit ($n=52$), General ($n=30$), and Special Education ($n=7$).

Procedure

Participants in this study first completed a prior knowledge assessment to determine familiarity with the topic of World War II. They were next assigned to read about this topic in either print or electronic format. The conventionally printed text used in this study was a four-page lesson from a seventh grade World History textbook (Burnstein & Shek, 2006). According to the Fry Graph Readability Formula, the textbook has a readability level of ninth grade, despite the fact that it is being used in seventh grade classrooms. The lesson included 14 paragraphs of text, as well as photographs of the war leaders, a diary entry of Anne Frank, a cause-effect chart, and a short summary at the end of the chapter. Vocabulary words were printed in bold type, with definitions highlighted in yellow. Major headings were showcased in blue font, while minor headings were printed in red font. There was also a short summary at the end of the lesson. Because all seventh grade students regularly use this textbook, participants were familiar with the text, including its layout and features.

The electronic text was created specifically for this study and contained narrative identical to that found in the students' textbooks. However, it was

necessary for participants to click on the green links embedded in the Power Point to retrieve additional information including photographs of war leaders, the Anne Frank diary entry, the cause-effect chart, and definitions for vocabulary words. After clicking on these links and viewing the information, students were directed to click on a link that said "Go Back" that returned them to the narrative. Several of the questions on the constructed response assessment tested knowledge of information contained within these links. This allowed the researcher to gauge if students were using the links, which is a critical aspect of electronic text reading.

Following the reading of the assigned text, comprehension was assessed. The first instrument used to assess comprehension was a written, unaided retell which required the participants to retell what they had just read, in paragraph form (See Appendix A). Students were prompted to write an extended constructed response (ECR) that contained main idea statements with supporting details. They were not permitted to reference the text when writing this ECR. A retelling scoring sheet (Appendix B) was created by the lead researcher that listed main concepts from the text, as well as specific details, similar to that of Leslie and Caldwell's *Qualitative Reading Inventory-4* (2006). The number of main ideas and supporting details written in the students' paragraphs were compared by one researcher to the retelling scoring sheet and then tallied to determine the total number of details that students recalled during the retell. A total of 131 details were possible for recall.

The second instrument for assessing comprehension was a constructed response assessment containing traditional questioning that varied from lower-level thinking, such as basic recall questions, to higher-level thinking questions, which required participants to analyze and evaluate sections of the assigned text. All recall questions were worth 1 point each, based on correctness. The higher-level thinking questions that required a brief-constructed response (BCR) were scored using a 0-1-2-3 writing rubric that is used in both middle schools in the county. In order to earn a score of 3, participants' responses demonstrated an understanding of the complexities of the text while addressing the demands of the question and effectively using text-based and/or text relevant information to clarify and extend understanding. A score of 2 meant that the responses demonstrated a general understanding of the text, while partially addressing the demands of the question and using text-based and/or text-relevant information to show understanding. To earn a score of 1, participants' responses demonstrated a general understanding of the text while partially addressing the demands of the question and using limited text-based and/or text-relevant information to show understanding. Participants earned a score of zero if the response was completely incorrect, irrelevant to the question, or missing.

The assessment was worth a total of 13 points, with raw scores converted to percentages. The students completed this assessment immediately following

the retell. In contrast to the retell, however, students were able to access the text when constructing their responses. To ensure inter-rater reliability, each BCR was independently scored by another teacher, trained in using this particular rubric, and the lead researcher, with an agreement rate of 89%. Disagreements in scoring were resolved through a discussion with a third teacher, also trained in using this specific rubric, until consensus was reached.

Data Analysis

To analyze the participants' performance on the comprehension measures, a series of regression analyses, employing a general linear model, were utilized to determine if a predictor variable (format of text) and three potential co-variables (academic placement level, gender, and prior knowledge) had an impact on two separate measures of reading comprehension, including an unaided written retell and traditional questioning on a constructed response assessment. Regression analysis served to measure these relationships, making use of regression tools in SPSS, version 17.

Findings of the Retell Assessment

The first regression analysis indicated that format of the text, print or electronic, was not a significant predictor of comprehension, as measured by the retell assessment. The mean score for participants reading conventionally printed text was 10.08 (SD = 8.39) as compared to a mean of 10.52 (SD = 5.9) for electronic text out of a possible 131 details recalled. Additional follow-up analyses were conducted to test for any interaction effects. There were no two-way interactions between text type and gender, text type and academic level, or text type and prior knowledge. In essence, it did not matter if participants read print or electronic text, as comprehension was not influenced by text format. Comprehension was, however, influenced by other variables, such as the academic placements of the participants.

Relationships of Academic Placement Level and Unaided Retell of Text

In the present study, there were no statistical interactions between academic placement level and text type. Analysis of data did indicate a main effect for academic placement, however. See Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Unaided Retell Based Upon Academic Level and Format of Text

Academic Placement of Students	Format of Text	Mean	Standard Deviation
Honors	Print	17.33	10.21
	Electronic	17.00	5.28
Merit	Print	7.76	5.05
	Electronic	8.83	4.77
General	Print	4.55	2.81
	Electronic	8.47	4.02
Special Education	Print	5.80	2.17
	Electronic	2.50	.71

As shown in Table 1, there were no significant differences in mean scores for print or electronic text with honors and merit students. However, there were noticeable differences in scores for general and special education students. The mean score for participants reading conventionally printed text, from the general education population, was 4.55 (SD= 2.8) as compared to a mean of 8.47 (SD = 4.0) for electronic text. General level students were able to recall more details after reading electronic text, whereas special education students benefited from reading conventionally printed text. It is imperative to note that the general level students in this study were participating in the Passport Reading Journeys (Cambium Learning Group) intervention program. These students had been engaged in consistent electronic text reading, numerous times a week, for eight months prior to the study, possibly affecting the findings for this subgroup's retell. Students receiving special education services participated in the same reading intervention program for four months prior to the study, but their results were completely opposite. This group instead significantly comprehended the print text; however, the small number of special education participants ($n= 7$) is a limitation of this study, as well as inconsistent teacher delivery of the electronic lessons.

Relationships of Gender and Unaided Retell of Text

There were also no statistical interactions between gender and text type, as measured by the unaided retell. Additionally, differences in mean scores as an effect of gender were not significant. Males in the study had a mean score of 11.39 (SD =9.0) on retell measures, while the mean score for females was 9.51 (SD = 5.6). There was little discrepancy in gender among participants reading electronic text, with males earning a mean score of 10.63 (SD = 6.37) and females earning a mean score being 10.52 (SD = 5.65). Although not significant overall, there was a more noticeable difference in mean scores with print text, as mean score for males was 12.42 (SD = 11.62) and females was 8.85 (SD = 5.58).

Relationships of Prior Knowledge and Unaided Retell of Text

Results indicated no significant interactions between prior knowledge and text type on the dependent variable of retell. A main effect for prior knowledge, though, indicated that participants with higher levels of prior knowledge also had higher retell results, regardless of text type. Likewise, students with limited prior knowledge had lower retell results, regardless of text type. Having prior knowledge was important in constructing the written retell, as participants were not permitted to reference the text for assistance, therefore having to rely heavily on what they already knew about the subject matter.

Constructed-response Assessment

After the participants composed details of what they recalled about World War II in an unaided retell, they responded to traditional, open-ended questions on the constructed-response assessment. This measure consisted of eight questions, six of which were basic recall, with two higher level questions requiring participants to compose a brief-constructed response (BCR). Unlike the retell assessment, participants were able to reference the text on this assessment. Basic recall questions were worth one point each, based on correctness, while the brief-constructed responses that incorporated higher-level thinking skills were scored using a 0-3 rubric. Scores for each question were summed to provide one final score for total comprehension (out of a possible 13 points), which was then converted and reported as a percentage.

Relationships of Text Type and Constructed-response Assessment

Again, regression analysis served to measure the influences of the predictor variable (format of text) and potential co-variables (academic placement level, gender, and prior knowledge) on the constructed-response assessment. Similar to the findings of the unaided text retell, text type was not a significant predictor of comprehension as measured through traditional questioning on the constructed-response assessment. The mean score for print text was 71.03 (SD = 18.47) as compared to a mean of 71.50 (SD = 18.27) for electronic text. In other words, regardless of text type, participants performed comparably on this traditional comprehension assessment.

Relationships of Academic Placement Level and Constructed-response Assessment

While there were no statistical interactions between academic placement level and format of text, results did indicate a main effect for academic placement. Similar to the retell assessment, honors students were once again advantaged, and the largest inconsistency in scores was again found with general level participants who performed at higher levels when reading electronic text. Means and standard deviations are displayed in the following table.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Constructed-response Assessment Based upon Academic Level and Format of Text

Academic Placement of Students	Format of Text	Mean	Standard Deviation
Honors	Print	83.62	13.45
	Electronic	83.47	10.39
Merit	Print	71.90	14.22
	Electronic	67.96	17.02
General	Print	55.91	15.48
	Electronic	69.58	20.47
Special Education	Print	44.60	15.02
	Electronic	42.00	5.66

Relationships of Gender and Constructed-response Assessment

Similar to the findings on retell measures, a statistically significant interaction between text format and gender was not found, as measured by the constructed-response assessment. Unlike the findings on the retell assessment, however, differences in mean scores as an effect of gender were significant on this assessment measure. For print text, males scored a mean of 65.38 (SD = 17.77), while females' mean score was 74.34 (SD = 18.27). For electronic text, males had a mean score of 68.19 (SD = 17.70) on traditional questioning, and females' mean score was 75.52 (SD = 18.82). The females clearly outperformed their male counterparts on this assessment with both formats of text. This finding is likely a result of females' willingness to utilize search strategies to locate answers in the text.

Relationships of Prior Knowledge and Constructed-response Assessment

Results indicated no statistically significant interactions between prior knowledge and text type. Having prior knowledge of the subject content was not an advantage for participants on the constructed-response assessment, which is in contrast to the findings of the unaided retell. Having the ability to reference the text was likely the main factor in this finding. If students had adequate search strategies, prior knowledge of the subject matter would not have been as critical.

Summary of Findings

Table 3 provides a summary of findings from the regression analyses of both assessment measures including the unaided retell and the constructed-response assessment. Additionally, findings from across data sources have led to several conclusions.

Table 3: Summary of Quantitative Findings from the Regression Analyses

	Retell	Constructed-response
Format of Text	Not significant	Not significant
Academic Placement Level	Significant	Significant
Gender	Not significant	Significant
Prior Knowledge	Significant	Not significant
Overall Reading Ability	Significant	Significant

Conclusion 1: Format of Text Does Not Predict Comprehension

Findings from the regression analyses revealed that text type was not a significant predictor of reading comprehension, despite the preference for reading electronic text, as expressed through a separate preference survey. This mirrors the findings of a number of previous studies (Casteel, 1988-1989; Dungworth, McKnight, & Morris, 2008; Helfeldt & Henk, 1985; Manzo, 1985; Standish, 1992). If self-reported preference was accurate, one might have expected increased comprehension when reading electronic text, as was found to be the case with previous studies conducted by Fry (2007), Alvarez (2006), Joly, Capovilla, Bighetti, & Nicolau (2005), and Reinking (1993). Pitcher, Albright, Delaney, Walker, Seunarineingh, Mogge, & Headley, Ridgeway, Peck, Hunt & Dunston, (2007) concluded, “Using adolescents’ preferred reading materials and modes of instruction will lead to increased motivation, and perhaps to improvements in reading outcomes” (p. 378). However, as the present findings suggest, participants in this study performed in a comparable manner, regardless of text type.

Conclusion 2: Multiple Variables Impact Comprehension

Although text format did not impact comprehension measures, other variables did indeed influence comprehension, and in some cases, confirms what those in the field already know about literacy instruction and best practices. The present study reaffirms that having prior knowledge is advantageous for readers, especially if readers cannot make reference back to the text. Participants with increased prior knowledge tend to better facilitate comprehension, (McKeown, Beck, Sinatra, & Loxterman, 1992), which proved to be true in the present study with retell measures. The present study also confirms what numerous gender and literacy studies have shown in reference to reading performance for males and females. Adolescent female readers tend to outperform their male counterparts on standardized comprehension measures (Brozo, 2002).

Classroom Implications

By coupling the conclusions of this study with current research, these findings may inform educators of the 21st century to consider the following classroom implications for instruction in order to meet the needs of our diverse students. First, practitioners must be willing to consider expanding the definition of electronic text to include more electronic text reading in every classroom. “When reading is limited to textbooks and whole-class literature, we limit ourselves as teachers and our students as readers” (Pitcher et al., 2007, p. 395). The environments of adolescents today are filled with electronic texts, and researchers contend that there needs to be a pedagogical shift so that classroom instruction incorporates these new modes of reading and communication (Walsh, Asha, & Spraigner, 2007), possibly leading to increased comprehension of electronic text. This was evident with the general education students in this study who had consistent exposure to electronic text reading. Students of all academic levels should have more opportunities to read electronic text, and when this becomes a more regular occurrence within classrooms, it is likely that results of a study such as this might be quite different.

There is growing concern that although students are regularly engaging with electronic media outside of the school setting, they are not being explicitly taught *how* to read and think about information in a virtual environment (Fisher, Lapp, & Wood, 2010). It is vital that teachers explicitly teach and model strategies to aid students in comprehending electronic text, as we know that modeling has a profound impact on students’ behaviors. Sutherland-Smith (2002) suggests students be taught the chunking technique for synthesizing information from multiple sites, possibly in the form of graphic organizers, as well as the “snatch and grab” technique to skim for information. With this technique, students are taught to initially read in a superficial manner and then compile a grab-bag of references, which should be culled after a closer scanning of the text. Additionally, students must be taught to evaluate the non-textual features of the text, such as images and graphics, and become critical consumers of literacy who can discern credible and reliable visual elements. Without explicitly teaching and modeling these, and other strategies, many students, especially struggling readers, might have increased difficulties navigating through and reading electronic text.

Teachers must also be acutely aware of adolescents’ personal uses of literacy and what is deemed important to them as readers. This is especially true of male readers who, in this study, did not appear to value searching the text for answers to questions posed on the constructed-response assessment. Partin and Hendricks (as cited in Pitcher, et al., 2007) suggest that educators broaden their perspectives of what they consider acceptable reading material to include the Internet, popular culture and music, newspapers and magazines, and other options that will invite opportunities for adolescents to become critical consumers of a wide array of texts while reading what they perceive as meaningful in their own lives.

As comprehension research with print text has suggested for many years, there must be a focus on pre-reading strategies in an effort to activate students’

prior knowledge, or create it, if it is lacking. This can be accomplished through vocabulary instruction, anticipation guides, concept maps, video clips, virtual field trips, photographs, and the like. Simply having prior knowledge may not be sufficient for students to facilitate comprehension. Educators must build bridges between students' existing background knowledge and the task at hand, whether it be with traditional print or in the electronic environment. In essence, it is important to make use of what teachers already know about best practices, including activating prior knowledge, as this knowledge seems to be directly linked to comprehension.

