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# Table of Contents

New England Reading Association JOURNAL  
Volume 46 • Number 1 • 2010

## Editorial

### Children’s response to literature
- Helen R. Abadiano, Central Connecticut State University, CT  
- Jesse P. Turner, Central Connecticut State University, CT  
- Lynda M. Valerie, Central Connecticut State University, CT

## Feature Articles

1. **First things first: Why good books and time to respond to them matter**  
   - Lee Galda, University of Minnesota, Minnesota

8. **Using the SIOP Model to improve literacy for English learners**  
   - Jana Echevarria, California State University, Long Beach, California  
   - MaryEllen Vogt, California State University, Long Beach, California

16. **Motivating and engaging students in reading**  
   - Jenna Cambria, University of Maryland, Maryland  
   - John T. Guthrie, University of Maryland, Maryland

31. **Eliciting picture book responses up and down the grade level ladder, and back and forth across the curriculum**  
   - Pegi Deitz Shea, Author

38. **Leading, learning and literacy: Implementing a Response to Intervention approach in the Riverside Elementary School**  
   - Katharine Shepherd, University of Vermont, Vermont  
   - George Salembier, University of Vermont, Vermont

49. **Using leveled graphic organizers to differentiate responses to children’s literature**  
   - Mary McMackin, Lesley University, Massachusetts  
   - Nancy Witherell, Bridgewater State College, Massachusetts

55. **The reading strategies used by male and female English language learners: A study of Colombian high school students**  
   - Alex Poole, Western Kentucky University, Kentucky

65. **From lecture-based to discussion-based instructional approach: The pedagogical journey of a Chinese professor**  
   - Wen Ma, La Maya College, New York

71. **The effect of nursery rhymes on EFL children’s reading ability**  
   - Sasan Baleghizadeh, Shahid Beheshti University, G.C., Iran  
   - Zeinab Dargahi, Shahid Beheshti University, G.C., Iran
76 REVIEW OF PROFESSIONAL BOOKS
Response to literature and creating worlds from words: Armchair travelers and artifacts of journeys in images and connections
Sandip L. Wilson, Husson University, Maine
Jane Ellen Brady, Washington State University, Washington
Janet Hill, Delaware State University, Delaware
Jennifer Johnson, Washington State University, Washington
Jane E. Kelley, Washington State University, Washington
Kara Tripp, Husson University, Maine
Jane Wellman-Little, University of Maine, Maine
Terrell A. Young, Washington State University, Washington

85 BOOK BEAT
Response to literature: Perspectives, voices, discovery, and identity
Sandip L. Wilson, Husson University, Maine
Laura Dunbar, Belgrade Central School, Maine
Barbara S. Lovley, Fort Kent Elementary School, Maine

96 REVIEW OF RESEARCH IN THE CLASSROOM
Reading and responding in the 21st century
Diane Kern, University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island

100 COMPUTERS IN THE CLASSROOM
Using podcasts to enrich responses to global children's literature
Paula Saine, Miami University, Ohio
Julia Kara-Soteriou, Central Connecticut State University, Connecticut

109 NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS
In this issue of NERAJ we celebrate two themes. First is “Children’s response to literature”.

We salute teachers, who, recognizing the critical role literature plays in the lives of children and young adolescents, use culturally and globally diverse literature in their classrooms and encourage students to approach literature as an experience to live through—inviting them to respond to literature in many different ways that they know how or choose to; thus, inspiring readers of all ages to generate powerful response to literature. When children and young adolescent readers make connections between their own experiences and prior knowledge and those they come to experience and learn in stories, novels, or nonfiction—these allow them to not only relate meaningfully to the text, but more importantly, help them to understand and to make sense of their own lives. Such is the power of literature!

Second, we further explore in depth the theme of our fall 2009 issue: “Transforming disengaged readers into engaged readers in our classroom”. What do we understand about motivation and how do we motivate all our students into becoming good readers, particularly our English learners?

We are excited to have articles by experts in children’s and young adolescent literature starting with Lee Galda who invites us to think deeply about the importance of reading and responding to books by
students and the potential power of engagement with literature in “First things first: Why good books and time to respond to them matter.” Pegi Deitz Shea shares many wonderful ways of “Eliciting picture book responses up and down the grade level ladder, and back and forth across the curriculum.” Complementing Lee’s and Pegi’s articles, Mary McMackin and Nancy Witherell explore how “Using leveled graphic organizers to differentiate responses to children’s literature” benefit all children. From an international perspective, Sasan Baleghizadeh and Zeinab Dargahi’s “The effect of nursery rhymes on EFL children’s reading ability” describes how they have successfully used nursery rhymes to support their beginning English language learners in Iran develop their language skills.

We are also delighted to have Jana Echevarria and MaryEllen Vogt, co-developers of the SIOP Model, share with us the article “Using the SIOP Model to improve literacy for English learners”. Jana and MaryEllen emphasize the importance of providing instructional support for children who are acquiring English-language proficiency so that they develop English proficiency as quickly as possible, and therefore experience success in the classroom where English is spoken. They present convincing argument for the SIOP Model as “the type of instruction that makes a difference, the kind of instruction that gives English learners the best chance of achieving academically while developing English proficiency.”

In his article “The reading strategies used by male and female English language learners: A study of Columbian high school students” Alex Poole reports that overall both males and females use problem-solving strategies with high frequency, but that females use reading strategies much more frequently than males. He calls attention to the fact that English language learners who are not active strategy users would have difficulty in becoming proficient readers unless they receive explicit strategy instruction.

Jenna Cambria and John T. Guthrie’s “Motivating and engaging students in reading” talks about reading motivations as interest, dedication, and confidence; Jenna and John then proceed to offer six motivation practices that teachers can implement daily in the classroom.

Further, we present you with an article on a currently “hot” topic—Response to Intervention (RtI).

Katharine Shepherd and George Salembier share their experience with Response to Intervention (RtI) in “Leading, learning and literacy: Implementing a Response to Intervention approach in the Riverside Elementary School” that has resulted in significant changes in classroom practice for teachers.

In “From lecture-based to discussion-based instructional approach: The pedagogical journey of a Chinese professor” we bear witness to Wen Ma’s transformation as a learner and as a teacher educator. “My lived experience has taught me that as educators, we need to critically reflect on and expand our thinking and practices to better respond to our students’ learning needs in the new socio-cultural realities in which we teach and live.”

In keeping with our theme: “Children’s response to literature” our departmental columns begin with Review of Professional Books focusing on “Response to literature and creating worlds from words: Armchair travelers and artifacts of journeys in images and connections.” Department Editor Sandip L. Wilson, and a team of reviewers: Jane Ellen Brady, Janet Hill, Jennifer Johnson, Jane E. Kelley, Kara Tripp, Jane Wellman-Little, and Terrell A. Young reviewed eight excellent books that present “a wealth of practices that brings books and children together and powerful arguments for the role of literature in the lives of children in and out of the classroom, connecting family, friends, and classroom with home and school.” Sandip also takes the lead in Book Beat with co-authors Laura Dunbar and Barbara S. Lovley. In this column, “Response to literature: Perspectives, voices, discovery, and identity”, the authors review books that are appropriate for PK-12 readers and are rich in opportunities for response to literature. In Review of Research in the Classroom, Diane Kern’s “Reading and responding in the 21st century” turns to three young readers of reader response theory to gain research-based insight into teaching reader response in 21st century classrooms. Finally, in Computers in the Classroom, Paula Saine and Julia Kara-Soteriou’s “Using podcasts to enrich responses to global children’s literature” describes “a possible way teachers can draw upon their students’ background knowledge… and experiences… to construct meaning, … and respond to literature… while incorporating new technologies and teaching new literacies… .”

Enjoy!
I was just 21 when I began teaching and now I am nearing retirement. In the intervening 40 years, I have watched the careful selection and systematic use of children's books ebb and flow in schools as short-sighted educational mandates and ill-conceived "scientific" studies have pushed books, and time to read and respond to them, out of the school day; as "time on task" has come to mean time on test, or worksheet, instead of time engaged in reading real books. Yet the achievement gap keeps growing, with many of our young people graduating from high school not only not reading well, but not reading at all. For those of us who feel that engagement with books and the development of literate lives is important for our students, and that literate citizens are important for our world, this is troubling.

To make my argument that children's and adolescent books, and time to respond to them, are more important, I begin with “anecdotal evidence” of the power of literature (Galda & Cullinan, 2003), and then move to a consideration of some of the many reports of systematic data-based research on response, and reading in literature-based classrooms. While I focus on my own work in this area, I contextualize it within the larger research community. Finally, because of the retrospective nature of this article, I consider both early and current research. But first, the anecdotal evidence.

I began my teaching career as a middle school English teacher with a B.A. in English and minimal preparation to teach, not particularly well-equipped to teach the diverse group of students in my classes, especially the seventh graders in those three classes of more than 35 each. The smaller, eighth-grade classes were marginally easier to manage. I struggled, as most first year teachers do, and so I attempted to rescue myself, and my career, with the best lifesaving device I knew—books. I established a library in my classroom, filling shelves with cheap paperbacks from the book club that was available, books from library sales, books from my own library. Some students contributed books as well. I also established Wednesday as our sustained silent reading day, and it turned out to be the best day of the week. Everyone read, even those who didn’t like to. So did I, even when my principal asked me if I “didn’t have any work to do.” My response, that I didn’t see how I could ask kids who didn’t like to read to sit and read a book while I did something else, surprised him, but he said okay, shook his head, and left me to it. After just a few months, something interesting happened; my students began exchanging opinions about the books they were reading, sometimes writing their comments on note cards that we kept in a box on the bookshelf, sometimes in oral exchanges. Then other students, kids who were not in my classes, began dropping by before and after school to borrow books. We had created a community of readers without lesson plans, book reports, tests, or mandates. We got our other work done Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday; Wednesdays were for books. Most of my behavior management problems disappeared, at least on Wednesdays. That year I learned the “communalizing” nature of the language of books as they drew my students and others in the school into a reading community.

Several years later, after adding a master’s degree
in reading to my bachelor's degree in English, I worked as a reading specialist in a large, urban, public school system in the mid-west, in one of the most populous and poorest elementary schools in the city. These were the days of ability grouping, and I taught intact classes as the reading/language arts teacher for those second, third, and fourth grade students who were in the lowest quartile in reading achievement. It became clear, quickly, that most of these students could learn to read, but they didn't want to learn to read. When reading was kits, worksheets, tests, and low-level comprehension exercises done with contrived texts, why should they have wanted to? So, while I worked with the standard instructional materials, I began to gradually diminish the time we spent with them and to increase the amount of time I spent reading aloud, they spent “reading” independently, and we spent talking about books. We had an abundance of good books, thanks to Title I money. Over the four years I spent in that school, every child learned to read. Not all were on grade level, but they all learned how to read and to like reading, at least enough to spend time doing it. I was not the magic in my classroom; it was the books. During these years, I learned the power of a book left unfinished by me so that my students would hunger to read to find out what happened. I learned the lure of even books like Go, Dog, Go when peers invested it with importance. I learned the effectiveness of books-on-tape with book-in-hand as a way to make struggling readers feel successful. I learned the power of reading aloud from books that were just beyond the reach of my students as readers, but well within their reach as thinkers. In other words, I was taught how books help children learn to read by making them want to learn to read.

Twenty years later, after conducting several research projects exploring children's literature, response, and literature-based instruction with elementary and middle school students, I spent an entire academic year in the second-grade classroom of one of my graduate students. I was there three mornings each week, and another graduate student observed three mornings as well; we overlapped on Fridays, when we also met with the teacher, who had begun implementing a response-based reading program and wanted us to observe, critique, and help her plan. During that year, we saw Lisa's second grade student become not only increasingly fluent with greater comprehension, but increasingly sophisticated and engaged readers (Galda, Rayburn, & Stanzi, 2000).

Out of the many anecdotes that I could relate about this year, one in particular stands out. The first chapter book that Lisa read aloud was Patricia MacLachlan's Arthur, for the Very First Time. The students responded with such enthusiasm that, after winter break, they asked me to read it to them again, over their lunch hour, which meant they would eat in the classroom and even miss recess, all in order to hear the book again. Towards the end of the book, sometime in January, I asked them a question—why is it important to “look through the faraway end?”—that related to a rather sophisticated theme in the book—learning to see from multiple perspectives. We talked, briefly, but no one responded with great enthusiasm or insight, so we went on to other ideas. Yet, over the course of the next few months, many of their discussions of the chapter books that they read for their discussion group revolved around the idea of perspective taking, without those words ever being uttered. Finally, one bright April day, one of the students, Amarchi, came up and hugged me when I entered the classroom, shyly whispering that she knew why it was important to look through the “faraway end.” Amazed, I asked why, and she told me “Well, I was looking through my binoculars at a bird in a tree. When I looked through the close-up end, I saw the bird, but when I looked through the faraway [other] end, I saw the whole tree” (Galda, Rayburn, & Stanzi, 2000, p. 1). This eight-year-old had kept both book and question in her heart, and brought them into her life, coming to the realization that there is more than one way to look at the world. This was the year that I became utterly convinced of the power of literature to shape the way we lived our lives.

These are but three of my stories; the link among them is the potential power of engagement with literature. Look in any number of journals for practitioners and you will find stories from other teachers that describe how trade books—children's and young adult literature—in the classroom increased motivation for and enjoyment of reading, as well as reading and writing ability. The “sheer number of teachers saying the same thing, regardless of differences in demographics, student ability, grade level, and teacher styles, should at least be considered a strong indicator of the central place of literature in the development of literacy” (Galda & Cullinan, 2003, p. 646). Beyond these anecdotes, there are also many empirical studies that offer evidence of the importance of books in literacy development. Many of these are reviewed in some of the latest professional handbooks (Marshall, 2000; Martinez & Roser, 2003; Probst, 2003).

Why is reading and responding to good books important? The key, I believe, lies in engagement in books, in what happens when a reader connects with a book. Transactional, or reader response theory and some of the hundreds of studies that illuminate what can happen when reader meets book, offer examples of the “potentially” (Rosenblatt, 1938/1976) inherent in this meeting, showing us both why and how books can be such a powerful force in our lives.

**Reader response**

Transactional, or reader response theory, began with
the publication of Louise Rosenblatt’s ground-breaking look at the place of literature in the school lives of young adult students—and in the lives of all of us (Rosenblatt, 1938/1976), but her influence on teaching and learning began in earnest in the late 1960s. In the subsequent 50 years of research we have learned a great deal about the complex nature of response (Galda & Beach, 2004).

Transactional theory posits an active reader engaged in making meaning with, not from, a text. Meaning, then, is constructed transactionally between reader and text (think of a two-way arrow), and thus is fluid, dynamic, a dialogue between text and reader over time and in particular contexts. Readers bring the sum of who they are to the act of reading. Predispositions, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, knowledge all contribute to a reader’s construction of meaning with a text. Texts, as Rosenblatt describes, guide and constrain (1978) a reader, with the author’s deliberate choice of words and structure shaping a reader’s response, even as the reader selects what words and structures to pay the closest attention to. Together, text and reader act upon each other to shape meaning.

Langer’s (1995) description of how reading unfolds underscores the temporal nature of reading and responding. Her extensive think-aloud protocol data demonstrates how readers begin books by “stepping in” to a text, proceed by “moving through” the text, sometimes “step out” to think, and then, when finished reading, step out to think about the reading experience. This process happens regardless of a reader’s stance, or how a reader approaches text.

Rosenblatt (1938/1976, 1978), Britton (1970), and Langer (1995) describe two primary ways to approach a text, using different terms but coming to generally the same conclusion. To use Rosenblatt’s terms, readers read either aesthetically, for the experience that the act of reading can provide, or efferently, for the knowledge that they can gain from a text to use in the world. Reading aesthetically or, in Langer’s (1995) words, “towards a horizon of possibilities,” provides opportunities for readers to enter the world of the book, to participate in the virtual experience that reading the book provides, or, as a ten-year-old once explained to me, to be “inhaled” by a book. Aesthetic reading offers readers an opportunity to think about the book, themselves, and their worlds, to consider the lives of others and to build their own values. At the other end of the aesthetic-efferent continuum, reading efferently, or toward a particular point (Langer, 1995), involves reading for information. These stances are rare “pure,” as most reading is done somewhere near the middle of the continuum as a reader’s attention focuses on different aspects of the text. Stances also change over time as a reader progresses through a text.

These stances are in a reader, not in a text, yet they interact with text to produce more or less effective readings. Poetry and literary fiction are most effectively read and understood when readers begin from a primarily aesthetic stance, experiencing a text by creating mental images, interacting or identifying with characters, actively accepting or questioning the ideas being presented (Benton, 1992), or entering the world of the text, before stepping back to discuss the author’s craft. A primarily efferent stance is most appropriate for nonfiction, although successful readers often respond to the aesthetic qualities of well-crafted nonfiction texts as well. Understanding the different processes and outcomes that these stances generate is important for understanding why and how readers respond as they do; it is also important for understanding why time to read and respond to good books is so important for young readers, and how to shape effective use of literature in classrooms.

While studies of adolescent and adult readers responding to literature began in the 1960s, studies that specifically examined children’s responses began almost twenty years later (Galda, 1982; Hickman, 1981). For the past 30 years, researchers have explored how readers make connections between books and their lives or other books (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Short, 1992; Sipe, 1998). Research has also focused on individual styles of response (Galda, 1982; Hancock, 1993; McGinley and Kamberelis, 1996; Sipe, 1998), exploring how response styles are developed through readers’ experiences both in and outside of the classroom, thus situating the act of reading within the sociocultural context of authors, texts, readers, and reading events. How readers resist or accept texts (Enciso, 1994; Galda, 1982), or the social norms in either text or classroom (Enciso, 1997; Lewis, 1997) have received increasing attention in the research literature. These and the hundreds of other studies that have been published, have underscored the complexity of response to literature and how it is enacted in classroom and community. The “multifaceted sociocultural nature of response and what that means for instruction” (Galda & Beach, 2004, p. 856), is still being explored, but we do know, from research on response and on literature-based instruction, what practices are potentially successful and what practices are not. In many cases, success depends entirely on a knowledgeable teacher creating situations in which young readers have time to read, some choice about what to read, and the opportunity to engage in either primarily aesthetic or efferent experiences, whichever is most appropriate.

**Literature-based instruction and reading**

When stories and poems are read from a primarily aesthetic stance, young readers enter the story world in a manner that allows them to do just what Rosenblatt (1938/1976) postulated: They think about what the characters thought and did, about what they, themselves might think and do, and about the connections between
story and life. Young readers who experience literature from an aesthetic stance are then eager to step out and consider the authors’ craft from an efferent perspective. When students have the opportunity to read nonfiction from an efferent stance, they learn to think critically about those texts, to evaluate the information as well as to incorporate new knowledge into their existing schema. As Sipe (2008) points out, various researchers have approached the question of stance in different ways. In those studies situated in classrooms, what students are asked to do influences the stance they take and thus the reading experience that they have; context influences response. When young readers have the opportunity to think and talk about books as and after they are reading, they become critical readers. What teachers do, the context for reading that they create, shapes student response, and this is very clear in the many studies of classroom discussion of literature (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Galda, Shockley, & Pellegrini, 1995; Galda, Rayburn, & Stanzi, 2000; Many & Wiseman, 1992; McGee, 1992; Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Roser & Martinez, 1995; Short & Pierce, 1990; Wiseman, Many, & Altieri, 1992).

Research on motivation and effective teaching also confirms that children’s literature plays a central role in engaging readers (Pressley, Doelezal, Raphael, Mohan, Roehrig, & Bogner, 2003). Intrinsic motivation to read is tied to a reader’s pleasure in reading that is done “for its own sake,” which is characterized by excitement, interest, and enjoyment in the act of reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), or reading as I describe above. Further, intrinsic motivation in reading includes curiosity and involvement (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), in which “curiosity is the child’s participation in activities that fulfill a desire to learn and understand the world around them. Involvement refers to the child’s enjoyment of immersion or absorption in a text. This is often referred to as ‘getting lost in a book.’” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 407). In other words, reading and responding to nonfiction literature that allows readers to find out about the world and to poetry and fiction that offer readers the opportunity for a virtual experience, for being inhaled by story, is a powerful motivation to read.

The opportunity to discover new knowledge, ideas, and experiences is enticing for readers. Engagement with literature and the opportunities that that engagement affords, lead to motivated readers, which leads to better readers. Taking pleasure in books supports the engagement and motivation that it takes to become a successful reader (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Children who engage with literature from an early age and become avid readers have an advantage that supports success, regardless of intelligence or circumstances; it’s true that reading a lot really does make you smarter (Cunningham & Stanovitch, 1998, p. 14). The cycle of success that engaged reading creates is widespread, as the more reading children do the better they get, and the more they have to build upon for future growth and development. Their self-efficacy increases, and they expect that the next reading experience will be pleasurable, and motivation increases.

Being motivated to read results in reading more, and this in turn relates to increasing skill and literacy learning. The language experiences generated through reading well-written books also helps students develop as increasingly skilled readers. This was evident in a year-long study of a first grade teacher, Betty, and her students in her literature-based classroom (Galda, Shockley, & Pellegrini, 1995). Across the course of the year these students read and responded to many texts in many ways as they were learning to read. Their reading abilities developed across the course of the year, but perhaps more important was the development of their desire to read, and to share books with others.

Recent research on effective schools clearly demonstrates that effective teachers like Betty Shockley and Lisa Stanzi offer many opportunities for students to read and respond in some way to quality literature (Guthrie, Wighfield, & VonSecker, 2000; Pressley, 2006; Pressley, Mohan, Raphael, & Fingeret (2007), accompanied by extensive talk and writing about text (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003; Taylor & Peterson, 2006). The effectiveness of the talk and writing are closely tied to what we know about response and stance.

Engaged reading, engaging books

What does all of this have to say about the role of literature and response in today's classrooms? Certainly, there needs to be more “time on task” in which the task is to be engaged in reading and responding to good books. Every year thousands of books for children and young adults are published, and hundreds of them are examples of wonderful writing and illustration. These books entice, entertain, inform, and challenge young readers. Certainly, books such as Go Dog, Go, which spurred some of my students on to learn to read, can be effective in teaching reading, but books that speak to readers on a deeper level, informing them about the world and themselves, are a rich resource for any teacher seeking to motivate her students.

Time spent with good books certainly motivates young readers, as discussed above, but it does more than that. As students immerse themselves in the many excellent narrative, poetic, and informational texts available, they enjoy themselves, go on to read more, and the more they read the better they get at reading, writing, and understanding the author’s craft. Reading or hearing and discussing the language in books contribute to language growth and development. Reading helps develop vocabulary, as readers encounter a greater variety
of words in books than they do in conversation or in the media. Since literature contains the carefully crafted language of poetry and prose, readers also encounter a wide variety of language patterns and structures. The vocabulary, patterns, and structures that young readers encounter in books become a resource upon which to draw in their own language use.

Recognizing and understanding how text structures work enhance young readers’ understanding of how various types of text (for example, narrative, expository, poetic) are organized, and this in turn helps them learn how to read these various types of texts with increasing comprehension. Thus, experience with and discussion of well-written books enrich the storehouse of language possibilities from which students can draw as they read new texts as well as create their own.

Students who read a lot and talk about language in books come to understand that authors make deliberate choices as they craft their books; they learn to notice what writers do and to draw upon this knowledge in their own writing. Frank Smith called this “reading like a writer” (1985). We have known for years that even quite young children “borrow” structures that they encounter in books for their own speaking and writing; they effectively use their reading to scaffold their language production. The variety of structures that are inherent in the vast array of literature for young readers offers students a rich foundation upon which to build their own language proficiency. This attention to language is apparent in young readers’ spontaneous responses to books (Sipe, 2008), and in their discussions of how their own responses were affected by the author’s craft (Galda, Rayburn, & Stanzi, 2000). Reading and responding to quality literature result in young readers developing an increasingly sophisticated literary understanding.

Children who read widely and deeply also learn to think of books as a source of information, inspiration, and enlightenment as they make books an important part of their lives. Young readers turn to nonfiction to gather information about their world. More information is available in the many rich nonfiction texts of all types than could possibly be available in single textbooks or brief encyclopedia entries, and this range of information is enhanced by the correspondingly wide range of reading levels across these texts. In short, information about virtually endless topics is available for all readers and in a variety of enticing formats. Nonfiction literature for children and young adults feed young people’s curiosity about their worlds; everything one needs to know, up to a certain point, could be learned from children’s books!

Poetry and narrative fiction offer a different kind of knowing to young readers when read from an aesthetic stance. As eight-year-old Chris explained, “if you read a book like Arthur, for the Very First Time, you kind of understand life better. If you read a book about weather, you get smarter” (Galda, Rayburn, & Stanzi, 2000, p. 57), nicely summarizing the different experiences that nonfiction and fictional narratives like Arthur offer. Readers use stories to confirm their own feelings as well as to experience new emotions, situations, and ideas as they step into another’s shoes for the duration of the story.

Whether nonfiction, fiction, or poetry, “literature enables young people to explore and understand their world. It enriches their lives and widens their horizons… They increase their knowledge, explore their own feelings, shape their own values, and imagine lives beyond the ones they live” (Galda, Cullinan, & Sipe, 2010, p. 34). When this happens, reading becomes transformational (Galda, 1998), as through books, readers alter the way they view their world. This is perhaps the ultimate power of literature, to open new worlds and provoke readers to think in new ways. Today, as our world becomes both more complex and more interrelated, it is increasingly important to offer all young readers the experience of being engaged with good books. What better resource for educating our children to become contributing members of our world.

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The classroom is abuzz with the productive noise that emanates from students working together. Groups of 4 are huddled around chart paper on which they are writing a character analysis. The teacher circulates and points to the posters with adjectives and adverbs, providing a resource for their writing. The English learners who are working in the groups are supported through scaffolding, including interaction with other students and the teacher.

In a class across the hall, the teacher is reading a story with the class as they follow along. Some students have their heads down on their desks, a couple have their sweatshirt hoods pulled over their heads. A few students in the back are acting up. When the teacher gives instructions for the follow up task, the English learners seem lost, unsure what they are supposed to do. The teacher notices and repeats the explanation of how to complete the worksheet.

Teaching literacy skills to an increasingly diverse school population is a challenge in part because many students become disengaged from learning at an early age. They attend schools that have practices and expectations that they may not fully understand and that may not reflect the values of their home. English learners (ELs) are learning a new language at the same time they are learning literacy skills, how to express their ideas, understanding the ways of school, and so forth. Young students enter kindergarten without many of the pre-literacy skills and experiences schools expect them to have. Older English learners have often been passed along from grade to grade without achieving basic literacy skills or they are recent immigrants who do not speak the language of instruction. For older adolescents, there is a “literacy crisis” (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2006).

However, even with these realities, we have observed many classes where English learners are thriving. Some are urban classes with high numbers of ELs and others are in suburban schools with only a handful of ELs but the commonality is that these students are active participants in learning and are set up for success. Because of their limited English proficiency (and sometimes interrupted schooling) ELs require “scaffolds” or support to to able to comprehend, learn, and complete academic tasks.

For English learners it is critical that teachers provide interesting, relevant lessons that are presented in a way that allows students to participate fully in lessons and will ensure that they will be successful in school. In this article we will describe the type of instruction that makes a difference, the kind of instruction that gives English learners the best chance of achieving academically while developing English proficiency.

Since 1995, we have been researching and refining the SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) Model for English learners (see Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008, or Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010a or 2010b for more information). The SIOP Model is an instructional framework for organizing classroom instruction in meaningful and effective ways. While it is now effectively implemented in bilingual, ESL, and two-way immersion classrooms throughout the
country, it is primarily intended as a model of sheltered instruction for all content classrooms (pre-K-12) where the language of instruction is English. Through our work and that of others, we have found that when teachers implement the SIOP teaching techniques to a high degree, the academic achievement of English learners (and other students) is increased (Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006; Echevarria, Richards, Chan & Ratleff, 2009; Honigsfeld & Cohan, 2008; McIntyre, Kyle & Moore, 2006; Short, Lougit, & Fidelman, 2009).

There are eight components in the SIOP Model that include thirty features of effective instruction for English learners. The components are Lesson Preparation, Building Background, Comprehensible Input, Strategies, Interaction, Practice & Application, Lesson Delivery, and Review & Assessment (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; 2010a; 2010b). Among the thirty features of the SIOP Model is one that focuses specifically on student engagement, which we define as: “Students pay attention and are on task, follow the lesson, respond to teacher direction, and perform the activities as expected” (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008, p. 155). For English learners to make academic progress, the expectation is that they must be highly engaged 90-100% of the time during each lesson. Adhering to the following principles of instruction will lead to higher levels of student engagement and, in turn, in higher academic achievement for English learners.

**Six principles of instruction that foster engagement for English learners**

*Provide many opportunities for English learners to develop oral language competency through interaction with others.*

English learners need oral language practice to help them develop and deepen their content knowledge and to support their second language reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills (Saunders & Goldenberg, in press). Oral language proficiency impacts all aspects of educational achievement, including grades, achievement test results, and acquisition of skilled reading (August & Shanahan; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Lesaux & Geva, 2008). As a child’s teacher, you are the main role model for English speakers.

As a child’s teacher, you are the main role model for appropriate English usage, word choice, intonation, fluency, and so forth, but do not discount the value of student-student interaction. In small groups, pairs, and triads, English learners can practice new language structures and vocabulary that they have been taught, as well as important language functions, such as clarifying, confirming or disconfirming predictions, elaborating on one’s own or another’s ideas, and evaluating opinions.

Further, structured interactions between ELs and native-English speakers result in English proficiency gains when the interactions focus on negotiating meaning and eliciting understanding, such as in instructional conversations (August & Shanahan, 2008; Saunders & Goldenberg, in press). To be beneficial for English learners, interactive activities need to be carefully designed to maximize student engagement and more proficient English-speaking students should be taught how to interact with youngsters who are developing English as a second or additional language.

Opportunities for authentic discussion and expression of ideas is important for language development, and sentence frames are also effective for providing language models for both English learners and native-English speakers. These frames serve as a scaffold for using complete sentences. For example, when you plan for your students to engage in a structured discussion, the following sentence frames will help English learners practice subject-verb agreement, while enabling them to participate more fully (Vogt & Echevarria, 2008, pp. 104, 116):

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____________________ was important to this story because it ____________________.
____________________ were important to this story because they ____________________.
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Another example of a sentence frame for older students that models appropriate agreement and disagreement with someone’s ideas is:

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“I respectfully disagree with ____________________
because I think that ____________________.”
“I agree with ____________________
because I think that ____________________.”
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Additional nouns and/or verbs could be added to the sentence frames for students with lower levels of English proficiency. The goals is to model the varied sentence constructions with the sentence frames, and then remove them as soon as students are able to formulate similar English sentences on their own.

There are times when it is important to provide clarification in a student’s first language, if possible. This can be provided by the teacher, instructional assistant, or another student who speaks the same language. Also, activities that foster classroom interaction and engagement assist students in developing friendships and support, so that English learners can learn and practice classroom routines in a comfortable, risk-free environment.

Effective teachers consistently write, post, and orally share with their students both language objectives and content objectives for every lesson they teach. This provides English learners with a road-map of what they are to learn and be able to do in both content
and language by the end of the respective lesson. Content and language objectives also guide teachers by reminding them that English learners must be able to learn both content and language simultaneously if they are to make gains (Goldenberg, 2008; Lyster, 2007). (For more information about writing content and language objectives see Echevarria, Vogt, and Short, 2008; 2010a; 2010b).

Explicitly link English learners’ background knowledge and experiences to lesson content and past learning.

One of the most important things you can do to assist English learners in meeting content standards is help them connect new concepts to their personal experiences and past learning. For many English learners who have not attended U.S. schools or who are unfamiliar with American culture, explicit background building can fill gaps students might have about content topics. This can be done with photographs, illustrations, video, explanations, or comparisons to a student’s own background or culture. Frequently, it’s also necessary to activate students’ prior knowledge in order to learn what they already know about a topic, or to identify gaps or misinformation. Don’t assume that students “lack prior knowledge.” Instead, consider that they may have a mismatch between what they have experienced and learned, and the topic you are teaching. Also, remember to tap your English learners’ funds of knowledge as resources, perhaps in lessons related to short story characters or plots, poetry, native-language nursery rhymes, songs they have learned previously, universal themes in literature, and so forth. Check your anthologies, novels, and other texts for cultural biases or idiomatic speech, so potential problems can be anticipated, and confusing concepts can be pre-taught. Let students read about topics with which they are familiar and give ample exposure to unfamiliar topics before they are asked to read about them (Jiménez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996; Vogt, 2005).

Provide explicit and contextualized vocabulary instruction to English learners.

Studies of vocabulary instruction show that English learners learn more words through explicit instruction than by incidental exposures. They also benefit from learning words that are embedded in meaningful contexts, rather than in isolation. ELs need to have many opportunities for repetition and practice with new vocabulary while reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and it is beneficial to post and review words frequently, while providing exposure to the words in multiple texts and contexts (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; Carlo, August, McLaughlin, Snow, Dressler, Lippman, Lively, & White, 2004). Further, research studies suggest that English learners benefit most from intensive vocabulary instruction that engages students in meaningful practice with ‘student-friendly’ definitions, and that provides regular review (Gersten, Baker, Shanahan, Linan-Thompson, & Collins, 2007).

Academic vocabulary provides particular challenges for English learners, and teachers need to include not only content words in the language arts and other disciplines, but also explicit instruction that includes process and function words (Vogt, Echevarria, & Short, 2010). These are words and phrases that have to do with functional language use, such as requesting information, justifying opinions, writing conclusions, “stating in your own words,” identifying multiple perspectives, persuading, interpreting, and so forth. Tasks that students are asked to complete during a lesson also fit into this category, and include such things as, list, explain, describe, paraphrase, identify, create, and share with a partner.

When teaching academic vocabulary, including content words, provide as much context as possible. For example, your word walls should provide more than just the word. Include a photo or illustration, a simple definition, and a sentence. This activity, called Four Corners Vocabulary (Vogt & Echevarría, 2008, p. 40), is effective for explicitly teaching word meanings. When 4-corner charts, with a word, illustration, definition, and sentence are posted while teaching a particular topic, students can refer to them as needed. Also, English learners’ vocabulary growth may be accelerated when instruction is linked to the home language, such as by offering an equivalent or synonym, or shared cognate (August, Beck, Calderón, Francis, Lesaux, & Shanahan, 2008). When designing your vocabulary lessons for English learners, we urge one caution: More is not necessarily better. Too many words on a Word Wall, or too many posters or charts on the wall are potentially confusing and quite distracting. Be purposeful when selecting words to teach, and keep the number manageable for both you and your students.

Each lesson you teach to English learners must be meaningful, comprehensible, and accessible.

English learners will not be able to understand what is being taught if explanations are spoken too rapidly, or if the readability of a text is far too difficult. This may seem like common sense, but the reality is that accommodations must be made to ensure that ELs (and other students) can understand. You can modify your instruction for English learners with SIOP techniques such as the following (Echevarria & Vogt, in press):

- Adjust your speech to your students’ proficiency levels, not too fast and not too slow;
- Regularly model or demonstrate tasks, processes, and routines;
- Use gestures, pantomime, and movement to make concepts more clear;
• Provide opportunities for students to engage in role-plays, improvisation, and simulations;
• Use visuals and supplementary materials, such as pictures, real objects, illustrations, charts, adapted texts, audiotapes or CDs, and graphic organizers, perhaps in the native language, if needed and available (Scarcella, 2003);
• Consistently use restatement, paraphrasing, repetition, and written records of key points;
• Preview and review key information and language structures;
• Provide hands-on, experiential, and discovery activities;
• For beginning English speakers, speak slowly and somewhat deliberately, with clear vocabulary and diction, using pictures, other objects, and movements to illustrate the content being taught (Goldenberg, 2008); and
• Judiciously reduce the complexity of language. Oversimplifying language limits exposure to varied sentence constructions and language forms (Crossley, McCarthy, Louwerse, & McNamara, 2007).

Stimulate English learners’ thinking and provide meaningful activities for students to demonstrate their learning.

One of our favorite adages is, “Just because a student doesn’t speak English proficiently, doesn’t mean he (or she) can’t THINK.” Therefore, as you plan lessons for English learners, just as with all students, it is of critical importance that you consistently plan for a range of questions and tasks that promote strategic, critical thinking (Chamot & O’Malley, 1994; Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). It is far easier to ask simple, factual questions—and too often, this constitutes “regular” instruction for English learners. Although ELs may be limited in the way they can express their thinking, they can still be asked higher order questions. For example, “In comparing the North’s and the South’s conflicting positions on slavery, why do you think the South refused to change?” The answer may be expressed in few words but the higher level thinking required to answer can still come through. It is important to provide instruction in how to use a variety of learning strategies to aid students in thinking critically (Echevarria & Graves, 2010; Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000). Also, create assignments that require your students to think more critically and apply their language skills in a more extended way.

