CHAPTER 2

# Understanding Literacy Principles and Practices

> Reading about complex public issues like climate change is not for the faint of heart. In addition to what we normally think about the nature of reading we — all of us — need to read into the use of words and images, in text, in talk, in tables, charts, and graphs. What may be reported as a fact may, in fact, be an opinion supported or not supported by evidence. How do we know? More reading, of course: deeper, more varied, with a major dose of thinking in the mix.
>
> John Myers, Curriculum Instructor, Teacher Education Program, OISE

## What We Know about Literacy

See Leading for Literacy: Roles of the Leader by Kathryn Broad on page 70.

Changes taking place within the field of literacy education do not entirely result from theoretical or methodological shifts, but also from shifts in the pedagogical infrastructure of elementary schooling. As we discussed in Chapter 1, the shifting administrative paradigm directly affects how your staff teaches literacy and your students learn to be literate. However, it is also necessary to consider: What will be the base upon which you can place your new role and responsibilities?

In deciding what needs to be taught and how it should be taught to encourage literacy growth, it is important to consider questions such as

- What is currently known about literacy teaching and learning?
- How do we define “reading”?
- How do people learn to read?
- What is decoding?
- What is phonics?
- What is reader response?
- How do teachers accommodate for special-needs students in early reading?
- How do people learn to write?
- What components are necessary for an effective literacy program?
- How important is technology in literacy learning?
- How can principals work with colleagues and parents to create an optimum literacy environment for students?

Certain lasting beliefs and understandings underpin effective literacy teaching and learning.

- Every child can learn to read and write, given time and support.
- High expectations are fundamental for all staff and students.
- Schools and classes are organized to reflect a commitment to maximizing student learning time.



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- Learning to read and write are processes brought to life by effective literacy teaching.
- Each staff member makes a difference.
- Professional learning is an ongoing and essential aspect of continuous improvement.
- A whole-school and community approach involving students, teachers, parents, and the community consolidates student learning.
- Working in collaboration with families not only strengthens the nexus between school and home, but also offers additional opportunities to promote high expectations.
- Student performance is significantly influenced by teachers' standards and expectations.
- Every learner is different and we should use whatever means and methods we have at hand to facilitate student learning and achievement.

In this chapter, we set out to consolidate an understanding of the principles and practices upon which successful literacy initiatives can be based if everyone is committed to the process of literacy-based school change.

## Thinking Outside the Box: The New Literacies

See Play and Literacy by Linda Cameron on page 72.

As a literacy principal, you guide the culture of the school. Committed to literacy, you create capacity in your school for making a real difference for students. Making a difference sometimes means thinking outside the box and creating space for innovation. Innovation can entail letting in influences from outside of school, such as different cultures, new media, digital and print technologies, and texts that exist in student's outside worlds.

### *New Texts, New Skills*

New texts feature prominently in students' outside worlds. In understanding them, you meet your students halfway.

Literacy has changed so much over the past decade that there is often a disconnect between what our students are doing outside of school walls and the work they are doing inside of school. Although we want our students to be proficient readers and writers of traditional texts, we need to be aware of and understand the kinds of texts that they appreciate and that garner their interest. By bridging a gap between their interests and school literacy, we are meeting them halfway and harnessing practice to their literacy strengths. See page 46 for is a list of non-traditional texts alongside skills that they carry or imply when you teach them to students.



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| New Texts | Skills |
|---|---|
| **Blogs** | • Reflective free writing<br>• Visuals used to say what words cannot<br>• Intertextuality: tying disparate texts within a single one<br>• Awareness of linked texts (i.e., hyperlinks)<br>• Expressing identity through words, pictures, illustrations, and animation |
| **Texting** | • Understanding abridged text<br>• Use of and proficiency with codes<br>• Recognizing unofficial voice and register vs. more official voice and register<br>• An understanding that texting is appropriate in some contexts (outside of school and at home) and not in other contexts (during school time) |
| **Magazines** | • Sense of genre (e.g., *Teen People* vs. car or computer magazines)<br>• Understanding use of headings as index for content<br>• Reading metaphors and messages in photographs<br>• Use of figurative language in journalistic writing<br>• Perceiving stereotypes and underlying messages in magazine photographs<br>• Sensitivity to visual communication of layout |
| **Television** | • Understanding of characterization<br>• Sense of genre (e.g., sitcoms vs. reality shows)<br>• Reading gesture, movement onscreen<br>• Recognizing affective speech (e.g., serious, comedic) |
| **Video Games** | • Problem-solving<br>• Understanding identity formation<br>• Evaluating settings and movements in settings<br>• Advanced vocabulary<br>• Social interaction through chatrooms and voice-activated speech |
| **Game Cards** | • Advanced vocabulary<br>• Understanding characterization and complex story lines<br>• Interpersonal practices with cards<br>• Intertextuality: seeing a relationship between cards, websites, and television shows based on the same story line (e.g., Pokemon, Naruto) |
| **Movies** | • Understanding of voice and figures of speech<br>• Understanding characterization, plot, and story line<br>• Intertextuality: ties to books and games (e.g., *Cars, Shrek*)<br>• Awareness of semiotic elements of film (e.g., close-ups vs. landscape camera shots) |
| **Family Artifacts** | • Use as expressions of identity<br>• Valuing practices that artifacts might carry with them<br>• Artifacts from home can tell you a great deal about the learner – their motivation and what they value<br>• Tie to different cultures and languages |
| **Zines** | • Expressive writing about keen interests<br>• Understanding of journalistic voice<br>• Use of visuals to express words<br>• Taking a position on an issue and making a statement about it<br>• Technological ability: creating HTML code and hyperlinks to related texts |
| **Cartoons and Comics** | • Understanding of characterization and how it shifts in different contexts<br>• Use of figures of speech<br>• Use of visuals to create affect<br>• Awareness of nuances of speech (e.g., sarcasm)<br>• Perceiving what comics and cartoons teach about life |
| **Music** | • Poetic speech<br>• Expressing identity and life events in music<br>• Creating videos from songs<br>• Connecting culture and music (e.g., reggae and Jamaican culture) |



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Although we have looked at just a sample of the texts within the communication landscape, we see a great complexity of thought and understanding in our students' interests and outside-school practices. Each genre of new texts tell us three valuable things about our students and what drives their worlds:

- They need and want to tie literacy to their identity.
- Different genres of texts carry skills that we need to harness to our teaching.
- Students have a tacit understanding of many of the concepts that we teach at school—such as comprehending story lines, settings, and characterization—from different genres of texts.

*Manga*, for instance, carries with it complex story lines, definitive characters, advanced vocabulary, complex contexts, and some comprehension of cultural nuances in texts such as *Naruto*.

**Picture of a Learner: Rob and Naruto**

*Jennifer Rowsell*

Rob (a pseudonym) is a special-education student at a suburban high school in New Jersey. Rob struggles with his literacy much of the time, yet he cannot get enough of Naruto. Naruto is an *anime* and *manga* series created by Masashi Kishimoto that depicts the life of a loud, hyperactive, young ninja with the great aspiration of becoming a Hokage. The story combines the long history of the ninja with levels of power and prestige based on *chakra*, the points of power, wisdom, and strength that we channel through our mind, body, and spirit. I learned all of this from Rob when I interviewed him in his school's computer lab for a study, which looks at reading practices online, that I am conducting with Anne Burke. Rob is a loner and occupies much of his time with *manga* texts, cards, and games that are tied to such series as Naruto and Yu-Gi-Oh. Rob is articulate and passionate about his love of *manga*, yet he has trouble with his reading and writing at school. Here is a sample of my conversation with Rob about the plot of Naruto.

ROB: This was in a recent episode that only comes out on Saturdays. They show last week's episode and then a new episode. Well, this one was still kind of recent at the Chuunin exams right after the preliminary rounds (Rob points to a character). That's Saski. He's in pretty bad shape. (We read text together, *Takoshi reaches Saski's hospital room just in time to stop Kuboto. His cover being blown, Kuboto answers Takoshi's question scornfully.*) What does scornful mean?
JENNIFER: Like resentfully or reprimanding.
(Rob reads more text and then asks about the word "inevitable.")
JENNIFER: Means destined to happen or it's going to happen.

You can see quite clearly that Rob loves the story and the characters and escapes into the world. He is comfortable with words like "Chuunin," yet does not know what "scornful" means. Rob is a familiar picture to many teachers; if we take the time to find out what our students love, as many teachers already do, we could bridge a literacy achievement gap.

### ASSESSING NEW SKILLS FROM NEW TEXTS

There are particular ways of assessing skills that emerge from the new texts that students use and enjoy. Eve Bearne and her team in England have devised an



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assessment framework to assess new literacies skills. Bearne claims that we need to have dialogues that will help children recognize the different representational demands made by different texts. Using Bearne's assessment framework is a way forward in assessing students like Rob.

**Composition and Effect:** This looks at children's ability to write imaginative, interesting, and thoughtful texts and to produce texts that are appropriate to the task, reader, and purposes:

- Select and adapt form and content according to purpose, viewpoint, and reader
- Convey ideas and themes in appropriate styles.

**Text Structure and Organization:** This focuses on children's ability to organize and present whole texts effectively, sequencing and structuring information, ideas, and events, constructing paragraphs, and using cohesion within and between paragraphs:

- Select and use structural devices for the organization of texts
- Order and group ideas and material within sections of their texts to elaborate meaning
- Maintain cohesion in texts of increasing variety and complexity

**Sentence Structure and Punctuation:** This considers children's ability to write with technical accuracy of syntax and punctuation in phrases, clauses, and sentences for clarity, purpose, and effect:

- Select and deploy a variety and complex range of sentence structures
- Use punctuation to mark grammatical boundaries and clarify meaning accurately and consistently
- Combine grammatical structure and punctuation to enhance meaning
- Use correct spelling

(Bearne et al, 2004; 2005).

Bearne and her colleagues use this framework to evaluate and assess a series of different multimodal texts. The term *multimodal* refers to an approach to literacy that argues that students use different kinds of modes that are equally visual, written, interactive, aural, and kinetic, and that they're understanding of different modes informs the way that they learn. Most texts nowadays are more than written words and, as such, require different kinds of skills (and different ways of assessing these skills).

### *A History of New Literacies*

"There are global matters of swift communications through Internet, e-mail, and digital imaging … and surrounding us are daily reminders that news media, advertising—all the rhetorical devices of society—are using image plus language in increasingly complex ways … These changes impose urgent demands on educational practice in literacy."
— Eva Bearne

The concept of new kinds of literacy that our students bring to classrooms takes its roots from New Literacy Studies, a field of research and practice that brings together the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, semiotics, and linguistics to study literacy in different places by different kinds of people. New Literacy Studies (NLS) grew out of an increasing need to account for a literacy achievement gap that could not be explained within literacy education alone, as literacy scholars expanded their perspective on literacy by consulting scholars in other disciplines.