Future Research

The topic of reading comprehension generally, and electronic text specifically, requires further investigation, as the Internet and other ICTs focus heavily on learning from electronic text. While there is a significant research base in regard to the reading of traditional text, there is still limited research on the nature of reading comprehension on the Internet and other information and communication technologies (Castek et al, n.d.). The nature of reading comprehension is constantly evolving, yet there is limited research to direct instruction or yield insights pertinent to comprehension of electronic text. The National Reading Panel has expressed concern that few studies have explored computer technology and literacy instruction. Additionally, the International Reading Association (2002) has called for "an intensive program of research on literacy and technology issues that will enable us to better understand the rapid changes taking place in the nature of literacy and literacy instruction" (p. 2). Despite these concerns and recommendations, this line of inquiry is still in the infancy stage and requires further research. A study assessing Internet-based comprehension, which begins with a question and takes place in limitless information space, is recommended.

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Appendix B: Retelling Scoring Sheet

Mark the students' responses.

Main Idea

_____ As troubles grew
_____ dictators came to
_____ power.

Details

_____ In Japan
_____ the military took over
_____ the government.
_____ In the Soviet Union
_____ Stalin took over
_____ after Lenin died.
_____ Brutal dictators arose
_____ in Italy
_____ and Germany.
_____ They attracted
_____ followers
_____ by preaching fascism.
_____ Mussolini made Italy
_____ the first fascist state.
_____ Hitler led the first
_____ fascist movement.
_____ Hitler took over
_____ the German
_____ government
_____ in 1933.

Main Idea

_____ The Axis Powers
_____ declared war
_____ on Germany.

Details

_____ Hitler aimed to take
_____ revenge on Germany
_____ by expanding German
_____ territory.
_____ He attacked Poland
_____ in 1939.
_____ The Allies,
_____ Great Britain and
_____ France,

_____ declared war on
_____ Germany.
_____ The Axis Powers
_____ formed.
_____ Germany, Italy, and
_____ Japan joined forces.

Main Idea

_____ WWII was a new kind
_____ of war.

Details

_____ Tanks and trucks
_____ allowed armies to
_____ move quickly.
_____ Bombers flew long
_____ distances.
_____ With new tactics,
_____ Germany quickly
_____ defeated Poland
_____ in a Blitzkrieg,
_____ or "lightning war".

Main Idea

_____ The United States
_____ joined the Allies
_____ and they won the war.

Details

_____ On December 7, 1941,
_____ Japan attacked
_____ Pearl Harbor.
_____ The United States
_____ led by President
_____ Franklin
_____ Roosevelt
_____ joined the Allies.
_____ For the next 2.5 years
_____ battles raged in
_____ Europe,
_____ Europe,
_____ North Africa,

_____ the Middle East,
_____ Asia,
_____ and the South Pacific.
_____ In June of 1944,
_____ British troops landed
_____ in France
_____ and pushed into
_____ Germany.
_____ Germany surrendered
_____ in May of 1945.
_____ The United States
_____ dropped atomic
_____ bombs
_____ on Hiroshima and
_____ Nagasaki.
_____ Japan surrendered.
_____ The war was over.

Main Idea

_____ There were many
_____ effects
_____ of the war.
_____ The world was vastly
_____ changed.

Details

_____ It was the deadliest
_____ conflict in human
_____ history.
_____ 34 million soldiers
_____ were
_____ injured.
_____ 22 million died.
_____ 30 million civilians
_____ lost
_____ their lives.
_____ Many were victims
_____ of the Holocaust.
_____ the Nazi's efforts
_____ to wipe out the Jewish
_____ people.

_____ Jews were sent to special camps called concentration camps. Six million Jews died in this genocide, the deliberate destruction of a people. Thousands of Japanese died because of the atomic bombs. The war weakened economies and governments. The United States and Russia

Details

_____ became the world's strongest powers. They began to distrust one another. The distrust led to the Cold War, rivalry between the superpowers with no direct fighting. The Soviets set up Communist states in Eastern Europe. Germany divided in two. West Germany became a democracy. East Germany became a Communist nation.

Main Idea

_____ There were several notable leaders of the

war. _____ Winston Churchill _____ Franklin Roosevelt _____ Joseph Stalin _____ Adolf Hitler _____ Benito Mussolini _____ Hideki Tojo

Main Idea

_____ Anne Frank _____ was a teenager living in Germany _____ when Hitler came to power.

Details

_____ Anne and her family fled to Amsterdam. _____ Nazis were rounding up Jews there. _____ Her family hid in a friend's home. _____ She writes in a diary and describes people being taken away in droves. _____ They are treated roughly and transported in cattle cars to Westerbork. _____ She assumes they are being killed

Details

_____ She has not lost her ideals, even though they might seem impractical and absurd. _____ She believes that everyone is still good at heart.

Main Idea

_____ The Nazis sent Jews away to concentration camps.

Details

_____ Concentration camps are special camps _____ where Jews and others were worked to death or murdered.

Appendix C: Constructed-response Assessment

Topic: World War II

Student _____

Type of text _____

Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. Write your responses on the lined paper that has been provided.

1. Cause-effect: Identify an event that led to World War II and a result, or effect, of the war.
2. On what side of the war did the United States join?
3. Who was the president of the United States during this war?
4. Name a leader of the Allies.
5. Name a leader of the Axis Powers.
6. What do you think Anne Frank meant when she said, "It's a wonder that I haven't abandoned all my ideals; they seem so absurd and impractical?"
7. What were concentration camps?
8. Do you feel that the atomic bomb was justified as a means to end the war against Japan? Support your opinions with facts that you read in the text.

Appendix D: Brief Constructed Response Rubric

Western County School System

3 points: The response demonstrates an understanding of the complexities of the text.

- ✓ Addresses the demands of the question
- ✓ Effectively uses text-based and/or text relevant information to clarify and extend understanding

2 points: The response demonstrates a general understanding of the text.

- ✓ Partially addresses the demands of the question
- ✓ Uses text-based and/or text-relevant information to show understanding

1 point: The response demonstrates minimal understanding of the text.

- ✓ Minimally addresses the demands of the question
- ✓ Uses minimal information to show some understanding of the text in relation to the question

0 points: The response is completely incorrect, irrelevant to the question, or missing.

- ✓ Text-based: coming directly from the text
- ✓ Text-relevant: having a bearing on or connection to the text

THE PROMISE OF AN ALTERNATE PERSPECTIVE: VIEWING *STRUGGLING* *READERS* THROUGH A SOCIO- CULTURAL RESEARCH LENS

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Abstract

This paper provides a review of empirical research published in the last decade that focuses on struggling readers. We analyze and synthesize this research with a specific focus on studies with a socio-cultural and situated view of reading disability. We report key differences in research addressing reading disability from a deficit skills perspective from those that approach students' learning as broad-based and influenced by students' cultural and experiential learning and social aspects of learning. We describe specific interventions addressed by researchers, their impact on students' performance, and conditions supporting or inhibiting that impact.

This paper presents an analysis and synthesis of empirical literature published in the last decade (2000) that focuses on struggling readers. This review is particularly timely given the renewed attention to struggling readers by policy makers during the last decade (e.g., NCLB, 2002; US Dept of Education, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), 2004) and educational programming influenced by government sponsored reviews of research (e.g., National Reading Panel Report, 2000).

Outcomes of these federally funded efforts are typically associated with a skills-based approach to educating students with reading problems in ways that

“fill in the gaps” of students’ deficiencies. Despite national efforts to implement powerful instruction, Gamse, Jacob, Horst, Boulay, & Unlu, (2009) describe limited reading achievement gains in Reading First Schools. Findings of limited impact on students’ gains mirror a history of little evidence supporting remedial programs on students’ progress (e.g., Carter, 1984; Slavin, 1991).

Conceptualizing the Review

Historically, a range of ideologies has affected research on instruction of struggling readers. The construct of reading disabilities has been associated with deficit ideologies that locates reading problems in the “deficiencies” of children and their families, and is often associated with children of color, living in poverty, and who may also be recent immigrants (Valencia, 1997, 2000). Valencia and Black (2002) argue that diversity is viewed often through a deficit lens and thus, disability is attributed to a lack of motivation, cognitive abilities, and a cultural history that codes students as “different” from norms set by school expectations. Nieto (1999) explains that some educators believe students are “walking sets of deficiencies” (p. 85). Such a perspective is associated with instruction that is compensatory (Nocol & Cole, 2009) or remedial, teaching to the deficits those skills that students “lack.” We expected this paradigm to be most prevalent in the set of studies reviewed.

Additionally, we anticipated finding a small set of studies with a socio-cultural and situated view of reading *disability*. The perspective of “struggling readers” as competent learners is particularly important for countering low teacher expectations, commonly associated with students experiencing reading problems. Socio-cultural theorists argue that an understanding of students’ reading abilities and *disabilities* requires a careful study of students’ in and out of school experiences and how such experiences mediate their literacy learning, identities as readers and writers, and interests and motivations (Cummins, 2007; Lee, 2008; Moll, 1997). Rather than viewing knowledge and literacy learning as individual traits, meaning is negotiated by histories of experiences, interests, and learning (Gutierrez & Lee, 2009).

Educators can function within a culture of disability, too quick to judge disability and too slow to consider alternatives including historical and cultural perspectives (McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006). Yet the struggling reader literature has a long history of associating reading difficulties with specific student “limitations” that result in labeling students as slow learners, reading disabled, mildly handicapped, or learning disabled (McGill-Franzen, 1987; Walmsley & Allington, 1995). Recently, these labels have been contested because they were constructed within school settings (ignoring students’ world knowledge or out-of-school learning) and place educational and social limitations upon students (i.e., teachers’ perceptions of their abilities as reflected on accountability measures of assessment and response to curricular programs).

Hence, it follows that optimal instruction builds on students' social and cultural knowledge and experiences while also building new knowledge and skills (Spencer, 2009; Triplett, 2007).

This paper is organized to present our review methodology, findings describing demographic characteristics of the studies and interpretive patterns derived from analysis of the research, critique of the research, limitations of our review, contributions we derived from the research, and conclusions.

Review Methodology

We conducted our review with the following procedures.

Delineating Selection Criteria for Empirical Studies

We included published empirical, peer-reviewed research articles that represent different methodological paradigms. The 2000-2010 period was chosen as it was deemed important because of a perceived "struggling reader crisis" associated with an increasing number of ethnic minorities and children of poverty in schools making evident an achievement gap in reading between minority and majority students (Aud, Hussar, Planty, Synder, Bianco, Fox, Frohlich, Kemp, & Drake, 2010; Lutkus, Rampey & Donahue, 2006).

The analysis focused on instruction and/or assessment. Further, we referred to quality criteria (i.e., provision of clear argument linking theory and research; applied rigorous, systematic, and objective methodology; claims that are substantiated by methodologies) implemented by Risko, Roller, Cummins, Bean, Block, Anders, and Flood (2008) and identified in the Education Sciences Reform Act (Eisenhart & Towne, 2003) to influence our inclusion of papers in our final pool for the review.

First, we established that a clear argument linked theory and/or previous research and a chain of reasoning was evident linking research questions, methodology, and findings. Second, we expected to find adequate details of methodologies to accept claims of findings and implications. More specifically, we expected that qualitative studies would provide sufficient information about their internal and external controls with clear documentation of data collection and data analysis procedures, and sufficient information to connect data analysis to substantiate claims. For the quantitative studies, we expected to find how validity and reliability were established for measures, sufficient description of treatments, and clear explanation of data points and analysis.

Conducting a Comprehensive Search of Databases

We conducted a series of electronic searches using databases established by ERIC and Marquette University, which included PsycINFO. Our search terms were reading difficulties, struggling readers, elementary education (1st-4th grade), middle school education, preschool-12 education, classroom techniques or classroom instruction, low-income literacy + struggling readers, or regular

classroom instruction, intervention (large group, 1-1, classroom), or special education. Next, applying identical search terms, we completed manual searches of recent journals that were not yet included in available databases.

Identifying Set of Papers Meeting Criteria

We read abstracts and identified a final set of 36 empirical papers that met our established criteria, 33 original research and three critical reviews that included two meta-analysis papers. We eliminated theoretical papers, book chapters, and unpublished papers. The critical analyses papers, including the two meta-analysis studies, met our criteria and were used to corroborate overall patterns.

Establishing Methods for Data Analysis

We applied an inductive paradigmatic analysis process (Polkinghorne, 1995) to analyze the set of studies that included a mix of research methodologies. Specifically, 19 (53%) papers employed a quantitative methodology; 14 (39%) applied qualitative methods; and 3 (8%) were critical reviews.

We followed an analytical-inductive paradigmatic analysis with semantic analysis to derive categories and axial coding to elaborate on, cross-reference, and integrate categories that we derived from our analysis. Our first analytical task was to identify and generate categories by classifying details (theoretical stances, research questions, procedures, demographics, methodology, findings, and implications) represented in each study and forming networks of concepts out of the data. The authors read and reread the studies and developed detailed synopses of each that included the explicit coherence of logic between theoretical or conceptual arguments, data collection and analysis, results, and implications. We generated connections between the studies identifying “successive layers of inferential glue” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 238) to derive and verify conceptual networks guiding the set of empirical papers. Our last step of inductive paradigmatic analyses involved verifying patterns across the entire set of studies using a coding matrix that recorded patterns and instances of occurrence. We then generated written descriptions of these patterns.

Findings

We begin by describing the general and demographic characteristics of the works reviewed. Next, we discuss interpretive patterns for two groupings of the studies. There were 30 studies guided by cognitive and constructivist learning perspectives and six studies with a socio-cultural and situated theoretical framework.

Descriptive Characteristics of Studies

Twenty-five of the 36 research studies (69%) were published from 2006 to 2010. Sixteen studies (44%) appeared in literacy journals (e.g., *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Reading and Writing Quarterly*); 10

studies (28%) appeared in special education journals (e.g., *The Journal of Special Education*); 8 studies (22%) appeared in general education journals (e.g., *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *The Journal of Educational Research*), and 2 studies (6%) were published in administration/policy journals (e.g., *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*). Seventy-four percent of the studies were conducted in urban settings, 12 % in rural settings, and the remaining 14 % in a mix of urban, rural, and/or suburban settings. One study was conducted outside the U. S., in India (Manjula, Saraswathi, Prakash, & Ashalatha, 2009).

Twenty-six studies (72%) were conducted in early childhood/elementary classrooms, six studies (17%) were conducted in a middle and high school classrooms, and one study (3%) was in K-12 classrooms. The remaining three studies (8%) were conducted with teachers in elementary settings and with preservice teachers.