Not surprisingly, this means that teachers must incorporate scaffolding techniques throughout each lesson for English learners (and struggling readers). As you reviewed the techniques recommended in the previous section for providing comprehensibility and accessibility to content, you may have noticed that many involve scaffolds, such as, modeling, using illustrations or photos, adapting your speech, and using graphic organizers. Without these and other scaffolds, and multiple opportunities to practice, apply, and transfer new learning through meaningful activities (Jensen, 2005; Goldenberg, 2008; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001; Vogt & Shearer, in press), it will be difficult, if not impossible, for English learners (and struggling readers) to tackle challenging questions and tasks (August, Beck, Calderón, Francis, Lesaux, & Shanahan, 2008). These activities for ELs should combine both direct and indirect instruction that includes a give-and-take between teacher and students that encourages higher levels of thinking, speaking, and reading (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006).

Assess English learners frequently, before, during, and after lessons, and plan purposefully, based on the assessment data.

Assessment and instruction are inextricably linked and are reciprocal processes. Data are used for making instructional decisions during lesson planning in order to meet students’ assessed needs. Assessments are then used to determine how well students have learned what has been taught, and the cycle then continues. Assessment includes both formal and informal formative and summative measures, such as those included in basal reading programs, and other curriculum-based measurement (CBM) that are integral to determining which students may require re-teaching or intervention for under-developed skills. For English learners, it is of critical importance to include an assessment of English proficiency, and if possible, primary language and literacy assessments that provide invaluable information. Certainly, your state’s standardized annual testing provides needed information about students’ academic growth over time. Your own teacher-created assessments are certainly important to include, and these may involve teacher observation, note-taking, end-of-the-week or unit tests, student writing samples, reading fluency measures, and any other informal assessments you find helpful.

While all students benefit from well-designed, appropriately paced instruction, English learners must have this type of teaching. They need much richer and more extensive teaching procedures than those that are generally recommended in core curricular programs (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005; Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts-Taffe, 2006). This includes frequent and specific academic and/or behavioral feedback so ELs can understand what they are doing well and what may need some correction (August & Shannon, 2006; Gersten, et al., 2007). For example, a familiar comment that many teachers use
while students are working is, “Good job!” While this may make a student feel good, it communicates little about why the teacher gave praise in the first place. For English learners (and struggling readers), a more helpful feedback statement would be, “I noticed that when you were writing, you weren’t sure how to spell a word, and you asked your partner for help. Then you both looked in the story, you found the word, and you corrected your spelling. Good job!” Remember, teacher observation is a valuable form of assessment, so use it to formulate specific feedback for your students. In sum, we know that students benefit from specific feedback on correct and incorrect responses, periodic review, frequent assessments to gauge progress, and reteaching when needed (August & Shanahan, 2008; Goldenberg, 2008).

**What leads students to lose interest in learning?**

When students disengage from academics, the obvious question is, why? An equally obvious and accurate answer is that the kinds of instructional practices described above are not used systematically and effectively with English learners. They simply do not understand the material being presented, the lessons aren’t meaningful to them and they tire of consistently performing poorly on assignments. However, there are also a number of other influences that teachers do not necessarily consider, ones that may have a profound impact on students’ motivation and well being in school (Jensen, 2005; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008).

- **Lack of positive relationships.** Many English learners experience loneliness and isolation at school. They may not easily form close relationships with peers or teachers, the kinds of relationships that positively impact academic achievement. Classroom settings that encourage interaction, use “teams” for instructional purposes, and provide ample opportunities to engage with peers around interesting topics will increase English learners’ chance of connecting with others and forming positive relationships. Teachers benefit in that they get to know their students at a deeper level through students’ active participation, discussion, and sharing of ideas. On the other hand, sitting passively in a teacher dominated class, being called upon in front of peers, and having little opportunity to collaborate with others contribute to feelings of isolation. It is difficult for teachers to develop strong relationships with students they know little about.

- **Awareness of disrespect toward one’s culture or ethnicity.** Disrespect is detected by students even when teachers’ attitudes and actions are subtle such as indifference or low expectations for culturally diverse students. We sometimes think of showing respect for one’s culture by having cultural events or classroom decorations, but it is more about, for example, acknowledging students’ home experiences as valuable and linking them to discussions. Ask students how their families spend weekends, what kinds of things they do with their siblings, and other kinds of non-invasive questions that convey interest and recognize the students’ home experiences as valuable. Establishing positive relationships with students is a critical factor for raising achievement. Seemingly simple acts that show a teacher has respect for students, identified by students themselves (Pane, 2008), include talking to students respectfully, answering students’ questions, helping students when they need it and calling students by their name. Further, being conscious of the sociocultural influences on students’ lives enhances communication and builds positive relationships (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Living in poverty, having household responsibilities, being separated from loved ones left behind in the home country, and the disconnect between the values and expectations of their home and those of the school are only some of the myriad sociocultural realities that English learners deal with every day.

- **Perception of threats.** School climate impacts student achievement. In their study of immigrant students, Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova (2008) found that students’ perceptions about violence were highly related to their academic achievement. In highly volatile environments where students feel at-risk, threatened, or detached from a chaotic school climate, they are less likely to connect with peers, teachers, and staff, leading to the kind of isolation discussed previously. The threat of harm may be real or imagined and may be on the commute to school, in the hallways and restrooms, or in the classroom. Supportive learning environments reduce the perception of threat and if the threat is real (i.e., in a high crime area), a strong relationship with teachers can provide refuge for students.

- **Perception that class assignments or tasks are irrelevant.** Many students disengage from learning because what they are being asked to do seems irrelevant. Teaching practices that contribute to this perception include an overreliance on paper and pencil tasks, assignments that are difficult to understand, both in content and teacher expectation, and instruction that doesn’t make connection
to what students know. However, when you provide lessons that are based on rich, interesting materials, involve related hands-on tasks, provide opportunities for students to grapple with ideas, have authentic discussions with their peers, and explicitly connect to students’ lives and experiences, learning is fun, engaging, and meaningful. In these kinds of classrooms, even the most reluctant learners thrive.

When students struggle: The promise of RTI

When English learners lag behind academically, they don’t make adequate progress in English language development, and they disengage and appear apathetic about school, teachers often wonder if these students have some sort of problem. There has been a long history of disproportionate numbers of ELs being referred to special education, with many either over- or under-identified as having learning disabilities (Artiles & Trent, 1994). While it is a challenge to disentangle possible learning disabilities from limited language proficiency, the first consideration must be the quality of instruction in the student’s classroom. In the past, too much focus has been on the learner rather than the teaching environment as the source of learning difficulties. Currently, a promising approach for meeting the needs of English learners – and all students – is Response to Intervention (RTI).

RTI is a multi-tiered instructional delivery model that is designed to identify at-risk learners early and make adjustments to instruction so that students can learn critical literacy skills. We believe it holds promise for English learners in particular because it provides a structure for monitoring their progress, adjusting instruction accordingly, and providing interventions as needed. Rather than focusing on what is wrong with the student, the emphasis is on searching for solutions within the classroom. Is instruction scaffolded so that the student experiences success? Does the teacher make connections to what the student knows? Are there adequate English language development opportunities? Can the student demonstrate knowledge of skills and concepts in the home language but not in English? Are other ELs in the class succeeding or are most struggling?

At the foundation of a successful RTI model is general education instruction that reflects best practice for meeting the academic and language needs of ELs (Tier 1). Figure 1 shows that in Tier 1, teachers use practices such as those delineated in the SIOP Model. Most students will achieve benchmarks when the teacher uses engaging, effective instruction that is differentiated for their needs. However, some students will require additional, more intensive instruction to learn some literacy skills (Tier 2).

Tier 2 interventions are for students who have difficulty with key skills that impact success in reading and writing, not for students who have difficulty in meeting specific standards such as identifying the main character in a story or distinguishing fact from opinion. To help those students, modifications are made as part of a teacher’s repertoire for individualizing instruction as needed. These are the kinds of things “good” teachers do because they know these modifications will facilitate their students’ learning. Some general practices for improving students’ performance might include conferencing with a parent or guardian, moving a student to another seat or to a carrel to reduce distractions, adjusting the level of difficulty of an assignment, providing sentence frames, outlines of a text or lecture, or other scaffolds, and providing native language support. Tier 2 interventions, on the other hand, are specific research-validated practices that develop specific skills needed for overall literacy development.

For the small number of students who don’t respond to Tier 2 intervention, they would move on to Tier 3, a more intensive level of support. In some models, this would include special education services. One thing to remember about English learners and disability: one cannot have a language or learning disability in English but not in one’s home language. Therefore, some overarching questions to ask about English learners include (Echevarria & Vogt, in press):

- Does the student differ significantly from others with similar background?
- Does the student’s family notice a problem?
• What about first language development? Was it normal?
• Does the difficulty the student is experiencing result primarily from cultural, environmental, or economic disadvantage?
• Is the student making steady progress, regardless how slow?
• Has the student had an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and skills in his home language?
• Has the student had sufficient opportunities to learn by hearing engaging stories, reading interesting texts, using the home language for literacy development and background information?

The answers to these questions are essential for identifying the source of a student’s difficulty in the classroom. While the same percentage of English learners would, theoretically, experience learning disabilities as the English-speaking school population, we need to first examine the quality of instruction being provided before an attribution of “learning problem” is assigned to English learners – or any student. Typically, opportunity to learn is a more significant factor that contributes to academic performance than issues inherent in the child. However, if extensive data (interviews, observations, assessment results) in both the student’s home language and English indicate that the student is not responding to intervention, then the student may be eligible for special education services.

Note that the RTI process is a reciprocal process (Figure 1), with students receiving the services they need for a period of time and may go in and out of the tiers as needed. They are still part of the general education class.

**Conclusion**

Students disengage from school for myriad reasons, some of which we discussed in this article. Because of the variation that we have observed in levels of student engagement and academic performance by students with similar profiles, we believe that a powerful contributor to the academic achievement of English learners is the type of instruction that takes place in classrooms every day. We hope that the principles of instruction presented here will be helpful to teachers as they work with the ever growing number of English learners in schools.

**References**


Motivating and engaging students in reading

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You can certainly ignore motivation if you choose. But if you do, you may be neglecting the most important part of reading. There are two sides to reading. On one side are the skills which include phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition, vocabulary, and simple comprehension. On the other side is the will to read. A good reader has both skill and will. In the “will” part, we are talking about motivation to read. This describes children’s enjoyments, their wants, and their behaviors surrounding reading. A student with skill may be capable, but without will, she cannot become a reader. It is her will power that determines whether she reads widely and frequently and grows into a student who enjoys and benefits from literacy. So we think you should care about motivation because it is the other half of reading. Sadly, it is the neglected half.

What is motivation?
Many teachers think of a motivated reader as a student who is having fun while reading. This may be true, but there are many forms of motivation that might not be related to fun and excitement. What we mean by motivation are the values, beliefs, and behaviors surrounding reading for an individual. Some productive values and beliefs may lead to excitement, yet other values may lead to determined hard work.

We talk about three powerful motivations that drive students’ reading. They operate in school and out of school, and they touch nearly every child. Some students may have all of these motivations and some may have only one. For some students, these motivations appear in the positive form driving students toward reading. For other students, the motivations are negative and push students away from books. When we talk about reading motivations we refer to (1) interest, (2) dedication, and (3) confidence. An interested student reads because he enjoys it; a dedicated student reads because he believes it is important, and a confident student reads because he can do it. We discuss each of these in this essay with an emphasis on dedication.

Research says that skill and will (motivation) go together. Usually, students who are gaining in skill are gaining in motivation as well; a student whose motivation increases because she is inspired by a terrific teacher will grow in reading skills. Research also says that these three motivations are independent. A student may be interested and read for enjoyment, but not dedicated and not seeing the importance of hard work in reading. A student may also be interested and want to read but not be confident in her ability. So confidence can be a problem when other motivations are not a problem for a student. Research also says that motivation comes from the teacher in the classroom. Of course, motivation may be stimulated by home and may be influenced by peers, but the teacher is the main actor influencing a student’s development of reading motivation.

What can a teacher do?
We offer six motivation practices that teachers can implement daily in the classroom. These practices can be brought into every lesson and directed to every student. Teachers do not have to wait for motivation to come from the outside. They can make it happen any time they want to implement one of these six practices. Research undergirds the impact of these practices on students becoming avid readers and on students becoming achieving readers. We provide examples of these practices from the literature and from our own experiences in our research and teaching.

Motivations to read—interest, confidence, dedication

Interest
When we think of motivation our mind first turns to interest. Motivation is enjoying a book, being excited about an author, or being delighted by new information. Researchers refer to interest as intrinsic motivation,
meaning something we do for its own sake. On a rainy
day, we might rather read our favorite mystery than do
anything else. We are not trying to get a reward when
falling into a novel.

Motivation also brings to mind the reward for
success. Who doesn’t like to win a trinket for hitting
the target with a dart at the State Fair? Who doesn’t want
to earn serious money for working hard in a career? These
are extrinsic rewards because someone gives them to us.
We do not give them to ourselves, and these rewards do
propel us to put out effort, focus energy, and get up in
the morning.

Yet, extrinsic rewards do not motivate reading
achievement in the long term. Students who read only
for the reward of money, a grade, or a future job are
not the best readers. The reason is that if you read for
the reward of a good quiz score, what happens after the
quiz is that you stop reading. If the test score is the only
thing that matters, it is OK to take shortcuts, not really
understand, or cheat. It encourages students to become
more interested in the reward than the learning. None
of these generate long-term achievement. Sometimes a
reward, such as candy or early recess, will jump-start
a group of students to read in this moment for this
purpose. But if the motivation is not intrinsic, it will
not increase achievement in the long term.

For some individuals, grades represent their quality
as a student and a reader. Being a high achiever is a
symbol of how they are doing. A high grade is an icon
of success and these students strive to feel successful.
One student told us that he read as practice to improve
as a reader and get better grades. He said, “Reading a
lot helps you read better ‘cuz at first I wasn’t a very good
reader but now I’m doing real good.” This point came
up again and again. Another boy said, “If I keep reading
then like you can do better in high school and then
you’ll get good, better grades.” Readers who identify
with school see grades as an emblem of their success
and a reason to have confidence.

Interest comes in two forms—situational and
enduring. Situational interest is fascination with a
detail in the here and now: a picture in a book, a link
in a Website, a funny comment by a character, or an
amazing fact about animals will all excite situational
interest. This does not last until tomorrow or next week.
Situational interest does not generate achievement
because it is locked into the local event. Situational
interest can become enduring if it recurs with teacher (or
other) continuing support. If a student finds one type of
novel he likes, such as realistic fiction, and is helped to
find more and to understand them fully, he may, over
time, grow an enduring motivation for reading fiction.
But the situational motivation is not sufficient to assure
the full maturation of intrinsic motivation. One of our
goals in schools is to foster intrinsic motivation, the
enjoyment and fulfillment in reading.

Confidence as a reader
Belief in yourself is more closely linked to achievement
than any other motivation throughout school. The
reason is that confidence, which refers to belief in your
capacity, is tied intimately to success. This link occurs
for simple, daily reading tasks. A student who reads
one page fluently thinks he can read the next page in
the same book efficiently. The link is also forged for
reading in general. A student who reads fluently and
understands well is also sure of himself as a reader.
In and out of school, people like the things they do well.

Conversely, students who struggle begin to doubt
their abilities. They expect to do poorly in reading,
writing, and talking about text. The real dilemma is
that lower-achieving students often exaggerate their
limitations. Believing they are worse than they really
are, they stop trying completely. Retreating from all
text interactions, they reduce their own opportunity to
do what they want to do more than anything—to be
a good reader. Their low confidence undermines them
even further in a cycle of doubt and failure. By middle
school, breaking this cycle is a formidable challenge for
teachers.

Partly due to their long history of difficulty,
middle school students need a safe environment. As
Nicole Connolly, a middle school teacher, said about
her struggling readers:

For many students, a trusting relationship with
their teacher makes all the difference in building
confidence.

Dedication
Although intrinsic motivation is desirable because it
is gratifying for the student, and because it energizes
students to achieve, this type of motivation is not always possible in school. There are assignments that are not desirable to a student, yet are part of the curriculum. There are books that do not appeal to some individuals, yet at a given moment in a given school, it is necessary to read them. What motivation enables students to read in this situation? The reason to read in this case is the students’ belief that reading is important, the students’ persistence in reading whatever the assignment, and the students’ organization that enables them to put forth effort effectively. We call this dedication.

Every student has the potential to be dedicated. Skill may be hard for some students to develop, but dedication is related to will. It is up to a student to decide whether to be dedicated or not. Students are either avoidant, dedicated, or somewhere in between the two. In this section, we will describe avoidant and dedicated behaviors in the words of middle school students. These signs are showing their value of reading, being well organized, and making efforts to be successful in reading. Essentially, dedicated students persist, plan, and place a priority on their reading. These are the three key signs of dedication in students.

**Signs of dedication**

The primary signs of dedication are persisting, valuing and planning.

**Persisting.** One of the most important distinctions between dedicated and avoidant students is that avoidant students do not make the connection between their efforts and the outcomes. A seventh grade teacher, Taysha Gateau-Barrera, told us that “Dedicated students know that they don’t improve by mistake. They make continued efforts to try hard and be well-organized because they want to be successful in school.”

Avoidant students make up excuses, avoid eye contact, or lack organizational skills. In our interviews we asked students to give an example of a time when they avoided a reading assignment:

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<tr>
<th>Interviewer: Can you give an example of a school reading assignment you and your friends avoided?</th>
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<td>Student: I didn’t want to do it because it was kind of hard. And so, I kept on walking around the classroom trying to avoid it. I didn’t want to do this because it was fifteen minutes of class and I didn’t have time to finish it so I didn’t do it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewer: Can you think of another example of a reading assignment that you and your friends tried to avoid?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student: Uh-uh. Because after that we failed.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For these students, avoidance had unfortunate consequences. Avoidance is a particularly powerful sign because it stops all learning abruptly. If a student wants to read and tries to read well she may learn. If another student refuses to interact with text, all hope for gaining skill, knowledge, or experience from text is dashed.

**Valuing the practical and personal.** The centerpiece of dedication to reading is believing in its importance. In our interviews with students, many talked about the practical importance for reading. But they also they also talked about the role of reading in helping them form an identity. One struggling reader said:

> Reading is important 'cause basically you need it for everything really. You need it like if you're going shopping, in a restaurant, obviously in education, when you're reading the newspaper, or reading a book or in everyday life you will need it. I guess that's why I love acting now because to get by as a youngster, I played the part of a reader and in that way I developed a coping strategy. In secondary school, everything changed because it was more competitive. I got bullied because I had to get the teacher to come and read to me. Recently I had the experience of being Mary Warren in the play The Crucible. I was honored I had been chosen to read the part, but petrified I couldn't come up with goods. I allowed myself to embrace the character, even using my fear of reading to empathize with the character's fear of being in the courtroom. I love reading and the feeling it gives me and I hope I will always feel like this, willing to accept bigger reading challenges (Barden, 2009, p. 298).

**Valuing knowledge—from reading.** Dedicated students read to attain information that expands their knowledge of their perceived world. Reading is a vehicle to take them to the knowledge they want. Unlike the kids who are reading for practice, these students seek information for its own sake.

One middle school student said:

<table>
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<th>Interviewer: Does reading information books help you?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Student: Well, it informs us because we read about the Titanic, and it happened on April 12. It's not boring, it's more like fun because they give you information and stuff about the past.</td>
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This high-achieving, dedicated student valued the knowledge learned from many different information books over an extended period of time:
Interviewer: Do you learn anything from information books in school?
Student: It actually teaches you things and makes you really think about life that’s going on on this earth.

Interviewer: Can you think of some reading assignments that you had to do where you actually learned something new? Something you didn’t know before?
Student: In science [we read about] this bacteria that I didn’t know about and it’s called hiking disease. When you’re hiking and you get some water from the pond and it’s this little bug that if it hits you too long it can make you very sick.

Interviewer: Okay. How about another class where you learned something new?
Student: In social studies because we had to talk about South Africa and countries.

Interviewer: How long have you felt that you can learn something new from reading assignments?
Student: Before middle school.

Values for the future. Dedicated high school students think about their future. Here is one example:

Interviewer: Why do you think it’s important for you to be a good reader?
Student: Well I guess if you are a good student and get a good education then you can go somewhere in life.

Interviewer: Can you tell me why – why do you say it’s very important for you to read?
Student: Because by being a good student you get in good colleges, and that’s what I’m trying to do.

Another dedicated, high-achieving student reported:

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about why you said being a good reader will help you in the future at school?
Student: Being a good reader will help you in the future because like if you got a job, you read a lot, like, even if you didn’t like it. If you didn’t read in school, you wouldn’t know the meaning of it.

Some students have career goals that they link to school subjects. Here is a dedicated female:

Interviewer: Can you think of some examples of reading assignments that you had to do and you believed those will help you in the future?
Student: I sort of want to be a vet when I get older, so readings in science and learning about chemicals help me. Learning how to write things and all that stuff will help me later on.

Interviewer: And how long have you felt that reading things like that will help you in the future?
Student: For a while cuz my parents said they will.

We can all learn from a page out of the book written about Whitney High School in Cerritos, California. After languishing for years in poverty and low achievement, this school was transformed by a charismatic principal into the highest achieving school (highest SAT scores) in California. Every student graduated into college. Celia, a veteran of three years in the school, expressed the motivations of students at Whitney High. Asked to comment on the “best about life and learning at Whitney” she replied:

Basically, all the academic courses themselves? Unimportant. While they do play [some] part in academics in college I suppose, they won’t stick with you the rest of your life. What is the most important, I think, is the discipline you have to learn when your teachers force you to do this assignment or read that book; it’s the fact that you’ve had to do it that will be most important in college because when mom and dad aren’t there strangling you and chaining you to your text, you will get the lock and chain out and force yourself to work (Humes, 2003, p. 139).

Celia went on to talk about the sources of her self-discipline when she was asked about what she thought influenced her:

I guess it comes out of knowing what your parents want and striving to please them, yet also knowing what you want and trying to stay true to yourself… In Whitney it was possible to find people who were like me, and liked me, rather than merely tolerated me. People who were interested in who I was… They were there when home life was rough, and held my hand walking forward in my life (Humes, 2003, p.141).
Planning for literacy. The two main signs of dedication, persistence and valuing, often become visible in students’ planning and organization. Dedicated students plan for success. They are organized with their assignments and their time. They schedule their work and do not forget their assignments. Dedicated students prioritize because being a good reader is part of who they are and getting good grades in reading is an icon of their success. Within their agenda of social, electronic, extracurricular, and out-of-school pursuits, dedicated students prioritize reading as a necessity of life.

Connections of interest, confidence, and dedication

The motivations are synergistic. They work together to propel students forward. Interest and confidence feed into dedication which is the factor that directly improves achievement. For example, some students enjoy reading. Their enjoyment leads them to commit time, effort, and concentration, which produces good grades and high test scores. But this effort and valuing are the dedication part of motivation. So, interest leads to dedication and the dedication impacts achievement.

A similar pattern works for confidence. Students who believe in themselves are willing to tackle challenges. Their confidence leads them to work hard when they have to. Confident students commit time and energy to tasks because they expect to succeed. But again, the time and effort are part of their dedication, and it is the dedication which generates a high standing in the class. In conclusion, interest and confidence do not empower students to achieve highly unless the students are also dedicated. But when interest and confidence are harnessed to dedication, students will score highly on tests, get good grades, and be worthy citizens of the literate classroom (Cambria, Coddington, Guthrie, & Wigfield, 2010). This leads to a focus on dedication in the classroom.

Research base on dedication in reading

When we refer to dedication in reading we mean doing the reading because it is important. This meaning has two halves. On one side it is an action or a behavior. It is something students do. On the other side it is not a blind behavior, but is a deliberate decision to read because of values the student may hold deeply.

In doing the reading, a dedicated student does not work simply for a moment. He spends a long time when it is needed and puts forth supreme effort if there are obstacles or challenges in the reading. The dedicated reader finishes the work he begins. He is conscientious about simple but key school behaviors, such as handing in homework on time. In a survey of secondary students, Lens, Simons, and Siegfried (2002) reported that persistent students gave more effort to be a good student, invested long periods of time with close concentration, studied frequently during the week, and did homework on the weekends, as well as filling all their course requirements daily. Such persistence is positively correlated with achievement and with feelings of being capable of completing the work successfully (Wigfield, Klauda, & Cambria, in press).

Valuing

The main reason that the dedicated reader persists in working hard is because he believes that reading is important. For secondary students, this valuing is central to students’ identity. Researchers show that dedicated students strongly agree that “My performance is important for becoming the person I want to be” (Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke, & Akey, 2004). In other words, for the dedicated student reading is useful because it will help accomplish a future goal (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Dedicated readers are likely to have a lot of self-discipline in general. They agree with statements such as:

- “I am reliable.”
- “People can count on me to keep on schedule.”
- “I am good at resisting temptation.”
- “I am not easily discouraged” (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004).

Studies show that middle school students who strongly agree with statements like these are exceptionally high achievers and students who strongly disagree with them are low achievers (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006). Students who avoid work are likely to believe they can succeed by just behaving nicely, impressing the right people, showing that they like the teacher, being lucky, or getting other people to help them (Nicholls, Patachnick, & Nolen, 1985). In fact, self-discipline is even stronger than IQ in predicting grades in reading and other subjects (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). In other words, dedication to reading is actually the same as self-discipline applied to reading in school.

Distinctions between dedication and intrinsic motivation

It is important not to confuse dedication and enjoyment in reading. A person who reads all the time for pleasure and enjoyment is intrinsically motivated. Such a person may put in high amounts of time and effort in reading, but it is for the benefit of enjoyment such as solving the mystery, following the character, or gaining information about a favorite topic. In contrast, the dedicated student reads whether it is interesting or not. She does the reading because she values the benefit it provides her. These benefits may include growing into the kind of person she wants to become, attaining high achievement to show success as a student, or satisfying family expectations that she has incorporated into her
own value system. Therefore, reading for enjoyment and reading for dedication are two different things. Students can be one but not the other. One student could be dedicated but not interested, whereas another could be interested but not dedicated. A few students may be both dedicated and interested. Researchers have found that in the elementary grades, students who are both dedicated and interested, achieve far higher, and read more proficiently than students who do not have both of these motivations working for them (Guthrie, Coddington, & Wigfield, 2009).

**Dedication impacts achievement in grades K to 12.**

When children enter school some are more interested in reading than others. Whether their parents read to them daily, they acquired a curiosity by being exposed to attractive books, or reading came easily to them. Motivated first graders gain rapidly in reading achievement. In this case, motivation is usually interest and enjoyment in reading. It is not a one-way street. Children who grow rapidly in learning to read during the primary grades also grow in motivation. So skill in reading and motivation to reading are hand in glove and operate reciprocally in the primary grades (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007).

As students enter the intermediate grades of three to five, some students become dedicated as well as interested. They see reading as a contributor to who they will become. It has been shown that interest alone does not assure that a student will be a high achiever in the intermediate elementary grades; however, dedication alone does not assure high achievement either. When outstanding students can integrate their interest (reading what they like) and dedication (reading what they must), their test scores and grades show positive effects (Guthrie, Coddington, & Wigfield, 2009). As students enter middle school, their dedication to reading takes the form of identity as a student. During grades six to nine, students who believe that being a good student is part of who they are and those who embrace the goals of learning through text are the highest achievers. Dedication takes over as the most reliable motivation to fuel achievement. Some of these students may also be intrinsically motivated and enjoy reading (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005), but that is not the primary driver of their achievement across subject matters and through time.

At the high school level, dedication to reading may take the form of attempting to understand texts as deeply as possible. This aspiration to comprehend fully is termed *mastery goals* by Pintrich and his colleagues (Pintrich, 2000). These students want to piece together the different sections of a text and integrate them fully with what they already know about the topic in the information or the character in literature. Not only do these students read conscientiously, but they seek deeper meanings and relish the challenge of complexity in books. Students who retreat from mastery goals and seek only to avoid getting low grades will obviously be the lower achievers.

Across the grade levels, confidence in one's ability to read is a key attribute of success. Overwhelmingly, at all grade levels, the lowest achievers believe that it is futile to hope that they can read like many of their classmates. They feel helpless. In their overwhelming sense of incompetence, these students cannot put forth effort even when it is possible to succeed. Thus, resilience is pervasive for achievers, and discouragement is the hallmark of low achievers across the grade span of K to 12.

**Motivational practices in the elementary classroom—CORI**

There are five motivation practices that are well supported in research. These practices foster all of the motivations we mentioned including interest, dedication, and confidence. Found in the classrooms of many outstanding teachers in primary and intermediate classrooms, these practices are not revolutionary, yet they are all too rare. To investigate how to generate and sustain motivation, we developed Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction focused on grades three to five. Over 10 years, we performed 11 experiments with 75 statistical comparisons of experimental and control groups (Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007), and other researchers have also documented their effectiveness (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004). Currently, we are documenting the impacts of CORI in middle school. These practices are not restricted to special events or grand occasions in which students have rare opportunities, such as a field trip to a museum. These are daily actions that motivate long-term achievement including the following: success, thematic units, choice, relevance, and collaboration or teacher-student interaction. We next address each of these.

**Success**

In some schools with some curricula, some administrators claim that they support struggling readers by giving them special instruction or collaboration with peers to help them decipher the texts. But this is not sufficient. Texts have to be user friendly to the student. By user friendly, we mean that students can read a text aloud with 90% accuracy. Another standard for readable text is summarizing. Students should be able to write a coherent summary of a paragraph or a page in the text used for instruction. Selecting readable texts is a challenge and often means that multiple texts are needed in the classroom. In CORI, we provide a class book for whole class instruction in a reading strategy; however, for guided reading, text-based writing, and
other independent reading activities we provide trade books of multiple levels. A reasonable rule of thumb is that the range of reading skill is the same number as the grade level. For example, in Grade 5, there are five or more years of reading level difference between the lowest and highest students. It is unthinkable that students in Grade 5, who read at the third-grade level, can make sense of a text that is appropriate for a fifth grader reading at the eighth-grade level.

Much more differentiation of text, books, Internet sites, and materials within the classroom instructional framework is necessary to insure the success of all students. Without success, the students never gain confidence or they lose the resilience they had when they came to the classroom. Though the benefit of a readable text is enjoyable to imagine, the disaster of an overly difficult text is a measurable consequence for deepening the dilemmas of struggling readers.

Students’ confidence or self-efficacy is increased by their experiences of success in reading. When teachers locate texts at students’ levels, and enable students to realize that they are reading them fluently with understanding, students gain confidence. Although it may sound utopian, success is the royal road to confidence. There is no alternative. Having a football star come to school and say that the kids are all stars in reading is entertaining. But it does not fool students into actually believing in their capacities. The football star may increase students’ energy to read for a day. But students’ success in specific reading tasks with praise from the teacher will fuel their reading for the long term. As Schunk (2003) and other researchers have reported, helping students perform competently, set their own goals, use teacher feedback, and gauge their own skills are the key ingredients in nurturing self-confident readers.

**Thematic unit**

Alongside success, the practice of providing a thematic unit is a powerful tool for developing students’ confidence. Thematic units may be literary, topical, or discipline based. For example, in CORI in elementary school, we provide thematic units on survival in plant and animal communities. We bring in information books on ecology and how animals live together. We also integrate stories, legends, and novels such as *Julie of the Wolves* by George, *Hatchet* by Paulsen, or *Caduto and Bruchac’s Keeper of the Animals: Native American Stories and Wildlife Activities for Children*. In teaching the theme we emphasize the broad conceptual topic with individual questions for the week and individual questions for each day. We emphasize how answering today’s question relates to the general topic and how answering it relates to yesterday’s question. We help the students identify which portions of text are answering the questions for each day and how the readings across time are expanding their knowledge of survival.

A thematic unit across time has the benefit of nurturing students’ confidence in reading. When the students see the topics, key questions, and essential portions of text linked together, they gain a sense that they can read. They expand their belief that they can answer the questions and perform the reading activities that enable them to be functioning members of a class discussion or a team project.

**Choice**

A favorite motivator of many teachers is choice. There is nothing more gratifying than seeing a student who has found the perfect book or has discovered an author she can call her own. Beyond selecting books for reading, we promote many forms of mini-choices that can be applied in every lesson. For example, students can choose which piece of a text to read. In a novel, a student may select one character about whom to specialize. She becomes expert on what this character does, thinks, and feels. It is her character. While she may know all the characters, the plot, and the theme, she nevertheless claims ownership of a significant slice of the novel. In an information book reading activity, students can select a significant concept in which to specialize. In a lesson on non-fiction, a teacher may assign which page to read in a short section of a book. Students can read to explain their section to the team or the class. To show their understanding, students can choose three of five questions posted on the overhead projector to answer in a discussion or in writing. On another occasion, students may show their learning by choosing whether to answer three teacher questions or to write a summary of a small section of text.

As one teacher reflected:

> I have been in education for 15 years and I have always known that choice was huge. But after going through CORI and giving some of those reluctant readers those opportunities for choice about books and partnerships, it was so empowering for them. I’ve actually done some things to transfer that to what I continue to do in my classroom.

**Relevance**

Teachers practicing the art of relevance enable students to connect the books of instruction to their lives. In CORI for elementary school, we provide a simple, hands-on activity to generate interest in reading. For example, one hands-on activity we used was dissecting an owl pellet. As many teachers have experienced, the students scream with delight when they discover a skull of a mouse in the pellet from an owl. When they piece together the bones with the skull and decide that this owl had eaten a mouse, they see animal survival in a
totally vivid way. After this 20-minute experience, students read avidly for 5 to 10 days about how animals live, find food, and defend themselves from predators. Providing the owl pellet experience is providing relevance for reading. Not only do books about owls and mice come to life, but the broader issues of predation, competition, and food webs are suddenly interesting. A student has looked at his own owl pellet, has had a personal experience of excitement. This excitement transfers to a text with photographs of plants, animals, and predation. In middle school CORI, we are providing similar relevance through videos of hunting in the Serengeti or symbiosis on a coral reef. For these middle school students, the video experience generates intense interest in reading.

Practices of relevance in the classroom can take many forms. For example, providing historical narratives about Central American Indians for Hispanic students from Central America is generating relevance for text reading. Some forms of culturally relevant teaching may generate relevance, but not all of them do. Having African American students read biographies of Booker T. Washington and Harriet Tubman does not automatically generate relevance simply because the texts are about African Americans. If the students do not feel connected to those African Americans in the biographies, relevance will not be generated. Cultural relevance can be an especially powerful motivational practice for minority students if they frequently feel little kinship and possess little background experience with traditional texts peopled with European American populations (Tatum, 2005).

Beyond locating books that students can connect to, teachers can create tasks that enable students to build relevance for text. For example, in the “bubble project” for fourth graders, teachers encouraged students to provide a social critique of advertisements (Gainer, Valdez-Gainer, & Kinard, 2009). After locating ads for clothing to perfume to sports events, students studied the texts. They questioned the meanings, authors’ intentions, and gender biases in the text. They wrote replies to the ads in the form of a bubble spoken by a character. The students experienced humor, social critique, and sheer enjoyment in this literacy event. Students saw that the text was relevant not only to their material interest, but to their thoughts and attitudes about popular culture. Such activities enable students to see that reading is important to their interests and their interactions with others.

Collaboration and relationship-building
At the elementary school level, social relationships are paramount for students’ development as readers. In CORI, we provide partner reading, team summarizing, group posters, and peer conferencing. Each is carefully orchestrated to assure full participation and accountability, for individual work as well as for group products.

In both primary and intermediate levels, research supports the power of motivational and emotional support for building motivation. A nationwide observational study of primary classrooms showed that when teachers were sensitive to student interests, invited student input into classroom decisions, and avoided harsh criticism, students gained in reading achievement. The effect was strongest for at-risk students and low income populations (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). For example, Mrs. Warren has morning meetings in her elementary classroom. She allows students to have friendly interactions and she greets each one by name daily. They share recent experiences and build a repertoire of songs, games, and poems that encourage a sense of belonging (McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009).

This collaborative emphasis may be especially valuable for African American students. In a study of 10- to 11-year old African American students, Dill and Boykin (2000) showed that collaborative learning environments had advantages over individual learning environments. A collaborative (or communal) learning setting increased the recall of stories that were read during collaborative interactions compared to individual reading. More centrally, enjoyment of the learning activity, and the desire to participate in similar activities in the future, were accelerated by the collaborative learning structures for the African American students. One source of such a benefit may be elaborated discussion.

Evidence suggests that African American students respond to collaborative learning opportunities by discussing text in relatively elaborate ways. In an experimental study, Webb and Farivar (1994) showed that African American students who were taught communication and helping skills in small group work during the reading of story problems had more elaborate and rich discussions than comparison groups. On the other hand, European American students did not benefit from the training in communication skills. Thus, African Americans were more cognitively responsive in social interactions around text, and thus, gained cognitive competencies in these settings.

