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ABSTRACT

Focusing on common misconceptions about children who have trouble learning to read, two papers discuss new ways to think about and teach these students. "Revaluing Readers and Reading," by Kenneth S. Goodman, argues that troubled readers should not be thought of as sufferers from an illness, but as strong, healthy individuals fully capable of learning how to read. To help prepare educators to build on these strengths, Goodman discusses some basic facts about how reading, as a unitary psycholinguistic process, works and develops. Geoffrey Williams and David Jacks' paper, "The Role of Story: Learning to Read in a Special Education Class," explores (1) the assumption that children who have trouble learning to read are deficient; (2) whether a change in approach that emphasizes the social uses of written language might, over an extended period of time, enable them to read more confidently; and (3) the practical management of collaborative language research in a special education setting. To accomplish these purposes, the article details the progress made in 1 year by 13 elementary children in a special education class. The class emphasized extending the functional range of written stories by employing what children already knew about the oral use of narrative. (JD)

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REVALUING TROUBLED READERS
Two Papers

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Revaluing Readers and Reading

Kenneth S. Goodman

University of Arizona

It's time that we change our focus in dealing with those having trouble learning to read. Using medical metaphor, we've treated those who do not respond well to reading instruction as sufferers from an illness. I'm not speaking only of those labeled dyslexic, I term I consider non-productive. I'm also speaking about those labeled remedial in all its variations of degree.

We've invented an endless variety of diagnostic tests to find out what's wrong with the learners. Few of the tests are based on any solid understanding of what reading is and how it works. Test results found among readers with problems are assumed to be different than general populations and causative patterns are assumed. Then when we find the same patterns among more proficient readers we assume they too are handicapped in some mysterious way that doesn't show- yet. The tests are designed to find things wrong with readers. And they co that well.

There's a much smaller variety of prescriptions available for dealing with syndromes the tests create. Everybody, regardless of diagnosis gets basically the same prescription: "These children" need more structure, we are told. Give them a strong dose of readiness followed by endless drills on phonics and word attacks. The same patent medicines prescribed for the dyslexics are also hawked for the learning disabled, the mentally retarded, the bi-lingual, the myopic, the culturally diverse, and the plain vanilla remedial readers.

So enough already! Let's now change our perspective and begin to treat our troubled readers as strong, healthy, and fully capable of learning how to read. If we can identify kids with real, demonstrable physical problems then let's get them medical and/or psychological help for dealing with those problems that can be cured or ameliorated and coping with those which cannot. But let's not let ourselves as educators off the hook by blaming the kids for our lack of success in helping them to learn. The perspective we must adopt is one of building on strength. If we understand as educators some basic facts about how reading works and how it develops, we can build on strengths of all learners and support them as they grow into literacy.

The term **readers in trouble** will be used here by the author for all those who are not doing as well as they think (or someone else thinks) they should do in the development of reading proficiency. The common denominator among such readers is that they have become their own worst enemies. They have acquired a view that the world is populated by two kinds of people: those who can read and those who cannot, those who can learn and those who cannot. They believe that if they could just learn the phonics rules, just get enough word attacks, just master the skills, then they could do what good readers do easily and well. However, they know they cannot because something is wrong with them; they just do not learn like "normal" people.

The key to helping readers in trouble is to help them revalue themselves as language users and learners, and revalue the reading process as an interactive, constructive language process. They must set aside the pathological view of themselves, cast off the labels, and operate to construct meaning through written language using the strengths they have built and used in making sense of oral language or sign. To do that, they need support and help.

READING: A UNITARY PSYCHOLINGUISTIC PROCESS

Unfortunately, many educators have come to view reading as performance on tests, exercises, and workbooks. Teachers must put aside the instructional technology they have equated with reading, and see reading instead as a process of making sense of written language, a receptive language process parallel to listening. In reading there is interaction between a reader and a written text and through it with a writer. What the reader brings to the text--experience, attitudes, concepts, cognitive schemes- is as important as what the author brought to it in creating it. The reader's act is creative too; meaning is created in response to the text.

We must understand that a text is not just a string of equally important words to be perceived, recognized or attacked in linear order. It is syntactically structured, semantically cohesive and coherent. A printed text is an overall unity, a representation capable of varied interpretation and variable comprehension. Furthermore texts exist in the context of culture, personal experience, and situation.

Reading is a psycholinguistic process in which thought and language interact as the reader builds meaning. Readers are not the prisoners of their eyes. They have brains with which they seek sense as they read--they predict and infer where the meaning is going, what sentence patterns are coming, what words and phrases are expected, and what the text will look like.Making sense of print is the reader's goal as well as the framework in which perceptual, syntactic and semantic information is processed. Readers are effective if they make sense of print.

Within the continuous preoccupation with meaning, the reader selects from the available cues only those that are most useful, predicts on the basis of knowledge of language and the world, monitors his or her own success, and corrects when necessary to make sense. The reader is always tentative but confident. He or she is self-monitoring to make sure predictions are confirmed, but he or she is willing to take the risks necessary to move to meaning. Risk-taking, self-monitoring, and self-confidence are the essence of a revaluing program.

HOW IS READING LEARNED?

Learning language is largely a matter of finding its underlying system, inferring its rules, and then being able to use them to express meaning and to understand it. Language is easiest to learn when it is whole, relevant, real, in context, and functional for the user. In this respect, written language is no different from oral language. One need not be unusually clever to learn to read and write any more than to learn oral language.

Only when learners are distracted from meaning by instruction or confronted by materials full of abstract nonsense is a disadvantage created for those who may have mental or physical impairments. Learning letters is more difficult than learning words, which is more difficult than learning to remember or comprehend sentences. Understanding sets of unrelated sentences is more difficult than comprehending coherent stories or other meaningful texts.

Recent studies have demonstrated that children make a strong beginning as readers and writers as they encounter print in their environment and learn to understand its functions (Goodman, 1980). As they see print used, they come to know what it is for and what it means. The key to the learning is the universal search for order and comprehensibility that is characteristic of all humans. If educators can grasp that, then they can understand the tremendous strength that all pupils bring to learning to read and write. That understanding can help teachers to re-value nonachieving pupils and to understand that their failure is educators' failure to help them use the strengths they have. All children seem to be remarkable language learners outside of school. If they appear less successful in school, it is because learning language has been made too hard for them in the quest to make it easier.

Overemphasis on skills and teachers

Skills have been the focus of the instructional programs troubled readers have repeatedly experienced. At the same time these pupils are trying to make sense of print they are also trying to read by the numbers: sounding out. attacking words, using skills. Getting the words right becomes more important, for them, than making sense. Every unfamiliar word becomes a major obstacle to be identified before going on. The reader suffers from the "next word syndrome"; each unconquered word is a symbol of defeat.

Readers in trouble are more likely to be the victims of too much skill use than not enough. They persevere on a single word, producing many nonword attempts before giving up. Many of them have had intensive instruction in phonics and word attacks over and over as they moved through remediation programs. Although the effect of this training shows in their phonic near misses, their miscues are often interpreted by diagnosticians as proof that more phonics is needed.

Readers in trouble also tend to look to the teacher to tell them what to do next. The pattern is to wait for a few seconds each time a problem word or phrase is encountered; then the teacher will supply the next word or an admonition to sound out the next word. The teacher may think he or she has helped by supplying the next word, but such repeated experiences only sustain the next-word syndrome and the basic feeling of defeat and inadequacy of the reader in trouble.