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Several NLS studies, such as those conducted by Shirley Brice Heath, Brian Street, and David Barton and Mary Hamilton, illustrated that literacy takes place everywhere, all of the time—only not exactly in ways that we think of when we think of school literacy (Heath, 1983; Street, 1993; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). What each study showed was that children, frequently from different cultures and challenging economic situations, had a variety of ways of using language in meaningful ways. In Heath's study, an African-American community drew on oral language and oral retellings of stories to make meaning (Heath, 1983). Street's study showed that there were three different models of literacy in a community in Iran: one tied to mosque and Islamic teachings; one tied to British schooling; and one tied to secular ways of speaking and understanding. Only one of these literacies is tied to schooling, yet they all represent ways of making meaning with language. Finally, Barton and Hamilton offered a longitudinal study of the literacy habits of hundreds of people in Lancaster to powerfully show the variety of ways in which we read, write, think, create, listen, and speak. Each scholar blazed a trail for us to rethink what literacy is and how it is shaped by people, places, and practices.

New Literacy Studies opened up literacy and, as educators, we can build on the strength of it:

- by using our students' literacy in the home to foster their reading and writing development;
- by seeing that every child comes with a "fund of knowledge" (see page 51) that we need to figure out and harness to our teaching;
- by appreciating that literacy is far more complex than accepted models of good literacy teaching practice, such as paired reading or guided reading (although both of these strategies are important as well).

The "new" in new literacy is an approach to literacy teaching and learning that acknowledges how we all come at literacy from different perspectives and how, as literacy leaders and educators, we need to find ways of mediating the different experiences and identities of our students.

Some valuable studies have grown out of the New Literacy Studies tradition, such as the work of Don Leu and his colleagues. In their work, they shift the concept of "new" to skills that students develop from their use of technology. New literacies can therefore imply the novel nature of many of the digital practices we have acquired, such as using search engines like Google or constructing and maintaining a page in MySpace. Our students spend a lot of time in digital spaces, and scholars such as Leu (Leu & Coiro, 2004) and Knobel and Lankshear (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007) examine in some detail how these practices inform our understanding of contemporary literacy.



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**Using New Literacies in the Classroom**

1. Literacy happens everywhere all of the time. As educators, we need to find out what our students do at home and outside of school.
2. Children have expertise about things that they value. Incorporate different kinds of texts and artifacts into teaching and display them in your teaching space.
3. Literacy can be broken down into four essential components: the meaning-maker, the text, the context, and the practice.
4. Our own cultures and backgrounds inform our teaching — and, of course, student learning.
5. Culture and cultural practice is a lens through which we see, hear, and visualize things.

### *Critical Literacy*

In conjunction with a redefining of literacy came efforts to look more critically at our perceptions of literacy. The work of Paolo Freire was instrumental in looking at issues of power within literacy and what literacy can do for people (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Freire is famous for claiming that reading the word is key to reading the world. After Freire, we saw the ascendance of critical literacy as a key topic in literacy education; that is, taking a critical look at ways we use literacy and how literacy gives people currency. Many literacy scholars have taken up a critical approach to how our students learn literacy, so that students can unpeel the layers and complexity of language, spoken or written.

Critical literacy as a field argues that students at all levels of education need to have a meta-awareness of how language functions in different genres of texts and in different contexts. Critical literacy compels teachers of literacy to explore the structures of stories and nuances of characterizations, but also the register of language, the choice of words, and the origins of texts and practices used around texts. The critical aspect of critical literacy deals with how we frame our reading of texts so that we see where our interpretation begins and ends, and where meanings within texts begin and end (akin to Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory, 2005). An approach to critical literacy curriculum can involve using issues of power and ideas as a lens for looking at texts. Critical literacy can also involve reading multiple texts to compare competing accounts of and stances on events, cultures, and places. Critical literacy entails working intertextually, not just across different media and genres, but also across cultural and historical texts and contexts (Luke, 2004). James Paul Gee argues that critical literacy is "socially perceptive literacy" (Gee, 1993). Luke and Freebody argue that there are certain key elements to critical literacy that encourage readers to be code breakers, meaning makers, text users, and text critics. Barbara Comber maintains that critical literacy means practicing the use of language in powerful ways to get things done in the world (Comber, 2007).



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**Critical Literacy Questions**

- How do particular texts work?
- What effects do they have?
- What has produced the text? Under what circumstances for the reader?
- How do texts represent particular groups of people in particular ways?
- How are people presented in relation to each other and in relation to their environment?
- How might we question these representations?
- How do texts depict events?
- Who is the audience for the text? How do you know?
- What does the text look like? How is text design tied to text content (and vice versa)?
- What kind of knowledge is produced by the text?

## *Cultural Literacies*

Understanding and acknowledging our students' cultural literacies — as in different languages, religion, and habits of mind that they carry with them — is a key way of understanding their meaning-making.

Our students bring a host of experiences when they come to our classrooms. Every one of them comes with culture — race, religion, family experiences, routines, treasured texts and artifacts — and it is up to us as educators to figure out exactly what these features of their lives are so that we understand how they make meaning. Gunther Kress argues that we cannot understand students' way into print unless we understand the processes of their meaning-making (Kress, 1997). Cultural literacies are plural because so many of our students (and we) carry multiple cultures with them. Appreciating the pluralistic composition of our classrooms fosters ease and a sense of belonging. Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti talk about *funds of knowledge* that we bring with us from our cultures and our homes. These funds we carry with us and they inform the way in which we learn. Funds of knowledge are the cultural artifacts and bodies of knowledge that underlie household activities (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). They are inherent cultural resources found in communities surrounding schools.

### WHAT ARE CULTURAL RESOURCES?

Cultural resources signify the cultural worlds of our students. They are important and need to be present in some guise in our classroom spaces and to be used, to varying degrees, in our planning. The term "culture" is used in the broadest sense in this instance. Cultural resources invite us into student worlds.

- Objects in the home: e.g., cushions, blankets, chairs from which children make meaning.
- Arts and crafts: paper, different kinds of paint, markers, scissors, glue, clay, brushes, crayons, etc.
- Family artifacts: mementos, symbols, old jewelry, clothes tied to events (e.g., saris), heirlooms, dress-up clothes, family tokens that have become a part of family history and signify ways of being in the family.
- Religious texts: religious texts and artifacts that tell stories and are written in a certain way that students understand.
- Popular culture: bedspreads, posters, CD covers, etc. that speak to student interests.
- New media: handheld computers, smaller console games, and game cards.



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Cultural literacies exist within school communities as well. There are often dominant cultures within school communities, and it is important to use the halls and walls of your school to acknowledge cultures. Translating newsletters and school correspondence is one way of speaking to cultures within your school's community.

- Toys: Lego, puzzles, maps, action figures, Barbies, etc.
- Stuff: baskets, masks, binoculars, little soldiers, etc.

LINKING CULTURAL RESOURCES WITH LITERACY

- Plot meaning-making: In an early-years classroom, have student chart objects that they have made to reveal how different children are making meaning in the classroom.
- Play and writing: Let children value their writing and see its relationship to play.
- Understand internal signs: Children each have a unique pathway into literacy. To foster this pathway, have students use whatever mode they like (visual, written, three-dimensional, dramatic play) to complete a task, such as creating a summary of the story just read.
- Gallery walk: Set up the classroom like a gallery; have students walk around to look at each other's works of art and talk about how they made them.
- Listening to children: Listening to children's talk while they are making meaning can tell you a great deal about what interests them, how they learn, and what modes they prefer or privilege over others.
- Making links: It is essential to make links between artifacts that children create in the classroom and how they are progressing with their reading and writing broadly, and how the same skills they have used in production cross over into their reading and writing specifically.
- Works-in-progress: As formative assessment, keep track of what students are working on and how these works change as they get closer to completion.
- Bringing home into school: As Kate Pahl expresses it, "Be aware that models made at home may have deep significance for the child." Have students talk about their model-making at home and help them see the tie between work they do at school and the kinds of activities that they do at home.
- Diversify texts: After reading a story, have students use cultural resources to extend story ideas. For example, in a story about a girl who lives in a hotel and who is very naughty and rides the elevator, have students create a diorama of a scene from the movie *Eloise*.
- Parents as a cultural resource: Have a parent come to class to discuss why a particular artifact is important to their family.

As Barbara Comber sagely advises, "the local and specific nature of children's lives will always influence what teachers of critical literacy believe is needed and is possible" (Comber & Nixon, 2005: 130). What is needed and certainly possible is an acknowledgement of the stuff that presides over our students' meaning-making. Using family literacy practices or popular culture as resources will open up our teaching to our students' worlds.

### *Multiliteracies and Digital Literacies*

With the rethinking of literacy and the acknowledgment of multiple kinds of literacy, there has been an opening up about what we mean by literacy. The term "multimodality" has gained some ground as a more contemporary way of describing the ways in which our students make meaning out in the world. Multimodality represents the different elements of texts of all kinds from which



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“We cannot understand how children find their way into print unless we understand the principles of their meaning-making.”—Gunter Kress

we make meaning. Texts are no longer solely made up of words and occasionally pictures, but instead are often a patchwork of other kinds of modalities that we understand alone or in combination.

Multimodal theory has influenced two new and important fields of research: multiliteracies and digital literacies. As literacy principals, you need to be acquainted with them to meet your students halfway.

Multiliteracies was launched at a meeting with key literacy scholars. From the meeting emerged a framework and new way of thinking about literacy. Multiliteracies scholars (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) contend that literacy is far more about design than it is about written words. They argue that literacy, broken down, requires using available designs to design texts — and requires redesigning them how we see fit. Their framework argues that we need to situate our teaching within students’ worlds, that we should teach overtly to the skills that they bring to school and, of course, critically frame these skills. Multiliteracies is a way for us to think about the new ways we read and make texts in light of technology and the prominent role of digital spaces in our students’ lives.

Digital literacies represent another field of research that looks in detail at digital spaces and how we make meaning within them. Scholars working in digital literacies (Davies & Merchant, 2007; Carrington, 2006) look at digital texts — such as blogs, wikis, or zines — and break apart what these texts do, how they are made, and the kinds of skills that they imply.

**Thinking About New Literacies: A Checklist**

- ❑ I am speaking to skills students possess (e.g., cultural literacies; funds of knowledge; modalities in their work and in texts that they enjoy).
- ❑ I have accounted for issues of gender in my teaching, in my choice of texts, and the ways in which we use these texts.
- ❑ I have thought about funds of knowledge that my students bring to the classroom.
- ❑ I have accounted for multimodality in the texts that I use.
- ❑ I have thought about the benefits certain texts afford over others (e.g., a pop-up book gives students a sense of three-dimensionality and offers more materiality than other kinds of books).
- ❑ I am situating my teaching in student worlds and critically framing the material that I teach.
- ❑ I am aware of my own identity and cultural literacies and how they inform my teaching.
- ❑ I acknowledge that students come in with a host of experiences and it is my job to find them out.



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## Cueing Systems for Reading

Reading is an interactive process in which the reader uses a variety of strategies for ensuring that comprehension occurs. In order to make meaning in print, all readers blend four cueing systems: pragmatic, semantic, syntactic, and phonographemic (phonics). Pragmatic and semantic cues help readers to use syntax and language patterns to predict words and phrases; phonics cues help readers to test predictions for unrecognized or confusing words in order to construct or confirm meaning.

It is important to help young readers become aware of how using the various cueing systems can help them find meaning in text and support their reading growth. Young children already have some of these strategies, and may use them to figure out individual words or phrases. The process is more complicated, however, when they must apply strategies to words embedded in a text, especially unfamiliar words within text that is outside their frame of experience.