Further evidence that teacher-student relationships in the classroom may be important to engagement and achievement in literacy was presented by Decker, Dona, and Christenson (2007). They examined the associations between the teacher-student relationship and outcomes for African American students who were behaviorally at-risk for referral to special education. Students were identified by their teachers as having behavior problems. Participants were 44 students and 25 teachers from two suburban and three urban elementary schools in a mid-western state. A multi-rater, multi-method approach was used. As both teacher and student reports of teacher-student
relationship quality increased, there were also increases in positive social, behavioral, and engagement outcomes. Additional analyses of teacher-student relationship patterns showed that as the relationship pattern improved, there were increases in positive social, behavioral, and engagement outcomes for students. Especially intriguing was the finding that as kindergarteners increased in their reporting of wanting to be closer to their teachers, their letter naming fluency increased. Thus, cognitive effort in reading and social interactions with teachers and classmates are intricately connected.

Teaching practices for middle school classrooms
How do middle school teachers foster the motivation of struggling students? Outstanding teachers who motivate all their students offer a wide platform in the classroom. They nurture confidence, dedication, and interest through many avenues. We next tap into the experiences of other educators who recommend the following: (1) creating relationships, (2) building success, (3) assuring relevance, (4) fostering awareness, (5) affording choices, and (6) arranging social goals.

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<tr>
<th>Teaching Practices for Motivation</th>
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<td>Creating relationships</td>
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<td>Building success</td>
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<td>Assuring relevance</td>
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<td>Affording choices</td>
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Creating relationships
As Nicole Connolly, a middle school teacher, said:

I think the number one influence for student motivation is relationships. Relationships, especially at the middle school level, are key. It’s not so much what it is that you teach the students, but what counts is the students knowing that you care about them and that you are willing to show that you care about them. Then they are willing to do what they need to do for you. So for me, definitely number one is relationship building with the students.

This is accentuated for lower achievers. Students who struggle need to connect with their teachers before they will put forth the effort necessary for school success. According to Santa (2006), the principal of an academy for “students who don’t do school,” the content and teaching techniques play second fiddle to human relationships. She says:

Students tend to work harder for teachers they like and put little effort into classes where they feel disconnected and misunderstood. Strategic instruction within classroom contexts where students feel they belong plays an integral role in learning. Students put more effort into learning when they have a relationship with their teachers; they don’t want to let their teachers down (Santa, 2006, p.472).

The research literature on the roles of teacher-student relationships and students’ social motivations in achievement is abundant. For example, students who seek to cooperate with the teacher and help other students academically, consistently get better grades than students who are less socially adept. Obviously, a classroom with many students who are antisocial, disruptive, and abusive to other students will be much less productive academically than other classrooms. As a result, teacher time invested in creating an atmosphere of trust, respect for others, compliance with rules, and personal responsibility toward social norms will be handsomely repaid in student comfort and learning (see Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009).

Building success
The first step in ensuring success is making certain that students can read the book in the curriculum with relative ease. It is crucial to have books be like Goldilocks’ porridge: not too hard, not too easy, but just right. One middle school teacher said:

I had a little guy, Anthony, who was struggling in choosing books. I took the time to let that student know that I cared about how he was going to choose and helped him find a good readability level for him. It was a good match; it was a good fit and he finished a 220-page novel, which was huge for him. It was really cool. The father came in and wanted to meet me because his son in seventh grade had never read a novel.

Difficulty of books is the largest, single barrier to middle school students’ confidence in reading. When students encounter a story that is beyond their comprehension, or an information text with vocabulary that is utterly impossible for them, they not only reject the book but turn off from all reading. Our interviews with discouraged struggling readers reveal one overwhelming theme:

• “The books are too hard.”
• “They are really confusing.”
• “I can’t read the words.”

Teachers often believe that challenging books are good prods for student learning and the students need
to be working hard to gain skill. That may be true for high-achieving, confident readers. However, students with a history of not being able to read the texts in the classroom have lost their confidence, have little resilience, and may have developed many strategies of avoidance, like procrastination.

The single largest factor contributing to low reading achievement is avoidance of books, especially information texts, in all subject matters of literature, science, social studies, math, and others. Students who initially find reading a little tough tend to avoid the book whenever possible and put in minimum effort. Obviously, this prevents them from gaining skill and they enter a cycle of failure to read and avoidance. The most powerful way to break this cycle is to locate books that are within the readability level of the learner.

Before students will try and try again to tackle new challenges, they need to believe in themselves. This belief in oneself propels students toward higher achievement because they expect to succeed. Putting forth effort in reading depends mainly on whether you have succeeded in reading tasks in the past. A volume of research shows that teachers who enable students to succeed grow the confidence of their readers (Schunk, 2003). Teachers can promote this confidence building by providing small steps for success. First, teachers can set goals for reading words, sentences, or paragraphs, and then students take the role of setting their own goals. But many students do not quite know whether they achieved a goal, such as understanding a paragraph, or not. Accurate feedback from the teacher is crucial. The feedback should be specific to the students’ task achievement rather than a general “good job.” A teacher might say, “Wow! You put yourself in the character’s situation and figured out how he may feel,” which is more effective than simply saying “nice reading.” As students learn to set goals and recognize their achievements, their resilience expands. They bounce back from failure. They sustain their concentration for longer times. Becoming actively persistent is the essence of becoming dedicated in reading. However, this persistence cannot come from a void. It is grounded in the belief that reading is important.

**Assuring relevance**

Students do not become dedicated to reading unless it is important to them. Obviously it is not the sounding out of words or the piecing together of paragraphs that creates relevance. It is the content and substance of books that they must value to grow in dedication. Students’ first reason for being a dedicated reader is that the texts are relevant to them.

In one survey, teachers found that African American students overwhelmingly selected literary texts in which they could connect to the characters. For example, one student stated that he liked the book *Gettin’ Through Thursday* by Cooper because “They go through almost the same thing we go through. That’s why I chose this story instead of the other one. It’s a good book to me because they had to pretend they were having a party because the mom didn’t have any money” (Gray, 2009, p. 477). It was not the genre nor having African American characters in the book nor having a particular theme that mattered. It was connecting to the character that was the most important criterion used by students to select books.

Making reading relevant for your students can be a challenging task. As Cheryl Nuhfer, a middle school teacher, said:

> It’s hard to take a child whose parent has been a farmer all his life and that’s what they are going to do. Why do they have to know Shakespeare? Why do they have to know Chaucer? Why do they have to know literature? There isn’t a real strong connection there. They have to know how to read a bill of sale and more functional types of reading. I think there is a disconnect between ‘the curriculum with the classics’ and the need to know.

As this teacher continued, “The irrelevance is probably the biggest factor in students’ avoidance of reading.”

One poignant way to make books relevant in the classroom is through videos. For example, a brief video of 2 to 10 minutes can set the historical scene for a novel set at the turn of the 19th century in Europe. If the topic of global warming is the subject of an information text that students will be reading, a brief video of icebergs melting in the Arctic or glaciers disappearing from high mountains will galvanize students’ attention. As a resource for relevance, The Discovery Channel has more than 50,000 1 to 30 minute videos that can be viewed in any classroom in which the district has an “inexpensive” subscription. When students observe a video, they have had a vivid, personal encounter which they can take to text, bringing the print to life. When students candidly say that the text connects to them, they recognize the benefit of literacy and value its role in their lives.

**Fostering awareness**

For many students, the benefits of reading to their reading today or in the future are simply not obvious. As one teacher said, “It’s difficult for a middle school child to think too much past Friday’s next dance.” However, teachers can help students create an awareness of the contribution of reading to their lives through a range of activities. In middle school, students are seeking freedom and are keen to read about people’s experiences of freedom. In secondary school, students can explore...
freedom by reading a book such as *The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis about Parvana, a 12-year old girl living in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. The novel depicts Parvana when she poses as a boy in order to earn money for her family by serving as a reader to illiterate soldiers in the local marketplace. She enjoys a measure of freedom by making her femininity invisible. Through open discussion of multiple perspectives on such a novel, students gain insights not only to their personal dynamics, but to the roles of reading in expanding their horizons (Bean & Harper, 2006).

When some students encounter information text in elementary school they quickly awaken to the benefits of reading. In classroom surveys in an elementary school in a low income neighborhood, students who read information books were primarily motivated by the knowledge gained from reading. As kids said:

- “I like dolphins. I think they are cool because they live in the ocean and I like oceans.”
- “It was important because I like different cultures.”
- “I liked it because it was about an Indian and I am interested in Indians.”

In choosing expository text with guidance from teachers, students came to the realization that they were able to pick up cool information about their favorite topics (Edmunds, 2006). Although it was not measured in this survey, it was highly likely that such an activity will spur students to realize that reading and books are valuable to them, which will fuel their longer-term dedication to reading.

Teachers have used a range of simple activities to foster awareness of reading’s benefits. For example, one teacher provided a simple t-chart with observations in a column on the left and inferences in a column on the right. As students read a narrative or an information book, they mark observations (which are literal meanings from the book) in the left-hand side under the observation column. On the right-hand side, under the inference column, students write information from their own knowledge and experience that enables them to connect parts of the texts to each other, or portions of the passages to their background experiences. As the students draw the observation-inference chart, they can easily be led to the realization that the book is bringing information to them and they are bringing information to the text. With the twin recognitions that they are an active learner and the book is an agent of knowledge growth, children see reading as important and value the literacy experience (Nokes, 2008). In these concrete situations, a particular book has helped a student on a specific day with a concrete task of mind expansion.

As students grow in awareness of how reading connects to them, their valuing of reading expands in breadth and depth. With awareness-expanding discussions with the teacher, students can expand their recognition that reading impacts their school success, their prospects for further education, their career potentials, and their prospects in the world of gainful employment. Such awareness gives a rationale for their persistence in reading challenging texts for long periods of time. It enables them to sustain their energy in reading when their interest is not stimulated. Although reading for interest is desirable and enjoyable, it is not always possible. The complementary motivation of being dedicated can bridge the individual into achievement when the luxury of interesting text is not within reach. Thus, dedication which merges persistence and planning with the value system of the reader is an enduring motivation that can be fostered daily in classrooms from K to 12.

Fostering students’ dedication cannot be accomplished only by encouraging effort. A lot of effort doing the wrong thing will not improve students’ achievement. Expert teachers also enable students to become aware of how they work as learners. Teachers have to help students work smart as well as work hard. Carol Santa, a remarkable teacher and past president of the International Reading Association reports from her school for unmotivated students saying:

> We help our students understand what active engagement and learning effort look and feel like. We might say, ‘Read this page, then stop and respond in your journal.’ During a lecture we stop and ask students to summarize what they have heard to a partner. They read and respond by drawing, making a concept map, taking notes, or asking questions. Throughout this activity we engage students in conversations: ‘How are you going to persist actively in learning this information? What active strategies did you use to grapple with meaning? Why does learning take work?’ (Santa, 2006, p.472).

Santa expects students to combine planning with their persistence to be effective. As she continues:

> Teachers who help students to work smart help them learn active strategies. When students rely too much on strategies, students may get turned off and disengaged from reading. But if students do not learn reading strategies, they lack the tools to read effectively and their persistence cannot be as valuable to them (Santa, 2006).

Massey and Heafner (2004) recommend well known tools for reading as follows: To persist effectively, students should use these strategies: (1) establish purpose for reading, (2) make connections to background knowledge, (3) understand the arrangement of texts, (4) make connections between texts, (5) monitor
comprehension through questioning, and (6) synthesize information across texts. With these tools, students will read for understanding and their effort at comprehension will pay off for them.

Too many teachers think of motivation for reading and strategies for reading as opposites. Either we are teaching hard, academic strategies or we are having a motivational day. Students benefit most when motivations and strategies are fused together. If students become excited about a book or a topic, they need strategies for learning from the book or enjoying it fully. Conversely, if students have a few effective strategies they will never use them if they are bored, avoidant, or otherwise unmotivated for reading. Therefore, teaching students to be dedicated readers requires helping them to work smart as they put forth high effort.

**Affording choices**

More popular than any motivational support is affording choices, which is widely supported in the professional literature (O’Brien & Dillon, 2008). However, misconceptions abound. For example, many teachers provide “sustained silent reading” time to give students a chance at self-selection. Yet, this technique is often misunderstood as the only way to give choice. Myriad little choices can be given during any lesson, which enable students to express small preferences that spur their reading. In a middle school classroom, one of us asked a small group of struggling readers, “What choices did your teacher give you today?” Students replied:

- “We could read with a partner or not.”
- “We could take notes or not.”
- “We got to choose which color card to write our question on.”
- “We could choose the word we thought was the key word in the paragraph.”

Then we asked the $64 million dollar question: “How did having a choice help you read?” Students erupted with sublime self-reflections, such as:

- “Having a choice whether to partner read made me feel better.”
- “I could read alone, which helps me concentrate.”
- “I could read by myself, which is faster for me.”
- “I liked finding my own key word on the page.”

Remarkably, these struggling readers were aware of how choice helped them think during reading. These mini-choices lent students a bit more investment into the hard work of learning to write good summaries. The total time for the choices was 2 minutes out of a 45-minute period, which was not excessive. Content of the lesson was not compromised. Teacher planning time was minimal. In other words, the benefits were palpable in the classroom. The costs were minimal to the teacher. Our nagging quandary is this: Why don’t more teachers make more use of mini-choices in teaching reading?

**Arranging social goals**

Just as a student will work hard to maintain a good relationship with a teacher, students seek to win the respect of their friends and classmates. In this light, students will be dedicated to their reading when reading has a role in their social interactions with classmates. One way to set up social goals among students is to create a project that will call for a student’s organization and persistence in reading. For example, one of the teachers we interviewed told us that she “will try to buddy them up so they will share the novels they are reading in a literature circle sort of thing, or even a book sharing recommendation.” For example, in CORI, students work cooperatively to build a group poster. The group selects a theme related to survival in nature, such as mutualism or predation. Each student reads and writes to create a contribution to the poster. They organize their work, create a timeline, and share their work with each other building toward the culminating point of explaining their poster to another team or to the class. This gives each student a social framework in which their dedication to reading will bring positive social interactions with their teammate.

When students see that teachers are supporting their active collaboration, they become more cooperative and dedicate themselves to reading more conscientiously than if they are continually required to toil in isolation. Many partnerships, team efforts, group projects, and peer cooperatives have been shown to motivate students, and some have been shown to increase reading comprehension directly (Murphy, Wilkerson, Soter, Hennessey, & Alexander, 2009).

**Professional development**

Teaching to the second side of reading, the will to read, like teaching to the first side, is a matter of teacher expertise. There is no formula or off-the-shelf program for motivating students. The good news is that teachers can rapidly learn to be more effective at encouraging engagement. With a short amount of professional development, teachers can learn to give choices that lend students a sense of empowerment (Reeve, 1996). In a slightly longer, but realistic amount of time, teachers can gain a grip on implementing all the CORI teaching practices for elementary school mentioned here. For secondary level, a book and guide for self-reflection about engagement is available (Guthrie, 2008). Our message for teachers and administrators is that a manageable amount of reading, thinking, and sharing
among teachers, followed by trial in the classroom, will cultivate the culture of engagement in classrooms and schools.

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**Children’s book references**


New England Reading Association’s 62nd Annual Reading Conference

“Striving and Thriving, Journeying into Literacy”

September 23-24, 2010
Crowne Plaza Hotel - Nashua, NH

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- Linda Gambrell - Past-President of IRA/Teacher/Author
- Georgia Heard - Expert on Writing and Poetry/Author
- Stephanie Spadocia - Guilford Author/Expert in Elementary Reading Instruction
- Linda Rief and Mary Ellen Giacobbe - Experts in Writing
- Donald Hall - 14th US Poet Laureate

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Eliciting picture book responses up and down the grade level ladder, and back and forth across the curriculum

Pegi Deitz Shea
Author

To jumpstart my Children’s Literature course at the University of Connecticut, I read Where the Wild Things Are. I ask all the adult students to come sit on the floor with me in a semicircle. They eagerly do. Many students already know the book and have long-standing responses to it. Whether it thrilled them or scared them, they will never know this seemingly simple story the same way again. Having been audience members to Where the Wild Things Are, they will now become active explorers, as Max is, and may indeed encounter wild things in many picture books.

First I do a dramatic read-through as I had to my own children when they were little, complete with rhythmic sound effects during the three wordless “wild rumpus” spreads. (I don’t incite my students, however, to jump on the furniture.) Now, back in our seats, we read through a “cheat sheet” of critical theories. (See sidebar.) This handout briefly, and simply, explains various critical approaches: feminist, post-colonial, psychoanalytical, etc. While English majors are exposed to these theories, most non-majors are delighted to see the depth and breadth of response resulting from the application of these approaches to literature for both adults and children.

For instance, reading Where the Wild Things Are from a post-colonial perch, readers can see how a white male, disguised in a white costume, crosses an ocean and encounters variously colored beasts. He “tames” them with language and magic, and they “make him King…” (Notice they don’t “vote him president.”) He riles up the beasts, as seen in the wordless, voiceless two-page spreads. Then Max abandons the beasts for the comforts of his home, predictable culture and remote seat of power.

While second graders don’t understand the term “post-colonial,” they certainly understand bullies, ownership and lack of a voice in matters. It happens on every playground. Fifth graders can make the leap from European monarchs imposing their rule over the colonists, to the freed colonists imposing their rule over the native inhabitants of North America. Twelfth graders can apply this plot to numerous examples around the world and over time. They can explore the paradox of America returning freed African slaves, who colonize (and in many cases persecute) native inhabitants of what is now called “Liberia.” In English class, they can compare Where the Wild Things Are with Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness.

From a feminist perspective, one must question why Max’s mother is never seen. Only the fruits of her labor appeal to Max. With older readers, this absence calls for a psychoanalytic approach. One can easily map Max’s exploration of his id world, then his return to a world where the super-ego rules.

Structuralism posits that there’s no “new” in new literature, for it will always call forth ancient archetypes and previous story scaffolds. In Where the Wild Things Are, young readers will identify with Max who, like Ulysses, sets out on his own odyssey and encounters monsters. Older readers will make connections to Lord of the Rings and other adventure texts. We also see several patterns of “3” in the story. Teachers can ask students what fairy tales use this structure. The children can then apply this plot mechanism to their own compositions.

Sendak loved opera as a child, and designed the sets and costumes of the American tour of “L’Enfant et les Sortileges,” by Colette and Ravel. When I was asked to adapt a European picture book version of the opera, I was delighted to see the parallels between Where the Wild Things Are and the book, The Boy and the Spell. In each, a boy loses his civility, is transported to another
world, where he learns a basic truth. Whereas, in Where the Wild Things Are, Max leaves his animal instincts behind; in The Boy and the Spell, Thomas learns to deal constructively with his math problems, his treatment of his ecological environment and his frustration with literacy. A favorite episode in Thomas’ fantastical journey is where he confronts a princess who is thrown out of the pop-up picture book he’s torn apart. Only by mending his ways will he learn the ending of the picture book story and achieve an overall harmony.

**Responding across the curriculum**

Having not been a teacher in 1988 when I began writing for children, I had no idea that picture books have myriad lives beyond the age group the publishers market it for. I’d been applying my writing skills to poetry and nonfiction for adults, and making real money writing in public relations, advertising and business-to-business marketing formats. So when my first book, Bungalow Fun-galow (Clarion, 1991) came out, I sought ways to promote it. Children’s authors told me about the importance of reaching teachers through providing cross-curriculum guides. At first I scoffed. My book is about a boy visiting his grandparents’ beach house on the Jersey Shore. It takes place in the summer, so how could teachers find ways to use it in their classrooms? I heartily apologize for underestimating teachers!

I set out listing the basic elementary school content areas—language arts, social studies, math, science—and thought of how my book’s content could involve readers in these subjects. Language arts? Sure! The book is a narrative of poems, some rhyming verse, but mostly free verse. The poems are full of imagery, and teachable poetic tools. In particular, the title poem, “Bungalow Fungalow,” celebrates the playfulness of language, and the malleable lives of syllables. This alone can prompt delightfully fun poems written by the students themselves. For me, this poem honors Theodore Geisel. The older the reader, the more this tribute stands out.

A beach book used in social studies? Well, I do refer to the Lenape Indians of New Jersey, and how their trails to the shore for fishing have since become highways. Older elementary readers could research the origin of similar roads around the country. They could consult maps and atlases to see how and why the world’s populations have developed alongside major bodies of water. Math—want to count grains of sand? OK, so not so much math at the beach. Oh, wait—comparison of shell properties—sizes, shapes, densities, weights.

Science? Hey, there’s a ton of it in a book about the beach—sea life, birds, terrain, tides. While first graders can explore fish, represented in many other picture books, A House for Hermit Crab, Lobster’s Secret, Rainbow Fish, etc., third and fourth graders may be sophisticated enough to study plankton and coral reefs. Have fun comparing real creatures of the sea to Sponge Bob Squarepants.

So I was lucky early in my children’s writing career to pack each text with layers meaning, content and nuance. I’d been doing that all along for adult readers. Now I knew I could do it for kids too.

My second book, The Whispering Cloth, exploded my tame mindset about educational applications of picture books. To briefly summarize, the book features Mai, an orphaned Hmong refugee from war in Southeast Asia. In a sordid Thai refugee camp, Mai turns to a traditional art form, pa’ndau story cloths, to connect with her past, to give meaning to her debasing present, and to raise hope for the future.

Children in 2nd and 3rd grades can identify with Mai’s situation of powerlessness. They can learn about the power of art, chart Mai’s emotional journey, and talk about intergenerational relationships. A social studies unit could introduce the basic truths of war: winners/losers, homelessness, immigration. Older elementary school readers can look at the Vietnam War and compare and contrast it with the American Civil War. Other social studies topics can include colonialism and moral responsibility. Hmong history and culture is rich for discussion of animism, clan structure, family interaction and oral traditions. Students can create a textile art project, i.e., stitch their own story cloths if you trust them with sewing needles; draw and paint their stories on cloth, if needles are a no-go. Picture books such as those by Patricia Polacco and Eve Bunting are sturdy stepping stones to middle grade and young adult fiction set in zones and times of strife.

It was The Whispering Cloth that surprised me most.
with its applications in middle and high school history curriculum. Teachers tell me they use it like a short story to illustrate and personalize the consequences of war. Older students can explore the attempts by European countries to colonize Asia and results. After reviewing historical critical theory, high school teachers can use picture books or excerpts of war-related chapter books and novels as springboards to discussing the roles of politics and religion in world events. These two realms are responsible for generating a good percentage of adult nonfiction and fiction. They have inspired a good chunk of children's literature as well. The brilliant books, *Letters from Rifka* by Karen Hesse and *Milkweed* by Jerry Spinelli offer many compelling passages from the point of view of a child. *The War* by Anais Vaugelade and *L'il Dan the Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story* by Romare Bearden are illuminating.

The persecution, displacement and dispersion the Hmong have endured over the past three centuries can be compared to that of many populations, e.g., indigenous tribes of the Western hemisphere, Jews, Kurds, Roma, etc. High schoolers can discuss the composition of “identity” and the costs of losing it. They are old enough to appreciate the irony in *Baseball Saved Us* by Ken Mochizuki. During WWII, American soldiers are helping to liberate European, African, and Asian peoples, while disenfranchising and detaining Japanese-Americans in internment camps on our own soil. In *The Whispering Cloth*, Mai’s creation of the p’ndau serves many purposes. One is to stem the loss of identity, by connecting not only with her deceased family, but also with her people’s identity represented by the traditional art form. Other picture book examples are Polacco’s *The Keeping Quilt*, *The Always Prayer Shawl* by Sheldon Oberman, and *Silent Music* (about a young artist’s passion for Arabic calligraphy) by James Rumford.

The importance of intra-cultural communication is magnified in history. Think about it: the first thing an attacker tries to do is de-stabilize its foe’s communication system. The British attempted to wipe out the Irish language (often referred to as Gaelic), which is making its comeback as a mandatory course in Ireland’s schools. The Chinese forbade the Hmong from using their language, and the Hmong eventually lost their written alphabet. (Missionaries devised a new one in the 1950’s.) Americans stole “Indian” children and sent them to American schools to learn English. In America’s first Gulf War, who can forget the televised night scenes of American bombs blowing up the communication center in Baghdad? Today’s version of de-stabilizing communication: hacking into computers, which are becoming our indispensable mode of communication. For tomorrow’s version, read *Feed* by M.T. Anderson.

Throughout history, when language fails, pictorial narratives and representations have been paramount in the recording of a culture’s survival. Mai’s story cloth can be connected with Chilean arpilleras of the “disappeared,” South African quilts showing Apartheid, even the Bayeux Tapestry which illustrates William the Conqueror’s defeat of England in 1066. In awe, I actually viewed this 230-foot long, embroidered history, a testament to the power of pictures enduring from the very first cave drawings. Today, we have picture books. Today, we also have an abundance of languages in the classroom. But pictures can be universal and specific at the same time. A practice many teachers already employ in all grades is covering the text in picture books and asking students to supply the story.

**Worlds of metaphor**

In language arts, middle and high school populations can use “New Criticism” theory, i.e., “close reading,” to appreciate Mai’s unique world of metaphor. Smiles such as “snug as a banana in a bunch” and “homes as big as mahogany trees” would probably not occur to American children. But to a deprived child who’s only seen nature beyond a barbed wire fence, these images and vocabulary are all Mai has. By contrast, in *The Boy and the Spell*, Thomas’s world is so immense and daunting that he feels assaulted by the vocabulary of math, music, literature and science. Sound familiar?

English teachers can lead students to examine their own worlds of metaphors and come up with unique similes. “Snug as a bud in my ear?” (Can you hear the playful reference to “snug as a bug in a rug”?) A more challenging exercise would have students step into a contemporary crisis such as Haiti, and create worlds of metaphors for people living in such conditions.

In my state of Connecticut, the fiction writing of third graders is tested. The structure of *The Whispering Cloth* is interesting because Mai is writing/stitching her own story. So the story-within-a-story element gives students a double shot. Mai must generate ideas, create the images, and even “revise” when Grandma tells her that her story isn’t finished. And just like a typical student, Mai whines and storms back to work. Of course, her extra effort—note, the third spread of p’ndau—produces a powerful conclusion to both the inner and the frame stories. It took me 10 drafts to get that perfect ending, and it involved peer critique (my weekly writers group), content expert critique (Hmong friends) and “teacher” critique (my editor).

My book would also lend itself to explorations in science. I use meteorology to show the passage of time, say, from hot season to rainy season. Again—Mai’s world of metaphor. One can study the geography of Southeast Asia, Thailand in particular, from the steep limestone karsts of the north through tropical rainforest down to shrub land and watery deltas. A sociological approach could examine Mai’s life of captivity, and
the Hmong clan structure. (Tangled Threads, the novel sequel, delves deeper into the political strata of refugee camp life.) The recent film, “District Nine,” and almost any prison film will remind audiences of our need for structure, pecking order, and laws written or unwritten. Perhaps without realizing it, teachers are already using Marxist theory to discuss the suppression of the underclass or the “other.” I use Smokey Night by Bunting in my Children’s Lit course to discuss the anarchy and chaos that occur when equality is denied. One hopes that, out of such chaos, can come a new, better reality.

From a religious point of view, teachers can use The Whispering Cloth to introduce or re-introduce animism, a belief system attributing life and spirituality to all things, including rocks, bends in rivers, and deceased ancestors. I say “re-introduce” because teachers may have touched upon Native Americans’ animism. Therefore, young readers can make informed responses to Mai’s engagements with spirits. Older readers can compare animism with New Age thinking, and with other religions’ definitions of spirits.

Marxism for all classes?
Wait—don’t dash for the Cold War bomb shelters! You already eat, drink and breathe Marxist theory which takes an economic view of narratives. Does the acquisition of material wealth drive the characters? How does wealth affect those who don’t have it? Are they being exploited in someone else’s quest for it? This is a concept played out every day on Main Street and Route 66. Do you have a few dollars to stop by Starbucks, or will you just pour faculty room coffee? Will someone else’s new pair of Nikes or I-Pad be the talk of homeroom? Whose parents just got laid off? Does poverty create bullies? Does material wealth make some children wield power unfairly? Young readers respond emotionally and thoughtfully in discussions about wealth. Teachers can come at many stories from a Marxist perspective to discuss the haves and have-nots.

In The Whispering Cloth and Tangled Threads, Mai has a naïve idea of what her labor can fetch. She is totally ignorant about what wealth can buy. Even though money doesn’t play a part in a real refugee’s transition out of camp (I’m not saying it doesn’t grease wheels, in some cases), Mai believes it can. The ending wouldn’t be so poignant if she didn’t believe money had that kind of power. To choose between selling her story cloth and keeping it is a huge decision, one that might delay her freedom. But she makes the sacrifice; in word and deed, she shows readers that some things are more important than money. Marxist theory also applies to my picture book, The Carpet Boy’s Gift, set in the Pakistani rug industry. Slave drivers have tied the self-esteem of child laborers to their production of hand-knotted rugs. Only when Nadeem realizes that education is worth dying for does he lead his co-workers out of the factory to the shelter of a school.

On the other hand, meaningful work is what delivers dignity and respect to the main character in Peppe the Lamplighter. Head of an impoverished immigrant family in Little Italy, Peppe’s father finally comes to see how doing even a menial job is important to his son’s esteem.

Most students don’t get a chance to study psychology until high school. But elementary teachers and children are already dealing with disorders including depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety. Social workers, counselors, school psychologists and pediatric psychologists have long used pictures to help children open up about their problems. Teachers can use picture books to explore characters’ psychological make-ups, to evoke empathy from students, or to discuss the effects of traumatic events such as loss, abuse, violence. Put Where the Wild Things Are and The Boy and the Spell together in a unit, and you have a range of examples of anger management. Reader response in the form of poetry may best express these new understandings. Building empathy in the elementary grades can lead to tolerance in upper grades of children who might otherwise be described as “weird”.

Simple is universal
While multicultural picture books beg to be used up and down the grades and across the curriculum, even the simplest picture books can be profound when examined through the various lenses of literary criticism. For instance, a feminist perspective might shed light on my book, New Moon (No, it’s not about vampires, but I wish it sold millions of copies like one!) I had initially written as a mother-daughter story because, well, it’s inspired by an actual event when my daughter was 16 months old. After several rejections, an editor kindly informed me: “Kids love their mothers but they don’t want to read about them.” So I changed the mother character into an older brother, and mothers still bought it, and big sibs (even boys) as well as little sibs could identify with the characters. What would have been a pro-feminism book about a mother teaching her eager daughter about a force of nature now put the big brother/narrator as the teacher of a little girl. The mother of the children only appears once, in a traditional subordinate role as provider of food. She is voiceless. However, while Vinnie the toddler can only say “moon” and “no moon”, she wields power in the book. After falling in love with the moon, she demands to see it all the time. She makes her big brother deliver it—through books about the moon and nursery rhymes, and finally upon a hill in a “peach ice cream” sky. At the climax of the story, Vinnie teaches her brother something: to her utterance of “moon”, he can only reply, “moon”. She reduces his eight years of life experience to a single moment of awe. To me, this
book is not only about a sibling relationship, which is always one of power; it is more about the power of language acquisition. At the end of the story, “moon was the only word in the sky.”

New Criticism or close reading, which is perhaps most successful with poetry, can be applied to very simple picture books. It was, after all, with close reading in college (circa 1980) that I initially got the idea for New Moon. In the poem, “Dejection: An Ode”, Samuel Coleridge alluded to the centuries-old ballad of Sir Patrick Spens, by using the bad omen of the new moon with the old moon in its arms. A structuralist would say my story references not only this poem and ballad, but also other tales, poems and nursery rhymes. Rightly so: teachers report their students connect my book to other texts about the moon—even at the youngest level in Pre-K. A feminist (such as myself) would say I am REMAKING the language of the new moon with the old moon in its arms into a positive image. Rightly so, too. But it was close reading that got me there, plus a little research on Coleridge’s allusion.

For intermediate students, close reading reveals the poetic tools I use in New Moon such as assonance, alliteration and metaphor. For readers of all ages, close reading of the pictures reveals even more. My editor had me get rid of a few other food metaphors. (I fought to keep “peach ice cream”, which readers of all ages have told me is so memorable.) But the illustrator, Cathryn Falwell, liked the other food metaphors so much that she inserted them as pictures. You’ll see a half-eaten cookie and a “spilled grape juice” sky, as well as many other visual references to the moon in the illustrations. Other simple books that work up and down the grade levels include:

- Margaret Wise Brown’s The Runaway Bunny for its feminine domination, psycho-analytical maneuvering, and language manipulation. A high schooler could trace the origin of Mother Bunny’s stichomythia from ancient Greek drama and Shakespeare’s Richard III, to ethnic call-and-response chanting to today’s political debates. (Democrats: “Republicans are the party of ‘no.’” Republicans: “We’re the party of ‘know.’”)”
- Bill Grossman’s Tommy at the Grocery Store (especially in these organic food days!) for close readings of its delightful malapropisms, double entendres, refrains and rhymes. In high school economics or marketing, teachers can use it to jumpstart discussions of purchase power and dubious sales techniques.
- Jane Yolen’s Owl Moon and Lois Lowry’s new picture book, Crow Call, for gender and ecological examinations.
- Jan Brett’s The Mitten for ecological discussion of habitats, and for socio-economic exploration of supply and demand, gentrification and material possession.

Even simple concept books can climb grade levels. Falwell’s Feast for 10 shows a contemporary African-American family shopping, cooking and entertaining. Lois Ehlert’s The Snowman invites ecological mapping. My book, Ten Mice for Tet, co-authored with Cynthia Well, is set in Vietnam, but can lead to explorations of belief systems around the world. Concept books are only the youngest form of children’s nonfiction picture books, which have enjoyed a renaissance over the past ten years. The boring names, dates and places of wars such as the American Revolution can be animated with biographies such as the quirky Patience Wright: America’s First Sculptor & Revolutionary Spy. Mathematics and physics come clear in the amazing books of David MacAuley. Music, civil rights and feminism wail with joy in Sweethearts of Rhythm by Marilyn Nelson. Visuals and narrative help students retain the facts they need to know.

Other critical resources to elicit response

Until now, I have only been talking about literary critical approaches, because that’s part of my “world of metaphor”. But teachers have a variety of worlds to tap. Explore picture books through music, dance, and art theories and enjoy the discoveries you and your students will make.

Here are two additional resources I use in my Children’s Literature class to help students connect texts and to read visuals in picture books.

The seven universal themes in literature

Adapted from: Against Borders: Promoting Books for a Multicultural World by Hazel Rochman

These themes echo back to the earliest Greek dramas and epics. The themes can combine in one story, or dominate one whole story. They work across genre such as mystery, romance, adventure, etc. Students can use them to make connections between texts.

1. The Perilous Journey. In an adventure, vision quest, quest, exodus, the main character will first feel “stuck” somehow—literally, emotionally, developmentally, etc. She/he will have an escape, which could be a fantasy or real journey. In Where the Wild Things Are, Max explores his personality.
2. The Hero and the Monster. The “monster” can be internal and/or external, an individual, or a monstrous force or group. In Baseball Saved Us, the monster is the American government and some of its citizenry.
3. Outsiders. The main character is the outsider coming into a new situation; or a new person could be introduced into an established group. In Crow Call, Dad comes home from war to his children who
barely know him.

4. **Friends & Enemies.** The main characters form or breaking alliances, handle social situations. *Smokey Night* shows how enemies can become friends. In *The Mitten*, animals that might otherwise prey on each other try to share an improper habitat.

5. **Lovers & Strangers.** Fairy tales and folk tales often pair characters who may appeal or repel each other. Strangers can be “exotic,” new or different in some important way. Love may come from unlikely sources, e.g., “Beauty and the Beast.”

6. **Family Matters.** The narrative explores family dynamics, search for family, escape from family, e.g. “Hansel & Gretel,” *New Moon, The Happy Hockey Family.*

7. **Finding Home.** The story may or may not involve a “perilous journey.” In *The Whispering Cloth*, in the refugee camp, Mai literally fabricates a home and family.

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**The ten basic principles of picture in picture books**
Adapted from: *Picture This: Perception & Composition* by Molly Bang

1. “Smooth, flat, horizontal shapes give us a sense of stability and calm... Humans are most stable when we are horizontal, because we can’t fall down.” Other examples: horizon line, triangle base.

2. “Vertical shapes are more exciting and more active...” Objects like trees, churches and skyscrapers “require a great deal of energy to build... release a great energy when they fall.” Example: a person going from sitting to standing. Note: a horizontal plane atop verticals, e.g., table, house, temple, convey both stability and pride.

3. “Diagonal shapes are dynamic because they imply motion and tension.” Examples: branches, mountain slopes. They also can supply perspective, e.g., a road leading us into or away from picture; and add support and connection, e.g., buttress or strut. Note: “A triangle placed on a flat base gives a feeling of stability.” A tipped triangle can convey motion, instability, direction.

4. “The upper half of a picture is a place of freedom, happiness, and triumph...” The bottom half of a picture feels more threatened, heavier, sadder, or more constrained; objects placed in the bottom half also feel more ‘grounded.’ ...An object placed higher up on the page has ‘greater pictorial weight.’”