Scenario for failure

Readers in trouble in literate societies with schools universally available have experienced repeated cycles of failure. The natural history of each cycle is something like this: The students are not doing well in school. The less well they do, the more intensively the teacher applies the program. If pupils are not doing well on worksheets, flash cards, skill drills, and remedial exercises, then the teacher repeats the same ones or provides supplementary, similar ones. If the usual amount of time spent on such activities is not paying off, then more time is provided for them, either at the expense of other, more meaningful aspects of the reading period such as free reading time, or of other aspects of the curriculum such as social studies, science, music, or art. If there is an aide available then the aide is assigned to review and repeat with the readers in trouble what has not worked when the teacher did it. Recesses, lunch periods, after school time, even vacation periods are invaded in the name of helping the readers in trouble to overcome their deficits.

Soon the classroom teacher gives up and the child is referred for remediation. Remediation usually begins with a heavy battery of tests that confirm that the pupil is inadequately responding to skill instruction. The tests reveal patterns of weakness and deficiency. Remedial exercises are prescribed to eliminate the weaknesses. The exercises will tend to be more abstract and fragmented versions of what did not work in the classroom.

Sometimes at the beginning of remediation there appears to be an upsurge of achievement and a flicker of hope and enthusiasm on the part of the learner. The pupil enjoys the special attention, particularly if the remedial teacher is warm and encouraging. Somewhat improved scores are achieved. As the remediation continues, however, the learner sinks once more into despair. The abstractness of the fragmented skill drills lead to frustration. What was fresh and new is recognized as the same, dull, repetitious, and tedious exercises that have not worked before. Pep talks and admonishments to try harder build personal guilt. Furthermore, the teacher shows resentment at the ingratitude of the learner for all the personal care and attention.

Meanwhile, back in the class, the remedial pupil is missing important learning opportunities: the time spent on remediation is the time classmates are spending building concepts, reading, writing, doing. So the learner in trouble, in the name of building basic skill competence, is deprived of rich school experience. Ironically, the pupil who rebels and acts out may be showing a healthier reaction than the pupil who withdraws or submits meekly to all this. At least such a rebel is showing a resistance to accepting full responsibility for failure.

Need for revaluing

The answer to this dismal scenario is revaluing. The pupils must be helped to revalue themselves as learners. They must revalue the process of reading as the construction of meaning in response to print. They must come to be able to appreciate their own strengths, to recognize the productive strategies they already can use, and to build positively on those. They must come to put in perspective the interaction of themselves with an author through a text. Then they can put proper value on themselves, understand that no one can easily read and comprehend everything, and that what one knows before reading constrains what one can know after reading. They need to know that some texts are difficult to read because they are poorly written, and others because they contain new, complex ideas. They need to know that while everybody can find interesting, entertaining, or useful things in print, not everybody has to like everything they read. Finally, they need to realize that the easiest things for them to read are going to be the very ones they have the most interest in, the most background for, and that they get the most pleasure from.

METHODS AND MATERIALS FOR REVALUING

Revaluing is not going to happen simply, easily, or quickly. It requires great patience and gentle support from teachers to help pupils in a long, slow rebuilding of the sense of self and sense of reading.

Essentially, a revaluing program involves getting readers to read real meaningful texts, to strengthen and gain new appreciation of the productive strategies that lead to comprehension, and to drop the nonproductive strategies. Teachers can turn the conflict that readers in trouble experience every time they attempt to read into a positive force to achieve the revalued reading. Piaget (1971) talks about disequilibrium, a point in learning where the learner has unresolved conflicts and has not yet accommodated. Readers in trouble have been in this unbalanced state for so long that it has become reading for them.

From skills to meaning

However, the very conditions of their discomfort contain the seeds of productive resolution: Here is a written text created by an author to coherently represent a message. Here is a reader trying to make sense of the text no matter what else he or she is doing. Patiently, in the context of supporting the reader's search for meaning, the teacher helps the reader to shift away from word identification, from sounding out, from teacher dependence. Patiently, the teacher helps the troubled reader to trust his or her own linguistic judgment, to have faith in the predictions and inferences that are coming to mind, to take risks, to self-monitor by constantly applying the key test: Does that make sense? Gradually the reader finds that the text is making sense. An accommodation takes shape in which graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues are used selectively to the extent that they are useful. Any exaggerated value attached to any one cue, cue system, or strategy gives way to putting each in its proper perspective.

Teacher as catalyst

The teacher, carefully monitoring this conflict between productive and nonproductive strategies, between getting the next word and making sense, can be a catalyst. The teacher tips the balance by supporting the troubled readers' intuitions, by appreciating when something has worked or by asking a timely question at a point where the reader falters: What's happening in the story? What do you already know about-----? Did that make sense? Why not?

The teacher starts by learning about the learner. That does not mean diagnostic tests. It means asking learners what they read. It means inviting them to read a variety of things that vary in content, function, and complexity. It may mean, if the student has made some kind of start at becoming a reader, using some variation of miscue analysis (Goodman & Burke, 1980). The teacher moves slowly and supportively to overcome the fear and despair. Often, as pupils relax, they reveal themselves to be much more capable than either they or the teacher had supposed.

One problem that may be faced at the beginning of a revaluing program is that the learners have so strongly internalized an expectation of how reading will be taught that they reject anything else. The pupil must come to trust the teacher and learn new ways of evaluating his or her own progress. The teacher must let the learner see how progress comes through a focus on trying to make sense of meaningful texts. This focus, of course, is near the center of revaluing.

Building self-confidence

In starting to work with any reader in trouble, the teacher must take care not to assume that the pupil is devoid of reading ability. Thus group or individual tests are untrustworthy: All they may reveal is the pupils' great fear of failure and the ease with which they become discouraged and give up. It is only after the pupil has relaxed and begun to fully participate that any trustworthy insights may be drawn. At the beginning the instructional situation must be made completely nonthreatening. For some readers who are in serious trouble, it will be sufficient, as a beginning, to encourage them to follow as the teacher or aide reads.

As the reader gains confidence and begins to reveal interests,focus may shift to a variety of kinds of reading: signs, catalogues, manuals, menus, TV Guides, and the like. The teacher will seek evidence of particular pupil interest and supply materials, either narrative or expository, that will be highly motivating --materials that are interesting and will help build the reader's self-confidence.

To be successful in helping troubled readers, teachers must take their lead from the pupils. The teacher monitors the learner, letting the learner set the pace and direction, but offering the right help at the right time.

This process is not unlike what parents do intuitively as they support the oral language development of preschool children.

Difficult textbooks

Coping with school texts, especially in upper elementary and secondary grades, is a problem that most troubled readers face even as they are improving in their ability and self-confidence. In fact, it is often discouraging for pupils to realize that although they know they are reading much better, they still cannot handle grade level texts. In dealing with this problem, as in all aspects of working with troubled readers, it is necessary for the teacher to be absolutely honest with the students. However, the pupils need to understand that it is not simply because they are ineffective readers that this problem occurs. Texts are difficult to read for many reasons:

1. The texts may be poorly written. Too many subject matter texts are still written by authors who do not write clearly and concisely with the nature of the intended readers in mind. Often vocabulary is used that is unnecessarily technical and obscure or not properly developed, illustrated, and defined.

2. The texts may present too much information too superficially and too rapidly. This is, of course, a problem that will vary with the background and interest of the learner, and the skill of the teacher in providing experiences to help the pupils read and understand the text. The problem may not be a general weakness in reading but rather too little background for the concepts presented.

