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AUTHOR Novick, Rebecca

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ABSTRACT

A central theme in this book is that there are many paths to literacy. The materials in this guidebook are intended to encourage those involved in teaching reading and writing to engage in dialogue and reflection with colleagues, to know their students well, to examine their own experiences and beliefs, and to generate and seek answers to their own questions by collaborative study of research. The guidebook builds and expands on two earlier Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) publications: "Learning to Read and Write: A Place To Start" and "Building a Knowledge Base in Reading." To make the guidebook a practical resource that will assist preschool and early elementary teachers and others in the education field, the materials provide a strong link between research and promising practices. The materials are organized into these sections: Learning To Read and Write: A Place To Start; Creating a Caring Community of Learners; Sharing Books with Children: The Heart of the Early Elementary Literacy Program; Teacher Demonstrations of Strategies for Decoding and Word Recognition; Storytelling, Story Acting, and Writing: Essential Language Experience for All Children; Nurturing Emotional and Aesthetic Literacy: Learning To Read the Heart; Monitoring Children's Progress; and Conclusion. Includes a handout section. Appended are a discussion of professional learning teams to enhance teaching and learning; an annotated 77-item list of children's picture books; and an annotated 48-item list of suggested professional resources. (Contains 315 references.) (NKA)

many paths to literacy

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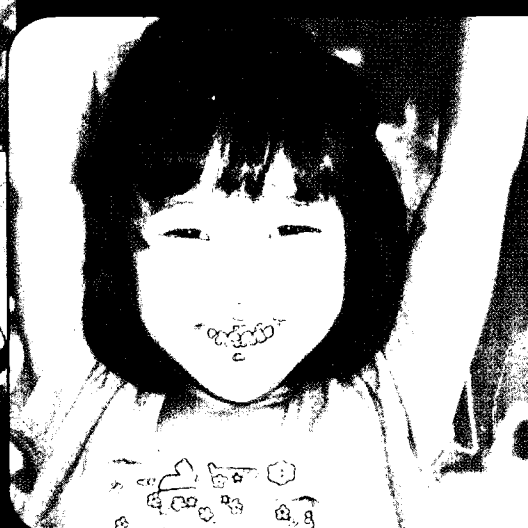

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Creating Communities of Learning & Excellence

Creating Communities of Learning & Excellence

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Language and Literacy
Assists educators in understanding the complex nature of literacy development and identifying multiple ways to engage students in literacy learning that result in highly proficient readers, writers, and speakers

Assessment
Helps schools identify, interpret, and use data to guide planning and accountability

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Many Paths to Literacy

Language, Literature, and Learning in the Primary Classroom

by Rebecca Novick

March 2002

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Language and Literacy Team
Steffen Saifer, Director

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Acknowledgments

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INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt in my mind that many children are disabled by the ways in which they are taught to read and write. When we break the intimate connection between experience and learning, children are cut off from their own problem-solving abilities. We sever the link between their lives and their learning, and they suffer as a consequence (Taylor, 1993).

When learners see their own experiences as valid knowledge and use reading and writing for their own purposes, the journey toward literate behaviors is soundly under way (Dahl & Freppon, 1995).

The current emphasis on high academic standards has had a number of positive effects on our thinking about educational practices. At their best, literacy standards and the assessments that monitor progress for children third grade and above emphasize comprehension and critical-thinking skills. Second, there is an emphasis on *all* children. We are asking schools to educate all children to levels of literacy that previously were expected of relatively few. Early childhood educator Dorothy Strickland calls this the "literacy of thoughtfulness."

In today's knowledge-dependent, technological society, all children need to be able to reason verbally; to follow a complex plot or argument; to analyze, synthesize, infer; to comprehend and to write increasingly complex texts. Higher-order thinking skills have become the new buzzwords. As a result, as Northwest principal Elaine Meeks points out, well-crafted assessments that monitor achievement can serve as an "equity" check by highlighting the still large educational achievement gaps among the nation's racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.

Many educators have concluded that the most important challenge in education today is eliminating these gaps, which often are identified as early as kindergarten and develop rapidly in the first three years of school. Teachers are well aware that success or failure in learning to read does not begin in kindergarten. We know that children come to school with widely differing literacy histories and experiences. Vocabulary growth rate, vocabulary use, conceptual development, comprehension, verbal reasoning, motivation to read, and the ease with which children learn to match print to sound are all affected by a child's language and literacy history (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Gunn, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995; Hart & Risley, 1995, 1999; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Teachers are well aware that success or failure in learning to read does not begin in kindergarten.

Fourth-Grade Slump

Language is the key. There is increasing recognition that language is the key and often the central problem. Many long-term studies have shown that children superior in oral language in kindergarten and first grade are the ones who excel in reading and writing in the middle grades (Dickinson &

Tabors, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1999; Snow et al., 1998; Wells, 1986). Yet, despite vast differences in children's early experiences, by concentrating on specific decoding skills and observable behaviors, schools have been successful in establishing a minimum literacy level for most children.

Because the ability to recognize printed letters and to sound out words is often the focus of early reading instruction, children who have had few engaging language experiences in the preschool years may score at grade level or above on tests of basic decoding at grade two. However, reading achievement often begins to decline between grades four and six, a phenomenon often referred to as the "fourth-grade slump."

In particular, below-average readers who also come from low socioeconomic status (SES) families tend to decelerate earlier and to a greater extent, dropping further and further behind their grade expectations (Chall, 1969). Chall and Jacobs (1983) reported that children in their study "had a good start in word meaning in grade two, but this competency was first to go into an early and strong deceleration" (p. 623). As breadth of vocabulary and the ability to reason verbally—to follow a complex plot or argument, to analyze, and to remember what has been read—become more important than decoding skill, children with little exposure to stories and to other reading and writing activities in the early years often fall behind their more advantaged peers (Chall & Jacobs, 1983; Morrow, 1992; Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, & Freppon, 1995).

There is no question that word recognition matters. Fluent reading of texts is an essential competency. However, there is no longer any doubt that the goal of reading is comprehension. As the National Reading Panel concluded, "Comprehension has come to be the essence of reading, essential not only to academic learning in all subject areas, but to lifelong learning as well" (2000). When the demands for comprehension increase in the fourth grade, children from backgrounds that do not emphasize language and literacy may not be able to transfer their early decoding and word recognition skills to reading words for meaning in stories and other texts.

The literacy ceiling. Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, and Hurwitz (1999) refer to students' difficulty with reading and understanding higher-level texts as the "literacy ceiling—a ceiling that limits what students can hope to achieve both in the classroom and in their lives outside of school" (p. 5). Limited vocabulary and background knowledge contribute to these difficulties, which often persist and even increase throughout a student's school years (Baker, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995). As these researchers point out:

> The challenge for the preschool or elementary classroom teacher is clear: They are charged with designing and delivering reading instruction that not only builds on what the individual child knows, but also accommodates the myriad of individual literacy backgrounds present in the classroom (p. 16).

So how can we make sure that we don't expect too little? How can we build on the experiences that all children bring to school to create a strong foundation for reading, writing, listening, and speaking—a foundation that will not only provide literacy skills, but also develop the habits of mind that lead to lifelong reading and writing? These are some of the questions explored in this guide.

Exploring the Many Paths to Literacy

A central theme in this book is that there are many paths to literacy. It is an exciting time to be a teacher of young children. Research, including research on early brain development, has con-

firmed that the experiences that many parents and early childhood educators provide in their homes and school settings promote language development and early literacy (Caine & Caine, 1990; Shore, 1997).

Teachers no longer have to worry that reciting nursery rhymes, playing word games, and singing songs such as Raffi's "I love to eat, eat, epples and benenes" are frivolous activities. Rather, they are helping children develop phonemic awareness (the ability to hear and manipulate the separate sounds in words), which plays a key role in phonics knowledge (understanding that letters stand for the sounds in spoken words). In addition, singing boosts early language skills, enhances memory and listening skills, and increases attention span.

Reading aloud need not be seen as a frill to be engaged in only after important seatwork is completed; instead, listening to and discussing stories are perhaps the most important activities for young children's literacy development (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Sulzby & Teale, 1991). Illustrating stories and creating stories in response to pictures help children create rich mental models; these activities are particularly critical for children who have trouble engaging with text, and enhance comprehension for all children.

Similarly, the link between dramatic play, storytelling, and story reading has never been better established. Pretend play is enriched by stories of all kinds, and acting out stories can bring the written word to life—enhancing story recall, overall intellectual performance, and social competence (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). All these activities—child-centered conversations, storytelling, singing, a print-rich environment, painting and drawing, repeated reading of favorite storybooks, and pretend play—promote

oral language development while they build a bridge from oral to written language. At the same time that children are building conceptual knowledge, vocabulary, a sense of story, and a love of reading, they can engage in many enjoyable and engaging activities that develop their letter-sound knowledge and use this knowledge in reading and writing. Promoting optimal learning of matching print to sound requires careful attention to motivational factors that influence the effectiveness of such instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000). The panel concluded:

> Further research on phonics instruction should investigate how best to motivate children in classrooms to learn the letter-sound associations and to apply that knowledge to reading and writing. It should also be designed to determine which approaches teachers prefer to use and are most likely to use effectively in their classroom instruction (§2, p. 137).

In this guidebook we will explore the many rich and varied experiences that make up a comprehensive literacy program, experiences that provide a strong foundation for language and literacy. As Egan observes, "the fullest achievement of literacy requires the fullest achievement of oral capacities as well" (1987, p. 469).

Using Research To Inform Practice

In the 1998 report by the National Research Council, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow et al.), the committee concluded that everyone involved with teaching children to read should be steeped in the nuances of reading research. They should "understand what is truly hard about learning to read, and how wide-ranging and varied are the experiences that support and facilitate reading acquisition" (p. A9). In this guidebook, research on learning to talk, read, and write is discussed, and activities to support the development of these crucial competencies are explored.

There is a growing consensus that reading is a process in which the reader constructs meaning from print—an active, problem-solving, thinking process that is influenced by the reader's prior knowledge and experience (National Reading Panel, 2000). This cognitive conceptualization of reading for understanding implies that we should cast a wide, cross-disciplinary net to capture the knowledge about how children learn to be thoughtful, engaged readers and writers. Cognitive and developmental psychology, linguistics, cultural anthropology, and educational research all make valuable contributions to our understanding of how children become motivated and proficient readers and writers.

