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ABSTRACT

Children's picture books, for example Allan Say's "Grandfather's Journey," can provide fresh materials and approaches to teaching reading to students in intermediate grades. One approach for preservice teachers learning to use children's literature might be to begin by planning possible uses for one or more literature selections and then organizing those ideas into disciplines, themes, or skill areas. A teacher should provide many and varied experiences that include reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Using the Say book a teacher might ask students to discuss and write quick comparisons of two people. Then the teacher might introduce "Grandfather's Journey" and ask students to listen for ways that the grandfather and grandson could be compared and contrasted, as the teacher reads. Then an activity with a Venn diagram would allow further exploration of comparison between the story characters. For evaluation and assessment of skills and experiences the teacher might use writing exercises focused on the words "walk," "journey," and "experience" to allow students to write creatively about their own perception of these concepts in their lives. Responding techniques to these writing assignments become important to encouraging and developing self-confidence in future writing ability. Teachers should correct misspellings or other mistakes by modeling correct versions. (JB)

Picture Books:

A New Text for Teaching Reading and Writing in the Intermediate Grades

Three years ago when I was a fifth grade teacher, a student in my class was an avid reader. Having taught for almost fifteen years, I had often taught students who loved to read. However, Leslie was different. She wanted to read all of the time. . .during math class, during science class, during lunch, and even during reading class. Yet, Leslie hated reading class. This made me think, "How could someone who loved to read with Leslie's passion hate reading class?" I concluded that the problem was not Leslie's; it was mine. Something was wrong with the way that I taught reading, and it needed to change. I didn't toss the basal reader and workbook out the window, but I did slowly begin to revise the way that I taught reading. I began to incorporate a variety of children's literature into the instruction. One genre of children's literature in particular came to my attention as never before: picture books.

Picture books have tremendous potential for use in all grades. The story lines are simple and the readability level is low; however, there is often tremendous depth in the messages conveyed by picture books.

Allen Say's *Grandfather's Journey* is an example of one such book. In *Grandfather's Journey* Say tells the story of the grandfather who as a young man leaves his home in Japan to journey to the United States. He travels across the country and finally decides to settle in California. He and his childhood sweetheart marry and have a daughter. When his daughter is a young woman, the family returns to Japan. The grandfather begins to miss the United States, but his plans for a visit are interrupted by war. His home in the city is destroyed by the bombs, and he and his wife return to their childhood village where he lives for the remainder of his life, never returning to the U.S. The grandson grows up in Japan, hearing stories of his grandfather's life in the United States. When he is a young man, he, too, journeys to the U.S. where he stays until the birth of his daughter. Like the

grandfather, he begins to miss his homeland. Unlike his grandfather, he often returns to visit the home of his youth.

The message is universal; the potential for instruction is extensive. The problem is often where to begin. Preservice teachers are often expected to develop thematic units of instruction that integrate a number of disciplines in the instruction. This is a very unnatural way for many teachers to plan. Before planning a thematic unit, it may be easier to begin by planning possible uses for one or more selections of children's literature. The first step in this planning is simply brainstorming all of the possibilities for instruction with the piece of literature. Include more ideas than would be practical to use in a unit of instruction. From this point, categorize the ideas using some type of graphic organizer, such as a semantic web (See Figure 1). Ideas might be categorized by disciplines, themes, or skill areas. Determine an order or connectedness between lesson ideas. Finally move from "what to teach" into "how to teach." Develop lessons that involve all learning styles. Move away from "talking about an idea" toward a marriage between instruction and engaging activities.

Observation and experience tells us that very little time is spent in the reading classroom on instruction and actual reading. Most of the teacher's time is spent in questioning and assigning rather than instructing; most of the student's time is spent in answering questions and completing workbook pages. This perhaps is the reason that students like Leslie have such an aversion to the reading class.

The teacher moves from "talking about" to instructing by developing and providing many and varied experiences that include the four elements of the language arts: reading, writing, speaking, and listening--all are inextricably linked. By modeling the skills to be taught, talking about our own thinking, and encouraging students to explain their own thinking, we move from making assignments toward sound instruction. To emphasize the importance of thinking, concrete activities that support the instruction are developed. In this way, we can assess the learning by observing students' actions, speaking and writing. The following sample lesson illustrates this concept:

Ask students to look around the classroom at their peers. Have them choose two people and write two ways that these two people are alike and two ways that they are different. Allow students to share their conclusions.

Introduce the terms "compare" and "contrast." Discuss the meaning and further discuss ways in which students could compare and contrast themselves to family members. Physical characteristics are most obvious; however, aspects of character, personality, and life's events make important comparisons.

Introduce the story *Grandfather's Journey*, and ask students to listen for ways that the grandfather and the grandson could be both compared and contrasted as the teacher reads.

Give students copies of a Venn diagram and an envelop containing several slips of paper. Three of the slips of paper have characteristics or experiences that relate to the grandfather, the grandson or both. Several other slips are blank.

Have students place the strips in the correct place on the Venn diagram and then write their own comparisons and contrasts on the blank slips of paper and place these correctly on the diagram. Ideas are then shared as the teacher places the strips on a transparency and writes in the students' ideas. By using slips of paper, students can easily move the paper around on the diagram, allowing them the luxury of changing their mind easily. The lesson also appeals to the tactile learner that is so often overlooked in the classroom. Variations that are similar include having students write their responses on adhesive notes and place them on a Venn diagram on the wall. Cutting a transparency into strips and allowing students to write responses on these strips and place on the overhead projector also provide, rather easily, for the kinesthetic learner.