Helping pupils realize that it is not always their fault as readers that they have trouble learning from textbooks is itself an important part of revaluing. Readers in trouble often think that good readers understand everything they read the first time they read it. Even when readers in trouble have had reasonably good comprehension, they think they have failed because they cannot remember every little detail.

Strategies

Readers in trouble also need other kinds of coping strategies:

- knowing how to read for the gist of a text rather than every detail, and knowing how to skim and survey materials to decide whether they are worth studying;
- knowing how to reread to focus on what is important in difficult materials;
- knowing how to frame questions to ask the teacher when they do not understand;
- knowing how to find information in simpler, easier to read reference books; and
- knowing how to get information from sources other than books.

Part of the solution for dealing with difficult school texts lies with teachers understanding why pupils have difficulty with them. Misuse of texts by teachers expecting pupils to learn from them without the teacher's help is at least as important a cause of difficulty as ineffective reading.

Writing

Teachers of readers in trouble often find that as their pupils improve in reading, they become enthusiastic writers. Troubled readers are seldom expected to write much, so they have usually had little experience in writing. Their first efforts will look like those of near beginners, full of invented spelling and shaky mechanics and punctuation. Encouraging pupils to keep journals will create a nonpressured opportunity to write without worrying about accuracy. Pupils can then move on to a variety of other expository and creative writing. The key to writing development for troubled readers is to create a sense of function by focusing on the most useful and meaningful forms of writing.

CHALLENGE FOR EDUCATORS

It will not be enough to turn troubled readers into reluctant readers. Schools have produced too many people already who can read but do not choose to. Reading for troubled readers has been difficult, tedious, and unproductive, and its acquisition has been associated with much embarrassment and pain. Teachers must patiently help such students to find reading materials that give them personal satisfaction and pleasure. They must help them realize that reading is something they can do when travelling, when waiting, when there is some time available for a quiet, personal activity, when there is nothing interesting on television or nobody to talk to. Pupils must reach the point where they choose to read when there is nobody to make them do it, before educators can really claim success.

Teachers can make the difference in whether readers in trouble find their way out or not. However, to be successful they will need the help of parents, colleagues less directly concerned with literacy, and the pupils themselves. All must come to revalue the readers and the reading process.

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The Role of Story:
Learning to Read in a Special Education Class

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When children experience difficulty in learning to read, adults often react by deciding that the problem is a result of an intra-individual deficiency. Thousands of research articles (and thousands of research dollars) are devoted to defining and remedying what such children can't do, as individuals, when they are asked to read. Representative of such approaches is the recent study by Kochnower et al. entitled "A Comparison of the Phonic Decoding Ability of Normal and Learning Disabled Children" (1983) in which the aim was:

> to determine if learning disabled children matched with normal readers on word recognition ability and IQ would have relative difficulty on tasks that measure the use of letter sounds in decoding. (p.348)

When the children were asked to read "real words", either monosyllabic or polysyllabic such as "hit", "doze" and "complain", or similar "nonsense" words such as "jit", "loze" or "lomprain", it was found that the "normal readers were able to read significantly more regular words and nonsense words than were the LD children."(ibid.)

Kochnower et al. carefully concluded, as have many writers before them:

> Although there must certainly be other factors related to developmental reading disorders, difficulty with the phonetic code would seem to be an extremely important variable to address in clinical research on remediation. (p.351)

We have become interested in the "other factors" and have been asking ourselves whether some of these factors are social rather than intra-individual. Particularly, we wonder if major difficulties for many children lie in not understanding social uses of written language, what written language, which is fundamentally a social phenomenon, can do.

If so, they would not be greatly advantaged by, in Harold Rosen's memorable phrase, a "thin gruel of drills based on floating bits of language" (n.d. , p.28) however kindly the gruel were to be served.

If, however, such children were to have extensive experience in using written language in a supportive social context where no reference were made to what they could not do, as individuals, with written language, might they begin to read more successfully? It is a tortuously complex question, but there is encouraging evidence in the work of Butler (1979) and Meek et al. (1983) to make it, at the very least, worth asking.

Several years ago Michael Halliday remarked in Language as Social Semiotic(1978, p.57):

> Those children who don't learn to read and write, by and large, are children to whom it doesn't make sense; to whom the functional extension that these media provide has not been made clear, or does not match up with their own expectations of what language is for. Hence if the child has not been oriented towards the types of meaning which the teacher sees as those which are proper to the writing system, then the learning of writing and reading would be out of context, because fundamentally, as in the history of the human race, reading and writing are an extension of the functions of language. This is what they must be for the child equally well.

The social context in which we have been working to explore the question further is a class of thirteen children whose ages ranged from 8.0 years to 11.5 years at the beginning of the school year. The children are members of what, in New South Wales, Australia, is referred to as an "OA" class, a group of "mildly intellectually disabled" children. They were transferred into the class, in several cases from other schools, because of their learning difficulties generally and in reading in particular. David is the class teacher and Geoff is frequently in the school for teacher education and research purposes. At the beginning of the year before we commenced the work to be described in this paper the children were in two separate Special Education classes but falling numbers forced an amalgamation in the middle of that year. In one of these classes Distar was the almost exclusive approach to reading: in the other, the Tansley Reading Scheme (which is focussed on the development of phonic decoding abilities) and sight recognition practice with words from the Dolch list, were employed.

On resuming school after the summer holiday all the children believed they could not read and several of them appeared from their comments to believe that they never would. On our observation two of the children could read single clause sentences using simple vocabulary, one could read only his own name and the other eight could recognise between six and twelve words from the Dolch list.

We wished to challenge the assumption that the children's reading was in this state because they were deficient and to explore whether a change in approach to reading, emphasising the social uses of written language, might, over an extended period, enable them to read confidently. To believe that these children were experiencing difficulty in learning to read only because they were deficient would have required us to deny evidence about the complex tasks they could manage effectively despite the personal difficulties they faced. Every day we observed many of the children using oral language successfully for diverse social purposes, reasoning, and performing some motor tasks requiring rapid processing of visual information. We wished, further, to explore the practical management of collaborative rather than individual work in language in this special education setting.

Reconstructing the nature of the difficulty the children were experiencing was not, of course, an asocial activity for us. Many people had strong views about our plans, sometimes even before they knew any details. A colleague with some experience of children with reading difficulty told us, with goodwill, that the children needed simplified tasks which could be quickly accomplished and which would readily give success. In reading, she believed, simplified tasks involved working with the apparently simplest elements of written language which, she stated, were individual letters and sounds. Other colleagues, too, were concerned that we might overestimate what the children could do and therefore we might exacerbate their difficulties.

Pressure on David, especially, was considerable. His way of coping was to stipulate his right to revert to his prior practice if he became dissatisfied with either the manageability or the outcomes of any new approaches to the children's reading development. He also insisted that any report, if one were to be written, should "tell the real story of what it is actually like". We cannot tell the full story: we will try to tell you a real story.

Gathering evidence about the progress of our work would, we agreed, have to take place without interference to the children's learning: reading tests or formal appraisal of any kind were explicitly excluded because of the great fear the children had developed. They were, of course, in this class because their failure had been described so frequently on previous tests. (We wondered, in fact, if failure on reading tests might have come to be important to some of the children as a means of protecting themselves from removal from the class back into the feared mainstream classes, and as a means of gaining sympathetic attention.) Reading tests in any case would have only measured a limited number of the reading competencies we considered important.