While research on what works for struggling readers can inform the design of effective programs, research on "well-read-to" children has also played an important role in our understanding of how children learn to read and write. Just as we know a lot about the factors that contribute to longevity by studying the lives of persons who live long and healthy lives, we have learned a great deal about early language and literacy development by studying the early learning environments of children who read well and easily. Emergent literacy, a perspective that emphasizes that reading begins early in life and is an ongoing process, has highlighted the importance of early experiences with oral and written language for literacy development (Whitehurst, 2001).

Similarly, during the last 20 years, researchers studying the comprehension strategies used by proficient readers have begun to inform the development of effective and explicit instruction in comprehension strategies (Pressley, 2000). These two areas of research and their implications for practice are explored in this publication.

Criteria for including research. Studies based on an experimental design with a "treatment" group and a control group that did not receive the intervention can yield valuable information to inform teaching practices. Many of the studies included in this paper utilized this design. In addition, longitudinal studies in which researchers collect data on children's language and literacy development for a number of years in a variety of circumstances are also included. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) suggest that progress in our understanding of the relationship between emergent literacy and skills related to reading should come from a synthesis of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. Both types of research studies are included in this guidebook.

Richard Allington, a researcher and professor of elementary and special education at the University of Florida, suggests a number of criteria for selecting research, including "quality of evidence" criteria. Only articles by authors who have published in peer-reviewed journals and books published by well-respected publishers are included in this guidebook. Allington also suggests using a "convergence of evidence" criteria. By this he means research that's been done in multiple sites, with multiple measures, by multiple investigators who come up with similar findings.

For example, there is increasing convergence of evidence regarding the importance of explicit instruction in phonics and comprehension strategies (National Reading Panel, 2000). However, the panel reported that there is little convergence on the best mix of strategies and practices that promote these important competencies. That is the case, in large part, because of the need to individualize instruction. The National Reading Panel points out what every teacher knows: Children come to school with wide variations in their ability to match print to sound and in their ability to comprehend text; children learn in different ways and are motivated to engage in reading and writing by different experiences. In order to optimize instruction for each child, teachers need to understand their students' interests, learning styles, needs, and strengths.

In *How People Learn: Bridging Research and Practice*, the Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning urges educators to abandon the idea that there is one universal best teaching practice. "Asking which teaching technique is best is analogous to asking which tool is best—a hammer, a screwdriver, a knife, or pliers. In teaching, as in carpentry, the selection of tools depends on the task at hand and the materials one is working with" (Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino, 1999, p. 22).

Practitioner observation and research. For these reasons, this guide draws on the insights and practices of effective practitioners. Throughout the book, vignettes and examples of effective practices from Northwest schools illustrate how schools "in the messy, real world of the classroom" are creating innovative and effective strategies to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse student population (Braunger & Lewis, 1997).

Researchers have consistently found that adults, like children, need to construct their own understandings and theories through reading, close observation, reflection, dialogue, and analysis. "Only by becoming teachers who know and can articulate what we do and why we do it, and who stand up for what we know and hold dear can we make our schools viable for our most precious natural resources, our students," says teacher and author Regie Routman (2000, p. xxxv). An example from a Northwest school illustrates this statement.

At Helen Baller Elementary School in Camas, Washington, Principal Pat Edwards and a number of teachers formed study groups to explore best practices in literacy instruction. They then visited New Zealand for an intensive study of that country's literacy program. Second-grade teacher Alona Dickerson describes her initial skepticism about the idea of changing her traditional skills-based literacy program to a literature-based one: "I was the ditto queen," confesses Dickerson. "I believed it was my job to keep the kids busy while I worked with reading groups. In order for me to change my practice, I needed to be convinced that it was best for kids. 'Show me,' was my attitude." The visit to New Zealand convinced Dickerson to try new methods, but it was her own research that has allayed her fears that children's skills might suffer in a nontraditional classroom. Over the last few years, she has helped children, including struggling readers, became successful and competent readers:

> At the end of the day I don't say, "My lecture was great, I did a great job today." I say, "The kids did a really good job today," and they leave saying it to themselves. It takes a lot of time to set up but the rewards are worth it. When we were using only Basals, only six children in my first-grade classroom *reached* the level of *Beth's Bear Hug*, a book at second-grade proficiency. Last year, only six of 26 first-graders *didn't* make it *all the way through* the book. And this year, 15 of 25 second-graders are reading at the fourth-to-sixth-grade level. Only one student, who came at the end of the year, is not reading at grade level.

Clearly, teachers' observation of their students and research on the learning that takes places in their classrooms can be powerful tools for informing, improving, and designing teaching practices. Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino suggest that conducting research in teams that "combine the expertise of researchers and the wisdom of practitioners" is a promising new approach to advancing the science of learning (1999, p. 33).

How To Use This Guidebook

These materials are intended to encourage those involved in teaching reading and writing to engage in dialogue and reflection with colleagues, to know their students well, to examine their own experiences and beliefs, and to generate and seek answers to their own questions by collaborative study of research. This guidebook builds and expands on two earlier NWREL publications: *Learning To Read and Write: A Place To Start* (Novick, 1998) and *Building a Knowledge Base in Reading* (Braunger & Lewis, 1997).

In an effort to make this a practical resource that will assist preschool and early elementary teachers and others in the education field, the materi-

als provide a strong link between research and promising practices, created and implemented by innovative and committed teachers. Interviews with teachers, parents, and students, document study, and classroom observations have been used to gather information on the challenges faced and successes achieved by elementary teachers in today's schools.

Readers may want to examine many of the research studies on language and literacy in more depth than is offered in this brief overview of our current understandings on language and literacy development. In addition, further study may be needed to implement some of the suggested strategies and practices and to explore additional practices. There is a wealth of resources available to teachers, of course. In fact, the sheer numbers of relevant books may be overwhelming for teachers. For this reason, in the appendices that follow the main text, we include an annotated bibliography of selected resources for teachers, as well as an extensive bibliography of the references cited throughout the guidebook.

The use of frequent headings, sidebars, and bullets is intended to allow busy practitioners to quickly find information relevant to their questions and interests. The materials are organized into these sections:

- **Learning To Read and Write: A Place To Start:** Highlights the importance of early experiences with oral and written language for optimal language and literacy development.
- **Elements of Effective Comprehensive Programs:**
  - **Creating a Caring Community of Learners:** Discusses resiliency and emotional intelligence, authentic learning experiences, culturally responsive teaching and learning, learning English as a second language, and school-family-community partnerships.

- **Sharing Books With Children: The Heart of the Early Elementary Literacy Program:** Explores the many ways of sharing books with young children, the importance of interaction and discussion, strategies for enhancing vocabulary growth and development, and explicit comprehension instruction.
- **Teacher Demonstrations of Strategies for Decoding and Word Recognition:** Discusses the role of repeated readings in learning to read, and explores numerous strategies for decoding, enhancing phonemic awareness, phonics skills, and fluency.

- **Storytelling, Story Acting, and Writing: Essential Language Experience for All Children:** Highlights the importance of providing multiple opportunities for children to develop their narrative voice through dictating stories, acting out stories, and writing, with various levels of support.
- **Nurturing Emotional and Aesthetic Literacy:** Discusses ways to link literacy with emotional development, helping children make personal connections with text, and the role of songs, poetry, and visual arts in creating rich sensory images while reading and writing.
- **Monitoring Children's Progress:** Provides brief overviews of several authentic strategies that provide a comprehensive picture of children's learning and development.
- **Conclusion**
- **Handout Section:** Materials suitable for handouts in workshops for both families and teachers are included in this section. These handouts include brief synopses of concepts, summaries of research, and suggestions for designing learning experiences for young children.
- **Appendix A:** Discusses strategies for creating professional learning teams to examine current practice, set priorities, create optimal learning environments, and expand teacher knowledge through classroom research. Questions to spur discussion on language and literacy development are included.
- **Appendix B:** Includes descriptions of 77 children's books written by 18 popular authors from a variety of cultures. Web sites that include annotated lists of books are included.
- **Appendix C:** Includes descriptions of 46 professional resources for teachers and other educators, categorized by the chapters in this guide.

LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE: A PLACE TO START

If we wished to identify clear examples of learning theory in action, we could find no better instances than are thrown up universally in the homes of language learning infants. There seems a strong case for looking at initial language learning as a suggestive model—perhaps the basic model—for literacy learning' (Holdaway, 1979).

Emergent Literacy

The study of language from the child's point of view has highlighted the role that language plays in the everyday lives of children. Young children, it is clear, learn what language *is* through what language *does*. Research has confirmed what many parents and educators have suspected: Literacy development has a long history, beginning in the first interactions between children and their caregivers.

In 1966, New Zealand educator Marie Clay coined the term emergent literacy to describe the literacy development of young children. Learning to read and write, rather than mastering a series of predetermined readiness skills, begins early in life and is an ongoing process. Grounded in cognitive psychology and linguistics, the emergent literacy perspective has highlighted the importance of early experiences with oral and written language for optimal literacy development. It is now well known that the ability to listen to and tell stories in the preschool years is strongly related to learning to read (Snow et al., 1998). Strickland (1990) sums up key elements of an emergent literacy perspective:

- Learning to read and write begins early in life and is ongoing
- Learning to read and learning to write are interrelated processes that develop in concert with oral language
- Learning to read and write requires active participation in activities that have meaning in the child's daily life
- Learning to read and write involves interaction with responsive others
- Learning to read and write is particularly enhanced by shared-book experiences

Rather than passively receiving knowledge and information from adults, in this view children actively strive to make sense of their experience from the moment they are born. Long before children are able to match print with sound, they are using language to persuade, reason, reflect, imagine, respond, analyze, observe, compare, infer, empathize, share experiences and ideas, solve problems, and for the sheer joy of playing with words.

Learning to read and write, rather than mastering a series of predetermined readiness skills, begins early in life and is an ongoing process.