For Leslie, for my principal, for my parents, and for reporting evaluation purposes, I had to establish some type of evaluation--one that would not necessarily be an objective view of their reading comprehension. What I wanted was an assessment that measured

their ability to relate our reading and our activities to language skills and authentic experiences. The only answer: writing!

To begin the writing exercise for *Grandfather's Journey*, a discussion of synonyms for *journey* should be listed on the chalkboard or transparency. As the teacher gets responses from the students, he should list them categorically as nouns and verbs without labeling the categories. At this point the instructor must be sure to list words that can be used as nouns and verbs in both categories. Responses that are likely to be mentioned are "sojourn, trip, trek, visit, vacation, travel, voyage, passage, cruising, hike, travel. . ." Synonyms that may not, or may, be given are "experience" and "walk." These the teacher may have to question student participants in order to obtain. Using Grandfather's journey home (to Japan) to marry his childhood sweetheart could help students see that marriage maybe a journey as well as an experience. To incorporate "walk" as a synonym for journey, students should be asked about journeying across the room or down the hall. These become very important to the writing activity later in the lesson.

At this point in the lesson, a discussion of the categories should focus on the fact that the lists are divided into nouns and verbs. One, the teacher is incorporating skills into a writing lesson without saying, "A noun is a word that names. . ." or "A verb is a word that shows. . ." Allowing this labeling to come from the students will increase retention of the ability to recognize nouns and verbs as well as the skill of categorizing.

Using the categories "Journey, Walk, and Experience," the teacher should ask students to list different journeys that grandfather and grandson had in *Grandfather's Journey*. Responses for journey will include Japan, California, and America. An explanation that a "walk" may be a opportunity to view something, to describe what one has seen, will help students to see that Grandfather's walks included wheat fields, deserts, a war-torn village, the Pacific Ocean's loneliness, and the steep Sierra Mountains. Then, reminding the student participants that one examples of Grandfather's experiences was marriage will help reactions to include war, birth of a child, homesickness, fatherhood. At

this point the instructor must be certain that the class understands the meaning of "journey, walk and experience," as they are being used in this pre-writing activity. When that understanding is ascertained, then students should be asked to take these categories and list journeys, experiences, and walks of their own. The teacher/leader should be careful not to give examples here because what "journeys, experiences, and walks" the students list here will be used for writing in the next step.

After allowing only a few minutes, not more than five, to do some brainstorming/listing, the teacher should put his own list on the overhead and mark two or three that he finds he wants to write or talk about, asking the students to do the same. Once the students have completed this step, they are ready to write. The teacher should ask each student to select one "journey, experience, or walk" and begin to write about it. The teacher should be careful not to allow too much time to write. Only enough time for the student to get "going," so to speak, is necessary. If a teacher allows too much time, some students will finish what they have to say and are less likely to revisit their writing. On the other hand, if a student is stopped before he finishes, he will want to go back to writing. Two reasons come to mind: 1) an excitement has been created about a memory and the student will want to get back to it and 2) the teacher is going to make an assignment to finish what has been started in class and the student must revisit. What happens at this point is that the student will reread what he has written and do some revision and reminding. Then he will renew his excitement about this particular piece because the story is about him, after all: every writer's most knowledgeable subject.

When the writing assignments are collected, responding techniques become very important to encouraging future writing and developing self-confidence in writing ability. A teacher must keep in mind that one does not teaching creative writing, one can only encourage students to write. Appropriate responses to misspellings would be statements or questions with the teacher modeling the correct spelling. For example, when a student of mine said she enjoyed "..skiing in Colardo [sic]," I responded, "It sounds like your

repeated experience in Colorado of skiing (and falling) helped increase your understanding of the sport. Great example." What I did was model the correctness and build the self-confidence. The student who wrote ". . . had he not went to college" did not get a red ink correction. Instead I wrote, "Had he not gone to college, do you think he would have been as supportive?" Again, I modeled--this time with a question to encourage the student to look at the support she was giving this statement. Yet another student wrote, "The bond between my special. . . You get your character. . ." My questions to her was "Did you mean to switch from *my* to *you* ?" To answer the question she must reread and re-evaluate what she meant and said. Ultimately, though, in each and every circumstance, the writing is not mine to correct and revise. My job as a teacher is to encourage writing and find a way to model correctness and let the student chose how he/she wants his essay, paragraph, paper, theme to be written.

Grandfather's Journey is only one picture book that can be used for springboard to developing units of instructions and writing activities. What every teacher must do is to look at the needs of his/ her class and decide how to include these books in lessons. The first grade teacher may want to cover the words, show the pictures, and have students write their own stories. The teacher of the intermediate grades can do a lesson similar to the one described here. And, yes, the high school teachers can use picture books. Their students might just be mature enough to grasp the real meaning. In the case of *Grandfather's Journey,* a better understanding of pride in one's country, family relationships, being a citizen of a village destroyed by war, or all people have similar thoughts and feelings. Picture books, like comics and cartoons, aren't just for children.