Seven researchers made explicit their cognitive or constructive theoretical stance, such as the use of technology for self-directed learning (Blackowicz, Bates, Berne, Bridgman, Chaney, & Perney, 2009) or strategy instruction (Cantrell, Almasi, Carter, Rintamaa, & Madden, 2010), and concept-oriented instruction (Duffy & Atkinson, 2001); 17 studies did not state their theoretical orientation, but followed a pattern of identifying a “problem” area that contributed to the reading difficulty (e.g. lack of attention, Wolcott, Scheemaker, & Bielski, 2010) and students who were considered ill-prepared for early literacy instruction (Burke, Hagan-Burke, Kwok, & Parker, 2009). Often researchers who did not state theoretical orientation referenced previous research supporting the importance of the targeted areas, such as fluency (Marr, Algozzine, Kavel, & Dugan, 2010); word study elements (Pullen, Lane, Lloyd, Nowak & Ryals, 2005; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Kouzekanani, Bryant, Dickson, & Blozis, 2003), and multi-components of word learning (Wanzek, Wexler, Vaughn, & Ciullo, 2010). Or researchers examined the effects of commercial programs on students learning, such as Kim (2010) who examined *Read 180* (Hasselbring & Goin, 2004) and McDaniel, Ducahaine, and Joivette (2010) who analyzed effects of *Corrective Reading*, and cited previous support of these programs. Two studies were influenced by theories related to the importance of students’ perceptions and attitudes, such as asking students to draw perceptions of their reading instruction (Chapman, Greenfield, & Rinaldi, 2010) and perceptions of correct answers (Spencer, 2009); two described an engagement and generative theoretical framework, such as students’ involvement in high and low challenging tasks (Miller, 2003) and students’ use of critical stance (Rozansky, & Aagesen, 2010); and six were socio-cultural, examining multiple situational factors such as parent support and cultural approaches to instruction (Orelus & Hills, 2010), and impact of peer culture on girls’ selection of texts (Graff, 2009). Almost all studies reported using traditional means, achievement tests, to identify students who were at least “two years below grade level” (Cantrell

et al., 2010), reading significantly below grade level (Yagdegarı & Ryan, 2002), or lowest achieving 20% in class (McIntyre, Petrosko, Jones, Powell, Powers, Bright, & Newsome 2005; McIntyre, Rightmyer, & Petrosko, 2008; Rightmyer, McIntyre, & Petrosko, 2006).

Studies Guided by Cognitive/Constructivist Perspectives: Patterns

We derived several patterns in our analysis of the 28 studies guided by a cognitive and/or constructivist perspective. First, approximately half of these studies had a deficit view of students (i.e., had gaps in their knowledge background, students came to school ill-prepared to be successful in reading and writing instruction). Several researchers designed their word study interventions based on their identification of lack of phonic knowledge (e.g., Brown, Morris, & Field, 2009; Chard, & Kameneui, 2000; Lane, Pullen, Hudson, & Konold, 2009).

Second, within the intervention studies, there was a positive trend for students learning within the designed interventions. Most students learned at least some of the targeted skills and strategies some of the time. Yet all intervention studies reported mixed findings (e.g. varied student success; small sample size impacting credibility of generalization from studies). In the Cantrell et al. (2010) study, for example, sixth grade students benefited from strategy instruction, as measured by comprehension measures; ninth graders in the same treatment did not. The Blachowicz et al. (2009) study showed that computerized practice benefited students' spelling development but not their phonics-related skills as measured by the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment tool.

Third, several researchers recognized that reading problems are complex and influenced by multiple factors and contextual circumstances concluding that their instruction alone was insufficient for ameliorating the targeted reading problems. Rightmyer, McIntyre, and Petrosko (2006) concluded that situation-specific factors, including instructional time and students' instructional history, influence students' word learning and that those programs alone can't account for performance. Walcott and colleagues (2010) concluded that the identification of attention problems is insufficient for predicting reading problems (e.g., students with attention problems varied in their reading abilities, some succeeding despite attention problems). They indicated that additional information and more complex research designs are required to account for multiple factors, such as instructional context, students' social economic status (SES), and students' out-of-school literacy experiences that might be mutually enabling or disabling.

A fourth pattern addressed teacher knowledge. According to the International Reading Association, all children have a right to be instructed by teachers who are knowledgeable about the reading process and supplementary reading instruction must be provided by teachers who possess this knowledge (IRA, 2000). McCutchen, Green, Abbott and Sanders (2009) found that teachers'

linguistic knowledge was related to improvement in student reading achievement. Triplett (2007) reported that teachers who were confident in working with struggling readers had master's degrees with additional coursework in reading. Knowledgeable teachers may also provide needed background information to increase the effectiveness of support staff in tutoring struggling readers. Para-professionals who tutored struggling first grade students under the supervision of reading teachers were found to be almost as effective as certified classroom teachers (Brown, Morris, & Fields, 2009).

Fifth, acquisition of teacher knowledge at the preservice level was explored. Well-planned literacy coursework combined with a supervised field experience has the potential of increasing teacher knowledge at this level. In a quantitative study of prospective special education teachers enrolled in a language arts course, Spear-Swerling (2009) found that the preservice teachers had inaccurate perceptions of their knowledge to teach struggling readers and of specific phonemic awareness and phonics skills (e.g., graphophonemic segmentation, syllable types, irregular words, morpheme segmentation). The preservice teachers' knowledge increased as they completed a supervised field experience tutoring second grade students while concurrently enrolled in a language arts methods course. Duffy and Atkinson (2001) also reported increased teacher knowledge associated with tutoring.

Sixth, the need to motivate struggling readers was another pattern observed in the studies examined. Researchers investigated the types of tasks, and family practices that motivated struggling readers. Miller (2003) found that teachers could be taught to create and use high challenging tasks to motivate and increase the learning of students who struggle. Parent involvement and education were identified as key elements of reading intervention provided for parents of children with reading and writing difficulties in India. The need for parent education was derived from the finding that 39 percent of the parents were not involved in their children's studies compared to 60 percent of the parents of children without reading and writing difficulties who were involved (Manjula et al., 2009). Hughes and Kwok (2007) reported that positive parent-teacher relationships were associated with positive student achievement and increased engagement. And Kim (2006) documented the importance of summer interventions for enhancing students' reading performance.

Seventh, several studies explored the effectiveness of instruction in small group or one-to-one instructional settings. D'Agostino, and Murphy (2004) found that 36 studies of Reading Recovery, an early one-to-one intervention program for low-achieving first grade students, had positive program effects. Mathes, Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, Francis, & Schatschneider (2005) investigated whether either small-group supplementary instruction, based on a behavioral or cognitive theory, coupled with research-based reading instruction was more effective than research-based reading instruction alone. They found

that the quality of classroom reading instruction and both types of interventions reduced the levels of literacy problems of a wide range of first grade readers in urban schools. Mathes et al. concluded that supplementary interventions should be based upon a comprehensive and integrated instructional approach and that both schools and teachers should be given latitude in choosing appropriate approaches to supplemental instruction. Their recommendation for small group instruction is supported by O'Shaughnessy & Swanson (2000) who found that second grade students made significant gains in phonological awareness, word identification skills, and oral reading fluency during small group intervention programs.

Studies with Socio-Cultural Framework: Patterns

Six papers were guided explicitly by a social cultural framework. These six papers were authored by Klingner, Artiles, and Barletta (2006); Orelus and Hills (2010); Poole (2008); Santamaria (2009); Spencer (2009), and Triplett (2007).

As stated in our introduction we need to have a greater understanding of the extent to which these students are a product of their social environment and cultural histories. It is then and only then that effective classroom literacy instruction and practices, and school-based interventions can build upon students' funds of knowledge generated from their home literacy practices and used as resources for implementing instruction and interventions that seek to create students' identities as lifelong readers and writers.

Researchers in this set distinguished a deficit view of struggling readers from a broader view of learners. They considered factors such as, instruction, curriculum, and teacher beliefs as possible influences on the identified reading problems, disabusing the notion that reading problems were associated with the individual characteristics of the students and their cognitive abilities or learning habits. Klingner et. al (2006) discussed problems with assessment tools (i.e., limitations in analysis of students' performance in first language vs. school language, inadequately distinguishing speech-language impairment from new language to perform in school). They argued that fewer language support programs are available for ELLs, identified as learning disabled, making it virtually impossible to know if the problem was lack of instruction or a language/learning impairment.

In a later study, Orelus and Hills (2010) provided a case study examination of a special education bilingual (Spanish and English) student, Angel, to trace his academic achievement when literacy instruction optimizes his abilities, self-motivation, and parental support. Angel's teachers took advantage of his multimodal abilities (i.e., drawings with print) to encourage him to represent his understandings when writing texts. Further, they noted and responded to his ability to represent his world knowledge to make relevant content he was learning during thematic instruction and his higher engagement when material was of high interest and relevant to his experiences. Teachers used miscue analysis to identify Angel's language cues and strategies as he read noting the influence of his rich language history on decoding complicated, multisyllabic words (that

were easier for him than monosyllabic words) and his ability to retell simple plots. They concluded that accounting for Angel's abilities and resources helped teachers identify Angel as an "achiever" and that the instruction that followed supported his achievement.

Poole (2008) documented a pervasive pattern of differentiation of responses to struggling readers in heterogeneous reading groups, despite school efforts to offer equitable and balanced support to readers with varied histories with reading success. Poole observed that struggling readers' amount of participation was diminished during heterogeneous group meetings with these students receiving far more multiple corrections during oral reading, shortened turns at reading, few opportunities for wait time and opportunities for self corrections, and teacher interruptions during oral reading followed by teacher requests to "good" readers to help those who were judged to be making errors or having difficulty.

All researchers in this set of six papers argue that the struggling reader label is socially constructed, as discussed specifically by Triplett (2007) and students realize that they are treated differently and teachers hold lower expectations for their performance (Spencer, 2009; Triplett, 2007). This differential treatment was evidenced in research by Triplett who found that socioeconomic status was the main cultural difference between successful readers and students identified as struggling readers. Based upon the social circumstances of struggling readers, teachers tended to form negative assumption about parents not fulfilling their responsibility for their children's well-being, and pitied students for their life circumstances. Moreover, Triplett noted that teacher differences in teaching and assessing struggling readers resulted in early identification for reading intervention. Placement in the intervention program affected students' social status at school because students assigned to intervention had limited opportunities to interact with other children. Thus, their friendships and opportunities to interact with other children were socially confined to students with similar difficulties and circumstances.

Inattention to the social knowledge and cultural knowledge of a first grade student, Kenny, was identified in research by Spencer (2009). While Kenny's knowledge of words, understanding of text, and literate practices of interacting with books and participating in interactions with others in discussing texts were valued in his balanced literacy classroom, they were not recognized in his intervention classroom. In this setting, Kenny was unresponsive when asked recall questions or questions requiring explicit responses modeled by the paraprofessional charged with implementing the mandated scripted reading program used for intervention. Consequently, his lack of demonstrated knowledge led to his classification as a struggling reader and determined the type of instruction that he received.

These six papers took a broad view of learning and educating. There is a careful tracing of instruction, teacher-student interactions, teacher and student beliefs, and the combined use of culturally responsive and differentiated instruc-

tion. Researchers document carefully the possibilities of providing appropriate and intense instruction, the positive trends in outcomes of such instruction, and the problems associated with instruction that marginalizes students' participation and learning (e.g. over-corrective behaviors during oral reading as documented by Poole, 2008; scripted instruction of Kenny documented by Spencer, 2009).

This broader view of learners takes blame away from the learner, or that reading problems lie within the individual and considers the broader context – examining how students' background experiences, language history, and culture may not be addressed within instruction. Klingner and her colleagues (2006) were alarmed that few researchers consider the intersection of learning, language background, race, and disability when identifying ELLs as learning disabled. This results in operationalizing a narrow view of assessments and instruction, relying only on performance measures that examine student traits alone.

Individualized instruction from a socio-cultural perspective is addressed in all six papers—advocating for intensive and sustained instruction, with access to content, with two-way interactions with students' generative learning, with culturally relevant pedagogy. Santamaria's (2009) five years of research led her to conclude that there is common ground between culturally responsive instruction and differentiated instruction and that these touch points (e.g., clarifying and teaching key academic concepts, balance between teacher and student selected tasks) offer potentially optimal forms of instruction for struggling readers, being both responsive to cultural histories and experiences and to individual differences. Yet research must continue to help us understand more fully the tensions associated with merging these two perspectives in every-day instruction and tracing outcomes. Achieving equitable and appropriate individualized instruction is difficult to achieve (Poole, 2008) as it is too easy for teachers to step into routines that are comfortable and that privilege students viewed as "successful".

All six papers call for enhanced teacher preparation. These papers provide budding indicators of what is possible to improve instruction. Santamari (2009) analyzed schools that were beating the odds by implementing either a differentiated form of instruction or culturally relevant instruction. She concludes that the merging of these two perspectives would be optimal for addressing both diversity and individual differences; yet her vision remains untested. Even with best intentions, good plans for instruction can go awry when implemented in classrooms by teachers who are ill-prepared for novel methodologies (Poole, 2008). Thus, there is a need for enhanced professional development for teachers to address issues such as ability grouping (Poole) and applying culturally responsive differentiated instruction (Santamaria).

Critique of the Research

From our analysis of the design and quality of research included in our review, we identified the following strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

Well-defined theoretical constructs. A majority of researchers considered theoretical constructs supporting their work (i.e., the majority of studies guided by a behavioral or constructivist theoretical framework) and researchers in all studies argued for their research questions by drawing on previous research. Researchers rarely traced historical impact or provided contrastive perspectives on their arguments, but we attribute this finding, partly, to page constraints of journals where authors are publishing. Approximately 12 studies focused on instruction of word study skills and/or fluency and they grounded their work in the findings reported by the National Reading Panel; for them, their reporting of an evidential base and history of such work began with the NRP.

Conversely, several researchers grounded their work in carefully documented and well-defined theoretical constructs. For example, Orelus and Hills (2010) provided an elegant argument for advancing cultural lenses on students' learning. They located their work in theories of co-constructed learning within social contexts by explicating a broad set of perspectives (e.g., anthropological, cultural contexts, language and procedural displays during teaching interactions) that deepened their rationale for advancing the use of students' knowledge and experiences as resources for instruction of a special education bilingual and to defy labels of disability.

Systematic data collection methods. Eight studies employed a case study methodology, single subject design, micro-ethnographies, and/or mixed designs that afforded systematic observations of instruction and providing a tracing of student performance over time, allowing for a richer understanding of how students are participating the instruction, their trajectories, the difficulties students experienced and how instruction was modified in response. For example, the mixed methods used by Blachowicz et al.(2009) provide greater depth in understanding how and why teachers and students found that the use of literacy technology positively impacted classroom instruction and student achievement. Teachers' perceptions about the perceived transfer of learning from technology use to the content presented in class lessons and their enthusiasm about the use of technology were captured in their own words and based upon thoughtful reflection about their students' learning and the teachers' instructional practices. Students' comments, coupled with their achievement scores, were just as informative in revealing students' developing understanding of letter sounds and the English language.