5. “The center of the page is the most effective ‘center of attention.’ It is the point of greatest attraction.” Note: Much delight can be found outside the center in images that are ironic, undermining, humorous, threatening, etc.

6. “White or light backgrounds feel safer to us than dark backgrounds because we can see well during the day and only poorly at night.” Exceptions might include finding safety in the dark; feeling exposed and vulnerable in the spotlight or alone on an ice mass.

7. “We feel more scared looking at pointed shapes; we feel more secure or comforted looking at round shapes or curves.”

8. “The larger an object is in a picture, the stronger it feels. ...We associate size with strength—strength of any sort.” E.g., mental, spiritual, etc.

9. “We associate the same or similar colors much more strongly than we associate the same or similar shapes.”

10. We notice contrasts, ...contrast enables us to see.”

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**Literature cited**


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Eco-Criticism explore how the natural world of the author or that of the characters impacts the language, actions, thoughts, images. What is the author's, narrators' and characters' "World of Metaphor"?

Feminist recognizes that women and their voices have been suppressed until the late 1900's in America, and are still suppressed in other parts of the world. Feminist criticism considers women's writing as a response to those restrictions and societal views, most likely established by males.

Historical posits that the literature is necessarily a product of the era in which the work was written. One cannot separate the work from the author's biography.

Marxist examines the material or economic conditions of the characters, and of the author. It explores class struggle, and generally roots for the downtrodden.

New Criticism or Close Reading treats the text as a separate entity from its author, and from any historical and cultural contexts. It looks at relationships between words, for instance—the often playful tension created by a poem's line breaks, the evocative power of ambiguity.

Post-Colonial studies the literature of formerly and currently repressed populations, e.g Native Americans, some African tribes, and how literature is a response to oppression; it also probes how literature can be a tool or weapon of the oppressors.

Post-Modern looks for ways texts thwart readers' expectations with tools such as irony, satire, unreliable narrators, nonsense, nihilism.

Psycho-Analytical or Freudian searches for deep struggles between life and death, depictions of childhood, family influences, and expressions of id, ego and superego.

Reader Response looks at how the readers' background, age, ethnicity, etc. affect their understanding of the work. Accepts plurality and ambiguity of the work's meanings.

Structuralism rejects the existence of individual or unique expressions in literature, stating that most literature is based on archetypes and ancient plots. Encourages connections between texts.
Leading, learning and literacy: Implementing a Response to Intervention approach in the Riverside Elementary School

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Over the years, the Riverside Elementary School has been committed to ensuring that all students meet local, state and national standards in literacy. Today, however, efforts to ensure the success of all students are guided by school wide implementation of a Response to Intervention (RtI) approach (Bender & Shores, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Kame‘enui, 2007). In 2007, the state department of education selected the Riverside Elementary School to participate as one of four pilot sites in a project designed to promote implementation of RtI. Each of the pilot sites was provided with professional development around RtI and literacy through on-site delivery of a three credit course taught by an educational consultant from the state department of education and a consultant with expertise in psychology and psychometric assessment. In addition, the consultants provided sites with ongoing technical assistance and professional development for a year following initial implementation.

As defined in the literature, RtI is a multi-tiered approach to assessing, instructing and monitoring the progress of all students; providing interventions to students who are not meeting grade level standards; and identifying students who may be eligible to receive special education services under the category of learning disabilities (Batsche, Elliot, Graden, Grimes, Kovaleski, Prasse, Reschly, Schrag, & Tilly, 2006; Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). Originally conceived as an alternative to the “severe discrepancy model” that has historically been used to identify students as learning disabled, the RtI approach became more widely known and used following its adoption as a provision of the federal government’s 2004 re-authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004; Yell & Drasgow, 2007).

For the most part, the literature pertaining to RtI has focused on particular aspects of the model, including its theoretical constructs and practical applications (e.g., Bender & Shores, 2007) and the accuracy of the approach as a method for identifying students with reading and learning disabilities (Burns & Senesac, 2007; Case, Speece, & Malloy, 2003; Fuchs, 2003; Fuchs & Deschler, 2007; Kavale, 2005; Shinn, 2007; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2004). Researchers have also examined the predictability and validity of related assessment measures (Catts, Petscher, Schatschneider, Bridges, & Mendoza, 2009; Jenkins, Hudson, & Johnson, 2007; Walker-Dalhouse, Risko, Esworthy, Drasgow, Kaisler, McIlvain, & Stephan, 2009), the effectiveness of particular interventions (Coyne, Kame‘enui, Simmons, & Harn, 2004), and the degree to which the model is being implemented with fidelity within specific classrooms (Daly, Martens, Barnert, Witt, & Olsen, 2007). While findings from these and other studies have served to highlight specific benefits and challenges associated with the RtI model, less has been written about actual implementation within a general education context (Hollenbeck, 2007; Johnson & Smith, 2008; Kovaleski, 2007) and the role of professional development in supporting implementation and sustainability (Kratochwill, Volpiansky, Clements, & Ball, 2007; McEneaney, Lose, & Schwartz, 2006;
The opportunity to view RtI from an applied perspective presented itself to the authors one year following initiation of the state department's RtI pilot project. Using qualitative research methods and a case study approach (Glesne, 2005; Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002), we conducted in-depth site visits to each of the four pilot sites, following which we conducted a cross-case analysis to explore emerging themes and challenges (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While each of the schools made significant strides with respect to implementation, we were struck with the fact that of the four, the Riverside School offered the most consistent and potentially sustainable picture of school wide implementation. As such, the purpose of this article is to describe the benefits and realities of the implementation of the RtI approach in the Riverside School in a way that helps to illuminate future change efforts. Riverside's story illustrates the potential for RtI to serve as a framework for aligning assessment and instructional practices, enhancing student performance, increasing collaboration among general and special educators, and developing a school wide learning community. The discussion that follows provides a brief outline of our research methods, a description of the RtI approach as it was implemented at Riverside, and a thematic analysis of the factors that contributed to Riverside's success in implementing the initiative. (Note that all names used in this report are pseudonyms.)

Research methods

Site characteristics

Riverside is a small K–6 school located in one of the most rural areas in the Northeast. At the time of the site visit, the school’s enrollment was approximately 140 students. Of these students, at least 49% of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, compared to the statewide average of 29%. Approximately 9% of the students were eligible for special education services, compared to a statewide average of almost 15%.

Data collection

The school’s principal, Liz Black, assisted us in identifying and scheduling the 23 individuals who participated as interview participants. Given the small size of the school, we were able to interview all 14 of the school's professional staff, including the principal, all general and special education teachers, the guidance counselor, the speech and language pathologist, and the Title I teacher. In addition, we interviewed regional administrators and selected paraprofessionals, parents, and school board members with varying opinions and experiences related to the implementation of RtI who had been identified with Black’s assistance.

A research team of five individuals, including the two co-authors of this manuscript, collected data during a five day site visit to Riverside and three days of off-site work. Prior to the site visits, the research team met on five occasions to review and revise interview and observation protocols, and to develop consistent techniques for conducting interviews, observations, and document reviews. The interview protocols consisted of 15 – 18 questions and were designed to elicit participants’ perspectives on the nature of the RtI approach, related changes in practice at the classroom and school levels, and other local and contextual factors that appeared to enhance or inhibit implementation.

Along with interviews, we attended a “community night” in which classroom teachers described their use of the RtI approach. We observed six classrooms engaged in various aspects of RtI implementation, and conducted two observations of building-based support teams for the purpose of triangulating information obtained through the interviews. Classroom observation protocols were used to record detailed descriptions of instructional activities and the roles of classroom teachers, special educators, paraprofessionals and others involved in implementing the RtI approach. Protocols used during observations of Riverside’s building-based support team, known as the Educational Support Team (EST), elicited descriptions of the processes used in data-based decision-making, planning, and follow-up for students requiring individual interventions and supports. We also reviewed a number of relevant written documents, including a brochure describing RtI to families, a description of the EST’s role and processes, and related school policies and procedures detailing implementation of RtI.

Data analysis

Following completion of the site visits, we used procedures associated with qualitative inquiry to code and conduct a thematic analysis of approximately 400 pages of interview transcripts, observation notes, and notes on document reviews (Glesne, 2005; Patton, 2002). A coding scheme consisting of 15 categories was used to code all interviews, observations and document reviews, with reliability checks indicating at least 85% agreement among raters. A final coded data set was then entered into a data management system and analyzed to identify emerging themes that captured the story of Riverside’s implementation of RtI.

Findings

Our presentation of findings begins with a description of the basic elements of the RtI approach as it was defined by the state consultants and adopted at the Riverside School. Following this, we discuss six themes that capture the interviewees’ perspectives on changes occurring as a result of implementation. These include:

1. Changing classroom practices through ongoing and systematic assessment of student learning;
2. Re-defining roles and responsibilities of general and special educators to support the needs of all students;
3. Refining school structures to promote collaborative problem solving
4. Creating a common focus on literacy through initial and ongoing professional development;
5. Engaging in instructional and shared leadership practices to build a school wide learning community; and
6. Addressing issues of sustainability.

**Basic elements of RtI:**

**Defining the approach at the Riverside School**

Early on, we recognized that while researchers and practitioners have achieved a basic level of agreement regarding the definition of RtI, the field has not endorsed a single model for implementation. We began our study by interviewing the two state consultants for the purposes of understanding the RtI approach as they had presented it through the initial three credit course. The consultants constructed the RtI course and resulting approach around the five premises described below. We provide a brief description of each, both to clarify the model used at the Riverside School and to set the stage for the thematic analysis that follows.

- **RtI as a general education initiative.** The two consultants stressed the idea that RtI needed to be viewed as a change process that was fundamentally situated within general education settings and practice. In fact, while we have chosen to use the more common title of “Response to Intervention” in our references to the approach, the consultants preferred the term “Response to Instruction.” In their view, the term “intervention” was too closely associated with special education, whereas the term “instruction” conveyed a better sense of RtI as a classroom-focused approach. They believed that while RtI had important implications for special education identification and service delivery, its primary purpose was to support the needs of all learners. The literature also defines RtI as an approach that can be used across various content areas, including literacy, numeracy, and written expression. While the Riverside School had a long term goal to implement the approach in all three areas, its primary purpose was to help Riverside’s teachers understand the importance of implementing interventions in accordance with publishers’ directions regarding materials, instructional procedures, and frequency of instruction.

- **A three tiered approach to instruction.** While there is some disagreement in the field as to the number of tiers needed to make the RtI model most effective, the consultants urged the Riverside School to adopt the three-tiered model referred to most often in the literature (e.g., Batsche et al., 2006; Gresham, 2002; Reschly, 2005). Tier I was defined as instruction provided in the general education classroom, using scientifically-based core curricula in literacy. Student progress at the Tier I level was monitored through universal screening measures administered to all students in Riverside during the fall, winter, and spring of each year. Results of these measures were analyzed by classroom to identify students who were struggling to meet standards. Some of these students had their needs met through differentiation of instruction within the regular classroom, while others received small group instruction and frequent progress monitoring provided at the Tier II level. When monitoring indicated that students were failing to make adequate gains in response to increasing levels of Tier II interventions, they were referred to the school’s Evaluation and Planning Team for a special education evaluation. Eligible students received instruction provided at the Tier III level.

- **Use of scientifically-based core curricula and interventions.** The state consultants devoted significant time to helping Riverside’s teachers and principal understand the importance of using scientifically-based core curricula and interventions in an RtI approach. While the consultants did not believe it was appropriate for them to endorse specific curricula or interventions, they instructed course participants to consult publishers’ information and/or the “What Works Clearinghouse,” a website developed by the United States Department of Education, to determine whether or not the curricula they were using could be considered to be scientifically-based. The consultants also provided guidelines regarding what it meant to implement instruction with fidelity. They noted the importance of implementing interventions in accordance with publishers’ directions regarding materials, instructional procedures, and frequency of instruction.

- **Common measures for universal screenings and progress monitoring.** As described earlier, universal screening measures were administered to students three times per year in October, January, and April. Targeted progress monitoring of students receiving interventions was typically conducted every two to four weeks. While the consultants presented options for the types of assessments to be used in universal screenings and progress monitoring, the Riverside School chose to use the reading fluency assessments and data...
management systems available through the AIMSweb program (2008).

- **Decision-making through an Educational Support Team.** Well before the implementation of RtI, the Riverside School had established an interdisciplinary team known as an Educational Support Team (EST) that was charged with assisting teachers in supporting students who were struggling to meet standards but were not eligible to receive special education services. The state consultants used the RtI course as an opportunity to help the school’s principal and teachers re-visit their EST membership and streamline their decision-making processes to ensure that the team was prepared to analyze and use data collected through the AIMSweb assessments for the purpose of identifying and developing plans for students in need of additional supports and interventions. The literature has identified both “standard protocol” and “problem-solving” approaches to discussing and responding to student progress, with some researchers and practitioners advocating for one approach over another (Bender & Shores, 2007; McEneaney et al., 2006). Members of the Riverside EST reported that their process combined the two approaches for improved team processing and effectiveness. They used a problem-solving process to identify a student’s specific areas of strength and need, and selected from among a set of scientifically-based intervention programs to provide individual or small group instruction.

**Theme #1: Changing classroom practices through ongoing and systematic assessment of student learning**

Riverside's principal, Liz Black, maintained that the challenge to enhance literacy success among all students “starts with the key concept that every student gets classroom instruction that is evidence-based... this takes away the idea that some classrooms are better than others... It’s Marzano’s guaranteed viable curriculum.” The three credit course delivered by the state consultants reinforced the idea among Black and her teachers that all students needed to have access to a high quality curriculum tailored to meet their needs through differentiation of instruction and valid and reliable assessment practices. As such, they embraced an important component of RtI: the link between assessment, instruction, and curriculum.

- **Linking assessment and classroom instruction.** When asked to reflect on the most powerful elements of the RtI approach, most teachers reported that their teaching had become more intentional, purposeful and thorough. They cited the use of universal screenings and ongoing progress monitoring as critical aspects of the RtI approach that had fundamentally changed their understanding of the concept of data-based instruction. One teacher noted how “With RtI, it’s all about what the data says and research based curriculum,” while another commented that within a short period of time, teachers’ instructional practices had changed because of “the actual paying attention to the data and examining the data.” A third grade teacher noted how both she and her students had benefitted from these changes in assessment practices:

> We’re seeing better scores in fluency and accuracy because we do it more often and we’re more purposeful in how we do it. I think the kids get excited because they kind of keep track of their scores and they see that and I think that’s exciting for them more so than it had been in the past. They love just the aspect of working against the clock, which they now think of as more of a game than a horrible challenge.

- **Moving to a new view of teaching and learning.** Liz Black’s observation that “Kids’ lack of progress is an instructional problem, not a kid problem” was at the heart of teachers’ renewed focus on using assessment data to examine and alter their instruction in accordance with student needs. She and a number of other interviewees acknowledged that the use of consistent assessment measures promoted a higher level of discussion around student progress. One teacher noted the transformation that occurred in the school as teachers began to develop a common language around assessment and the expectations that they held for students:

> Before RtI, we weren’t using same measures, so number one, RtI ensured that we all started using the same base line measures. Now when we say something like “Gregory is low”, we know that we are speaking about his low achievement according to a standard, instead of low achievement “in my view”.

Other teachers noted that the use of RtI had created a shift in their thinking about their individual and collective roles as teachers. The RtI brought new assessment practices, instructional techniques, and student-specific interventions to their classrooms, and it also brought a new way of thinking about accountability and responsibility. A teacher who had only recently begun her career in education commented:
Hopefully I can change their lives. It’s allowing me to implement my philosophy. I think as a new elementary educator, it’s also steering me in a real positive way to really carefully monitor these kids, to take responsibility. It is my responsibility to make sure everyone learns in my classroom, and I think it holds me accountable for that.

Theme #2: Re-defining roles and responsibilities of general and special educators to support the needs of all students

Riverside’s implementation of RtI also resulted in a refinement of teachers’ roles and responsibilities in order to promote effective collaboration and problem-solving around students’ needs. Prior to implementation, some of Liz Black’s general and special educators saw their roles as somewhat distinct from one another. They lacked regular opportunities to collaborate around instructional approaches that would benefit individual students. As a result, special education and Title I teachers and assistants sometimes removed children from their classrooms to provide individual support that was not always well-coordinated with classroom content.

- Collaboration in the classroom. Following implementation of RtI, however, teachers across the building reported that they had more opportunities to share information, resources, and instructional practices. Suzanna Quinn, a Title I teacher, commented that “the real change is we’re all on the same page and this gets us talking a common language and we’re all responding in a uniform way.” Recognizing the need to enhance collaboration among general and special educators, Liz Black created regularly scheduled time for them to plan consistent and coordinated approaches to assessing and instructing students. The school day, too, was structured to allow for collaborative implementation of the RtI approach. Riverside’s mornings began with classroom meetings, followed by 90 minutes of literacy instruction in all classrooms. We observed a second grade “literacy block” that began with whole class instruction using a scientifically-based core curriculum. Following initial instruction by the classroom teacher, students were provided with appropriate levels of instruction and supports. A special education paraprofessional provided support to three students who needed help to complete written work associated with the day’s lesson, while the classroom teacher worked with a group of “on level” students engaged in guided reading.

One group of four students left the classroom to join a speech and language teacher for intensive instruction in phonemic awareness, while five students whose performance had been identified as “above level” joined a reading group led by the third grade classroom teacher. The teachers reported that since “everybody is moving” during literacy block, no stigma was attached to leaving the room for instruction and support.

- Increasing communication among teachers. Teachers also reported an increase in the amount and quality of “teacher talk”. The flexibility of the literacy block approach allowed teachers and paraprofessionals to engage in informal communication and sharing about each was doing, what was working and not working for individual students, and what changes might need to be made to support individual students and/or the overall success of literacy instruction. A first grade teacher noted:

… it’s really opened up a new dialogue amongst the teachers I think and it’s been very consistent. We all know the same language. We all know what’s involved so even if we’re feeling like we’re frustrated with a piece of it, we all know that piece because we are all doing it. You find that we’re supporting each other.

Liz Black commented on the power of having general and special educators working so closely during literacy block, noting that their collaborative efforts helped them to “blur their roles to create unified systems...The benchmarking and progress monitoring keep people looking at all kids and provide a starting point through which they can work together to provide additional supports that kids need to meet standards.”

Theme #3: Refining school structures to promote collaborative problem solving

Along with promoting increased opportunities for teachers to work together in the classroom, the RtI framework prompted Riverside to examine and re-design a variety of school teaming structures. According to Black, increased collaboration among general and special educators “limited fragmentation between programs within schools and increased the capacity of the school to meet the needs of all students.” Educational Support Team meetings, for example, were restructured to allow for more discussion and problem-solving. Prior to the implementation of RtI, ESTs met on an “as need basis” to review the progress of individual students. In re-thinking the critical role that the EST would need to play in the implementation of RtI,
Black and her teachers decided to hold one set of EST meetings in the fall of each year to review, on a class by class basis, student performance data on universal screening measures. Using teacher input as well as data from other assessment measures, the team determined which students were in need of accommodations and/or more intensive levels of instruction. Outside of these two regularly scheduled reviews of student achievement data, teachers were encouraged to refer students to the EST at any time during the school year, so that the team could determine whether or not the student needed increasingly intensive interventions and/or referral for a special education evaluation.

A number of the interviewees reported major differences between EST functioning prior to and following the implementation of RtI. One teacher noted that “Our EST meetings happen more frequently and with more players”, while others commented on the power of having more current and accurate data available for monitoring student progress. Another teacher commented:

…organization has become key. Before RtI, we might walk in and sit down and start talking about a student not performing well and talk about how bad their home life was and how they didn’t look rested, and we really weren’t basing any of our conversations much on the data… It was pretty generic all occasion hand wringing and holding and now it is very specific. Everything is tied in to data. And you know who is on the agenda before you get there so you come to the meeting prepared.

Liz Black reported that the implementation of RtI helped the EST to “sharpen its saw on data-based decision-making”. “If kids are not moving,” she noted, “we need to change what we’re doing—either the medicine or the dosage.”

Outside of EST meetings, Riverside also relied heavily on the use of regularly scheduled grade level teams and an RtI Steering Committee to provide time for teachers to share information about students, discuss changes that need to be made to the system, and identify relevant professional development opportunities. Teachers on the 5th and 6th grade team, for example, used weekly grade level team meetings to determine “who needs what the most” and to organize differentiated instruction and activities that occurred daily for all students during a 30 minute time period following lunch. The RtI Steering Committee was a representative group that met weekly to discuss the systemic issues related to RtI, including the need for additional professional development, challenges around scheduling, and dissemination of the model to the community.

Theme #4: Creating a common focus on literacy through initial and ongoing professional development

The interviewees described a number of ways in which the initial course provided by the state consultants was a powerful and critical approach to successful implementation. First, the fact that the course took place at the school and began prior to adoption of the approach helped to establish a common base of knowledge, language, and community throughout the school. Liz Black and a majority of the school’s teachers participated in the course, creating momentum for initial implementation as well as a “critical mass” of people with the skills and knowledge to support the handful of teachers who were not able to participate in the course and/or came to Riverside following the course. Second, the fact that Liz Black participated in the course sent a powerful message to teachers that in turn helped to solidify “buy-in” for the RtI approach. One teacher noted how the principal had been at the forefront of the instructional leadership.

She volunteered us for being a pilot. It was just one of those things where she said “We’re going to do this, it’s coming down the pike, let’s do it.” And she has been right there all the way showing interest, helping to make sure we’re all comfortable with this and that we’re all on the same page.

The interviewees also noted that Liz Black’s very presence in the course sent a powerful message to her teachers. Prior to implementation of RtI, Black was considered to have great expertise in mathematics, but less in the area of literacy. Her willingness to reveal what she knew less about, to ask questions, and to act on her new knowledge of literacy affirmed her role as an instructional leader who was seriously interested in creating a school wide learning community. As one teacher commented:

Liz was part of the course with us. She’s learned more about phonemic awareness and phonology and those areas that she was not so confident in or didn’t have the knowledge in, and she’s gone and she’s extended her knowledge so that she can come in and really, during an observation, know what she’s looking for…Liz’s becoming more aware, her taking it on, and seeing that as important, is very important to us.

Third, Riverside’s approach to professional development around RtI did not end with the initial course. While the course was viewed as a necessary starting point, many of the interviewees noted the importance of being able to continue in a variety of planned and
purposeful professional development opportunities that extended their knowledge of RtI, literacy assessment and instruction, specific interventions, and other relevant topics. As part of the pilot process, the two state consultants continued to be available to support teachers in their continued professional development. A number of teachers had worked with one of the consultants on specific approaches to enhancing students' reading comprehension, vocabulary and spelling, while others worked with the other consultant to troubleshoot individual challenges with AIMSweb. Some teachers participated in additional course work that they identified as necessary, particularly around specific reading interventions that they wished to use with particular students. Others identified teachers within the school who served as mentors and coaches to others in various aspects of the implementation of RtI. Many identified Suzanna Quinn, the Title I teacher who became the school’s “point person” around data entry and management within the AIMSweb system, as a key support for the continued development of building level expertise in assessment.

Finally, Liz Black and her teachers saw a link between the implementation of RtI and the use of a school wide learning community model that they had begun to implement prior to the RtI initiative. They drew on the protocols used within the learning community model to frame ongoing discussions of RtI. As Black noted, “I wish other schools could start with this model, because without it, they may not have the structures or processes they need for data-based decision-making.” She also described the way in which RtI gave meaning to the “structures and processes of the learning community model, commenting that “RtI helped us decide what we wanted kids to know. Early on, we didn’t know enough to answer the professional learning community questions. RtI gave us those answers.”

**Theme #5: Engaging in instructional and shared leadership practices to build a school wide learning community**

Throughout the site visit, it became clear to us that Black’s approach to leadership was critical to the school’s success in increasing opportunities for collaboration, improving student outcomes, and refining school structures. She described her approach to leadership through a “petri dish” metaphor in which leadership is seen as a process of “putting together people who need common things together—and waiting for the magic to happen.” Her trust of teachers’ abilities and commitment was evident in her belief that “leadership is about watching what people do naturally and building on that.” Seeing herself as “more producer than director,” Black acknowledged her role in the RtI implementation process as being tied to able to “talk the talk” in faculty meetings as well as to “walk the walk’ in the hallways”.

In Black’s case, “walking the walk” was evidenced by her willingness to learn alongside of her teachers in the initial three credit course, and by her regular participation as an EST member. One teacher described how Black’s vision for the school was reflected in her personal allegiance to the RtI approach and its potential to enhance student success:

She’s very supportive. And she’s a believer and she’s really committed to it. I think it’s made an awareness for her too. She is more aware of the children’s strengths and weaknesses in my classroom than I think before RtI. She’ll say “Look at this kid. Look where he is now!” It’s causing a shift so there’s a commonality that she can actually connect with.

Many interviewees commented on Black’s desire to be “hands-on,” and to participate in every aspect of implementation. In addition to participating in the initial course and attending all EST meetings, she was reported to have spent many hours in the classroom helping to administer assessments and observing to ensure fidelity of the interventions used across the three tiers. As mentioned in the section on roles and responsibilities, Black was credited with being successful in organizing, defining, and funding support staff positions with both general and special education resources. According to many, the resulting ability of general and special educators to support students both within and outside of special education was critical to the school’s ability to provide to a variety of Tier II and III interventions and to ensure that interventions were provided on the basis of students’ needs rather than their “labels.” The interviewees described how Black’s leadership style was also evident in her connections to the larger community. She communicated the goals and outcomes associated with the RtI model through the development and dissemination of written materials, the establishment of an open house focused on RtI, presentations to the School Board and central administration, and ongoing communication with parents.

According to Black, her primary contribution to the implementation of RtI was to “create the structural and organizational capacity to make it happen.” She created annual goal setting activities related to RtI and other school wide initiatives and was instrumental in improving functioning among school wide teams and re-structuring teachers’ roles and responsibilities to allow for additional collaboration. At the same time, she noted that while she may be the “principal leader” of the school, she was by no means the only leader. Black reported that over 50% of her staff served as the leader of a school team or initiative; thus “pretty much leadership has become something everybody
does. Everybody takes a turn and so I think everyone is leading something that they believe in.” Teachers who participated in external professional development related to RtI were expected to share new knowledge with the entire faculty, and several were encouraged to travel to other districts to share Riverside’s success and challenges related to implementing RtI.

In short, Liz Black’s leadership supported the development of a school wide learning community in which every member of the school community had the opportunity to participate in learning, decision making and problem solving. Central to this was the sense that all school wide efforts—including implementation of RtI—needed to be based on the needs of students and the ongoing quest to ensure that changes in school practice resulted in positive changes for all students. One teacher commented on the school’s child-focused approach, noting its link to Black’s leadership:

I think one of the key things about this school is that we as a faculty put kids first and that’s because Liz puts kids first...She doesn’t just come up with an idea because it will make her look good, unless it’s going to be the best thing for kids. And I think that’s something that she imparts to us and so she gets you willing to do things.

Theme #6: Addressing issues for sustainability

The interviewees at the Riverside School were proud of their accomplishments, but they recognized that a key aspect of implementation would be the ability to continually improve and sustain RtI practices over time. Our final theme presents questions and areas for future growth that were identified by the interviewees and may have implications for implementation in other settings.

• **Assessment.** While the AIMSweb assessment system received positive reviews from most of the interviewees, a number of teachers also reflected critically on potential challenges with respect to Riverside’s approach to the assessment of literacy. Many teachers noted that in addition to RtI assessments, the school engaged in yearly state-mandated standardized testing, as well as additional local assessments of reading. Some teachers were concerned that the amount of time devoted to assessment activities might be detracting from, rather than contributing to, instruction. Others believed that multiple assessment measures were valuable because they provided a range of ways to view student progress and to gain a holistic view of individual and collective performance. A number of these teachers were in fact concerned that the assessment measures used in universal screening and progress monitoring were too focused on reading fluency and needed to be complemented by more in-depth measures of reading comprehension.

Finally, a number of teachers voiced a need to have a more systematic way of analyzing individual student performance across a variety of measures, especially when different measures indicated different results for the same student. These ongoing conversations about assessment practices encouraged a healthy debate that kept the interviewees engaged in thinking about the purpose and nature of the RtI approach. They reflected the school’s overall commitment to using assessment results to inform instruction and to seeking ways to create an integrated, systemic and holistic approach to analyzing student performance.

• **Eligibility.** The interviewees acknowledged that the RtI process allowed for earlier intervention for students who were performing below standards in the area of literacy and lessened the possibility that students would need to “wait to fail” before becoming eligible to receive interventions and support through special education. While implementation of the RtI model had helped to inform and clarify the eligibility process, the interviewees reported that special education evaluation and planning teams were still identifying students with learning disabilities by administering standardized measures in order to determine a “severe discrepancy” between a student’s ability and achievement. This situation fell short of full implementation of the RtI model, in which failure to respond to scientifically-based instruction and interventions could be used to document the presence of a learning disability. While this issue was not of serious concern to most interviewees, it was acknowledged as an area for future development and growth.

• **Professional development.** As described earlier, the interviewees were generally enthusiastic about the course that was provided to them as part of the state’s RtI pilot process. Still, a few offered suggestions for improving the course in the future, including an earlier introduction to the use of the AIMSweb assessments, and more differentiation of instruction around the information provided on literacy. Of greater concern to many was degree to which intensive professional development appeared to be a necessary condition for implementation and sustainability of the RtI approach. Liz Black and a number of teachers identified a need for pre-service programs to increase their atten-
tion to RtI so that new teachers entering the district would be prepared to integrate the model into their classroom practice. Additionally, the interviewees wondered how future implementing sites would address professional development. As Liz Black noted, the issue of cost could be “huge as the state moves forward with implementation.” She and others believed that there was a need to develop alternative and cost effective ways to support schools across the state in the implementation of RtI. Successful statewide implementation was viewed as an important goal in that it would provide more consistent and contemporary practices in both general and special education.

- **Evaluation of student and systemic outcomes.** Finally, the interviewees spoke often about the need for Riverside and other schools to explore ways to evaluate the success of the RtI approach from the perspective of improved student outcomes in literacy. The interviewees felt confident in the gains that they had made as a school and provided numerous anecdotes of improved outcomes for individual students. Importantly, the results of state standardized testing provided two indicators of improved performance at the school level demonstrated over a two year period from the start of implementation of RtI to the year following initiation. During this time, the reading achievement of students in the second grade, as measured by the Directed Reading Assessment (DRA), increased from 85% of students meeting or exceeding the standard to 100% of students meeting or exceeding the standard. In addition, the percentage of students in grades 3 – 6 achieving at or above the standard in reading on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) increased from 65% to 70% during this time period. These increases signaled improvement in student performance and further substantiated the idea that the implementation of RtI was making a difference for students.

Still, the interviewees acknowledged that improved scores on the DRA and NECAP did not provide enough evidence for the school to claim that the implementation of RtI had resulted in improved performance in literacy for all students. As they looked to the future, Liz Black and her teachers acknowledged that the school needed to identify more sensitive and varied measures of student performance that could be used to document overall effectiveness of the approach across all grades.

**Discussion and implications**

The implementation of the RtI model at the Riverside Elementary School has resulted in significant changes in classroom practice, especially around increased understanding and use of research-based practices in assessment and instruction and the organization and delivery of multiple tiers of interventions. The use of universal screening practices, targeted progress monitoring and data-based decision-making were highly evident, suggesting that the basic principles of RtI were being implemented in a systemic fashion.

Several features of implementation at Riverside appeared to have resulted in a deep level of implementation and the likelihood of sustainability of the innovation. One of these was the understanding that adoption of the approach needed to be rooted in a vision of RtI as a strategy for change within general education, rather than as a special education initiative. Related to this, Liz Black and her teachers had committed themselves to creating flexible roles and increasing collaboration among general and special educators for the purpose of optimizing student growth and learning. A third important component of implementation was that of building capacity through the creation of critical decision-making structures, including the EST, the RtI Steering Committee, and the team devoted to promoting a school wide learning community model. The transformation of the EST from a fairly typical “prereferral team” to a team that could be used to operationalize the goals of RtI was noteworthy. EST members had become much more skilled in interpreting and using data to create and monitor plans that allowed students to receive supports and interventions with appropriate levels of intensity and frequency.

A fourth critical aspect of Riverside’s implementation of RtI was its approach to professional development. The initial course was seen as a key starting point for developing teachers’ competence in implementing RtI, but professional development did not end there. Instead, capacity building efforts related to RtI were aligned with a re-conceptualized school wide learning community model that was focused on supporting teachers’ development and sustaining the RtI approach. Finally, one of the most important features of implementation was the fact that principal of the Riverside Elementary School played an active and dynamic role throughout all phases of implementation. Liz Black was described as a “hands on” leader whose unwavering vision and compassion provided both direction and support to teachers, support staff, students, and the school community. She was engaged in all aspects of implementation, including the initial course, EST development, the refinement of teacher roles and responsibilities, observations and feedback on assessment and instruction of RtI, and ongoing professional development. She created the structural
and organizational capacity that teams needed to grow and thrive over time (e.g., regular opportunities to meet, resources, training, etc.), and developed and supported teacher leaders in their ongoing reflection and actions related to continuous improvement around student learning.

Riverside has embraced the RtI framework because it has allowed the school to refine approaches to ensuring student success in literacy in a way that honors the individuality of each student. Black and her teachers have worked continuously to address challenges at the student and systemic levels. They demonstrate a tireless ethic and commitment to making things better, because at the root of it all, they care about making the school a place where all students’ needs are addressed. “When asked to meet a kids’ challenges,” Black says, “we always ask ‘How can we?’”.

References
Richards, C., Parvis, S., Golez, F., Canges, R., & Murphy, J. (2007). Response to intervention: Building the capacity of teachers to serve students...


Using leveled graphic organizers
to differentiate responses to children’s literature

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In an ideal world, all children would come into our classrooms on the same level in every subject. Students would simply provide evidence of a year’s growth within a year, no more, no less. Thankfully, we know that this is not the case. Using leveled graphic organizers to differentiate responses to children’s literature is one way to meet the needs of all children, whether a teacher is utilizing the same book with the entire class or using guided reading levels.

Differentiating content, process, and product
Tomlinson (1999) discusses differentiating instruction through content, process, and product. Before we introduce our tiered graphic organizers, we’ll take a look at each one of these categories and then briefly discuss the role differentiated instruction plays in Response to Intervention (RTI). Doing so will provide a context into which we can place the tiered organizers we’ll introduce later in this article. Let’s begin by looking at how we can differentiate the content we teach.

Content
Teachers often differentiate content by using leveled readers. When they do, students are given texts of different complexities and are matched to the level that would result in optimal growth for each one. For example, students might be studying pioneers and the Oregon Trail. Children in guided reading groups could read books about the Oregon Trail at different levels or books written in different formats (e.g., picture books, books written as letters). What’s important to note is that the differentiation comes from the level of the text. Teachers also differentiate content when focusing on directions they provide. Are the directions simple, one-step directions or multi-step directions? Do illustrations accompany the directions? The directions teachers provide can make content easier or more challenging to access. Finally, teachers use different media, such as books with CDs, e-books or trade books to differentiate the content they present, depending on the needs of the students.

Process
Classroom teachers often differentiate process through their actual teaching. They may provide direct instruction of strategies, for instance, that focuses on aiding students to comprehend. Current literature recommends that these strategies be integrated into comprehension instruction rather than being an end to themselves (Garcia and Whalen, 2009). When differentiating the process, teachers may use flexible groupings that allow students to attempt more challenging work at a faster pace than students who need additional instruction. Some students, for example, will quickly be able to infer a character’s personality by analyzing the character’s actions. In Dear Mrs. LaRue, Letters from Obedience School (Teague, 2003), Ike, the very disobedient dog writes to his owner from obedience school and states:

“Day after day I am forced to perform the most meaningless tasks. Today it was “sit” and “roll over,” all day long. I flatly refused to roll over. It’s ridiculous. I won’t do it” (non-paged, October 4 letter).

After reading this passage, a teacher might ask students to discuss what it reveals about Ike’s personality. Many
students would be able to at least begin some analysis and suggest characteristics such as stubborn, bad and disobedient. Others would need more targeted, teacher-directed strategy instruction to be able to do this. Most teachers we know differentiate through process almost automatically; they continually amend how they structure learning activities when children are not responding well to their initial attempts to teach a skill, strategy, or concept.

**Product**

Tomlinson (1999) identifies *product* as the third vehicle for differentiation. When differentiating product, teachers ask students to complete different tasks as a response to a text or a lesson. These tasks may include drafting a book review by writing a postcard, making a book jacket or a newspaper article. All three products expect a summary with criteria that gets increasingly more difficult. In the Oregon Trail unit we referenced above, students might be creating diaries to depict the content knowledge they’ve gleaned from the text(s) they’ve read. Teachers could structure these diary responses so they could vary in complexity of design and content. Some students might work with a partner to draft a diary of facts from their readings; others might pretend they are Lewis and Clark and craft their entries from their perspective; others may be encouraged to investigate primary source materials to enhance their diaries.

