

Educator's Voice

NYSUT'S JOURNAL OF BEST PRACTICES IN EDUCATION

VOLUME I, SPRING 2008

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Early Literacy

THE FOUNDATION OF ALL LEARNING

In this issue ...

There is compelling evidence that high-quality early literacy instruction can lead to significant, long-term improvements in student achievement. Educators, parents, researchers and policymakers alike are developing a growing understanding that early literacy is an investment that yields critical academic and economic gains.

This premier issue of *Educator's Voice* explores early literacy through a framework that raises questions and provides practical strategies for building literacy skills among young learners. In this journal, you will find research on several developmentally appropriate literacy activities from birth through elementary levels; strategies for helping struggling readers; information on integrating vocabulary instruction with literacy development; and much more. Enjoy *Educator's Voice*, and we look forward to your feedback.



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Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to the first issue of *Educator's Voice*, NYSUT's journal of best practices in education. *Educator's Voice* provides research-based, field-tested strategies that have been used by experienced educators to help schools close achievement gaps and ensure all students have a solid academic foundation.

Research has shown repeatedly that early literacy — the theme of our first issue — is critical to ensuring high levels of student achievement. The National Institute for Early Education Research has found that students with strong early literacy skills benefit academically, socially and, eventually, professionally. In short, the gift of early literacy stays with students throughout their entire continuum of learning.

Among educators and policymakers, the focus on early literacy is increasing. In New York, more students than ever are enrolled in publicly funded pre-K programs, thanks to a new initiative supported by the state Legislature and Board of Regents. Schools throughout New York are using increases in state aid to direct more resources at early education and literacy. NYSUT has offered professional development opportunities focused on improving literacy instruction in elementary and middle-level education and among English language learners.

Our challenge as educators is to translate this momentum into proven, classroom-based strategies that will enhance our students' literacy skills. We can accomplish this by providing a forum through which educators can share best practices they have used to make a difference and achieve positive outcomes for all students. That is the mission of *Educator's Voice*.

Enjoy *Educator's Voice* and, as always, we welcome your comments.

Sincerely,

Maria Neira
Vice President, NYSUT

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Educator's Voice

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VOLUME 1

Early Literacy

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An Early Childhood Practitioner's Guide: Developmentally Appropriate Literacy Practices for Preschool-Age Children

SUMMARY

In her discussion of user-friendly and developmentally appropriate literacy strategies for the early childhood teacher, the author provides a short review of best practices in literacy for young children and a list of developmentally appropriate, research-based literacy instruction strategies for the preschool teacher.

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She also teaches child development in a master's degree program. She has worked as an early childhood teacher with infants to preschoolers. She is a member of the board of Syracuse Association for the Education of Young Children and previously served on the board of the New York State Association for the Education of Young Children.

Teaching children

to become literate members of society is a daunting task, often relegated to the elementary school teacher.

However, research on teaching children to become literate suggests that this process must begin well before kindergarten. Research suggests that children are primed for learning language and literacy *in utero*. Parents and early childhood teachers are significant contributors in the process of preparing children for the instruction they will receive beginning in kindergarten. We are all familiar with the statement "It takes a village to raise a child." Perhaps it should be amended to say "It takes a village to teach a child to read." Literacy, which includes the acts of reading, writing, speaking and listening as essential skills, requires much time, energy, people and materials to be successful. However, it also calls for the use of

appropriate strategies, ones which will optimize the literacy outcome.

Developmentally Appropriate Literacy Practices

Developmentally appropriate practice suggests that the developmental skills and abilities of the child are used as the platform for teaching literacy. The age and ability of the child are considered, then age-appropriate opportunities are provided to the child, with feedback and practice. The child's current ability and practice of emerging skills provides the child with an opportunity to master the skill, increasing his repertoire. The role of the teacher or parent is to astutely assess the child's current and emergent skills, then supply the child with appropriate materials and support. When this occurs, the child masters the skill. A sound knowledge of child development is a necessary tool in this process. Knowing not only what

by Carmelita Lomeo-Smrtic, Ph.D.
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the child can do at this moment, but also and more importantly, what will be coming down the pike developmentally, are pivotal to the success. Anticipating the child's next developmental milestone allows the child sufficient practice with currently occurring skills but also provides the framework for new, emerging skills (NAEYC, 1997).

This developmental ladder provides the early childhood educator with a framework for developing and providing appropriate learning opportunities, materials and experiences. The early childhood educator's responsibility is not to teach reading but to develop pre-literacy skills, thereby making the child ready for intense literacy instruction typical of kindergarten and beyond.

What Does the Literacy Research Tell Us?

Findings from the *National Reading Panel Report* (1998) suggest that several key components must be in place to ensure reading success. The panel found significant research that supported the need for parent participation providing children with early language and literacy experiences that foster reading development. The

research also suggests that best practice includes phonemic awareness, phonics, and good literature in reading instruction. Finally, the research suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching reading doesn't work. Rather, the skilled teacher must integrate different reading approaches to enhance the effectiveness of instruction for all students.

The panel then evaluated the literacy research and recommended that a balanced literacy approach should include the following components: alphabets (phonemic awareness instruction and phonics instruction), fluency, and comprehension (vocabulary instruction and text comprehension instruction).

Phonemic awareness instruction involves having children focus and manipulate phonemes, the smallest units of sound, in both syllables and words. In the English language there are approximately 42 to 45 phonemes. Children practice identifying, isolating, deleting, categorizing, blending, segmenting, adding and substituting phonemes in an oral-only lesson. Phonemic awareness instruction is different from phonics in that

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Literacy Activities

- Well-Designed Literacy Centers
- Reading Center
- Writing Center
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- Books in All Centers
- Word Walls
- Read Alouds
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- Build Literacy into Every Activity and Lesson
- Repeated Phonemic Awareness Activities
- Alphabetic Principle Experiences
- Group Stories
- Print Conventions
- Big Books
- Label the Environment
- Songs and Fingerplays
- Sign-In Sheet
- Rebus Charts
- Literacy Props
- Guided Reading Activities
- Teach Vocabulary
- Use Props during Read Alouds

An Early Childhood Practitioner's Guide: Developmentally Appropriate Literacy Practices for Preschool-Age Children

The research suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching reading doesn't work. Rather, the skilled teacher must integrate different reading approaches to enhance the effectiveness of instruction for all students.

phonics connects the letter with the sound, while phonemic awareness focuses on the sound only. Children play fun and often silly games with sounds, such as: *What word do you have if you add "s" to the beginning of mile?* Or: *The word is bug. Change the "g" to "n." What is the new word?* Or: *Which word is "b-i-g"?* Children identify word, teacher writes word and students repeat word. Phonemic awareness is the foundation to later phonics instruction. Children cannot successfully learn to spell and read if they don't have a sound phonemic awareness understanding. Phonics involves learning letter-sound relationships necessary to learning how to spell and read. There are many approaches to phonics, both explicit and implicit. Phonics instruction should not begin before kindergarten. The most successful phonics approaches involve a strong phonemic awareness component in addition to the systematic letter-sound relationship instruction.

Fluency, the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy and proper expression, is critical to reading comprehension. Guided, repeated oral reading and independent, silent reading are the two most successful strategies to becoming a fluent reader.

Comprehension, the ability to understand what has been read, requires the reader to intentionally

engage in a construction of meaning through problem-solving and critical thinking. Comprehension can only be achieved through the development of a large vocabulary and the understanding that comprehension is an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text. The larger the child's vocabulary, the more he comprehends when reading. Both vocabulary and comprehension must be taught both implicitly and explicitly. Text comprehension is when readers actively relate the ideas represented in print to their own knowledge and experiences and construct mental representations in memory. Children are asked to make the following comparisons, text to self, text to text, text to others and text to world, allowing the reader to construct a new understanding of the world and make necessary connections to later recall and better understand the content read.

Best Practice in Preschool Literacy Instruction

Utilizing the National Reading Panel Report information and developmentally appropriate practice in literacy instruction, the following is an early childhood practitioner's guide to simple, effective and research-based literacy strategies for home, day care and preschool settings.

■ Well-Designed Literacy Centers

Reading, listening, and writing centers should be well stocked, open and available to the children at all times. Teachers should support these centers with small-group and one-on-one time.

■ Reading Center

Provide the children with both fiction and non-fiction books. Choose books that are of varying levels of difficulty. Rotate the books on a weekly basis and include books related to the thematic study of the week.

■ Writing Center

Provide a multitude of supplies for the novice to the more sophisticated writer. Post the alphabet, both upper and lowercase letters in Denelian print. Regularly provide the children with story starter pages with a sentence, which may be related to the thematic study of the week. Buy or make journals for each child. Be the stylus for the children, writing their dictations to pictures they created in the art center. Create a mailbox for each child to communicate with all members of the classroom.

■ Listening Center

Buy or create your own books on tape. Your voice reading a familiar book is wonderful. Have a blank audiotape for each child and allow each to read a book and record it. Create or buy flannel pieces to favorite books and let the children retell the story to each other.

■ Books in All Centers

Support the theme or concept with both fiction and non-fiction books pertaining to the thematic or conceptual study. For example, in the art area, provide books that show pictures of the theme so children can construct their own artistic expression of the concept.

■ Word Walls

In the writing area or the circle time area, using large index cards, print the key words associated with the weekly thematic study, including a picture so the children can begin to associate the letters/word with the object. Review them regularly. Make additional copies for the writing center so children can copy the words when journaling.

■ Read Alouds

Complete several story read alouds daily, utilizing open-ended questions that get the children involved in not only the story but the literacy process. When introducing the story, talk about the author and illustrator, so children begin to understand the process. When developing open-ended questions consider those that develop text comprehension skills. For instance: What other stories have we read that are like this story? Have you ever felt like the character? What would you do if you were the character?

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METHODOLOGY

Connecting Words and Pictures



An Early Childhood Practitioner's Guide: Developmentally Appropriate Literacy Practices for Preschool-Age Children

Children who begin kindergarten with rudimentary comprehension skills, a significant vocabulary, phonemic awareness and understanding are primed for learning the literacy skills in today's literacy curriculum.

■ Conversations

Have engaging, genuine and meaningful conversations with children frequently throughout the day. Ask questions to get them critically thinking and to express themselves.

■ Build Literacy into Every Activity and Lesson

At the water table, have a prediction chart so children can think, speak, write about and listen to what they are studying. A simple sink-and-float activity becomes a study in predicting and charting.

■ Repeated Phonemic Awareness Activities

Provide children with numerous phonemic awareness activities, fun and silly rhyming activities like “Down by the Bay.”

■ Alphabetic Principle Experiences

Post the alphabet in many places in the classroom, not just the writing center. Use environmental print to allow children to recognize letters they see every day in their environment.

■ Group Stories

In circle time or small group, create stories the children dictate, illustrating print conventions as the story is written.

■ Print Conventions

Help children acquire print conventions. Demonstrate the proper way to hold a book, pointing to the words as you read.

■ Big Books

Read big books, illustrating print conventions.

■ Label the Environment

Label all objects in the environment so children associate the word with the object.

■ Songs and Fingerplays

Sing songs and fingerplays and utilize rebus charts to assist in learning the words to the songs and fingerplays.

■ Sign-In Sheet

Have children sign in and out daily as they arrive and depart, practicing the letters of their names.

■ Rebus Charts

Make rebus charts (words and pictures) for all activities — cooking, experiments, etc.

■ Literacy Props

In the dramatic play area, include literacy props to support the theme of the play.

■ Guided Reading Activities

Select books with repetitive phrases, print the phrases and have the children participate in an interactive read aloud, reading the repeated phrase. Read “The Little Red Hen,” and on chart paper write the repeated statement and have the children read the statement as the story is read.

■ Teach Vocabulary

Intentionally include new vocabulary in books read out loud, and implicitly

and explicitly teach the vocabulary words as the book is read.

■ Use Props during Read Alouds

Supply children with props they can hold during a read aloud, as the object is discussed in the book, the child has to raise the object, participating in the read aloud.

What Does It All Mean?

The research on early childhood and literacy best practice provides us with a plethora of findings, as well as the application of the research into everyday practice. Literacy is a multi-faceted process that requires much practice and guidance. This guidance comes not only from skilled and well-trained professionals, but also parents — the child's first teacher. The application listed in this article can be implemented by parents at home with some modifications.

Pre-reading experiences, essential to school success, should be pleasurable and fun. When children enjoy the process, they are more likely to learn and it is often much more meaningful. Today, learning has become something children dread, filled with skill and drill, worksheets, and meaningless activities. The activities discussed in this article are not just best practice for the early childhood teacher, they are best practice for the elementary grades as well. When children learn in meaningful ways and construct their own knowledge of the world — or, in this case, literacy — not only do they

learn literacy, they will be successful in school endeavors, including today's standardized ELA exams.

The above described literacy activities provide children with meaningful, everyday experiences, in which they learn valuable knowledge of print and pre-reading skills. These prerequisite skills are imperative if children are to really become literate. Children who begin kindergarten with rudimentary comprehension skills, a significant vocabulary, phonemic awareness and understanding are primed for learning the literacy skills in today's literacy curriculum.

When we rush children to learn literacy using canned programs and ignore best practice, many children are "Left Behind." The valuable preschool experience with literacy is invaluable to school success. Appropriate literacy experiences in the preschool years inoculates children, allowing them to take these reading prerequisite skills into the elementary school years, helping them to succeed in becoming a literate individual.

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Using Props





SUMMARY

Because students enter kindergarten in varying states of readiness, meeting the national challenge that every child read by the end of third grade is no easy task for primary teachers. Here, one classroom professional offers a host of proven strategies to help meet this goal.

Kristin Dale has taught for 18 years, 14 of them at Wingdale Elementary School in Dutchess County, where she teaches first grade. She is an instructor for NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust, focusing on the master's literacy program. A member of the Dover-Wingdale Teachers Association, she is a building representative and served as a member of the union's contract negotiating team. She also consults in the area of reading comprehension, struggling readers and guided reading.

Early Literacy in School: Getting off on the Right Foot

Most five-year-olds in New York state arrive in kindergarten with a palpable excitement about learning to read. They see this task not as work but as an exciting learning experience; the key to participating in the grownup world of print. However, these young learners arrive in our schools with a wide range of reading readiness and motivation. Some know and understand sounds, letters and words from television, computer programs or home play and instruction. Some have no concept of the interrelatedness of sounds and symbols. Some have been read to every night from birth and some have been deprived of this language-building experience because their parents or caregivers cannot read, are not home at bedtime or do not realize its critical importance.