To provide a rich bank of evidence on which to draw, we decided that David would write his observations regularly in diary form, we would talk together once a week and tape our conversations when we were discussing problems and making significant decisions, we would date and keep the children's writing, take photographs extensively and that we would tape the children's reading when we were sure they would not be afraid of this being done. We discussed the possibility of having external observers visit the class but decided this would be intrusive and opted, instead, to record voluntary comments by other members of staff about their observations of the children in the playground and in activities such as craft clubs.

We quickly learned how important reciprocal relationships are to the children in any evidence gathering activity. For example, when Geoff wanted to photograph John with his latest book after they had taped a reading of it, John immediately asked to photograph Geoff and then the taperecorder they had been using. Oral reading had to be seen not only as social but sociable in the sense of being part of a playful, warm and reciprocal context of work.

The children's enthusiasm for morning news sessions provided us with a clue as to how we might re-invent the context for learning to use written language. At the beginning of each morning the children had for some time chaired their news sessions, taking turns to report events outside the school which were important to them. (David is always a member of the group and sometimes seeks permission from the child chairperson to share his own news.

His managerial role is only re-assumed when it is necessary to intervene to maintain good relationships between the children.) Most of the children vie with each other each morning to share their news and are active in questioning each other about meaning.

The language of the news session is narrative in form. We decided to place written narrative at the centre of all we did in reading: narrative language both formed by the children and in books, especially picture books. If, as Barbara Hardy argued many years ago, "narrative is a primary act of mind" (1977, p.12), narrative forms of language seemed to us to be central to functions of oral language which could be extended into written language in ways meaningful to the children. Written narrative seems to be at the heart of Cushla's (Butler, op.cit.) remarkable reading development, and we suspect it was significant in explaining why the children observed by Clark (1976) and Wells (1981) learned to read before receiving systematic instruction in school. We were not, however, wanting to use written narrative as merely a more interesting "motivating" way to teach children to read. To reiterate, we wanted to use narrative because it is a primary way by which people learn to mean. It is from the stories we hear and read, and in stories we tell and write, that we, in important ways, form views of who we are and who we might become. That is why the news sessions were of such importance to the children. Harold Rosen has recently commented:

> ...in recent years the study of language acquisition has gone far beyond the description of an emergent grammatical competence in young children to reveal a ... competence in language use, an intricate semiotic, systems of meaning making developed in dialogue and in active participation, a partnership of mind and society. The narrative mode, acquired early, is an intrinsic part of language acquisition. But we do not put stories away with the discarded toys of childhood. As with language itself, we get better at using them and broadening their functional range... (n.d., p.28)

The detailed new work on the development of competency with narrative reported in M.Meek (ed.) (1983b) further indicates the significance of narrative in children's early reading development.

On the basis of our analysis of the significance of narrative we saw our task as helping the children find ways of extending the functional range of written stories employing what they already knew about the oral use of narrative.

At The Beginning Of The School Year

At the beginning of the school year, which in Australia starts in February, after the long summer holiday, the children were a dispirited, isolated and sometimes disruptive group. David expressed his deep concern about the insularity of the children in the class and in the playground in his early diary notes. In class they didn't talk or share except in news sessions and they were frequently involved in violent incidents in the playground.

The children had, of course, a very low view of themselves and were frequently tormented by other children because of their membership in the "OA" class. One day after lunch in the middle of first term Raymond rushed in very upset by the teasing he had been subjected to in the playground. His tormentors had taunted him about being in the Special Education class and, as on so many other days, he wanted to know from David why he was there. Mark, sitting nearby, tried to comfort him by saying "Don't worry about it. We're just brain-damaged, we can't learn." There was almost daily pressure on David from parents for the children to be returned to mainstream classes as soon as possible, a pressure which greatly affected morale. Looking back, it is hard to imagine a more dispirited group. We wonder why they were not more angry.

David's general observations of the children's work with written language at the beginning of the year were bleak:

> The children have begun the year with a very negative attitude to reading. Some of the class show some interest in books but quickly give up after they spend 5 minutes trying to work out a word or waiting for me to come and help them. Their usual approach to unknown words is to sound the word out. If this strategy fails then they go for help, either to another class member or to me. However. because of waiting so long, they usually give up.
>
> Few children show any interest in listening to a story. (In some cases they apparently haven't had stories read to them in class since infants' years.) Consequently, the majority of the class find

attending very difficult. This inability to concentrate and the disruptive behaviour that follows upsets those interested, so that eventually even these children become frustrated.

It is rare to find any children reading a book if they have any free time. Colouring has more appeal. The children do try to read but the results for them are not positive.

This frustration with reading is paralleled by their pathetic attitude to writing. One story takes anything up to a fortnight to complete and its always a struggle.

Each word becomes an example of their inabilities to spell or to write neatly or mean something even at such a basic level. Stories are left unfinished or, if finished, eventually find their way to the rubbish bin. Rarely have they wanted to take stories home.

We recorded some of the comments the children themselves made about reading during the first few weeks of the year:

Greg: Reading is filling in sheets.

Mark: Reading is sounding words out, except if you know one.

Dove: Reading takes too long.

Raymond: The only books I can read are babyish. It makes me feel bad.

This was reading in a cold climate indeed. At the beginning of February David cleared out all the old "reading scheme" (basal reader) material and we began a series of weekly planning meetings before school. (If this paper were about processes of curricula change, we would record the detail that we encouraged ourselves with croissants and coffee!) We were joined for the first five weeks by the school librarian, who spent half an hour on four mornings a week in the classroom with a group of children and by an ex-teacher friend who had resigned because of her pregnancy. After five weeks the baby arrived, the teacher librarian was transferred to a consultancy position and David was left as the only adult working with the children except when Geoff was able to visit the class. Our colleagues did, however, give us critically important support in the early stages.

We pioneered no new methodologies but used ways of working with picture books and the children's own narratives which are familiar to many teachers of young children. We therefore report here only a broad overview of the range of activities.

David read extensively and repeatedly picture books such as There's A Dinosaur In The Park, Bear Hunt, There's A Nightmare In My Cupboard and John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat. Taped readings of these and other picture books were used on a listening post so that the children could follow the text while they listened to the reading.

Four of the least confident children, Kylie, Dove, John and Jamie, worked with the teacher librarian to make a book of captioned photographs about the school. We had a double purpose: to help the children explore areas other than the isolated patch of playground they usually inhabited and to print their own language about the pictures to form the text for reading. The print was thus part of a context of shared meanings in which the children selected, photographed and talked about the scenes they wanted to include in the book. This was the first of many similar books developed by the children.

Retelling of stories, or episodes from them, has been central to our work (Goodman, 1983). We talked a great deal about stories, painted favourite scenes in groups and individually, sequenced strips of cardboard with sentences from the picture books printed on them and made plays about the stories. Paintings on large sheets were often made into big books (Holdaway, 1980) with much accompanying discussion to sequence the events as in the original narrative.

Big books of There's A Dinosaur In The Park and Bear Hunt were also made by friends with graphic arts skills. These and the children's "big books" were used in group reading and discussion and in activities in which the children matched strips of text onto the big book versions. Enlarged illustrations, with the accompanying text, were placed around the room and on cross wires. Our obvious aims were to make a lively, narrative-related visual environment and to provide contextual support to the print as much as possible.