A reader uses the four cueing systems simultaneously to varying degrees. Proficient readers use a minimum of cues, while less experienced readers or readers who are reading a text for a specific purpose may use more cues to help them determine meaning. Limited readers often tend to use phonics cues as their primary strategy. When these readers are reading difficult texts, they, in essence, may need to decode the majority of words they meet. This limits the amount of comprehension that occurs as a result of the reading — the more a child must decode individual words in a text, the less meaning she or he may take away from the experience.

A proficient reader's recognition of words is so immediate and vast that they rarely notice their use of context cues. Their rate of recognition is directly tied to the amount of reading they do — the more a reader reads, the greater the automatic sight vocabulary. A parallel situation exists for those who read a variety of types of text — as they increase their exposure to text types, their recognition of patterns and structures specific to a genre of text increases. Knowledge of patterns is reinforced when writing is combined with reading — children then have the opportunity to put into practice their awareness of how print works. However, even proficient readers may sometimes miss interesting turns of phrases or special nuances because they are processing text at a speed that does not allow for subtleties. Revisiting or working with the text may increase both comprehension and the metacognitive awareness of experience of the text.

It has been proven that strong literacy programs at the primary levels that incorporate all four cueing systems can dramatically reduce the number of reading problems experienced by today's adolescents and young adults. To do this, educators need to focus on the following core elements of literacy teaching:

- Alphabet knowledge
- Knowledge of sound–letter correspondences
- Automatic sight words
- Reading for meaning
- Numerous opportunities for reading many types of books and digital resources
- Increased teaching time and extra resources devoted to at-risk readers
- A secure environment that encourages children to grow as readers and writers using a variety of texts and text forms



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## Critical Comprehension

When readers read, are they always able to make sense of what they are seeing in print, both on the page and onscreen? Do they connect to what the author is saying or do they think about what she or he is saying? Are the author's words or ideas too far removed from their own experiences? The question remains for teachers: How can they assist children in making sense of what they read, so that their personal understanding and satisfaction will grow and deepen from the experience? This is what is meant by "teaching comprehension."

Reading comprehension or textual understanding occurs when readers are able to interpret written symbols in order to make meaning. A reader internalizes the accrued meanings and relates these to previous knowledge, experiences, and texts read before. Comprehension is a cognitive, emotional process, and thus, it is difficult to assess. Yet its presence or absence can be determined to some extent when teachers

- Watch and listen to students reading a text
- Ask students to describe what they have read
- Discuss books that students are reading with them
- Encourage students to share their responses to what they have read

As will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 4, these informal ways to assess students' comprehension can be combined with more formal assessments to provide teachers with a picture of students' levels of comprehension with particular texts. Teachers can then assist children with strategies that enhance comprehension, helping them make meaning before they read, as they read, and after they read.

Everyone's experience differs. It is important for teachers to keep this reality in mind as they work with groups so that they don't present only one interpretation of a story. Instead, teachers must share their expertise in such ways that support students and encourage their learning.

In order for readers to understand a text, they must be able to relate it to other texts they have read and to life experiences, thereby combining the knowledge gained from this text to their knowledge base. The strength of these connections relates directly to students' level of comprehension. If students cannot connect the reading to personal aspects of their lives, their level of comprehension will suffer, just as it will if they cannot connect the text to others they have read.

## Stages of Reading

Most students follow what can be considered a continuum of reading acquisition; however, they do not always master skills in order. That is, they may have difficulty with one strategy, yet will have gained another typically evidenced by a more fluent reader. Competencies vary according to the text being read and the situations in which they find themselves reading.

When teachers assess students' reading ability, they need to consider where the majority of the behaviors fall on a particular place in the continuum. Then, they need to watch that students make gains that will move them into the next stage of reading.

Students progress at their own rate and in their own style. In the past, readers who progressed at a slower rate were often labeled (e.g., learning disabled, dyslexic, attention deficit disorder). However, it is now known that if teachers can identify the various stages of growth, then they can have a much clearer picture of the problems and what each needs to do to build strength as a reader.

Since reading is an individual process, one of the best indicators a teacher can use to assess a child's growth is his or her own development throughout the year. In order to do this, it is necessary to establish a baseline of skills and knowledge.



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In this way, as teachers assess students through the year, they can return to the baseline to see where each student has made gains.

The sections that follow provide a brief overview of the five stages of reading to help establish the baseline of skills and knowledge referred to above.

### *The Early Reader*

Early readers, who are sometimes referred to as pre-readers, enter Kindergarten with some of the skills and concepts they need to become readers. These children generally enjoy reading, since most of their experiences with texts have involved being read to by family members or caregivers. Books, then, represent pleasure and entertainment for them. Many children will have favorite stories they like to hear again and again. These readers have a sense of story and enter into stories readily.

Early readers will often pick up a book and approximate reading by holding it the right way, stopping the reading while they turn the page, and finishing the story exactly on the last page. Such imitation is not without value. Through this, children learn that texts give readers cues to reading, that print on a page matches certain words, that pictures support the story, that books are read from front to back, that text flows from left to right, and that reading is an authentic activity. When children "read" books in this way, they are preparing themselves to become readers.

Early readers know that print carries meaning and they are aware of sources of print around them — in books, on products, on labels, on signs, etc. While they recognize many of these words in context, they may not carry over this knowledge when they see the words in isolation. These readers may not know how sounds are represented by letters. Phonemic awareness (how sounds combine to make words) and phonics (how words are written on a page) will develop during this period.

Phonemic and phonics instruction, if it is to be effective, should occur through real reading activities, such as using rhymes, songs, patterns, and word games. These activities focus children's attention on sounds and the corresponding letter or letters that represent them. It is only when children have a knowledge of sound–letter correspondence that they can begin to read and write independently and transfer knowledge from one situation to another.

### *The Emergent Reader*

Emergent readers, like early readers, enjoy listening to stories and have favorite books that they seemingly never tire of. Children at this stage know that books can provide them with entertainment and information, and they see themselves as capable of reading them.

These youngsters have refined their knowledge of how books work, and realize that the purpose of print is to record or share meaning, and that it is fixed. They are beginning to rely on semantic and syntactic cueing systems to predict events, and can retell sequences of events. These children are interested in developing their print abilities. They like to have their stories transcribed, which they can read back to a teacher or parent.

To help emergent readers develop knowledge of how writing reflects spoken words, it is necessary to create environments where children are surrounded by print. Teachers or parents need to show examples of how print is used and give



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children plenty of opportunities to read books successfully, particularly pattern books and books with detailed illustrations. Shared reading, of course, brings these books alive and directs children to focus on functions of print. Finally, publishing children's own stories gives them real reasons to write and reinforces the major purposes of writing — to record and to share.

### *The Transitional Reader*

Developing or transitional readers can read some texts independently and successfully. Children at this stage of reading often enjoy books by a favorite author, including books in a series, and it is during this period that children come to recognize characteristics of various genres. Using this knowledge, and their experience in reading, they begin to develop a personal literary taste.

At this stage, their knowledge of sound–letter correspondence is growing, and they can recognize and write letter groups such as blends and digraphs. Their knowledge of sight words is also growing, and they can read these words in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts.

As they read, developing readers use all four cueing systems to help them make meaning. They are able to self-monitor their reading, identifying and correcting miscues, and can substitute words that make sense when they are unsure of a text. At this level children are reading silently. Some children may still finger-point or say the words softly to themselves. As their reading ability develops further, they will discontinue these practices.

To progress in their literacy development, developing readers need to consolidate a strong sense of story. Teachers can build upon developing readers' enjoyment of independent reading, particularly with familiar texts, as well as their interest in discussing stories in small groups, and the value they place on connections between reading and writing. As part of their literacy program, teachers should introduce chapter books and simple novels, and ask students to retell the plots of stories they have read. To imbue a meta-awareness of texts, children at this stage need to be encouraged to recognize characteristics of genres of texts. As well, they need to increase knowledge of literary elements and the materiality of texts (e.g., the cover, illustrations, etc.). Developing readers should also recognize phonics generalizations and have a growing vocabulary.



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**Texts for Learning Readers**
*Lea Pelletier*

The content area teachers with whom I work have struggled for years with students who won't read their textbooks as assigned. When I went into some of the textbooks looking for strategies that might help, I found that the majority of them had readability levels that suited only fluent readers, and that did not use text features at all well (either too few, or so many that they distracted from the "meat," graphics that didn't really help at all).

When I sat down and talked with the teachers about this, most were incredibly relieved; they had thought they were incompetent because they couldn't motivate the students to do the reading. Since then, we have used a number of strategies to help students through parts of the existing textbooks; however, we have also spent considerable time successfully locating alternative or supplementary texts for the units they teach. At first, some of them experienced concern that this was "dumbing down"; but about three weeks ago, one of them who teaches a course often taken by marginal readers stopped me in the hall and said, "I'm completely converted. I just finished the unit on ________ with the book we bought last spring, and I was able to cover three times the content, and they know it!"

I've done PD sessions on this issue across the region and at a provincial conference; in it, I place teachers in the students' position, and give them a short text to read on astrophysics, with a short test to complete in table teams. They struggle for a while and exhibit all the behavior that you see in a classroom when students can't read. Then I give them a "friendlier" text that contains all the same content, but is more simply written and is laid out better; with this text, of course, they succeed. They guess that the first text had a readability level between Grades 14 and 16, and that the second was about Grade 10; I tell them that the first was at Grade 11.9, and the second, Grade 6.3. Then we talk about what this means for their teaching. It has been powerful.

I really believe that, while we want all students to be fluent readers and continue to work hard toward that goal, in secondary school we cannot, in all conscience, keep bright students who have problems with reading from acquiring the content they are capable of understanding by giving them textbooks from which they cannot make meaning.

## *The Fluent Reader*

Fluent readers have arrived at a point where they have built up an extensive sight vocabulary and thus are free from the time-consuming word analysis that may have occurred at previous stages. These readers can read a range of texts for a variety of purposes, read silently, link new information with existing knowledge, and adjust their style of reading to reflect the type of book being read.

This is a critical stage in reading. Some children may begin to lose their enthusiasm for reading because books may appear too challenging or they no longer find themselves as captivated by story. In these cases, we must select books that children enjoy and that they can read successfully, all the while avoiding habits and classroom routines that may give reading activities the "appearance" of a choice (e.g., routine comprehension questions). Children need to continue to confirm reading as an act that entertains them, that brings them satisfaction, that adds to their knowledge, and that is undertaken for genuine reasons.



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Just as they are becoming independent in their reading, so, too, are they becoming independent in their writing. These children are learning to write in a variety of forms for a variety of audiences and purposes. In addition, they are improving the quality of their written work through editing and proofreading, and are mastering the conventions of the language.

The school's role is to help children develop those strategies that will increase their reading and writing fluency. Teachers can do this in part by identifying genres that appear appealing, by demonstrating behaviors they consider useful (e.g., proofreading written material), by conferring with children on an as-needed basis, and by acting as a resource to help them rediscover the joys of reading.

### *The Independent Reader*

Independent readers read texts independently and silently. The style of reading they choose reflects the material being read and these readers monitor their reading for understanding.