These factors make the national challenge of NCLB's Reading First — that every child read by the end of third grade — a monumental challenge for every teacher of young children. What, then, can we do in schools to increase the likelihood that all children will achieve literacy by the end of third grade? What is it, exactly, that we expect them to be able to do?

What can we do as educators to enhance their abilities?

This we can say with certainty: If a child in a modern society like ours does not learn to read, he doesn't make it in life (McPike, 1995). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has created a goal that every healthy child born in the 21st century should be reading at or above the basic level by age 9. When it comes to reading, the months of first grade are the most important in a child's learning career.

Primary children need explicit, systematic instruction in phonics and lots of exposures to rich literature in both fiction and nonfiction genres. Attention to meaning and comprehension strategies is essential right from the start. Decoding and comprehension strategies should be taught at

Reading First FAST Facts

Grant from NCLB:

New York received \$443,135,000
from 2004-08

Participants:

Number of districts: 98
Number of schools impacted: 308
Number of teachers impacted: 10,000
Number of students impacted: 78,000

by Kristin Dale
Dover-Wingdale Teachers Association

the same time. We need to teach children that reading is thinking guided by print right from the beginning of their instruction (Calkins, 2001). This would help alleviate the comprehension gap many students encounter in upper elementary grades. In writing, conventional spelling should be developed through focused instruction and practice. One of the best ways to do this is with the use of word walls in the primary classroom (Wagstaff, 1998). Primary students should be able to correctly read and spell previously studied words.

Learning to monitor their own comprehension is one of the major tasks for beginning readers. As readers are exposed to a variety of reading materials and experiences, they begin to develop a self-extending system of autonomy and regulation. This self-awareness is critical for achieving reading comprehension success. Proficient readers are successful when given instruction and modeling in fluency. An emergent reader becomes a fluent reader when he is engaged in reading a just right text and has multiple opportunities to feel what it is like to read smoothly and with fluency; young students and other less fluent

readers may not always know what fluent reading should be like (Rasinski, 1989). Support during the process of reading, in a guided reading group, allows the teacher to give learners direct instruction and feedback while the readers are engaged in the process of reading. Children need access to a large supply of books of appropriate difficulty. This means books they can read fluently while also understanding the story or information (Allington, 1998).

Research shows that parent involvement, especially in activities that directly support their children's school success, is correlated with reading achievement (Learning First Alliance). Reading aloud to a child is the single most beneficial language-building task parents or caregivers can engage in with their child. Reading aloud to a child is a critical activity in helping a child gain the knowledge and language skills that will enable good comprehension strategies later on. Benefits from reading aloud to children include: developing background knowledge about a variety of topics, building vocabulary, becoming familiar with rich language patterns,

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Parents Helping Their Kids to Read

The 1,000 Book Project was started by two teachers in the Albany suburb of Bethlehem with a goal that parents read 1,000 books to their children by the age of 6. The teachers filled 100 sturdy bags with 10 books each and let parents sign out the bags free for two weeks at a time.

The concept has since spread to communities across the state. One community with a large Latino population makes bags of dual-language books available, exposing Spanish-speaking parents to English as they provide their children exposure to Spanish.



Extensive research has indicated the importance of phonemic awareness as a prerequisite for understanding the alphabetic principle, namely that letters stand for the sounds in spoken words.

developing familiarity with story grammar, acquiring familiarity with the reading process and identifying reading as a pleasurable activity (Hall & Moats, 2000). Teachers can provide parents with opportunities to visit the classroom and read aloud to the students as well. This helps model for students how adults live their lives as readers, enhances the home-school connection and helps to continually foster a love and joy for reading.

The most effective approach in helping children with reading difficulties is prevention. Diverse learners face the tyranny of time on a daily basis in which the educational clock is ticking while they remain at risk of falling farther and farther behind in their schooling (Kameenui, 1993). Children who are behind in language development are in a never-ending battle to catch up with their peers. This delay may be caused by second language learning issues, poverty, developmental delay or disability. The probability that a child will remain a poor reader at the end of fourth grade if the child was a poor reader at the end of first grade is 0.88 (Juel, 1988). The research of Stanovich (1986) refers to this cycle as the Matthew Effect — the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Those who are able to read do so more often. As a result, their schema, vocabulary, strategies and skills continue to grow and improve. Those who do not read well avoid the task and the gap between the

rich, successful readers and the poor, unsuccessful readers continues to grow. Children who play with language and writing are more likely and eager to learn.

Phonemic awareness has a strong and direct relationship to the success of a beginning reader; it is both a prerequisite to and consequence of learning to read (Yopp, 2000). As an alphabetic orthography, English does not have a one-to-one correspondence between all of the speech sounds and letters. This relationship between written symbols, which we know as letters, and sounds, makes it difficult to learn to read our language. The awareness that our speech stream consists of a sequence of smaller units, known as phonemes, and the ability to manipulate those phonemes, is called phonemic awareness. Extensive research has indicated the importance of phonemic awareness as a prerequisite for understanding the alphabetic principle, namely that letters stand for the sounds in spoken words (Griffith & Olson 1992). As a result, it is essential that our classroom instruction builds on that understanding. We need to build on the language foundation our children come to us with and teach reading from speech to print. The auditory manipulation of sounds, through rhyming, blending and segmenting of sounds, capitalizes on this foundation and sets the reader up for future success.

Richard Allington states, “It is the quality of the teacher, not variation in curriculum materials that is identified as the critical factor in effective instruction.” He goes on to state, “Expert teachers produce more readers than other teachers, regardless of the curriculum materials used” (Allington, 1998). As classroom teachers, it is essential for our students’ success that we continue to develop as professionals. We must know what is best for the learning of our students and continually learn and improve as practitioners of reading. Young children learn to read when immersed in classrooms rich with language, music, word play and poetry. They need exposure to large volumes of rich, beautiful literature from both fiction and nonfiction genres. It is imperative that children spend the greatest portion of their reading instruction actually engaged in the process of reading. Children need to have books in their hands to read that are at their just-right instructional level. If engaged in the process of strategy instruction, young readers benefit from reading books at their independent level so as not to focus on decoding and free up their minds to focus on mastering the reading strategy.

During the primary years of education, young children learn the prerequisite reading readiness skills to set them up for a lifetime of reading and writing success. For young readers, it is not just about mapping sounds to print, decoding or thinking aloud. We must teach our children the joy and love of reading as we model for them how we live our

lives with books. Modeling the exciting journeys and travels we take as readers who understand and connect with characters is the best way to show our emergent readers what it is all about: Reading is thinking guided by print!

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When it comes to reading, the months of first grade are the most important in a child’s learning career.



SUMMARY

To comprehend a text, readers need to understand up to 95% of the vocabulary. Where does this leave English language learners? With the help of simple, research-based strategies, vocabulary instruction can be less daunting, more successful — and even fun.

Katie Kurjakovic is an ESL teacher and United Federation of Teachers chapter leader at P.S. 11, a K-6 school in Queens. She is a trained coordinator in the American Federation of Teachers Educational Research & Development program in beginning reading instruction. She is a member of the NYSUT Committee on English Language Learners.

Vocabulary Instruction for English Language Learners

Last week, I witnessed a scenario all too familiar to teachers of English language learners. A second-grade teacher was preparing to read a story about George Washington’s wife, Martha, to her class. She anticipated all the unfamiliar vocabulary she thought they would encounter. She told them what colonies and colonists were. She spoke of the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence. Then, shortly after she began reading, a girl raised her hand with a puzzled look on her face. “What’s a wife?” she asked.

My colleagues and I find two generally recognized statistics particularly daunting. The first: Readers need to know 90% to 95% of vocabulary in a text in order to understand it. The second: College-bound seniors have working vocabularies of 60,000-100,000 words.¹ The problem: ELLs enter our classrooms starting from scratch. Where does one begin? Thanks to the research of Isabel Beck, Margaret McKeown and Linda Kucan, we have new knowledge of not only how students acquire vocabulary, but how to more effectively teach it to ELLs.

I have taught ESL for 15 years at PS 11, a K-6 elementary school in Queens. PS 11 has a large population of ELLs. This year, 340 of our 1,175 students were eligible for the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test. Approximately 80% of the student body speaks a second language at home. While we have had great success in teaching decoding skills using explicit, multi-sensory strategies and programs, teaching vocabulary has remained an obstacle. Even the simplest decodable or predictable text contains words unknown to ELLs. Take, for example, a story titled “The Bet.” A colleague asked her third-graders to predict what the story might be about. Members of the class confidently raised their hands. The first student she called on thought it would be about an animal doctor (confusion with *vet*). The second suggested the book might be about someone sleeping (confusion with *bed*). They were clearly unfamiliar with the word “bet.” Given their initial misunderstanding, what kind of meaning could these students have constructed if they had read the text on their own?

by Katie Kurjakovic
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As ESL teachers, we knew our students needed explicit vocabulary instruction. We knew that asking our students to look up words in dictionaries would not work — they could not understand the words used in the definitions. We were also frustrated by the quality of sentences students would hand in as their vocabulary or spelling homework — “*Shop: I shop every day. Rush: I rush every day.*” It was evident that we were not helping students to internalize the meanings of words at all.

We knew we were not alone. In the spring of 2003, the entire issue of the American Federation of Teachers’ research journal, *American Educator*, was devoted to words and the role that weak vocabulary plays in the “fourth-grade comprehension plunge.”²² Fortunately for us, that issue included an article by Beck, McKeown and Kucan titled “Taking Delight in Words: Using Oral Language to Build Young Children’s Vocabularies.” In this article, and in their book from which it was excerpted, *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*, the authors provide strategies that have proven

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METHODOLOGY

Growing Vocabulary from ‘Sentence Stems’

To encourage the use of new vocabulary, many of my colleagues and I would ask students to write sentences using a weekly list of words. More often than not, this was a source of frustration for students and teacher alike. One of the most helpful exercises we have incorporated from Beck’s research is the tool of “sentence stems.”²¹ Sentence stems are a miraculous scaffold for English language learners. Instead of requiring students to start from scratch to create context, meaning and syntax simultaneously in one sentence, sentence stems serve to isolate meaning.

To prepare for this activity, the teacher provides the beginning of a sentence. This sentence starter should be carefully constructed so the students will demonstrate their level of knowledge of the word by how they complete it. It should include the targeted word, but be open-ended so students can finish the sentence.

Sample stems might be, *Dad got mad when I **upset** the paints because ...* or *When he **leaned** back in his chair...* We have found that the support of sentence stems limits student error significantly while still allowing for authentic use of language. They can be used in groups or pairs, as well as independently.

Sentence stems are an accurate assessment tool that provides immediate feedback. I gave a fourth-grade group of intermediate and advanced ELLs the following sentence starter for the word *panic*: “My mom will panic if...” Some examples students posed were: “My mom will panic if I come home late from the park” and “My mom will panic if I fall off the boat.”

When one student suggested, “My mom will panic if I lose my shoe,” I was able to clarify the difference between panicking and getting angry or worried. The student changed his example to, “My mom will panic if I lose my brother!”

Writing stems takes more effort on the teacher’s part, but saves time on error correction. This year, one fourth-grade teacher is experimenting with stems for a few words per week. Another uses this as an oral activity during the literacy block, providing the beginning of the sentence verbally and having students working in pairs confer briefly to develop an ending. Even students who are normally hesitant to participate are eager to jump into the discussion with their classmates.

Sentence stems are a miraculous scaffold for English language learners. Instead of requiring students to start from scratch to create context, meaning and syntax simultaneously in one sentence, sentence stems serve to isolate meaning.

effective in our ESL classrooms. Their suggestions for selection and instruction of words, as well as a follow-up activity based on “sentence stems” (*see related article*) have been particularly useful. What follows is a description of how I have incorporated their strategy for early literacy instruction for ELLs.³

In brief, there are six steps (*see sidebar at far right*).

I use these steps regularly with a group of second-grade beginning and intermediate-level ELLs, as determined by the NYSESLAT. The story I last read to them was the classic *Caps for Sale* by Esphyr Slobodkina. The first step was to choose three to five words. Beck suggests picking words that are unknown, but that will be useful to students in other contexts.⁵ As I planned the lesson, I anticipated that many students would not know the words *long* (in reference to time), *leaned*, *upset*, *peddler* and *checked* (as in fabric design). I decided that the first three words were of broader importance to my second-graders, and that when it came to *peddler* and *checked*, I would just provide a quick synonym or explanation as I read the story aloud.

One generally accepted best practice for ELLs is to preview vocabulary. So, in the first lesson, I introduced the words to students with user-friendly definitions. It is important to

clarify the meaning of the word as it is used in the text. I defined *long* as “not quick, taking a lot of time.” *Lean* was “to bend a little so you are not straight” (we all acted this out, of course).

Upset does not have its usual meaning, but rather is used in the sense of “to make things fall over.” Once we had covered all the words, I was able to read *Caps for Sale* aloud, without interrupting the flow of the story.

As Beck and her co-researchers stress, it is not enough for students to have passive word knowledge.⁵ Therefore, steps 4 through 6 help students transfer words from a page of a book into their own experiences and active wells of language. To begin this process, I re-read the book the following day, then discussed one word at a time. First, I used the targeted word in the context of the story. For example, “Let’s talk about the word *long*. In *Caps for Sale*, we read that the peddler slept for a *long* time.” Next, I demonstrated that *long* can be used in different contexts. “My train was late yesterday. I had a *long* wait before it came. While I waited, I read for a *long* time.” Students have now had the opportunity to hear the word “long,” with the same meaning, in a completely different context and using different language structures.

The final step was to give students an opportunity to use the target word in terms of their own lives. I provided

METHODOLOGY

Early Literacy Instruction for English Language Learners

1. Choose three to five words from a story.
2. Preview the words, using definitions the student can understand.
3. Read the text (as a read aloud, shared or guided reading).
4. Put the words in context.
5. Give an example in a different context.
6. Ask students to provide their own examples.

my students with the scaffold, “I waited for a *long* time. What is something you have done for a *long* time?” Their responses allowed them to practice while giving me a window to assess whether they thoroughly understood and could use the word correctly.

If students are to fully internalize new words, however, they need to have repeated interactions with them. In *Bringing Words to Life*, the authors state, “The vocabulary research strongly points to the need for frequent encounters with new words if they are to become part of an individual’s vocabulary repertoire.”⁶ It is my goal to systematically infuse my instruction with newly taught words. I plan to create a vocabulary word wall and challenge myself to use as many words as possible, as many times as possible, throughout the school day and year. It is a challenge I will make to my students, as well.