Later, when children are expected to understand and synthesize increasingly complex texts, these same critical-thinking skills will be called into play. The five-year-old who makes up her own stories,

invents new rhymes, writes pretend messages, discusses books that have been read to her, sings complex songs, and reads a book she has memorized is demonstrating that she has a great deal of knowledge about reading and writing.

Using Language Creatively

Many children enter school filled with poetic images and unique word usage, and are adept at metaphorical thinking. Egan (1987) reports that nursery school children are much more likely than older children to use a metaphor to complete a sentence of the form: "He looks as gigantic as _____." A few examples illustrate this tendency:

> An eight-year-old surprised her teacher with this lead to a draft of a story: "A cheetah would make a sports car look like a turtle" (Graves, 1983, p. 3).

> A four-year-old comes in from the playground and stops at the doorway.
>
> "Hi Jason," Samantha says. "You can be the rainbow baby. Joseph is the dad."
> "I can't. I have to go back outside."
> "Why do you?"
> "Because I'm running back and forth as fast as the sky and faster than the clouds" (Paley, 1990, p. 4).

> A five-year-old gave this explanation for the recurrence of rainbows: There are only one or two rainbows in the world. They come back, taking turns. Rainbows never wear out (Wilson, 2000/2001).

> In response to a teacher's question, "What is a shadow?" children replied: "It's night lying down. Day is night time for the shadow" (Wilson, 2000/2001).

As these examples illustrate, children often use language to explain their world. Educator and author Vivian Paley points out: "As soon as he learns a language well enough, and before he is told he cannot invent the world, he will explain everything. This ability to imagine the beginnings and ends of events is most highly developed during the kindergarten year" (1981, p. 31). When schools encourage creative use of language, children's imaginations continue to develop. A first-grader provided this explanation of why ladybugs are all female:

> Once upon a time there were ladybugs and man-bugs. But they were attacked by an army of ants. The man-bugs were very brave and fought back. But the ants were too strong, and the man-bugs all died defending their wives and children. To this day, there are only ladybugs.

Yet, as Boloz and Jenness (1984) point out, all too often these poetic images and imaginative stories disappear as children undergo "proper" language training. Because of the importance of phonics knowledge in learning to read, kindergarten and first grade are often a time when the instructional focus is on learning decoding skills. While these skills play a critical role in learning to read and write, children's natural curiosity and imagination may soon give way to passivity as they learn that they are not usually expected to use language creatively, or to ask and answer their own questions. Rather, they may spend much of their time sounding out words letter by letter (often in isolation) and copying letters and sentences.

"Almost as if by Magic"

Fortunately, a rich body of reading research and practitioner knowledge can inform the design of effective reading and writing programs—programs that enhance, rather than stifle, children's innate curiosity, creativity, and imagination. In particular, research on the literacy development of children

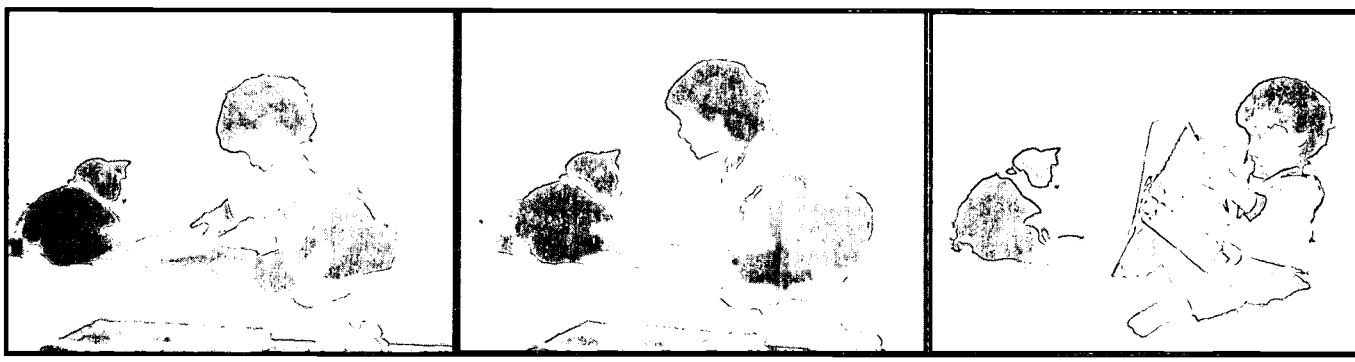
who come from homes with rich oral and written language environments has helped us to understand how children learn to integrate reading and writing into their well-developed speaking and listening skills.

In such homes:

- Children's efforts at storytelling, reading, and writing are accepted with interest and enthusiasm and enhanced by adult questions and encouragement. Children often spend hours looking at books and telling stories to go with the pictures. Later, they focus on print, as well as on illustrations. Storybook reading by children who are not yet reading is considered an important part of literacy development (see Page 90).
- Parents and other adults respond to children's interests in various aspects of the world, building background knowledge and helping children to observe, compare, reflect, predict, empathize, and reason.
- Songs, nursery rhymes, and other forms of wordplay encourage phonemic awareness (the ability to hear the separate sounds in words), and encourage the creative use of language.
- The environment is "print-rich." Adults and children make grocery lists, follow recipes together, and read signs around the neighborhood. Books, newspapers, magazines, and even comic books offer multiple opportunities for reading and learning about the world. Magnetic alphabet letters, alphabet books, blocks, and puzzles provide enjoyable ways to explore the alphabet (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Gunn et al., 1995; Hart & Risley, 1995; Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 1999; Sulzby & Teale, 1991).

Researcher G. Reid Lyon, in testimony before a House of Representatives committee, described how some children who come from such highly literate environments learn to read and write, "almost as if by magic":

> Some children learn to read and write with ease ... even before they enter school, they have developed an understanding that the letters on a page can be sounded out to make words and some preschool children can even read words correctly that they have never seen before and comprehend what they have read.



- Adults and older siblings frequently read to themselves and out loud to infants and children, demonstrating the importance of literacy as well as its enjoyment. Adults and children discuss what is read, sharing ideas, experiences, and making personal connections with text.

> Research has shown that some of the children, before school, and without any great effort or pressure on the part of their parents, pick up books, pencils, and they are on their way, almost as if by magic (1997).

Creating Responsive and Print-Rich Environments

> *What a child knows about print depends upon the richness of the environment and the responsiveness of the adult* (Nebraska/Iowa Departments of Education, 1993).

Many schools *have* and all schools *can* create an environment with many characteristics of the homes of "well-read-to" children. Teachers play a crucial role in making literacy meaningful and relevant:

- Because young children naturally want to imitate the behavior of significant adults and to please them, teachers model their appreciation of reading and writing by sharing their favorite books and their own writing. "Teachers must be readers first. Of all professionals who read, teachers must top the list," say authors Harvey and Goudvis (2000).
- Teachers encourage children to connect reading and writing with their own knowledge and experience, and help children to become aware of how much they already know about reading and writing. Teachers know that the five-year-old who makes up her own stories, invents new rhymes, writes pretend messages, discusses books that have been read to her, sings complex songs, and reads a book she has memorized is demonstrating that she has a great deal of knowledge about reading and writing.
- Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning, and teachers convey to children that they expect them to learn to read and write.

Cambourne (1987) reminds us that "from the moment children are born, meaningful spoken language washes over and surrounds children. They are *immersed* in a language flood, and for most of their waking time, proficient users of the language-culture bathe them in the sounds, meanings, cadences and rhythms of the language that they have to learn" (p. 6). In order to provide similar conditions for the printed medium, in an optimal language-learning environment, printed materials are everywhere; it is a print-rich environment. High-quality literature and expository texts line the walls, and fill bookshelves and other containers, offering a wide variety of choices for reading. On the walls, there may be charts, calendars, poems, lists, songs, high-frequency words, graphs, and a message board. Children's art and written work is prominently displayed on walls and shelves, conveying to everyone that their work is valued.

Learning centers. Literacy-enhanced learning centers provide additional opportunities for children to explore print in functional and meaningful ways. For example, in a dramatic play center, teachers can put books for children to read to dolls and stuffed animals, and materials for letters and lists; in the block corner, children can make signs and labels for their structures. If children seem to be bored with these traditional centers, teachers can plan with children to create exciting centers—farms, offices, grocery stores, spaceships, school buses, and flower shops, to name just a few. All of the centers in the room should, in Freppon's (1991) words, "include invitations to interact with print" (p. 192). Pickett (1998) found that the presence of an adult model with whom to interact in the enriched environment dramatically increased literacy behaviors. Some "must have" centers include:

- The book corner—light, bright, and complete with a cozy reading nook—should include songs, poems, and literature from a variety of cultures, lifestyles, and income groups, especially—but not limited to—those represented in the classroom. Plenty of nonfiction books, newspapers, and magazines offer a wide range of reading materials. In this inviting corner, children read individually and with peers as they develop literacy skills and the enjoyment of reading.

- The writing center is well stocked with a variety of writing, painting, and drawing tools and surfaces—portable chalkboards, easels, dry-erase boards, alphabet blocks, letter tiles, an assortment of alphabet puzzles, and an alphabet pocket chart.
- In a listening center, children listen to and/or read along with a story while they read it to themselves. As children listen and read along, they develop their ability to memorize stories, match print to sound, and improve fluency and comprehension.
- Puzzles, blocks, a dramatic play center, manipulatives, a water and/or sand table, computers, and play dough offer opportunities for hands-on learning. Flannel boards, puppets, and other props encourage children to act out stories and to make up their own.

Before turning our attention to the key experiences that all children need to become lifelong readers and writers, a brief discussion of how children learn language follows.

Learning To Talk

> *To become good readers children first need help in installing the cognitive and language furnishings that will make the brain a comfortable place for real literacy to dwell!* (Healy, 1990).

Psychologist George Miller estimated that infants must add words to their vocabulary at an average rate of one every hour they are awake, a total of several thousand a year. Children learn grammar with a complexity that defies linguistic analysis (Bruner, 1983). How do children manage such a theoretical impossibility? Discovering how children learn language has fascinated generations of philosophers and linguists; in recent years, a broad-based approach, usually referred to as the "interactionist perspective," has emerged as the most influential theory in the field. Its basic premise is that at birth, infants are psychologically prepared to learn to talk and learn to do so within the context of reciprocal, social interactions with caregivers (Bruner, 1983). (See Handout 1.)