Weaknesses

Generalizability. The small number of students (mean = 158) included overall in the instructional investigations limits generalizability of findings from the set as a whole or from individual studies. The number of students participating in the investigations ranged from 1 to 655, with fewer than 100 students per study in 63% of the studies. Seventeen percent of the studies included 400 to 655 students.

Duration. The duration for implementation of instruction was brief, severely limiting drawing any conclusions about long-term impact of instruction. Thirty-one percent of the studies were conducted during two months or less (with three studies conducted in one day). Additionally, 38% of the studies were conducted between 2 to 7 months, 22% in one academic year, and 9% for two years. Furthermore, the researchers did not consider the issue of time as problematic and did not explain what they expected students to learn when involved in two months vs. two years of instruction.

Completeness of reporting. Although all studies met criteria for inclusion in our review, there was variability in the reporting of details about instructional routines, contextual factors, and data analysis. Almost all studies would have been enhanced with more detailed descriptions of this information.

Assessment. Assessment problems were apparent in many studies. Rarely were multiple measures used to collect data. Some studies relied on teacher or parent self report data alone (with these data not triangulated with other forms of data), or tests of reading development were single measures and in the word study investigations, students read pseudowords to meet criterion of achievement.

Demographics of student populations. Almost all studies reported sufficient information on ethnicity and race, and percentages of students (at the school level, not specific to students in the studies) eligible for free or reduced payments for lunch. However, 86% of the researchers did not address cultural differences, rural and urban settings, and/or SES levels in their instructional work. Instead, they treated instruction as “business as usual,” focusing on perceived or identified deficits and skill needs. Researchers did not attend to students’ history, culture, personal goals or funds of knowledge in ways that could provide a responsive and/or individualized approach to instruction. Overall, there was a need for a more complex approach to instruction, one that views learning as situated and influenced by social and cultural ways of knowing, and attends to multiple student and learning context characteristics.

Limitations

Our review has several limitations. Studies were used that were published from 2000 to 2010, and included studies examining instruction and/or assessment of students with reading disabilities. Only one study was conducted outside the U.S. A broader review of international databases would be warranted for a more comprehensive analysis. Most of the studies involved early childhood/elementary settings.

The strengths and weaknesses of these papers yield few conclusions that are different from earlier reviews of struggling readers (Allington, 2011, Lysynchuk, Pressley, D’Ailly, Smith, & Cake, 1989; Pressley and Allington, 1999, Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998, Troia, 1999). Most would have benefited from a more detailed explanation of methodological procedures and audit trail from

data analysis to conclusions to assure that rigorous and systematic methods were used. These studies had brief durations and too few students to derive generalizations for instruction that can make long-term differences. This pattern of brief duration and small student numbers has limited the impact of struggling readers' research for at least three decades and unfortunately characterizes much of the research we reviewed.

Contributions

We conclude by identifying contributions of this review. First, as we described above, a small set of studies explicate how socio-cultural theories of learning and teaching can be actualized in the classroom when teaching students who historically have been labeled as reading or learning disabled. They indicate explicitly how these theories can be taken to practice in the classroom and circumvent the labels of disability that often disrupt students' identities and achievement. For example, Poole (2008) and Triplett (2007) documented carefully inequitable teaching practices and drew specific implications for adjusting instruction to support students and attend to social and cultural knowledge, while Santamaria (2009) and Orelus and Hills (2010) provided detailed accounts of how co-constructed learning opportunities and culturally responsive instruction can motivate and enable students to achieve while building on students' language and skill strengths and teaching new knowledge and needed skills.

Second, we identified areas of instructional directions (e.g., comprehension strategy instruction, use of computer-based materials to support specific skill learning) that hold promise for additional research, and the call made by several researchers to consider students' history of performance, parental and peer support, and their world knowledge when planning instruction, and to measure carefully and with multiple measures students' responsiveness to instruction over time (Mathes et al, 2005; McIntyre, Petrosko, Jones, Powell, Powers, Bright, & Newsome, 2005; McIntyre, Rightmyer, & Petrosko, 2008).

Third, teacher knowledge and confidence in teaching abilities was enhanced by carefully supervised fieldwork by methods instructors for prospective teachers, and high knowledge teachers (e.g., those with advanced education and degrees in teaching reading) are more confident about their own ability to teach struggling readers (Spear-Swerling, 2009; Triplett, 2007). Similar findings were reported by Risko et al (2008).

Conclusions

At least half of the studies reviewed approached instruction with the goal to teach to struggling readers' skill needs, and this goal for instruction had moderate success. Most students within these studies learned some of the targeted skills and strategies at least some of the time. Overall, findings from these instructional

studies were mixed and researchers documented conditions contributing to their findings.

In the last decade, a socio-cultural perspective influenced a small number of published studies. Those studies offered an alternative view of struggling readers, a viewpoint that does not seem to have taken hold by the majority of researchers in our pool. These studies offer a promising vision for transforming the *struggling reader* construct, a vision that thinks of reading development as situated and influenced by both the individual and the lived history of that individual.

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TUTORING AND MENTORING: THE RESULTS OF AN *AMERICA READS* PROGRAM ON STRUGGLING READERS’ MOTIVATION AND ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract

The association between motivation and student achievement is well documented and suggests that engaged readers can overcome traditional obstacles to reading achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). The current study builds on previous research exploring tutoring programs as interventions designed to increase reading motivation and text comprehension (Ehri, Dreyer, Flugman, & Gross, 2007; Vadasy, Sanders, & Abbot, 2008) and describes an America Reads tutoring program for struggling readers in Grades 1 through 3. The Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) and Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) were used to assess students before and after the tutoring intervention. Findings showed a significant increase in MRP scores for students in Grades 1 and 3 with a significant increase in self-concept scores for boys. Additionally, there was a significant increase in QRI scores across students, with a significant increase posted in implicit response scores for students in Grades 1 and 2. Results and implications are discussed.

“I-think-I-can. I-think-I-can. I-think-I-can...” This famous statement from the classic children’s tale of *The Little Engine that Could* (Jacobs, 1910) embodies the story of a small train, that although slight by stature, had the motivation and

determination to beat the odds and chug over the top of a mountain to save the day and deliver toys to eager children. This timeless story is loved by generations for many reasons, including its message of persistence and motivation as a means to accomplishing goals. The relationship between motivation and the little blue engine's success in this literary work provides a succinct and eloquent example of what a growing body of scientific evidence has come to reveal: a similar relationship exists between student motivation and reading achievement. The following discussion outlines studies that have demonstrated the relationship between motivation and successful learning (specifically, a learner's active engagement with text and reading achievement) and shares new data to support relationships and the promise of tutoring interventions.

The relationship between motivation and learning has been historically documented through lenses of behaviorism, humanism, cognitive psychology, and social-cognitive theoretical perspectives (Ames, 1992; Atkinson, 1964; Bandura, 1977, 1982; Eccles, Adler, Futterman, Goff, Kaezala, Meece, & Midgley, 1983; Maslow, 1943; Skinner, 1953; Watson, 1913); yet it is still ripe for study as the current understanding of the relationship provides researchers with more questions than answers. Motivation and learning are multifaceted and intertwined. Whether examining the role of motivation in learning through extrinsic motivation, deficiency needs, attributions, goal orientations, or self-perceptions of values, utility, and expected outcomes, the importance of motivation to learning is well supported.

The significance of motivation to learning, with regards to reading achievement, is accented in research which suggests that the correlation between engaged reading and reading comprehension achievement is greater than the correlation between reading comprehension and other demographic characteristics, such as gender, income, or ethnicity (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Guthrie and Wigfield's findings indicated that children from low-income and low-education family backgrounds, but who were highly engaged readers, substantially outscored students who came from high-education and high-income family backgrounds, but were less engaged readers; suggesting that self-directed motivation to engage in literary activities could outweigh well-documented hindrances to successful reading achievement. Learners' internal motivation may contribute to building of elaborated schemas and more effective use of cognitive retrieval systems, thus providing resources to overcome traditional barriers to effective reading achievement (Brophy, 1999).

More recent research conducted by Applegate & Applegate (2010) suggest students who are motivated to read are more thoughtful readers, particularly with respect to text comprehension. These results are not surprising, as it is understood that good readers enjoy reading more and are therefore more likely to engage in literacy activities, which in turn improves their reading. Referred to as the Matthew Effect, the positive spiral of student achievement, motivation,

and value of reading can be a positive and beneficial cycle (Stanovich, 1986). Unfortunately, the opposite cycle can also exist for poor readers. As students become more cognizant of their struggles with reading, they often become more hesitant and less motivated to engage in reading activities, consequently limiting opportunities to become better, more confident readers. The challenge remains to explore the relationship between motivation and student achievement in programs designed to change negative student trajectories of reading performance through purposeful interventions.

One program intervention that has received considerable attention is tutoring. The tutor-tutee ratio and individual attention that can be given to specific student needs in such a setting make tutoring an attractive intervention. During the past two decades, a number of tutoring program interventions designed to increase reading motivation and text comprehension have been explored (Ehri, Dreyer, Flugman, & Gross, 2007; Vadasy, Sanders, & Abbot, 2008; Wasik, 1998). Tutoring programs vary in type and procedures, including guidelines for student eligibility, characteristics of tutors (i.e. peer vs. adult), program oversight and coordination, overall program description, training of tutors, and time of day students receive assistance. Wasik's (1998) review of volunteer tutoring programs found that regardless of the variation in adult tutoring programs, four overall emergent themes prevailed regarding a program's success: (a) whether or not the program had a coordinator who was trained in reading instruction, (b) tutoring sessions that provided reading opportunities in both familiar and new books, activities that emphasized word analysis and letter-sound relationships, writing activities, and ensuring active engagement of the child in the learning process, (c) intensive volunteer training and/or highly structured lesson materials, and (d) coordination between tutoring and classroom instruction.

The primary goal of the current study was to explore enhancement of student motivation and reading achievement for struggling readers enrolled in an *America Reads* program. *America Reads* programs are federally funded programs initiated by President Clinton in 1996. The intended charge of the *America Reads Challenge* was to ensure that every child in the United States would be an independent and skilled reader by the end of Grade 3. Research suggests that students who are not reading on grade level by third grade have a greater chance of dropping out before high school graduation (e.g., Lloyd, 1978), emphasizing the importance to provide intentional and appropriate interventions for young students. By 2000, over 1,400 universities participated in the *America Reads* program (*America Reads Challenge*, n.d.). Within the design of the program, undergraduate students tutor struggling readers, providing the young learners individualized opportunities to read and learn.

Considering the established bodies of research mentioned above pertaining to tutoring, motivation, and reading achievement, our research specifically addressed the question: Can an *America Reads* program support struggling

readers in becoming more engaged and proficient readers? In order to answer this question, we must first describe: (a) the theoretical framework grounding this study, (b) elements present in the current *America Reads* program, and (c) methods for data collection and analysis.

Theoretical Perspective

This study is guided by the social-cognitive theories focusing on Vygotsky's (1978) learning theory and Eccles and colleagues' (1983, 2002) expectancy-value theory in conjunction with Pressley and colleagues' (1992) cognitive-based Transactional Strategies Approach. Vygotsky's learning theory stresses the use of teaching strategies that include: modeling, scaffolding, and progress through an individual learner's zone of proximal development. Tutors in this study implemented the premises outlined in this theory through purposeful read-alouds, shared readings, and book introductions. Instruction was based on individual reading levels indicated by instructional level scores from the Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 (QRI; Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). Eccles and colleagues' (1983, 2002) expectancy-value model of reading provides a framework for explaining motivational changes in the subjects and how those changes might relate to gains in their reading achievement as a result of the tutoring program. In the expectancy-value theoretical framework, a learner's motivation to complete a task is dependent on the learner's perceived *expectancy* to succeed at the task combined with the perceived *value* of the attributed task. Tutors in the study may have heightened motivation by providing explicit instructional support and aids that fostered subjects' expectancy of success, and by anchoring personal relevance to the task through personal choice and specific examples of perceived value (Brophy, 2004; Cunningham & Allington, 1999; Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGoldrick, & Kurita, 1989; Pressley, El-Dinary et al., 1992; Schiefele, 1991; Spaulding, 1992). Tutors measured changes in student motivation by administering a pre-and post- Motivation to Read Profile (MRP; Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzone, 1996).

Methods

The exploratory study employed a repeated measures (i.e., pre-post) design using a reading achievement measure and a reading motivation measure. Quantitative analyses assessed engaged student motivation and student performance of reading. Data were collected before and after elementary students participated in the *American Reads* tutoring program.

Setting

The tutoring program took place in an elementary school in the southeastern part of the United States. The school has over 750 students registered in

Kindergarten through fifth grade. The elementary school is considered to be in a prominently rural area and serves a diverse population of students, including those from low-economic and middle-class families. Thirty percent of the school population received free or reduced lunches. The school had recently seen an influx of students who are English language learners and students who are considered by traditional standards to be *at-risk*.

Participants

Elementary Students. Fifty-six students participated in the tutoring program. To be eligible for participation, students in Grades 1, 2, or 3 were referred by teachers based on Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) scores from the beginning of the academic year as well as in-class observations of student reading. Parents were provided with information about the program and the researchers obtained parental consent prior to allowing student to participate in the *America Reads* program and this current study. As expected in educational research, there was attrition among the participants as 11 students moved out of district or experienced schedule conflicts, and two students tested out of the program due to substantial academic improvement. Data were included in the study only for the students who participated for the duration of the intervention ($n = 43$) and included 21 students in Grade 3, 14 students in Grade 2, and 7 students in Grade 1. Sixty-eight percent of the students enrolled in the tutoring program were White, 15% were African American, 9% were Latino, and 2% were Asian. These numbers represented a similar proportion of the school's student demographics. At 65%, the majority of the elementary student participants were male.

Tutors. Tutors were undergraduate students recruited from a university near the elementary school. The tutors participated in a Federal work-study program and received pay for their work accordingly. The competitive nature of the program recruited undergraduate students from a variety of majors across departments. Approximately 80 applicants underwent an extensive interview process completed by the two co-directors of the *America Reads* program and a faculty member at the university. Undergraduate students with the highest application and interview ratings were asked to be tutors. Results of the interview process yielded 45 tutors who participated during the fall semester, with 36 continuing into the spring semester. From the total number of tutors ($n = 45$), 16% were male, 56% were White, 33% were Black, and 11% were Hispanic. Elementary students whose fall tutors did not participate in the spring semester were reassigned to a new tutor.

Description of *America Reads* Tutoring Program

In order to successfully scaffold and motivate struggling readers, tutors structured lessons that considered the multitude of factors involved in effective

reading comprehension (e.g., attention, prior knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary knowledge, fluency, inferencing skills), by providing explicit instruction on how to employ multiple strategies to extract meaning from text. According to Gambrell and Jawitz (1993), “Successful initiation and use of appropriate comprehension strategies depend on the reader’s awareness of specific strategies and the employment of these strategies to assure better comprehension” (p. 265). This statement aligns with research-based comprehension instruction reviews by Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGoldrick, and Kurita (1989) and Stahl (2004) which point to the need for explicit training of multiple methodological approaches in order to produce efficient, self-regulated comprehenders. Pressley, El-Dinary, and colleagues (1992) stressed the benefits of the “coordinated use of diverse strategies” (p. 256) in the teaching of reading comprehension through a Transactional Strategies Instruction approach. Tutors in the study were taught to implement this approach through modeling and scaffolding of various activities in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000).