These children can read a range of books, as well as novels that reflect other cultures, other times, and other ways of looking at the world. They are capable of interpreting complex plots and characterization, and need to be challenged to move ahead on their own, using fiction, non-fiction, and computers.

To further the development of independent readers, it is important to encourage them to read a range of texts in a variety of ways, through such means as independent reading, shared reading, and literature circles. Since their writing often reflects their reading knowledge, they can be encouraged to respond to texts read in innovative ways.

## English Language Learners

"The current literacy initiatives and practices in Aboriginal education are varied to suit the needs of many students, teachers, and schools, and are all developed with the intention of providing an educationally rich environment where all students will learn to read and write. In order to achieve this, we must foster a shared decision-making process that invites and supports a partnership with the Aboriginal community so that students will feel respected and connected to the learning environment." — Vancouver School Board

These ELL readers face a special challenge. Although they share their peers' reading tastes, their level of English precludes them from reading many age-appropriate texts. These children generally do not want to read books that are read by younger children. High-interest low-vocabulary novels were developed to fill this gap, but did not prove to be a great success, with their general lack of plot and character sophistication. What then do teachers give these children that will appeal to their humor, their sense of adventure, and their thirst for a good story? How do schools teach them to read?

First, teachers need to realize that it is important to honor each child's culture. By providing an atmosphere where these students see their past experiences as valuable to their learning of English, they have in place a set of skills and a knowledge bank on which they can draw as they learn the language. Indeed they may benefit from being able to speak and write in their home language as they become accustomed to their new surroundings.

Second, it is essential to welcome these children into the school and make them feel a part of the school culture. Where possible, teachers may wish to pair a child with no English with a child who shares the same home language but who has acquired some English. This buddy can introduce the new child to the physical layout of the school, its schedule, its resources, and its extracurricular activities, as well as provide a model for language-acquisition success.

Finally, it is imperative that ELL readers get experience with more than just simple texts. By giving these children the same books that others are reading,



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then structuring the learning so that they can receive assistance and support as they read, you can ensure these students can sustain interest while advancing their language skills.

Each year, principal Ann Christy had beautiful and intricate designs painted on her arms by parents in her school's ethnic community. She also invited guests from the community, such as singers, storytellers, and authors, to come to the school. These were important components of the celebrations in her multicultural urban school.

## The Reader in Difficulty

The factors that explain why some students are at-risk readers are as varied as the children themselves. Some may have medical difficulties, challenges at home, or attention deficit difficulties that impede their learning, while others may learn at a slower rate than their peers, including both those experiencing problems in particular areas or in all areas of learning. Some students may progress at a "normal" pace for a while, but become blocked at a particular point in their learning. Whatever the reason, teachers need to observe and assess these students to decide on the support they most need.

Teachers can often help these students by spending time with them individually or, for brief times, in small groups where they share the same level of literacy development as others. It is of particular importance to read aloud to these students, to read with them, and to listen to them read. Teachers can also assist at-risk readers by giving them quiet reading time, by helping them to identify the purposes for reading, and by making obvious the link to activities that make experiences with print meaningful and real.

## Boys and Literacy

This issue is discussed at length in *Even Hockey Players Read* by David Booth.

When we began researching material about boys and literacy, we were amazed at the quantity of available resources for parents and teachers, especially on the Internet. People are certainly concerned about males and literacy. Dozens of books have emerged in the last few years documenting issues in male culture and in raising and schooling boys. Some emphasize biological differences in males and females; others take a socio-constructivist approach; still others struggle for a culturally elitist model promoting the literary canon. We need to look at them all to find directions for supporting parents, teachers, and educational policy makers, but especially for helping youngsters themselves to begin taking control of their literacy lives, aware of their own needs and interests as developing readers and writers.

Consider the change in the texts we read today at home or work: books of every variety — softcover and hardback; thousands and thousands of magazines and comics available from the local newsstand; letters, bills, ads, and pamphlets through the mailbox; electronic print of all sorts, from ones that fit in the palm to giant TV screens; memos, fact sheets, documents, e-mail and attachments. The definition of literacy has altered, as have the strategies necessary for reading text.

Before deciding on plans of action, we need to examine the issues pertaining to the literacy lives of boys, how they perceive themselves as readers, and how parents, teachers, and peers influence their literacy development. The role of gender in reading success is complex, and we want to uncover many of the assumptions and stereotypes that parents and educators have about boys and how they handle the world of print text. We need to listen to the voices of writers for young people, of authorities in this field, and, most crucially, of boys and men as they reveal their literacy challenges, struggles, tastes, and values, and offer us insights into how we can support all learners in their literacy journeys.

If we believe that all children should have access to the literacy world, how will we ensure that boys, in particular, see themselves as readers who can handle the requirements of such a variety of texts? Non-readers tell us too many stories of punishment and pain, of no care and no touch, where books never metamorphosed into friendly objects, where worksheets and controlled readers dictated



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their eye movements and caused their reading hearts to beat irregularly. They drown in printer's ink.

We don't want to generate or fuel new problems for education — especially for girls — as we explore and even promote programs for boys. And there are diverse opinions about the origin and even the nature of the problems that we find inside such a discussion. Most importantly, the education of boys is closely connected to the education of girls, and school and education policies on gender will directly influence both. If we focus on the problems of boys, do we endanger the efforts of so many in the struggle to bring equity for girls into our society? Or do we see these initiatives as dialogues that are attempting to move us all forward into strengthening the lives of every child as an individual? What if we refuse to consider the issues not as a "war," but as an inquiry into the dynamics of how boys and girls construct their gendered literacy lives?

How can we who work in schools respond fairly to the needs of boys in relation to the needs of girls, and to the diversity among groups of boys and girls? Fortunately, we can benefit from the educational reforms that grew from the changes associated with girls: we can apply those principles of gender equity to the educational needs of boys, even though in many ways that very system of schooling formerly marginalized girls and privileged some boys. What conditions, then, contain or exacerbate these problems for so many boys and for many girls?

At a school we recently visited, we observed that twice a week at noon hour, the principal plays basketball with those Grade 7 and 8 boys who are working in a group for troubled readers. The activity is a strong motivating force for the students.

We know that no single category includes all boys or all girls. We don't need to add to the stereotype of classifying all boys' behaviors, tastes, and attitudes into one single frame, nor do we want to reinforce the generalities that are often applied to boys. But as we look at studies and reports that examine boys and girls, their learning styles and special interests, their growth patterns and their stages of intellectual development, we do notice differences. These differences are not in all boys or in all girls, but in enough of them to cause us to reflect about our demands on their young lives.

There are definite problems with the ways in which many boys view themselves as literate beings, with how they approach the acts of reading and writing, and with how they respond to assessments of their skills. At least the faltering test scores have opened up discussion on these issues that concern many teachers and parents.

How closely are we watching and interpreting the alarmist data? Are all boys at risk? If not, which ones? How significant are developmental stages in boys' literacy abilities? Are there differences in boys' growth with boys of the same age? What is normal literacy achievement for a six-year-old boy? Is it the same for a six-year-old girl? Which boy and which girl? Are we concerned about the girls who are doing poorly? And most important, what do we mean by "literacy"?

Parents and teachers have many questions, and they are almost always about boys in literacy trouble: they don't read, can't read, won't read, don't write, can't write, can't spell. Those of us who are responsible for educating boys are deeply concerned over the plight of many of them who can't or won't enter the literacy club. But our rules for entry are very strict and, oddly enough, computer skills are seldom part of the qualifications.

We need to examine the challenging issues around boys and literacy. The role of gender in learning to read and write is complex, and educators need to uncover many of the stereotypes we hold as parents and teachers about boys and how they cope with the world of print, so that we can create and support a cul-



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ture of literacy in school and at home that engages boys who can't read, who don't read, and who *do* read.

**Strategies for Boys' Literacy Success**
*Ontario Ministry of Education*

1. Be in their corner: The role of the teacher in supporting boys' literacy
2. Keep it real: Making reading and writing authentic and relevant to boys
3. Have the right stuff: Choosing appropriate classroom resources for boys
4. Help make it a habit: Providing frequent opportunities to read and write
5. Let them talk: Appealing to boys' need for social interaction
6. Teach with purpose: Understanding boys' learning styles
7. Read between the lines: Bringing critical literacy skills into the classroom
8. Get the Net: Using technology to get boys interested in literacy
9. Embrace the arts: Using the arts to bring literacy to life
10. Find positive role models: Influencing boys' attitudes through the use of role models
11. Drive the point home: Engaging parents in boys' literacy
12. Build a school-wide focus: Extending literacy beyond the classroom
13. Assess for success: Using appropriate assessment tools for boys

## Appropriate Levels of Literacy Challenge

In order to assist students in their literacy development, we need to ensure that students have access to texts that are accessible and that they can comprehend, so that they can engage in purposeful reading and responding. Students need to read for a reason — for enjoyment, for information, or for instruction, and, as they participate in making meaning with a text, they also have opportunities to learn about how they function as readers and writers, and how the process of literacy works for them.

As a secondary principal, Tom Moore has a strong literacy push in his school that is built upon his own teaching career, when he filled his classroom with books. An avid reader, he purchases several hard-covered novels each month that he then donates to the school library to support young people as readers. He encourages teachers to search the newspaper for articles, editorials, and pictures that highlight their particular discipline and to mount them on bulletin boards each day. This way, students can note the contemporary effect of literacy in their lives.

As teachers, we want to find texts that will both engage the reader and develop literacy competence. As students apply the strategies they have acquired to new or difficult texts, they are improving and extending their reading abilities. Therefore we have to provide texts that are appropriate to the students' stage of development and to their reading interests. To achieve this, we need a variety of engaging texts that correspond with the range of student literacy competencies found in a regular classroom setting.

The texts we use in our classrooms need to represent a continuum of challenge, based on a variety of factors, so that we can match the complexity of the selection with the ability of the student. In this way, we can provide the students with guided reading lessons and conferences that support their processing of text, with only a few challenges involving word solving and issues of context and content. Students are able to see themselves as successful readers who are engaging with meaningful texts, both on the page and onscreen.



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In a school with a mandate for improving literacy for all students, the library should become the main focus in building a central resource to support every student and every teacher. Today's school libraries can supply invaluable texts for enriching the literacy lives of the students: computer resources, information books, novels for both boys and girls, magazines, poetry anthologies, and reference materials. Through the collections and resoruces an effective library offers, each classroom becomes connected to the world outside the school, and the teacher/librarian can add support to every teacher's programs — in curriculum areas, during independent reading, for student research projects, and, most of all, by motivating and encouraging students to widen their literacy horizons and to deepen their awareness of the great variety of texts, both in print and online, that will connect them to that world.