We reap the rewards of vocabulary instruction daily. It may come after a teacher mentions the *long* weekend coming up and a buzz goes around the room: “Did you hear that word? *Long!*” It may be when we ask the students to work slowly and carefully during a test and one asks, “You mean don’t rush?” It may be when a bilingual kindergarten student points to an energetic group of his peers and knowingly says to the teacher, “boisterous!” It is stories like these that excite us and challenge us to keep our expectations high.

Robust vocabulary instruction shows great promise in our K-6 ESL classes. It is free; it is fun; it can be adapted to any text or literacy program. The more English words students know, the more they can understand and speak. The more they can understand and speak, the more they will be able to comprehend what they read and develop their writing abilities.

No, we can’t teach 100,000 words in a year, but teaching five today is a great start.

ENDNOTES

¹ Hirsch, E.D. (2003) Reading comprehension requires knowledge — of words and the world. *American Educator*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 16-29. American Federation of Teachers. p.16.

² Chall, J.S. & Jacobs, V.A. (1996) The classic study on poor children’s fourth grade slump. Reprinted in *American Educator*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 14-15. American Federation of Teachers. p.14.

³ Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G. & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life: robust vocabulary instruction*. New York: The Guilford Press.

⁴ Beck, p. 8.

⁵ Beck, p. 13.

⁶ Beck, p. 69.

SIDEBAR ENDNOTES

¹ Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G. & Kucan, L. (2002), *Bringing words to life: robust vocabulary instruction*. New York: The Guilford Press. p. 80.



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Response to Intervention: An Overview

New Hope for Struggling Learners

Most children

who are classified as learning-disabled are identified because of difficulties with reading. Since the 1970s, the process for identifying a child as learning-disabled, or reading-disabled more specifically, has had, as a central criterion, the requirement that there be a substantial discrepancy or difference between the student's measured intellectual ability and his or her measured reading achievement. This approach to LD classification was implicitly based on the belief that IQ and achievement should be strongly related. That is, it was believed that children whose IQ was unusually high should, in general, be relatively high achievers academically and that children whose measured IQ was relatively low should be relatively low achievers. When this close relationship was not evident, particularly when IQ was substantially higher than academic achievement, it was believed that there must be something inherently wrong with the student's ability to learn. In other words, it was believed that the student was unable

to learn (i.e., he or she was learning-disabled). This foundational belief about the meaning of a discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic performance was institutionalized in the United States with the passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975.

However, there were a variety of criticisms of this IQ-Achievement Discrepancy approach to the identification of learning-disabled students, and these criticisms led to a good deal of research, particularly in the area of early reading development, that demonstrated that the hypothesized close relationship between intellectual ability and reading ability does not exist in the early primary grades. In fact, there is only a weak relationship between intelligence and reading achievement in the early primary grades (Adams, 1990). Moreover, Vellutino, Scanlon, and Lyon (2000) demonstrated that, among children who experience difficulty in learning to read, there is little if any relationship between the children's measured IQ and their response to intervention designed to reduce reading difficulties.

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Findings such as these argue strongly against the use of an IQ-Achievement Discrepancy approach to learning disabilities classifications, particularly for children in the primary grades (see Vellutino et al., 2000 for a more comprehensive review).

Response to Intervention (RTI) is the most commonly cited alternative to the discrepancy approach. It involves identifying children who are not meeting grade-level expectations and who are presumably at risk for continuing to lag behind their peers early on and providing instructional modifications (interventions) for these children that are instituted early in their educational careers. The students' progress is closely monitored to determine whether and when additional modifications need to be made or whether the interventions can be discontinued because the student is performing at or close to grade level. The goal of the instructional modifications is to accelerate the children's rate of growth so that they will be able to meet grade-level expectations. In an RTI model, when appropriately

intensified and targeted interventions fail to lead to accelerated progress in learning, the child would be considered for possible LD designation.

The call for using RTI as a major component of LD classification grew out of a substantial body of research that indicates that many children who demonstrate early reading difficulties can overcome those difficulties if provided with intensified assistance in developing literacy skills and strategies. The roots of that research may be traced to an article published by Marie Clay in 1987 titled "Learning to be Learning Disabled" in which she asserts that many children who are identified as learning-disabled (at least in reading) qualify for that classification not because there is something inherently wrong with the child but because the child's early instruction was not sufficiently responsive to their instructional needs. Clay argued that consideration for LD classification should be delayed until substantial efforts had been made to help the child to overcome his or her early difficulties. Clay's Reading Recovery

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SUMMARY

Response to Intervention has its roots in research on early literacy development and the prevention of long-term reading difficulties. This research has demonstrated that early and intensive interventions can accelerate the process of young struggling readers and thereby help to avoid inappropriate LD classifications. The current article provides an overview of what implementation of RTI in the primary grades might look like. It also highlights the many unanswered questions and concerns that schools currently confront with regard to RTI.

Response to Intervention: An Overview

New Hope for Struggling Learners

There is fairly universal agreement that the characteristics of a child's instructional experiences must be weighed heavily in attempts to determine whether lack of progress is due primarily to underlying learning difficulties or to insufficient instructional intervention.

program, which is an intensive (one-to-one) intervention for struggling first-grade readers was, in fact, developed for the purpose of accelerating the progress of children who demonstrated difficulties at the early stages of learning to read. Clay argued that children who continued to demonstrate reading difficulties despite such intensive support may be appropriately identified as learning-disabled.

Since Clay's 1987 article, a substantial amount of research demonstrated that instructional interventions are effective in reducing the incidence of early reading difficulties. In fact, it is now widely acknowledged that, for the majority of children who demonstrate difficulties at the early stages of learning to read, long-term reading difficulties can be prevented through early and appropriately targeted reading intervention (Denton et al., 2005; Scanlon, Vellutino, Small, Fanuele, & Sweeney, 2005; Torgesen, Alexander, Wagner, Rashotte, Voeller, & Conway, 2001; Vellutino, Scanlon, Small, & Fanuele, 2006; Vellutino, et al. 1996; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003). Some of this research has also demonstrated that, for many children, classroom and small group interventions can serve to accelerate the development of early reading skills, thereby reducing the number of children who need more intensive one-to-one interventions

(O'Connor, Fulmer, Harty, & Bell, 2005; Scanlon, Gelzheiser, Vellutino, Schatschneider, & Sweeney (in press); Scanlon et al., 2005). Indeed, some have estimated that the provision of high-quality classroom instruction, by itself, could substantially reduce the incidence of early reading difficulties (Lyon, Fletcher, Fuchs, & Chhabra, 2006). However, without such instructional interventions, many children who struggle at the early stages of learning to read continue to struggle throughout their academic careers (Juel, 1988) and many are ultimately identified as reading-disabled (Vellutino et al., 1996; O'Connor et al., 2005).

These various strands of research stimulated federal legislation that sought to apply the scientific knowledge on a broad scale. The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) were both driven by this research. Indeed, the IDEIA was the first federal legislation permitting and encouraging the use of alternative approaches, such as RTI, to the identification of learning-disabled children.

Most RTI models involve using a "tiered" approach to the implementation of instructional modifications. In a tiered approach, instruction is

gradually intensified for low-performing students who do not show accelerated growth with less intensive instruction. Intensification may be accomplished by providing more time in instruction, smaller instructional groupings, or both. In most models, the first tier of intervention occurs at the classroom level and is provided by the classroom teacher. Children receiving such intervention are monitored for a period of time and, if they do not show accelerated progress, they are provided with an additional tier of instruction. Tier 2 instruction is generally provided in addition to (rather than instead of) classroom instruction and is provided by a specialist teacher in a small group context. Once again, the students' progress is monitored. In some RTI models, children who do not show accelerated progress when provided with Tier 2 intervention are considered for possible LD classification. In other models, an additional tier of intervention (Tier 3) is provided before consideration for LD classification. In either case, it is the documentation of limited progress over a protracted period of time, in spite of multiple attempts to adjust the amount or type of instruction the child receives, that serves as a major criterion in deliberations regarding classification.

Thus, there is fairly universal agreement that the characteristics of a child's instructional experiences must be weighed heavily in attempts to determine whether lack of progress is due primarily to underlying learning difficulties or to insufficient instructional intervention. Despite this area of agreement, there are many aspects of an RTI approach about which there is considerable diversity of opinion with regard to how aspects of an RTI approach might be operationalized in schools. To date, there is only limited scientific evidence to guide schools in their implementation planning. Thus, the goal of this article is not to attempt to answer the multiple questions that still exist, but rather to provide a brief description of what an RTI approach might look like in a school and to provide a structure that schools might use in thinking through the options that need to be considered in developing their RTI approaches. The model we present is consistent with the research that we and our colleagues have been engaged in over the last 15 years and with the general conceptualization of RTI.

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Virtually all RTI models call for some formal documentation of progress. However, there is, at this point, no widely accepted standard for how often such assessments should be used.

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Ideally, the classroom teacher would form small instructional groups of children who are similar in their early literacy status.

A Suggested RTI Model

Drawing upon on the extensive research that we and our colleagues have done that has focused on preventing reading difficulties, in what follows, we describe a model for RTI implementation in the early primary grades that, in our view, would be reasonable. The model calls for beginning to address differences in literacy-related knowledge and skills as soon as they are noticed so as to maximize the likelihood that achievement gaps can be closed rather than allowed to grow.

Tier 1 Instruction

In this model, all entering kindergartners would be assessed on a measure of early literacy skills such as The Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI, Texas Education Agency, 2005) or the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS; University of Virginia). These and other measures provide benchmarks that allow for the identification of children who are at increased risk of experiencing difficulties in learning to read. For children scoring below the benchmark, the classroom teacher would monitor their progress more closely and would provide more intensive and targeted instruction in early literacy skills. This does not mean the teacher would provide these children with an entirely different instructional program. Rather, the teacher

would devote a portion of the time allocated for language arts instruction to providing children identified for close monitoring with small group instruction that specifically meets them where they are relative to the classroom curriculum. The children identified for close monitoring need to progress at a faster rate than their peers who are already meeting grade level expectations. Therefore, they need to learn more in a given period of time than do their higher-performing peers. Additional instructional support will be needed to accomplish this goal. Ideally, the classroom teacher would form small instructional groups of children who are similar in their early literacy status. This would allow the teacher to offer instruction that is specifically targeted to meet the differing needs of the children in the various groups (i.e., the instruction would be differentiated). Ideally, the children in the close monitoring group would receive instruction in smaller groups, more frequently, and/or for longer periods of time. In other words, they would receive more intensive instruction than would the children who began the school year with skills that were closer to or above grade-level expectations. Small group instruction would, of course, constitute only a portion of the language arts instruction provided during the course of the school day. Read alouds, shared reading, writing,

and a variety of other aspects of language arts instruction would be offered in a whole class context.

As noted, the progress of the children in Tier 1 should be monitored more closely than that of the children in the rest of the class. Virtually all RTI models call for some formal documentation of progress. However, there is, at this point, no widely accepted standard for how often such assessments should be used. Indeed, recommendations regarding frequency vary substantially with some suggesting that assessments be conducted as often as twice per week (Christ, 2006; Safer & Fleischman, 2005) while others (such as ourselves) have utilized formal assessments only three or four times a year (Scanlon et al., 2005). However, it is generally agreed that a record of progress needs to be maintained as it is this record that is used to determine whether a change needs to be made in the intensity of support being offered to each child.

There are also substantial differences of opinion with regard to the type of instrument that should be used for progress monitoring. An extensive discussion of the issue of progress monitoring is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is important to note that, in the intervention research that we and our colleagues have done, we have used a combination of standardized assessments

administered three or four times per year and informal, ongoing assessments guided by checklists completed by teachers to monitor progress. This approach to progress monitoring is distinctly different from approaches that involve frequent assessment of isolated skills such as the speed with which children can name letters or words, or segment words into phonemes. There is growing concern that the use of speeded measures of isolated skills as the sole index of progress will lead to the unintended consequences of children being fast and accurate in such things as word reading but inattentive to the meaning of what they are reading (Johns, 2007; Paris, 2005; Pearson, 2006; Samuels, 2007). We share this concern and would add that such assessments provide teachers with far less information upon which to base instructional decisions than do informal observations that take note of the children's knowledge, skills, strategies, and attitudes and not just how quickly they can apply isolated skills. In fact, we would argue that informal assessment should be an ongoing process that occurs during the course of instruction and thus, essentially, occurs in every instructional interaction as the teacher makes note of how the children respond to the lesson and reflects on how instruction might need to be modified in order to facilitate student learning.

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The children identified for close monitoring need to progress at a faster rate than their peers who are already meeting grade-level expectations.

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Research indicates that student outcomes in the general population are more closely tied to the quality of teaching than to characteristics of the instructional program.

It is important to note that the main purpose of frequent progress monitoring is to ensure that children who are not making sufficient progress toward meeting grade level expectations do not go unnoticed. Teachers who are knowledgeable about early literacy development and who are working closely with young children in small groups are likely to be acutely aware of which children are making limited progress. Indeed, classroom teachers are particularly likely to be able to identify children who are making limited progress because these teachers, unlike teachers who work exclusively with students who are receiving intervention, are working with children who demonstrate a broader range of literacy skills.

Tier 2 Intervention

Children who do not show the accelerated progress in Tier 1 that would allow them to attain benchmark performance levels by the end of the school year would be provided with additional instructional support or Tier 2 intervention. Tier 2 instruction is provided in addition to ongoing Tier 1 classroom-based instruction and should be provided by a teacher who has specialized knowledge of how to promote development in the targeted area. Generally, Tier 2 instruction would be provided in a small group context (maybe three or four students) several times a week.

As with many aspects of RTI approaches, there is no general agreement regarding the relationship between Tier 2 intervention and the classroom curriculum. In implementing an RTI approach, schools sometimes assume that Tier 2 instruction should involve the implementation of a program that is different from the classroom program and specifically and exclusively targets foundational skills such as phonics or phonemic awareness. In our intervention research, on the other hand, we utilized an instructional approach that was tailored to the children involved and took into account both what the children knew and were able to do, and what they needed to learn in order to benefit from their classroom language arts instruction. (Scanlon, et al., 2005; Vellutino et al., 1996; Vellutino, Scanlon, & Lyon, 2000). No packaged or scripted programs were employed. In contrast, Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) suggest that scripted and prescribed programs are reasonable alternatives for intervention purposes as they eliminate the need to have expert teachers engaged in the intervention. Clearly, there is a great need for additional research to address this issue. In the interim, there is reason to be cautious about broad scale implementation of tightly scripted programs that may limit the teachers' ability to respond to their students. Indeed, the U.S.

Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, which has provided evaluations of several educational interventions, finds remarkably little evidence that widely marketed interventions have a positive effect on student learning (www.whatworksclearinghouse.org). And, at least as of the date that this article was finalized, the only program that this site identifies as having potentially positive impact on overall reading performance is Reading Recovery, an intervention approach which relies heavily on teacher decision-making.

It should also be noted that there is abundant research indicating that student outcomes in the general population are more closely tied to the quality of teaching than to characteristics of the instructional program adopted (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Haycock, 2003; Taylor & Pearson, 2002; Tivnan & Hemphill, 2005). We would argue strongly that the children who struggle the most with literacy acquisition need the most expert teaching if we are to help them achieve the kind of accelerated learning that is needed to close their initial achievement gaps. Thus, we would argue against the adoption of a tightly scripted intervention program at either Tier 2 or Tier 3 and would argue instead for an intervention approach that supports the children in learning the content of their classroom language arts curriculum.

Tier 3 Intervention

To return to the general model of a tiered approach, children who are receiving Tier 2 interventions are monitored closely as in Tier 1. In many cases, with the intensified instruction provided through the combination of Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction, children experience accelerated gains and therefore interventions can be discontinued. However, some children continue to make limited progress. One option for these children is to intensify instruction even further by providing them with very small group or one-to-one instruction (Tier 3). While the notion of providing one-to-one instruction may sound formidably expensive, it is important to note that if Tiers 1 and 2 have been effective, there should be only a small number of children who qualify for Tier 3 intervention. However, children who qualify for Tier 3 intervention are likely to be in greatest need of expert teaching in order to accelerate their learning because for these children the teachers need to very carefully tailor the instruction offered such that it accounts for the child's current knowledge and skills and prepares the child to benefit from ongoing classroom instruction as much as possible.

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Teachers who are knowledgeable about early literacy development and who are working closely with young children in small groups are likely to be acutely aware of which children are making limited progress.

Response to Intervention: An Overview New Hope for Struggling Learners

An RTI approach involves attending to the instructional needs of young children as soon as those needs can be identified in the hopes of closing achievement gaps before they have the opportunity to grow and become debilitating.

Following a period of Tier 3 intervention (in this model), the children who demonstrate only limited or no growth following several months of intensive, expert instruction might be considered for classification as learning-disabled. However, it is important to note that such a designation should not be taken as a signal to discontinue efforts to build the student's literacy skills. It is just an acknowledgement of the fact that, given current funding realities in schools, it is generally not possible to continue intensive Tier 3 instruction indefinitely. Less-intensive instructional interventions, while they are likely to be less powerful, should nevertheless be maintained for the children who are ultimately identified as learning-disabled.

At far right is a graphic representation of the generalized three-tiered RTI model discussed above. To summarize the workings of the model, students who perform substantially below grade level expectations at the beginning of the school year are identified for close monitoring and are provided with one or more tiers of intervention depending upon their degree of growth at each tier. Children who demonstrate accelerated growth at Tier 1 and perform at or above the desired level (however it is assessed) would exit the tiers and be served by the regular classroom program. Children who show limited or no acceleration in growth in Tier 1

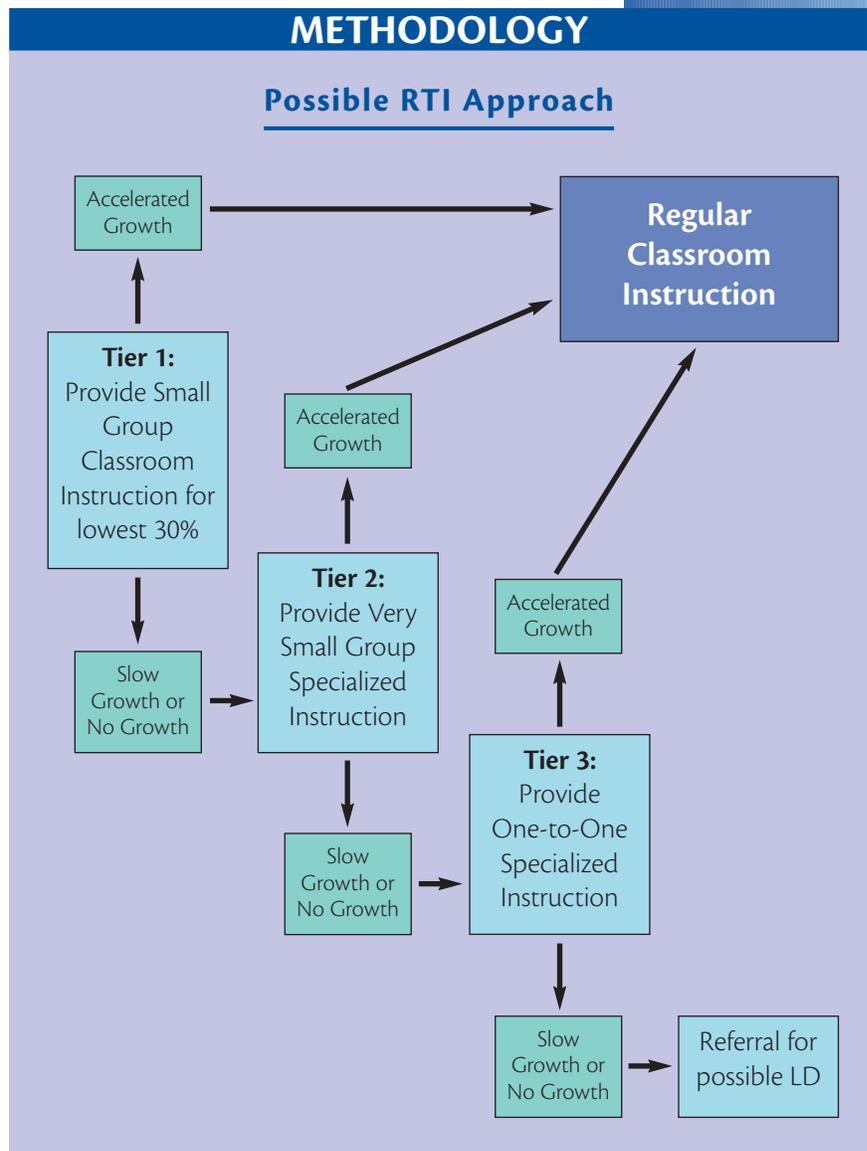
would be provided with Tier 2 intervention which is provided by a specialist teacher in a very small group. Tier 2 intervention would be provided in addition to ongoing Tier 1 intervention. The progress of Tier 2 children would be monitored for a sufficient period of time to determine whether they show the growth needed to meet grade level expectations.¹ Those who demonstrate limited or no growth would receive Tier 3 intervention. This very intensive intervention would be provided in addition to Tier 1 supports. That is, the student would receive literacy instruction from both the classroom teacher (Tier 1) and the specialist teacher (Tier 3) to allow accelerated progress. Children who continue to show limited growth despite gradually intensifying interventions provided by expert teachers over a protracted period of time might ultimately be considered for LD classification.

In discussing the model provided above, we spoke in broad generalities and did not provide guidance on such important questions as when a child might enter the tiers and how long a student might spend at given tiers. There is little research to guide decision-making about these questions. Thus, a perusal of the literature would reveal that some studies have offered relatively short periods of intervention at each of the tiers while others offer longer term interventions.

The studies that have been done differ in terms of the types of interventions offered as well as the duration of each tier. Therefore it is not possible to confidently prescribe a timeline for interventions and decision-making. However, based on our research, we would advocate for the implementation of Tier 1 for the first two or three months of kindergarten followed by the addition of Tier 2 for children who are not showing accelerated progress. Tier 2 intervention would be maintained throughout the remainder of the kindergarten year for those children who continue to demonstrate limited growth.

At the beginning of first grade, all children would be assessed. Intervention planning for those scoring below the specified benchmark would depend on the children’s performance levels and instructional history in kindergarten. Thus, children who demonstrated the most limited growth during kindergarten might begin Tier 3 at the start of the school year. Children who had been in Tier 2 in kindergarten and had demonstrated reasonably good growth might be continued in Tier 2 at the beginning of first grade. Children who never qualified for intervention in kindergarten or who made accelerated progress with Tier 1 alone, might be offered a period of Tier 1 only in first grade as their low initial

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An RTI approach has the potential to reduce the number of children who are inappropriately identified as learning-disabled.

performance may be due to limited literacy experience and engagement during the summer months. In general, intervention planning at the beginning of the school year should take the children's instructional and performance history into account.

As the school year progresses, performance on the progress monitoring assessments would guide decisions about the intensity of intervention that is offered with children who show the least growth being offered Tier 3 intervention for the longest period of time that is manageable given the resources available. In our opinion, a minimum of 15 to 20 weeks of daily Tier 3 intervention should be offered before a referral is made for special education or consideration of a learning-disabled classification. However, we should note that some children do not begin to show acceleration until they have had many weeks of intensive intervention. For these children, ideally, intensive intervention would be maintained once that acceleration begins and continued until the student consolidates his or her skills.

Summary

This paper provides an overview of response to intervention, which we argue is an important step forward in addressing the instructional needs of children who begin school with limited early literacy skills. Rather than providing children with “the gift of time,” which was once thought to be the appropriate response to children who lagged behind their peers at the early stages of learning to read, an RTI approach involves attending to the instructional needs of young children as soon as those needs can be identified in the hopes of closing achievement gaps before they have the opportunity to grow and become debilitating. A substantial amount of research now indicates that early reading difficulties can be prevented through appropriate instructional interventions. Thus, a major value of an RTI approach is that it has the potential to reduce the number of children who are inappropriately identified as learning-disabled.

There are, at this point, more questions about RTI implementations than there are answers. While the research community will continue to explore these critical questions, federal and state legislation is encouraging schools to begin to utilize RTI as a preferred method for determining whether children should be considered for learning-disability designation. This is

It is now widely recognized that the “wait to fail” model is not acceptable.

good news for children who experience early difficulties with school. It is now widely recognized that the “wait to fail” model in which struggling learners languished in schools while waiting for the discrepancy between their intellectual and academic abilities to grow large enough to qualify them for “services” is not acceptable. With the reauthorization of the IDEA, schools are encouraged to allocate instructional resources in a preventive fashion. As a result, schools have the potential to substantially reduce the number of children who are inappropriately identified as learning-disabled and to enhance the learning experiences of all children who struggle during the early school years.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the extant research that supports the use of an RTI approach to learning-disability classification focuses primarily on literacy learning in the early primary grades. There is little to no research on the applicability of an RTI model in the upper grades and in other academic domains. The lack of research in these areas does not, of course, argue against attempts to institute substantial remedial efforts before learning-disability classification is considered. On the contrary, efforts at remediation would seem to be the first response to any learning difficulties. However, the model that might be adopted in these situations might be substantially different than

what was outlined above. For example, it may not make sense to institute a period in which an older child receives Tier 1 intervention only. Rather, older learners who are performing substantially below grade level expectations are likely to be in greater need of a swift and more intensive response to their difficulties. The absence of research to guide our thinking should not limit our response to children who are in need of intervention.

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ENDNOTES

¹ As with many aspects of RTI, there is no clear research evidence that provides guidance on how long children should be served at each tier before decisions are made regarding whether intervention should be intensified or discontinued. In our own research, interventions for kindergartners were provided for a total of approximately 50 half-hour sessions with sessions occurring twice per week for most of the school year. Children who continued to demonstrate substantial difficulty at the beginning of first grade received daily one-to-one (Tier 3) instruction for 75 to 125 sessions.



SUMMARY

In this increasingly multimedia and multidisciplinary world, classroom teachers working with visual arts specialists can create the kind of learning environment that will help students develop the literacy skills needed in the 21st century.

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The Importance of the A in LiterAcy

In the digital

environment of the 21st century, it is becoming increasingly clear that the visual imagery: art (the A in LiterAcy) — with all it entails, including creativity, cognitive expansion, and literal and emotional expression — is essential in developing meaning through the written word. As written literacy integrates more seamlessly with formats such as on-line news, and Web-based archival sources, educators and students are finding that they must be able to both read the “written” words and decode the visual images that are often integral to them.

In seeking an understanding of literacy, education professionals are developing new approaches to meet the challenges of an increasingly multimedia, multidisciplinary world. Teachers, working to train students to understand and utilize the vast resources of digital media, are providing both methods to decode the meanings imbedded in the digital environment, and skills to create effective, literate digital content. As a result, the field of literacy has expanded to meet the demands, the realities, and the emerging needs of new constructs of knowledge, skills and under-

standings that are essential for literacy in the 21st century.

Expanded concepts of literacy have been around a long time. Yet their visions include ideas that are only now emerging into the mainstream. As far back as the 1970s, Paulo Freire (as referenced in Education Development Center, 2000) put forth the concept that “literacy is an active phenomenon, deeply linked to personal and cultural identity. Its power lies not in an ability to read and write but rather in an individual’s capacity to put those skills (reading and writing) to work in shaping the course of his or her own life.”

Literacy requires fertile ground in which to grow. Healy (1990) recognized that to enter into the world of literacy, children need help in developing the internal thought and language environment that can make the brain a comfortable place for real literacy to dwell. Through creative arts, students can develop the imaginative and creative skills and understandings that enable them to connect to the symbolic language (i.e., words and images that convey meaning) that emerge with growing up literate.

Comprehensive literacy in the digital environment

In the early stages of literacy development — i.e., early elementary school — students learn the symbolic meanings of letters and written words through illustrated texts. As their skills and capacities grow, they encounter more and more text-based content. Yet, in contemporary digital environments, the page organization and visual illustrations are increasingly core to comprehension of the written word. By necessity, students, as they grow, must continue to learn through integrated visual images, and, as a result, they must develop a comprehensive literacy that carries far beyond the basic text. Teachers can integrate explorations into content and meaning in written words that focus on visual aspects of digital literature.

Using interactive Web resources (such as <http://arturoartstories.org> or www.miscositas.com/stories.html) they can teach young students to function more fully in the digital environment. Furthermore, working with visual arts specialists, classroom teachers can set a learning environment that develops the literacy needed in the 21st century.

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Linking Literature with Art

We must counter the pressure to narrowly define learning to read and write, and give children significant recognition for their exploration in all modes of representation.

— Curtis & Carter (2000)

As Curtis and Carter suggest, linking literature with art can be critical to helping students engage with written text. Thoughtful understanding involves the ability to enter into the created reality of a piece of literature — to visualize a location, to find meaning in a storyline, to establish internal connections to the literary personalities in the work, and to see in the mind's eye what the author has created. By integrating visual arts

instruction with the development of literacy skills, arts specialists and teachers can maximize the resources available for student learning.