We provided structured practice in word recognition, but always as play and always with the language of the enjoyed books or the children's own stories. For example, David would hide words around the room and ask John to help Kermit, his constant puppet companion, find the one David would nominate. With Jamie we used simple matching games, sometimes called "trains", sometimes called "aeroplanes", but always it was play with language he had recently dictated to us.

Narrative poems, especially from Michael Rosen's You Can't Catch Me, were frequently read and, when they became popular, were taped for use on the listening post. Similarly, charts of the words of songs the children enjoyed were made and read during singing.

Initially we were influenced by Graves (1983) suggestions for children's writing development. David encouraged the children to write freely in draft without concern for the surface of the language. However, the children's frustration was so great and their dislike of writing so intense, we reluctantly abandoned the procedures and instead encouraged the children to dictate stories to David. He wrote sentences on 6 cm. wide strips of cardboard which were, in turn, illustrated by the children and stapled into books. The whole procedure we carefully called "writing" so that the children's conception of their role in composing was as undiminished as we could achieve. Under this arrangement, the children have written much more freely and have delighted in mastering a reading of their stories. Here, for example, is the story John, who rarely spoke even to his classmates at the beginning of the year, dictated to us about his:

Excursion to Muogamurra

I went to Muogamurra.
I put a tent up.
I listened to what Bruce said.
I went for a walk.
Owen painted our faces.
I saw Bruce, he was talking to us about how old the trees were.
We had a good time.
I saw Bill and I went over to say hello. "Hello Bill".
I was playing with Mark N. I slept in a tent with Mark H.

On one memorable day early in April when a bookseller displayed a large range of picture books in the school for teachers of the K-2 classes to purchase, we took the children to select some new books for the classroom. We couldn't, with fifty dollars to spend, meet all their requests, not even half of them, but the children were able to choose some books which have become popular. A simple move, but not, we think, unrelated to learning about social uses of written narrative if you haven't many books of your own.

It has been necessary to present the broad range of activities in a very condensed form. We are concerned, though, that the form of our presentation does not give an impression of the activities being introduced as though their reception was not problematic: everything was problematic, especially in the first term.

Our major anxiety, we think understandably, was with management. We considered that the children's emotional lability and low morale necessitated David keeping sub-groups busy with activities during reading time. It was difficult for David to provide enough activities of sufficient variety each day. We understand now more clearly what we didn't perceive then, that our limited expectations were part of the problem. We needed to let the children take more control of their own uses of narrative.

Abdullah and Mark H. taught us through their interest in Bear Hunt. Abdullah's enthusiasm for the book was so great we asked him as a "retelling activity" to make his own version by drawing his own pictures to accompany the original text. He worked on this task for many days, delighting in his ability to read a book for the first time in his life.

Mark H. perhaps caught some of Abdullah's enthusiasm. David's diary notes from this period are instructive:

> Mark H. was very keen to write a sequel to Bear Hunt. He asked me on a number of occasions if he could do this. Before this time Mark had rarely shown an interest in books, preferring to state his inability to read and thus not complete any of the required reading tasks. Now having completed his "book" he is able to reconstruct his story without any concrete aid."

In Mark's case the original text was not used. He began with Anthony Browne's narrative but transformed it, working with Mark N. and Scott, into a different story. What was so remarkable to us was his playfulness with the original narrative given his almost total lack of interest in written language at the beginning of the year. He wrote:

BEAR HUNT 2

WRITTEN BY MARK H. AND MARK N. with help from Scott

Bear and his pencil have a house
He drew a torch and drove off to
have some fun.
He got to the toll gates.
He saw a flag.
The hunters were right behind.
Through the city.
Up in the air.
Down on the ground.
Back to sleep.

Occasionally interest in a particular book has been strong enough to launch a child into other social uses of language. Bear Hunt was so important to Abdullah that Geoff suggested he write a letter to the author. He was very diffident at first, claiming he didn't know how, but he accepted an offer of assistance and dictated:

Dear Anthony Browne,

Could you make me a book called Bear Hunt 2?

The name of my flat is....

After we talked about his letter a little further, he extended it to the following, the longest piece of writing he had composed to this point:

Dear Anthony Browne,

Could you make me a book called Bear Hunt 2

My address is ......

I liked Bear Hunt because I liked the pictures of the hippopotamus and the hunter when he pokes the gun. Also, I like the colouring. Also, I want you to know that I made a book of "Bear Hunt". It's by Abdullah.

With best wishes,

In understanding the children's perceptions of the social uses of written language, the following short interaction between Geoff and Abdullah is instructive:

Geoff: I was just having an idea. What do you think of this, if I take this back into the University and ask my secretary if she'll type it for you so that it looks really good and then I'll bring it back over and you can sign it and then we'll send it off? Would you like to have it typed?

Abdullah: Well, can I see...? Yeah.

Geoff: OK? So it looks really neat? Good. Do you know what I mean by signing it?

Abdullah: (inaudible murmur)

Geoff: Look, I'll make my signature, that is, I'll sign something. (writes) All I'm doing is writing my name but I write it the way I want to write it. Want to write your name?

Abdullah: I don't think I can write it in running writing.

Geoff: It doesn't matter, just however you'd like to write it.

Abdullah: (writing) Can't write good.

When he was later asked to sign the typed copy Abdullah was again very diffident. That it was the first occasion for him to sign a letter was evidenced by his writing in the extreme bottom left-hand corner of the page. He later insisted on practicing his signature several times before he was finally ready to sign.

After Six Months

Though we had been working with the children for such a short period and we were very conscious of what was not yet even attempted, we made the end of the second school term the point in the year at which we would carefully review what we and the children had been doing for any signs of development.

We did notice some important developments in the children's use and understanding of written narrative. The most general was the evidence from our observations of the picture books they were reading; their enthusiasm for the books was high and they were now engaging in voluntary reading, in some cases several times a day.

We noticed changes in the syntactic and narrative forms of their dictated stories. Raymond, for example, began to use some complex sentences more typical of written rather than spoken narrative in his stories. The concluding pages to the 'Adventures at the Icerink" were:

(1) As soon as we came home, I cooked some sausage rolls for them.

(2) We sat down, comfortably, and put on the movie. Tootsie and David slept over.

The syntactic form of the first sentence in (2) is quite different from anything Raymond wrote earlier in the year. His sense of an audience for his writing has also developed, as the second sentence in (3) shows:

(3) Richard went home while Ashley and I skated. Ashley is my brother.

Though the first sentence in (3) is similar to (2) in his use of two clauses, the verbs in (3) indicate simultaneous past actions, a syntactic form which represents an important development over the sequential past form he used earlier.

Abdullah's writing, too, was much more extended, indicating the beginnings of a sense of narrative form. In his page for the book the class made about their excursion to the university, the museum and the harbour, he wrote:

I went to the bus and I got on it. I went to the University and I saw Mr. Williams. We went and saw the museum. Then we went to the Harbour Bridge. We went to the toilet and then we washed our hands. Then we went to Balmoral Beach. Then we got onto the bus and came back to school.

The string of events is here arranged in temporal sequence to form a circular narrative structure: as readers we are brought back, like Peter Rabbit from Mr. McGregor's garden, once our adventure is over. Though this is, of course, one of the simplest of narrative forms, it is far in advance of the single sentence narratives Abdullah wrote earlier in the year, such as:

On Friday I went to the airport. (04.11.84)

Unlike Raymond, Abdullah only here employs compound sentences using past tense verbs. He does, though, remain consistent in his tense usage and, within each sentence, the pronominal forms are also consistent. This, again, is a development over his writing at the beginning of the year.