Differences in language environments. The optimal environment for stimulating language development is one of responsiveness to and acceptance of the child's communicative attempts. When children are encouraged to talk and responded to in a way that fosters further talk, language and thinking are enhanced (Bruner, 1983; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1995, 1999). By acknowledging children's ideas and observations about the world, we are telling them, "I care about you; I value your ideas." Author and teacher Vivian Paley observes: "When we are curious about a child's words and our responses to those words, the child feels respected. The child is respected. 'What are these ideas I have that are so interesting to the teacher? I must have good ideas'" (Paley, 1986, p. 127).

By acknowledging children's ideas and observations about the world, we are telling them, "I care about you; I value your ideas."

In contrast, parents and teachers may actively discourage thinking and hinder the development of curiosity and interest in the world. In a longitudinal study, Hart and Risley (1995) found that children from low socioeconomic status (SES) families frequently experience a language-impoverished environment, receiving substantially less parenting per hour than children in middle class families, and that these differences were strongly correlated with subsequent IQ measures of the children. Hart (1982) found that although the language of poor children displayed as great a variety and

complexity as middle class children, poor children used complex structures less frequently than their middle class peers. In addition, poor children added new words and structures more slowly than advantaged children. The result was "a cumulative, ever-widening gap between the size of the lexicon in use by children in poverty vs. advantaged children" (p. 209).

In addition, in Hart and Risley's 1995 study, a substantial proportion of low-income parents' speech to children functioned to *prohibit* children's activities. The children in welfare families heard a prohibition, such as "Don't," "Stop," "Quit," twice as often as they heard affirmative feedback. These researchers found a significant *inverse* relationship between the rate of prohibitions and children's IQ. They concluded that the strong relationship between even low prohibitions and unfavorable child outcomes suggests that prohibitions have a toxic effect on children's speech development.

Supporting Early Language and Literacy in School

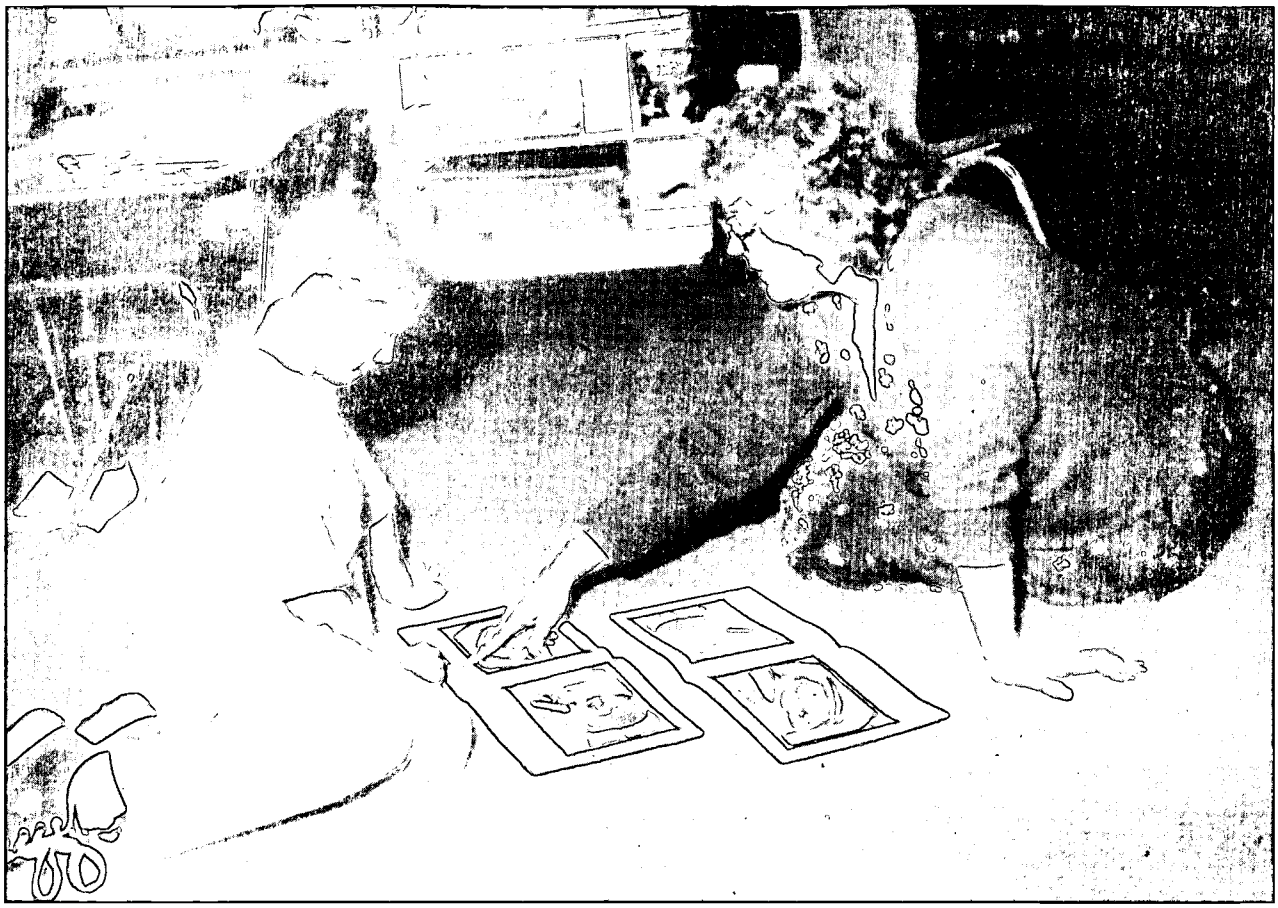
Schools can help to close the cumulative, ever-widening gap in language development by providing a language-rich and responsive environment. A number of studies of outcomes of preschool experiences have found that the amount and quality of verbal interaction engaged in by teachers and children emerged as the strongest predictor of positive child outcomes (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Phillips, 1987). Data suggest that 20 minutes three times a week of one-to-one conversations can lead to dramatic gains in children's language competence. What are the characteristics of such interactions? According to Snow, Dubber, and de Blauw (1982), an optimal language-learning environment is provided by caregivers and teachers who:

- Know their children well and interpret communicative attempts as meaningful
- Accept and value behavior that children are able to do
- Are highly responsive to children's interests
- Provide opportunities for children to exercise control over activities
- Provide activities and interactions that are developmentally appropriate

Meaningful Conversation

The Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development conducted by researchers Dickinson and Tabors (2001) found strong evidence that teacher-child conversations, in which children play an active part, have an important role in shaping children's language and early literacy development. In particular, they found that:

- Children tend to do better on kindergarten emergent literacy tasks if their teachers engage them in conversations that include personal narratives, explanations, pretend, talk about past and present events, and discussion of ideas (p. 251).
- The quality of teacher-child extended conversations (talk that requires participants to develop understandings beyond the here and now, and that requires the use of several turns) throughout the day has a significant bearing on the child's long-term language and literacy development (p. 274).
- Exposure to conversations that include low-frequency vocabulary words *(rare words)* has a beneficial effect on children's language development. Talking about the meaning of the words during shared reading help children remember new words (p. 275).
- The amount of time that kindergartners are observed talking about literacy-related topics (talking about a book, sharing writing, telling stories) is related to assessments of their early literacy skills.



- Reading books aloud offers particularly rich opportunities for vocabulary growth "because there are two sources of words: the words in the text of the book and the words spoken by the mother [teacher] in discussing the book with her child" (p. 100).
- Picture book reading is a unique opportunity for language development in that the mother [teacher] and child can return to the same story time after time. Repeated readings and discussions of the same page in a book are rich settings for language acquisition (p. 42).
- Kindergarten performance is better when the children as four-year-olds have teachers who limit their own talking, give children more time to talk, and respond in a way that encourages more talk (p. 250).

Having enough adults to provide conversational partners is essential for optimal language and storytelling development. In addition, teachers of young children can examine their curriculum to determine how to increase opportunities for children to engage in meaningful dialogue. At the same time, these extended conversations create shared memories and a sense of community, helping to bridge home and school, enabling each child to find a sense of belonging in school.

Author Nellie Edge describes excellence in kindergarten literacy as the "vital foundation for school reform. Professionally, I cannot separate one aspect of excellence in literacy development from the total experience of immersing children in meaningful language and literacy experiences within a joyful, caring community" (see Handout 2). These experiences remain critical throughout a child's school years.

The following examples from Northwest schools illustrate the many and varied ways that schools can provide rich language and literacy experiences for all children. The focus of these vignettes is on environments that foster a love of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Throughout the guidebook, examples of skill and strategy instruction are also provided.

Harborview/Capital Elementary, Juneau, Alaska*

An image of school as a place where children in orderly classrooms sit quietly at their seats engaged in "on task" behavior is deeply entrenched in American educational thinking. However, a visitor to Harborview/Capital Elementary School in Juneau, Alaska, would look in vain for such children. Classrooms are exciting, lively places that reveal a substantial tolerance for mess. Colorful, life-size papier-mâché birds—nuthatches, blue herons, horned owls, wood thrushes, ruffed grouse, and peregrine falcons—are perched on tables and clotheslines and hover amidst ocean dioramas, illustrated wall stories, posters, quilts, puppets, and multicultural dolls.

Living on the shores of Auk Bay provides many opportunities to engage in projects that integrate art, scientific inquiry, language, and literacy. In a kindergarten/first-grade room, more than 100 feet of bright blue string, demonstrating the length of a Portuguese man-of-war's tentacles, winds around tables and chairs, out the door, and into the hall. Suspended from the ceiling in a multiage kindergarten/first-grade/second-grade classroom is a life-size killer whale. Made of chicken wire, PCP pipe, papier-mâché, and construction paper, the project has taken two years to complete.