Training students to 'read' visual images, to create their own visualizations and to use words and pictures to communicate those visualizations builds a structure of learning that stretches the scope of both the visual arts instruction and the literary arts content.

Many notable literacy scholars have supported the importance of using experiences in the visual arts to enhance the ability of students to develop literacy skills. Readers who cannot visualize their reading are unlikely to want to read (Eisner, 1992). As Wilhelm (1995, p.476)

reports, "One frustrated young reader, when asked his thoughts on a reading assignment, exploded: "I can't think about it, talk about it, do anything about it, if I can't see it!" Thus, it is clear that an important tool

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“Those who cannot imagine cannot read.”
— E.W. Eisner

METHODOLOGY

Developing multimodal comprehension

Teachers can structure lessons that help students develop their literary skills by conveying understanding through visual images. By incorporating visual exercises into lessons that develop student ability to understand and interpret the written word, teachers can help their classes to build skills that enable them to acquire a foundation in dealing with multimodal (combination of written, visual and sometimes auditory) content.

in literacy development is the motivation of students to create artwork in tandem with their reading development because such creative learning helps them to construct rich mental models as they read (Wilhelm, 1995). The skills developed in visual arts are synergistic with those for developing literacy. When students are observing, discussing, and reflecting on visual artwork, they are developing perception and visualization. They learn that, similar to the way that the written word consists of symbols (i.e., letters that make words and words that convey ideas) that communicate meaning, visual art consists of symbols (i.e., visual images) that transmit ideas, experience and feelings that can be shared (Honigman & Bahavnagri, 1998). When children have the opportunities to write in response to art, they are able to expand their inherent understanding of symbols (both literary and artistic). This activity enables them to apply their knowledge of reading in meaningful and purposeful ways (Braunger & Lewis, 1997).

Multimodal Literacy:

Has there ever been a time when we have not been awash in a remarkable torrent of symbols and opportunities for reading and writing them?

(William Kist, 2005, as quoted in NCTE Guidelines: Multimodal Literacies, p.1)

Multimodal literacy includes content across the curriculum that is created by the powerful overlapping of spoken, written, and artistic content communicated through and with digital media. Multimodal literacy — the ability to read, understand, analyze, explain, critically evaluate, create and appreciate the ways in which this multifaceted content makes meaning — is central to understanding and navigating the world in which we live.

Like many scholars, Kress (2003) suggests that an expanded understanding of literacy needs to look beyond the traditional symbols of language (i.e., the letters and the words with their literal and implied meanings), and encompass a broader assembly of literacy forms that include multiple symbol systems (written and spoken words, sound and image). A growing number of researchers and educators are calling for a multimodal perspective of literacy — “strategies for developing literacy practices that can be carried across multiple sites/texts/media, rather than a set of practices tied to specific sites.” (Adler-Kassner, quoted in NCTE, 2007).

This shift augurs a profound change in the nature of literacy. Teachers must abandon the uni-dimensional approaches to literature — the pedagogy of understanding the written word. They must expand their teaching



tool box to include the integrated study and comprehension of multimedia digital documents and resources. In other words, literacy, by necessity, in the 21st century, goes beyond the spoken and written word to a comprehensive, integrated set of skills, knowledge and understanding that enable students to communicate in the multimedia contemporary world.

In considering multimodal literacy, it is interesting to observe that children create meaning when they wish to communicate knowledge and to express their thoughts and reflections. (Kendrick & McKay, 2004). In telling stories, young children employ meaning constructs that are not necessarily reflected only as words. They often act out ideas, create music and sound effects, and create visual images that can convey how they think about the world, express

ideas, explain thoughts, and communicate with others. This fluid flow provides them with a foundation for developing true literacy.

In their early school years, children are asked to develop an understanding of literacy although their ability to use words in a traditional structure is rudimentary and limited. Kendrick and McKay (2004) argue that there is an urgent need for expanding school curricula with learning that can foster the expression and development of a full range of human emotions and experience. In their research, they point out how children productively can use drawing as a vehicle to express their learning of meaning through verbal literacy. In addition, their studies confirmed that drawing can provide an alternative way of understanding the written word.

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METHODOLOGY

Linguistic and Visual Tools

Teachers are finding success taking lessons beyond the core written words by using an expanding menu of educational tools to build both visualization of written meaning and creation of written materials that incorporate imagery. Students increasingly should be asked to consider the visual aspects of digital content — the illustrations, the arrangement of text on a page and the hyperlinks imbedded in the text. By necessity, they should learn to visualize images as they read and create their own writing using the full spectrum of linguistic and visual tools.

In addition, when students have the chance to write about or discuss their own works of art with others, they not only should be asked to clarify their thoughts and feelings through the spoken and written word about the art, but also to validate their perceptions about it. Furthermore, the writing and the discussion of a child's art can provide a path for the teacher to gain insight into a student's vision and life aspirations in a natural flow without undo probing.

Teachers and students should study the interplay of meaning-making systems (alphabetic, oral, visual, etc.)

Impact on Teaching

According to the NCTE (2005), there are key concepts (declarations) of literacy that have profound impact on teaching. To begin, integration of multiple modes of communication and expression can enhance or transform the meaning of the work beyond the simple functions of illustration or decoration. “Multiple ways of knowing” (Short & Harste, 1996) include art, music, movement, and drama, which should not be considered curricular luxuries. Not surprisingly, it is also suggested (Short & Harste, 1996) that teachers and students should study the interplay of meaning-making systems (alphabetic, oral, visual, etc.).

In this context, it is important to remember that all modes of communication depend on one another. “Each affects the nature of the content of the other and the overall rhetorical impact of the communication event itself.” (NCTE, 2007) Thus, young children engage in multimodal literacy naturally with spontaneity. They intuitively move among the modes of drama, art, text, music, speech, sound, and physical movement.

Many children grow up in economically and literarily impoverished and repressed environments and may not have the opportunities to experience and develop important early literacy foundations. Furthermore, “the over-emphasis on testing and teaching to the test may deprive many students of the kinds of diverse literacy experiences they most need.” (NCTE, 2007)

Engaging in classroom strategies to help students achieve literacy is critical. “The use of different types of expression in student work should be integrated into the overall literacy goals of the curriculum.” (NCTE, 2007) Students need to develop the abilities to both read critically and write functionally, no matter what the mode. In personal, civic, and professional discourse, combined alphabetic, visual, and aural literacy is not a luxury but essential components of knowing for the literate person. It is the responsibility of our schools to provide students with the access to this essential component of learning for the future success.

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SUMMARY

Long before they learn to read and write, children often express themselves through the simple drawings they create. A veteran art teacher explains how this basic creative outlet, if it is nurtured, can be instrumental in helping youngsters develop — and improve — their reading, writing and speaking skills.

Joan Lipson Davidson has taught students at all grade levels for more than 35 years. She is president of the New York City Art Teachers Association / UFT and is a member of the NYSUT Committee on the Visual and Performing Arts. She is a past president of the New York State Art Teachers Association and a recipient of its Art Educator of the Year award. Although retired, she continues to develop curriculum and present. Her award-winning paintings have been exhibited in one-woman and group shows throughout the country.

How Drawing in Conjunction with Writing Contributes to Literacy

The process of drawing and writing in a series stimulates children to make connections between letters, words and visual symbols. It sparks their interest in acquiring the skills to communicate their ideas through images and words.

The drawing and writing series is a way of working and a way of thinking. It encourages the learner to think in at least two modes, each expanding and clarifying the thinking of the other.

For many students, the arts are their primary way of knowing and communicating. According to Howard Gardner (1993), a factor in creativity is to build on the learner's interest — a predilection to working in a particular domain.¹ In this process, the domain of image-making is augmented by writing. Literacy learners differ in many ways, including cultural background, neurophysiology, material resources, experience with language, and developmental level.² Educators must tailor their teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of literacy learners.

The drawing and writing process involves documenting layers of thought and using each layer as a stepping-stone to another layer. Picture a delicate, smooth-skinned red onion whose aroma gets more pungent as you peel away each circular, slippery layer. The goal of the process is to create a need for learners to discover and unlock what is unique about them, their personal voice — what they want to say in a form that is understandable to others. Picasso declared: “All of my paintings are researches ... there is a logical sequence in all this research.” Picasso, in fact, executed approximately 45 sketches in preparation for *Guernica*.³

The drawing and writing series process stimulates an engagement in both visual literacy and the specific topics related to early literacy outlined by the New York State Standards for English Language Arts for pre-K through grade 5. Based on real-world experiences, sounds, shapes, words, meaning, interaction with peers and adults, literature and media, students will achieve the

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following standards, which align with the ELA standards:

1. ELA Standard: Language for Information and Understanding.

Students will collect data, facts and ideas; discover relationships, concepts and generalization by creating a drawing and writing about the drawing, then reading their writing and drawing from their writing. They will create a series of work by repeating the process. (Adult help in writing may be necessary, depending on a child's age and ability.) The drawing and writing generated will be based on the meanings children construct while engaged in a process that supports their imagination.

2. ELA Standard: Language for Literary Response and Expression.

In the process of drawing and writing, students will gain experience in developing a story by writing about characters in their drawing, the setting and will develop plot ideas based on what is happening in their picture.

3. ELA Standard: Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation.

In the process of drawing and writing, students reflect on and respond to the work of their peers. In presenting their work to the class or to individual groups, students will expand their speaking and listening skills and vocabulary.

4. ELA Standard: Language for Social Interaction

Through interactive dialogue, students will relate information in their drawing and writing to other events, increasing their awareness of possible content for their work. Students will gain empathy for and connectedness with others by viewing their artwork and listening to other points of view. The process engages children in drawing and writing for real-life reasons — to communicate something they want to say.

Gardner notes that “If, in early life, children have the opportunity to discover much about their world and to do so in a comfortable, exploring way,

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METHODOLOGY

Do you think your artwork helped with your writing?

“For me writing didn't help my drawing, but drawing helped my writing.”

Carisse, Grade 3

Did writing help you with your artwork?

“Yes. If you write something, you know what the picture should be about and you know what details to add.”

Madalyn, Grade 3

How Drawing in Conjunction with Writing Contributes to Literacy

The use of the drawing and writing series process is appropriate as soon as the youngster can use words to talk about his or her image.

they will accumulate an invaluable “capital of creativity, on which they can draw in later life. If, on the other hand, children are restrained from such discovering activities, pushed in only one direction, or burdened with the view that there is only one correct answer or that correct answers must be meted out only by those in authority, then the chances that they will ever cast out on their own are significantly reduced.”⁴

For pre-school children, the art and writing process supports their visual imagery and gives them an idea how writing connects with their images. Expression pre-language takes the form of sound, movement and drawing, if given crayons, pencils or other writing instruments.

Both Viktor Lowenfeld and Rudolf Arnheim explored in depth the development of graphic characteristics in children’s drawing. For these young artists, content is often constructed during or after the shape is drawn. Over a week’s time, a series of drawings could have similar — or different — content. The use of the drawing and writing series process is appropriate as soon as the youngster can use words to talk about his or her image, which may seem like scribbles to a viewer who cannot “read” the picture.

Working with Carisse and Alex

The drawing and writing series process is illustrated by the works of eight-year-old Carisse and Alex, a pre-schooler age 4 years and 7 months. The series by Carisse was collected when I worked with third-graders in a New York City public school, PS 31 in the South Bronx.⁵ I worked intensively with 14 children, beginning with their entire third-grade class. All but one of the students who showed an interest in continuing their drawing and writing series were not the academic stars of the class. They enjoyed making images — that was their way of communicating. Their teacher wondered how the writing skills of these students had so improved, and I explained that the classroom curriculum needed to provide these image-makers with an opportunity to use drawing as a way to make sense of the ideas and facts they were presented.

Carisse, Grade 3

Carisse’s drawing had a positive effect on her writing, and her writing helped her think more carefully about her drawing. Growth was apparent in terms of her increased perception about her environment, her understanding of how to use the whole paper to tell her story and her development of graphic and writing techniques to communicate ideas.

In her first drawing, she includes herself and her mom, differentiated only by the fact that her mom is holding a shopping bag. Face, dress, size and body parts are all drawn the same. The bag her mom carries symbolizes she is going shopping. The dots for eyes and nose and upturned crescent line for a mouth symbolize a face and show no expression. All forms are reduced to their bare minimum to tell a story.

Carisse created her second drawing after reading the story another student wrote about her work and after discussing her writing and drawing in a small group with me. The questions posed in the group were: (1) What else could be happening on the block? and (2) How could a story be developed from the activities? In the second drawing, Carisse has more figures and each is doing something different.

In Drawing #3, Carisse shows she has an interest in drawing her block more accurately. Instead of relying on her memory, her mom suggested she look out her window. She then drew the block she saw across her street. The buildings now look quite realistic and her figures show more details in their body parts, eyes and accessories. Compared to her earlier drawings, growth is evident. As Carisse began writing, more details about learning to ride a bike came to mind and she included them in her story. Proud of her writing, she explained, “I knew I loved to do artwork, but I never wrote such a long story.”

METHODOLOGY

Carisse’s Drawings and Writings

Writing #1

In my block I see drug dealers some-times. I like the rain a lot. Me and my brother are looking out the window. We see a little girl in the rain with an umbrella and another lady with a bag.

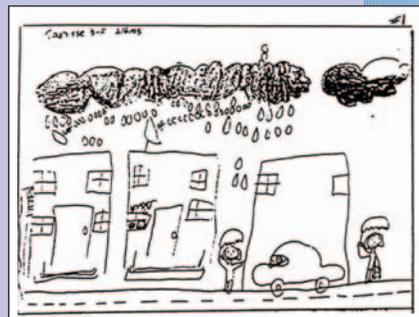
Writing #2

created in response to writing on first drawing.