**Selecting Quality Literacy Resources**

**Questions for Selecting Resources**

- Reviewing new materials to meet needs
- How are school teams involved in selection
- How are student data used in selection
- What process is in place for gap analysis

**Outcomes**

- Incorporates a variety of organizational structures
- Whole-class, small-group, and independent instruction
- Offers multiple perspectives
- Linguistic, social, and cultural diversity
- Connects to student lives, knowledge, and experiences
- Relevant to student interests
- Encourages curiosity
- Matched to assessed needs and strengths
- Promotes technology and media
- Promotes critical literacy
- Encourages higher-order thinking
- Increasingly complex topics and issues
- Aligned with curricula
- Cross-curricular connections
- Explore a variety of text forms
- Aligned with new initiatives for improving achievement
- Includes assessment for learning, strategies, and tools
- Consistent with current research about literacy practice
- Interconnects the language arts
- Provides purposeful, direct instruction, demonstrations, and modeling
- Supports the gradual release of responsibility to the students

## *The Graphic Novel*

The New Literacies, as they have been labeled, are concerned with multimodal texts such as comics, magazines, newspapers, books, the Internet, e-mail, graphics, video, and sound. Together, these texts fill the lives of our students, and meaning is accrued as students combine the messages from the different media into their own construct of the world.

Many of today's young readers enjoy reading a type of book different from those that we are most familiar with — the graphic novel. This shouldn't come as a surprise in a world where visuals from TV, videos, games, and computers fill so much of our youngsters' time. In an increasingly image-filled culture, this new literacy medium offers alternatives to traditional texts used in schools, while at the same time promoting literacy development. For many of us, comics are tainted as a lesser genre, relegated to childhood's Saturday-morning leisure time. But many of today's graphic novels include a complex and art-filled variety of genres, from fiction to biography, social studies and science, representing social, economic, and political themes and topics that readers might not choose in other types of texts. As well, they present opportunities for incorporating media literacy into the reading program, as students critically examine this word-and-image medium itself.

The concept of the graphic novel is conveyed through two separate terms: "novel" and "graphic." The concept of *novel* is generally understood as a form of literature, popular among readers, and well-used by authors of textual narratives



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in English and other languages throughout the world. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a novel as "a fictitious prose narrative or tale of considerable length... in which characters and actions representative of the real life of past or present time are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity." *Graphic novel* is a branch of this literary form. In simple words, a graphic novel may be described as a stand-alone and complete narrative (story) presented through texts and pictures in parallel with the definition of the term *graphic*, "the production of pictures, diagrams, etc., in association with text."

## The Intervention Process

Research shows that there are certain factors that affect literacy. These include

- Poor readers read less than their peers
- Poor readers are constrained by a lack of vocabulary development and world knowledge
- Poor readers often experience reading in negative, passive, and inefficient ways

Based on studies of large-scale initiatives over the past decade, such as Slavin's Success for All, Reading Recovery™, and Crevola and Hill's Early Years Literacy Project, the earlier you intervene with at-risk readers, the greater the improvement. Early intervention has repeatedly been shown to have a substantial impact on children's reading progress.

According to Jane Hurry of the Institute of Education in Great Britain, research evidence demonstrates that successful reading interventions require

- One-to-one tutoring in a broad curriculum
- The inclusion of different genres of texts in a variety of groupings
- The incorporation of writing, particularly related to spelling and word-level work
- Explicit phonics teaching connected to the content of the text

In her article, Hurry maintains that, although we need to acknowledge the contributions of meaning-based reading by always having a language context, there has to be a phonological element to any intervention.

In identifying a framework for intervention, it is important to focus on the following aspects:

- An intensive literacy program
- Effective teaching
- Assessment

### *An Intensive Literacy Program*

An intensive literacy program includes a combination of phonics teaching alongside meaningful and purposeful literacy activities. There are certain key principles that are fundamental to this approach:

- Understanding that print carries a message
- Learning the relationship between letters and sounds
- Developing sight vocabulary
- Learning letter formations and spellings for writing



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- Monitoring comprehension and inference skills

Some of the more successful interventions have been ones that merge a phonological approach with a meaning-based approach. What is also increasingly important is a writing component, including spelling awareness.

### *Effective Teaching*

Research and practice have shown us that one-to-one teaching instruction in reading and writing is the best vehicle for success in literacy. As discussed above, intervention programs should also be intensive and instituted as early as possible.

The following are the critical issues in terms of teaching strategies for reading interventions:

- Increase the amount of time devoted to teaching literacy
- Use a one-to-one approach, as it has been proven more reliable than group programs
- Make professional development a component of the intervention process to ensure that the implementation of programs like Reading Recovery™ are an integral part of the overall school program

### *Assessment*

Assessment should be used to inform the teaching decisions about particular interventions. Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive look at the role of assessment and evaluation in all aspects of literacy teaching.

Through assessment we not only establish what pupils know, but also what programs will fit their needs (e.g., phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension skills, etc.). Most importantly, assessment charts student progress. Susan Schwartz maintains that knowledge about assessment and evaluation is key to planning and monitoring all literacy initiatives.

## Writing

Over a series of Saturdays during the year, principal Roy Howard drove groups of Grade 6 students to the museum in a large nearby city, followed by lunch in an interesting restaurant. The students' experiences resulted in all kinds of writing, talk, and further research, which they then shared with Roy.

Quality writing occurs in classrooms where students write about things that matter to them, and where a language-rich, supportive environment fosters their desire to see themselves as writers and increases their ability to capture their ideas and feelings proficiently. It is important for children to have real purposes for writing and to speak in their own voices with clarity and accuracy. Writing may not always be easy or fun, but it can be satisfying and purposeful.

Teachers have not always counted all of the writing events that occur in classrooms as acts of written composition, but they are. We have at least replaced the inappropriate subject term *creative writing* with *writing*, which opens the door for exploring the many different functions of writing, including reporting, creating, persuading, note-taking, and describing, to name just a few.

To encourage writing growth, teachers should encourage students to write frequently during the day in a variety of situations: for example, note-taking during a mini-lesson; working on an idea web for a social studies project; completing a final draft of an independent piece. Students need to realize that only the last type of writing mentioned here requires extensive revising and editing — that we "publish" our writing when we have something special to share and to keep. Chapter 3 describes some strategies for helping your teachers implement the writing process.



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## Models of Effective Literacy Programs

See The Literacy Initiative at Elms Elementary School by Theresa Licitra on page 74.

The list of programs that follows emerged from our research inquiry into literacy programs that have proven effective with students. In researching exemplary reading and writing programs, we examined three main areas:

- The philosophical framework of each program and its implications for teaching and learning
- The methodology of use required for implementation
- Assessment and evaluation components

What unites the programs we deem "effective" is a whole-school approach to changing literacy achievement in a district, state, province, or country, based on many of the components of literacy-based school change described in Chapter 1. Our selection of programs encompasses international literacy initiatives that have proven successful in Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States.

See Literacy in Middle and Secondary School by Mark Federman on page 77.

We also highlight reading and writing programs that do not provide prescriptive methodologies, but instead offer guidelines for teaching practice. This approach requires professional development and support services for teachers to implement them effectively — reading and writing programs are only as effective as the principals and teachers working with them.

Each program we selected is based on an approach to the teaching of reading and writing that advocates students having ample opportunities for engaging in meaningful reading and writing activities. The programs also incorporate opportunities for students to learn through talking with others. In all of these programs, literacy skills are carefully articulated and are connected to the actual processes of reading and writing.

Administrators may wish to consult this section when considering an early reading program that fits their own and their staff's approach and/or philosophy of practice. We have divided our list of exemplary programs into three distinct models of literacy as interpretations of literacy teaching and learning:

- Balanced literacy model
- School-change model
- Literacy framework model

### *A Model for Balanced Literacy*

A balanced literacy approach promotes reading skills and literacy among school-age children based on the characteristics of reading stages: early, emergent, developing, fluent, and independent. A balanced literacy framework entails a whole-class approach to reading development that requires strong organizational skills to assess students' learning needs, to plan instruction based on these needs, and to set up learning stations and strategies that support a literate classroom. The premise underlying programs that follow this model is that students need an environment that is organized, stimulating, and psychologically comfortable to learn effectively.

The ten components of a balanced literacy program are

1. *Read-aloud/Modeled reading* — teacher reads selection to students
2. *Shared reading* — teacher and students read text together



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3. *Guided reading* — teacher introduces material at students' instructional level
4. *Interactive reading* — teacher and students read and discuss story together
5. *Independent reading* — students read independently
6. *Write-aloud/Modeled writing* — teacher models and teaches writing strategies
7. *Shared writing* — teacher and students collaborate to write and teacher acts as scribe
8. *Guided writing* — teacher reinforces writing skills and students do the writing
9. *Interactive writing* — teacher and students choose topic and compose together
10. *Independent writing* — students choose topic and write at their independent level

Ted Humphries rewrote all of the warning signs and notices that are sometimes necessary in the front hall for school safety in polite and invitational language, and added a display case for copies of letters and notices that the school had received or sent to celebrate authentic literacy. (Do signs asking visitors to report immediately to the front office really keep out intruders?)

A balanced literacy format emphasizes speaking, listening, presenting, writing, reading, and viewing. The classroom set-up can include a whole-group area, a small-group area, and learning centres such as a reading area, a writing centre, a cross-curricular centre, computer stations, a creative arts centre, a communication area/post office, and a listening station.

## *A Model for School Change*

Some literacy initiatives and early reading and writing programs have proven effective emerge from models developed by theorists working in the area of policy and school change. As is outlined in this book, a literacy-based school change model advocates a strong balanced literacy program that operates within a new infrastructure of administration.

Michael Fullan's involvement with the *National Literacy Strategy* in the United Kingdom serves as an example of improving literacy rates by making changes to the administrative infrastructure of schooling. In an article profiling the success of Britain's program, the *National Literacy Hour*, Fullan attributes the success to six critical elements:

> There are six critical elements to their (i.e., *National Literacy Strategy*) approach: First, set ambitious standards; second, devolve responsibility to the school level; third, provide good student achievement data to schools and provide clear targets; fourth, invest in the professional development of teachers; fifth, establish transparent accountability systems so everyone from administrators to the general public can see how well schools are doing; and finally, intervene in school boards in inverse proportion to success (successful schools and districts take on leadership roles; failing schools and districts receive targeted attention to turn them around).

The *National Literacy Hour* is based on the objectives of offering focus and direction in literacy teaching and learning. Its rationale is to provide a practical structure of time in which to teach literacy. It is set up in this way:

- Begins with 15 minutes of shared text work which represents a balance of reading and writing
- Is followed by 15 minutes of whole-class word and sentence work



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- Is followed by 20 minutes of group and independent work with mixed ability groups (some doing guided reading and others completing a writing activity)
- Ends with a whole-class discussion in which the teacher reviews, reflects upon, and consolidates all teaching points

### *Literacy Framework Model*

There are several reading and writing programs spearheaded by theorists in the field of literacy that have proven effective with students in a variety of contexts. Research demonstrates that such frameworks have proven more effective in children's reading comprehension than other reading programs on the market. We have identified two programs that fit this profile: *Success for All* and *The Four Blocks.*

*Success for All* is a school-wide reading program that incorporates tutoring and family support services along with classroom teaching. The major components of *Success for All* are

- Story-related activities
- Direct instruction in reading comprehension
- Independent reading
- Listening comprehension
- Writing

In this program, students work together to improve strategic reading and comprehension skills. The writing program concentrates on creative writing and responding to literature.