Circle areas for group brainstorming, singing, storytelling, and instruction, and activity centers, spilling over with elaborate block structures, large floor puzzles, games, and painting and writing projects, offer inviting alternatives to individual desks. While at any given time a number of children are quietly reading and writing, they are seldom sitting at desks; rather, they are lounging on couches, rugs, or rocking chairs. Children engage in dramatic play, tell stories, sing, care for a variety of plants and animals, paint, listen to taped stories and songs, and, most of all, take part in animated conversation—about a book, a story in progress, an art or science project, or a math problem. For example, in a multiage kindergarten/first-grade/second-grade classroom, two children are discussing endangered species:

> "A thousand wouldn't be enough."
> "Yes, it would," comes the spirited reply. "Because all the girl cheetahs would have babies and there would be a lot more cheetahs. Then they wouldn't be endangered anymore."
> "What if the babies don't make it to full size? Then what would happen?"

Next door, in another blended classroom, two children are discussing their writing assignment.

> "What would be better, being in charge of your family or in charge of the world?"
> "I'd rather be in charge of my family because then I could make my brother do what I want."
> "But if you were in charge of the world, you *would* be in charge of your family."

Rather than discouraging such behavior as disruptive and "off task," at Capital, these conversations are viewed as playing an important role in children's cognitive and social development. Teachers work collaboratively to provide a socially supportive atmosphere that encourages children to share ideas and strategies, exchange writings, and challenge each others' thinking.

* The Harborview/Capital Elementary School closed in 1996 due to the age of the building.

Cherry Valley Elementary, Polson, Montana

National Education Milkin Award winner Doug Crosby's first-grade classroom reflects his deceptively simple teaching philosophy:

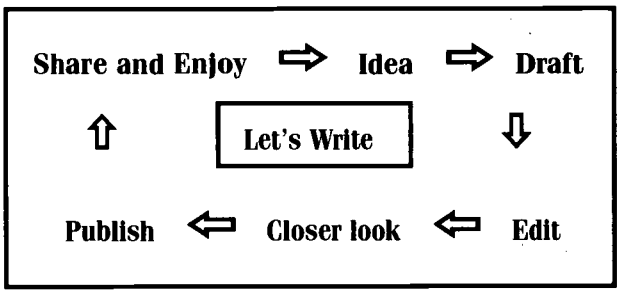
> I like to think of it as a self-motivated class of engaged learners. My basic teaching philosophies are rather simple, particularly when talking about the language arts field. I begin with the notion that all reading and writing must have a valid purpose. Then, I teach reading by getting the kids to read, and I teach writing by getting the kids to write. With that, you have my program.

Currently dominating the room is a large tepee that provides a place to go "to read and write and get into another dimension." Blocks, Legos, easels, and a rice table offer multiple opportunities for hands-on learning and creating. Books, hand puppets, stuffed animals, and examples of children's work are everywhere. Newly painted pictures hang from a clothesline that rings the room; whimsical clay figures wait to be taken by the visiting artist to be fired in a kiln. A colorful library prominently displays children's published books and letters from pen pals in New Hampshire.

The school day is made up of an array of opportunities to engage in authentic and intrinsically motivating literacy activities. Each child has an individual plan that enables him or her to set priorities among his or her activities each day, ensuring a balance of individual reading, buddy reading (reading with a friend), guided small-group reading, listening to stories (with and without explicit instruction), modeled and draft writing, publishing, and conferencing with the teacher. In addition, every day children sign up on a voluntary basis to read to the class, a practice that the children initiated.

For a substantial part of the day, children are curled up with books on the well-worn, comfortable sofa and on braided rugs with soft pillows, reading individually and out loud with friends. Others are listening to tape-recorded books at the listening center. Tables, rather than isolated desks, provide opportunities for cooperative learning. A writing center, complete with paper, pens, crayons, markers, paints, stamp sets, fancy-cut scissors, and glitter, invites children to write and illustrate their stories.

In Crosby's classroom, the walls are filled with print of all kinds: There are calendars, charts, posters, graphs, poems, songs, paintings, and friezes. One large poster in the writing center describes the writing process:



Other posters reflect Cherry Valley's literacy philosophy. A quote from Frank Smith, professor of education at the University of Victoria, reminds readers: "In reading, what the brain says to the eye matters more than what the eye says to the brain." Another proclaims:

> Literacy is not a 45-minute period
> of instruction
> With behavioral objectives and predictable
> outcomes.
> Literature is enjoying, learning, feeling,
> Being, sensing, laughing, crying,
> Hating, deciding, loving, growing,
> Sympathizing, listening.
> Literature is all day
> Being and becoming
> Growing and growing.

Helen Baller Elementary, Camas, Washington

"We know that readers get better at reading when they choose books they can and want to read," say authors Harvey and Goudvis. "We need to fill our rooms with terrific books at every level, on every conceivable topic, to ensure that kids get their hands on books they want to read" (2000, p. 28). Researcher Donald Graves recommends that readers self-select about 80 percent of the texts they read (1991).

Like oral language, written language is best learned through actual use in a social context.

In Alona Dickerson's second-grade classroom, children not only choose from a wide selection of high-quality literature, they read in a variety of ways: in the inviting reading nook; on benches covered with blue calico to match the curtains; sprawled on the circle rug; individually and with friends, in a tepee; and even in a plastic bathtub filled with pillows. Children read the print-filled walls, songs, and poems they have memorized, and they choose books from their own learning logs (in which they write their own stories) and from the "browsing box," which includes a favorite book, an "I can read" book, and a new book. They write poems, stories, and in journals, and share their writing with friends and family.

One of the key conditions for learning described by Brian Cambourne (1995) is that learners must be free to approximate the desired model or outcome. The faculty at Helen Baller works together

to create an atmosphere that helps children feel free to take risks—to make mistakes and to try again. "A primary goal of education at Helen Baller," explains Principal Patricia Edwards, "is to allow children to explore and problem solve; we want to make children aware that they have something to say about what happens, that they can make a choice and that their choices do matter."

Literacy-enhanced activity centers—filled with puzzles, games, props for dramatic play, puppets, flannel boards to help children recall and reenact stories they have heard, a listening center, computers, poems, and play dough—allow children to "find their comfort level before branching out to other forms of literacy." Dickerson explains:

> This way, with so many choices, children can be successful right off the bat. We don't just give them a worksheet and if they can't do it, they just sit there or disrupt the class. When we just used basal readers, they could only read the basal texts—it didn't transfer to other books. Now they never say, "I can't read, I can't write." At whatever level they are, they can do it. They feel like they're free, but really we've set it up so they can be successful. The freedom empowers them to be learners, and it has almost eliminated discipline problems.

Summary

Research on how oral language develops has greatly influenced our understanding of how children learn written language. Because oral language is regarded as the cornerstone of reading and writing development, literacy is viewed as beginning in caregiver-infant interactions. Oral and written language are seen as interrelated and developing simultaneously, each reinforcing and transforming the other. In this view the underlying process of learning written language and oral language is the same: Like oral language, written language is best learned through actual use in a social context.

As the classroom examples illustrate, teachers can provide rich, enjoyable, and cognitively stimulating language and literacy environments. Dickinson and Tabors (2001) concluded that teachers who value and encourage children's ideas and interests and take time to engage in extended conversations about topics of interest to children play a critical role in fostering children's long-term language and literacy growth.

CREATING A CARING COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

> *However else one defines schooling, especially in the very early years, it is mostly about face-to-face interaction between children and adults, and these interactions, these conversations, are the process of adjustment, or adaptation. Test scores and other common assessment measures are but blurry snapshots of this process* (Pianta & Walsh, 1996, p. 156).

Although schools have traditionally separated children's academic achievement from social and emotional development, increasingly educators are coming to the conclusion that a narrow focus on academics will not always bring results. A recent report from the Child Mental Health Foundation and Agencies Network, titled *A Good Beginning*, emphasizes that social and emotional school readiness is critical to a successful kindergarten transition, early school success, and even later accomplishments in the workplace (Peth-Pierce, 2000). The report concludes that many children enter school without the social and emotional readiness to succeed in school, putting them at high risk for early school failure.

Schools can foster children's healthy emotional and academic competency by creating caring communities that support learning by all. Caring communities are defined by Lewis, Schaps, and Watson (1995) as "places where teachers and students care about and support each other, actively participate in and contribute to activities and decisions, feel a sense of belonging and identification, and have a shared sense of purpose and common values" (p. 551). A central goal of such schools is, as Cherry Valley Principal Elaine Meeks puts it, "to create a positive school climate as seen through the eyes of each child."

To do so requires not only careful attention to interactions and relationships between teachers and children and among children, but throughout the school and community, as well. Teachers, families, secretaries, businesspeople, senior citizens, family advocates, teaching assistants, foster grandparents, reading visitors, custodians, child development assistants, librarians, police officers, and administrators all make important contributions to the care and education of young children. Montana's Polson Partnership Project Coordinator Co Carew points out, "Creating school communities that foster positive relationships among all members is not in competition with math and other basic subjects; social and academic competence go together."

Many children enter school without the social and emotional readiness to succeed in school, putting them at high risk for early school failure.

Knowing that emotional competency is learned through interactions with peers and adults, school personnel emphasize the crucial role they play as models of attitudes and behaviors. A principal in a Northwest classroom notes: "There may be some place where the expression 'do as I say—not as I do' is effective advice, but school is not the place. We constantly ask: 'How do we talk to kids? How do we interact with kids? What behaviors are we modeling?'" At the same time, children are helped to reflect on their own feelings, and to increase awareness of others' feelings. "Look at her face," a teacher might advise. "How do you think she feels?"

The Caring Communities of Learners: Five Interdependent Principles

1. **Warm, supportive, stable relationships.** Schools are set up so that all members of a school community—students, teachers, staff, parents—know one another as people and view each other as collaborators in learning. Teachers carefully examine their approaches, asking, "What kind of human relationships are we fostering?"
2. **Constructive learning.** Good teaching fosters children's natural desire to understand their world by providing experiences that help children become more skillful, reflective, and self-critical in their pursuit of knowledge. Rather than focusing on rote learning, teachers help children make discoveries, struggle to find explanations, and grapple with evidence and views different from their own.
3. **An important, challenging curriculum.** Curriculum development should be driven by major long-term goals, not just short-term coverage concerns. These goals should be broadly conceived to include children's development as principled, humane citizens.
4. **Intrinsic motivation.** Educators need a curriculum that is worth learning and a pedagogy that helps students see why it is worth learning. Teachers introduce topics in a way that piques students' curiosity and helps them make personal connections.
5. **Attention to social and ethical dimensions of learning.** Everything about schooling—curriculum, teaching method, discipline, interpersonal relationships—teaches children about the human qualities we value. Teachers scrutinize disciplinary approaches to promote children's responsible behavior over the long run. Teachers engage children in shaping the norms of the class and school, so that they see that these norms are not arbitrary standards set by powerful adults, but necessary standards for the well-being of everyone. Teachers also help children develop collaborative approaches to resolving conflict, guiding them to think about the values needed for humane life in a group.