Training

The tutors who were selected to participate in the *America Reads* program underwent seven, two-hour training sessions. The tutoring program employed tutors who reflect majors from across the university. Due to the diverse educational leadership skill of the tutors, the training served two purposes: first to instruct tutors in educational techniques associated with tutoring, and secondly to teach the tutors how structure instructional lessons in a purposeful setting. Research suggests that purposeful, well-structured tutoring sessions increase student achievement more than unstructured tutoring sessions (Cohen, Kulik, & Kulik, 1982; Wasik & Salvin, 1993).

The first two days of training consisted of required paperwork, introduction to the elementary school staff, and induction to the program with emphasis on the important role of the tutor. The third day of training was devoted to discussing the “Big 5” components of reading emphasized by the NRP (2000). These elements consisted of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. During this session, tutors were presented with specific examples of evidence-based activities they could implement that provided modeled and scaffolded instruction, as necessary, for the elementary students to become more effective readers. For example, tutors were taught to implement a Transactional Strategies Approach through explicit instruction of various research-based activities that encompassed each of the five areas outlined in the 2000 NRP report. Activities for each of the categories included, but were not limited to: phonemic awareness (e.g., rhymes and sound identification activities), phonics (e.g., word games, picture sorts, and word sorts), vocabulary (e.g., list-group labels and context clues), fluency (e.g., modeling and repeated readings), and comprehension (e.g., story maps and concept maps).

The fourth day of training focused on the importance of read-alouds, retelling techniques, and shared readings as modeling and scaffolding tools for helping students become more motivated and effective readers. In particular, it focused on how reading to and with children helps increase enjoyment of reading, expands their existing knowledge base, and teaches knowledge of how to flexibly employ a variety of cognitive skills (e.g., relationship between word sounds and written text, concepts of print, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension skills).

The fifth day of training centered on book introductions and lesson planning as they relate to helping children grow as readers. The session outlined specific procedures for effective book introductions (e.g., pointing out the title and author, picture walks, sounding out difficult words, and having the student make predictions) as well as examples of follow-up activities the tutor could plan for monitoring understanding (e.g., alternative endings, asking relevant comprehension questions, having the child illustrate their favorite part of the book).

The sixth and seventh days of training were devoted to instruction on administering the MRP as a motivation assessment and accurately identifying students' reading levels with the QRI. The timeline for administering both formal and informal reading and motivation assessments, as well as a review of expectations and response to tutor questions, were also the focus of the last two sessions.

University tutors and elementary readers were paired at the beginning of the academic school year. Tutors met twice a week, after school, for one-hour sessions with each student. Tutors were required to create structured lesson plans, based on a Reading Recovery format, for tutoring sessions. Structured lesson plan formats are available in Appendix A. Additionally, expert teachers who observed the tutoring sessions provided constructive feedback to the tutors.

Assessments

The elementary students were assessed in September, prior to the intervention, and again in April, after the completion of the tutor intervention. Data were collected using the MRP and the QRI.

Motivation to Read Profile. The MRP was developed by Gambrell and colleagues (1996) to assess two dimensions of reading motivation: self-concept as a reader and value of reading. The 20-item survey is a self-reported assessment that allows students to rate agreements of items on a four point rating scale. The MRP has established reliability and validity (e.g., Gambrell et al., 1996; Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy, & Igo, in press).

Qualitative Reading Inventory-4. The QRI is designed to provide information about the reading ability of the student based on miscue analysis and comprehension questions. The QRI consists of two sections: word identification and oral reading of passages along with comprehension questions that yield scores for explicit and implicit comprehension.

Results

Student Motivation

Results from a series of one-way repeated measure analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were evaluated to analyze the relationship in changes in student motivation and reading performance over time. Analysis of student scores on the MRP yielded a statistically significant increase in overall MRP scores for students in Grade 1 $F(1, 6) = 8.22, p < .05$, and Grade 3 $F(1, 20) = 4.91, p < .05$. Upon investigating the individual components of the MRP, statistical analysis indicated a significant increase for self-concept for students in Grade 1 $F(1, 6) = 15.86, p < .01$. The same analysis indicated no statistical difference on value of reading for students in Grades 1, 2, or 3. The means and standard deviations for student scores for the MRP are presented in Tables 1.

Table 1 - MRP Scores by Grade

Grade	Full Score		Self-concept Score	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
	M (SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)
1-3	72.95(13.60)	76.88(9.15)*	71.81(14.30)	77.84(9.54)**
1	69.14(15.34)	78.00(11.62)*	65.14(17.38)	9.86(11.23)**
2	75.21(15.21)	75.64(3.48)	72.57(16.23)	76.29(6.39)
3	72.57(12.54)	78.14(10.49)*	73.24(12.15)	78.81(10.69)

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Similar analyses were conducted to determine the effect of gender on changes in MRP scores. Significant differences were found in overall MRP scores $F(1, 29) = 6.44, p < .05$ and self-concept scores $F(1, 29) = 16.77, p < .01$ for males, but not females. Means and standard deviations can be found in Table 2.

Table 2 - MRP Score by Gender

Measure	Full Score		Self-concept Score	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
	M (SD)	M(SD)	M (SD)	M(SD)
Female	76.92(15.39)	77.62(8.39)	74.31(16.35)	73.38(9.63)
Male	71.23(12.63)	76.57(9.58)*	70.73(13.48)	79.77(8.98)**

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Reading Comprehension

Results from an ANOVA indicated a statistically significant increase from pre- to post-assessment on the total score for the QRI for students in Grade 1 $F(1, 6) = 7.56, p < .05$ and Grade 2 $F(1, 13) = 12.69, p < .01$. See Table 3 for means and standard deviations. Follow-up tests were conducted to analyze the separate QRI components (i.e., implicit and explicit comprehension) yielding a statistically significant increase on pre- to post- scores of implicit comprehension for students in Grade 1 $F(1, 6) = 29.54, p < .01$ and Grade 2 $F(1, 13) = 7.81, p < .05$, but no statistically significant increase for explicit comprehension of students in Grades 1, 2, or 3. Means and standard deviations for implicit comprehension scores by grade are available in Table 3.

Table 3 - QRI Scores

Measure	Pre	Post
	M (SD)	M(SD)
QRI-explicit	3.33 (1.48)	3.81 (0.76)
QRI-implicit	2.00 (1.46)	2.93 (1.14)**
Grade 1	0.29 (0.49)	2.57 (0.98)**
Grade 2	1.79 (1.25)	3.00 (1.11)*
Grade 3	2.81 (1.21)	3.10 (1.18)

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Limitations and Discussion

In this exploratory study the central question posed was: Can an *America Reads* program support struggling readers in becoming more engaged and proficient readers? Our results showed that an *American Reads* program supported and nurtured reading development and engagement of the struggling learners who participated in the program. However, it is important to note that this study was not designed to prove causality, but to provide a measurement of gains in student motivation and reading achievement as a means of adding to a growing body of research on tutoring programs (e.g., Applegate & Applegate, 2010). The researchers chose not to implement a quasi-experimental design due to the ethical considerations of withholding additional support (e.g., tutoring and supplementary instruction with evidence-supported interventions) from struggling learners who qualified for the program. This precedent has been set by previous researchers (DeFord, Pinnell, & Lyons, 1997; Farkas, 1996) and is applicable to the current study. While the study cannot draw definite conclusions of the effectiveness of the tutoring intervention compared to the absence of an intervention or a different intervention, it does provide an open forum for conversation and continued research. The study, therefore, provides us with a

measurement of gains in student motivation and reading achievement as a result of this particular *America Reads* tutoring program in conjunction with traditional instruction. It should also be noted that limitations include implementation at one school that employs quality teachers and fosters good instruction during traditional instructional time. The tutoring was supplemental for struggling learners and took place outside of regular classroom hours.

Research historically documents that the motivation of struggling readers decreases as students progress through school (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995; Guthrie & Anderson, 1999; Sperling & Head, 2002) and boys tend to be less motivated to read than girls (Gambrell & Marinak, 2010; McKenna et al., 1995), yet the motivation for students enrolled in the *America Reads* program increased from the beginning of the academic school year, with statistically significant increases for students in Grades 1 and 3. Notably, there were also statistically significant increases for boys, a finding that differs from normal trends. While the current research did not look at changes in motivation and reading achievement of a control group at the same school, it is with confidence that we share the increase of motivation and reading achievement of struggling readers enrolled in the *America Reads* program as a possible intervention in helping poor readers to escape the negative cycle of the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 1986).

It should be noted that the mean score for student motivation to read increased; however, upon deeper analysis, it was self-concept of student success, as opposed to the value of reading that yielded the largest increases, posting significant increase for students in 1st grade. This suggests the students' value of reading remained relatively consistent over the school year, but self-concept (i.e., perception of reading ability) increased. Essentially, the students thought they were better readers by the end of the year, a belief supported by student scores on the QRI, which was indicated by significant gains in posttest scores. This may be in part to the quality instruction received during the school day and the supplemental support of reading through the *America Reads* program.

When analyzing the effects of gender on student motivation, we found significant changes in self-concept and overall reading motivation for boys, but not girls. It has been documented by researchers that boys are more inclined to engage with text when they see the relationship to text and their personal lives (Wilhelm, 2002). Engaging with a tutor after school in meaningful discussion and purposeful activities may help the boys make personal meaning of the learning, thus increasing engagement and achievement in reading.

Also interesting to note, many students showed significant improvement on implicit questions on the QRI, but not explicit questions. The significant increase for students in Grades 1 and 2 may be for a variety of reasons, but we rationalize it is because the struggling readers who were enrolled in the *America Reads* program were originally much weaker in implicit answering skills and

therefore had the most to gain in that type of question. An additional reason may be that students did not value reading for the purpose of simply remembering rote facts from the text (e.g., hunting for answers to explicit questions for academic gains), but rather valued the deeper understanding of text and developed the confidence and knowledge to extract the information necessary to make meaningful sense of the text, thus allowing them to comprehend and answer implicit questions. The students may have had more confidence in engaging with text and not simply answering basic questions posed by a teacher. Comprehending text to answer implicit questions is inherently more difficult for students, especially students who already struggle with reading. Our reasoning is supported by students' implicit scores, which, although indicating significant improvement from the post assessment, were still lower than students' explicit scores from the pre-assessment taken eight months earlier.

Implications

The results from this study contribute to a growing body of research that supports interventions, such as a tutoring program, that address and evaluate motivation in efforts to improve student academic performance, specifically reading. This study supports an *America Reads* tutoring program structured on Wasik's (1998) recommendations for tutoring programs, which included (a) appropriate training, (b) continual supervision of tutors, (c) use of structured lesson plans, and (d) evidence-based practices implemented during the tutoring lessons, as a potential intervention for struggling readers. These findings may help guide educators when developing and implementing a tutoring program designed to increase student motivation to read as well as improve reading skills.

While the results from this study are promising, the limitations need to be acknowledged. There is a clear need for experimental research on tutoring programs in general. Additional research is also needed to explore the efficacy of using university students as reading tutors as well as maximizing the resources and academic supports available to struggling readers, especially boys. Future research should examine why student scores for implicit, but not explicit, information significantly improved. Was it that there was just more room for growth with the implicit skills, or did certain aspects of the tutoring intervention better help students develop those skills?

At the end of the story of *The Little Engine that Could* (Jacobs, 1910), the little blue engine did what other more experienced and more equipped trains refused to do. The little blue engine exhibited motivation and determination that allowed success with a difficult task. Investing in interventions such as tutoring programs designed to increase reading motivation and comprehension for readers can help turn "I-think-I-can" into "I thought I could."

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UNPACKING ADOLESCENT LITERACY SKILLS IN A HIGH-POVERTY, URBAN HIGH SCHOOL: A STUDY OF NINTH-GRADE LITERACY SKILLS

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Abstract

This study describes the oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills that ninth-grade students from poverty who attend a struggling urban high school brought with them from middle school. Of the 83 students assessed, 37 (44.6%) are of Caucasian ethnicity while 41 (49.5%) were African-American. Standardized assessments were utilized to measure oral reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. Narrative and expository texts were constructed to measure student ability to read grade-level text. Finally, prosody was assessed to determine the ability of students to read with expression. Results indicate that this group generally attains at the fifth- to sixth-grade level with African-American students significantly below Caucasians. Regression analysis show that oral reading fluency accounted for 36% of variance in reading comprehension while vocabulary knowledge accounted for an additional 6.8%. Implications for literacy education are discussed.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress ([NAEP] National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009), more popularly known as the Nation's Report Card, shows that only 32% of the nation's fourth- and eighth-graders read at a Proficient level or better (NCES, 2009). While this number remains disappointingly consistent with past assessments, equally frustrating is the persistent disparity by ethnicity group where white students outperform African-Americans and Hispanics by 25 points (230 compared to 205 respectively).

When analysis focuses on the nation's 17 largest urban districts, the percentage of students reaching the Proficient level or better declines by about one-third, with just 23% of fourth-graders and 22% of eighth-graders scoring above the Basic level (NCES, 2010). A longitudinal study of NAEP data by Lee (2010) compared student cohorts across some 30 years of data and found that today's 9-year-olds perform about 3 months ahead of those from three decades ago. Unfortunately, this progress did not translate into the middle grades with achievement showing no significant longitudinal improvement between ages 9 and 13. When assessing high school change, Lee (2010) found an overall decrease in reading achievement equivalent to about a quarter of a standard deviation per year, or a total of 1 year's worth of schooling, when comparing NAEP cohorts from 1984-2004. To explore this decline more deeply, the present study attempts to quantify the literacy skills that ninth-grade students in one struggling, large city, urban high school bring with them as they begin their high school career. Of particular import is the notion that a lack of oral reading fluency in these readers may be related to depressed comprehension scores.

Theoretical Framework

A common assumption among theorists is that many of the processes involved in text comprehension contain automatic components (Brown, Gore, & Carr, 2002; Kintsch, 1993; Perfetti, 1993; Raynor & Frazier, 1989; Singer, Graesser, & Trabasso, 1994). Regarding the process of word reading, the instance theory (Logan, 1988, 1997) hypothesizes automatic performance as a memory phenomenon where each encounter with a word results in the creation of a unique and faster memory trace. This phenomenon of automaticity has been proposed by Perfetti (1995) to also occur within higher level comprehension processes such as those used to identify anaphoric referents, the integration of text propositions, and the integration of background knowledge. Logan's theory proposes that at the point where word retrieval becomes faster than the application by the reader of a decoding algorithm, automaticity is hypothesized to occur and along with it, learning. Such automaticity with words is critical to fluent reading (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974).