We also noticed some interesting developments in the children's discussion of complex stories. Geoff had talked about Anthony Browne's Hansel and Gretel with six of the children, working in pairs so that the children would have more time than was possible in whole class discussion to comment about pictures and language. In each case the children were invited to look at the pictures first and then comment freely before the story was read to them. Questions were raised with them as they looked at the illustrations to help them become aware of the interrogative nature of the illustrations and language, and of the use of repeated ambiguous images as cohesive devices.

Within each pair the children had quickly related to the story and talked readily about it. We were therefore intrigued to consider the transcripts of their discussion in some detail. In most cases they began by commenting on the qualities of the fictional parents in comparison with their own. For example:

> Leba: The mother's cruel to them because that's not fair to ... um ... them. She can still work but that's her children. Cause like, my mum, she works for me to make food and give me stuff. Yeah.
>
> Abdullah: So does my dad. He always gets videos and gets me stuff, and gets food from the markets ... and he looks after my mum, too, and my sisters.

The significance of these comments is not just that the children find the opening pages of this particular narrative discourse meaningful. Their comments indicate that they have learned that every text is intertextual: one story is an invitation to make another story. From this story Abdullah hints at other narratives about times when his Dad "gets videos" and "food from the markets". Here, indeed, is the "narrative mode of meaning" running "freely in the veins of the vernacular" (Rosen, n.d., p.18). On some occasions the children chose to construct a narrative alongside the one they were hearing, even occasionally parallel to it, as in the following example:

> Child: No. My dad just about did it to my sister. Because my dad wants my little baby sister to come up to see him ... every day... yeah ... and ... and she goes to a friend's house every day and my sister .. my father told my sister that .. that .. she was in primary and she was about nine and my dad told her

to pack up my little sister's things and then we'll get rid of her .. rid of her... so we decided to keep her here.

The child told this story at the point in our reading when the threat of Hansel and Gretel's death first became apparent. Why does he tell this story at all? And why at this point? Why is the theme of child-as-nuisance so prominent? And are the parallel forms of the reconciliations at the end of each story significant? We would like to know much more about how intertextuality functions to affect a sense of how a narrative is structured and how other stories work to build a sense of how this story might be resolved. (cf. Iser,1974)

In talking about Browne's Hansel and Gretel, the children commented freely on the contradictions between the meaning of the language and the illustrations, sometimes trying to resolve a contradiction by creating inferences about the family's situation. When Greg and Mark were asked, "Do you think they are very poor?" they replied:

Mark: Yeah, it looks like it.

Geoff: What makes you think that?

Greg: He must have some money to buy the paper.

Mark: They look...

Geoff: He's got the newspaper there.

Greg: Yeah, he must have some money.

Mark: He looks all sad and all that.

Geoff: Yes.

Mark: They look really sad.

Geoff: Right, right.

Greg: They're not really....

Mark: They're probably sick maybe.

As the children became familiar with the design of the illustrations, they soon learned to look for detail and to pursue ambiguity in the visual forms. After searching one illustration for repetitions of triangular black shapes suggestive of witches' hats, Greg and Mark became adept at detecting ambiguous forms in the subsequent illustrations. Later, Greg leapt with excitement on one ambiguous form:

Geoff: There's something funny in that picture I want to talk to you about.....don't see....

Greg: It's a snake!

Geoff: Oh! How's he done that?

Greg: I just, I can recognise his tongue, and his, and his...snakes have that head.

Geoff: Right, right. I wonder why he's done that?

Greg: I just picked it.

The tolerance, indeed the welcoming, of ambiguity was an important resource for Greg. In an extraordinary comment he showed that he dissolved the surface of the narrative and remade it, wrote it in Roland Barthes' (1974) sense of the word:

Geoff:(reading) "The stepmother, however, had died."

Greg: I bet, I bet the stepmother was the witch.

Geoff: Mm.

Greg: Would you bet?

Geoff: What do you think of that, Mark?

(lengthy pause)

Here is no plodding subservience to the narrator, but the beginning of a recognition that narrators may be unreliable (Booth,1983,p.159 ff.) and that the role of the reader is to construct meaning out of the text elements. Clearly, a necessary condition for Greg to achieve this insight is the complexity of the narrative we were reading. As a reader he would not have had any choices to make if the text did not allow him space in which to construct an interpretation for himself.

More generally, we noticed a major change in the children's desire to read. Whereas at the beginning of the year none of the children read voluntarily, for most of them it was now quite common to ask to go to the reading corner to read a book or to ask to read one of their own stories to us. The changes had come about in different ways and at different rates for different children: it is worth reviewing in general terms some aspects of particular children's development to see how sensitive and variable progress in reading is for them. An overview carries the danger of imprecision, but the advantage of economy.

Raymond, the source of the comment quoted earlier, "The books I can read are babyish, it makes me feel bad" was our most vulnerable child partly because he was the oldest. He spends many hours alone and craves attention from adults.

He finds it difficult to retain close friends because of his erratic behaviour, especially because he tends to explode when frustrated.

Raymond was very aware at the beginning of the year of his inability to read and although he was progressing through the different levels of the Tansley scheme during 1983 he was concerned that his reading was getting no better. He knew more words but this didn't help him to read. The urgency for Raymond to learn to read of course increased as he saw that his peers in other classes were so much more competent.

When we introduced the new reading approach in 1984 it was important for us to ensure that Raymond quickly saw that he was going to benefit. He was very wary when one of the initial activities was to paint a picture and then to write a sentence about it. However, he was happier when he realised that the sentence he wrote could contain his own language, especially words he wanted to "learn" rather than words someone else thought he should learn.

Writing his own sentences was important to him but it still in Raymond's mind was not reading. It was imperative to find a book that suited his ability and interest and which was, to him, a "real" book. A compromise was found in a shared reading of Roald Dahl's The Twits, a book which is popular with other children in the school.

Initially Geoff read alternate paragraphs of the book, leaving Raymond to read the others. We were not altogether good judges of Raymond's ability as we eventually had to read quite a deal more and Raymond much less so that meaning and interest could be maintained. When the adjustment was made, the strategy was more successful, with Raymond beginning to remark about how he was making progress.

Raymond's reading continued to develop quickly from a point four months into the year when he came to David and said very jovially, "Mr. Jack, I can read you know!" (It is hard to remember who was the more excited and relieved.) Whilst he was not yet by any means a fluent reader he also now knew that he had achieved the most difficult step, that of believing in himself as a reader. Reading had now become an important activity for Raymond, even to the extent of reading some of the daily newspaper at home.

Progress in reading is not linear and Raymond was our most cogent and persistent reminder. Two months after our review we decided to introduce some dramatised readings of poetry to the children, partly because we ourselves enjoyed it so much and wanted to share our enthusiasm, partly because we wanted the children to hear oral reading by experienced readers. For our first move we arranged to read Michael Rosen's poem "If You Don't Put Your Shoes On By The Time I Count Fifteen" to the children together.