Source: Lewis, C., Schaps, E., & Watson, M. (1996). The caring classrooms' academic edge. *Educational Leadership, 54*(1), 16–21.

Fostering Resilience and Emotional Intelligence

Is the emphasis on nurturing and caring merely a warm, fuzzy approach to education that conflicts with or replaces a more rigorous curriculum? In *Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why American Children Feel Good About Themselves But Can't Read, Write, or Add*, Charles J. Sykes (1995) argues that schools are enhancing children's self-esteem but ignoring the basics. However, researchers in developmental psychology have concluded that emotional intelligence is the bedrock upon which to build other intelligences, and that it is closely linked to lifelong success (Greenspan & Benderly, 1997).

Emotions do not usually get in the way of thinking; they are a crucial source of information for learning—they drive attention, create meaning, and have their own memory pathways (Greenspan & Benderly 1997; Jensen, 1998). In *Teaching With the Brain in Mind*, Eric Jensen explains why engaging children's emotional response is important for robust learning:

> Emotions engage meaning and predict future learning because they involve our goals, beliefs, biases, and expectancies ... the systems [for thinking and feeling] are so interconnected that chemicals of emotion are released virtually simultaneously with cognition (p. 93).

The stronger the emotion connected with an experience, the stronger the memory of the experience. But emotions can also inhibit the thinking process. Under conditions of high stress, the brain goes into "survival mode"; higher-order thinking is impeded. Although in many schools, there are few opportunities to talk about feelings and concerns, children's ability to learn is often jeopardized by the neglect of their emotional well-being.

"In the rush to get to the learning, schools often miss the point that students need to feel connected and valued and known before they'll bring their truest and best selves into the room," says Northwest educator Dawn Dzubay. Yet, despite this rush, many elementary teachers have created activities that both enhance language and literacy and build community.

Singing, storytelling, story acting, reading aloud, and discussing stories are typical activities in a primary classroom. All these activities help teachers and children explore feelings together, get to know each other, and value each others' ideas and perspectives. In *Create Celebrations of Language in Your Kindergarten* (1999), author Nellie Edge includes numerous activities that she has collected in her years of teaching and working with teachers. Some of these activities are described below:

- Summer home visits help connect teachers and families. Edge writes: "I always took the week before school started to make home visits. This allowed me to greet each child within the family setting and invite the parents to share special things about their child and voice expectations. The child chooses a favorite thing to stand next to while I take a photo, which I assure the child will be in the room when he or she comes to visit school" (p. 7).
- Teachers can demonstrate that they value children and their work when they adorn the classroom walls with the lives of children—with pictures they have drawn and photo montages of the children engaged in authentic projects.
- When children are encouraged to post notes and illustrations on the "Students' Favorite Books Bulletin Board," they learn to value reading. These activities help children go beyond merely counting books read to thinking about what they read.

- Throughout the year, Sherly Rissberget's students learn about their classmates by having a "person of the week" who shares pictures, hobbies, trips, and information about their family. During that week, each classmate writes to that person about things they enjoy or admire about him or her. These writings are collected and saved. By the end of the year each collection is individually bound. On the last day these books are presented to the children, shared, and signed, like yearbooks.
- At the end of the school year, Barbara Witta's children were studying Australia. On the last day of school, she read the book *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Australian author Mem Fox. "In the book, an old lady, Miss Nancy, loses her memory and a young neighbor boy tries to help her rediscover it by bringing her a basket with familiar objects. Her memory is triggered," Witta explains.

> "I read the story to my class and shared memories from the year that I had collected in a basket—a favorite class book, a favorite tape, a puppet," says Witta. "I then asked the children to think of their favorite memories. We gathered together to share them. What we discovered was that one child's memory was actually a collective memory for all of us."

Conflict resolution through children's literature. Reading about children who experience bullying, prejudice, grief, rejection, and loneliness can spur rich discussions that encourage empathy and reflection (see Pages 131-134). Books can introduce or extend a conflict resolution skill, and provide a nonthreatening way to talk about conflict (Adams & Wittmer, 2001). In her latest book, *Lifetime Guarantees,* teacher and author Shelley Harwayne observes, "Reading aloud from carefully chosen books remains my favorite way to be the school disciplinarian" (2000, p. 23).

In *Teaching Conflict Resolution Through Children's Literature*, William Kreidler (1994) makes the following suggestions for reading books about conflict:

- Read the book up to the point of conflict.
- Ask the children what they think the characters are feeling. "How is Koala Bear feeling now?"
- Have the children identify the conflict.
- Brainstorm ways that the characters could solve the conflict. Discuss which one the children think the characters in the story will use.
- Read the rest of the story. Discuss the characters' solution to their conflict. Ask: "Was that a good solution? Why? How do the characters feel now?"

Children Who May Need Additional Support

But what about children who need additional support, whose emotional needs may interfere with learning—not just their own, but with that of other children in the classroom? Teachers may spend a great deal of time attending to the needs of children who appear to lack persistence and motivation, are unable to focus attention, to get along with other children, and to control their emotions and behavior. Joanne Yatvin, superintendent of a rural district and principal of a small rural school in Oregon, observes:

> In order to learn, a child must believe: "I am a learner; I can do this work; craftsmanship and effort will pay off for me; this is a community of friends and I belong to it." Because such beliefs often are not the inherent property of children who come from splintered families and dangerous neighborhoods, teachers today must work as hard on them as they have always worked on the intellectual side of learning (1992, p. 7).

School-based child and family support programs. To address the social and emotional needs of children, and to build strong linkages between home, school, and the community, many schools are creating school-based child and family support programs. While effective programs evolve to meet the unique needs of a particular school community, they share many commonalities. They are frequently directed by a working team that includes teachers, principals, school psychologists, social workers, and/or counselors.

Partnerships with the juvenile justice system, Head Start programs and other preschool teachers, and medical and mental-health community members increase the support network for children and families. In addition, at the center of these partnerships is often a position that has a long history in Head Start programs, but is still relatively rare in schools. Variously described as a family advocate, child and family mentor, parent liaison, case manager, family service worker, or child-development specialist, this liaison between home and school plays an important role in breaking down barriers that inhibit home-school partnerships.

Services are both child- and family-focused. In the context of a supportive relationship, children are given opportunities to learn conflict resolution strategies, anger management, communication, problem solving, and friendship skills. Family advocates or mentors (often with guidance from licensed counselors or social workers) frequently work directly with children, as well as coaching teachers and all staff members in the use of strategies to promote children's social skills and emotional development.

The Polson Partnership Project. Funded by a variety of grants, Cherry Valley Elementary School's Polson Partnership Project is designed to "ensure that all children have a positive, successful school experience and to link families with needed services." (See also Pages 60-64.) At the heart of the project in Polson, Montana, is the opportunity for children to form a positive relationship with a caring, responsive adult.

Working closely with the project's social worker, Co Carew, and with school counselors, child and family partners serve as "guides" or "pals" to children. "Unconditional, nonjudgmental interactions and respect are essential in our relationships with children and families," partner Lori Johnson says. In the elementary schools, partners often spend time with children in the classroom, but they don't always interact with children. Johnson explains:

> Just having someone pay attention—to know that someone is clearly looking out for them—is enough for some kids. Other kids don't feel comfortable with us in the classroom, so they

> visit us in the Family Resource Center. Girls love to come during recess. We play cards, visit, and talk. For some of our kids, especially our Native kids, the invitation to "Come and talk to me—the door's always open," isn't enough. There are still barriers. We have to move gently with kids. It often takes years to build relationships.

In one classroom, Carew reports, "The whole group was in trouble—telling on each other, saying hurtful things. Children needed skills to better support themselves and each other." Carew explains:

> As a classroom, we problem solve—we don't allow put-downs; we don't allow anyone to take all the power. We ask the kids, "How do you support yourself—emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually?" We might say, "Do you see how what you said affects her—how do you think it feels? How does this support him emotionally? What did you notice that happened differently?" They know and they are empowered by getting to figure it out.

Carew often incorporates traditions from her Native American culture in her work. In some classrooms, each child makes an identity shield. Each piece of the shield represents an aspect of the children's lives—their interests, their friends, and their family. When a child says a kind thing, they attach it to feathers on the shield. "Children learn to recognize their own and their classmates' uniqueness and strengths, and they become more aware of each others' feelings," notes Meeks. "We do a lot of looking at what kids say and creating activities to help children learn empathy, problem solving, and anger management," agrees Carew. "At the same time, we recognize and support teachers' skills in order to foster their self-efficacy and power."

Carew's remarks point out the importance of a supportive environment for teachers and all staff—environments that encourage dialogue and reflection, and collaborative inquiry into teaching practices (see Appendix A). The protective factors that foster resiliency in children—caring and support, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation—also foster resiliency in adults (Benard, 1993). Only when there are high expectations for teachers and ongoing support to meet them will teachers, in turn, be able to help children meet high standards of learning.

Teacher Expectations

In their 1998 study of effective first-grade literacy, Pressley and his colleagues concluded that "the best classrooms were very positive places, fostering student reading and writing in many different ways and conveying the message, 'You can be a reader.'" In the early school years, children develop patterns of learning and patterns of reliance on significant others to support learning that directly affect later attainment (Entwisle, 1995). Young children want to please the significant adults in their lives, and their self-images, in large part, are based on their perceptions of how acceptable they are in the eyes of those adults (Bowman & Stott, 1994; Sroufe, 1979).