The ability to automatically process words is subsumed within the broader connectionist model of reading, specifically, those utilizing the parallel distributed processing approach (Adams, 1990; Harm & Seidenberg, 2004; McClelland & Rumelhart, 1986; Seidenberg & McClelland, 1989). These models are particularly useful for the investigation of the processes involving decoding, reading fluency, and comprehension. In the connectionist model proposed by Seidenberg and McClelland (1989), it is assumed that readers process words on a phonological, orthographic, and semantic basis and that such processing is completed in an interactive manner where a representation by any one

processor is influenced by each of the other two. The model also assumes that this construction process can be influenced by other factors such as semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic constraints specific to the reader. An important feature of the connectionist theory is that it is inherently a learning model (Jorm & Share, 1994) and in this respect, corresponds well with Logan's (1988, 1997) theory of memory-based automatization. The connectionist model uniquely explains the interaction between word processing, vocabulary, and comprehension processing.

Adolescent Fluency

There are few studies investigating the attainment of oral reading fluency skills that specifically assess ninth-grade students. At the same time, fluency attainment can be viewed as a developmental process and some insight can be gleaned by reviewing studies of other age groups. For example, Pinnell, Pikulski, Wixon, Campbell, Gough & Beatty, (1995) investigated the relationship between oral reading fluency and comprehension attainment on the NAEP and found 44% of fourth-grade students to be disfluent with grade level texts. This finding is important and relevant to the present study for the reason that if students are dysfluent in the fourth grade, what will occur within their educational development to ensure they become fluent by the time they reach the ninth-grade? For example, DeLeon (2002) found close to half of entering ninth graders to still be reading three to four years below grade level. Other authors investigated the oral reading fluency processes of 303 ninth-grade students at a Title I high school and found that just over 60% of students read at a rate commensurate with the 25th percentile on eighth-grade norms (Rasinski & Padak, 2005; Rasinski, Padak, McKeon, Wilfong, Friedauer, & Heim, 2005). When regressed against the state assessment of reading comprehension, oral reading fluency accounted for 28% of the variance, suggesting a significant relationship between oral reading fluency (ORF) and the reader's success on this assessment.

Schatschneider, Buck, Torgesen, Wagner, Hassler, Hecht, et al. (2004) investigated the relationship between phonemic decoding efficiency (PDE) and ORF for seventh- and tenth-grade students scoring below grade level on Florida state achievement assessments. For the seventh-grade sample, average PDE and ORF attainment was at approximately the 40th and 16th percentiles respectively. For the tenth-grade sample, PDE averaged at the 23rd percentile while ORF averaged at the 19th percentile. These findings also suggest the importance of adequate decoding and reading fluency in both middle and high school students in order to facilitate and support academic achievement.

Using structural equation modeling, Paige (in press) studied the relationships among fluency, comprehension, and academic achievement in 227 sixth- and seventh-grade students attending a large-city, urban middle school. Using

standardized measures of oral reading fluency and comprehension, students were found to average at the 32nd and 20th percentiles respectively, suggesting they struggled with reading proficiency. Results also found that oral reading fluency contributed approximately 50% of the variance to reading comprehension, which in turn, contributed up to 82% of the variance in academic achievement on state achievement tests. Suggestions from these studies are first, a need for closer attention to development of fluent reading in students if they are to reach their potential on high-stakes tests. Secondly, while Paris (2005) points out that indicators of fluent reading are constrained variables, some portion of middle school students are still in need of significant development of these skills as they are far from reaching the developmental levels necessary to support both fluent reading with grade-level text and appropriate academic achievement.

The reviewed research suggests that adolescents benefit from adequate fluency skills if they are to realize their full academic potential. The research also suggests that a number of students across grade levels are not fluent readers and that dysfluency contributes to less than adequate comprehension processing. With these findings in mind, this study seeks to answer three questions:

1. What is the literacy achievement of ninth-grade students in a struggling, large-city, urban high school in terms of fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension processing?
2. What are the differences by gender and ethnicity in these reading processes?
3. What is the contribution of oral reading fluency and vocabulary knowledge to reading comprehension?

It is hypothesized that ORF will contribute significant variance to text comprehension and that such variance will be less than is typically seen in elementary populations due to factors such as background knowledge and working memory constraints that take on additional importance as students age (Swanson & O'Connor, 2009).

Method

School and Participants

The high school involved in this study was purposefully selected because it had recently been identified by the state as one whose overall academic achievement was in the bottom 5% of all high schools in the state. Additionally, achievement at this school has been persistently low performing for over a decade. Finally, the school draws a population of students that is fairly evenly distributed between Caucasian and African-American students that allows for the ability to assess attainment differences between the two ethnicities.

Approximately 1,032 students attend the study school with 282 of those in the ninth-grade. The large majority of students attend from the surrounding neighborhoods that are characterized by high poverty and low parental educa-

tional attainment. Free- or reduced-priced lunch is received by 86% of the student population. For this study, all ninth-grade students who returned informed parental consent were admitted to the study resulting in a sample of 83 (29.4%) students. Of these students, 33 (39.8%) were female and 50 (60.2%) were male. Ethnic distribution of the study sample resulted in 37 (44.6%) Caucasians, 41 (49.4%) African-Americans, 3 (3.6%) Hispanics, and 2 (2.4%) Asian students. Average age of study participants was 14 years and 8 months with a range between 14 years, 0 months and 16 years, 0 months.

Assessment Measures

Oral reading fluency. The Gray Oral Reading Test-4 (GORT-4) Form A (Wiederholt & Bryant, 2001) assesses oral reading proficiency of connected text through a series of increasingly difficult narrative reading passages, after which, students answer five questions to assess comprehension. The GORT-4 assessment provides standardized scores for four indicators of reading consisting of reading rate (RATE), word identification accuracy (ACC), fluency (FL), and comprehension (COMP). These subtests are based on a distribution with a mean of 10 and a standard deviation of 3. Reliability coefficients for the age groups assessed in the present study range from .88 to .97.

Grade level fluency. To assess the ability of ninth-grade students to read grade level narrative and expository texts, two passages were created by the researchers. Construction of the passages was informed by the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association, 2010), which have been adopted by 42 states. These standards suggest that approximately 70% of ninth-grade reading across high school content areas should focus on expository text in what they refer to as the Grade 9-10 text complexity band. To assess whether a text is in this band, the standards suggest three criteria be considered with the first being the use of a quantitative measurement instrument to assess readability. The standards recommend use of Coh-Matrix (Graesser, McNamara, & Kulikowich, 2011) as such a tool. The second and third criteria require the professional judgment of knowledgeable teachers to determine 1) qualitative dimensions (levels of meaning, structure, language clarity, conventionality, and knowledge demands) as well as 2) reader and task considerations (student motivation and background knowledge). The standards are clear that these are broad recommendations meant to guide teachers and should be used in tandem with professional judgment when choosing text.

To choose appropriate texts for this study, ninth-grade teachers within the study school were consulted and asked to use the three criteria to inform their judgment on selection of texts for this particular assessment. A fourth criterion was applied where each passage would be of sufficient length as to require a minimum of two minutes to read aloud, thus providing insight into a student's reading endurance. The resulting narrative text was a 408-word passage taken from the book *The Arabian Nights* (NARFL) while a 418-word expository passage was taken from *Cromwell and the Commonwealth*, a book detailing the reign of the 17th Century English leader. Teachers reported that neither of these public

domain books nor their content were included within their curriculum and that both passages were representative of the type of grade-level text they would expect ninth-graders to be able to read. Using the Coh-Metrix on-line tool, the narrative and expository passages measured at the 9.5 and 9.24 grade-levels respectively on the Flesch-Kincaid scale.

For the assessment, students read each passage aloud in its entirety while being recorded using a digital audio recorder. To compute a fluency rate, total reading miscues (omissions, insertions, mispronunciations, and deviations from the text) were subtracted from the number of words (408 or 418) of each respective passage, then divided by the total number of seconds it took the student to read the passage. This number was then multiplied by 60 to result in a correct-words-per-minute (CWPM) metric.

Prosody. To assess the ability to read grade level text with expression or prosody (PROS), the recorded reading of *The Arabian Nights* was utilized. Readers were analyzed for prosody using the Multi-Dimensional Fluency Scale (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991 [MDFS]). With the MDFS, the reader is graded on their ability to apply proper expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and reading rate. These four indicators are then summed to form an overall rating of prosody with potential scores ranging from 4 to 16. The MDFS has been shown to be a valid and reliable assessment of prosody with inter-rater reliability equal to .86 (Rasinski, 1985; Rasinski, Rikli, & Johnston, 2009). All prosody ratings were evaluated by the two authors. To assess inter-rater reliability of prosody scores, a random sample of 17 scores (20.5%) was selected for which Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960; Fleiss, Levin, & Paik, 2003) was calculated. This resulted in a kappa equal to .79, suggesting very good inter-rater agreement.

Comprehension and vocabulary. The paragraph reading and relational vocabulary subtests of the Test of Reading Comprehension—4 (Brown, Hammill, & Wiederholt, 2009 [TORC-4]) were administered to provide measures of silent reading comprehension (COMP) and vocabulary knowledge (VOCAB). The paragraph reading subtest of the TORC-4 consists of a series of increasingly difficult narrative passages after which students answer five multiple-choice questions that assess factual and inferential passage comprehension. The relational vocabulary subtest assesses knowledge of word relationships by first providing a prompt of three words that form a meaning relationship. From a choice of four words, students then choose two that represent the same relationship. Subtests for the TORC-4 are based on a mean of 10 with a standard deviation of 3. Test-retest reliabilities for these assessments range from .81 to .86.

Assessment Administration

Students were assessed individually in a quiet room on the measures of oral reading fluency. Administration of the assessments took approximately 25 minutes per student. For administration of the TORC-4, students were group assessed in a controlled testing environment under the supervision of the study researchers, school administration, and teachers.

Study Results

Means and standard deviations for the measured variables are shown in Table 1. Scores for oral reading fluency as measured by the GORT-4 resulted in standard scores of 7.59, 8.90, 7.47, and 7.64 for Rate, Accuracy, Fluency, and Comprehension respectively, suggesting attainment between the 20th and 37th percentiles. Oral reading fluency of grade-level narrative text is equal to a CWPM of 108.5 with expository text fluency equaling 98.5. For the indicator of prosody the mean score equals 10.99, suggesting semi-prosodic readings. TORC-4 results for vocabulary and comprehension reveal standard scores of 7.68 and 7.90 respectively, suggesting attainment between the 20th and 24th percentile.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of the measure variables

Assessment	All Students (n = 83) Mean(sd)	Females (n = 33) Mean(sd)	Males (n = 50) Mean(sd)	Caucasian (n = 37) Mean(sd)	African- American (n = 41) Mean(sd)
<u>GORT-4</u>					
RATE	7.59(2.48)	8.27(2.79)	7.14(2.17)	8.57(2.86)	6.66(1.82)
ACC	8.90(2.93)	9.40(2.60)	8.58(3.11)	9.95(2.72)	7.81(2.67)
FLUENCY	7.47(3.75)	8.49(3.86)	6.8(3.56)	8.92(4.06)	6.00(2.98)
GCOMP	7.64(2.47)	8.49(2.33)	7.08(2.41)	8.78(2.16)	6.51(2.73)
<u>NARRATIVE AND EXPOSITORY PASSAGES</u>					
NARFL	108.51(30.89)	117.64(34.02)	102.48(27.34)	121.07(34.19)	96.57(24.58)
EXPFL	98.53(28.63)	108.28(30.62)	92.10(25.56)	108.62(31.11)	88.72(24.65)
PROSODY	10.99(2.77)	11.89(2.78)	10.39(2.63)	11.73(2.67)	10.15(2.76)
<u>TORC-4</u>					
VOCAB	7.68(2.29)	7.91(2.17)	7.52(2.38)	8.67(2.16)	6.73(2.05)
COMP	7.90(2.26)	8.64(2.18)	7.38(2.19)	8.28(2.46)	7.30(1.94)

RATE = GORT-4 rate; ACC = GORT-4 word accuracy; FL = GORT-4 fluency; GCOMP = GORT-4 comprehension; NARFL = narrative text fluency; EXPFL = expository text fluency; PROS = prosody; VOCAB = TORC-4 vocabulary; COMP = TORC-4 comprehension.

Correlations for the study variables are shown in Table 2 and are interpreted within the framework suggested by Cohen (1988) where correlations between .1 and .3 are considered small, .31 to .54 are medium, and .55 and greater are considered large. The GORT-4 indicators of rate, accuracy, and fluency show large and significant correlations among each other. The measures of narrative and expository fluency reveal a large and significant correlation between each other ($r = .915$) and with GORT-4 fluency ($r = .834$ and $.860$ respectively), suggesting they are assessing similar underlying skills. The indicator of prosody also shows large and significant correlations with GORT-4 fluency ($r = .753$), narrative fluency ($r = .774$) and expository fluency ($r = .786$). The TORC-4 comprehension measure is significantly and moderately correlated with GORT-4 comprehension ($r = .532$), with narrative and expository fluency ($r = .450$ and $.442$ respectively), with prosody ($r = .485$), and with vocabulary ($r = .438$). A

moderate and significant correlation is seen between TORC-4 comprehension and GORT-4 rate ($r = .476$), while correlations between accuracy ($r = .577$) and fluency ($r = .570$) are large and significant.

To assess whether students differed in their ability to read narrative and expository text aloud, a paired sample t -test was conducted and found to be significant $t(82) = 7.28, p < .001$ with means showing that narrative text was read more quickly. To provide further insight into the description of these students around their literacy skills, CWPM was analyzed by percentile. For narrative text, CWPM percentiles are equal to 85.9 (25th), 108.9 (50th), 127.1 (75th), and 154.4 (90th). Expository CWPM percentiles are 77.6 (25th), 97.9 (50th), 113.4 (75th), and 134.2 (90th).

Table 2: Bivariate correlations of the measured variables

Measure	RATE	ACC	FL	GCOMP	NARFL	EXPFL	PROS	VOCA B	COMP
RATE	1								
ACC	.762**	1							
FL	.914**	.914**	1						
GCOMP	.432**	.584**	.523**	1					
NARFL	.887**	.540**	.834**	.452**	1				
EXPFL	.889**	.723**	.860**	.417**	.915**	1			
PROS	.724**	.685**	.753**	.400**	.774**	.786**	1		
VOCA B	.527**	.583**	.554**	.560**	.561**	.572**	.530**	1	
COMP	.476**	.577**	.570**	.532**	.450**	.442**	.485*	.438**	1

Note. All correlations significant at * $p = .05$; ** $p = .01$. RATE = GORT-4 reading rate; ACC = GORT-4 word identification accuracy; FL = GORT-4 fluency; GCOMP = GORT-4 comprehension; NARFL = 9th grade narrative text fluency; EXPFL = 9th grade expository text fluency; PROS = 9th grade narrative text prosody; VOCAB = TORC-4 vocabulary; COMP = TORC-4 comprehension.