Our tiered graphic organizers support differentiation of process since they allow learners to access content in different ways and to varying degrees. In the end, the product is also differentiated as the students are working toward the same outcome but different criteria for the product. It’s important to note that the graphic organizers are not worksheets or end products; they serve as the initial step (the planning stage) for the products students ultimately create. As such, they play an important role in differentiating product.

**How do leveled graphic organizers fit into RTI?**

It may be that you’ve already begun to differentiate content, process, and product, especially if your school district is implementing RTI, a federal initiative that “integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavior problems” (National Center on Response to Intervention). Mary Howard, author of *RTI from All Sides: What Every Teacher Needs to Know*, states in her introduction, “I was excited by an initiative that could make schoolwide differentiated instruction a priority” (p. xiii). We have always known that differentiating instruction is an important component for student success. Now that it’s an essential element of RTI, school districts are placing greater emphasis on differentiated instruction than ever before. In fact, Brown-Chidsey, Bronaugh, and McGraw (2009) state, “Differentiated instruction is teaching that is different from what was used before or what is used for other students. Differentiated instruction is really another way of saying instruction as intervention and is what RTI is all about” (p. 18). As noted above, one way to differentiate instruction is through the use of tiered (leveled) graphic organizers (Tomlinson, 1999). In the next section, we define what we mean by this term and provide a sample set of tiered graphic organizers.

**What are leveled graphic organizers?**

Tiered graphic organizers are planning tools students can use to systematically record notes during or after reading. Tiered organizers differ from typical graphic organizers in that they are developed in leveled sets around a common instructional outcome. The levels are intentionally designed to become increasingly more complex. Over the past several years, we have created sets of tiered graphic organizers for use in the primary grades (Witherell and McMackin, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c) and the intermediate grades (2002/2005, 2005, 2007). Each set contains three tiers: The first tier in each set provides students with a great deal of structured support for the concept, skill or strategy introduced. The second tier is designed for students who are capable of practicing the targeted concept, skill or strategy fairly independently, and the third tier is appropriate for students who need to be challenged at a cognitively advanced level. The purpose of using leveled graphic organizers is to ensure that students are working on their own instructional level. In all cases, whether a student is working on grade level, below, or above, we can challenge him or her with developmentally appropriate tasks.

When teachers focus instruction on Vygotsky’s *Zone of Proximal Development* (1978), they consider what students can do independently and what they might be able to do with some additional support from a knowledgeable mentor. With tiered graphic organizers, the complexity of a task increases from one level to the next in order for the students to continue to progress while staying within their ZPD. For instance, many of you reading this article know how to bake brownies, most of us by reading the directions on the box. We operate from a very basic understanding of brownie baking. Others may have the directions memorized: add 2 eggs, ½ cup water and ¼ cup oil, stir and bake at 350 degrees for 28 minutes. These cooks don’t need help from the box. They are a bit more advanced than those of us in the basic category. Now, there are some advanced brownie bakers out there who never make brownies from a box, but always from scratch, using a double boiler to melt the chocolate, which is quite messy to clean. But, an even more advanced student would be able to melt the chocolate in the microwave without
burning it to a hard crisp. Each level of brownie baking increases in complexity, but everyone comes out with brownies (we hope). So, when matching students to a graphic organizer, it is very important to stay within the zone of his or her proximal development, otherwise—burnt chocolate.

One of the most difficult pieces of teaching is figuring out when students are ready to go forward and if it is time to challenge them with more complex tasks. Teachers, by disposition, are basically very nice people, and nice people do not like to see anyone struggle. In this frame of mind, it seems that children are sometimes not moved soon enough, and as time passes they get further behind. At times a slight struggle is necessary to foster growth.

Using leveled graphic organizers in the classroom

When using leveled graphic organizers in the classroom, the first thing a teacher must do is match each student to the leveled graphic organizer that he or she can complete successfully. Depending on your students, you may decide to introduce two, three or even more different leveled organizers to accompany a lesson. With tiered instruction, all graphic organizers, although they will range from simpler to more complex, must be designed to achieve the same outcome. In the next section of this article, we introduce a set of comprehension graphic organizers that can be used as a response to children's literature with the following intended outcome: Students will be able to identify important events in a story and document them by creating a character's itinerary.

In order for children to make the best product possible when responding to literature in written or oral form, they need to know what “makes up” the response. For younger children we often need to teach the concept before we can explain the writing product. In the case of itinerary, older students may not know the term, but will be able to identify the model as something with which they are familiar. They may have used itineraries in their own travels, for summer camp, or to plan a day at Disney (e.g., listing times of shows and events).

Travel brochures or pamphlets that offer itineraries for day trips or longer adventures are great models to show what can be in an itinerary and to motivate students to read. Wonderful models of itineraries can be found in travel brochures (from travel agencies) and online. If you collect some of these, students can explore the itineraries and brainstorm the criteria of an itinerary (i.e., list what they notice about the itineraries). That way, they will know what the end writing product should contain. Depending on the models you have chosen, your list of components in an itinerary may include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A list of time slots in chronological order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic information at each time slot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting information at specific time slots which may include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights of the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic times for activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students should understand that an itinerary is often an outline of a journey or a guidebook for travelers. Itineraries are written in chronological order, contain details and short descriptions of what there is to do or see. Itineraries are often used to advertise certain places or events, for example, see the 1:30 PM stop at Best Town's Acadia Mall in Figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1. Best Town USA Shopping</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30 am Bus Departs from Freeport Landing Parking Lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00 am Breakfast at the Patti’s Pit Stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 am Arrival Best Town Outlets Here you will be allowed to shop at your leisure. Some popular bargains are: jewelry, blue jeans and shoes. Return to the bus by 11:45 am.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 pm Bus Departs Best Town Outlets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:15 pm Lunch at the World Famous Riverside Galleria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30 pm Arrival at Best Town’s Acadia Mall Enjoy the fascinating window displays as you browse the entire half-mile long mall. Don't forget to forage down the side halls, where delightfully interesting and unique items can be purchased. All stores accept credit. Return to the bus by 5:45 pm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00 pm Bus Departs Best Town's Acadia Mall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30 pm Bus Returns to Freeport Landing Parking Lot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Itineraries may even contain choices for the reader to consider. For instance, an itinerary might say, lunch may be a sit down event in the main dining hall or a light snack at the outside café. You might also point out that events in the itinerary are written in phrases rather than in complete sentences and contain only essential information. You may compare the writing of an itinerary to the writing of a text message. In both cases, there is an economy of words used; all clutter is eliminated.

An itinerary can be written for any amount of time: a day in New York City or two weeks in Spain. For our purposes, we will keep to a day plan, include time, and what there is to see and do. Students need to see and discuss itineraries until you are sure that they have a "good handle" on what is expected in the writing of an itinerary.

Once you have brainstormed your criteria list, create an itinerary with the children to scaffold their learning. It is best to pick an area in which your students are familiar. Some suggested topics include: day at school, day in town, day in nearby city, day in nearby large park or zoo, a special event day at school or in town, or a class trip you have taken.

When you are sure students understand how and why itineraries are written, it's time to demonstrate how they can sequence the events in a book (or chapter in a book) to create an itinerary for a character. You might share Eve Bunting's (1996) *Train to Somewhere* to model this process. (see Figure 2 for a sample itinerary from this book)

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**Figure 2. Train to Somewhere**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stop 1</strong></td>
<td>Porterville, Illinois: See town hall. Watch photographer. See Zachary, Mavis and Nora get selected for adoption.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stop 2</strong></td>
<td>Kilburn: See quaint J.H. Rosen's Hardware Store. Watch Eddie Hartz get adopted and the boy who can stand on his hands.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stop 3</strong></td>
<td>Glover: Breathe nice country air where crowds are thin. Watch children get adopted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stop 4</strong></td>
<td>Memorial: Relax in a quiet little town. Watch Amy and Dorothy get adopted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stop 5</strong></td>
<td>Last stop, Somewhere, Iowa: Meet the wise and humorous elderly couple, Tillie and Roscoe Book. Watch Mari-anne get adopted.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Train to Somewhere* (Bunting, 1996) is an historical picture book based on the orphan trains that were used to place orphans outside big New York City from the mid-1850’s until the 1920’s. This book works well with itinerary writing because the train makes a number of stops, while the main character, Marianne, hopes to find her mother.

Finally, it's time to match each student to a leveled graphic organizer. We have included three graphic organizers at the end of this article. You can see how each one gradually gets more complex. In the first one, *Exciting Itinerary,* students write the time and topic. They also show their knowledge of details by providing pictures of the events from their reading. The second graphic organizer, *Fascinating Itinerary,* is more difficult because students, although including one picture, must write and explain the events happening in the book or chapter they have just read. Finally, the third level graphic organizer, *Intriguing Itinerary,* increases in difficulty as it challenges students to use an interesting adjective in the written description of the event.

It's not always an easy task to match students and graphic organizers because it can be difficult to measure each student’s comprehension and to determine the semantic complexity within the graphic organizers. Students are not just filling in a worksheet, but completing a number of difficult tasks. For example, using the easiest graphic organizer (introductory level), a student must recall details, remember the sequence, be able to “look back” and locate forgotten information, show understanding, and write an itinerary as defined. There’s a lot going on. We’ve found that teachers sometimes match a student with one level and then use the organizer as an assessment tool. If the student does well at the given level, the teacher provides additional instruction and has him complete the next level graphic organizer. If the student doesn’t do well, the teacher knows that she or he needs to re-teach and provide additional support.

**Book ideas**
The itinerary graphic organizers we’ve shared can be used in creative ways for many books—both fiction and nonfiction. We recommend the following books for writing an itinerary because the characters are placed in a number of settings:

**Books for Younger Readers:** (These itineraries should be done using the whole book.)

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52 | Feature Articles
Books for Older Readers: (These itineraries may be done by putting a “stop” at different chapters.)

Although teachers can’t create an ideal world, and probably wouldn’t want to even if they could, they can ensure that every learner progresses at a pace that’s both rigorous and comfortable for the learner. Tiered graphic organizers are one of many tools that can help teachers and students achieve this goal. We wish you and your students many happy stops in the itinerary of life and much success with the itineraries you use to help students comprehend and respond to texts.

Interesting Itinerary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of book or chapter</th>
<th>_____________________________________________________________________</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>What you would see and do</th>
<th>Draw a Picture</th>
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Write two sentences explaining the highlight of the day:
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

Fascinating Itinerary

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Title of book or chapter</th>
<th>_____________________________________________________________________</th>
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| Time | In this space write the topic: what will be seen or what the stop will be. Then write one sentence explaining the stop. (Picture boxes should represent the details written nearby.)
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Example: Cedar’s Junction: Get a light snack here and be sure to check out the carved totem pole.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Feature Articles | 53

The NERA Journal (2010), Volume 46(1)
### Intriguing Itinerary

**Title of book or chapter**

| Time | On this side you are to write: (1) What there is to do and see. (2) Interesting facts about what there is to do and see and (3) include at least one adjective that will intrigue the visitor.  
*Example: Dinosaur Alley* | See dinosaur prints from prehistoric days. As you walk the trail that leads down Dinosaur Alley be careful on the perilous rope bridge that crosses the bottomless gully. We want you to make it back. (Put a topic picture in the picture box.) |

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### References


English has exploded as a world-wide language in recent years. Crystal (2006) estimates that there are close to a billion and a half speakers of English in the world, only about half of whom are native speakers. One of the countries in which English is not spoken as a first language, yet is widely studied as a foreign language, is Colombia. Recently, the Colombian government has embarked on the ambitious goal of having all high school graduates possess a level of English sufficient enough to economically and culturally compete on a global level (“Bilingüismo en Colombia”, 2005), something that is currently only plausible for graduates of elite private schools (de Mejia, 2004). More specifically, by 2019 the Colombian government wants to establish a rigorous system of English language teaching, learning, and assessment modeled after the Common European Framework (CEF), in spite of the significant socioeconomic and political differences between Colombia and the European Union (Sánchez Solarte & Obando Guerrero, 2008).

Inevitably, one of the crucial components of such a goal will be a high level of reading proficiency, which is necessary if students want to study and work in English-speaking environments. In addition, reading will most likely be one of students’ main sources of English since interpersonal experiences with native speakers are relatively rare for the average Colombian (presumably because of a precarious security situation due to the country’s ongoing civil war) (Velez-Rendon, 2003), and many teachers lack the proficiency to conduct their classes in English (Sánchez Solarte & Obando Guerrero, 2008). Fortunately, Krashen (2003, 2004a, 2004b,) and Poole (in press) have shown that significant gains in grammar, vocabulary, and cultural knowledge can be made by reading comprehensible and pleasurable materials such as books, magazines, and comic books both inside and outside the classroom.

Review of literature

Reading strategies and English language literacy development

However, in order to become highly proficient readers, Colombian English language learners (ELLs) will need to actively use a wide-range of reading strategies, which are the “deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader’s efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meaning out of text” (Afflerbach, Pearson & Paris, 2008). According to Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), skilled ELLs frequently and creatively use strategies, while their unskilled counterparts tend to use only a few strategies and in ways that are inappropriate.

Several studies confirm the relationship between reading strategy use and reading proficiency. Baker and Boonkit (2004), for example, analyzed the reading strategies of Thai college students majoring in English. One hundred forty-nine participants filled out a strategy survey, 17 of whom were later interviewed about their responses. In addition, 12 participants kept language learning journals. Significant overall differences were not observed between high and low-proficiency participants; nevertheless, significant differences were observed between high and low-proficiency participants on several individual strategies.

Instead of studying Thai first language ELLs, Yang (2002) analyzed the strategies used by six skilled and six unskilled Chinese college readers while they carried out think-aloud protocols and were exposed to strategy instruction. The findings showed that unskilled
readers were unable to monitor their comprehension and became sidetracked by lexical and grammatical items. Their skilled counterparts, however, were adept at comprehension monitoring and avoided becoming distracted by grammar and vocabulary.

Zhang (2001) also studied the reading strategies used by struggling and proficient Chinese college ELLs. Ten students were interviewed about their understanding of strategic reading, reading tasks, and their reading abilities. Proficient readers understood more about strategic reading, reading tasks, and their reading abilities than struggling readers. In addition, struggling readers tended to use bottom-up strategies that rarely lead to overall text comprehension such as examining syntax, and utilizing the dictionary. Proficient readers, on the other hand, used strategies aimed at text comprehension (e.g., monitoring their comprehension, skimming, scanning, and predicting text content.).

Lee and Liao's (2007) study of 163 Taiwan college students produced results similar to those found in Yang (2002) and Zhang (2001). Instead of using qualitative methods, Lee and Liao (2007) administered a 30-item strategy inventory called the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002). The survey consists of three strategy subscales: global, problem-solving, and support reading strategies. The results indicated that those students who scored higher on their college English entrance exam reported using more strategies overall and on the three subscales.

Sheorey, Kamimura, & Freiermuth (2008) also used the SORS with 237 Japanese university students in a technical writing course. According to their self-rated reading ability in English, learners were divided into high and low groups. The participants in the high group reported using 80% of the strategies with greater frequency than the low group. Moreover, there were significant differences between high and low groups on nine strategies.

Another SORS study was carried out by Sheorey and Baboczky (2008) using 545 university students in Hungary. As in Sheorey, Kamimura, and Freiermuth's (2008) study, participants self-rated their reading proficiency in English and were accordingly assigned to high and low groups. Participants in the high group used eight strategies more frequently than those in the low group. In addition, the high group had a higher mean on the global strategies subscale than the low group.

While the majority of these studies have taken place in Europe and Asia, some have been carried out in the United States. One such study was carried out by Kamhi-Stein (1998), who examined how three underprepared first year Spanish-English bilinguals at a university in California used reading strategies in both languages. Among other things, the participants completed a reading habits questionnaire, carried out think-aloud protocols, and made an outline following a reading task. The results revealed that participants seldom utilized essential strategies such as text integration and planning.

Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) also studied ELLs in the United States, but used a quantitative methodology to do so. Using an early version of the SORS, the authors asked 152 college students from various first languages to rate their reading proficiency in English. They were put into high and low groups based on these ratings. The findings revealed that the high proficiency group used 27 of 30 strategies more frequently than the low group. Likewise, they exhibited more frequent strategy use overall and on two of the three subscales.

While the research strongly suggests significantly different reading strategy use by skilled and unskilled ELLs, the vast majority of it has been carried out with college students. In fact, there are very few studies using ELLs in secondary settings. The few that have been published show results similar to those using college students. Schoonen, Hulstijn, and Bossers (1998), for example, examined 488 sixth, seventh, and tenth grade Dutch ELLs students' reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and understanding of reading strategies, text characteristics, their own reading goals and comprehension criteria. The results showed that those with better levels of reading comprehension were more aware of reading strategies, text characteristics, reading goals, and comprehension criteria.

Zhang and Wu (2009) surveyed 270 Chinese high school students using the SORS. Based upon the results of three English exams, three proficiency categories (low, intermediate, high) were established. The results showed that high proficiency learners utilized more strategies than intermediate and low-proficiency students overall and on two of the three SORS subcategories (global and problem-solving).

Given the importance of the connection between reading strategies and overall reading proficiency, it is surprising that so few studies have done with ELLs at the secondary level. In the case of Colombia, this is an especially critical gap in light of the goal of having future high school students graduate with a higher level of English proficiency than those in past generations. However, if they are currently not active strategy users, it seems unlikely they will become highly proficient readers unless they receive explicit strategy instruction.

Reading strategies and gender

Another important issue that has received little attention is gender differences in reading strategy use among ELLs. Chavez (2001) points out that gender should be examined more closely in order to discover possible achievement gaps and, if possible, reduce them. Although there are relatively few studies focused on
gender and ELLs’ reading proficiency, most studies show more strategy utilization by females. Poole (2005a), for example, conducted a study of mainland Chinese university students—217 females and 111 males, using the SORS. The results showed that females employed significantly more strategies overall and on all three subscales. Notably, females utilized 18 of the 30 individual strategies more than males.

Sheorey (2006) also used the SORS and again found an advantage for females. The participants consisted of 276 male and 323 female university students from India. Overall and on two of the three subscales, females reported using more strategies than males.

A third study conducted using the SORS was carried out by Sheorey and Baboczky (2008). The participants consisted of 411 female and 134 Hungarian university students. Overall, on the three SORS subscales, and on eight individual strategies, females reported using significantly more strategies than males.

A fourth study which found that females used more strategies than males was carried out by Poole (2009), who used the SORS with 117 male and 235 female Colombian university students. Overall, on two of the three SORS subscales, and on eight individual strategies, females reported using significantly more strategies than males.

While most studies demonstrate an advantage for females, some have shown an advantage for males. Phakiti (2003), for example, studied the differences between 211 female and 173 male Thai university students. The participants completed a reading examination and then filled out a questionnaire that asked them to report the cognitive and metacognitive strategies they used on the exam. The results showed that while there were no significant differences in cognitive strategy use, males used significantly more metacognitive strategies than females.

Finally, some studies show very few differences between males and females. Using an early version of the SORS, Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) studied 60 female and 92 male ESL students at a US university. No significant differences were found overall or on any of the three SORS subscales. On individual strategies, there were no differences except on one strategy, which females reported using more than males.

Poole (2005b) also studied ESL university students using the SORS and found few gender differences. The participants consisted of 110 female and 138 male ESL students from various first languages. The results showed no differences overall or on any of the three SORS subscales. On individual strategies, there were only differences on two strategies, with females scoring higher on one, and males scoring higher on the other.

In sum, even though most studies show that females use more strategies than males, such results have not been found in all studies. Given the diverse sociocultural and political contexts within which English language learning takes place, it seems doubtful that consistent gender-based patterns in reading strategy use will be discovered. However, precisely because of the sociocultural and political differences of the settings in which gender-based studies take place, Yoder and Kahn (2003) suggest that future research focus on gender within specific environments rather than as a static trait. In the case of Colombia, the one study that focused on gender found that females were significantly more active strategy users than males. Nevertheless, the participants in that study were college students. Since more English language proficiency will be expected of high school graduates than in the past, it is imperative that gender differences in reading strategy use be investigated, and if significant differences are found, steps be taken to minimize them.

The current study
The following study sought to answer two questions: (1) What academic reading strategies do Colombian high school English language learners report using? (2) Do males and females report using different academic reading strategies? By investigating these areas, this study represents a first step in discovering whether or not both male and female Colombian high school students are nearing the goal of advanced English language literacy.

Method
Participants
The participants in this study were 199 Colombian ELLs (males=103; females=96) studying in three private Colombian high schools in the country’s capital, Bogotá. These schools generally serve students from middle to low-income families. Participants ranged from ages 12 to 18 (M=14), and represented grades 8 to 11, which are the normal years of Colombian secondary education. Males had studied English for an average of 6.45 years, while females had studied for an average of 8.02 years. Even though all teachers were licensed to teach English, instruction was generally not very intense, ranging from 3 to 5 hours per week. In addition, students reported reading academic materials in English an average of only 3.35 (males=3.23; females=3.48) hours a week. Finally, on a scale of 1 to 10, the average self-rated proficiency for males was 5.58, while it was 5.57 for females.

Instrument
The means used to measure academic reading strategies was the Spanish version of the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS). As mentioned in the review of literature, the SORS is a 30-item quantitative inventory consisting of global strategies (13 items), problem-solving strategies (8 items), and support strategies (9 items). Global strategies are steps learners take to plan
how to read and manage their comprehension (e.g., “I have a purpose in mind when I read”; “When reading, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore”). Problem-solving strategies involve practices learners use when reading to make difficult portions of a text comprehensible such as rereading difficult passages and guessing the meaning of vocabulary items. Support strategies are devices and techniques learners use to understand text such as bilingual dictionaries and underlining key words and sentences. The SORS is scored on a five-point Likert scale, with 3.5 or above corresponding to frequent strategy use, 2.5 to 3.4 exemplifying moderate strategy use, and 2.4 representing infrequent strategy use (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002).

Data collection
After obtaining parental consent, students were given the surveys, which they completed either at school or home. After filling out a short demographic questionnaire, students were instructed to circle the number that represented how frequently they used each strategy. Those surveys that were not filled out appropriately were not analyzed. Descriptive statistics were used to measure the frequency with which learners reported using strategies. In addition, t-tests were used to discover whether or not there were significant differences between males and females in their self-reported use of strategies.

Results
Colombian ELLs’ use of reading strategies
The first question concerned the types of reading strategies that Colombian high school English language learners use. The results showed that, overall, participants were moderate strategy users (M=3.35). In addition, global (M=3.26) and support (M=3.30) strategies were used with moderate frequency. However, problem-solving strategies were used with high frequency (M=3.54). Table 1 shows that participants reported using 12 strategies with high frequency and 18 with moderate frequency. They did not report using any strategies with low frequency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Strategies Used by Colombian ELLs in Ascending Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. PROB 7 I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. PROB 9 I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. PROB 14 When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. PROB 25 When text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. GLOB 3 I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. SUP 29 When reading, I translate from English into my native language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. SUP 13 I use reference materials (e.g., a dictionary) to help me understand what I read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. SUP 18 I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. GLOB 4 I take an overall view of the text to see what it is about before reading it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. GLOB 23 I check my understanding when I come across new information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. GLOB 1 I have a purpose in mind when I read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. SUP 30 When reading, I think about information in both English and my mother tongue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. SUP 18 I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. GLOB 15 I use tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase my understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. PROB 11 I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. PROB 16 I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. SUP 26 I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. GLOB 27 I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. GLOB 21 I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. SUP 22 I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. GLOB 17 I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender differences in reading strategy use

The second question concerned gender differences in reported reading strategy use. While females (M=3.47) had a higher overall mean than males (M=3.22), both had moderate strategy use. However, the difference between males and females was statistically significant (t[197]= -3.05; p<.05). As Table 2 indicates, global strategy use was also moderate for both males (M=3.14) and females (M=3.38), although females use of global strategy was significantly higher than males (t[197]= -2.65; p<.05). In terms of problem-solving strategies, females (M=3.63) used them with high frequency, and males (M=3.45) used them with moderate frequency, although the differences were not significant (p>.05). Finally, both males (M=3.12) and females (M=3.47) used support strategies with moderate frequency, with females using them significantly more than males (t[197]= -3.52; p<.05).

On individual strategies, there were also notable differences between males and females. As Table 2 shows, there were significant differences on 9 of 30 strategies, with females scoring higher on all of them. In fact, on 27 of 30 strategies, females scored higher than males. The exceptions were strategies 17 (“I use context to help me better understand what I am reading”) and 30 (“When reading, I think about information in both English and my mother tongue.”), in which males scored higher, and strategy 19 (“I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.”), in which males and females had the same average. Males used 9 strategies frequently (#3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 14, 25, 29, 30), 20 moderately (#1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28), and 1 with low frequency (#10). Females used 12 strategies frequently (#1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 18, 23, 25, 29) and 18 moderately (#2, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30) and none with low frequency.

### Table 2.
Differences in Online Strategy Use by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Male (n=103) (M)</th>
<th>Female (n=96) (M)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. GLOB Purpose when reading</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>-3.04</td>
<td>.003*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. SUP Taking notes</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>-2.96</td>
<td>.003*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. GLOB Using prior knowledge</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>-2.00</td>
<td>.047*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. GLOB Previewing text before reading</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>-1.62</td>
<td>.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. SUP Reading aloud when text becomes difficult</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>-3.97</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. GLOB Checking how text content fits purpose</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>-.98</td>
<td>.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. PROB Reading slowly and carefully</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>-2.15</td>
<td>.033*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. GLOB Noting text characteristics</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>-2.17</td>
<td>.031*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. PROB Try to stay focused on reading</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>-.86</td>
<td>.390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. SUP Circle or underline information</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>-3.96</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. PROB Adjusting reading rate</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>-.70</td>
<td>.488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. GLOB Determining what to read</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>-1.17</td>
<td>.246</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

**Colombian ELLs’ use of reading strategies**

The results of this study showed that, in general, Colombian high school students are being moderately active strategy users when reading in English, with the exception of problem-solving strategies, which they used with high frequency. Such findings suggest that Colombian students have the basic tools to reach a high level of reading proficiency in English. These results are also encouraging because they suggest that high school students from working and middle-class backgrounds are using reading strategies just as frequently as successful English language learners studying in US universities. For example: In one study, Poole (2005c) found that 147 college students reported using problem-solving strategies with high frequency and global and support strategies with moderate frequency. These results are identical to the findings of the current study. Also identical to the results of the current study were those found in Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001), which showed 152 English language learners using problem-solving strategies with high frequency and global and support strategies with moderate frequency.

However, such results should be interpreted with caution for, as Mokhtari, Sheorey, and Reichard (2008) note, tools such as the SORS are based on self-reporting, and thus they cannot guarantee that students are actually using strategies as consistently as they indicate doing so. Moreover, using strategies with high frequency is not always associated with highly proficient reading; on the contrary, certain strategies can be of questionable value. In this study, “I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading” was the number one reported strategy, yet research has shown that it is generally no more advantageous in terms of overall text comprehension than reading quickly (Farrell, 2009). In addition, “I use reference materials (e.g., a dictionary) to help me understand what I read,” which was the seventh most reported strategy in this study, is not a strategy that highly proficient readers frequently use (Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1995, 1996; Zhang, 2001; Zhang & Wu, 2009).

Unfortunately, this study was not able to directly observe strategy use, measure the success with which learners implemented individual strategies, and obtain objective measures of participants’ reading proficiency.
in English. Thus, in order to get a more accurate picture of learner strategy use—whether in Colombia or elsewhere—future studies should do the following: First, they should investigate whether reported use correlates with actual use. This can be done by using qualitative techniques such as think-aloud protocols, observations, and interviews (Mokhtari, Sheorey, & Reichard, 2008). Problematically, the labor-intensive character of qualitative research would make it difficult to get an overall picture of any population’s reading strategy use.

Second, future studies should examine how successfully learners implement specific strategies and compare them with their reported use of such strategies. Doing this would show whether or not learners’ reported use of strategies is effective or inappropriate. For example, if students report using reference materials with high frequency, yet fail to decode lexical items and contextualize them during an exam or think-aloud protocol, then they probably are unaware of when and how to use this strategy.

Third, investigators should study how patterns of reading strategy use vary according to proficiency level. Proficiency levels can be established by using standardized tests such as the TOEFL or national college entrance exams. Such studies could reveal which strategies underperforming learners are overusing or incorrectly applying. In Zhang and Wu’s (2009) study, for example, the results showed that more proficient readers used more global and problem-solving strategies than less proficient readers. However, less proficient readers used more support strategies that more proficient readers.

Gender differences in reading strategy use

Based on the results of this study, future studies of Colombian ELLs should also include gender as a variable, for it is obvious that there is a gender gap in reading strategy use. As seen, females reported using significantly more strategies overall and on the global and support subcategories than males. In addition, they reported using nine individual strategies significantly more than males. These results are similar to several other gender-based studies using the SORS (Poole, 2005a, 2009; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001; Sheorey, 2006; Sheorey & Baboczky, 2008; Zhang & Wu, 2009), which show females to be more active strategy users than males.

However, the reasons for these gender differences in strategy use are not clear. It could be that females are more proficient readers, for as reported in the methodology section, females had studied English for more time than males (females = 8.02 years; males = 6.45) on average. Likewise, they reported reading academic materials more than males (females = 3.48 hours per week; males = 3.23 hours per week) on average.

Thus, they could have had more opportunities to utilize certain strategies. Future studies should use the previously discussed qualitative methods (i.e., interviews, observations, and think-aloud protocols) to investigate why females tend to use certain strategies more than males. In addition, such studies should investigate how male and female reading strategy use differs according to proficiency level. It is possible that gender is not a significant variable when learners are at the same proficiency level. Alternatively, gender could be a significant variable at certain proficiency levels, but not at others.

Regardless of the results of future studies, the central issue in the current one is whether or not the gender gap in strategy use is cause for concern. Even though females often times reported using significantly more strategies than males, both were, in general, moderate strategy users. In fact, both males and females used most individual strategies with moderate frequency (males = 20; females = 18). In addition, males used only one strategy with low frequency (“I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.”). Such results are probably not cause for great concern.

Teaching reading strategies to ELLs using the SORS: Some recommendations

While the present study shows that both male and female Colombian high school students are aware of the importance of reading strategies, these results may not be indicative of all ELLs in Colombia and other countries. Fortunately, classroom teachers can use the SORS to both assess students’ strategy use and teach specific strategies. In terms of assessing strategy use, Mokhtari, Sheorey, and Reichard (2008) suggest that teachers use the SORS as a pre-test to determine what strategies students lack awareness of or overuse, and therefore need instruction on how to properly use. The SORS can then be used as a post-test to assess the effectiveness of instruction.

The SORS can also be used to assess the types of strategies learners use when they read specific genres (e.g., fiction, poetry, instructional manuals, textbooks) for specific purposes (e.g., general overview, in-depth research, exam questions) (Mokhtari, Sheorey, & Reichard, 2008). Mokhtari and Reichard (2008) showed that such factors can significantly affect strategy usage.

The 65 high school students who participated in their study reported using significantly more strategies overall and on the global and support subscales when they read for academic purposes than when they read for entertainment.

In terms of how to teach specific strategies using the SORS, there are a variety of methods that can be used. One option suggested by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2008) is for teachers to inform students about what strategies
they feel are important and model them using a specific text. Another option they recommend is to model strategies that research has shown to be challenging for struggling readers, such as global strategies. A third alternative involves having students fill out the survey and discuss their strategy choices, the idea being that simply encouraging them to rationalize their cognitive processes will make them more considerate strategic readers.

**Conclusion**

This study represents a first step in discovering if Colombian high school ELLs are active strategy users and whether or not there are significant differences between male and female strategy use. The results showed that Colombian students—both male and female—are moderate strategy users overall. Such findings should be encouraging, yet given the importance of reading in Colombia’s English language proficiency goals, more information needs to be gathered about students’ actual—as opposed to reported—strategy use, the success with which they implement individual strategies, and the relationship between proficiency level and strategy use. In the meantime, English language teachers in Colombia and elsewhere must consistently set aside time to teach strategies in order for their students to become advanced readers.

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From lecture-based to discussion-based instructional approach: 
The pedagogical journey of a Chinese professor

Wen Ma
La Moyn College, New York

In a Chinese educational context, the teacher is often expected to offer the most he or she knows through organizing the content systematically before class, interpreting the texts by providing additional information, examples and exercises during class, and answering student questions after lecturing (Lee, 2000; Watkins & Biggs, 1997). In turn, students are obligated to make disciplined efforts to listen to lectures attentively. While students are required to be actively engaged with the academic content, few opportunities are offered for using verbal responses to externalize their thoughts (Ma, 2007), or what John-Steiner called “the external footprint of the internal thought” (personal communication, April 2003). This instructional approach contrasts sharply with the social constructivist model prevalent in American education, which views the classroom as a site where the teacher supports students to interact as competent learners, and where understanding may be explored, negotiated and constructed through participatory dialogues (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand & Gamoran, 2003; Brookfield & Preskill, 2005).

As a native of China, I had been influenced both as a learner and as a teacher in a Chinese educational-cultural milieu. After I became a teacher educator at a small liberal arts college in the United States, I struggled to respond to the U.S.-born undergraduate and graduate students’ participation and response styles in my methods classes. For example, in both formal course evaluations and informal conversations with me, my students indicated that they preferred participatory discussions and project-based learning activities, and did not appreciate the substantive lectures that I took painstaking efforts to prepare and deliver.

These challenges prompted me to look critically at my role in the classroom. This action research explored the major phases of change that I have experienced as I made the transition from a Chinese-style, teacher-directed, lecture-based approach to a more student-centered, discussion-oriented approach.

Theoretical framework
This research is informed by the sociocultural perspective of learning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987). To depict the social and cultural influences on the child’s learning and understanding mediated through language and other cultural artifacts, Vygotsky (1978) conceptualized the notion of “the zone of proximal development,” a virtual continuum comparing what one can already do with what one can potentially do with the help of others. This comparison corresponds with the learning potential of an individual in any social context. What one can do and cannot do needs to be considered in terms of the interaction between one’s ever-changing cognitive conditions and a wide range of interrelated social, cultural and institutional situations in which the individual lives. These unceasing interactions across the inter-personal and the intra-psychological domains provide the material conditions for one to learn within his or her cognitively allowable developmental levels in a given socio-historical context. The social and individual domains are thus dynamically united (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Wertsch, 1991).

According to this sociocultural viewpoint, interacting with others (peers, teachers, or any other knowledgeable person) provides many opportunities for a learner not only to grasp and refine his or her literacy skills, but also to cultivate his or her higher order thinking (Miller, 2003). As such, social interactions are critically important for students to use language to make...
sense of the text, themselves, and the world. A limitation with Vygotsky's theory of learning and cognitive development is that, other than the face-to-face interaction involving small groups, Vygotsky had not fully explored how broader social, institutional and cultural factors historically impact the conditions of the group and the individual. In particular, it is not so clear how such impacts “carry over” to other situations and continue to be present in the subsequent verbal behavior of those involved across time and space and across social settings (Wertsch, 1991).

Bakhtin's (1981) theorization of dialogism, voice, and text provides a different set of conceptual lenses from which to look at the mediational role dialogue plays in extending human thinking. Speech, the primary vehicle of social interaction, serves as the medium for the learners to engage with one another discursively so that, collectively, they make sense out of the topics of discussion. In a school context, “the speaking personality, the speaking consciousness” (Emerson & Holquist, 1981, p. 434) of different learners, being constantly shaped and reshaped by such a “dialogized heteroglossia,” connect with both other people’s voices and the “texts” previously experienced and understood by the learner, whether such “texts” are written, oral, or experiential. A “new text,” which emerges from the multi-layered discursive and experiential residues from these interactions, is then integrated into the learner’s repertoire and becomes another “text” within the existing system of “texts.” Hence, the learner’s knowledge and understanding roll on and keep growing through dialoging with other people or texts (Emerson, 1994).

Vygotsky’s and Bakhtin's theories on learning have informed a sociocultural framework of dialogic interaction for the student’s cognitive and social development (Hicks, 1996; Kozulin et al., 2003; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000). First of all, the social nature of learning necessitates a conceptualization of any learning to be socially situated, and social interaction in the classroom provides the needed context for one to engage with the discourse and the text. Furthermore, social interaction draws the participants’ attention to the specific content or issues, the perception, formulation and articulation of which extend and advance their understanding and thinking. Moreover, dialogic interactions provide opportunities for the individuals to talk it out, in the process of which the individual’s thinking is further expanded by hearing the alternative views of others, becoming clearer through expressing his or her own ideas and discussing other possibilities with others. In addition, there are multiple discourses and texts behind each verbalized utterance, which result historically from previous dialogic interactions across social and cultural contexts. Finally, these texts help to shape the formation of the multi-dimensional and ever-evolving selfhood and social identity of the learner, whose discursive practices inevitably reflect the reciprocal complexity of the interplay of all those elements.