Children who come to school with few experiences with child-centered conversations, books, stories, and print are often labeled as delayed, unready, or of limited ability (Allington, 1994), labels that may lead to lowered expectations for their literacy achievement. Several studies have found long-term effects of first-, second-, and third-grade teachers' expectations on children's performance in high school and beyond (Entwisle, 1995). Teachers' expectations for children's success have been shown to have both direct and indirect influences on achievement. Directly, teacher perceptions can affect placement of children in ability groups. Once the child has been assigned to an ability group, Entwisle (1995) explains, "real consequences begin to follow":

> Placement in reading groups effectively determines the amount and type of instruction children receive; it influences group process (interruptions and disruptions); and it affects how children are viewed by parents and teachers. ... Indirect effects come about when the teacher influences the first-grader's own attitudes toward achievement, which are then carried forward within the child (pp. 238, 240).

In a study by Graue (1992), a six-year-old boy's words illustrate how teachers' judgments in the early school years may shape a child's self-image in a way that may seriously constrain his or her future ability to learn. When asked what skills are needed to succeed in first grade, the child replied, "Read and be good and sit down and be still .... If you don't know how to be good then you'll be a bad boy .... Then you'll have to wish that you were good .... Nobody will want you if you're a bad kid."

Positive Teacher-Child Relationships

In a longitudinal study of a multiracial cohort of 698 infants on the Hawaiian Island of Kauai, Werner and Smith (1992) identified children who, despite multiple risk factors, were able to lead productive lives, exhibiting competence, confidence, and caring. One of the key protective factors for these children was the availability of persons who provided them with a secure base for the development of trust, autonomy, and initiative. Among the most frequently encountered positive role models in the lives of the children of Kauai, outside the family circle, was a favorite teacher. For the resilient youngsters, a special teacher was not just an instructor for academic skills, but also a confidant and positive model for personal identification. Other studies have demonstrated the critical importance of the teacher-child relationship:

- In a recent study of more than 400 children, Pianta, Steinberg, and Rollins (1995) found that teacher-child relationships in kindergarten were predictive of children's competence and behavioral adjustment in the first three years of school.
- In a case study of a first-grade teacher, Pederson, Faucher, and Eaton (1978), show the impact of a teacher who formed relationships with students that supported independence, made them feel worthwhile, motivated them to achieve, and provided them with support to interpret and cope with environmental demands. This teacher's students differed on dropout rates, academic achievement, behavioral competence, and adjustment in the adult world.
- Pianta and Steinberg (1992) found that children who were at risk for retention were less likely to be retained if they developed a positive relationship with their teacher during the year.
- The relationship between students and their teachers remains important for children throughout their school years. In a study of high school students living on American Indian reservations, more than a third of the dropouts from Montana and almost half of the Navajo and Ute dropouts felt their teachers didn't care about them (Dehyle, 1992). When asked about good teachers, students consistently explained that a good teacher was "one who cares."

Abandoning the bell curve. Culturally and linguistically diverse children are particularly likely to experience low expectations on the part of teachers. Delpit points out that teacher education usually focuses on research that links failure and socioeconomic status, failure and cultural differences, and failure and single-parent households. "It is hard to believe that these children can possibly be successful after teachers have been so thoroughly exposed to so much negative indoctrination" (1995, p. 172).

One of the most persistent and pernicious constructs in education is the bell curve. Washington educator and author John Morefield (1998) explains why this construct does not apply to learning:

> In order for educators to believe that all children must learn, many of them must unlearn some deeply held societal beliefs. They must change the belief that intelligence is fixed at birth. The common thought for many years has been that IQ is innate, fixed and, in any population, distributed along a continuum best represented by the bell curve. We must throw out the bell curve as an acceptable operational value for schools.
>
> The bell curve is a mathematical construct designed to illustrate the law of physics that explains behavior of random inanimate objects. The bell curve has made it legitimate to say that, "we can't educate all children because not all children are educable." We grade on the curve. We rely on tests that are philosophically pinned to a bell curve that says some will fail, some succeed, and the majority will fall in the middle. But the bell curve does not apply to human beings engaged in learning. We must eliminate the belief that in any classroom there is a certain percentage of gifted, average, and special education students.

When school faculties hold a belief—conscious or unconscious—that minority students will fall on the lower end of the bell curve, these beliefs can have a profound effect on students' academic self-image. When a child's academic self-esteem is threatened, he or she may react by de-emphasizing school achievement as a source of self-esteem, turning instead to peer-group relations. While the peer group offers a more viable basis for self-esteem, rejection of schooling may be the price a child pays for a sense of belonging.

"Doing well in school requires the belief that school achievement can be a promising basis of self-esteem, and that belief needs constant reaffirmation, even for advantaged students," writes Claude Steele, professor of psychology at Stanford University (1992). Creating schools that help children foster a positive self-image is even more critical for children from cultural groups who may suffer from low expectations, prejudice, and discrimination. "I think the number-one obstacle we had to overcome in our school was the expectation that our kids couldn't learn," says Carl Cason, a principal in a predominantly African American school in Washington state. "The one thing we had to do was convince our teachers that our kids could learn."

Teaching *for* Understanding and Learning *as* Understanding

Authentic pedagogy is at the center of a caring community. According to Newmann and Wehlage (1995), a learning situation is authentic if students engage in higher-order thinking, develop a deep understanding of subject matter, participate in classroom discourse to build shared understanding, and can relate their knowledge to public issues or personal experience:

> Our standards emphasize teaching that requires students to think, to develop indepth understanding, and to apply academic learning to important, realistic problems. We call this "authentic pedagogy," and we found that authentic pedagogy boosted student achievement equitably for students of all social backgrounds (p. 3).

Creating learning communities where everyone is engaged in challenging and meaningful activities requires changes in the "core of educational practice"—in the "fundamental relationships among student, teacher, and knowledge" (Elmore, 1996). Researchers in school reform have consistently found that in order for teachers to facilitate higher-order thinking and a love of learning in children, they, too, must be viewed as intellectuals, capable of creating new knowledge to inform instructional practice.

As a Washington state teacher put it, "How can we teach children to think critically when we don't have opportunities to think critically ourselves?" Learning new ways of teaching requires time for observation, reading, reflection, dialogue with colleagues, action research, and ample opportunities to address questions and concerns regarding educational practices (see Appendix A).

Teacher observation and teachers' research into their own classrooms and practice can be powerful tools for informing and improving teaching practices. Good teachers have always built on children's understandings, seeking to understand learning from the child's point of view. A teacher in a Northwest multiage classroom advises: "Listen to children's thinking. Use their words and work as a window to see their processing and perspectives."

In an educational approach based on authentic pedagogy, both adults and more competent peers play important roles in children's learning: An active child and an active social environment collaborate to produce developmental change (Vygotsky, 1978). Glennellen Pace (1993) describes the role of the teacher in a classroom based on social-authentic pedagogy:

> This is not a laissez-faire approach. As the teacher, you are a central player, not someone who "sits-out," afraid of "getting in the way of" students' knowledge construction. But neither is this approach teacher centered, where your meanings are the meanings students must "get." Instead, you play multiple roles: demonstrator, mediator, keen observer, and listener (p. 4).

Creating a state of disequilibrium in a child's understanding through posing questions and problems, followed by discussion, is a strategy used frequently in classrooms where higher-order thinking is valued. Three Northwest teachers describe their approach to teaching math in their blended first- and second-grade classrooms:

"How can we teach children to think critically when we don't have opportunities to think critically ourselves?"

> As teachers, we look for challenging problems that will land our students on the edge of a cliff. We must help them find the motivation and courage to take the leap across the chasm. Not every learner needs the same distance to cross. If the gap is too wide, a child will falter and lose confidence. If too narrow, the child won't stretch, and instead just follow a prescribed course. Students must take this leap of understanding, over and over again. When the confusion is resolved, a bridge has been built across the chasm, bringing power and flexibility of thinking (Briggs, Folkers, & Johnson, 1996, p. 36).

Brain research has helped us to understand why frequent new learning experiences and challenges are critical to brain growth. "Challenging sensory stimulation has been rightfully compared to a brain 'nutrient,'" writes Jensen (1998, p. 31). The brain, we now know, is designed as a pattern detector—perceiving relationships and making connections are fundamental to the learning process (Caine & Caine, 1997). Early experiences and interactions do not just create a context for development and learning; they directly affect the way the brain is wired—the connections that are formed between neurons (Shore, 1997). Because the brain is predisposed to search for how things make sense, strong connections are formed when children make meaning from their experiences (Caine & Caine, 1990). (See Handout 3.)

Building on the experiences that children bring to school is particularly important for children who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children whose early experiences are often far removed from the world of the classroom.

Culturally Responsive Learning and Teaching

Every child has the right to feel included. Every child has the right to have the opportunity to feel inclusive of others. This must happen every day, lesson after lesson. Learning is a process, not an event, and learning about diversity is most effective when integrated into the daily life of the classroom (Morefield, 1998).

In this country, educators have often viewed children who speak languages and dialects other than Standard English as deficient. Culturally influenced differences in learning styles and communication patterns are often interpreted as problems to be "fixed." As a 1918 superintendent noted, the objective for all immigrant children was "absolute forgetfulness of all obligations, or connections with other countries because of descent of birth" (Yzaguirre, 1998/1999).

This sentiment is illustrated by the following story: According to legend, Henry Ford periodically staged a ceremony to celebrate "the great American melting pot." In the ceremony, newly arrived immigrant employees, dressed in their ethnic attire, walked behind a large cauldron. When they emerged on the other side, dressed in their new company-provided overalls, they symbolically disposed of their ethnic clothing in the cauldron.

Schools have reflected this melting pot concept of America. The role of public education has been not only to produce future workers but to socialize students into the existing social, economic, and political ideologies by transmitting knowledge, skills, and social and moral rules of the culture (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). To achieve this enculturation, schools are often designed to "use educational technology to 'stamp' a uniform education on all students" (Bowman & Stott, 1994).

However, the absence of continuity and congruence between the child's home culture and the school—an absence of shared meaning—may interfere with children's competent functioning in the new setting. Researchers have found that by the age of eight, disparities between the home and school cultural values and patterns of communication may undermine children's enthusiasm for learning and their belief in their capacity to learn (Cummins, 1986; Entwisle, 1995).