When David told the group that we were going to read a poem Raymond exploded, saying "Ah, shit, not this bloody stuff!", and moved to a far corner of the room. He calmed as David quietly reasoned with him, but remained sitting a long way from the rest of the children. We started reading, despite the inauspicious start, because of the other children's interest. David read the father's dialogue and Geoff the child's. The children were very quiet at first, but began to enjoy the dramatic tension of the poem and to laugh at the familiarity of the language. We became aware of Raymond moving back into the centre of the group. At the end of the reading Raymond jumped up and yelled,"Heah, that's great. I want to read that!" So he sat with Geoff at the front of the room, Geoff's hand over his guiding him to the parts of the poem he should read in response to David's stern fatherly dialogue. He shook with excitement at what he was attempting and whilst he wasn't able to read without some assistance, he was caught up in reading something that gave him great pleasure, a long way from his complaint about the "babyish" books of his perceived competence at the beginning of the year.

Kylie we decided to observe very closely in our review because she was still so uninterested in reading. Perhaps more than in the case of any other child, David believed that Kylie couldn't read because she thought she couldn't. The books which had so interested other children had not interested Kylie so much, nor had the writing of her own stories. In the middle of the year she was still firmly stating "I can't read!" though she did actually write some sentences such as:

"This is my dad fishing and my brother they caught some fish." (06.18.84)

It was her interest in drama, begun by her involvement in making a brief video retelling of a story that allowed some breakthrough. She made several plays with her friends Dove and Avy, some based on stories, some on their personal experiences and some on their fantasy play: several of the plays were recorded, transcribed and used, in edited form, as reading material for the three girls.

Kylie and Dove formed one of the pairs to whom Geoff read Hansel and Gretel. The two enjoyed the book and decided to dramatise the story to show to a guest in their room. They changed the story, however, by adding a short additional scene in which the reunited father and children took a holiday by air to the United States. The children's explanation was that the family had had such a bad experience they would obviously want to do something enjoyable with their wealth.

The extension is of more than passing interest. This was the first occasion on which the children tried to extend a plot, suggesting that now the power relationship between author and readers had shifted substantially. While it is true that they were reproducing somebody else's story (as, of course, was Anthony Browne, the Grimm Brothers and their informant....) they were also making it their own by the shape their version gave it. These were, we felt, indications of a new sense of confidence, but also a new sense of where readers can be positioned by the discourse they are reading: here, these young, rather faltering readers began to make the story with the author, not receive it from him. Their scene adds celebration to the ending, becoming in itself a form of celebration of the story. The form of the published text was of critical importance again here, as it was to Greg and Mark: the ironic relationship between the illustrations and the language served as an invitation to the readers to take part in the making of the story.

At the beginning of the next term, still sensitive to Kylie's deeply negative view of herself as a reader, we decided to introduce a book to her and to make some activities specifically for her around it. Geoff read her John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat on her own early one morning. David who, after our review, had begun to tape some of his conversations with the children at his desk, asked her later what she had been doing with Geoff:

Kylie: Well, we went down into the library to Mr. Williams' room and we talked about Dove for awhile and then we had a look at John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat and then we read it right through and then we were gonna ....I might be going to do a book about it and maybe a play with Dove and Avy if I'm allowed and.... we talked about the dog and the Midnight Cat and Rose and there's some words I know in here.

David: Can you, ah, can you read some of the stuff you know?

Kylie: Well, there's .... I know the beginning John ..."John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat."

She then experienced difficulty in finding any other words she "knew" and explained to David:

Kylie: Yes ...well Mr.Williams was reading the book and as he was going over the pages I was ..trying.. and that's why the ..

David: Right.

Kylie: ..the ..we were looking at ..

David: Tops.

Kylie: and we were looking at some of the book and I was ...

David: You were following along were you?

Kylie: Yep.

David: Great.

In the subsequent discussion Kylie resisted David's attempts to bring her back to reading the text, though she was enthusiastic to talk about the story and made astute comments on motivation:

Kylie: Oh, that's when he drawed a line around the house.

David: (laughing) Yeah.

Kylie: .. to tell the cat to stay out.

David: He wasn't too fussed on that cat, was he?

Kylie: Yeah, he didn't like it because Rose liked the cat and he.. John Brown, the dog, thought that .. um .. John ..Rose didn't want him any more.

David: Yeah.

Kylie: And he wanted the cat dead.

David: Yeah....Did .. did she want John Brown?

Kylie: Yes, she just wanted two pets.

After several more minutes of attempting to read word by word and to sound out, Kylie was so frustrated that David brought the session to an end by asking her:

David: What if I said to you that by the end of this year you'd be able to read all this book, what do you think you'd say?

Kylie: I don't know.

David: Do you reckon you could?

Kylie: No.

David: You don't think so?

Kylie: No.

David: All right, we'll see how we go. Thanks Kylie.

On the last day of the school year, with great merriment. David and Kylie taped the following conversation to send to Geoff:

David: Morning Kylie.

Kylie: Morning Mr. Jack.

David: Come over nice and close to the tape. Do you remember back, back in September when I said "Do you think you could read John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat all the way through, what did you say?

Kylie: "No."

David: Yeah, you said "No." And, what, this is the last day of school, it's the what, 13th December, let's see how you go...

(adjusts microphone)

Kylie: "John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat. Rose's husband died a long time ago...." (and so through to the end of the book)

In the intervening three months we had encouraged her to make her own illustrated version of the story, and we worked to help her learn that the words on the page would make sense for her if she used the syntactic and semantic resources she already had available. Specifically, we played with syntactic cue usage by making matching cardboard sentences from the text, by cutting these up for her to re-arrange, by sequencing text excerpts with her and by playing some simple sorting and matching games with individual words from the text.

It has to be said that though she was eager to participate in these activities, it strongly appeared that the most important thing to her was to rehearse her reading of individual pages so that, very slowly. almost painfully, she aggregated to herself a feeling of confidence about her reading. She most particularly enjoyed time in which "to work out the words" collaboratively with

Dove, causing us to entirely change our original plan for individual work. The excitement of her collaboration and shared success was very significant to her, as it was to Dove. She was by no means a confident independent reader by the end of the year but, after so many months and such singleminded attention to the one passionately enjoyed text, she let her fear of written language begin to diminish.

John is physically small, has a hare-lip and a cleft palate. At the beginning of the year he had rarely spoken unless asked a direct question and then he had only made one or two word utterances. David's diary noted his "very poor concentration", his "poor co-ordination" and his "very poor memory". Like Abdullah, John developed relatively quickly once he discovered in late March that he could read Bear Hunt from beginning to end. From that time he dictated stories, rehearsed readings of them extensively, read books at home and attempted to read instructions on worksheets and around the school. After seven months he wrote a "project" by himself at home:

My Backyard

by John H.

We have thirty budgies in our aviary.

Sheba is our large black dog. She loves to go for a run with my sister and me.

We have five trees in our yard. a Lemon a Jackaranda and two maple trees.

His emerging confidence in reading has been accompanied by much more confidence in using oral language and, therefore of course, in making social contact. In an excursion with other classes to a computer display, John, to the surprise of a colleague nearby, not only read the video screen instructions but also corrected the reading of two age-equivalent mainstream class children.

We have previously described something about Abdullah's development but a series of events toward the end of the year illustrated our own uncertainty about the pace of the children's development and what, therefore, were reasonable expectations for what they could achieve. We were still the victims, however unwittingly, of false, limited expectations which had been built up over such a long time.

Abdullah visited Lebanon early in his life and he is intensely proud of his Muslim background. We wanted to provide a way for him to voice some of his experiences and hopes in written language. Geoff suggested to Abdullah that they might together make a book about Lebanon which might be shared with the other children. Abdullah acknowledged Geoff's ignorance of Lebanon and readily agreed to dictate some ideas.