Differences by Gender

Tests to detect differences by gender were designed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the application of a Bonferroni adjustment to correct for Type I experimenter-wise error with results shown in Table 3. Significant differences are found on the measure for GORT-4 comprehension $F(1,81) = 6.91, p = .01$ with the means from Table 1 indicating that females outperform males. Tests for differences on the GORT-4 indicators of rate, accuracy, and fluency were non-significant. For the measures of comprehension and vocabulary as assessed by the TORC-4, a statistically significant difference is found only for comprehension, $F(1,79) = 6.52, p = .013$, again with females outperforming males. For the indicators of prosody and expository fluency, statistically significant differences show that females outperform males on the measures of prosody, $F(1,82) = 6.23, p = .015$, and expository fluency, $F(1,81) = 6.80, p = .011$.

Table 3: One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) for Differences by Gender

Variable and Source	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
GORT-4 Comprehension				
Between groups	1	39.23	39.23	6.91**
Within Groups	81	459.92	5.68	
TORC-4 Comprehension				
Between groups	1	31.14	31.14	6.52*
Within Groups	79	376.89	4.77	
Prosody				
Between Groups	1	44.96	44.96	6.23*
Within Groups	81	585.02	7.22	
Expository Fluency				
Between Groups	1	5207.35	5207.35	6.80*
Within Groups	81	62022.18	765.71	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Differences by Ethnicity

To assess differences by ethnicity, all tests utilize analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the application of a Bonferroni adjustment to control for Type I experimenter-wise error. Results for fluency indicators are shown in Table 4 and reveal that Caucasian students outperform African-American students on the GORT-4 fluency indicators of Rate, $F(3,79) = 4.43$, $p = .006$, Accuracy,

Table 4: One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) for Fluency Differences by Ethnicity

Variable and Source	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
GORT-4 Rate				
Between groups	3	72.61	24.20	4.43**
Within groups	79	431.47	5.46	
GORT-4 Accuracy				
Between groups	3	103.73	34.58	4.56**
Within groups	79	599.49	7.59	
GORT-4 Fluency				
Between groups	3	175.25	58.42	4.71**
Within groups	79	979.42	12.40	
Narrative Fluency				
Between groups	3	11848.72	3949.57	4.70**
Within groups	79	66383.75	840.30	
Expository Fluency				
Between groups	3	7882.56	2627.52	3.50*
Within groups	79	59346.97	751.23	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

$F(3,79) = 4.56, p = .005$, and Fluency, $(3,79) = 4.71, p = .004$. Caucasians also outscore African-Americans on Narrative fluency, $F(3,79) = 4.70, p = .005$ and Expository fluency $F(3,79) = 3.50, p = .019$. For the indicators of vocabulary and comprehension as measured by the TORC-4, and for comprehension as assessed by the GORT-4, statistically significant results shown in Table 5 reveal that Caucasian students outscore African-Americans on the measures of vocabulary, $F(3,77) = 6.39, p = .009$ and GORT-4 comprehension, $F(3,79) = 7.23, p = .001$.

Table 5: One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) for Vocabulary and Comprehension Differences by Ethnicity

Variable and Source	df	SS	MS	F
TORC-4 Vocabulary				
Between groups	3	83.68	27.89	6.39**
Within groups	77	335.98	4.36	
GORT-4 Comprehension				
Between groups	3	107.48	35.83	7.23**
Within groups	79	391.68	4.96	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Comprehension Variance

To assess the contribution of oral reading fluency and vocabulary knowledge to text comprehension, a series of multiple regressions were performed using the GORT-4 comprehension measure as the dependent variable (Table 6). Underlying assumptions were examined with no serious violations found (Ethington, 2002; Stevens, 2009). Variables for rate and accuracy as measured by the GORT-4, as well as prosody and vocabulary knowledge were explored. Reading rate and prosody were eliminated as they did not account for significant variance in GORT-4 comprehension. The two significant predictors resulting in the final baseline model were accuracy ($r^2 = .357, = .41, p < .001$) and vocabulary knowledge ($r^2 = .068, = .321, p < .001$), together which predicted a total of 42.5% of the variance in reading comprehension.

Table 6: Regression Analysis Summary for GORT-4 Comprehension Predictors

Variable	β	SE B	$\underline{\beta}$	R ²	ΔR^2
Step 1					
Constant	3.28	.70		.36**	
ACC	0.50	.08	.60**		
Step 2					
Constant	2.02	.79		.43**	.07*
ACC	0.34	.09	.41**		
VOCAB	0.35	.11	.32*		

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

Discussion

To assess the reading skills of 9th-grade students from poverty attending an urban, large-city, struggling high school, 83 (29.3%) students were assessed using standardized measures for oral reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. Additional measures were administered to assess indicators of narrative and expository fluency with grade-level text and prosody.

Two characteristics of the assessed population frame the interpretation of the study results. First, 86% of the students attending the study school qualify for free- or reduced-priced lunch suggesting they come from a background of low socio-economic status within a large urban school district. Secondly, the ethnicity of students attending the school is split rather evenly between Caucasian and African-American. This particular ethnic composition allows for first, the analysis of the effects of poverty on literacy attainment, and secondly, the effects of poverty by ethnicity. It should also be pointed out that the study population is from a geographical area identified as containing one of the largest areas of concentrated poverty in the country (Berube & Katz, 2005). Multiple studies have found neighborhood quality to be a factor in both educational attainment and school completion (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Crane, 1991; Datcher, 1982; Garner & Raudenbush, 1991; Halpern-Felsher, Connell, Spencer, Aber, Duncan, Clifford, et al., 1997; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, 2004). This study provides insight into the literacy indicators of ninth-grade students from poverty, particular that of oral reading fluency, the results of which are not often reported in the literature for this age group.

The first research question sought to determine the literacy attainment of ninth-grade students attending a large inner-city school. Results suggest that this student group possesses skills that are approximately 2.5 years below grade level for reading rate, fluency, and comprehension on the GORT-4, and almost 1.5 years below grade level on word identification accuracy. The mean score on the TORC-4 vocabulary subtest indicates a 6th-grade level of word knowledge while text comprehension measured at the 4.5 grade level. The mean CWPM of 108.5 for grade-level narrative text fluency is commensurate with the 25th percentile on eighth-grade fluency norms (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006) while the measure of prosody (10.99 out of 16) suggests that students possess a marginal propensity for prosodic reading with grade-level text. While few studies assess the reading fluency of ninth-grade students, one comparable study is that by Rasinski and Padak (2005) and Rasinski, et al. (2005). These authors found oral reading fluency results for a ninth-grade population in a Title I school equivalent to the 25th percentile on eighth-grade norms with 61% of the study sample reading at a CWPM below 124 words per minute. In the present study, 74.7% of the sample read at a rate below the 25th percentile and fully 89.2% read below the 50th percentile of 151 words-correct-per-minute for eighth-graders. Using a CWPM of 167 as an average standard expected by teachers (Rasinski et al.,

2005), only four students in our study achieved this expected narrative fluency level (4.8%). As norms do not exist for the fluent reading of expository text, it is difficult to benchmark the results in this study. However, one aspect to consider is that the narrative and expository fluency results correlated significantly ($r = .92$), suggesting that if one was a capable reader of narrative text, then it was likely that expository text was also read well. At the same time, this group of students read expository text at a statistically significant slower rate (98.5) compared to narrative text (108.5), substantiating the notion that students have increased difficulty reading expository text.

Research question two investigated the differences by gender and ethnicity in oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Females significantly outperformed males on measures of comprehension (GORT-4 & TORC-4), grade-level narrative and expository fluency, and prosody. While females often outperform males on measures of reading (Chudowsky & Chudowsky, 2010), these results do not conclude that females in this study performed adequately. Standard scores for both the TORC-4 and GORT-4 comprehension measures show female attainment at the 35th percentile, a level suggesting a struggling reader (Hock, Brasseur, Deshler, Catts, Marquis, Mark, et al., 2009). Reading rate standard scores for females suggest attainment at the 27th percentile with fluency and comprehension scores only slightly better. Females did best on reading accuracy with the standard score of 9.4 suggesting attainment at the 42nd percentile.

While the effect of poverty is spread across the entire study sample, results shown in Figures 1 and 2 indicate that significant and disproportionate differences by ethnicity are present. Although decoding accuracy was notable for Caucasian students as it approached the 50th percentile, attainment on indicators for vocabulary, rate, accuracy, fluency, and GORT-4 comprehension measured at approximately the 35th percentile for this group. In contrast, African-American students scored between the 9th and 23rd percentile on all measures from both the GORT-4 (rate, accuracy, fluency and comprehension) and the TORC-4 (comprehension and vocabulary) suggesting performance that is up to five years below grade level. Significant differences on both narrative and expository fluency showed Caucasian students read faster (25.4% and 22.4% respectively) than their African-American counterparts. The reader should keep in mind that reading rates for Caucasian students in the present study are some 29 words-per-minute behind the 50th percentile for eighth-grade students for narrative text and that African-American students read at a rate 53 words-per-minute slower than the same norm (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006). The implication for this disparity becomes important for teachers as these readers require significant literacy support including additional time to complete class and home assignments (Rasinski, 2006).

Research question three sought to determine the contribution of oral reading fluency and vocabulary knowledge to reading comprehension. Regression analysis resulted in prosody predicting 35.7% of the variance in text comprehension while vocabulary knowledge contributed an additional 21.7% of variance resulting in a total of 60.6% for the two predictors. Rasinski et al. (2005) found in a study of ninth-graders that oral reading fluency accounted for 28% of the variance in reading comprehension as measured by a state administered test of reading. The results of this study strongly suggests that for this group of 9th-graders the ability to fluently read text is an important predictor for the understanding of text. These results align with our hypothesis that oral reading fluency would be a significant contributor to text comprehension, and that the percent of variance would be less than the 50% to 64% found by Paige (in-press) for 6th- and 7th-grade students. Regression results also found that vocabulary knowledge contributed 21.7% of variance to reading comprehension and this finding is in line with authors who have found vocabulary to be a significant contributor to comprehension (Adams & Gathercole, 1996, 2000; Nagy & Scott, 2000; Pressley, 2002).

Although disturbing, these findings are not altogether surprising and carry ramifications for schools. Balfanz (2009) suggests that for students from poverty who experience achievement gaps, the divide becomes more akin to “chasms” (p. 6) and if not closed, middle school students will enter high school without sufficient skills to adequately achieve and graduate. Results from this study support an assertion by Balfanz (2009) that for non-selective, high poverty schools, students often enter with fifth- and sixth-grade skills and that this decrease in literacy attainment is not spread equally across ethnicity. For such schools, implications for literacy instruction arise around an increased emphasis on the continued development of appropriate fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills across content areas through the use of proven content literacy strategies (Paige, 2011). By appropriate fluency we mean to suggest that ORF should not be conceptualized as a speed contest where the fastest reader wins, but rather, should consist of an emphasis on accurate, prosodic reading at a conversational rate with a variety of texts that emphasizes understanding (Rasinski, 2006; Rasinski & Hamman, 2010). Additionally, responsibility for overseeing literacy development cannot be solely placed on the backs of language arts and reading teachers as the challenge requires school-wide teacher capacity to put in place the strategies necessary to support effective literacy gains (Paige, 2011).

Again, less-than-desirable results of national assessments of reading (Lee, 2010; NCES, 2009) indicate that the current effort at increasing the literacy skills of adolescents from poverty is insufficient. Inadequate high school literacy attainment, particularly in schools with students from poverty, suggests that the instructional continuum around literacy must continue through high school. Our work with teachers inside numerous urban high schools has revealed the

disappointing trend for teachers to actually move away from the use of text because students can't and (or) won't read them. Rather than working to increase literacy skills in students, we are seeing evidence in schools that some teachers are working to devise strategies to "work-around" poor literacy skills. This suggests that the paradigm around reading instruction in high school may benefit from a re-definition. For example, within the district where we do much of our work, there exists a program for the most challenged students, however, it serves only a small percentage of the students who struggle with reading and comprehending text. Balfanz and Byrnes (2006) suggest that rather than providing much needed specialized instruction to tens of students, high schools must devise strategies to deliver these programs to potentially hundreds of students.

Overall, districts may consider adopting a literacy continuum focused around the development of appropriate oral reading fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension in students. While many of the various sub-systems of literacy attainment are constrained as Paris (2005) suggests, the degree to which this is so is not the same across each sub-system skill. Our results suggest that in this sample of ninth-grade students, many of these constrained skills, particularly those contributing to oral reading fluency, have yet to reach asymptote. Fluency across grades requires regular practice with increasingly difficult texts and if the student has not engaged in such practice, fluent reading may cease to develop. Similar examples can be found for vocabulary knowledge and comprehension processing. Implementation of within-school systems that monitor cross-grade student development around these reading skills would be useful for informing on the appropriate development of their students and hence, the effectiveness of their instructional efforts.

Conclusion

Limitations of the study should be kept in mind by the reader. For example, the participant sample was not randomly selected and so impairs the ability to generalize to a similar population. Also, this study represents results from a single high school in one urban district, suggesting that broader school sampling would be beneficial to substantiate these findings. As the study focused on ninth-grade students, the level of literacy attainment found in these students cannot necessarily be extended to students in ascending grades as they were not assessed. For the students examined within this study, the presence of limited oral reading fluency and vocabulary knowledge skills are shown to be a constraining factor on reading comprehension. Without significant increases in these skills, a potential ceiling may well be in place on their future academic achievement. This suggests a more intense focus on the continual and steady progression of fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension growth from later elementary, to middle, and then high school may help to insure that all students acquire the necessary literacy skills that will enable them to maximize their unique human potential.