Writing #3

My Block

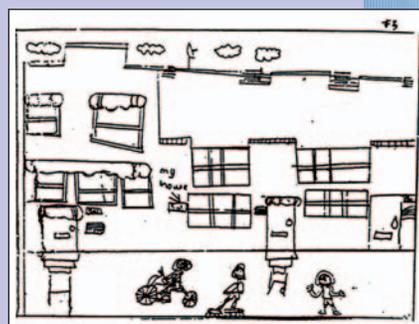
My block is a nice place to live. It’s not separate buildings. The private houses are small, but the top house has a lot of space. A Lot of people live here. My friends live on the block. Their names are Richard and Jessica and they like to play together. Sometimes we roller blade or ride our bike. At first I didn’t know how to ride my bike, but in the summer of 1995 my father taught me how to ride. One day he was teaching me and I kept jumping off the bike because I was scared to run into something or fall off the bike. I continued riding but I was always afraid. One especially warm day, after I had been practicing with my Dad for almost a whole summer, my Dad, after work, took me bike riding as usual. He said, “I’m about to let you go” and I said, “No, don’t let me go, don’t let me go.” But he still let me go and I rode in the basketball court. When I went in the basketball court I saw people playing basketball. They moved out of the way because they did not want to get hit. My Dad followed and yelled, “Watch out Carisse, you are about to hit the gate!” I just missed the gate and went to



Drawing #1



Drawing #2



Drawing #3, a completely new drawing is created based on observation of the building across the street

a wide open space where bikes could ride. My Dad was proud of me because I rode a bike by myself. Then we went back home.

How Drawing in Conjunction with Writing Contributes to Literacy

Feedback from peers and adults is vital to sustain the growth of the learner.

Alex (Pre-K, Age: 4 years, 7 months)

More recently, I collected the series by Alex in a home situation. I was encouraged to see how the process sparked his interest to recognize letters and words.

As Alex dictated his story and responded to questions to tell about particular parts, he responded in more detail, then added more details in his drawings the next time.

Watching me type, he wanted to try. As he sat at the computer I pointed to the letters and he touched the key.

The next day, he remembered some of the letters as I called them out and he located them on the keyboard. Later in the day he transferred this

knowledge to naming the letters and recognizing words as I read him a story. He continued the process at home — with the support and feedback he received from his parents and relatives as they read the book to him — and at school, where his teacher and peers applauded his efforts.

The role of assessment and feedback in the process

Feedback from peers and adults is vital to sustain the growth of the learner. Gardner explains how a significant support system from someone with whom the learner feels comfortable and cognitive support from someone who could understand the nature of the breakthrough are vital to nurture the creativity of the student.⁶



Role of parents in the process

Parents have an opportunity to become learners and facilitators, now and in the future, for their children who cannot yet write. If parents work with their child's teacher, they can learn how to ask questions to help their child clarify and think about their graphic symbols in different ways. When parents write the explanations dictated to them by their children or listen to or read their children's writing and compare it with their image, they get a peek into the "unspoken" life of their youngster. The process provides an entry point for the parent to become a partner in their youngster's journey to develop reading, writing, and speaking skills.

Role of teachers and parents

Authors Pressley and Hilden⁷ (2006) explain that a balanced literacy instruction program includes teaching specific reading strategies along with building word knowledge through vocabulary work. They cite 30 years of research that has shown that explicitly teaching cognitive comprehension strategies (e.g., predicting, questioning, seeking clarifications, summarizing, attending to elements of story structure, constructing mental images, and connecting to prior knowledge) leads to improved reading comprehension. In the drawing and writing series process, an image exists first and becomes the foundation for questions to clarify

METHODOLOGY

Alex's Drawings and Writings

Writing #1

This picture is a story of robots. And the robots are defeating their enemies and I am one of the robots I guess. The good guys, the Ninja turtles, will find the robots before the bad guys find them and they run to get their weapons for battle.



Drawing #1

Writing #2

The picture is about the Ninja Turtles fighting Mr. Underwear. The Ninja Turtles are running in battle. They jumped off the building when they saw Mr. Underwear. He was climbing the building and then he was bouncy, boingy, boing off both buildings because he was made out of rubber. Before he broke them into pieces they punched him in the face. There is the Jersey Devil and the Vampire Succuborn. They are just crawling around the Ninja Turtles.



Drawing #2

Writing #3

The setting for this picture is bubbles which 2 aliens are trapped in. One of the Aliens has two eyes and one has one eye like a plankton — a type of shrimp. The red stuff is lava. The pink is an electric net that zaps birds and then they die. The Ninja makes people eat rocks and dirt. There was a purple boy who was killed in the desert by a thief because he had money in his body. The thief took the money out of his body because he wanted to be rich. The Ninja replaced the boy's bones with metal bones. He then cut the bones into pieces so the boy could become evil. The Ninja has 10 legs and 2 swords and one shield. He plans to make the Aliens eat things they are not supposed to eat so they get sick and die.



Drawing #3

How Drawing in Conjunction with Writing Contributes to Literacy

If parents work with their child's teacher, they can learn how to ask questions to help their child clarify and think about their graphic symbols in different ways.

thinking, the structure of a story, predictions and a summary of what is happening in the story and or the picture. Responses to questions easily lead to a next picture or writing or both. This is just how the series progresses. George Szekely (2006) points out, "Young children start life as full-time artists and collectors. But they become part-time and secret artists as they find little connection between their home and school art. Children continue being artists when their art dreams are supported in school, and the art ideas they bring from home are valued in school."⁸

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Howard Gardner, *Creating minds* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), p. 42.
- ² Anne McKeough, Linda M. Phillips, Vianne Timmons, Judy Lee Lupart, editors, *Understanding literacy development: A global view* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), p. 4.
- ³ Howard Gardner, op.cit., p. 175.
- ⁴ Howard Gardner, op.cit., p. 31.
- ⁵ Joan L. Davidson, "My block and beyond: A documentation of how drawing in conjunction with writing contributes to the thinking process," *Resources in Education* (1996), Microfiche # ED406 300.
- ⁶ Ibid., pp. 43-44.
- ⁷ McKeough, loc.cit., p. 4.
- ⁸ George Szekely, *How children make art. Lessons in creativity from home to school*, (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 2006), pp. 3-4.

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SUMMARY

When it comes to helping students better understand what they read, there are a number of basic, useful strategies that can be utilized not just by teachers in the classroom but by anyone reading to, or with, a child. Here are 15 of them.

Mary Ann Taylor is an educational consultant with NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishers. She taught literacy at all grade levels for more than 30 years, including teaching secondary English at Cohoes City Schools and having served as a reading teacher and literacy coordinator at the Shenendehowa Central School District in Saratoga County.

Comprehension Strategies that Enhance Literacy

Creating a thinking mind is a complex task which requires teachers to model, guide, and monitor their students' ability to read and respond to text, conversation, situations and graphic works. The art of comprehending any concept requires having the ability to integrate what we already know about a topic with new information. It is a skill that requires metacognition — the ability to think about one's own knowledge — and how that knowledge might be refined by learning new information.

Skilled readers and writers need several ingredients in their instructional process in order to become proficient. Foremost, they need a teacher who understands that teaching is an art and a science that requires an understanding of how a student learns, behaves and responds to the classroom experience and how a teacher's classroom management skills and expertise enable learning.

Comprehension is the transaction between the teacher, the student and the text that transforms all those actively engaged in the following activities. The result is understanding the intent of the author.

These strategies have been published by multiple researchers and teachers. I have collected them throughout my teaching career, from graduate courses, conferences and inservice programs, from working alongside colleagues, from the teachers participating in the graduate courses I teach. They may appear to be simplistic, yet when used they do increase comprehension for learners of all ages. These are written for a teacher to use in a classroom setting, but may just as easily be used by anyone reading to or with a child — a parent, day care provider, babysitter or another student. With this article, I give tribute to all the teachers who work with students every day to help them understand their worlds by understanding what they read.

by Mary Ann Taylor
Shenendehowa Central School District (retired)

15 Simple Strategies to Promote Comprehension

In fiction and non-fiction, with readers of any age

1. Set a Purpose

Students need to know why they are reading. Are you reading for fun? To get new information? To confirm something you guessed? To answer a question?

2. Retrieve Prior Knowledge

Teacher asks students to set the context for reading and link the reading to their own experiences. *What do you know about _____?* Or *Tell me everything you think you know about _____.*

3. Make and Confirm Predictions

Students survey the cover and illustrations, and table of contents and make predictions or guesses, supported by details from the cover, to predict what the book will be about.

4. Read Aloud to Students

Teacher models reading aloud, complete with fluency that engages the listener (expression) and thinks out loud to demonstrate how the teacher

thinks as a reader. This encourages students to be actively engaged in listening to the teacher read and then to read with the same level of expression and fluency. This can also be done using tape recorders.

5. Promote a Robust Vocabulary/ Discuss Unknown Words

Teacher uses word walls, index cards, word bingo, personal word lists, word games and writing activities and games to develop rich vocabulary so students will deeply understand text and be able communicate their ideas with precision and interest.

6. Visualize

Teacher leads students to use their imagination to visualize the setting and events in a story or chapter, enabling students to “see” the details and feel the mood the author is trying to convey. Students can compare their “mind pictures” to discover similarities and differences.

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METHODOLOGY

Modeling is the key

“Isabella” I ask “How can you tell that this story takes place a long time ago?” Silence descends upon our small group of readers. Isabella knows the answer, I am certain, but is reluctant to respond. Suddenly, Juan raises his arm, waves his hand enthusiastically and says “I can help Isabella!” Juan continues, “Isabella, look at the pictures. People don’t dress like this anymore. And we don’t live in castles.” I ask Isabella, “What strategy did Juan use to help us get the answer?” She replies, “By comparing what has happened in the story to what we know about. You remember, Mrs. Taylor, don’t you? You do that every time you read to us.” “You are right Isabella. Let’s thank Juan for his help!” Modeling is the key, I remind myself, in teaching how to apply comprehension strategies that enable students to become competent critical thinkers.

Even after reading a picture book, and certainly after reading a text with different points of view, it is important for students to take a position and defend their thoughts relative to text.

15 Simple Strategies to Promote Comprehension (continued)

7. Promote Rereading

Teacher establishes procedure for how students reread to other students, into a tape recorder or to another adult. Rereading text aloud to another leads to greater understanding of the meanings of words, builds fluency and gives the reader another opportunity to have meaningful engagement with the words in print.

8. Use Graphic Organizers

Teacher builds awareness that picture clues and other access features, including graphs, maps, tables and timelines, enable the reader to confirm the meaning gleaned from the text. Students can also construct their own graphic organizers to confirm understandings.

9. Listen to Retellings

One way a teacher knows if a student is grasping the text is to have the student retell the text in his or her own words. Retelling is not rereading but rather, closing the book and telling the story (fiction) or the important facts (non-fiction.) Many misconceptions about meaning can be identified through this strategy.

10. Reinforce Comprehension Skills

Teacher encourages comprehension by asking readers to make inferences, draw conclusions, compare and contrast ideas by using specific examples from the text. This practice helps readers to incorporate new information and revise what they already know.

11. Generate and Answer Questions

Teacher encourages reader logs or journals in which students develop a list of surprising information or events and questions for the author based on the text. They can also begin every reading with the questions: What are you curious about in this story or text? What do you wonder about? What do you need more information about?

12. Relate the Text

Teacher models that reading is about connecting text to your own life by encouraging students to develop a deliberate system for discovering the literal and inferential message in a text. To do this they need to continually relate the text to themselves, the world as they know it and to other texts.

13. Summarize

At every level, from pre-reading books with no words to critical reading of expository text, students can master the skill of selecting the essential elements presented in the text. This requires practice and a guiding hand.

14. Evaluate

Even after reading a picture book, and certainly after reading a text with different points of view, it is important for students to take a position and defend their thoughts relative to text. When teachers model how to make a judgment based on text, they are teaching how to think from two points of view, which further requires recalling important details, character analysis, and authentic details.

15. Respond in Writing

True literacy, or deep understanding of the meaning of a text, is demonstrated when the reader is able to respond in writing to what has been read. When possible, every comprehension lesson should incorporate an opportunity to answer an open-ended question with supportive details from the text, for as John Sheffield, 17th century poet, once wrote, “Of all those arts in which the wise excel, Nature’s chief masterpiece is writing well.”

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SUMMARY

Join a group of early childhood literacy coaches in New York City as they spend two days learning more about data-driven planning and instruction.

Deborah Jones, a New York City public school teacher for more than 25 years, is a New York City regional school support center Reading First regional coach at the UFT Teacher Center. She is a former content specialist in literacy at the center. She also served as regional instructional specialist for literacy in the Chancellor's District in New York City. In 1997 she received the Teacher of the Year Award from Community School District 17, Board of Education, New York City.

Leslie Richmond is a UFT Teacher Center literacy coach working at P.S.48 in Jamaica, Queens. Previously, she taught early childhood and elementary education in the New York City public schools. In 2000, she achieved National Board Certification in Early Childhood.

Facilitating Professional Conversations:

Data-Driven Planning and Instruction for the Early Childhood Classroom

As New York City

UFT Teacher Center staff members, we encourage the development of professional learning communities. One aspect of our work is facilitating professional conversations such as the two-day series on data-driven instruction that we describe in this article.

In the UFT Teacher Center collaboration with Region 5 (Districts 19, 23 and 27), we have provided monthly work sessions on early childhood literacy for coaches this year.

On a rainy Friday morning in New York City, 55 early childhood literacy coaches sat in two large rooms, singing “Willoughby, Wallaby, Woo.” While it might seem hard to believe, the singing was a part of a professional development series on assessment and data-driven instruction. We developed the theme of this series in response to conversations we had on assessment with literacy coaches. After the series, these coaches — who support teachers in grades K-3 — would be able to use this material with teachers in their schools.

Literacy Development, Adult Learning and Professional Development Standards

Our design and planning of the data-driven work series was grounded in best instructional practices in early childhood literacy, literacy development, adult learning and professional development standards.

Literacy development is a multi-layered process that children move through at different rates and points of time, Jeanne Chall wrote (1995). Regie Routman (2003), among others, names the process of literacy development a “continuum” while Chall has described the process as unfolding in predictable stages. Today, most early literacy practitioners and theorists agree that children move through both literacy development and the developmental stages of early childhood at their own rate.

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2003), teachers of literacy need to know the developmental expectations for their students

**By Deborah Jones
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and the stages through which they will move. Then, in order to facilitate their growth and individualize instruction, teachers must use ongoing assessment in the instructional cycle (assessment, planning, instruction and evaluation).

A major formal component of early childhood literacy assessment in New York City, the Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System 2 — ECLAS 2 — was used as the focus assessment in the professional development series. New York City mandates that teachers administer ECLAS 2 to students in kindergarten through grade 3 in fall and spring. Developed specifically to enable classroom teachers to make literacy instructional decisions, ECLAS 2 focuses on the five essential elements of reading — phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and reading comprehension. It also includes listening, writing and oral expression. ECLAS 2 (2003, CTB McGraw-Hill) aligns with the

research used in *Reading First*, New York State’s No Child Left Behind Act initiative.