These theoretical underpinnings call for a dialogic approach to instruction. Consequently, many educational researchers and classroom teachers have explored the use of discussion as an instructional tool in the language arts, literature, and various content areas and programs, e.g., Applebee’s (1996) curricular conversations, McMahon and Raphael’s (1997) book clubs, Nystrand’s (1997) substantive discussions through authentic questions and uptake, Daniels’ (2001) literature circles, Wells’ (2001) inquiry-oriented conversations, and Miller’s (2003) dialogic reasoning. Accordingly, classroom teachers have been encouraged to change from lecturing to student-led discussions, in which the learners can share their understandings, confusions, concerns, and interpretations of what they read, express their own ideas, and hear alternative views.

University professors regularly employ discussion-based instruction in their courses as well. For instance, Nowacek (2007) advocated inter-disciplinary connections through college students’ discussions, and Prior (1998) explored disciplinary learning and enculturation in graduate seminars. Not surprisingly, American college and graduate students, shaped by their earlier school experiences, often expect to learn disciplinary content through participatory discussions (Ma, 2008). This expectation poses a challenge to those educators who are not so familiar with a discussion approach. For university faculty who come from non-native linguistic and cultural backgrounds or who are of an older generation accustomed to lecturing, the learning and the use of such an approach can be particularly challenging. In this sense, the exploration of how diverse educators perceive and employ class discussions will help the educational community better understand and tap the dialogic potential.

Central to the present inquiry is the construct of discussion. There are different definitions of discussion. For example, Dillon (1994) defined discussion as “a unique form of group interaction, where people join together in addressing some question of common concern, something they need to understand, appreciate or decide” (p. 5). Nystrand (1997) viewed discussion as using open-ended questions and substantive uptake to engage with literary texts by secondary teachers and students. Brookfield and Preskill (2005) further proposed employing discussion as a way of teaching. In the research described below, I use the term to refer to student-led, open-ended classroom discussion for the purpose of learning disciplinary content. These varied forms of verbal exchanges include whole class discussions, small group discussions, and a combination of presentation and discussion.
Situated within such a broad conceptual backdrop, this study explored the pedagogical journey I traveled as a teacher educator of Chinese decent from a lecture-based approach to discussion-oriented approach. Then I described one model of participatory discussion developed through my teaching, transactional presentation. Clearly, such critical pedagogical research is important because it is not only meaningful for my teaching effectiveness, but may help other diverse educators similarly wrestle with the interplay of their prior educational and cultural backgrounds and current classroom practices as well.

**Method**

**Research design**

This research follows the action research tradition (Creswell, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Tomal, 2003), which allowed me to reflect on and describe the qualitative dimensions of my lived experiences holistically. As I continued to learn from my teaching and gathered more data over the years, I came to focus on how my instructional style has evolved in response to my students' preferences and needs.

**Researcher's role**

Naturally, my teaching practices are influenced by who I am. Since I was born and educated in China, and taught at both secondary and university levels there for more than ten years, this background gave me personal insight to the Chinese educational practices that I explained earlier. Equally importantly, my doctoral coursework in the United States had already introduced me to class discussions. My current position as a teacher educator further allowed me to understand what the teaching and learning practices are, how my students have been taught, and how they are expected to teach at American schools. Still, while tapping my knowledge of both educational contexts as my strength, I am aware (as readers should be) that these prior backgrounds might affect what was experienced and described in this research.

**Data collection and analysis procedures**

Just as Schenul, Schenul and LeCompte (1999) suggested that “in ethnographic research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection” (p. 273), my constant reflection as a qualitative researcher was the primary data of this action research. To triangulate my findings, I also collected a variety of secondary data sources, including student surveys, my teaching notes, email communication with students and colleagues, informal conversations with students, and formal student evaluations.

For data analysis, I used the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Specifically, I critically reflected on and self-examined my teaching practices, paying particular attention to how my instructional styles evolved over the years. In particular, I identified what I call “crisis moments,” such as student complaints and unsuccessful classes/units, my searches for and experiments with new approaches, and important feedback from students and colleagues. Meanwhile, I drew on other data sources to further substantiate and triangulate these events and experiences. All these recursive analytical procedures led me to the identification of four major themes as I have gradually shifted from a lecture-based approach to a more student-centered approach to instruction.

Finally, these are the steps I followed to develop the transactional presentation model. Firstly, I used the first few classes to model for the class how to summarize and use key information from the reading as the basis for substantive discussions. Secondly, I participated in the discussions as a facilitator, asking questions to direct the class’ attention to critical issues or providing key information for better understanding. Thirdly, at the end of each discussion, I made constructive feedback about what went well and what could be further worked on. Lastly, I asked students to complete two written evaluations (one mid-term, one final) and compared their participatory learning experiences.

**Findings**

In the following, I chronicle each of the four major phases of change with a brief description. I then discuss the procedures of transactional presentation and the educator's role in the next section. I end by suggesting the potential of integrating the educator's prior experiences and current practices as a direction for future research.

**Phase I: I talk, you listen**

Of the major phases of change that I have experienced, the first phase borders the Chinese practices with which I was familiar. It frequently involves presenting knowledge and information I gleaned from the texts and other sources, which I felt the students should know. This phase, which may be characterized as “I talk, you listen,” occurred primarily during the first semester. Although I spent a lot of time preparing detailed lecture notes and background information related to the course material, my students seemed unmotivated.

At the end of the first semester I received poor evaluations for my teaching. A majority of my students reported that they were dissatisfied that “the professor lectured too much,” and “had too few class discussions and hands-on learning activities”. In retrospection, it was a difficult beginning as I made the transition from a student to a professor status and from a Chinese to an American context.

**Phase II: First listen to me, then do it yourself**

Having learned that my students preferred more hands-on opportunities, I revised the course syllabi...
in the second semester by reducing my lectures and including some group discussions and activities for the students. In each class, I asked the students to first listen to my presentation of key concepts, theories and strategies. Then they had to combine theoretical issues with practical applications. Sometimes they worked individually, but more often in pairs or in small groups, and each time they had to problem solve in light of their own reading comprehension and personal experience. Based on the discussions, they had to place the course material within some teaching and learning settings.

For example, after we covered how a teacher's personal beliefs about how reading develops in children may impact how she teaches reading in a first grade classroom, I asked my students to write a personal narrative about how they learned to spell and read. For this assignment, they may interview their parents, siblings or former teachers, bring in actual books, and finally share their narratives in class. Another example is that, after the concept and procedures of shared reading were explained in the textbook, I asked each student to choose a children's book, read it from a teacher's perspective, design activities if they were to teach the book, and then model a shared reading activity in small groups. In informational conversations, students shared with me that they liked the changes although in the midterm survey and formal evaluation they still complained with me that they liked the changes although in the midst of presentation, which I call “transactional presentation.”

Phase III: Do as I do
Beginning in my second year of teaching, I further adjusted my instructional style to allow for more student involvement in the learning process. This phase saw my first modeling for the students how to read a chapter critically, summarize the key ideas, and present them to the class. Then I asked each student to sign up for a chapter and to similarly present its highlights in class. I call this “do as I do.” Specifically, I used the first few classes to share an overview of the assigned chapter(s), engage them in discussions about the theoretical and pedagogical implications of the major issues, and ask them to design relevant instructional activities that incorporate the strategy or concept. After a few weeks when the expectation was clearly understood, I began to ask individual students to sign up for a chapter of his or her choice to play an instructor's role. A few brave students would respond, having 10 to 30 minutes to explain and/or provide relevant activities to help others better comprehend the material.

Before and after such a student-facilitated learning session, I would add my ideas on the content, sometimes offering additional information and sometimes raising further questions that were not addressed during the previous presentation. Students reported to me that the peer-led sessions and my further instruction helped them develop a deeper understanding of the content.

To my own surprise, less teaching by me implies more learning by my students.

Phase IV: Transactional presentation
The last phase seems a natural extension of the third one. After I discovered that some students were preoccupied in synthesizing and presenting the key information from the chapters for which they signed up, I now require a presenter to move beyond just synthesizing information by involving the class community as much as possible. The presenter needs to facilitate class discussions in the midst of presentation, which I call “transactional presentation.” I also explain concepts such as monologue, self-analysis methods for classroom discourse, and dialogic interaction, in order to help each presenter better understand the multiple layers of intellectual wrestling over an important concept or strategy. In other words, a presentation is not just for thorough representation of the textual information; it is also for involving the class community in grappling with the materials and constructing new understandings of them.

Interestingly, when my students are busily engaged in presentations and discussions, my critical role as a teacher is not diminished from these learning scenes. Instead of directly controlling the classroom discourse, I find myself asking critical questions to deepen or broaden their thinking or sharing my ideas during each presentation. Additionally, I give a brief introduction to frame a given presentation within a larger curricular context. I also make suggestions about where the student did well, and what areas may require further attention.

Discussion
The above descriptions show my pedagogical transformation resulting from my exploration for effective pedagogy to engage the class community. Understandably, the four major phases of change are not linear, and there is certain overlapping among them. Nevertheless, the procedures for implementing the “transactional presentation” model with which I have experimented are worth noting. Firstly, invite individual students to sign up for a given chapter(s) of the required textbook. The student who signs up for the chapter(s) needs to synthesize the key information in an overview and lead the class discussion. Secondly, ask all students to read the assigned chapter(s) critically, and they need to prepare questions and examples related to the content. Thirdly, the presenter may share the key information, engage the class to wrestle with key concepts and strategies by using a variety of discussion methods, including whole class, small group, or online discussion board. At any moment, a question from the class community may pop up, and the presentation may turn into a heated discussion involving everyone or a mini-lecture by the prepared presenter.

This model of transactional presentation has important pedagogical implications. On the one hand, my
students are noticeably more motivated to read the assigned reading, bring substantive issues to the in-class discussions, and are thus drawn into the learning process as they wrestle with and act on the course content more actively. On the other hand, my role to teach and guide is not diminishing; in these peer-directed presentations and discussions, the educator’s role just shifts to a more facilitating one (Applebee, 2003; Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). For example, prior to a transactional presentation, I often give some concise overview of the content, in connection with the larger curricular issues, trying to frame the ensuing presentation and discussion. During each collaborative presentation, I listen to the information presented, ask questions, and participate equally in the discussions and learning activities, just as other peers do. Following each transactional presentation, I provide a debriefing or summary of the discussions, sometimes with more relevant information or learning activities. Occasionally, I also accept invitations to team up with more quiet students or those from diverse backgrounds to prepare and co-present the information and engage the class in substantive discussions. In my experience, these measures are useful to encourage the class community to bring personal experience and prior experience to question, confirm, elaborate, and extend the content of my courses. As this model integrates the educator’s responsibility to teach and the student’s creative engagement with the academic content, it helps my American students better comprehend and learn the course materials.

This research also has implications for other educators who come from non-native cultural, educational or linguistic backgrounds and who are similarly going through difficult periods of adjustment and transformation. On my pedagogical journey, I have learned to employ discussion as an instructional tool in response to my American students’ learning and participation styles and preferences. However, considering that faculty members who come from non-mainstream backgrounds make up 16.5%, or 109,964 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007), perhaps they do not have to abandon their prior educational cultural perspectives in order to fit in a mainstream classroom. After all, our students should be exposed to diverse educational perspectives and practices in order to broaden the spectrum of their learning experience. Clearly, if our dinner table is made more colorful because of all the dishes originated from different ethnic and cultural groups and geographic regions, then educators from diverse backgrounds may similarly contribute to our collective profession, and the American educational enterprise may be enriched by the unparalleled diversity in our society.

In light of this thought, I plan to further explore the potential of integrating useful elements in Chinese and American education during the next stage of my action research. One area that intrigues me is how Chinese pedagogical practices emphasize teacher-directed instruction, strict discipline, meaningful memorization, and careful listening, and how Chinese students often turn out to have a good command of foundational knowledge in their coursework (Ma, 2010; Watkins & Biggs, 1997). In contrast, the dialogic practices in an American classroom offer more opportunities for personal exploration and active engagement with the learning process (Applebee et al., 2003; Ma, 2008). Given these differences, perhaps I can draw on complimentary Chinese thinking and practices to enrich my current students’ learning experience, especially in terms of cultivating their attitudes and skills for remembering essential information and reflective listening. Their prospective students, in turn, may benefit more.

In a real sense, this research has generated more questions than its answers. I have journeyed from searching for an appropriate instructional approach for my methods classes, to examining the effectiveness of my teaching, to reflecting on my underlying epistemological transformation. Treading into some of the unplanned domains, I have come to realize that a willingness to search external data critically, as well as to look hard internally, is truly imperative for reflective action research. My lived experience has taught me that as educators, we need to critically reflect on and expand our thinking and practices to better respond to our students’ learning needs in the new socio-cultural realities in which we teach and live.

Finally, while this research provides important evidence about my pedagogical journey, some limitations must be acknowledged. For example, I have not systematically gathered the student discussion data and analyzed them since so far I focus primarily on looking at my own transitional moves. Yet my teaching and my students’ learning cannot, and should not, be viewed separate from each other. Moreover, as I continue with my exploration, I realize that the specific content of my courses and my concrete instructional practices should be examined together. Lastly, now that I have passed the initial “fit-in and survival mode” as a new non-native educator, I need to sustain my own professional development and to diversify my students’ learning experience by drawing more strategically on my unique educational and cultural strengths. All these issues require further exploration in future research.

References


The effect of nursery rhymes on EFL children’s reading ability

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According to certain misconceptions about language learning, some language learners still think that the ultimate goal of language learning is to master language rules to meet exam requirements. Such misconceptions have prevented many students from looking at language as a life-long educational endeavor. In order to overcome such misconceptions, students have to be provided with frameworks to help them have an emotional engagement with language and to nourish their capacity for using language imaginatively and expressively. As nursery rhymes are connected to an imaginary world, it would definitely be beneficial to include them in the language instruction curriculum.

The use of nursery rhymes with young children promotes language acquisition. In most second language classrooms when children sing nursery rhymes they become emotionally engaged with the language, which in turn nourishes their capacity for the creative and expressive use of that language. Specifically, nursery rhymes can also lead to different classroom activities that call for the exchange of feelings and opinions. Such activities can trigger various response potential in children (Lazar, 1993). When children find the activities and the context they are engaged in absorbing, they enjoy the risk of getting involved with the target language.

Therefore, we realize the beneficial effect of using nursery rhymes in our language classes as a means of enhancing the language learning of children. Various studies demonstrate that introducing nursery rhymes to children can be a useful way to help them improve their language skills. When children listen to their favorite nursery rhymes, sing them with joy, and also participate in related activities—all these can definitely facilitate and support the development of their language skills.

One of the reasons for using nursery rhymes is that children find them motivating and fun. Nursery rhymes can help them develop positive attitudes towards the target language and language learning. Children can create a desire to continue learning. Wright (1995) argues that “… the children want to find meaning in the songs and stories they hear, so they listen with a purpose. If they find meaning, they are rewarded though their ability to understand the foreign language. If they do not understand they are motivated to try to improve their ability to understand” (p. 4).

Another reason is that using nursery rhymes creates a possibility for children to internalize the language and reinforce points previously learned. “When people learn their native language, they are not taught the rules of grammar and the meaning of words, they work out how the language works from what they hear… and so internalize or construct mentally their knowledge of language…” (Hill, 1996, p. 7).

Foreign learners must have a large body of authentic and understandable material to work on. Krashen (1985) calls it “comprehensible input” and believes that an exposure to large amounts of authentic materials will, moreover, reinforce what the students have previously studied as an academic exercise. Making children work with interesting songs as authentic materials is exposing them to comprehensible input. For example, children enjoy listening to nursery rhymes over and over again. This frequent repetition allows certain language items to be acquired while others are overtly reinforced.

Children can also improve aspects of phonetics such as sounds and stress through nursery rhymes which will help them in different language skills, especially their reading ability. The reason is that through songs children get familiar with different sound patterns in a rich context and using pictures and contexts are clues...
to help them with decoding unfamiliar words. So, it is common that the use of familiar rhymes and songs that contain repetitions and predictable elements, support children's early efforts to associate meaning with printed words and their successful reading (Manzo, 1995).

In this article we will argue in favor of the effect of using nursery rhymes in enhancing the reading ability of children in language classes. We will also demonstrate that there are strong links between children's early knowledge of nursery rhymes and their development in phonological skills. Since such skills are known to be related to children's success in learning to read, it could be hypothesized that acquaintance with nursery rhymes would also have positive effects on children's reading.

**Review of literature**

When asked to recall childhood memories, we would probably be reminded of the wonderful nursery rhymes we were able to recite long before we could read or write. These rhymes have stayed with us and many others around the world for years. We have inherited them and will continue to pass them on to future generations.

It was due to the lack of written material, and more importantly the lack of education for the working class that the rhymes which we now refer to as nursery rhymes were passed on by word of mouth. Despite the emergence of rhyme, an interest in the "unappreciated trifles of the nursery" did not appear until the 1700's (Eckenstein, 1906). It was not until this time that publishers began to document the songs found in the nursery and put them into print for those who were able to afford their enjoyment.

The deep and long history of these songs indicates the main reason for their existence in entertaining readers and especially children who memorized them for fun. But nowadays research shows that nursery rhymes have much more to offer than just an entertaining value. Related studies indicate how important it is to surround young children with many and different language and literacy experiences and rhymes can be one of these experiences, which help boost children's language development and lay the foundation for them to learn different language skills.

Clearly, nursery rhymes are an effective way to encourage language development. They are helpful in scaffolding the various sounds in a language in order to help children make the connection between sounds and meaning. Children learn the form of a language through the rhymes and patterns that they can repeat. Nursery songs are very rhythmic, have rhyming words, have a simple form, and may tell a simple story. Nursery rhymes are made up of words put together in a somewhat meaningful string, so that the patterns in the sentences help children develop and remember the oral language first, and later develop other skills such as reading. Therefore, children like hearing rhymes and songs repeatedly because it reaffirms their newly learned skills of language.

The primary effects of rhymes is on the development of the phonetic system known as **phonological awareness**, which is basic in developing and improving children's reading skills. Phonological awareness is the understanding that oral language can be broken up into individual words, words into syllables, and syllables into individual sounds or phonemes (Bradley & Bryant, 1983; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). In an English alphabetic system, the individual letters on the page are abstract and meaningless for children at the first sight. They only become comprehensible when the letters are eventually linked to equally abstract sounds (phonemes), blended together, and pronounced as words, where meaning is finally realized. To learn to read English, the child must figure out the relationship between sounds and letters (Lyon, 1998). The would-be reader must understand that speech can be segmented or broken into small sounds (phoneme awareness) and that the segmented units of speech can be represented by printed forms. This understanding that written spellings systematically represent the phonemes of spoken words (termed the alphabetic principle) is absolutely necessary for the development of accurate and rapid word reading skills (Lyon, 1998).

Children's phonological awareness can be developed through the use of poetry, nursery rhymes, rhyming, alliteration and rhythmic activities, which can lead to the improvement of reading. This is also claimed by Strickland and Schickedanz's (2004) words about the beneficial effect of using rhymes for the reading development in children: “A rhyme’s repetition can sensitize the children to the individual units of sound, known as phonemes, which make up words. Having developed sensitivity to language, children are ready to think about the sequence of sounds in a whole word, a skill that is crucial for learning to read” (p.19).

Bradley & Bryant (1985) believe that using nursery rhymes has a direct effect on the child’s reading ability. They contend that dealing with nursery rhymes as a meaningful fun activity for children would help them build their awareness of sound patterns of language and combine the phonemes which would lead them to the recognition of new words in written texts. As a result, their reading ability is also improved.

Some researchers suggest that the roots of phonemic awareness, as a powerful predictor of later reading success, are found in traditional rhyming and word games (Bryant, MacLean, Bradley, & Crossland, 1997). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2008) points out that children would definitely learn the sounds of the language through exposure to games, nursery rhymes and rhythmic activities. In a study reported by NAEYC, researchers found that 5- to 7-year-old children's
knowledge of nursery rhymes specifically related to their more abstract phonological awareness. Researchers further acknowledge that engaging children in the choral reading of rhymes allows them to associate sounds with written symbols, thus paving the way for their successful reading (MacLean, Bryant, & Bradley, 1987).

Another study by Ehri & Robbins (1992) indicates similar results related to increasing the phonemic knowledge of children through nursery rhymes that leads to reading success. They reported that children who are phonemically aware can think about and manipulate sounds in words. Children know when words do or do not rhyme. They also know when words begin or end with the same sound. They recognize that a word like /c/ /a/ /t/ is composed of three sounds and these sounds can be blended into a word. As children get familiar with the word and its sound patterns in this way, they would be able to pronounce and read the word in any written text.

The ability to recite nursery rhymes has also been found to be one of the best indicators of future reading success. Through reciting a nursery rhyme, the rhymes become more familiar to children, and are easier for them to learn and understand. Working on a particular rhyme and providing opportunities for children to use it repeatedly would help them remember the rhyme and the words related to it. For example, the rhyme /at/ in fat and cat would familiarize children with its sound pattern and use in other words. Thus, they would more likely be able to recognize this particular rhyme in written texts and would have fewer problems in reading the words with the same rhyme, as they have worked on it before, through a song.

Research in the field of early childhood development and reading has shown that children who struggle to recognize words that rhyme often have difficulty in learning to read (Lyon, 1998). Hence we realize the importance of familiarizing children with rhymes through certain songs in order to develop their reading ability.

The study:

**Nursery rhymes and children as readers**
The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of using nursery rhymes on teaching sounds to second language learners of English and their ability to read. We selected 20 beginning learners, aged 7 to 9, in Primer 2 (which means they were at the very first steps of learning English) at the Iran Language Institute (ILI), divided into two groups—control and experimental. Altogether, the courses at the children’s department consist of 14 terms called: PRIMER, STEP, MOVE, and JUMP; the first two terms are called Primer 1 and Primer 2, followed by 4 terms in each mentioned level, that is Step 1, Step 2, Step 3, Step 4 and the same 4 terms for other levels, too. The participants had learned the alphabet completely with the short sounds for each letter in the first term and in Primer 2, they dealt with the long vowel sounds, for example, long “a” (/a/) and long “e” (/e/).

In the control group, the children were taught the two sounds of letter “a” (/a/, /æ/) using a traditional approach, which was teaching sounds in isolation. Thus they were explicitly taught that the letter has two different sounds and various examples were provided for them to become familiar with the two new sounds. They also practiced by using words with these sounds. For example, the pictures of words with the target sounds were put on the board and after the teacher’s modeling the children were asked to read them chorally and individually several times.

In the experimental group, the children were taught the sounds of the same letter using nursery rhymes. By practicing the nursery rhyme several times, the children became familiar with the target words and their sound patterns. Pictures were also provided for the rhyming words in order to make the children focus on them. To provide the right input for the experimental group, we had to find suitable nursery rhymes. Considering the proficiency level of the students and their age, we did not have access to a large body of resources. Besides, we couldn’t use just any nursery rhyme since we needed nursery rhymes that contained examples of the target vowel sounds.

Once we identified an appropriate nursery rhyme, some pictures were provided related to the main character of the song and its events to ensure that the children would become familiar with the context of the nursery rhyme completely. To illustrate, Figure 1 reinforces for the children the nursery rhyme:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,
All the king’s horses and all the king’s men,
Couldn’t put Humpty together again.

Figure 1.
Humpty Dumpty
The other words included in the nursery rhyme were those that students had learned in their previous term, for example, they already knew the meaning of words such as horse or king. Thus, they did not have difficulty in understanding the meaning and context of the poem.

The children practiced the nursery rhyme for two weeks. During this period, they heard the poem repeatedly. They listened to the poem only at the beginning sessions. Then, in the following sessions they practiced it through some oral activities. For example, the nursery rhyme was played for them chunk by chunk and they repeated the lines after each chunk. The purpose was to help them remember the sound patterns and rhymes of the poem. Finally, the children wanted to recite the lines of the poem, especially the target rhyming words which they were asked to read several times, and they enjoyed singing the nursery rhyme together and acting it out, which added to the fun of the whole activity.

The participants' reading ability after the treatment was measured through an oral test that we constructed. In this oral test the participants were asked to read a number of target words and attention was given to their ability to recognize and produce the appropriate sound patterns in the words. The words included either of the two sounds, which were taught to the participants. Each word read accurately scored one point.

What we learned
In this study we asked the question: “Which of the two methods of sound teaching—the use of nursery rhymes or the traditional sound approach is more effective to promote the ability to read words among EFL children?”

The oral test results based on the correct or incorrect reading of the target words had a high reliability of 0.91. (See Table 1.)

The results of this study support earlier research, which acknowledges the positive role of nursery rhymes in enhancing children's reading ability. These findings also agree with Snow, Burns and Griffin's (1998) claim that some children learn by exposure to sound patterns through word play or nursery rhymes; other children may require more explicit instruction. Children who do well on sound-awareness tasks such as nursery rhymes are better readers than their peers who struggle with those tasks.

This belief is reinforced by Clay's (2001) statement that “children who have worked with nursery rhymes become better readers because they develop an early sensitivity to the sounds of language as they have learnt to think their way through a word, sound by sound, in the order in which they hear it. This ability known as phonemic segmentation is the best predictor of future reading success” (p. 76).

In this study we noted that using the nursery rhymes was most beneficial to children particularly those who are learning English as a foreign language.

Teaching the sounds of the alphabet to children who are learning English as a foreign language has always occupied a major place in language pedagogy and as research has indicated, plays a great role in improving their skills such as pronunciation, speaking, and reading. One of the options in teaching sounds is through the traditional, direct and oral approach. The other option is to provide children with various opportunities to be immersed in the delight of simple nursery rhymes and at the same time learning the sounds of the language.

We propose that nursery rhymes would be interesting materials to teach English to young learners since they provide a large body of input and make children interested in foreign language learning. This is in line with Tomlinson's (2005) argument that materials designed for young learners should make use of nursery rhymes in the classroom.

### Table 1.
Descriptive statistics on posttests of experimental and control groups

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<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
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<tr>
<td>Post-test of G1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test of G2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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In order to analyze the scores, the independent samples t-test was carried out, and the results showed that the experimental group, which was exposed to the nursery rhymes, outperformed the control group, t(18)=2.03, p=.001. (See Figure 2.) Thus, it can be concluded that the children introduced to nursery rhymes did better on reading the target words than those children who were taught using the traditional approach. There is a significant difference in the reading ability between the children taught through the use of nursery rhymes and those who were not.
of children’s love of songs and rhymes to expose them to language in use and benefit from informal implicit learning rather than formal explicit teaching.

As seen in this study, using nursery rhymes in teaching sounds to beginning learners of English achieved the desired effect on the improvement of their reading ability.

References


Response to literature and creating worlds from words: Armchair travelers and artifacts of journeys in images and connections

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When we talked about the theme for this issue of the journal we wanted to explore children's response to literature examining the scholarship related to analyzing and selecting books and teachers' experiences with young readers. We wondered how scholars and teachers viewed the social and cultural shifts in reading that have been influenced by increasing access to technology and media and changing priorities in school reading programs. In this collection of books we have found both a wealth of practices that brings books and children together and powerful arguments for the role of literature in the lives of children in and out of the classroom, connecting family, friends, and classroom with home and school.

A number of the books present perspectives that the journal's readers can think about as they expand their understanding of children's and young adult literature, such as the combination of literature and literacy in Lehman's book, *Children's Literature and Learning: Literary Study Across the Curriculum*, the close observations of children's responses to picture books in Sipe's *Storytime: Young Children's Literary Understanding in the Classroom*, and the examination of ourselves as readers as well as the books we select in Botelho and Rudman's book, *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children's Literature: Mirrors, Windows, and Doors*. Chapters in Hadaway's and McKenna's *Breaking Boundaries with Global Literature: Celebrating Diversity in K-12 Classrooms* and Wooten and Cullinan's *Children's Literature in the Reading Program: An Invitation to Read* challenge how we look at the genres of children's literature and the world of publishing. One quality that weaves through many of the books, exemplified in Vasquez's *Getting Beyond "I like the book:" Creating Space for Critical Literacy in K-6 Classrooms* is the central place of the child, the reader, and the relationship between children, the adults in their lives, the authors of the books they read, and the characters and stories of the books children and adults share. All the books in this
collection show readers of the journal how to enrich the learning and lives of young people while supporting their engagement with books and with the world.


In this highly readable book Lehman focuses on building support for using “good books throughout the curriculum to make good readers” (p. 26). In achieving this goal the author argues that sharing quality children’s books with children from pre-kindergarten to sixth grade and older “offers many benefits to not only literacy skill development but literary development” (p. 46). The book focuses on just that, connecting quality literature with literacy and literary skill development and is divided into eight chapters. The content of the chapters explore a range of topics including literary theory, instructional methods, classroom environment, and the role of the teacher. Of particular note is Lehman’s discussion of the role literary criticism has when talking about children’s books and its role in engaging children in talking about books as she questions the dichotomy between literary and literacy development. Drawing upon theoretical knowledge and her literacy teaching experience, Lehman argues that the separation between literary and literacy development is counterproductive. The two should be taught concurrently rather than exclusively. To support the argument Lehman presents an array of ideas and learning experiences that simultaneously promote literacy skills and nurture reading for pleasure.

The greatest strength of this book are the pedagogical practices that infuse skills instruction with children’s literature while also fostering literary knowledge development. The author features 149 children’s picture books and novels, some featured individually and others presented as a collection of books. In both cases the books are highlighted in connection to a variety of learning experiences. The specific teaching ideas and methods discussed take two directions. One path is “enhancing literary development through literacy instruction” (p. 47) which includes sense of story, story language, prior literary knowledge, characterization, and themes. The other path centers on the “contribution of literature to literacy development” (p. 52) with specific attention to oral language, concepts of print, alphabetic knowledge, phonological and phonemic awareness, orthography, visual discrimination, and writing. The two directions work in tandem to provide a useful guide for classroom teachers interested in creating a quality literacy program.

Lehman argues that pedagogical practices such as read alouds, book talks, and literature circles are essential to building a link between literature, children, and literacy skill development. One teaching idea for upper elementary students helps them recognize universal themes and understand story structure by reviewing stories with which they are familiar. Lehman gives an example in reading *Holes* by Louis Sachar (1998), considered a modern fairy tale, during which students examine how stories “deal with human nature, the sometimes harsh realities of life, and the struggle between good and evil” (p. 31) that nonetheless can have happy endings. Using their prior knowledge of fairy tales, “students can generate a list of characteristics of fairy tales, then an analogous list of the characteristics of *Holes*, and compare the two” (p. 31). The objective of such a lesson is to encourage students to “use comparison to draw conclusions about the nature and purpose of fairy tales and the role of modern stories in this tradition” (p. 31). Such a lesson serves to foster the construction of literary connections and knowledge of literature.

Woven throughout the discussion of theory, the presentation of classroom research, and the many practical teaching ideas is the author’s passion for children’s literature and creating life long readers. After reading this book, I am eager to place books in the hands of children and share literature and lesson ideas with future teachers in an effort to make literature and literacy programs come alive. The emphasis on children’s literature and its role in the classroom makes this book a valuable resource for content area reading courses and for pre-service and in-service teachers interested in creating a literacy program that builds reading skills and love of reading. The back matter includes a glossary of literary terms and an annotated list of the children’s books cited with interest/grade level and brief synopsis of each book.


Wooten and Cullinan invite teachers and pre-service teachers to consider children’s literature titles and accompanying teaching ideas. Page after page the chapters they have edited illustrate their hope is to promote reading and a love of literature among all students. Specifically, this book is designed to “identify children’s and young adult books, promote critical thinking, cultivate deeper understanding of text, and create better understanding of and appreciation for diversity” (p. xviii). This book is divided into three sections. The variety of genres is discussed in the first section and section two focuses on the roles of children’s literature in the classroom. Reaching beyond the classroom walls to support literacy, specifically
with librarians and parents, is the emphasis of the third section. Each section is a treasure trove of teaching ideas with children’s literature titles designed to meet the book’s purpose. Contributing authors share personal experiences with classroom vignettes and offer words of encouragement.

As a teacher of children’s literature, I was immediately drawn to the genre studies highlighted in the first section and the books mentioned for their visual design, newer formats, and refreshing discussions. Picture books, poetry, series books, multicultural and international literature, and those of a newer genre, graphic novels and postmodern picture books are discussed and accompanying teaching ideas, many of which are research-based, are integrated into each chapter of the section. For instance, *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001) “holds great potential for teaching students to make inferences (p. 33),” when a teacher asks students to their background knowledge, the illustrations, and the text to make inferences about the story. I have noticed students infer meaning in this book with its nontraditional story structure.

Although often overlooked in a literacy curriculum, poetry develops students’ vocabulary, imagery, and fluency. When a teacher “gives students a chance to write poems about favorite topics that they have been studying, all three elements [of writing]—knowledge, love, and ideas of subject—merge into one creative writing experience” (p. 52). At the beginning of his chapter, author and poet David Harrison notes that “the purpose of poetry is to contribute to man’s happiness” and can “stir the human spirit” (p. 45). He introduces a teaching idea called “Friday Fishbowl” in which students and write titles of poems they wish to recite on pieces of paper shaped as fish. They drop the suggestions into the classroom’s fishbowl and each Friday fish are drawn and students present their poems to the class. The section includes other resources that providing students opportunities to write poems of their own, such as *Easy Poetry Lessons That Dazzle and Delight* (Harrison & Cullinan, 1999). Additional poetry books, such as *Sounds of Rain: Poems of the Amazon* (Harrison, 2006) and *Sidewalk Chalk: Poems of the City* (Weatherford, 2001) create the opportunity for teachers to use poetry in content area learning while celebrating diversity.

Contributing authors provide glimpses into classrooms where teachers use children’s literature implementing literature-based teaching, developing comprehension strategies, using mentor text to inspire students’ writing, and selecting content area children’s and young adult literature to enhance learning, even when they have mandated scripted materials. For example, Liang and Galda focus on comprehension strategy instruction. Because “research on comprehension strategy instruction has indicated that one of the most effective ways to teach strategies is through a direct explanation method” (p. 100), the authors provide procedures for sharing *Because of Winn Dixie* (DiCamillo, 2000) and *The Snowy Day* (Keats, 1962) to teach students how to make predictions. Other chapters offer valuable information for sharing books as models for writing in social studies, science, and language arts. *My Great-Aunt Arizona* (Houston, 1992) is one such book providing a wonderful “example of biography for mini lessons and genre study—perhaps inspiring young writers to collect family histories of their own” (p. 136). The authors have included a table presenting the many possibilities of books from the Children’s Choices and Teachers’ Choices Booklists in the content areas.

Reaching beyond the classroom walls, the focus of the third section, includes an invitation to librarians and parents to add to students’ literacy development by “collaboratively planning with librarians ensures that classroom content is reinforced throughout the library lessons” (p. 145). The chapter emphasizes the establishment of home-school connections and the role of children’s literature, including books about families and grandparents, has in cultivating those connections. “The more children and their families see themselves and their situations in the books they read, the more they can see the relevance and importance of literature in their lives” (p. 156). True to the editors’ purpose this book shares quality books, inspires teachers and pre-service teachers to expand their knowledge and use of children’s literature, and deepens appreciation for diversity. One criticism of the chapter on poetry is that in exploring the kinds of poems students like, the authors cite a 1974 study highlighting children’s poetry preferences. While interesting to read a study conducted thirty-six years ago is outdated. The figures that accompany the chapters in the section are small for all the teaching charts and classroom snapshots they contain.

As the title suggests, it is an invitation to read reminding teachers “… perhaps it is we who teach, we who are closest to the readers, who have the most responsibility to hang on to the presence and ensure the quality of books in classrooms” (p. 85). May this always be so.


Critical literacy advocate Vasquez has taken a good book incorporating critical literacy in the elementary classroom and made it even better in this second edition. After first explaining what critical literacy is, the author proceeds to share a series of classroom vignettes featuring students and their teachers as they engage in
critical conversations about issues that matter to them. Critical literacy advocates argue that texts are never neutral, but are socially constructed, and the perspectives students bring to their talk about books are important. Adherents of critical literacy, a term not easily defined, are concerned with understanding the points of view from which texts are told and challenging assumptions of the book and the author while working for change. More than a set of skills to be mastered, literacy is, by nature, social and occurs during interactions with books and with others and critical literacy provides spaces for students “to imagine how existing social practices could be otherwise” (p. 103). The point of critical literacy, discussing various issues from different perspectives, is to examine topics in ways that encourage students to take action in response to their reading.

Teachers will find this text easy to understand because the author has filled it with lively classroom examples from kindergarten through sixth grade and has blended the theoretical underpinnings of pedagogy throughout its pages. Books, as Vasquez reminds us, “...are useful as tools to do critical literacy work only insofar as they can be vehicles for discussing issues of power and control” (p. 19). The topics the students explore with Vasquez and her colleagues vary widely, from marginalization, gender, and racism to weather and school policies on field trips, yet all topics encourage students to take action of some sort. Although much of the material from the first edition is included, this book is fresh and new, brimming with ways to incorporate literacy practices. The second edition adds three new critical literacy chapters that focus on science, social studies, and new technologies and social media. Each chapter includes classroom dialogue and examples of student work. The classroom anecdotes show the use of such materials as posters, films, advertisements, and podcasts. The list of children's books, useful in initiating critical conversations, has been updated, an important concern when teachers are selecting new books.