With an emphasis on oral language development, *Success for All* also includes story telling and retelling (STaR), emergent reading, rhyme with reason, shared book experience, and Peabody Language Development kit. The second level of the program emphasizes a balance between phonics and meaning, using both children's literature and stories which have phonetically regular text, along with 50 minutes of shared reading daily. The third level emphasizes cooperative learning.

*The Four Blocks* program provides several varied opportunities for all children to learn to read and write. It is arranged into four blocks: working with words; self-selected reading; guided reading; and writing. The Four Blocks aims to make each block as multileveled as possible. It provides additional support for children who are struggling, as well as additional challenges for children who are independent readers. At-risk students can be supported by intervention programs while participating fully in the program.

There is no ability grouping in *The Four Blocks* program. The blocks can be scheduled in any pattern to meet the needs of individual classrooms. The structure of the program is as follows:

- *Working with words* — In this block, the children work with the word wall, then they work on the phonetic patterns of high-frequency words for reading and spelling activities.
- *Self-selected reading* — A teacher starts this block by reading aloud. The students then read a self-selected book on their own while the teacher conferences with individual children.



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- *Guided reading* — This block aims to give children opportunities with different genres to teach reading comprehension. Whole-class, partner, and small-group formats are used with membership in various formats, changing often to maintain the multilevel methodology. This is the most difficult block to maintain with a mixed-ability group.
- *Writing* — Each day this block starts with a mini-lesson. The teacher then helps students revise, edit, and publish. The writing block is carried out in writer-workshop fashion.

**Reflecting on the Process**

- What would you and your staff consider to be the "best possible" literacy curriculum you could ever imagine? What resources would you need to support your program?
- What would the students achieve in this "best possible" literacy curriculum? How would the staff facilitate their development?
- How do individual teachers currently establish their timetables in your school?
- What literacy materials are presently used? Do they form the basis for the curriculum or are they seen as isolated resources?
- Are reading, writing, and talking the centre of the curriculum?
- How can the learning achieved by staff members who have taken in-depth professional courses in such areas as writing, children's literature, or drama education be most profitably shared with others?
- How can the staff at your school take ownership of in-school or district-wide workshops to make sure the events are significant to their needs?
- How can you facilitate the attendance of your staff at educational conferences that are coming up to support a new literacy vision?
- What areas of change could you and your staff inititate in trying to institute a new or modified literacy curriculum?

## Concluding Thoughts

Although many of the principles and practices foregrounded in this chapter derive from the strength of research and information on the content of literacy education, they have been framed within our overall goal of promoting literacy-based school change.

As a literacy principal, you should understand and be proficient in issues tied to literacy education. There should be a shared vision in your school of what people need to know to organize and manage a comprehensive reading and writing program that includes literacy events across the curriculum and opportunities for development as individuals, as part of small groups, and as part of a literate community.

Schools need teams of teachers to design and implement programs that support each child's development over the years. As lead voice in your school, you create the foundation for building the capacity for a literate community.



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## Leading for Literacy: Roles of the Leader

Kathryn Broad

Kathy Broad is the Director of the Elementary Initial Teacher Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in the University of Toronto. Her doctoral study explored transformative leadership for school change. Her current research and learning includes teacher induction, teacher development, and school leadership.

In the past five years, there has been an incredible growth in our knowledge and thinking about literacy and about leadership. Conceptions of literacy have broadened and deepened, to include multiple ideas about texts and multiple ways of knowing and being literate. Notions of leadership have also expanded and become more nuanced, emphasizing less formalized and more shared or distributed leadership practice. In my study and experience over this time, I have come to believe even more strongly in the relational nature of leadership for literacy and learning. I see leadership as a complex, interconnected, and dynamic web of approaches and actions that can be somewhat captured in the following framework: leader as learner, teacher, partner, advocate, and researcher.

For me, leadership at its core is about learning. As leaders interested in developing literacy, it's vital for us first to recognize that we must be the lead learners. There has been an explosion in the knowledge base of effective literacy practice — multiliteracies, critical literacy, and information about the processes of reading from cognitive science. All leaders are challenged to keep reading and learning about effective instructional and assessment practices, new theories, and pieces of research, and to re-examine practices in light of these new ideas. At times I've been powerfully confronted with counter-intuitive information about my own methods; for example, realizing that assisting a student too readily or frequently sends a subtle but undermining message about our confidence in the learner that has a direct impact upon efficacy. As well as studying all that research has to offer, as lead learners we must also continue to learn about our own particular context and the strengths, needs, and experiences of our community of learners. We must expect to be surprised and informed by all of the learners in our community.

Implied in this role of leader as learner is an openness to new ideas and understandings, and a willingness to risk and try the unfamiliar. I've come to see the role of leader-as-learner extending into that of researcher or inquirer. Viewing ourselves as inquirers empowers us to take an investigative and constructively critical approach to our work. It allows us to notice things, to hypothesize and to ask key questions: What do our observations and the evidence we have gathered about our learners or practices reveal? What elements in our literacy methods are effective? …surprising? …problematic? What additional information do we need? How can we differentiate for our learners? What are the needs and strengths of our community? Using this approach we can undertake our own inquiry projects, using the evidence we collect to plan and implement strategies and interventions, and then observing the outcomes of those efforts in a continuing cycle of inquiry learning. Questioning often leads to newer and better questions, along with new and different actions and ideas.

The role of leader as teacher — sometimes referred to as "educative leadership" — has also become even more essential. What was once called serving as "instructional leader" has come to mean much more. Knowledge of effective instructional practice and the ability to demonstrate responsive teaching or adaptive expertise — connecting practice to solid research and literacy theory — is critical for leaders. It is also vital to understand and appreciate both student



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and adult learners, to help everyone to construct their own knowledge and understanding by valuing and building upon prior knowledge and experiences, to ensure that the learning and work are motivating as they are meaningful and connected to the learner, and to keep students as the focus of all efforts. In the role of leader-as-teacher, our modeling learning, risk-taking, and mistake-making become key. We must both "walk the talk" and also "talk the walk," articulating and communicating the rationale for exercising the professional judgement and actions that are the underlying principles, knowledge bases, research, and theoretical underpinnings of our work.

A newer role that I have come to understand and believe in more fully is that of leader as advocate. As we work to transform not only the practices in our schools but also the literacy outcomes for all students, advocacy becomes a central feature. Leaders must be prepared for the fact that undertaking important change may mean discomfort — like living in a house that is being renovated. If we are to focus on literacy, what other elements will be given less attention? What will be our decision screen? In this role, the leader works to purposefully protect and provide precious resources, such as time and person power. This is also where the leader communicates broadly the efforts, successes, and challenges involved in important change and improvement efforts. This is where the leader is able to demonstrate courage and steadfastness in change initiatives. When the inevitable implementation dip occurs, being prepared and ready to maintain the course through a time of unexpected outcomes or disappointing results requires perseverance, strength, and a profound belief in the worth of the undertaking or initiative.

The final role, leader as partner, places collaboration as the foundation of leadership for transformation, particularly in the area of literacy. When formally designated school leaders recognize and utilize the unique contributions and diverse perspectives of all partners — staff, students, parents and community members, colleagues in other schools, district support personnel, federations, governments and universities — capacity for leadership in literacy increases exponentially. This community of leaders, when united in collaborative work on behalf of students, has almost unlimited strength and knowledge as well as capacity for learning and growth. We can ask difficult questions and undertake quite comprehensive change efforts when a diverse and trusting team is in place to consider and offer ideas and share the "heavy lifting." In this way, everyone in the community seeks common understanding, shares energy and power, and takes collective action to support student learning. By understanding and building on the strengths and skills of the community of leaders, the ability of that community to envision, create, and sustain meaningful change is powerfully increased.

### *Questions that Encourage Learning for Literacy Leaders*

Barth (2001) tells us that "learning from experience is not inevitable. It must be intentional" (p. 65). I offer these questions to encourage reflection that can spur all of the many leaders within school communities to learn and grow individually and collectively. The following questions may be used as prompts for thinking, writing, dialogue, or collaborative inquiry among all of the leaders in literacy.



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1. What are we most proud of in our literacy programs? What are we most concerned about?
2. What do we want to learn next to improve our literacy instruction?
3. What would we change immediately if we could?
4. What concerns right now hold the greatest potential for change?
5. What kind of collaboration regarding literacy is occurring in our school?
6. What are our current questions about literacy teaching and learning?
7. What issues are coming to our attention? How are they being brought forward?
8. What research information about literacy instruction/assessment/development would be most useful for us right now?
9. Where are our sources of information and/or supports for answering our questions?
10. What prior experiences or knowledge bases am I/are we bringing to bear on this situation/question?
11. What values and actions do I/we want to model?
12. How do I/we select worthwhile projects and protect energy and time?
13. How do we maintain optimism and hope?
14. What does sustainability mean in this context?
15. How does this question or potential project fit with the goals and initiatives of our school? Our system?
16. How are our beliefs and understandings about literacy teaching and learning reflected in our practices and actions?

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## Play and Literacy

Linda Cameron

Linda Cameron is an Associate Professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, where she specializes in Early Years Education. As well, Dr. Cameron speaks internationally as an advocate for the Arts in Education.

### *Playful Lives, Structured Classrooms*

For many of us, school experiences were quite different from those experienced by children today. We sat in rows; the teacher stood at the front of the classroom; the blackboard reminded us of what we were working on; and we were silent — *apparently* quiet and well-behaved. But underneath the silence was play — secret codes that careened around the room, private jokes, plans affirmed by nods, gossip and pointed looks, notes passed with fear of being exposed (that was part of the excitement), and other games of wit and wile.

In those days, backpacks were designed for serious treks, not laden daily with burdens of homework. School books were the school's books and stayed there. School time generally contained delivered lessons, drills and worksheets, projects, and one-page compositions. Students that did not finish assignments within the allotted time were envigilated after the final bell tolled — a serious punishment. Time outside of school was precious. Three-thirty, and we filed like silent soldiers down the hall and out of the school to freedom — freedom from adult supervision; the choice of time, place, and direction was ours. We could play!

It was our choice who we would play with, what to play, where to create, what to use, when the game began, what the rules would be, how to protect ourselves, and how to work through our social dilemmas. Supervision and adult interference was minimal. Most kids walked to and from school, collecting or depositing



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one another as they went: talking, playing, scheming, pretending, exploring, wondering, wandering, fighting and making up, experimenting, dreaming. Ah, the learning that happened en route! The pace (literal and metaphorical) was slow enough that one could absorb the experience with one's senses, develop questions and theories, open up ontological space that could be temporarily superimposed on "reality"— a new imaginatively created reality in which self, objects, relationships, roles, meaning, rules were all redefined. Play was our place, our space, our time to be.

With huge blocks of time, one could develop a story with a plot full of potential, develop a new race, a new world, a new complexity of meaning— a story! Unsupervised, we had to solve the problems and our safety was our own responsibility. We had to keep thinking. Real, robust questions emerged from these adventures, and the inquiry sent the learning quotient straight up. Eleanor Duckworth (1996) defines intelligence as the having of "wonderful ideas." What invites wonder? Exploration. Engagement. Experience. The environment. Conversations. Stories…. Play!