He composed two chapters in the first session and, at it's conclusion, was enthusiastic to write more the next day. This was by far the largest quantity of text he had composed in one session all year and we were worried that he would forget what he had composed and find reading it very difficult. We decided that if he were discomforted the next day by the quantity of print we would find a way of making the book briefer so that there was no danger of his being frustrated. We didn't for a moment think that he would be able to read, readily, what he had written. We were quite wrong. He had no difficulty at all, not even in fact making a single miscue. He went on to write another two chapters. Here is his story:

A Story About Lebanon

Chapter One

My family comes from Lebanon. When I was born in Australia, my Dad took me to Lebanon and at Lebanon my Dad got me a Lebanese drum.

I'm going to Lebanon again with my Mum and sisters in 1985.

Chapter Two

My Dad wants me to go to Lebanon because he sent a video camera to my cousin and he wants me to go and help him with the lights and video camera. At Lebanon I will be going to school and I'll be learning how to speak in French.

When I go to school I'll be catching a taxi with my cousin. It's a school cab and we catch it in the morning and in the afternoon.

At the school there is only one man and a couple of teachers.

Chapter Three

At Lebanon they film a lot and they filmed my Lebanese school when they were saying the prayers. At Lebanon this man made a Lebanese name for God. They have flats broken down by the war. The windows are smashed and the grey walls are broken. There are a lot of shops there with good stuff like roses and flowers and people making things.

My uncle made a house and he has a little baby boy. He had another baby boy and he died when he was born.

Chapter Four

When I won the rewards in Australia I sent them to Lebanon and also some pictures. I've got some pictures of Lebanon and I've got a picture of when my Dad got married. At Lebanon I saw my grandfather and grandmother and my uncles and aunties.

At Lebanon I have some friends. They are very, very kind. I have some marbles. We have a big garden with lemon and orange and mandarin trees. At Lebanon we have a big flat and me and my Dad and Mum and my sisters, we live up the top where the videos and TV are kept. At Lebanon they have black and white TV's and not colour.

At Lebanon we caught a donkey. We hanged him up and first we cooked him. He tasted good.

The social context for his writing, including the celebration of his achievement, was of considerable significance to him. After the sessions in which the chapters were composed, Abdullah and Geoff made a photocopy of the roughly printed text. Abdullah took the photocopy home to show his parents and Geoff had the text typed ready for the next session. In the second and subsequent sessions Abdullah became very proud of his ability to read even the rough copy to his parents and was delighted with their enthusiasm for what he was doing. Here was written language, even more, his own written language working for him to share his distinctive experience with an appreciative audience. He was at the centre of a social process in which written language was indispensibly functioning to help him bring the world of his home and of his two schools closer together, and the form his language takes is narrative. The functions of this language are far removed from the pseudo-functions it had in the Distar exercises with which he struggled during the preceding two years.

We have, as indicated earlier, been interested to record unsolicited observations of the children by other adults in the school. So we end with a brief anecdote from Horatio, the school's general assistant who has recently arrived in Australia from South America.

Each morning Horatio operates the offset printing machine in a small staffroom adjacent to a main thoroughfare in the same building as the Special Education classroom. One morning, towards the end of the second term, Geoff sat in this room to write some notes before going to another class. John, on his way to the canteen with lunch orders, noticed Geoff and came in to ask him if he planned to visit the class later in the day. Having ascertained what his new watch would "say" when Geoff would come to the classroom, John left. Horatio stopped the machine and explained, with great trouble because of his difficulty with English, what a difference he had noticed in the playground behaviour of the children during the year. Whereas he had apparently in the previous year been something of a target for their aggression he now found that the children wanted to talk with him and sometimes even join him in his work in the grounds. Anecdotal material unsuitable for an academic paper? Or narrative discourse from a spectator providing insight into a stratum of school relationships often hidden from professional eyes?

At the end of the year the beginning seemed a very long way away indeed, so much had changed in the children's learning and in our views of the children's abilities. If there are intra-individual deficiencies they now seem unlikely to prevent the children from learning to read. Whereas analysing and then attempting to remedy apparent deficiencies in the children had not proved productive, re-inventing the social context for language use did.

We knew from their news sessions that oral narrative language was very accessible to the children. What we did not know at the beginning of the year, and feel strongly now, is that written narrative, real language in real use, could also be accessible to them and could provide them with a reason for wanting to read and a purpose in doing so. When, in reading, the focus was on shared enjoyment and jointly constructed interpretations of stories, either stories the children wrote themselves or stories published for them, the power relationships in the classroom were radically altered. Narrative language opened up space for the children to be welcome participants in the exchange of meanings in the classroom rather than, by contrast, relatively powerless decoders of other people's complex and arbitrary messages. As they participated in making meaning their views of reading and of themselves as readers were reconstructed, in some cases radically so, as with Kylie, Raymond and Abdullah.

Play around and in the stories, whether in drama, painting, games or in talk was important for the development of this sense of power. It was a form of joint celebration of stories in which we could all participate and which helped to build up sets of shared understandings in the group. Analyses of narrative discourse in the work of Barthes, Booth and Genette helped us emphasise the value of constructing interpretations, often competing interpretations, rather than of testing comprehension: the discussions of Hansel and Gretel were a salutary experience, helping us to look again at what the children could do when they were free to collaborate in making a story.

Quality of text was important, we feel, to the children's reading development. We have already used the metaphor of space in suggesting how narrative made room for the children's participation. The same metaphor can be extended to point to one important quality of narrative text. Those texts such as Bear Hunt, Hansel and Gretel, and John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat in which the tendency of the narrator is to show rather more than he or she tells explicitly, to make more room for the reader's contribution, were welcomed by the children and seemed to us to provide invaluable reading lessons about what readers have to do in order to make sense of a story. The ways in which some authors used the children's experience of the world while simultaneously acknowledging their reading inexperience were resources on which we drew with deep gratitude. Without such texts we feel the children's learning would have been considerably diminished.

Extensive practice in reading the language of the stories was very important, of course, but we feel that both the form and purpose of the practice was critical. The children were always aware of where the language used in practice sesssions had come from and why they were working with a particular sample of language. As they succeeded, their progress was explicit to them: they were able to read an enjoyed story independently. In practice sessions the large book formats were invaluable because they allowed us to help the children collaborate in making meaning, in maximising their use of clues to play the guessing-game more effectively, to use Goodman's familiar metaphor. Again and again the children taught us, as we described in the case of Kylie and Dove, that it was collaborative work which they enjoyed and could profit from and "big books" were an important aid to collaborative work.

In retrospect we wish we had placed more emphasis on the children's writing of stories. Their dictated stories are of great importance to them but we need now to help them go much further, a need to which Abdullah pointed in his dictated *Story about Lebanon*. We have to find a way in which problems with motor control do not limit the children's use of their growing understanding of the forms of story and their right to authorship.

None of the thirteen children could, now, be called an independent reader. All of them still bear the marks of earlier failure and of the personal difficulties which brought them to this class. Several of them still read orally with a plodding rhythm bespeaking uncertainty and vulnerability. Long catalogues of what they can't yet do in reading could easily be drawn up and they clearly would emerge as reading below age norms on any test they might be given. Nevertheless one of them, Mark, has now fully joined a mainstream class and we are hoping that others will be able to do so too as their confidence grows. Most importantly, all the children now *want* to read and, as far as we can tell, believe they will.

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