Informal conversations with coaches and teachers helped us to frame a question for our series: How could data from ECLAS 2 be used more effectively to inform and plan instruction—for a whole class, small groups within a class and one-on-one? Since our goal was to impact positively the professional conversations on data-driven instruction by coaches and teachers, we realized the importance of a second question as well: How could we apply effective coaching techniques to create the conditions for those conversations? We kept in mind that we were planning for adults-as-learners.

Professional development standards of the National Staff Development state that if professional development is to be successful, it needs to employ what works with adults in learning situations, including opportunities to

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AUTHOR NOTES

The New York City UFT Teacher Center is a collaborative project of the United Federation of Teachers, the New York State Department of Education, the New York City Department of Education, participating schools, districts, school support organizations and metropolitan-area cultural institutions. UFT Teacher Center promotes teacher excellence and student achievement. Drawing on current research and best practices, the program’s major goal is to increase the academic achievement of all students, including those in our lowest performing schools. Online: www.ufttc.org.

Facilitating Professional Conversations: Data-Driven Planning and Instruction for the Early Childhood Classroom

Developed specifically to enable classroom teachers to make literacy instructional decisions, ECLAS 2 focuses on the five essential elements of reading — phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and reading comprehension. It also includes listening, writing and oral expression.

see, try out, discuss, practice, write about and group problem-solve, (1995, NSDC, 29-30).

Research about effective professional development and adult learners has been collected over many years. We became determined that our series would use the following three goals from the NSDC Standards, (1995, NSDC, p. 9):

- We would utilize effective modeling.
- We would offer practice on real-life examples.
- We would provide classroom instructional tools and strategies.

Day 1: Data-Driven Planning and Instruction in the Early Childhood Classroom: A Professional Conversation

We structured the series using our three goals, starting with modeling a conversation by coaches who were looking at data. We used a sample of ECLAS 2 assessment results — a second-grade summary sheet from the ECLAS 2 assessment conducted during the previous fall. The summarized data showed the students' performance levels in relation to the benchmarks in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading and oral expression, listening and writing, and spelling conventions.

We asked the coach-participants to think about three questions based on the data:

- What does the data tell me about the whole-class levels and what do these levels mean for whole-class instructional needs?
- What does the data tell me about how I might group my students for instruction?
- What does the data tell me about the instructional needs of the students whose levels currently fall on either end of the continuum, separating them as individuals from any other students?

We then modeled a conversation that coaches might have in order to illustrate a process of analyzing the summary sheet.

Coach 1 (Leslie): They all have passed the phonemic awareness level. They all seem to be clustered around the level 5-6 spelling benchmarks in phonics. This means that they have almost achieved mastery of one-syllable writing patterns, word families and blends. I guess we can build on this as we plan next steps.

Coach 2 (Deborah): But look in the category of decoding. The benchmark levels range from 2 to testing out at 6. That's quite a range. I think that really speaks to the grouping needs in this class. According to ECLAS 2, this category of phonics requires the use of more complex patterns and conventions to decode both familiar and unfamiliar words.

Coach 1 (Leslie): I guess we'll probably see a similar range when we view the levels in the categories in reading and oral expression and when we look at those, we can probably make some grouping decisions.

Continuing the Conversation: Practicing on Real-Life Examples

After modeling what an initial analysis of the ECLAS 2 data might sound like for the coaches, they had an opportunity to look at the summary sheets from their own schools. In table groups or with partners, they began to analyze the data. To guide their thinking, we gave them the three questions on a note-taking sheet.

At first, there was silence as they began to study the data. Then a buzz began to emerge. We listened to the conversations as the buzz in the room grew. Partners and table groups began to share with each other what they noticed. We heard one conversation:

Coach A: "The students in this kindergarten class need more instruction to build their phonemic awareness. Most of them did not master the syllable clapping. Clearly, the whole class can use instruction on this." (In syllable clapping the teacher says a word. Students repeat the word, clapping at the start of each syllable.)

Coach B (responds): "That's true, but only five students didn't master the rhyme recognition portion of the

test. (Rhyme recognition is identifying and generating rhymes.) The teacher can give small-group instruction to them and include rhyming activities in the learning center."

Other coaches mentioned decoding, reading sight words, letter writing, reading comprehension, spelling, and blending sounds. Other observations included strengths of the students and what they perceived as their needs, (i.e., skills that needed to be taught).

As this type of exchange took place throughout the room, we continued to prompt and ask guided questions to keep the thinking and conversations going as coaches directed their own learning, engaged in problem solving and made focused decisions about instruction. All of their decisions and conversations were based on the ECLAS 2 data collected from the assessment. These meaningful conversations would serve as models for their conversations later with colleagues at their schools.

We finally brought the whole group together to share some of their findings and talk about the experience. They found the opportunity to study the data with colleagues enlightening and valuable. They discovered more about their students because they were able to talk, listen and share with others.

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METHODOLOGY

Punctuating a Point

We did a shared reading lesson using oversized text from an old, familiar big book. The text was displayed without any punctuation. We asked the participants to read the text exactly as presented (without the punctuation). Next, we asked them to help us put the punctuation back into the text and then to read it fluently. We asked the participants how they might adapt this activity if they had only a small group of students needing this practice. Two coaches suggested the same activity in a learning center with overheads, instead of the big book.

Facilitating Professional Conversations: Data-Driven Planning and Instruction for the Early Childhood Classroom

We have learned that, in order for true transfer of learning to take place, adult learners need the opportunity to see and practice what they need to learn.

References were made to what the students needed to learn and what instructional format would be most effective — whole group, small group, or individual instruction. Many of the coaches expressed a similar thought: While some of the teachers in their schools were struggling with grouping their students for instruction, the coaches felt that studying the class summary sheet would give them a clear illustration of how grouping possibilities were indicated just by studying where needs clustered.

Day 2: Providing Classroom Instructional Tools and Strategies

Having completed the important work of analyzing the data from ECLAS 2 on Day 1, we were now more informed about what the students needed. For the remainder of the series we focused on a myriad of instructional strategies teachers could use to address the needs of their students. Just as we used three questions to guide analysis of the data, we would now use those questions again to guide discussion of instructional strategies. We asked the coaches to keep in mind the instructional needs they gleaned from the data and, in grade-alike groups, to brainstorm the instructional strategies they could use to address the needs of the whole group, small group and the individual students who would need customized support.

We charted a long list of the strategies the coaches and teachers were already using. Our series culminated with coaches modeling and practicing new strategies that would reinforce and develop the skills and knowledge students would need.

We have learned that, in order for true transfer of learning to take place, adult learners need the opportunity to see and practice what they need to learn. (Fogarty, 2004, p. 7). We began the journey of modeling and practicing various instructional strategies by modeling a strategy that builds reading fluency. We selected a fluency strategy to model because when we looked at the second-grade class data, most of the students were clustered around level 4 and level 5, indicating a need for support in this area.

Reading fluency means reading quickly, effortlessly and efficiently with good, meaningful expression, says Rasinski. It is the ability to simultaneously decode and understand what you are reading. He mentions several ways to build fluency: model good oral reading, provide oral support for readers, encourage fluency through phrasing and offer plenty of practice opportunities, (Rasinski, 2003). We modeled a strategy called *Pausing with Punctuation*, which demonstrates the importance of punctuation in reading fluency, (Ellery, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

Staff Development

The Staff Development Standards outlined by NSDC state that all staff development should be designed to improve the learning of all students. Staff development should provide educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate as well as to use learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal. One of our intended goals was that these coaches would walk away from this two-day series with a deeper understanding of the importance of looking closely at data to make decisions about instruction. From their feedback, we felt confident that we had given them the tools and the practice that they needed to do this with teachers at their schools.

Once again it was the coaches' turn to practice with real-life examples. They were asked to think about their students and the ECLAS 2 data that they had just analyzed. We distributed a variety of books, poems and short texts and a packet containing various strategies. They were to choose the appropriate method to fit an instructional need or needs of the class, which they determined in their analysis, and then discuss and record how this activity might be used throughout the reading block. Each table group would then present their lesson on an instructional strategy.

As we surveyed the group, we observed coaches engrossed in planning for data-based instruction based on their review and analysis of data. The second-grade group worked on fluency while the kindergarten group had come up with new ways to use nursery rhymes to reinforce phonemic awareness.

Hence, the reason for singing "Willoughby, Wallaby, Woo" on a rainy Friday afternoon, which by the way, is a wonderful way of increasing the students' phonemic awareness.

Reflecting on the Series

Giving coaches and teachers a forum and a structure for studying data together would definitely be something that they would implement back at their schools. The coaches wanted teachers to realize what they

now realized: Collecting the data is only a start. Analyzing and understanding what it tells us will help us make the instructional decisions so necessary to impact students and students' improved achievement.

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Early Literacy

BOOK REVIEWS

Book Title: *The Sandbox Investment
The Preschool Movement and Kids-First Politics*

Author: David L. Kirp

About the author:

David L. Kirp is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of 14 books, most recently *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line*.

Publisher: Harvard University Press, 2007

ISBN: 0674026411

Book Type: Education, preschool, politics, sociology/Non-fiction

Summary:

The Sandbox Investment presents a strong case for high-quality early education. The author taps arguments from history, sociology, neurology, economics, politics and education to heighten the need for Pre-K programs in America today. Building on the results of the Perry Preschool longitudinal study, Kirp also cautions that preschool programs cannot be available only for some children in America, but must be available for all.

Opinion:

In light of the current political spotlight on the importance of early childhood and preschool programs, this is an important book. It explores the history of the preschool movement in the U.S., the political realities and the economic arguments for its importance. Like Jonathan Kozol's books, it is a startling and eye-opening look at an issue in every community in the country. The historical perspective and the description of preschools challenge the reader to take action, not to crumble in despair. This book clearly defines the arguments for high quality preschool programs for all. Advocates already use this work. Generalists in public education would benefit from a thorough reading as well.

By Kathleen Graham Kelly, Ed.D
NYSUT Research and
Educational Services

Book Title: *Ready to Learn*
How to Overcome Social and Behavioral Issues
in the Primary Classroom

Authors: Jeanne Shub and Amy De Weerd

About the authors:

Jeanne Shub is a child psychologist specializing in learning and school-related problems. She has taught in the primary grades and been a school consultant supervising teachers, school psychologists, school social workers and speech therapists. She created Interplay in 1983 and has led professional workshops on it throughout this country and abroad.

Amy DeWeerd has spent the past 20 years teaching elementary school. She has taught the Interplay program as a graduate course in Albany, N.Y., as well as leading workshops for parents, teachers, administrators and social workers since 1994. She also writes children's stories.

Publisher: Heineman, NH 2006

ISBN: 0325008752

Book Type: Education/Non-fiction

Summary:

Shub and DeWeerd's book clearly describes the elements of a classroom practice that is designed to help young children understand how their behavior affects others. Interplay, a classroom practice or activity, can be woven into instruction for primary students, special-needs students in activities that require 40 minutes of classroom time once a week. Part 1 describes the principles and strategies of the Interplay model and its research foundations. Part 2 gives specific steps for putting the Interplay model into practice.

The Interplay model uses creative problem-solving, stories and role-playing appropriate for very young children to help address social, emotional and behavioral aspects that can compromise students' readiness to learn. Through metaphorical adventures the students are led to develop positive attitudes and thinking skills related to the following values: believing you can learn, enjoying

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Book Title: *Ready to Learn
How to Overcome Social and Behavioral Issues
in the Primary Classroom*

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learning, showing self-regulation and self-awareness, being willing to make mistakes and take risks, paying attention, respecting your own and other students' efforts, accepting help and direction from others, and understanding and practicing the social rules for functioning in classroom activities. The techniques of change built into the model include scaffolding, metaphor, intentional modeling, dramatic role-play, stories and reframing.

Part 2 of the book presents lesson designs for units to be used in kindergarten, first, second and third grade. While the units can stand alone, the power of the potential for change is in the scaffolding of the metaphors from year to year. Each lesson includes the goal, materials required, a copy of the metaphoric story, teacher tips and potential problems with solutions. The book concludes with an appendix with specific directions to the teacher and a subject-specific bibliography and Web site resource list.

Opinion:

The testimonials from a BOCES superintendent, a principal and teachers convinced me that this book is a valuable resource for classroom teachers. With the narrowing of curriculum created by the assessments in No Child Left Behind, a plea for retaining creative play has been shouted by early childhood educators across America. This program gives the teacher a creative approach for addressing non-productive behaviors while still building language-rich activities that lead to higher thinking skills. The units are fun, creative and active with scripting provided for the teacher and adaptation encouraged.

Although Interplay was first developed as a behavior modification strategy to be used with special-needs students it could easily be used with small and large groups and in inclusion classrooms in groups of any age through middle level.

Book Title: *Kindergarten Literacy:
Matching Assessment and Instruction in Kindergarten*

Author: Anne McGill-Franzen, Ph.D

About the Author:

Anne McGill-Franzen is professor and director of the reading center at the University of Tennessee. Prior to joining the university faculty, she was a professor of literacy at the University of Florida. She earned her Ph.D. at the State University of New York at Albany, where she was a professor in the reading department and associate dean of the Graduate School of Education. Previously, she was a Title I remedial reading teacher and special education consultant teacher. The focus of her professional work has been struggling readers, including policy that supports or constrains teachers' efforts to support children at risk.

Publisher: Scholastic

ISBN: 0-439-80034-X

Book Type: Education/Non-Fiction

Summary:

This approach to kindergarten literacy begins with a teacher's examination of instructional practice, including teacher goal-setting. The underlying assumption is that the most critical factor in the success of a kindergarten student is a well-informed and inspired teacher, not a cookbook of scripted activities. The author urges the reader to begin with self rather than with outside forces. But that is just the beginning. The book itself provides a framework for kindergarten literacy and includes both practical strategies for addressing literacy instruction in kindergarten and the research base that suggests each practice. Chapter 2 presents the research about print awareness, speaking and listening vocabulary and teacher-centered professional development through references to the Tennessee Kindergarten Literacy Project. In response to the overuse of DIBELS, an assessment tool required in Reading First schools in New York, the book describes a collection of practical, timely, easy-to-use assessment tools for systematically observing, documenting and interpreting children's literacy knowledge at the beginning, middle and end of the year. Chapter 4 takes the assessment results to the next phase, feedback to the teacher to modify instruction. She addresses the questions of how to use results, comparisons in local norms, and the use, strengths and weaknesses of assessments that accompany commercial materials. Chapter 5 presents a wide variety of instructional practices, routines and strategies for teaching the alphabet, names and words. Chapter 6 does the same for

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Book Title: *Kindergarten Literacy:
Matching Assessment and Instruction in Kindergarten*
(continued)

learning to write, including a sequence for writing development and accompanying instructional routines that foster children's written expression. The final chapter introduces the reading routines that help children increase their ability to decode and comprehend text.