In *Last Child in the Woods* (2006) Louv suggests that kids today are suffering from what he calls "nature deficit disorder" because they lack the multisensory, rich experience of a park, the woods, a brook, or the seashore: places where investigation or meditation are natural, where one can observe life and learn. William Crain, in *Reclaiming Childhood* (2003) suggests that today the thrust is to have children achieve success in the human-made world, thus they develop cognitive skills that enable them to succeed in a high-tech workplace. The development of the child's relationship with the natural world is hardly a national priority. It seems to me that if kids don't experience nature as a friendly, comfortable place of adventure and excitement, they will miss a critical dimension of perception and imagination.

### *Why Play?*

Why this reminiscence? Is it a romantic version of history? No.

We know the importance of the many kinds of play to give voice to the many languages of childhood. Playing school as a means of exploring power and educational concepts, building forts that provide place and space for exploring architectural and mathematical prowess and practical-problem solving — these *were* learning opportunities and a cherished curriculum.

Rich language development is a major byproduct of play. Oral language develops as children negotiate, hypothesize, regulate, explore, interpret, listen, explain, give directions, argue, and express feelings with authentic purpose. As play begins, the initiator enters a temporary ontological space, and any collaborator needs to "buy into" this space. The space may in fact be jointly created or negotiated. Let's make-believe, let's pretend and make ourselves believe for now that this object and situation are really something else. (Sounds a little like a deep comprehension skill doesn't it?) Or, as in the case of games, the player must learn and accept the rules constructed for the game — you can only move this block in this way and that one in that way, or you can only have three tries, etc. This process involves serious meaning co-constructing, the stuff of writing and reading and comprehending and communicating. Play involves serious language development. Is that where we learned much of our language skill? Is that where we honed our cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical skills?



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The value of play is significant. Experience tells us, memories remind us, research supports the pleasure and potential of play. Pause and remember one time when you played. What kinds of significant intellectual, physical, emotional, spiritual, creative, imaginative, inquiring, problem-solving things were part of that scenario? Where were you? Who were you with? Why are you smiling? What did you learn, try out, figure out?

What does all of this have to do with being educational leaders?

### *Structured Lives, Playful Classrooms*

Children live in a very different world today. They are pushed, structured, tested, protected, plugged in, kept indoors, entertained, and forced to comply. They are often sedentary spectators, caught in the consumption net by marketers. Elkind (2007) comments that

> Children in the twenty-first (century) have been transformed from net producers of their own toy and play culture to net consumers of a play culture imposed by adults.

Where is the fun for today's children? Play is gone...missing...held hostage! We are all caught up in striving for excellence, hyper-parenting, educational tested standards, corporate growth, globalization, competing for a high score in the current standards of life, ravaged by the torment to be the best. Toys are marketed to assure that children will learn something. Kids' time is usurped by lessons and their responsibility is to win, to perform, to be the best at everything. Schools are measured. Kids are tested. Homework is escalating. Creativity does not matter. Fun is not an important factor. Inquiry, imagination, and interaction are limited by the constraints of the pursuit of excellence. Everyone is trying so hard to get ready, to be prepared, to pass the test. In fact in *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools* (2007), Nichols and Berliner suggest that the pressure on kids, teachers, administrators, and even states has been so great that it is threatening the very purposes, morals, and ideals of our education system.

Have we lost sight of what really matters? Let's imagine a classroom that would have opportunities for play as a fundamental part of the literacy curriculum.

Let's free Play!

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## The Literacy Initiative at Elms Elementary School

Theresa Licitra

Theresa Licitra is an Assistant Principal at Elms Elementary School in Jackson, New Jersey, where she has maintained literacy achievement through inspired and forward-thinking initiatives.

### *Choosing an Initiative*

As a school-based writing initiative, we chose to embrace, present, and support the philosophy, framework, and approach of the *6+1 Trait Writing Model* to all certified staff in Kindergarten through Grade 5. This directive provided the Elms Staff with ideology, concepts, and strategies in order to readily incorporate the *6+1 Trait* model as part of their daily writing instruction and implementation. This model directly aligns itself with our basal reading series and parallels the



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online resources available on its website and on supplemental *6+1 Trait* writing sites.

These school-based initiatives directly align themselves, both separately and collectively, to the "Criteria for Power Standards" of the model of DeFour et al. The *6+1 Writing Trait Model* exemplifies all of the attributes of the endurance indicator; the cross-content integration used by teachers through instruction, including components of our differentiated instructional initiative, provides the second component of leverage; meetings in, between, and amongst grade levels provides a platform that enables educators to engage in dialogue which is, according to DeFour, "essential to the next level of instruction." Being proactive in the implementation and targeting of both district- and school-based initiatives enables us to directly and effectively target the keys to assessment for learning: consistency, timeliness, and differentiation.

### *Implementation*

Targeting the first trait, *ideas*, all teachers worked with learners as they developed ideas in their writing. Meetings specific to each grade were attended during the weeks of October, at which time teachers shared writing samples from their classrooms, which had been developed and holistically scored using the *6+1* rubric. These meetings provided time for teachers to focus on the standards, analyze their assessment, and use the information obtained as they reflect on accountability of instruction and student performance. Utilizing this model, the literacy focus was established in the areas of comprehension, expressive written language, and skills development.

Incorporating the *6+1 Trait* model and its five-point rubric, which is in direct alignment with the NJDOE rubric scale, set the premise for the morning's discussion. Data sheets for each classroom teacher, comprised of NJASK scores, end-of-year assessments, and unit test scores, provided a focal point for instruction. All teachers were reflective in the areas of their classes' strengths and targeted areas in need of refinement. Targeted writing traits were *ideas* and *organization*; *voice* was being introduced. Ms. Roberts noted that voice is a strong component of writing and provided an integral piece to focus on in order to strengthen and influence instruction.

### *Maintenance of the Program*

During the first weeks of December, special education teachers, along with support personnel, met again to reflect and discuss the results demonstrated by the initial baseline student assessments; this data and analysis will continue to be used for instruction. The initiative at the Elms Elementary School continues to focus on a "curriculum by design model, incorporating prioritization and planning" (DuFour 2005) utilizing standards, assessment, and accountability.

A quarterly checkpoint was determined for written responses to a picture prompt and to a poem aligned within the grade-level Literacy Pacing Guide. Holistic scores and student performance on the end-of-unit tests were recorded. Student progress was monitored and students in need of supplemental literacy assistance were identified. The reading teacher provided remediation through small-group instruction and lesson modeling. Supplemental programs such as *Reach for Success* and *Voyager*, and an extended after-care program called *Beyond*



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*the Bell,* offered supplemental support to those students identified as being at-risk.

### *Involving the Community*

Throughout, the literacy focus is in the areas of comprehension, expressive written language, and skills development. The message to the Elms educational community that it is important for children to read and to be read to was reinforced through the implementation of the Principal's Buddy Reading Program. Activities that highlight reading — such as Barnes and Noble Night, Read Across America, Book Fairs, and Mystery Readers — continue to motivate learners and strengthen literacy skills.

The Elms Elementary School continued its collaboration with the Jackson Public Library and highlighted summer reading initiatives that learners could pursue with their families at the Jackson Library or through their own independent reading. The Elms Parent Teacher Network, in collaboration with the Elms staff, presented reading incentives to learners at all grade levels. The Jackson Township School District implemented its Summer Reading Program in June 2006, which continued in June 2007, providing learners with both a book and corresponding activities, providing a model that offered titles that were both appealing and grade-appropriate. Assemblies were held and all students were given information and incentives regarding our Summer Reading Program. These initiatives served to foster increased student interest in reading across and within the grade levels.

### *Tracking Progress*

The vice principal and the reading teacher reviewed the district literacy pacing guide and the NJCCCS for each grade level. Model literacy lessons based on the standards implemented by the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act and New Jersey's *Reading First* incentive were demonstrated and modeled by the reading teacher and the vice principal. Exemplary practices using scientifically based research methodologies were implemented and monitored at all grade levels through the checking of plan books, through informal observations, and through formal teacher evaluations.

Ms. Licitra and the reading teacher continued to meet with MLLD teachers, resource teachers, and members of the child study team in order to assist students to meet performance objective and adequate yearly progress. On request, model lessons presented by the vice principal and the reading teacher continued to be demonstrated, with both descriptive and prescriptive feedback developed and exchanged.

Staff development continued its focus: throughout the year educators were provided with opportunities to improve their instructional practice with the *6+1 Trait Model,* providing a common language for both teacher and learner as it prescribed a targeted, focused model of standards-based instruction. Special area teachers collaborated with classroom teachers and devised specific grade level cross-content activities that targeted literacy concepts: Awesome Adjectives and Art; Music and Poetry; and Technology and Literacy. In September 2006, January 2007, and September 2007 (scheduled), the Jackson Township School District In-service Committee, for which the vice principal at Elms Elementary is a committee member, presents their In-service Professional Development to all



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staff, with differentiated instruction continuing to be a major focus. Differentiated activities continue to be implemented across the content area and, in all grade levels in the upper elementary grades, specifically Grades 3, 4, and 5, literacy and math objectives continue to be the area of intended focus.

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## Literacy in Middle and Secondary School

Mark Federman

Mark Federman is a principal at East Side Community High School, a 6–12th grade public school on the Lower East Side of New York City. Mark has created a strong culture of literacy in his school with consistent literacy achievement over the years.

### *Creating a Vision for Literacy*

Several years ago, our English classes were dominated by whole-class novels that many of our students couldn't read, wouldn't read, or pretended to read when asked to read on their own. Emphasis in content areas was totally on content, not on access to text, although most students could not access the text. The bottom line was that most students just would not (and many could not) read the texts in front of them. Students viewed reading as a chore rather than something to enjoy or access as a resource. Consequently, students were spending very little time actually reading, so they were not growing as readers.

Some teachers found success with implementing a small-choice, independent reading program at the beginning of each block. Other teachers and school leaders (including myself), who were a little hesitant about "teaching" fewer whole-class novels, started to see that the students who were given a choice and time were actually reading much more than other students. We discussed and studied this, and made a commitment as a school to explore a school-wide Independent Reading program. First, we committed to spending the first twenty minutes of English blocks (or, as we called them, humanities classes) in Independent Reading, where students could choose any book they wanted to read and would read silently. The teacher would "model" reading by quietly reading in front of the class and make sure that all students were reading (or quietly pretending to read). This was a great start, because kids were actually reading more than ever, and many were enjoying it.

However, we noticed a few problems. First, because teachers' class libraries were not substantial enough, and the school library was a bit antiquated, students did not have choice to the extent they needed. Many of the most interesting or desired books would be grabbed off the shelves. Also, although many students chose books that were interesting to them, often these books were too difficult for them to read. Furthermore, we found that the length of time that the students read was still not enough or was inconsistent. The twenty-minutes-a-day requirement was shorter in some classes and longer in others, and students were not reading as much at home as they needed to, even though some teachers required it. Last, but not least, there was not enough consistent direct involvement or instruction by our teachers to move students to the levels we needed them to be at.

It all became incredibly clear. What our students needed to become truly independent and powerful readers were the following three things:

1. Choice and Access: Students needed easy access to books they wanted to and could read.



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2. Time: Students needed uninterrupted, uncompromised time to read these books independently in school and at home.
3. Instruction: Teachers needed to teach students through mini-lessons, reading conferences, and other methods how to choose books, how to become more powerful readers, and how to make reading plans so that the students grow as readers.