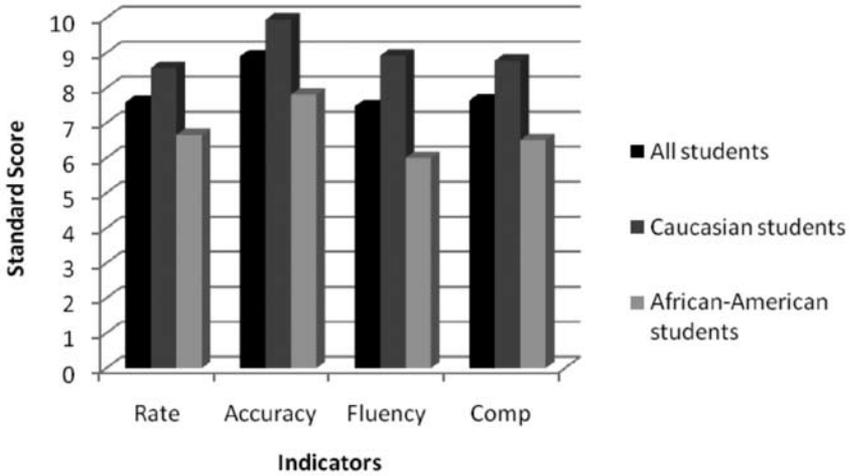


Figure 1. GORT-4 fluency indicators by ethnicity

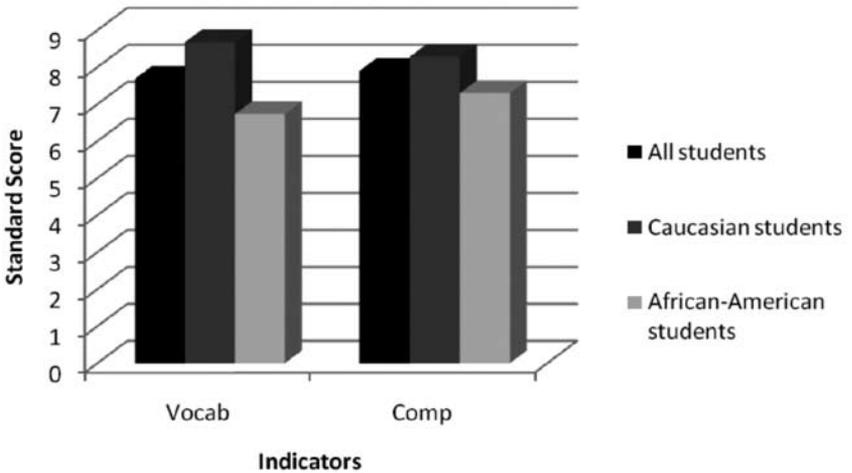


Figure 2. TORC-4 indicators by ethnicity

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VIDEO GAMES: THE MOTIVATIONAL VALUE FOR LITERACY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to discover if playing video games influenced third through fifth grade ELL and non-ELL students' motivation for reading. Specifically, researchers were interested in whether or not playing video games could coexist in a positive manner with students' self-concept as readers and/or the value students' place on reading. This research study consists of two questions: Does interest and motivation to participate with video games influence ELLs' self-concept as readers, boys' self-concept as readers, and/or girls' self-concept as readers? and Does interest and motivation to participate with video games influence the value ELLs, boys, and/or girls place on reading? Results showed both ELL and non-ELL boys played video games much more often than ELL and non-ELL girls. However, ELL boys reported equally positive or more positive responses than ELL girls to all questions in relation to their thoughts on reading. The opposite results were found with non-ELL participants. Non-ELL girls reported equally positive or more positive responses than non-ELL boys to all questions in relation to their thoughts on reading.

The English Language Learner (ELL) United States population has continued to grow at a rapid rate over the last 20 years. In 1990, ELLs comprised 14 percent of the total U.S. population. By 2000, that number had risen to 18 percent, an increase of 47 percent (NCES, 2006). According to the 2006-2008 American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the estimated percent of people five years and over who speak a language other than English at home was 19.6 percent. By 2030, the United States population of language minority students will encompass 40% of the school-age population (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

Entering the second decade of the 21st century, educators are faced with meeting the demands of the growing ELL population in a way that is both educationally and culturally responsible. Today's cultural environment necessitates that ELLs be engaged with technology that provides participatory literacy opportunities (Black, 2009). Students must be able to effectively use and adapt to new technological innovations. These innovations allow for the use of multiple modalities in order to communicate meaning and for the creation of meaningful social roles in online environments where the majority of text is in English.

Noted researcher James Gee (2007) believed learning theories embedded within good video games better suits the technological, global world in which today's youth live. However, many educators fail to recognize and utilize video games motivational relevance (Walsh, 2010). Gaming offers language learning connections, motivation, and relevance to students' lives as well as opportunities for the cognitive achievement of socio-cultural reading and writing which influences economics, history, and politics (Gee, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent that third, fourth, and fifth grade students' participation with video games provided motivation to read. This research study consisted of two research questions:

1. Does interest and motivation to participate with video games influence ELLs' self-concept as readers, boys' self-concept as readers, and/or girls' self-concept as readers across grades (3-5)?
2. Does interest and motivation to participate with video games influence the value ELLs, boys, and/or girls place on reading across grades (3-5)?

Theoretical Framework

In the early part of the twentieth century, Dewey brought about the concept of motivating from within and motivating from without (Dewey, 1916/1944). His message was that educators can make lessons interesting and motivating using outside inducements, or they can assist students in discovering the value that knowledge holds in and of itself (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). Today this is more commonly known as extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Kintsch's (1980) theories of emotional and cognitive interest were built on Dewey's motivation theories. Kintsch believed that emotional motivation was based on the affective impact of literacy and cognitive motivation was based on critical literacy. Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory explored different types of motivation based on reasons and goals that cause action. They believed these reasons could explain student traits which allow for sustained engagement with games, and how those traits can inform literacy development. According to Rigby and Przybylski (2009), video games appear to give players both emotional and cognitive motivation to engage in literacy. Engagement with video games offers players opportunities for independence, competence, experimentation, and cooperation.

Literature Review

Attitudes toward Video Games

The video game/virtual world market has grown at an astounding rate (Rigby & Przybylski, 2009). The current, most popular online game has over 10 million players across the globe. Five years ago, the most popular game had only 100,000 players. In a recent Taiwanese research study of university faculty's beliefs about gaming showed questions and concerns about the educational utility of online gaming (Chen & Liu, 2009). A prevailing misconception about the world of video games is that they are simple in nature and do not require complex thought processes (Gros, 2007). However, virtual worlds found in video games are extraordinarily complex and provide high levels of mental challenge through cooperation, engagement, and problem solving.

Home to School Connection Created by Video Games

Integration of home-based literacy and school-based literacy involves integration across school, home, and the community. This idea represents a change in focus about literacy. Literacy becomes more than just a set of acquired skills, but rather a set of cultural practices (Gavelek, Raphael, Biondo, & Wang, 2000). The social and cultural practices of learning are significant because they impact student success (Hawkins, 2004; Lapp, Fisher, & Frey, 2010). When students integrate language and literacy skills for gathering information and for studying ideas, then students have authentic reasons to participate in literacy because of its relevance to their lives. As students home-based literacy is validated and appreciated through scaffolded learning experiences in the classroom, students become motivated to develop their school-based literacy (Lapp, Fisher, & Frey, 2010; Noddings, 2005; Pierce, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999).

Educational Relevance and Motivation Created by Video Games

Virtual worlds allow students to experiment with identity and develop communal values (Stroerger, 2008). They also learn through seeing, knowing, and doing. Stroerger believed that as students handle "...tools and materials, observe and interact with others, student-players can experientially develop a deeper understanding of a theme, topic, period of time or concept" (p. 52). Players have many choices within the game, and the game responds to these choices. Student-players frequently have a sense of control in regard to their learning and, as a result, own their learning development. Gaming also provides students with positive intrinsic learning opportunities (Prensky, 2006). Prensky also indicated that in contrast to the level of learning motivation in many classrooms, virtual world gaming offers learning that is so compelling, that students will relinquish almost anything else to be in them, and they'll fight hard not to have to leave them.

English Language Learners and the Technology Connection

Many schools now offer computer classes for ELLs. However, the emphasis is often on the basic characteristics or mechanics of computer usage, and focus

on print-based activities simply reproduced on the computer. Black (2009) found that ELL students developed their technological literacy by tapping into online sources and networks of technologically skilled people. These ELLs also developed critical literacy skills by having to disseminate and make decisions about information gained through these online sources.

ELLs who are still developing spoken and written English can experience expressive thought opportunities, and critical literacy through online literacy experience (Black, 2009), one of which is online gaming. They can use online gaming as a technology which employs multimodal forms of representation to gain understanding. Further, ELLs can develop their English and literacy by participating in the linguistically complex and cognitively challenging tasks available through online gaming environments. Online gaming can provide ELLs with not only print literacy but also with valuable 21st century technological literacy skills.

Methods

The design of this research was experimental. Data collection began in the fall of 2010 at a suburban, North Texas elementary school.

Participants

There were 45 participants (24 females and 21 males) in this study across grades 3, 4, and 5. Forty-two of the students were noted as low socio-economic status. Demographics included 33 Hispanic, 7 African American, 4 Anglo, and 1 was bi-racial (African American and Anglo). Fifteen participants were ELL students whose home language was Spanish. Participants across grades 3, 4, and 5 and were asked how often they played video games and were placed into four separate groups accordingly. The four groups in each grade were categorized by those who played video games *often* (6 plus hours per week), those who play *sometimes* (3 – 5 hours per week), those who reported *not often* (1 – 2 hours per week), and those who *never* played.

Survey Material

Motivational Survey. Participants were given the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP). The MRP (Gambrell, L., Palmer B., Codling, R., & Mazzone, S., 2009) consists of a reading survey and a conversational interview. The interview assessed motivational factors related to the reading of narrative text, informational text, and on more general factors related to reading motivation. The survey consisted of 20 items and used a 4-point Likert-type response scale. From the MRP, students' self-concept as readers and the value students place on reading was identified. This assessment tool was found to be a good match for the research questions in this study. The internal consistency of the reading survey has a moderately high reliability for both third grade (.70) and fifth grade (.76). The inter-rater agreement for the survey was .87. Additional interview

questions were included in order to determine the number of hours participants spent playing video games. These questions aided in the stratification process.

Questions 2, 9, and 12 of the MRP were chosen for examination. Researchers considered these specific questions as ones that could provide a link between motivation to read and video game play. The researchers administered the MRP to students on the school campus in a space provided by the elementary school principal over the course of two weeks. Results were analyzed using member checks and by construct using descriptive statistics.

Video Game Questions. Researchers asked participants the following two questions: Do you play video games? and How often do you play video games? If participants answered no to the first question then their answer to the second question was listed as *never*. Participants that answered yes to the first question were given the second question. Participants who reported 6 plus hours per week of game play were listed in the category *often*. Those who answered that they played 3-5 hours per week were listed as *sometimes*. Reporting game play at 1-2 hours per week was listed as *not very often*.

Results

MRP Data

Question number two on the MRP asked students to rate whether or not reading a book is something they like to do. According to the results based on 15 ELL students in grades 3, 4, and 5, 73% (88% boys; 57% of girls) liked to read *sometimes*, 13% (29% girls) liked to read *often*, and 13% (13% boys; 14% girls) reported *not very often* when asked if reading a book is something they like to do. Responses by all 30 non-ELL students surveyed showed 70% (77% boys; 65% girls) like to read *sometimes* and 23% (15% boys; 29% girls) like to read *often*. Only 7% (8% boys; 6% girls) reported *not very often* when asked if reading a book is something they like to do.

The MRP's question 9 asked students to rate themselves as a reader. Based on the 15 ELL students surveyed across 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade, 47% (63% boys; 29% girls) answered they were *good* readers. Whereas, 33% (25% boys; 43% girls) felt they were *OK* readers, and 20% (13% boys; 29% girls) felt they were *very good* readers. Out of all non-ELL students surveyed, 47% (54% boys; 41% girls) considered themselves *good* readers. Twenty-seven percent (23% boys; 29% girls) felt they were *OK* readers, 23% (15% boys; 29% girls) felt they were *very good* readers, and only 3% (8% boys) felt they were *poor* readers.

Question 12 on the MRP asked students to rate the value they place on knowing how to read. Out of the 15 ELL students surveyed, 67% (75% boys; 57% girls) felt that knowing how to read was *very important*, where as 20% (13% boys; 29% girls) reported knowing how to read was *important*. In addition, 13% (13% boys; 14% girls) reported reading was *sort of important*. Of all

non-ELL the students across the grades, 57% (46% boys; 65% girls) reported that knowing how to read was *very important*, 37% (38% boys; 35% girls) felt knowing how to read was *important*, and only 7% (15% boys) felt knowing how to read was *sort of important*.

Video Game Questions

Researchers asked participants if video games were something they liked to do *never*, *not very often*, *sometimes*, or *often*. An overwhelming 53% (75% boys liked; 29% girls) reported playing video games *often*. Twenty-seven percent (25% boys; 29% girls) responded *sometimes*, and 20% (43% girls) responded *not very often* in regard to time spent playing video games. Out of all non-ELL students surveyed, 50% (77% boys; 29% girls) reported they liked to play video games *often*. Twenty-seven percent (15% boys; 35% girls) felt playing video games was something they liked to do *sometimes*, while 20% (8% boys; 29% girls) responded *not very often*. Three percent (6% girls) of all non-ELL students surveyed reported they *never* liked playing video games.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included each student's comfort level during the interview process, interview environment provided by the school administration, and student auditory comprehension skills. Individual participant's comfort level with the interview process was a limitation as it could result in the participant telling the interviewer what they perceive the interviewer wants to hear rather than their own personal perceptions and beliefs. The interview environment provided by the school administration was a limitation as it was located at one end of a hallway in the elementary school. This environment could have caused students to hurry through the interview process if they were uncomfortable in this sometimes noisy and distracting setting. Student auditory comprehension skills were a limitation when participants did not understand the questions being asked.

Discussion/Conclusion

The majority of ELL students surveyed played video games three or more hours per week, yet still placed a high value on reading and had positive self-concepts as readers. Results showed all boys (ELL boys 42%; non-ELL boys 28%) in this study played video games *often* and *sometimes* more than their female counterparts. However, ELL boys also had higher percentages than ELL girls when asked if reading was *very important* (18%), if reading was something they liked to do *often* or *sometimes* (2%), and if they considered themselves *good* or *very good* readers (18%). In contrast, non-ELL girls had higher percentages than non-ELL boys when reporting they were *very good* readers (14%), when classifying reading as something they liked to do *often* or *sometimes* (2%), and when

considering reading as very important (19%). Findings suggest that time spent playing video games did not result in a negative relationship between ELL boys and their motivation to read. In fact, evidence would suggest that video game play was able to coexist in a positive manner with ELL boys' self-concept as readers and the value they place on reading. Further research is needed to understand the differences in motivation video games may play in the lives of both ELL and non-ELL students, as well as the relationship between time spent playing video games and students' literacy development.

Video games have the potential to provide a gateway in which traditional school content becomes more appealing while motivating students to engage in both home-based and school-based learning (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Gee, 2004). Yet, many educators fail to recognize and/or utilize the relevance of video games' motivational value for students' developed skills, expanded satisfaction, or extended literacy encounters (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Gee, 2004, 2007; Walsh, 2010). In order to draw students' attention (in particular those who play video games) to literacy learning, educators should consider the use of video games as a form of literacy. Thus, literacy becomes more than a set of acquired skills, but rather a set of cultural practices (Gavelek, Raphael, Biondo, & Wang, 2000). Validating literacy within video games possesses the potential to bridge the literacy gap between home and school on a local, national, and international level as well as develop a generation that seeks out innovative ways of learning and understanding (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Gee, 2004, 2007). When home-based and school-based literacy can be integrated, students have motivating, authentic reasons to participate in literacy because of its relevance to their lives (Lapp, et.al, 2010; Noddings, 2005; Pierce, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999).

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