Opinion:

Kindergarten Literacy is a core resource for teachers in that critical beginning school experience of kindergarten, as well as a valuable reference for all early childhood educators. It is teacher-friendly and it demonstrates belief in the importance of teacher as instructional decision-maker. The link between teacher professional development and change in literacy practice is at the heart of this book. This author is able to blend the competing interests in the dynamic field of literacy and especially in early literacy instruction. It should be a resource book in every kindergarten in New York.

Early Literacy

GLOSSARY/LITERACY CONCEPTS

These brief annotations are provided to support readers who may not be familiar with the academic literature of early literacy or the teaching of reading. For more information see *The Literacy Dictionary, the Vocabulary of Reading and Writing* by Harris, Hodges eds. 1995.

Alphabetic principle

The foundation concept, taught as pre-reading skill, that each sound or phoneme of a language has its own graphic representation (letter or group of letters).

Automaticity

Fluent processing of information that requires little thought or attention.

Balanced literacy

Informal term for use of a wide variety of reading and writing instructional approaches including decoding (phonics) strategies, word recognition (sight words), and process reading and writing instruction; term used as a combination of competing approaches that created divisions in the literature and instructional approaches in the past. A balanced literacy program includes phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, fluency practice, vocabulary development and varied comprehension strategies as well as attention to the processes of reading and writing and motivation to read.

Basal Reading Series

A published collection of student texts, workbooks, teacher materials and supplemental materials used for developmental reading and, sometimes, writing instruction.

Big book

Enlarged version of a beginning reading book, usually with illustrations and very large type, used by a group of students to read together or be read to by a teacher and learn about concepts of print and reading.

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Comprehension

Understanding the intended meaning of a communication; accurately understanding what is written or said; the purpose or goal of all reading

DIBELS: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills

DIBELS are five brief measures of the important skills forming the basis for early success in reading. DIBELS measure a student's ability to hear the individual sounds or phonemes in words, to decode words, and to read connected text. DIBELS are typically administered from pre-kindergarten through third grade, the time when these skills should be firmly established. Required assessment in Reading First schools.

Digital media

Generally refers to electronic sources of information, including the Internet, DVDs and CDs, e-books and digital television.

Emergent literacy

A theoretical framework that views reading and writing development from the child's point of view and examines changes over time in how the child thinks about literacy and in the strategies the child uses in attempts to comprehend or produce written language

English language learners (ELL)

Students with a native or first language other than English.

English as a second language (ESL)

Program for teaching English language skills in an English-speaking community to students whose first language is not English; also English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

Fab Five or Big Five

Informal reference to the core elements in Reading First instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

Fluency

Easy, clear, fluid written or spoken expression of ideas, done without hesitation.

Graphophonic

Connecting symbols (letters) to sounds.

Guided reading

Reading instruction in which the teacher provides the structure and purpose for reading and for responding to the material.

High frequency words

Words that appear many more times than most other words in spoken or written language.

Independent reading level

The readability or grade level of material that is easy for a student to read with few word identification problems and high comprehension.

Learning center

Area of a classroom or library dedicated to specific tasks, separated from others; a place where students can work on specific skills or activities in a semi-independent learning environment.

Linguistic awareness

A prerequisite to learning to read; the ability of a speaker/hearer to grasp and use the grammar and phonological knowledge used in a language.

Listening

The ability to attend to sound; the act of understanding speech.

Listening center

A place in a library or classroom or lab where a student can use a headset to listen to recorded instructional material.

Metacognition

Awareness and knowledge of one's mental processes such that one can monitor, regulate and direct them to a desired end; in reading, knowing when what one is reading makes sense by monitoring and controlling one's own comprehension.

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Metalinguistic

Referring to language in relation to culture.

Motivation to read

A factor in early literacy because children who view reading as a desirable positive behavior are more likely to learn to read.

Multimodal literacy

Using such sources as text, television, art, music, audio and the Internet to comprehend concepts.

Phoneme

Minimal sound unit of speech.

Phonemic awareness

Awareness of the sounds that make up spoken words.

Phonics

A way of teaching reading and spelling that stresses symbol-sound relationships, used especially in beginning reading instruction.

Picture book

A book in which the illustrations are as important as the text, with both contributing to the telling of the story; often the first books introduced to children and read to them.

Pre-reading

Activities engaged in before the reading act, to build skills, to explain vocabulary, to give background of a story or to have students identify purpose for reading.

Print awareness

A learner's growing recognition of conventions and characteristics of a written language; such as in English reading from the top to bottom of page, left to right of page, meaning of punctuation and spaces.

Read aloud

(v.) act of reading a story or text orally to an individual or group.

(n.) a designated time when a reader or readers read orally to each other or a group.

Reading readiness

Readiness of a person to profit from beginning reading instruction. This term is being replaced by *emergent literacy*.

Rhyme

Identical or similar recurring final sounds in words within or, more often, at the end of lines of verse. Used in early literacy as word play to introduce phonemic awareness and motivation to read.

Shared reading

An early childhood instructional strategy in which the teacher involves a group of young children in the reading of a particular big book in order to help them learn aspects of reading, including print conventions, reading strategies, decoding skills and predictions.

Vocabulary

Background knowledge of words and their meanings in different contexts.

Word family

A group of words sharing a common phonic element, root or base, used in word play and games with early readers.

Writers/readers workshop

Instructional strategy in which the teacher provides an intensive seminar on how to read and/or write. The focus is on the reading and writing process and sharing of products with others.

Early Literacy

RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS AND EARLY LITERACY PROVIDERS

Your Local Public Library and Local Elementary School Library

Public Television:

www.readingrockets.org/

New PBS early literacy initiative,
January 2008

www.thejournal.com/articles/21574

PBS kids shows and materials

www.pbskids.org/

Reading Rainbow

www.pbskids.org/readingrainbow/

Sesame Street

www.pbskids.org/sesame/

Tips for parents
of preschoolers to grade 3

www.readingrockets.org/article/7833/

Book distribution
to support early literacy

www.nccic.org/poptopics/bookdist.html

Television programming
to support early literacy

www.nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/television.html

Early Literacy Web Resources

www.oregon.gov/OSL/LD/youthsvcs/earlylit/resources/#websites

www.literacy.uconn.edu/earlit.htm

Annenberg Institute for School
Reform at Brown University

www.annenberginstitute.org/VUE/spring07/resources.php

Guidelines for Implementing
Reading First LEP/ELL Students
in New York State

www.emsc.nysed.gov/biling/docs/ELL-LEPguidance.FinalSept.2007.doc

Overview of Native Language
Instruction in New York State

www.emsc.nysed.gov/biling/resource/NLA/CH9DApD.pdf

Early Literacy Profile,
AN ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT
Provided by the New York State
Education Department

www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/pub/elp1.pdf

Organizational Web Resources:

NYS Education Department
Office of Early Childhood
and Reading Initiatives
www.nysed.gov/earlyreadinginitiatives

NYS Reading First 2006-2009
Application and Guidelines
www.emsc.nysed.gov/funding/readfirst06092.htm

NYS Reading Academy
www.nyreadingacademy.org

NYS Association for the
Education of Young Children
www.nysaeyc.org/

National Institute for Literacy
www.nifl.gov/nifl/early_childhood.html

NYS Teacher Centers
www.teachercenters.org

English Language Learners Literacy,
Colorin Colorado
www.aft.org/teachers/colorado.htm

Early Childhood Education Reports
www.aft.org/teachers/pubs-reports/ece.htm

NYS Reading Association
www.nysra.org

American Federation of Teachers Early
Childhood Education
www.aft.org/topics/ece/index.htm
www.aft.org/teachers/pubs-reports/reading.htm

National Education Association (NEA)
www.nea.org/webresources/ece06.html-
www.nea.org/earlychildhood/nearesources-earlychildhood.html

NYS Teacher Center Online Academy
Offers several Web-based courses related to early literacy. For a full catalog and registration information go to www.olacatalog.org.

Special Education in Early Childhood Web Resources

A Parent's Guide Special Education in New York State for Children Ages 3-21 (Also available in Spanish).
www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/parentguide.htm

Programs and services provided for families of children with disabilities at five parent centers located in New York City, Buffalo and on Long Island.
www.vesid.nysed.gov/lsn/parent.htm

NYS Special Ed Preschool Publications
www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/preschool/home.html

Reading resources from the U.S. Department of Education
www.ed.gov/parents/read/resources/edpicks.jhtml?src=ln

Teaching Reading to Students with Disabilities: Tools for Schools. (Transcript of a March 13, 2002, broadcast)
www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/sate/reading2.html

NYSUT Education & Learning Trust

The Education & Learning Trust is NYSUT's primary way of delivering professional development to its members. ELT offers courses for undergraduate, graduate and in-service credit, partnership programs that lead to master's degrees and teaching certificates, and workshops and professional development programs for teachers, school-related professionals, and members from the health care community.

ELT offers the following graduate courses related to early literacy:

Beginning Reading: Grades Pre-K-3

Creating a Balanced Reading and Writing Classroom

Enhancing ELL in Elementary Classrooms

Enhancing Literacy for All Students

Multicultural Children's Literature

Reading Strategies for At-Risk Students, K-8

Literacy for Students with Special Needs

For information on ELT, go to www.nysut.org/elt;
e-mail ELTmail@nysutmail.org; or call (800) 528-6208 or
(518) 213-6000 in the Capital District.



Early Literacy

CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR FUTURE VOLUMES OF EDUCATOR'S VOICE

Educator's Voice is a series dedicated to highlighting research-based classroom and school-wide strategies that make a difference in instructional practice in literacy. NYSUT proudly invites articles from all constituents and seeks real classroom stories about effective practices that are based on research. You are invited to submit a proposal for an article for the next two volumes. Authors must be active or retired member of a NYSUT affiliate, including United University Professions, the Professional Staff Congress and all other locals. If there are multiple authors, at least one author must be a current or retired NYSUT member.

Vol. II Literacy: Building on the Foundation in the Middle Years 2009
Vol. III Expanding Literacy for Adolescents in All Content Areas 2010

Audience: Classroom teachers, SRPs, union leaders, parents, administrators, researchers, legislators and policymakers.

Deadlines:

Volume II

Literacy: Building on the Foundation in the Middle Years, Grades 5-8

May 15, 2008 Author intent to submit article;
June 15, 2008 NYSUT confirms acceptance of articles;
Aug. 15, 2008 Article submission date.
Spring 2009 Publication

Volume III

Expanding Literacy for Adolescents in all Content Areas, Grades 7-12

May 15, 2009 Author intent to submit article;
June 15, 2009 NYSUT confirms acceptance of articles;
Aug. 15, 2009 Article submission date.
Spring 2010 Publication

Please note: Submission of a proposal to write an article is not a guarantee of publication. Decisions will be made by the Editorial Board.

For more information, editorial guidelines and electronic application forms, go to:
www.nysut.org
and click on Educator's Voice.

Literacy: Building on the Foundation in the Middle Years

EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

Theme: Literacy is the foundation of all learning in the middle years of school, from grades 4-8, in all settings with all learners.

Audience: Classroom teachers, union leaders, parents, administrators, researchers, legislators and policymakers.

Article Length: 1,800-1,900 words.

Writing Style: Authors are encouraged to write in a direct style designed to be helpful to both the practitioners and to others committed to strengthening education. Use of educational jargon is strongly discouraged.

Manuscript APA style.

Requirements: Footnotes at end of article.
Pictures may be submitted and if used, permission will be required. Guidelines for photos will be provided.

Submission: 1 CD with the entire document saved in Word.
1 hard copy of your article, double spaced.

Rights: Submission of a proposal is not a guarantee of publication.
Publication decisions are made by the Editorial Board.
NYSUT retains the right to edit articles.

The author will have the right to review changes made and if not acceptable to both parties the article will not be included in the *Educator's Voice*. NYSUT may also retain the article for use on the NYSUT Web site, www.nysut.org, or for future publication in *New York Teacher*.

Educator's Voice – Volume II

EDITORIAL GUIDELINES (CONT'D)

Educator's Voice – Volume II will feature research-based classroom and school-wide strategies that make a difference in instructional practice in literacy from grade 4 through grade 8. NYSUT invites articles from all constituents and seeks real classroom stories about effective practices that are based on research. Authors are encouraged, but not required, to address all points listed below. In the article, tell your stories in a straightforward way, considering the following:

- A specific real-life description of the practice, strategy, or approach.
- The research base that supports the practice, including research findings with citations and their relationship to your classroom practice.
- A description of the students impacted and the school context.
- The evidence of success that indicates the strategy achieved the goal.
- Evidence of broader impact on other students, teachers, the school building, and the district.
- Involvement of parents in the strategy.
- Possible implications and involvement of the wider school community, businesses, the medical profession, school libraries, public libraries, museums, and community colleges.
- Implications for policymakers.
- Quotes and testimonials from students, teachers and parents.

Literacy: Building on the Foundation in the Middle Years

AUTHOR SUBMISSION FORM

Proposed by Author _____

If multiple authors please list all names _____

Article working title _____

Specific topic(s) related to literacy in the middle years (grades 4-8) _____

*Authors must be current or retired members of a NYSUT affiliate.

For articles with multiple authors, at least one must be a current or retired member of NYSUT.

Please check all the categories of affiliation with NYSUT that apply to you:

- 1. I am an active teacher member of the following local _____
- 2. I am an active SRP member of the following local _____
- 3. I am an active higher education member of UUP or PSC
Please identify campus _____
- 4. I am an instructor of NYSUT Education & Learning Trust course _____
- 5. I am a member of NYSUT Subject Area Committee _____
- 6. I am a retired teacher and member of the following retiree council _____

Please attach a 150 word statement of the purpose of your article, the research base you propose to use and the educators who would be most interested in applying your findings in school settings. Include your current employment, including district, grade(s) and content area. Attach a separate contact list with primary author's name, address, day and evening phone numbers, e-mail address and summer contact information.

Please return these forms by May 15, 2008 to:

NYSUT Research & Educational Services
Attn: Kathleen Graham Kelly
800 Troy-Schenectady Road,
Latham, NY12110

Or submit all requested information electronically by May 15, 2008, to kgraham@nysutmail.org.

Acceptance of articles will be announced June 15, 2008. Completed articles will be due Aug. 15, 2008.





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