While the first chapter establishes a context for critical literacy and points out that critical literacy provides perspectives in how children's literature is shared with children, the preponderance of the book highlights classroom experiences. One chapter shows classroom events in which students talk about books to analyze social issues in the community and explore social issues by bringing the outside world into the classroom. In other chapters students study the “what if” and “why” in mathematical investigations and the weather in the Science Curriculum. They re-examine a national holiday, Arbor Day, and the social studies curriculum, and investigate new technologies with “A Podcast Is Born.”

Vasquez discusses the challenge teachers and students encounter as they explore issues they considered important. Reflection questions at the end of each chapter prompt teachers to consider how they might find a space for critical literacy in their own classrooms. For instance, Vasquez suggests that teachers consider how specific cultures are depicted in the literature used in their classrooms after making note of the cultural background of students in the class. The reflection questions encourage teachers to find spaces for critical literacy in their classrooms and encourage them to consider roadblocks to making these changes. By examining the way books and other texts impose their own thinking on a topic is useful to students.

Vasquez never shies away from incidents that do not end successfully. For instance, the efforts of fifth and sixth graders to convince their principal and superintendent that they would learn many mathematical concepts on a field trip to a theme park were ultimately unsuccessful. Despite their failure to change school policy even with evidence from their own research and math investigation journals, Vasquez points out that the students learned about math and how to question existing policies. Even their teacher learned to question the choices he provided to his students. For Vasquez, what matters in today's literacy and content area learning should be affording opportunities for children to raise issues of their own as well as the chance for teachers to reconsider the role that children's literature can play in their classroom.

For teachers having to integrate literature with benchmarks, standards, and test preparation, Vasquez provides specific examples of how critical conversations address content area standards. Text sets with conflicting points of view foster critical literacy and books paired with other texts and technologies foster integration of genre and multi-media. The book's back matter includes a reference list for additional reading and an index.


If the book's cover art by Chris Rashka doesn't draw you into this book, or P. David Pearson's eloquent and pointed treatise detailing exactly who should read this book and why in the book's Foreword, then let Sipe's own words do the convincing. He writes:

Literary understanding is not a matter of being able to parrot back details from the story, or being able to answer a barrage of questions from the teacher, or a test. It's a matter of engaging in literary meaning-making, of passionately interpreting stories with increasing sophistication, cognitive power, and delight. (p.3)

Sipe is a leading researcher in how young children construct their literary understanding through interac-
Sipe’s book is structured in three parts. Part I, on the connection between picture books and literary understanding, begins with a discussion of the definitions of a picture book. Readers who are familiar with the synergistic qualities between text and visual images will recognize the scholars he draws upon yet readers who are new to them will learn why books are referred to as illustrated books, picture books, and postmodern picture books. Sipe encourages readers to closely examine their picture books and emphasizes the importance of not skipping over the dust jacket, cover art, endpages, and other peritextual features. The term peritext, according to Sipe, “refers to any part of a picture storybook, other than the sequence of double-page spreads that contain the verbal text of the story and the accompanying illustrations” (p. 91). He illustrates peritext analysis with a classroom example during which children make predictions about the plot of the story, and the quality of the main character from the examination of the end pages. He challenges readers to ponder what these elements bring to an appreciation of the book, and to speculate upon why readers made these choices. Sipe deftly examines and intertwines perspectives on visual aesthetic, and reader- and text-based theories to create a foundation for interpreting children’s literary responses. The chapters reveal that engaging in these sorts of discussions with children, before, during, and after reading gives children (and their teachers) the discourse to socially construct meaning and in variety of multi-literate responses.

Through his analysis of the research data gathered from field notes, teacher interviews, audiotaped storybook read alouds to whole groups, small groups, and individual children, Sipe categorizes children’s responses into five types: analytical, intertextual, personal, transparent, and performative. He explores each type, defining, describing, and illustrating them and includes excerpts of classroom discussions about books. For instance, in his definition of the transparent response, children talk back to the actions of characters. Sipe characterizes this response as more a moment when the child “has transposed his world on the world of the text” (p. 90) than a response intended for an audience. A response can be one in which the child becomes “one of the story characters and speaks in role” (p. 169). For example, a child speaks as if she were Little Goldilocks pleading for mercy, “Don’t eat me!” at the point in the story when Leola (the Goldilocks figure) is confronted by the irritated bears” (p. 171) in the book *Leola and the Honeybears: An African American Retelling of Goldilocks and the Three Bears* by Melodye Rosales (1999). Sipe notes that the transparent and performative responses, although rare in the data, “represent some of the most interesting and provocative data in my research” (p. 169). Other kinds of response have with indepth descriptions give teachers many examples of children’s talk to think about as they listen to their children’s response to literature in the classroom.

The book is important for anyone who (a) experiences the nagging and unsettling notion that the teachers’ focus on response via summaries, retellings, and teacher-directed questions is causing us to lose the richly textured discussions sparked from children’s wonder and delight, (b) feels the pressure to abandon reading aloud in favor of other literacy instruction, (c) wants to learn how to structure read aloud practices to initiate and scaffold children’s interpretive responses to picture books, and (d) recognizes that a picturebook is an art form. A graduate student, enrolled in a course that is entirely devoted to exploring meaning in the art of picture books, read aloud the opening quote in class one night. A conversation bubbled up that led students to wonder if current literacy practices have narrowed teachers’ vision of what it means to create meaning. Another student summed up the conversation by lamenting, “I think we can’t see the forest for the trees, I mean, I think we might be losing sight of why we want kids to read and its not for some test.” The teachers understood they wanted conversations with children that unified text and image. They wanted to hear children talking about the visual images in picture books with the same level of confidence and clarity as they did of the story.

Through their work with teachers, Ehmann and Gayer realized teachers needed a collection of children’s books that served as mentor texts. The authors argue that guiding mentor texts may be useful in developing children’s responses to literature when used effectively. In this book, the term effectively refers to teaching elements of writing through sharing and reading literature. Ehmann and Gayer have noted that “Time and effort could be saved if teachers had access to an extensive bibliography of children’s books that identified the elements of author’s crafts contained within each book” (p. 2). After choosing children’s titles illustrating the elements from a list such as the ones the authors have included, teachers can show young people how writers include the elements in their work to create a piece of literature.
The book is organized in three sections: the introductory section, Craft Elements, followed by Selected Craft Study Lessons, and finally, Mentor Texts to Demonstrate Craft Elements. In the introductory section, Ehmann and Gayer discuss such elements as alliteration, descriptive language, lists, and hyperbole. They list examples of children’s literature that can be used to demonstrate these elements. In the more engaging section on selected craft study lessons the authors have provided specific activities in pairing children’s literature with the elements. The lessons are detailed enough that when they are included in the classroom students are empowered in their response to literature encouraging their desire to experiment with different writing styles and techniques to become better writers.

Ehmann and Gayer have designed the book so that all of the elements discussed are included in easy-to-read tables with a list of children’s books. One table has children’s books ordered by title, while the other has children’s books listed by author. The tables streamline teachers’ search for children’s books that demonstrate one or more of the elements. Following the tables the authors have created an annotated bibliography for all the books in which they include a summary and examples of craft elements for each book. Although the tables and lessons are tailored for writing workshop, they are practical in reading workshop. Because writing and reading go hand in hand, many of the elements that the book’s readers see in the tables can be discussed and evaluated for children’s books during a reading workshop and, among teachers, during professional study groups. Veteran teachers may be interested in using the tables and annotated bibliography as reminders of children’s books that serve as effective mentor texts and, pre-service and new teachers who may not have experience with children’s literature can use the tables as a guide while introducing the elements to students.

Ehmann and Gayer included additional information and material in their appendices. Appendix A consists of reproducible student recording sheets pertaining to descriptive language, hyperbole, leads, onomatopoeia, and print features and layout. These sheets would be useful in a classroom to help students organize their thoughts while they respond to literature. Appendix B contains additional reading lists: Children’s Books About Writing, and Suggested Professional Readings. The authors have shown how children’s books can be used to demonstrate writing craft elements. They have presented charts that may be beneficial to teachers at any level. Using children’s books as models while teaching writing allows children to connect the scenarios in the books to their own lives, encouraging a rich response. Certainly, the book is a resource for students to explore elements as they read and consider how the reader and the reading are influenced. To gain a better understanding of writing workshop, or to use as a guide, any teacher may be interested in the suggested professional readings that are provided.


Teachers often feel a responsibility to their students to broaden their worldviews and, in turn, extend their capacity for empathy beyond the familiar. Literature has a way of connecting us with our own humanity and evoking empathy for others by strengthening our connections to the world yet, for teachers, keeping up with current children’s literature is often a challenge in light of all that teachers do. Consulting booklists such as the Notable Books for a Global Society (NBGS) helps teachers meet the challenge. Sponsored by the Children’s Literature and Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association, a committee of nine members selects twenty-five books that they believe represents the best of multicultural and global literature published in the United States each year.

In the chapters of their book Hadaway and McKenna have brought together authors who integrate the first ten years of the NBGS book lists into teaching from a perspective of global understanding and suggest ways that teachers can incorporate books into their curricula. From the “call to action” issued in the introduction to its inspirational conclusion, this book offers teachers of any grade level (K- college) a wealth of material to help them transform their curriculum into one that supports cultural understanding and social action.

The book is divided into three parts: Part I is designed to build knowledge of global literature and provide a foundation for the more practical parts to follow and Parts II and III discuss themes that surface in global literature and teaching strategies for sharing and discussing books in the classroom. In Part I Hadaway presents an historical perspective of the terms multicultural and global literature and in the following chapter Freeman, Lehman, and Scharer address publishing trends in international children’s literature, the problems of access to international literature in the United States, cultural authenticity, and the “Americanization” of books originally published in other countries. In their suggesting how teachers can include more international literature in their curricula they suggest professional discussions during which teachers can explore implications of their choices of books and become familiar multicultural books.

The themes of Part II offer many perspectives on topics in literature that influence global understanding,
Giorgis, Mathis, and Bedford identify and discuss traits of strong female characters introduced in the NBGS books. Positive traits such as sense of self, embracing cultural roots, cleverness, the ability to overcome obstacles, the will to survive, and their contributions to society provide perspectives of strong women and girls across cultures and serve to support “a developing sense of identity” (p. 56) for both girls and boys. Readers will find helpful related reader response activities that include poetry, drama and oral history. McGlinn highlights NBGS books that address issues of survival that immigrants faced, finding refuge, breaking ties, and developing new identities when they traveled to the United States. Hadaway and Young analyze recent NBGS books that address language diversity and linguistic identity in the United States. The books they present celebrate the linguistic heritage and honor people’s struggle to learn English and adapt to the cultures of their new home. Response activities include visual displays celebrating language diversity and demonstration in mapping language influence, designed to help students “develop an awareness and understanding of the diversity of languages” (p. 108). Lamme explores NBGS books that explore the lost innocence, family turmoil, separation and survival that literary characters experience in times of war. She draws attention to the resilience that many characters display in their toughness and resistance. Response activities at the end of the chapter offer a range of cross curricular activities such as exploring war and the military in a social studies unit, connecting books with science and nutrition, and creating picture book art.

The chapters in the third part provide strategies for introducing literature that promote global awareness. Angus presents text sets of related books that, while accommodating different reading levels, encourage readers to consider a topic from a variety of perspectives. She includes text sets of folklore presenting the wise and foolish folk hero, the trickster, both animal and human and gives readers a list of Perfect Pairs, two related books with activities that will help readers make intertextual, intercultural, and international connections. Napoli focuses on poetry as she explores ways for readers to “challenge the injustices and navigate the contradictions of their world” (p. 152). She advocates for teachers surveying students’ experiences with poetry, suggests global poetry browsing and personal response to help readers make connections between poems and their lives, and offers suggestions for reading aloud, performance, and drama to invite readers “into the language of the text” (p. 154). Building on a theoretical base of Bloom’s Taxonomy and the work of Louise Rosenblatt McKenna explains a three-stage transformative teaching and learning model, information, integration, and transformation when sharing global literature to promote experiences that will inspire students to become advocates for global understanding and social action.

Each chapter contains a vignette written by a children’s author whose book or books have been featured on the NGBS lists. Authors such as Joseph Bruchac, Chris Crowe, Nikki Grimes, Jane Kurtz, Ben Mikaelson, Suzanne Fisher Staples, Pat Mora, and Janet S. Wong, give insights into the writing process, the personal stories that reveal their own experiences with culture, and their own perspectives on the importance of introducing children to global literature. A companion website (found at http://www.reading.org/General/Publications/Books/bk616.aspx?mode=redirect) contains annotations of books for all ten years of the life of the NBGS lists, sorted by author and illustrator, genre, and cultural representation. Teachers will want to refer to this site often when designing literature study and social studies units.


The title of the book is central to Tatar’s argument that, in an age where people are surrounded by media, when we read, “we fall under the spell of the words but also remain hunters, active seekers of those glittering portals to forbidden and enchanted lands” (p. 27). She pursues an inquiry into how literature lures children into the world of words and “the notion of reading as a process of discovery and explore how that process engages three dominant features: boredom, wonder, and curiosity” (p. 32). In the process she discusses individual authors and their books to illustrate her points, among them, L. Frank Baum’s *Wizard of Oz*, Maurice Sendak’s *In the Night Kitchen*, J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, stories of the Grimm Brothers, Hans Christian Anderson, and C.S. Lewis, Norton Juster’s *The Phantom Tollbooth*, Margaret Wise Brown’s *Goodnight Moon* and E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*. Tatar notes, “I want to reclaim the term enchanted hunters for children, using it to describe what happens to them through the transformative power of the books they read” (p. 27) and illustrates how reading books have influenced children and adults story telling in the extended family became story telling through reading. The book serves as a journey into and through literature and presents sometimes startling, but consistently engaging, explorations into reading, yet she notes in her introduction that observing children’s responses is not always straightforward when the words are few and delayed and expressions appear distracted. Tatar inquires into how and why the social practice of bedtime reading developed and explains that bedtime is an in-between state on the threshold of waking and sleeping, sociability and solitude and notes that children have a hard time making the transition. On the one hand bedtime reading was, and is, an opportunity for bonding, but Tatar notes that parents resorted to harsh measures to get children to bed, sometimes a potion such as a “boiled poppy mixture,” or other cordial, or a warning of the imminence of a monster. “Nineteenth-century parents... invoked the bogeyman, the sandman, and other fiends” (p. 45). She notes literature, such as “All the Pretty Horses,” an American cradle song urging babies to sleep so they do not suffer what happened to the lamb whose eyes were pecked out by bees, and authors, such as Charles Dickens’ account of his memories of nursery reading. On the other hand Tatar notes that adults “are also eager to settle in with [children] and read stories that will help them face down their anxieties in a safe setting and ignite their imaginations” invoking such figures as Wee Willie Winkie and a more benign sandman. Tatar traces the focus on mortality and brushes with death of the period before the nineteenth century and the emphasis on imagination, creativity, and playfulness since the late 1800’s.

Fascinated by story readers transform words into worlds, Tatar argues, and words can be charged with meaning and Tatar refers to C.S. Lewis point that they are “sometimes terrifying and sometimes lovely” (p. 73). She discusses “The Emperor’s New Clothes” which she notes has global currency in part because it enacts innocence speaking truth to power but notes that the tale is memorable not just because words work wonders but because it outlines a strategy for making that happen. Tatar does not use the term critical literacy, but suggests the perspective in her explaining the roles of the different characters in the story.

She argues that adults do not mind a representation of beauty in stories but horror is another matter, and horror has the power to frighten and fascinate. In her discussion of how much horror we want to expose children to and when she discusses a collection of fairy tales and traditional literature and suggests that bedtime reading is an opportunity to process both beauty and horror. Books have what she calls “ignition power,” beauty combined with jolts of horror, and explains that readers are explorers, not passive readers. “We invent
responses to texts in ways detached from the moral, educational, or aesthetic agendas advanced by authors” (p. 89). Readers can be oppositional and rebellious. They invent, interpret, and create new narratives. Tatar presents multiple perspectives to books and stories that are sure to promote a deeper understanding of them making space for responses of children.

The book is a must read for anyone who explores children's literature, yet readers might criticize the book for its generally euro-centric literature with little reference to the literature of other continents and cultures. In the back matter are extensive endnotes that add information to the ideas, information, and sources in the book and an extensive appendix in which Tatar has included recollections of authors of children's and adult literature in which they explain their relationships with books and characters. She notes, “these passages constitute a moving history of childhood reading and remind us that words develop a transformative capacity when they are part of a story and history” (p. 205). Like travelers, readers return with artifacts but instead of the souvenirs they come back with words and images.

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Response to literature: Perspectives, voices, discovery, and identity

Sandip L. Wilson
Husson University, Maine
Laura Dunbar
Belgrade Central School, Maine
Barbara S. Lovley
Fort Kent Elementary School, Maine

In responding to literature readers mine books for events, information, detail that stand out for them, that has connection to their lives, other reading, and their understanding of the world. Writing reviews of books is a similar process. Short of retelling all the information of a nonfiction book and the events of a narrative, certain details of characterization, themes or topics, arguments and illustrative points stand out that capture the quality of the book, in the eyes of one who introduces the book. Teachers experience a response to literature when they share a book talk with students. Not everything in a book is conveyed, and each book talk is different in the focus and details that are shared. Readers add their own response discovering other details when they pick up the book for themselves.

The books in this collection are those that have engaged students, on the one hand, and that address the theme of this issue, on the other. Some of the books include the response to literature as part of their content but other books suggest aspects of response, for instance, response as multiple perspectives. Different readers bring their experience of reading, the world, genres of literature, and their interests to their response to a book. Readers capture such different qualities of a book that someone who has not read the book might think they were talking about different books. As one character noted in a book reviewed, *The Cat Diaries: Secret Writings of the MEOW Society* by Betsy Byars, Betsy Duffey, and Laurie Myers (2010), we discover more about ourselves in our responding to story. Response to literature is an opportunity for individuals to rethink their experiences and lives through a book and articulate new understanding expressed in the voice of each reader. Response stimulates readers to take action or to reconsider actions as individuals in the books here have done, such as Alfie in *Alfie Runs Away* by Kenneth Cadow (2010), Derek in *My Life as a Book* (2010), and Charles Darwin in the biography *Charles Darwin and the Mystery of Mysteries* by Niles Eldredge and Susan Pearson (2010). Readers learn more about themselves and explore their identity as Mina in *My Life with the Lincolns* by Gayle Brandeis (2010), and women working together, in *Sweethearts of Rhythm: The Story of the Greatest All-girl Band in the World* by Marilyn Nelson (2009) have done. Response to literature is not constant but changes and makes a difference in people's understanding as they talk together.


In responding to literature, readers explore different details, characters, courses of action to such a degree,
that sometimes, short of an complete retelling, anyone listening to the response might think he was listening to a different story. Teachers practice a response with students when they rewrite a scene or an ending of a story developing different outcomes than the one in the book. In What If? Seeger creates such a response to a story herself as she tells the narrative of seals at the beach in three different ways. Two of the features consistent in each version are the beach ball on the beach and three seals but what if the one seal did take the ball and go play with it by himself after the other two tossed it too far.

The story is told in the illustrations that express joy, puzzlement, and sadness and the text is included as cues for thinking about each scene in the illustration as Seeger writes, “What if …?/And what if …?/Then what if …?/But then …/Or …” (unpaged) as she tells a different version with the three seals, the ball, the beach, the sea, and the sky. At the beginning of each story, four illustrations on one page open the narrative, followed by a full-page illustration, a series of double-page spreads, and a single full-page illustration with the word “Or…” in the middle of the facing page. The expression of the single seal in two of the stories suggest that the story is not right yet, at least it does not have an ending that makes all of them happy.

Illustrations are in media with the appearance of tempera and gouache and rendered with broad brush strokes, easily seen from a distance during read aloud sessions with a group of students. Although the book is appropriate for younger readers, it serves older readers in how it demonstrates that, like response to literature, stories are constructed in which the author makes decisions, changes her mind, and rethinks the story.

When Alfie suffers the indignity of his mother explains why she is going to give away his favorite shoes, things had gone too far. He proclaims “I am going to run away” (unpaged). At first his mother argues that his shoes are too small for him to wear, but, faced with his determination, she helps him pack offering him water, a flashlight, and then a list of items including snacks of peanut butter and crackers, raisins, and his buddy bear. Among the items are books, one about a bunny, one about a bear, and one about a toad and frog, all his favorites that he cannot do without. Finally, after his mother puts a hug in the bag, but after reading all the books to his bear while camping, he finds his mother’s hug is gone.

The loss of the hug causes him to rethink his choice to in run away and to reconsider what he is going to do with his shoes. Readers may be surprised at the ending. The illustrations are rendered in watercolor and the wide lines of soft graphite. In black and white the illustrations in the end papers include all the things he took with him except his shoes, drawn bright red, the focus in this story of resolve and self-understanding.

Author and illustrator, Daniel Kirk, guides children
into the world of imagination with a mouse named Sam
whose home is the hole in the wall behind the children's
reference books. For the librarian or teacher who is
looking for a book that will inspire discussions about
discovering the possibilities in reading and writing,
this book is the one. Sam sleeps all day and at night
he reads and reads all genres, including cookbooks.
Once Sam is filled with knowledge and satisfied by how
much “his imagination is brimmed over with wonder
and fantasy,” (unpaged) he responds to all the literature
by deciding that he should write his own book. And
then the adventure of how reading can lead to writing
really begins.

As Sam introduces children to what kinds of
books can be found in the library to what makes an
author, children will be engaged with Sam's creativity.
The detailed illustrations are as bright and as lively as
Sam. In one illustration the reader can search for where
Sam is hiding in the bookshelves. A blend of key-hole
and full-bleed illustrations expand from a single page
to a page-and-a-half to double page spreads as though
suggesting Sam's expanding world of experience and
image. A librarian or teacher will duplicate the Meet
the Author activity that will encourage children to tell
and write stories as they haven’s before.

Lies, Brian. (2008). Bats at the library. New York,
978-0-618-99923-1

The bats are bored. But someone left the window open
at the library. In rhyming text and a style that has a sense
of humor Lies tell a story in which the bats float, hang
when they rest, even play a game. And they read. Story
time is just the thing for bats at rest in the evening. The
bats, young and old, flit and fly across the pages as they
respond to the books on the library shelves by acting out
scenes and characters. Lies' book-loving bats shed a new
light on reading in the library in which readers follow
the pages of a book together, adventuring through the
stories and language.

The text, full of adjectives and adverbs that are
matched to engaging illustrations, will take children
and adults on an exploration of how books and libraries
can entertain, enlighten, and enrich their minds' eyes.
The illustrations are full-page bleeds with white text
on the dark enticing night scenes. The book includes a
bibliography on the back flap demonstrating to readers
that fiction includes information and writers of fiction
do research so the characters, settings, and plots of their
stories have accurate details.

Byars, Betsy, Duffey, Betsy, & Myers, Laurie
(2010). Cat diaries: Secret writings of the MEOW
Holt. 80 pp. Gr 2-5. ISBN 9780-80508717-8

The cats in town convene once a year for their meeting
of the Memories Expressed in Our Writing Society
during which each cat reads a memorable story he
or she has written, personal experience of intrigue,
adventure, heroism, to be shared at the convention of
young and old. The book involves much more than the
cats reading their writing in a community of writers, as
one member reminds everyone. The old cat, Sage, says,
“Stories from our ancestors about wisdom in ancient
Egypt, bravery from the pirate cat in the Caribbean,
and adventure from the Gypsy cat are really stories
about all of us” (p. 78). She reflects upon their responses to stories and the meeting. “We’ve seen ourselves in the dreams and weaknesses and humorous looks presented by thoughtful friends” (p. 78). The participants heartily agree as she lists experiences that everyone can understand in dealing with questions about the human world.

Her words add to the insights they have experienced during the meeting in response to the variety of stories, issues with Christmas trees, problem of being abandoned, the discovery of a lost treasure, the work of a library cat, the solution to a theft by a bilingual cat, stories where good will and the wish to help out, or at least explore, make life better. Then, Sage explains, “When we hear stories of others it reminds us of our own story. We celebrate our catness in tales of hunting and adventure and romance” (p. 78). The stories include black and white illustrations interspersed in the text that add humor and detail to the tales.

The book addresses reading and writing and purposes of response. It includes a table of contents which young readers. Appropriate for students second or third grade other students will appreciate the stories each cat tells. They will no doubt associate the experiences with their own experiences of daring and mishap made right and Sage’s argument about reading will prompt discussion.

Derek counts the minutes until school is out for summer vacation and is rapturous about its possibilities until his teacher gives all the students in his class a book list for summer reading. Derek declares in the first line of the book, “I don’t want to read this book” (p. 1), thinking that his summer is ruined by the prospect but his teacher encourages him to read by suggesting he draw the meaning of words he doesn’t know in the margins of his journal yet his resistance to reading biases his observations of his mother whom he watches reading. He says, “If you’re doing this as an example of how much fun reading is, it’s not working” (p. 53) but his mother points out the flaw in this perception. “She closes the book but keeps her finger in the page. ‘Believe it or not, Derek, not everything has to do with you. I have a free hour and just want to relax—do you mind?’” (p. 53).

During one of his escapes from reading in the attic he discovers a newspaper article telling the story of a young girl drowning while saving Derek, when he was two, at
the beach. He needs to find out more and his parents do not want to talk about it.

Through a series of arguments he convinces his parents to take a vacation and to visit the New England beach noted in the newspaper article, yet, only after he learns the truth of the story of his being rescued do the twists and turns and unexpected conflicts and lessons in self-understanding of the novel begin. Written in first person Derek discovers he can visualize what he reads which transforms his relationship to books and he makes flip-o-rama drawings that keep him reading. Printed in sans serif font with wide margins that accommodate the vocabulary words and sketches, the action of the book is fast paced and Derek learns more than he bargained for yet finds out what is more valuable than he realized.


Justin keeps a diary through the year and anguishes over the events at the beginning of school that indicate his life will not go well. He does not get the teacher he wants, his best friend is another class, he gets sent to the principal’s office for an idea for a class them the teacher does not like, and, among others, his parents will not get the family a dog, because they say, he is terrified of dogs. He is terrified of robbers, he argues, and a dog would ensure safety from robbers, but his parents are not persuaded. He does not like group projects and yet has been assigned a group to make a map of a European country.

The first-person narrative lets readers in on Justin's secrets, for example, when he makes a goal when playing soccer his father is jubilant and believes the extra practice makes a difference but Justin tells his diary, “I will never tell him hat I was actually trying to pass the ball to Sam and just aimed it badly so it arced into the goad accidentally” (p. 61). When he wins the position of class representative in the school election readers of this book will wonder what the truth is about Justin, especially since he campaigns for another candidate in his speech yet his opponents are thrilled that he wins and hug him in celebration. He is concerned about his sister while he is, at the same time, envious of pleasure in school a place that makes him anxious each day, yet he discovers he is protective of her at the holiday concert trusting she will not have the experience she had the previous year when she could not sing because “She turned sort of bluish and cried in Mom’s lap the entire time” (p. 78). In his diary he reflects upon the change in himself and finds himself a tiny bit proud of his protective feeling. “It made me realize I am really growing up” (p 79). For an anxious boy he discovers many ways he is growing up through the novel and readers will follow the multiple events as they find he is a likeable character and that maybe they have experienced at least some of the feelings he has. The book has pen and ink drawings through out. Although Justin is in third grade the book is appropriate for older readers.


What would you do if you found out that your third grade teacher wasn't going to be replaced and that you would have to spend the next school year in the fourth grade with your brother? That is what happens to Jessie. The letter from school comes during the last weeks of summer vacation just before school is to start. Jessie and her brother, Evan, respond to the letter by feuding and starting what they come to call the ‘Lemonade War’. Their mother is busy working in her home office. They rob the kitchen of anything that might make a good lemonade-like drink and set up lemonade stands. The chapters are set up so that each begins with an economics term and its definition. The term gives a hint to what is in store for them in the chapter that follows.
Different fonts suggest multiple meanings and important moments and the emphasis on math and business strategies makes the reading fun. Their sales signs, notes on division, and examples of solutions to their problems related to money are educational as well as cool. A great read from start to finish, for intermediate students, the book will not fail to pay off in engaging readers in the exploration of literature.


This nonfiction book, an account told from different perspectives, is similar to response to literature as multiple voices in exploring detail, ideas, and story. The perspectives in this book are the instruments that the Sweethearts of Rhythm in the 1940s band played. Written as rhyming poetry, each section, all of which have titles of songs from the period, recounts a detail of the life and work of members of the ensemble. For example, in the section, “I Can’t Get Started,” two instruments, an accordion and bagpipe, speak. “On our church-to-church fund-raising, tours of the South/for the Piney Woods Country Life School, /we were the instruments who had the most breath, /and we were handled with consummate skill” (unpaged). They go on to explain the historical context of the musicians, “If only the girls had been paid a fair wage; /if only their musicianship had been less confined, /they might not have run away . . ./leaving us behind” (unpaged).

The book includes details about how the women formed the band, their tours, and their musicianship. The alto sax explains, “By the time I was held again I had almost forgotten/that the mystery of breath is concealed in every note” (unpaged). Jerry Pinkney’s illustrations some of which include collage with ticket stubs and snippets of sheet music, are striking in their bright reds, rich, luminous blues, and warm yellows. In the design of the book, instruments’ monologue is on one page with an illustration depicting events to which the instruments refer, for example, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the victory gardens of World War II, Jim Crow practices in the United States, on the other. A number of double-paged illustrations are monochromatic suggesting the sad counterpoint of people serving the war effort yet suffering racism and depicting other events happening contemporaneously with the work of the Sweethearts, yet others are luminous, such as the depictions of the musicians themselves. The book is rich in text and illustration and with the author and illustrator notes will inspire different responses from students at each reading.


Morose that they are not among the popular, cool people
in their school, Lydia and Julie undertake a research project in which they observe the girls and the boys who they consider popular in the hopes of discerning what qualities and actions make people so sought after. The text of the book, printed in two-color handwritten font, introduced on the title page, serves as both their journal of observations and commentary, their notes to one another, and a place for their illustrations of the cool people and depictions of action and setting. Readers are introduced to the fifth-grade characters early in the novel, yet the intrigue of multiple and shifting relationships among them and the multiple subplots that spread out through the pages, a challenge for younger readers, will engage older readers.

When Lydia and Julie emulate the popular girls, starting with Lydia's dying her hair with terrible results inspires classmates to increase their ridicule of her. Julie decides to train in stick fighting, only to find she doesn't like it and suffers the criticism of her mother for not following through with a goal. Yet knitting lessons, talent shows, camping trips, betrayal, compound the story of the girls' relationship. Yet, they develop friendships with unexpected people, learn lessons about who they are, and make unexpected discoveries about their capabilities.

The color illustrations through augment the narrative, demonstrate the girls' observations and research, and include scenes of dialogue. Readers will find that they cannot ignore the lines of hand written text and colored pencil and pen and ink drawings as they follow the events unfolding in and out of school through the perspective of observations and research which becomes a challenge as the girls become more involved in the events they had planned to observe.


The opening pages of this nonfiction book capture the multiple topics that thread through it, the archival record of the building of the railroads in the Eastern U.S. after the Civil War, the tale of John Henry, the steel driving man, and the questions and searches of an historian. Readers open to a full-page photograph of a steam engine. On the facing page is an illustration from a 1943 publication of a version of the folktale. The text with headings and in large font engages the reader in the historian's quest.

In Nelson's describing his detective work as an historian, he shows that history constructed from a variety of sources available, birth certificates, census records, newspapers, postcards, and prison, court, and military records. For example, Nelson explains, “If John Henry really existed, then maybe it was at Big Bend that he hammered steel in a contest against Huntington's steam drills. …To understand how a tunnel is built, you
have to look at it from all sides” (p. 29). Collis Porter Huntington, an entrepreneur from California who, with his three partners, underwrote the construction of the western part of the first transcontinental railroad, made a wager with the State of Virginia that he could build a tunnel through a section of the Alleghenies. Nelson discovers that the tunnel at Big Bend would not have been the tunnel of the song because of the soft nature of the rock.

Nelson is patient in his search for sources and one provided a significant clue to his understanding of the song and the man John Henry yet raises more questions. During different readings students can focus on different aspects of the book, the archival illustrations and photographs, the questions and search of the author/historian, the words of versions of the song and the depiction in literature of John Henry, and the historical events during Reconstruction. More importantly students see that history is a search for information and answers to questions, individuals intrigued by a detail that might go unnoticed, such as a version of a song and folktale, pursue patiently.


When Mina, short for Wilhemina, was six and learned to read she discovered a connection between her reading and her family. She saw her father's initials were A.B.E and the connection between Abe Lincoln and her father was a lasting one. She says, “I'm the one who suggested he name the furniture store Honest Abe's after he inherited it from his uncle David” (p. 3). She made connections between Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln's children and the children in her family establishing the connection for readers when she writes an essay recounting the lives of the Lincoln family. Throughout the novel she thinks about what Lincoln would do as she and her father become involved in the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago in the 1960s when the people focused on fair housing and reforms to renew neighborhoods the city had neglected through racism and political favoritism.

Mina lives in a suburban community called Downers Grove. Her friend Hollister Bergeron is more an adversary as he tries out his bow and arrow with her as a target, by accident he argues, and becomes an unwitting central figure in a violent event, also an accident he argues, as the people’s protests in Chicago become local and include a parade in their community. Compounding Mina's life is her concern for disease and she makes yet more connections to the Lincoln family. “Just because I died of typhoid or malaria when I was Willie [Lincoln's son] didn't mean that's what I'd die from as Mina” (p. 23). She is convinced she has a weak heart and she worries when she says, “My chest had been hurting for a while, a dull ache behind my nipples, like rug burn when it's starting to wear off “ (p. 23). She has other problems. “I had been worried about breast cancer . . . but the book said breast cancer doesn't usually hurt, so I lay in bed and looked up 'chest pain’” (p. 23). Her concerns about her health involve her in a crisis in the novel even as the she and the family are dealing with other problems, a father and mother who become more and more estranged from another, an older sister who falls in love with the summer guest, Thomas, the son of her father's partner in the civil rights work, Carla, for whom her father has growing fondness, and mysterious furniture conventions that Mina and her father attend that are really civil rights meetings, rallies, and marches in Chicago.

The novel is a good companion for biographies about Martin Luther King, Jr. especially those that focus on his work in Chicago, and for other books on the Civil Rights Movement from 1947 into the 1970s. The depiction of the political movement of the period, as Mina describes it, provides a rich context for further study, and the surprising climax is shocking. At the same time readers may be doubtful of the adulation Mina has for President Lincoln and his family, yet will
come to care for her and discover that her life becomes her own as she navigates the family and political crises swirling around her.


Laura and her family are awaiting their carbon cards, the most recent effort of the government to ration energy to the residents of London. Everyone has a ration of carbon uses, driving, taking the bus, using electricity, yet the whole family has ideas of what they want on their wish lists, a new car, ipod, cosmetics, peace and quiet at home, once the temporary period of rationing ends and life can get back to normal. As the story unfolds the members of the disgruntled family change their lives. Father loses his job and builds a garden in the backyard complete with a pig, Larkin. Mother leaves the family because she sees herself as destructive and becomes a member of a women’s action group, Laura’s sister Kim locks herself in her room, and Laura maintains her life at school where she has to “Write an informal personal review of an aspect of your home-life environment in the light of the new carbon-rationing system” (p. 15), reckon with the community bully, Tracy Leader, who negotiates goods for carbon rations, rehearses with her rock band, for which she plays bass, and longs for the attentions of Ravi Datta, whose values conflict with those of his parents.

The novel, written as a year long diary includes email messages between Laura and her cousin, Amy, in Washington, DC, who wants information on what living with carbon rationing is like. Laura is thrifty and at the end of the month gets an electronic message that she has not used all her points so has more for the next month while friends and family are using their ration points up. The government rations electricity so the people of London face multiple blackouts and less and less heat while the weather shifts and rain falls for months during the summer, causing the sewers to fill. In late fall, in a climactic part of the book, the incessant wet weather is compounded by a major storm and a surge, flooding the city, and Laura sets out to help a woman stuck in her car. The novel includes facsimiles of electronic messages, photographs, and maps, and with the many discouraging moments, all the characters introduced are transformed in unexpected ways. The characters and their lives, whether readers like them or not, are engaging and believable, and readers will want to find out what happens to them and their city.


After a unit on Alaska and Alaska’s Iditarod, my students became fascinated with wolves. As a result of their excitement, and our reading Patent’s book, it became one of the most popular books in the classroom library.