These three things, along with the professional development, structures, and money to support them, would ensure that our students and teachers found great success and joy. Most importantly, it was my job as principal to make sure this happened.

### *Implementing a Literacy Initiative*

#### CHOICE AND ACCESS

In today's world of hundreds of cable channels on television, it is rare to find a teenager who would say that there is nothing to watch or no new video game they would like to try. We wanted to have a school where no student ever said, "I am not reading because there is nothing to read." With the insurgence of young adult fiction and texts over the past ten years, there really is a book — in fact, many — for every young person. We set forth to acquire as many of these books as possible.

The expectation immediately became that every English/humanities teacher would have an extensive library in her/his classroom. We shared titles, consulted various professional lists, combed bookstores, and spoke with students to gather the titles we wanted, and then stocked the libraries with these titles. In looking for titles, we focused on books that were of high interest to our students but made sure that the levels varied. We paid particular attention to finding high-interest, low-level books. In addition, we set up each library with attractive, labeled book bins (something that I modeled in my office and will discuss later). This helped students find books more easily, supported them in developing favorite genres and taking risks with newer genres, and made the libraries more attractive in general. The libraries have continued to take off and grow as we regularly replenish them. Each year, we place a minimum of two large orders for which teachers, the librarian, students, and I choose the new titles we want. Also, teachers purchase books throughout the year to replenish the libraries. They are each given a sizeable allotment for which they get reimbursed, and many of the teachers purchase even more books using their own money.

In addition to building classroom libraries, we hired a new librarian from our teaching ranks and revamped and restocked the library. Using funds from our regular budget and through several grants, we ensured that our library had the hottest and latest young adult titles and that we covered all levels and genres. Students have three great places to find books: their classroom, my office, and the school library. Their choices are abundant, and there is always a variety of books in any student's interest at his or her current reading level. If there isn't, the teachers, librarian, and I are always willing to purchase any book that a student requests. Often, we buy books with particular students in mind. There is nothing more empowering for a student or for making a student a powerful reader than when an adult walks up, hands her or him a book, and says, "I saw this book, thought of you, and bought it for my library so you could read it."



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### TIME

As adults, we cherish any quiet moment we can find to escape into a book. We wanted and needed this same opportunity for our students. Once we created the access and choice that students needed and matched students to books, we needed to ensure that students had a sufficient span of quiet time to fall in love with reading and get lost in books. Therefore, we made sure that our school schedule afforded each student, in Grades 6 through 10, 30 minutes of uninterrupted, non-negotiable time for Independent Reading, which grew to 20 minutes a day in Grades 11 and 12. Our hopes were that, once students had this time to fall in love with books, many would actually want to read independently outside of school. Just to make sure, we set the expectation that students would read for 60 minutes a night, and reinforced this through standardized reading records, making the expectation explicit to families and grading students on their home reading.

As a result, you can walk into any English or humanities classroom in our school, on any grade level, during the beginning of class, and find 95% of the students engaged in their books. This is sacred time — if you to dare distract them with anything other than talking about their books, they will not have it. It is common to hear a universal "Awwwwww! Please…a few more minutes?" when the teacher says it is time to put the books away. In addition, almost all of our students are reading regularly at home or somewhere outside of school.

### INSTRUCTION

Once we provided students with the choice and the time they needed to fall in love with reading, we realized we needed to provide more direct instruction to help our students become powerful readers. Our teachers needed to be trained in the instruction of reading. Therefore, we attended various professional development sessions and training with the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, brought in staff developers, and eventually recruited one of our teachers as a full-time literacy coach. Through this professional development, many professional conversations, regular inter-visitations to classrooms, and a commitment to maximizing the results of our literacy program, we took our program to the next level. We strengthened our mini-lessons, articulated and developed the reading strategies we needed to teach our students, modeled strong reading practices through read-alouds, and built strong skills and systems for reading conferences with students. This full-fledged reading workshop allowed us to build a reading program that was heavily student-centered, that created intrinsic motivation, and that naturally differentiated direct instruction of reading strategies, skills, and habits.

Some of the instruction with which we provide students can be broken into three parts:

- matching students to books
- instruction around reading strategies
- increasing their reading levels.

Teachers must know how to match students to books and how to provide instruction that allows students to make independent reading choices that not only suit their interests but also their needs. The more a student is aware of his or her needs as a reader, the more he or she can choose texts that help him or her grow as a reader. We teach students how to know if a book is the appropriate



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level, and strategies to comprehend and interpret these texts. Teachers support students in making reading plans, where the students make a list of books they would like to read in order of increasing difficulty. That way they have "goal books" (books they want to read but that are too difficult for them to read at that time) toward which they are working and are consciously aiming to increase their reading levels. As students move gradually into more difficult texts, they are taught strategies on how to approach and read more challenging books. It is much easier — and we have seen much evidence for this — to motivate students to become stronger readers because they strive to read a desired book, than to push them to read more because it will help them do better on a test or because reading will make them better readers.

### *Examining the Role of Leadership*

In some ways, it is difficult to separate my roles, because a large part of our success has stemmed from the wonderful collaboration that our staff — of which I am an organic part — demonstrated in developing and embracing this program. However, there are some very important things I did and continue to do, things that seem like common sense but really make a difference.

During my first year as a principal, I decided to wear my message on my sleeve and never apologize for it. I made it explicitly clear to our students, staff, and families that we were going to tackle the literacy issue. I outlined five things in a presentation that I regularly give to other principals:

#### 1. PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS

I knew that the type of literacy program my staff and I wanted would require the basic support of the school leadership on several levels. I would need to buy books and build libraries, create a schedule that provided time for reading, and provide our teachers with professional development. However, it would not be enough to just spend money on all of these things; I would need to live them as well. If staff members are sent to professional development (PD), or are provided PD, it changes teachers; if principals and school leaders attend and experience PD with groups of teachers, it changes schools. Therefore, I often attend professional development sessions with teachers and continue to be part of the teachers' ongoing learning regarding the instruction of reading.

#### 2. GET TO KNOW THE STUDENTS AS READERS

This includes getting to know the books they are reading or want to read. I regularly visit classrooms, ask students what they are reading, and speak with them about their books. I hold reading conferences with students and interview them about their reading. I look at their reading records and have done school-wide reading surveys and research on our students' reading. I do book checks to make sure students are bringing home their books or are always carrying their Independent Reading books. I listen to students and utilize them as advisors and consultants on book purchases. I regularly speak with teachers who know young adult books, sharing titles and students' favorites. I browse the *Young Readers, Young Adult,* and *Teen* sections of bookstores and libraries, read young adult book reviews, and check out Hot Pick lists in magazines and online. And most importantly, I read young adult fiction and non-fiction regularly.



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### 3. BUILD A LIBRARY IN YOUR OFFICE

I wanted to make sure that my office was not a place where students were sent when they got in trouble or for other negative circumstances. I wanted it to be a place where students came on their own to celebrate learning, to celebrate reading and books. I also wanted to provide a model and set a standard for what I wanted classroom libraries to look like. Therefore, in my office I built a young-adult library consisting of over 2000 titles. Books are organized in colorful bins by genre, and are easy to access. This is one of a few ways I send a clear message to my students, staff, and families about what is most important in our school. It also helps me ensure that the majority of my interactions and conversations with students are focused on what really matters: reading and learning.

### 4. START A PRINCIPAL'S BOOK CLUB

The Principal's Book Club started as a response to four issues. First, I was learning about and reading so many great books that I needed a better way to share them and get them in students' hands. Second, I was also trying to figure out more formal ways to establish myself as a model reader and literacy leader. Third, I missed teaching. And last, but not least, I saw many issues cropping up in students' lives.

Every couple of months, I choose five to six titles of mixed genres and levels, purchase 30 to 50 copies of the book, and place a *Principal's Book Club* seal on each book. I conduct a "book talk" with students in their classrooms or at town meetings, or I write a letter to the students introducing the books. The books are then distributed to the different classroom libraries, and any student can sign up to read any Principal's Book Club book. Once the student has read the book, she or he writes me a letter or e-mail and then attends a lunch or meeting to discuss the book. Each book-club book is typically read by anywhere from 40 to 200 students (15% to 40% of our student population).

In choosing the books, I consider books in series (because students will usually read the rest of series); books that are hot off the presses; favorite authors (again, to spur students to read their other books); timely books that fit into a particular season, part of the year, news event, or theme month (e.g., African American, Latino, Women's Heritage); books that have been made into movies about to be released; and important issues that teenagers are grappling with. I would like to address this last category for a moment, because it is one of the most important reasons why we must allow students to choose their own books, and it is one of the best ways we can support teenagers. Today's teens regularly encounter racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, violence, teen relationships, pregnancy, peer pressure, bullying, divorce, abuse, and many other issues. Yet they often do not have the tools or the models to address or responsibly handle these situations. Adults are often hesitant or do not feel qualified to help students tackle these issues by themselves. Luckily, there are more and more young adult books (fiction and non-fiction) that address these concerns. If we can get these books in our students' hands, they can see responsible models of how young people handle these issues, models we can use as a launching pad for comfortably addressing and exploring these issues. This is called "bibliotherapy." And one of my goals with the Principal's Book Club, and with our reading program in general, is to make sure our students have access to books that will help them become not just better readers but better people.



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##### 5. ENGAGE, EDUCATE, EMPOWER, AND INVITE FAMILIES

Extend literacy to the home and beyond. One more role in which I see my leadership as necessary is that of ensuring that families understand the importance of our literacy program for the development of their own children. I start this by making sure that the reading expectations are clear to all families. I communicate this regularly in person and in writing, and I have a PowerPoint presentation, titled *10 Ways You Can Help Your Child Become a Better Reader*, that I present to all families at least once. Furthermore, the students' teachers and I regularly provide them with a complete picture of their son's or daughter's life and growth as a reader. This includes reading records (in class and at home), books read, conference notes, and plans for growing as a reader. Last, but not least, I have regular check-ins with families about how the program is working for them and their children.

##### 6. SPREAD THE LITERACY WORK TO ALL CONTENT AREAS AND TEACHERS

For this piece, I focused primarily on our Independent Reading program, which is implemented by our English and humanities teachers. However, our focus on literacy has spread well beyond these classrooms. Currently, our arts, math, science, and social studies teachers see addressing literacy as a crucial part of their job, both as a means to improve students' reading and writing, and as a way to help students access and understand the content. They participate in professional development and constantly consider the students' literacy needs while planning curricula, instruction, and assessment.

### *Managing Change*

In conclusion, my role as a leader goes well beyond just stamping an approval on the latest reading program or cheering (or barking) from the sidelines. By collaborating with teachers to create the program and by participating in my own way in every aspect and phase, managing change is something that feels natural. The program was developed over time by a group of teachers and leaders who were not satisfied with the results we were getting and who knew our students deserved more. As a result, we actually see this as more of a journey than an actual program, and are open to any and all changes that may help us and it to better serve our students. I must admit that I am fortunate enough to have a brilliant and phenomenal staff that makes this difficult work a bit easier. However, it is crucial for me to never forget that it is my responsibility as a leader to ensure we all reach our full potential.



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