In 1872, Yellowstone was declared the world’s first national park, with the intent of only preserving its geologic wonders. People who visited the park were allowed to cut down trees, and hunt the animals. The wolves of Yellowstone were specifically targeted because they preyed on elk and deer that attracted people to the park. By 1926, the wolves were eradicated from Yellowstone. At that time, people weren’t aware of the role that wolves played in the balance of nature of the park. With the disappearance of wolves, coyotes took over the land and with that, the effects trickled down through the food chain.

Each double-page spread contains a sentence of simple text, three or four colored photographs, and a more detailed text, all situated on a black background. The design and format of the text makes this book a perfect buddy reading book for children at different grade levels. The style of language makes the book...
accessible to younger students and the extensive details are appropriate for older readers. The back matter includes a note about the photographs, where to go for more information, and an index. The end pages in the back illustrate a complex food chain with the wolf at the center and a list at the bottom explains where more information on the animals can be found in the book. Students are attracted to the complexity of the relationships between the wolves and wildlife, both plants and animals, and teachers will love the variety of activities for which the book is appropriate. With its engaging style and inspiring content Patent’s book is sure to become a classroom favorite for both the students and the teacher.

_The Wolves are Back_ by Jean Craighead George accompanies this book nicely. She shares the story of ten Canadian wolves brought to Yellowstone where they make a new home. As she moves between past and present in the story, the repetitive lines, “The wolves are back,” and “The wolves were gone,” make this nonfiction book appealing to a younger audience. The books can be used to crosscheck the information about the Yellowstone wolves. Students can read each book and make a list of the nonfiction features found in each one. Then, students can use a Venn diagram to compare how the two different authors chose certain nonfiction features to share the same information.


One of the notable qualities of this biography is the description of Darwin’s early life as a student and the influences of books and mentors. He was influenced by the discussions his grandfathers, Josiah Wedgwood and Erasmus Darwin, learned men and friends, his father and mother, the books on geology by Lyell, books on the birds of North America illustrated by Audobon, and the book on Zoology written by his grandfather Erasmus. Charles’s reading and talking with mentors influenced his choice of professions. He aimed to be a minister, although his father had hoped he would be a medical doctor, and by the time he joined Captain Fitzroy on the _Beagle_, as the naturalist, he had spent the early years of his life reading, observing, and discussing philosophy and natural history with others dedicated to learning.

Readers will find the book engaging for its discussion of plants and animals that Darwin investigates set against the settings of South America depicted in archival illustrations, some of which were drawn by the ship’s artist. The book includes events that might be unfamiliar to students studying science and Darwin. For example, one chapter devoted to an earthquake in Chile with an archival illustration recounts Darwin’s observations of the resulting volcanic activity corroborating ideas that Lyell had discussed in his book. Students may be familiar with Darwin’s finches from the Galapagos Islands but Darwin did not "see the importance of the little black, brown, and
greenish birds” (p. 75) until long after his trip. He kept
good notes on the origins of each bird and when he
returned home and consulted an ornithologist colleague
he learned that the significance of the differences.

His work and this book show students that scientists
ask questions and puzzle over information they have
gathered in observations to make plausible explanations,
come up with tentative answers, and find new questions,
but the work is intensive and outcomes are not clear.
In reading this book students will be introduced to
scientists who have influenced modern thinking about
the natural world such as botanist John Hooker, who
became Darwin's friend, Alfred Wallace who had ideas
similar to Darwin's, and John Herschel who mapped
planets of Uranus and Saturn and experimented with
color photography, a term he invented.

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Reading and responding in the 21st century

Diane Kern
University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island

As I write this Review of Research in the Classroom column, my local newspaper The Providence Journal, which I read either online and in print daily, has been covering history-making education events here in New England and nationally. Here’s a highlight of some of the news:

- The entire high school faculty and staff at Central Falls High School in Rhode Island is fired after the school superintendent chooses the “turn-around” reform model for this ‘failing school’ (Jordan, 2010).
- President Obama proposes abandoning No Child Left Behind law and plans that by 2020, all students graduating from high school would need to be ready for college or a career (Turner, 2010).
- The American Federation of Teachers Central Falls, RI, Teachers Union, Local 1567, has a full-page message which begins: “Because we are teachers...” and includes a website to visit for more information (American Federation of Teachers, 2010).
- Two columnists share different viewpoints on these issues. Bob Kerr (2010) shares the viewpoints of two Central Falls High School graduates, and Julia Steiny (2010) discusses how tempers may flare as worst performing schools here in Rhode Island and nationally.
- Sports columnist Bill Reynolds (2010) quotes Central Falls High School basketball player Robert Alers, “I want a good education and a good job” (C1). In addition, a video of Rob and his teammates winning the Rhode Island Division III Boys Basketball championship, for the first time in 22 years, appears in the news (Szydiowski, 2010). Coach Brian Crookes is also featured in the video.

Louise Rosenblatt, who I quote to open this column, first advanced reader response theory in the late 1930s in her seminal book Literature as Exploration (1938). Her message—that teachers, like us, can play a crucial role in the educational lives of our students—seems particularly relevant as we read and view the educational news of today.

“I am not under the illusion that the schools alone can change society. However, I can reaffirm the belief uttered so many years ago: We teachers of language and literature have a crucial role to play as educators and citizens.”

Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 297
Transactional theory

Rosenblatt also suggested that teachers must think constantly about the transaction between the reader and the text, which was seen as a revolutionary way to teach literature. In the time when this was written, and perhaps still in some classrooms today, good readers gleaned the right meaning from the literature, which often was the teacher's interpretation. As we now understand, each reader brings a variety of life experiences, background knowledge, cultural influences and context to each reading experience. For example, as I read about the news of the mass firing of teachers in Central Falls, I recall the three years that I worked successfully with the school superintendent. In addition, I remember the exemplary teaching I witnessed as my English language arts middle and high school student teachers worked in this urban district. Middle school language arts teacher in Central Falls and championship winning coach Brian Crookes was a student in my Language Arts Methods seminar, was the opposing coach of my son's high school basketball team, and was my student teacher Alex's cooperating teacher this semester. My transaction with the texts above surely must be different than yours, yet in many way may be the same. Perhaps one of your local schools is 'failing' or a district near you—even your own—is making deep cuts in teaching personnel and student programs during these difficult economic and education times.

Efferent and aesthetic stances

As I did, you might read the article about President Obama's goal to prepare all students for college or a career by 2020 (Turner, 2010) to learn how this law will affect your students and your school. Rosenblatt calls this reading with an efferent stance or reading to gain information. You may have also reacted with pleasure when you viewed the Central Falls High School basketball team's video or filled with tears when you learned that Rob Alers, one of the senior star players, describes his mother as a woman who has struggled all her life, yet doesn't really ask for anything. He then says, "That's where I get it from" (The Providence Journal, March 14, 2010, C3). Rosenblatt calls this reading with an aesthetic stance or reading to gain emotional meaning or connection. All responses to literature occur along this continuum between aesthetic and efferent stances while reading.

Reading in the 21st century

When Rosenblatt first posited her transactional reader response theory, she did not know that today our students would be reading the news both online and in print, as we have done in the opening of this column. Such major cultural changes require us to reexamination how we—our students and ourselves—make meaning when reading a wide variety of texts—videos, columns in a newspaper, books, advertisements, or a news article with hyperlinks. Wayne Booth, author of the foreword in Rosenblatt's most recent edition of Literature as Exploration (1995) states, "Can we hope that some young reader of her [Rosenblatt's] work will take it in, fully, and then be tempted to address its diverse and complex implications for our TV and video generation?" In this column, we turn to three such 'young readers' of reader response theory to gain research-based insight into teaching reader response in 21st century classrooms. In the first study, Donna Sayers Adomat (2009) shares ways to actively engage young readers in stories through drama. Next, Wendy Glenn (2008) addresses ways to engage readers of young adult literature with a critical lens. Last, we'll see how reader response theory intersects with new literacies in a fifth grade classroom (Larson, 2009).

Drama as response to literature

Adomat (2009), an elementary reading specialist, was concerned with the growing emphasis on explicit phonics instruction for primary students who qualified for Title I funded reading support in her district. She wanted the young readers she worked with to not only learn to decode but also to engage in active meaning making. In this study, Adomat shares case study data on two first grade students, who along with 8 other children in her reading classroom, engaged in response to read-alouds through drama.

Nathan was a struggling first grade reader who had trouble learning the correspondence between letters and sounds, according to his kindergarten teacher. He experienced difficulties writing stories and reading common first grade three-letter words. Nathan began to show signs of frustration through avoiding reading situations or pretending to read during silent reading time. In contrast, Nathan loved to be the leader of the class and enjoyed the story dramatizations his teacher had led.

Adomat provided supports for Nathan's graphophonetic needs as well as opportunities to develop his interest in responding to stories. She treated Nathan as 'a competent meaning maker' (p. 630) and through drama provided a "way to approach texts in an imaginative way and create personalized meaning for story before he turned into the kind of disengaged reader who focused only on the words (Wilhelm, 2007)" (Adomat, p. 630). For example, Adomat allowed Nathan to 'take the spotlight' in a drama based activity based on Ouyen (Henkes, 1993), interpret texts with friends, and engage in language play with quality children's literature, such as Thunder Cake (Polacco, 1990). Nathan grew more hopeful and engaged as an early reader.

In the second case study, Adomat describes Tommy as a new student in first grade who was an emergent
reader according to the results of initial screening. He enjoyed the pictures in books and loved to tell his on stories based on the pictures. Tommy was very good at playing the role of a character during response to literature drama activities, and over time, he “easily slipped into dialects, voices, and gestures that are appropriate for the characters” (p. 633). Adomat (2009) suggests that drama not only helps students understand story elements and structure (what Rosenblatt (1995) would call an efferent stance), but also serves students wants and needs, which Adomat calls “personal agency” (p. 633) and is closely related to what Rosenblatt (1995) calls an aesthetic stance. In addition, Tommy as able to unlock his creative potential through dramatizations and helped him to make social connections with his peers in the classroom.

Adomat (2009) argues that classroom teachers today need to provide struggling readers with a wide range of approaches when responding to literature. Artistic reader response activities, such as a drama, provide our Nathans, Tommys and all of our students with an opportunity to learn to love language and literature.

Critical literacy as response to literature
Have you or your students read Gossip Girl (von Ziegesar, 2002) or perhaps watched the television show that you can view through an online video stream? If you have, you know that the story line involves affluent teens, who live in New York City and live a life of conspicuous consumption. Their social interactions and misbehaviors are tracked by the mysterious ‘gossip girl’ through her website gossipgirl.net.

Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional reading theory is certainly relevant as students read such young adult novels; readers will surely bring background knowledge and cultural experiences to the reading of such texts. Although as Glenn (2008) points out, “Literature, as a source of inspiration, wields a double-edged sword. Literature can transmit values that alter the lives of readers (Bowles-Reyer, 1998)” (p. 34). Young adult novels or film, like the Gossip Girl (vonZiegsterg, 2002), require readers to respond beyond the aesthetic an effèrent stance. Teachers must prepare students to view texts with a critical reading stance.

In her literary analysis, Glenn chooses two lenses to view selected young adult literature: 1) Marxist theory and 2) critical literacy. Marxist theorists attempt to analyze literature based on context—economic, class or ideological—to determine the author’s meaning and to understand the social reality of the setting (Appleman, 2000). Regrading the second lens used, Glenn states, “critical literacy aims to disrupt the commonplace, interrogate multiple viewpoints, focus on sociopolitical issues, take action, and promote social justice” (p. 35). Glenn carefully analyzes three young adult novels, Gossip Girl (vonZiegster, 2002), The Insiders (Minter, 2004), and The A-list (Dean, 2003) and provides several implications for classroom practice.

Glenn encourages teachers to help their students engage in textual and cultural critique. To do this, teachers must help students learn to question the dominant culture, such as the lives of teenagers who wear Versace pantsuits, stay at the St. Regis Hotel, earring vintage Chanel and have an eight-digit trust fund, to help them make meaning of and to change society. For example, we could teach The Great Gatsby (F. Scott Fitzgerald, ) in tandem with young adult novels, such as the ones listed above. Glenn provides sample questions to guide students in a critical evaluation of the young adult literature they are reading. For example, teachers might ask students to consider:

• How readers see or don’t see themselves in the characters and worlds described in the book?
• How is power and privilege rewarded in this fictional society?
• What is the author’s intention when writing these novels?
• What is the impact of these texts on readers’ perceptions of self or others?

Glenn (2008) closes with the suggestion that readers must become not only critical readers of texts, but also critical consumers of text, who are empowered by their responses to literature.

New literacies and response to literature
In preparing this column as well as living my day-to-day literate life, I access both online and offline texts for pleasure and to learn. You and your students probably do also. Perhaps your students read more online than you do, through FaceBook, Myspace, AOL, and text messaging. I know this is the case for me, compared to my students! Larson (2009) used Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reader response to provide the theoretical framework for her study of 5th graders’ responses to literature using an online message board. Larson uses two terms Rosenblatt certainly did not use—e-Reading and e-Responding! The researcher had two groups of students spend 15 sessions first reading Bud, Not Buddy (Curtis, 1999) or The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 (Curtis, 1995). In this qualitative study, Larson set out to learn more about how 5th graders responded to reading while using the online message board.

Larson (2009) and her participating teacher, Mrs. Stitt, found that students initiated 5 types of discussion prompts when posting responses to the online message board. These were:

• Experiential prompts—connecting students’ prior knowledge to the text
• Aesthetic prompts—heartfelt and sometimes heated discussions about the feelings elicited by the text
• Cognitive prompts—these prompts, initiated by the students, required peers to use comprehension strategies, such as making predictions or inferences.

• Interpretive prompts—these prompts called for higher-level thinking, such as thinking about the life lessons learned or the moral dilemmas presented in the text.

• Clarification prompts—this type of prompt was initiated when a student was confused or needed clarification for a specific question related to the discussion.

This study has several important implications for practice in our own classrooms. While traditional classrooms, like those in Rosenblatt’s time, tend to require students to determine a fixed set of knowledge about the texts read in class, the use of the message board technology allowed students to discuss their reading, without interruption and actively. Students were asked to create their own discussion prompts, which enhanced students’ ability to generate questions and to motivated students to actively engage in meaningful discussion on the questions they found important. The message board also provided equitable opportunity for students to share responses. This practice ultimately promoted a socially constructed learning environment in which all students became members of a ‘community of learners.’

No illusions, yet hope

The notion that we, as teachers of reading and language arts, can play a crucial role in the education and citizenship of our students is indeed invigorating as Rosenblatt (1995) exclaims in the final chapter of Literature as Exploration. In these times of ‘failing schools,’ high stakes testing, and ever-increasing literacy demands on students, teachers can make a difference in whether or not a student loves to read and to learn. Justyna Szulc, a recent graduate of Central Falls High School—the school you will recall from the opening of this column where all of the teachers were recently fired— is a senior at Boston College who is now looking forward to law school. She tells Bob Kerr (2010), a local reporter, “If not for the teachers at the high school, I would not be where I am now” (p. A7). While we teachers do not have any illusions that schools alone can change society, we have hope, even in these challenging times in the education profession, that teachers can and do make a positive difference in the lives of the children we teach.

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Literature cited


Using podcasts to enrich responses to global children’s literature

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In this age of globalization and increasing diversity in the United States, it is essential that teachers of literacy prepare their students about the world around us (Banks & Banks, 2006; Fernández, 2008; Hall, 2008; Hollingsworth, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Morgan, 2009; Terrill & Mark, 2000; Webster & Walters, 2008). As teachers facilitate their own development as culturally responsive literacy educators, they must begin to carefully select global literature that can bring all cultures together. Global literature, as defined by Hadaway and McKenna (2007), “is a comprehensive and inclusive one, reflecting our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (p.ix). All students, Harris (1997) writes, feel welcome in school to the extent that they find themselves and their experiences represented in the books teachers use in the classroom. However good this may be, it means more than giving students quality literature; it means doing authentic activities (reading, writing, sharing, talking and thinking) with the literature that will be beneficial for all writers and readers. The teachers’ role is one of planning and supporting these authentic experiences for their students to ensure that they are able to read with meaning as they respond to the text.

The term “response to literature” is used in a variety of ways. It may refer to what happens in the mind of the reader or listener as a story or poem unfolds. Or a “response” may be something said or done that reveals thoughts and feelings about literature. The reader’s response to literature is a central aspect of criticism and may take many forms. It can be both free and guided, but, in any case, the purpose is to help readers gain a greater insight into and appreciation of literary work and literature as a whole. Rosenblatt (1978) argues that
Many students may have gone through this same experience or may know someone who shares their experience of moving or may know someone who shares this experience. Using Rosenblatt principles of reader response theory students can read and respond to global children's literature. In this article, we will describe a possible way teachers can draw upon their students' background knowledge (Anderson & Pearson, 1984) and experiences (Lee, 2005) to construct meaning (Piaget, 1963; Vygotsky, 1978), and respond to literature (Rosenblatt, 1978) while incorporating new technologies and teaching new literacies (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). Given that learning could be positively influenced when students use electronic tools as they write for wider audiences (Boxie, 2004; Boxie & Maring, 2001), we will focus mainly on extending written responses using multiple digital publishing tools. Finally, we share many titles our readers can explore as they begin to diversify their selection of global literature from various geographic regions.

**Digital publishing tools for creating and extending global literature response**

Like the importance of teacher preparedness for culturally and linguistically diverse populations, the infusion of technology into the curriculum is increasingly important. Leu and Kinzer (2000) argue that the competition of global economics is driving the infusions of and change in technologies into the classroom. Due to these changes literacy is also changing. For instance, teachers and students are not only becoming users of the Internet but also producers. In this article, we invite teachers and students to become producers by exploring podcast. This is simply a digital media file, either audio or video (usually MP3 or MP4) that is made available on the Internet with a news feed, such as really simple syndication (RSS), instead of direct download. This means that the podcast, which has a host and/or theme, is released episodically to interested listeners or viewers who use special software, known as podcatcher (Podcast, 2010) to access a podcast distributor's site/web feed, check for updates, and download any new podcasts in the series. In the case of a classroom, these digital files would contain students' written responses to global literature that can be shared as a weekly or biweekly radio show. Students can work on these responses individually, in pairs, or in small groups. We provide the reader with instructions for producing podcasts in the form of digital audio, PowerPoint, and Digital Storytelling. Each of these forms can be used to promote and extend written responses to literature. In each of the following sections, we describe these publishing tools and then provide examples of response activities to specific titles of global children's literature. If these titles do not align with your curriculum you might want to choose other titles from Appendix A, where we provide a more extensive list of global children's literature organized by geographic regions.

**Audio podcast**

The ability to capture one's voice is an amazing way to enhance students' reading and writing skills as they prepare to report reading and writing for a larger audience through podcasts. In doing so, students can use Audacity, a cross-platform digital audio editor and recording application (Audacity, 2010) that can be downloaded for free from Audacity at http://audacity.sourceforge.net/. Because this software is simple and easy, students will spend less time acquiring the technological knowledge and more time focusing on the quality of their written response that will later be recorded with Audacity. Students can reread their written responses several times and receive feedback from the teacher or a member of the class before recording the final response. Table 1 provides step-by-step instructions on how to produce a simple three to five minute long podcast using Audacity.

**Integrating audio podcasts and global literature**

In Leslie Bulion's *Fatuma's New Cloth* (2002), Fatuma goes to the market with her mother and meets many people who sell tea, spices, milk, and pans and who all claim that their goods will help make a better chai. But Fatuma wonders how Mama can make hers sweeter. When they get to the kanga shop Fatuma looks for the perfect kanga for herself and, when she finds the right color, she finds the answer to the perfect chai written on the cloth: "Don't be fooled by the color. The good flavor of chai comes from the sugar." Then Fatuma realizes that you cannot always see the good thing because it is in the inside, and this is not only real for sugar but for people, as well.

Ask the students what they know about Kenya, East Africa, where the story takes place. List responses...
on the chart paper or type on your classroom computer and project for the whole class with the use of an LCD Projector. Then show the students how to use Google Earth (downloaded for free from http://earth.google.com/) to locate Kenya and calculate how far it is from the USA and their own state. A discussion on how people in Kenya live, the different types of things that might be sold at their market, and how prices could be negotiable will lead to a comparison with living in the USA and shopping from a supermarket. The oral discussion can then be followed by a technology-based activity where students use a Venn diagram from ReadWriteThink.org (http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/venn/) to compare and contrast shopping at the market in Kenya vs. shopping at the supermarket in the USA. Have students print and display their Venn diagram in the classroom.

All these activities will provide students with content knowledge to prepare the script they will later turn into a podcast. The students will work in small groups to write a persuasive paragraph, where they will pretend they are the owner of a shop in the market and their purpose is to persuade Fatuma to buy cloth from their shop. Remind students that when they try to persuade someone, it means to get the other person to see things their way. When their paragraphs are complete, students can work in their groups as they record their paragraphs using Audacity. The teacher can upload the podcasts on the classroom’s webpage for parents and other students to listen to and decide which podcast is the most persuasive.

Another way of enhancing written responses through Audacity is with the book Rice is Life by Rita Gelman (2000). Gelman’s poetic structure and Choi’s oil paintings portray the importance of rice for the people in Bali, Indonesia, and how rice grows as the animals take part in the lifecycle of rice. Before reading the book, teachers can ask students to share what they know about Bali and then do a quick Internet Inquiry (Leu, Leu, & Coiro, 2004) to collect information from a few websites, such as the website of the Bali Tourism Board at http://www.balitourismboard.org/. A group of students can use Google Earth to locate Bali and another group can search for images of Bali from Google Images at http://images.google.com/. With the development of background knowledge about Bali, students will have a better understanding of the book and can participate in after reading discussions about rice cultivation in Bali, which is the main focus of Rice is Life.

Given the focus of the book, students can then talk about the use of rice in their country and their homes and then research how rice is grown and used in different parts of the world. In small groups students can then write an expository essay explaining how rice is grown in their chosen part of the world. The essay will follow the expository structure of description, even though

### Table 1. Podcasting with Audacity

Details are provided here for a simple three to five minute long podcast. If you have not created a podcast before, complete a podcast tutorial at the following websites:

1. **Creating Podcasts in Mac OS X**

2. **Creating Podcasts with your PC**
   http://www.windowsdevcenter.com/pub/a/windows/2005/04/05/create_podcasts_with_pc.html

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Download/Secure the Necessary Software</strong></td>
<td>Audacity (<a href="http://audacity.sourceforge.net/download/">http://audacity.sourceforge.net/download/</a>) FREE software for both Windows and Mac versions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Purchase/Secure the Necessary Hardware Microphone</strong></td>
<td>Buy an inexpensive (less than $10) USB microphone from an electronics retailer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Prepare a Script</strong></td>
<td>The script will be the original literature response that has been edited and revised individually or in small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Practice the Podcast Before Recording</strong></td>
<td>Practice rereading the script several times before recording it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Create Audio Files</strong></td>
<td>Start your podcast with music and then read the script. You’ll need to export your recordings as .wav files from within the software.</td>
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(Podcasting instructions adapted from Johnson & Edwards, 2008)
the way roosters crow in Morocco. Then tourists come and join in and show how roosters sing in their country. Excited that he learned lots of foreign words, he runs back to his father's shop and, without realizing, he brings in all the tourists with him.

The teacher can begin by asking the students what they know about Morocco and list responses on the chart paper. Students can use the Internet to locate Morocco and find pictures and facts about the country to share in a whole class discussion. Again, Google Image and Google Earth, as well as the website of the Moroccan National Tourist Office (http://www.visitmorocco.com/index.php/eng/Home), are useful resources in creating the necessary background knowledge for beginning to understand the story's context.

To help students become familiar with the diverse languages found in the book, have the students return to the story and identify the different ways roosters crow “cock-a-doodle-doo” around the world. Have the students make a word web with the different languages and then ask them to work in small groups to research and create additional word webs by writing different languages from around the world. Google Translate at http://translate.google.com offers free online translation of English words and text to 34 different languages and vice versa. Students will begin this activity by placing their target word in the middle of the word web; then, with the use of this online translator, write the word in a different language. Identifying the name of the country in which each word is originated will also be included.

Next have students create a picture book of foreign words by inserting a picture of each word in a PowerPoint presentation. Pictures can be found on the Internet and appropriate credits need to be given to their sources. Students should, therefore, be taught to access public domain pictures, while copyright issues are addressed as part of integrating new literacies instruction. Students can begin from the website Copyright Free and Public Domain Media Sources at http://people.uwec.edu/koroghcm/public_domain.htm where they can search through thousands of images for their project. Once this step has been completed, students will save the PowerPoint slides as jpg format and use Audacity to record the words and say something interesting about them. Finally, students will drag both images and audio into iMovie or Windows Movie Maker. Students may choose to add music before and/or at the end of the podcast.

Another book students can use to study a different culture and present their understanding through a podcast is My Name Was Hussein by Hristo Kyuchukov (2004), who shares a candid story about culture clash based on events experienced in his own life. As Islamic citizens of Bulgaria, Kyuchukov and his family were subject to the authority of their government and were expected to conform in much the same way that Hussein in the book is expected to conform. The book explores the meaning of a name and the importance that tradition
Table 2. Podcasting with Image (PowerPoint) or Video (Digital Stories) Files

Details are provided here for a simple three to five minute long podcast.
If you have not created a podcast before, complete a podcast tutorial at the following websites:
1. Creating Podcasts in Mac OS X
2. Creating Podcasts with your PC
   http://www.windowsdevcenter.com/pub/a/windows/2005/04/05/create_podcasts_with_pc.html

Step 1: Download/Purchase/Secure the Necessary Software
   - PowerPoint
   - Windows Movie Maker or iMovie
   - Audacity FREE (http://audacity.sourceforge.net/download/) -for PC and MAC
   - Jodix FREE (http://www.ipod-video-converter.org/) -for PC only

Step 2: Purchase/Secure the Necessary Hardware Microphone
   Buy an inexpensive (less than $10) USB microphone from an electronics retailer.

Step 3: Secure the Necessary Items You Wish to Include in Your Podcast
   - Locate photos or other images as needed to make your podcast attractive.
   - Obtain music or other sounds you would like to include, if desired. To avoid copyright infringement and possible incarceration, please avoid use of more than 20 seconds of copyrighted music. Search for free-use music, if desired.
   - Provide a PowerPoint of the contents of your podcast (minus the voice-over). When saving, use the FILE SAVE AS option and choose jpeg as the format. A folder that contains each separate PowerPoint slide as a picture (jpg format) will show on your computer screen. Afterwards you can drop those pictures into Windows Movie Maker (PC) or iMovie (Mac) and make your movie file.

Step 4: Prepare a Script
   The script will be the original literature response that has been edited and revised.
   This response will be used to accompany the visual images of your podcast.

Step 5: Practice the Podcast Before Recording
   Practice rereading the script several times before recording it.
   Then organize photos, images, and/or video. Keep in mind that you will coordinate the photos or images/video with a script that shares the visual content you are presenting.

Step 6: Create Audio Files
   - It is recommended that you use Audacity (freeware software for both Mac and Windows) to record each step of the desired activity as a .wav file. You'll need to export your recordings as .wav files from within the software.
   - Save your audio files using names that correspond to steps from the text file (e.g., Sound1.wav is the audio corresponding to Image01.tif, etc. NOTE: save in a folder on your desktop.

Step 7: Combine Audio Files and Video/Image Files
   - Drag all audio files into a video editing software (e.g., Windows Movie Maker or iMovie (Mac), arranging the audio files in sequence. Do this first, before adding images.
   - Next, drag images into the software. Resize the length of time that a particular screen is displayed to fit the duration of the corresponding audio file. Add transitions and/or titles as desired.

Step 8: Export to an iTunes-Compatible or iPod-Compatible Format
   - DO NOT SKIP THIS STEP! If using Windows Movie Maker, use the option that indicates save the movie for use on your computer. In other words, use the FILE SAVE AS MOVIE option: when prompted indicate you are saving for “use on computer.” DO NOT compress the video or audio.
   - Next, use Jodix (free Windows software) to convert the resulting movie file to an iTunes format (i.e., an mp4 file). However, if using iMovie (Mac), select the “Share>Export movie>desktop” option to export the podcast to a ready format (i.e., an mp4 file).

Podcasting instructions adapted from Johnson & Edwards, 2008)
brings to individuals’ understanding of themselves, their culture, and the world. The dreamlike quality of the illustrations complements the eloquence of the writing.

Prepare the students for the book by telling them that the story they are about to read or listen to takes place in Bulgaria and then ask them to point out the location of Bulgaria using Google Earth, a globe, or a map. Ask students if they have ever been asked to give up something without their will. What was it? What did it feel like? Did they understand why this was happening to them? Then tell students the story is about a boy and his family who were forced to give up something.

Like many cultures in Bulgaria, people are given names that have a meaning. Ask students to research their names on the Internet to find the meaning(s) and origin(s) and share with the class. Websites like Behind the Name (http://www.behindthename.com) and Meaning-of-Names.com (http://www.meaning-of-names.com/) are some of the online sources students can use during a short Internet Workshop (Leu, 2002). Then tell students to imagine they lived in a culture where they had to give someone a new name against his or her will. Next, have the students create a podcast, using PowerPoint, informing the audience what that name would be and why. In their short PowerPoint students should state the chosen name’s meaning and origin and include images the students think are appropriate for that name. After the students write a short explanation of why they chose the particular name, have them use Audacity to record their explanation and add voice to their presentation. Finally, students can merge audio and images into iMovie or Windows Movie Maker to complete their podcast.

In Circles of Hope by Karen Williams (2005), Facile, a young Haitian boy attempts to plant a tree in honor of his new baby sister, just as his father planted a tree for him when he was born. Sapor’s use of charcoal and pastel creates a warm feeling that embraces the family bond that Karen conveys with his words. Have the students discuss about the kind of environment Facile is trying to plant the tree. Keep in mind the tree Facile’s father had planted for him when he was born was the only tree on the whole dusty mountaintop. Why is it so hard to plant trees in his environment? What do seeds need to grow and what was missing? After many unsuccessful attempts, Facile finally finds a solution.

Tell students to pretend they are the host of a new Home and Garden show. Every evening they tell their audience how to grow and take the best care of plants. Ask students to form small groups to brainstorm what the name of their show would be. What type of plants would they tell the audience about? Each student can research and write a description about a different plant. After the students have written, revised and edited their work, allow them to podcast the show using PowerPoint and Windows Movie Maker or iMovie.

**Digital Storytelling**

Digital Storytelling is a process in which students use multimedia to illustrate their stories with images, voice-over, video, and sound combined with text to create a unique story. These digital stories are typically short and are often persuasive, historical, or reflective. They also show great respect for individuals, families, and cultures. Before you begin to create digital stories with your students, spend a few days exploring the website of The Center for Digital Storytelling (http://www.storycenter.org), an international non-profit organization that has been helping people use digital media to tell meaningful stories from their lives. Another useful website is The Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling (http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu), which is being maintained by the College of Education at the University of Houston and provides many resources to support teachers and students in their efforts to create Digital Storytelling. Students could watch digital stories from these and other websites and discuss as a whole class what is needed in order for someone to do Digital Storytelling. Students will then realize that technology is not the only skill required and that preparing a well-structured narrative or expository essay is also important.

In this section, we suggest Digital Storytelling as a way to enrich a learner’s skills in reading, writing, and researching using online and offline resources. Before creating their Digital Storytelling, students will need to begin to think how their digital story will look like and what types of resources will be needed. Students will then have to search and collect different types of artifacts, such as personal photos, online images, historical facts, music files, and short movies and then write a script to go with the collected artifacts. All resources will need to be turned into digital files (audio and video) that will be imported in iMovie or Windows Movie Maker to create an enhanced podcast (see Table 2). The ultimate objective is to tell a story from the heart. Before they do all that, however, we recommend that students have the experience of creating simpler podcasts, like the ones that require only the creation of short audio files.

**Integrating Digital Storytelling with global literature**

Edna Bercaw’s Halmoni’s Day (2000) is a story that focuses on family and culture and, with Hunt’s realistic illustration, portrays the understandings across generations and cultures. The main character is a Korean American girl, named Jennifer, who is worried when her grandmother visits from South Korea. Grandparents’ Day at Jennifer’s school is the next day and the fact that her grandmother wears a traditional Korean dress and speaks no English makes Jennifer nervous because she believes her grandmother will embarrass her in front of all of her friends.
Before and during the reading of the book, students can use the classroom computers to find information about South Korea, its people, traditions, and family relationships. Text-to-self connections can be made by asking students to discuss their own experiences of being worried that someone from their family would embarrass them or has embarrassed them in front of their friends. Then a discussion about grandparents and the important role they play in a family can become the starting point for a Digital Storytelling about grandparents (or ancestors, in general, if this fits better with the school’s curriculum).

Before students create their digital story, they will have to engage in family research by interviewing their grandparents or other relatives who can share information about the grandparents. Students will practice asking leading questions, such as “Where were you born?” or “What was it like going to school?” or “What are your favorite books?” or “How did you meet grandpa?” At the same time, students will collect different artifacts to support their story, such as photos, birth certificates, and special awards, and learn to scan them in order to turn them into digital files that will later on be inserted in their Digital Storytelling. Next, the students will write a narrative about their grandparents and bring it to class for creating their digital story.

The narrative, the artifacts, and other supporting files, such as music files and short video segments, will all be used to create a digital storytelling to be shared on the classroom’s website and, maybe, during an Authors’ Night organized by the school.

Another great book to use for creating digital stories is, The Remembering Stone by B.T. Russell (2004). With the creative use of Spanish words and phrases throughout the English text of the book, the author tells the story of a young girl named Ana and her mother whose dream is to return to her home country of Costa Rica. The mother’s dream inspires Ana to build her own dream. The different adults that Ana speaks to about dreams paint a soft picture of how humans incorporate hope into their lives.

While it provides a wonderful opportunity for students to begin to learn about Costa Rica, the book also serves as an inspiration for students to talk about their own dreams. Brainstorm with students about their dreams and list on chart paper or a SmartBoard. Next, have the students write a narrative about themselves and a dream they wish to accomplish. After the narrative is revised and ready to be published, have the students turn it into an audio file and combine it with other digital content, such as video and music files, for making a three to five minute podcast. Share the story with other classes or at a parent event directly from the classroom’s website.

Finally, teachers can consider the book In English, of Course by Josephine Nobisso (2002). In this story, Josephine, an immigrant from Italy, tries to express herself in English as her teacher helps find the words that she wants to describe. Based on her true experience, Nobisso’s story will touch the heart of readers who are learning how to express themselves using a language that is not their native tongue and of readers who never thought of the challenges the former encounter.

Ask the students if they have or know anyone who has experienced linguistic misunderstandings. Then ask the students to listen for a few minutes to a podcast in a foreign language (do an Internet search using “podcasts” and your chosen foreign language as the search keywords) and say in their own words what they understood. This will give the students a glimpse of what English language learners are going through when they enter a school where everybody speaks an unfamiliar language. Ask students to pretend they are Josephine, the character from the book, and had recently enrolled in a new school in a country where the language is different from their own. Have the students talk about what it could be like. Then have the students work in pairs to write a digital story about a day in the life of Josephine. Be sure to focus on the 5 W’s and H: Tell who the main character is, what happened, when it happened, why it happened, and how it happened. The student storytellers will combine their narrative with other digital content (i.e., music and scanned drawings) and will make a three to five minute podcast for their new television show called “A Day in the Life of Josephine.”

Final thought
As students are given multiple opportunities to interact with global literature, they will have a more deepening and broadening understanding of the world cultures. We believe their responses to literature should not be limited to questions and comments or written activities, but should also include digital responses. Involving students in podcast development, such as audio podcasts, PowerPoint, or Digital Stories, could further enhance learning and will provide an authentic audience for the students’ creations. And once the podcasts are created at school, they can be listened or viewed anytime, anywhere.

References


**Children's books cited**


APPENDIX A
Global Children’s Literature (2005-2009)

This list is organized according to geographic regions. However, teachers may also choose to organize according to the themes of the books. We encourage our readers to explore these titles as they begin to diversify the selections in their own classrooms.

**African American Literature:**

**Bangladesh Literature:**

**Chinese Literature:**

**Filipino Literature:**

**Haitian Literature:**

**Japanese Literature:**

**Korean Literature:**

**Mexican Literature:**

**Native American Literature:**
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110 | Notes on the Contributors
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The Editorial Board of the New England Reading Association solicits manuscripts of interest to educators on a broad array of topics related to literacy and classroom practice. We welcome submission in a variety of writing formats such as articles, interviews, essays, and research reports. The NERA Journal is peer-reviewed and is published in fall (issue deadline: February 15th) and in spring (issue deadline September 15th).

**TOPICS OF SPECIAL INTEREST**

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<th>Spring 2011 Issue</th>
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<td><strong>Curriculum on the Margins</strong>&lt;br&gt;Deadline: February 15, 2011</td>
<td><strong>Continuity and the Pendulum</strong>&lt;br&gt;Deadline: September 15, 2010</td>
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