Lisa Delpit Talks About Getting To Know the Community, the Parents, and the Children

Sometimes I tell my graduate students to imagine that they have just gotten word that they have to leave tomorrow to go teach in Eritrea, which they've never heard of. I ask them, What are you going to have to do in order to teach when you get there? And they go through a long list of things: the culture, the relationships between parents and children. They need to know the music, the literature, the stories and how people feel about them coming there, how people feel about Americans in general. Then I ask them, How would you find out? And they say they would live in the community. They would get an informant, a friend, somebody who could help them learn about it. They would go to the religious places, the shopping places, where people congregate.

And I ask, how much of this information do you know about the children you teach? I try to get folks to understand how knowing the community and knowing the parents and the children is connected to teaching. They know that, but yet they don't seem to carry it over into their world. I think we all really know somewhere deep inside that in order to teach people, we have to know who they are and how they feel about us.

Source: Delpit, L. (2000). School colors: The racial politics of public education. *The Nation, 270*(22), p.18.

Theories of Cultural Discontinuity

From the early part of the 20th century, theories of cultural discontinuity have been proposed in an attempt to explain the difficulty encountered by students in adapting to a school environment foreign to the societal norms of their ethnic community.

Proponents of the cultural difference approach, such as Cummins, argue that differences between white and minority cultures in values and interaction, linguistic, and cognitive styles lead to cultural conflicts that in turn can lead to school failure (Cummins, 1986). For example, many classrooms emphasize individual responsibility and achievement, competition, and teacher-controlled learning. Other cultural groups, such as some Asian groups, Native Americans, and Alaska Natives, may be unaccustomed to this style of learning, and instead place a higher value on group work that fosters shared responsibility. Such differences may undermine learning in the school context.

"No matter whether we are white or minority teachers, we have all been prepared to teach middle-class kids."

Sociostructural theorists, such as Ogbu, argue that social and economic stratification lead to rejection of schooling by some groups when they see that schooling does not necessarily translate into social and economic gains. Unlike many immigrant groups who come voluntarily to this country to "begin a new life," minority groups such as American Indians and African Americans were incorporated against their will into U.S. society, a society where they may experience prejudice and discrimination. Their "caste-like" status may result in a rejection and distrust of schooling (Ogbu, 1982). Both theories provide a framework for understanding the school experiences of culturally diverse children.

Not "Just the Way Things Are"

As our schools are becoming increasingly culturally diverse, our teachers are becoming increasingly white and middle class. As Washington bilingual specialist Liz Flynn observes, "No matter whether we are white or minority teachers, we have all been prepared to teach middle-class kids."

Because our own cultural patterns, beliefs, and language are seldom part of our conscious awareness and seem quite natural, "just the way things are," we often forget that our beliefs and values are culturally and historically specific. We all bring our own "private collection of biases and limitations to the classroom," reminds Vivian Paley. In *To Become a Teacher*, Nancy Balaban (1995) writes:

> Critical to truly seeing and understanding the children we teach is the courage to reflect about ourselves. Facing our biases openly, recognizing the limits imposed by our embeddedness in our own culture and experience, acknowledging the values and beliefs we cherish, and accepting the influence of emotions on our actions are extraordinary challenges (p. 49).

Yet, many educators throughout the country prefer a "color blind approach. "We don't see culture," said a Washington state administrator. "We only see kids. We have a school culture." However, when children are not validated for who they are, and helped to make connections between what they already know and what they experience in school, failure is all too frequent. In an interview with NWREL researchers, a Mexican American mother of two college students expressed her belief that children's low achievement often results from shame and embarrassment over cultural heritage:

> The children have to develop a voice—in grade school, middle school, and high school. They need to develop a voice about self-identity of who they are, where they come from, what their beliefs are, what their culture is, and not be embarrassed and ashamed of that. I speak

from experience, because I have had to overcome a lot of my own embarrassment and shame because it wasn't addressed in the schools.

What happens when children's culture and language are not used in the school setting? Confusion. The child becomes confused, and again I speak from personal experience, being raised in the United States. My experience was never a part of the school, so I was trying to read and write about other people's experiences and never relating them to myself—never having the opportunity to recognize my strengths because of my culture. And never validating, even for myself, my own experiences and my culture so that I have something to hold on to when I'm reading and writing to compare and contrast (Novick, Fisher, & Ko, 2000).

Reflective Self-Analysis

One of the first steps teachers can take toward creating inclusive and unbiased classrooms and schools is to engage in reflective self-analysis to examine their own attitudes toward different ethnic, racial, gender, and social class groups (Banks & Banks, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Phillips, 1988). A number of strategies can help all concerned gain the self-awareness needed to begin a school-community conversation about our deeply held, often taken-for-granted beliefs and biases.

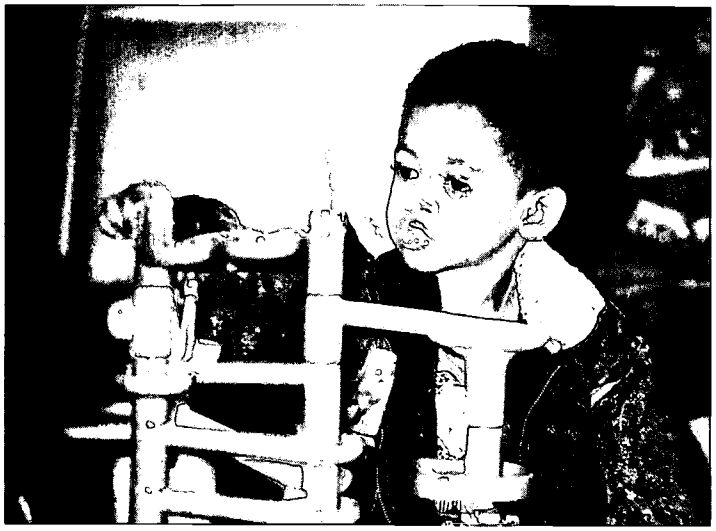
Workshops provided by representatives of diverse cultures offer a starting point. Teacher study groups focusing on race and culture, reflecting on one's own life story, and videotaping classroom interactions and examining them for bias are all strategies that can foster self-reflection and understanding of difference. Tacoma, Washington's Family Involvement Coordinator Bonnie Pinckney stresses the need for people to become aware of their underlying beliefs:

> We have to have the conversation, and we have to allow enough time for the conversation to develop so you can get at people's basic beliefs. People don't like to talk about these things anymore, but if you really truly think that some kids still are innately incapable because of where they came from, their race, or their financial status, then there will always be problems. If it's deep seated, then there's nothing I can say, because I know that if you get to those conclusions illogically, there's nothing logically I can tell you that will change it, nothing. It has to be a self-actualization.

The multicultural curriculum advocated by many early childhood educators, then, is not merely a "tacos on Tuesday" or "tourist" approach to diversity, one that emphasizes the "exotic" differences between cultures by focusing on holidays, foods, and customs. Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C. Task Force (1989) point out that such an approach tends to ignore the real-life, everyday experiences and problems of other cultures and can lead to stereotyping.

Instead, the suggested approach is to view multicultural education as a perspective that is integrated into the daily activities of the classroom. If it begins with teachers' self-reflection, it also includes an examination of the racism and biased attitudes and behaviors that are structured into our society and our schools, and an exploration and validation of the many cultures that make up the classroom, our nation, and our world.

When teachers understand that bilingual and bicultural children have the potential to enrich the classroom environment with diverse ways of seeing and understanding, they can recognize and build on the skills, knowledge, and resources that students bring from their homes and communities. The improved self-esteem that results from having one's culture and language valued, rather than devalued, is correlated with increased achievement and staying longer in school (Crawford, 1997; Cummins, 1986; Garcia, 1994).



Steps Toward Cultural Competence

Key to this approach is the assumption that diverse languages and ways of understanding and interpreting the world are an asset and a resource, not a liability. While not all children have experiences with books and print, all children have background knowledge and experience; all children have stories to tell. Including those stories in the classroom enriches learning for all. (See Pages 111-130.)

Harvey and Goudvis (2000) describe an experience of reading Eve Bunting's *Going Home* to a group of eighth-graders from Mexico who were reluctant to share their past experiences for a "variety of cultural, personal, and practical reasons." Bunting's book tells the story of a family living in Los Angeles who return to their hometown at Christmastime:

> When Steph [Goudvis] finished reading *Going Home*, these middle schoolers swarmed around the book like bees to honey in an effort to be the first to hold and reread it. Kristi [the teacher] commented that kids who had never responded to a book seemed to be overjoyed with this one. Kristi recognized and valued all of her kids' prior experiences, both in Mexico and Denver. And she knew that building on their past experiences would enhance their understanding of the text (p. 49).

Developing cultural knowledge. According to Terry Cross, founder and director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association, developing cultural knowledge is a key element of becoming culturally competent, which he defines as, "Functioning effectively within another person's or family's culture." Yet, learning about all the cultures represented in the classroom can be a daunting challenge. Cross acknowledges that the average practitioner cannot achieve comprehensive knowledge of all the cultures of their students or clients.

In addition, most cultural groups are not homogeneous, representing different geographical locations, histories, experience, and degree of assimilation to Anglo culture. "Professionals who think of cultures as they were generations ago, who romanticize cultures, or who fail to see cultures as complex, dynamic, changing systems will quickly fall short of the goal of effective services," writes Cross (1995–96). Cross suggests a number of steps to learn more about a culture, including spending time with strong, healthy people of the culture and with reading both fiction and nonfiction literature by and for persons of the culture. (See sidebar.)

Steps Toward Cultural Competence

Terry Cross, founder and director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association, suggests the following steps to learn more about a culture:

First, spend more time with strong, healthy people of that culture.
Second, identify a cultural guide—that is, someone from the culture who is willing to discuss the culture, introduce you to new experiences, and help you understand what you are seeing.
Third, spend time with the literature. Reading articles by and for persons of the culture is most helpful. Along with the professional literature, read the fiction. This is an enjoyable way to enter the culture in a safe, nonthreatening way. Find someone with whom you can discuss what you have read.
Fourth, attend cultural events and meetings of leaders from within the culture. Cultural events allow you to observe people interacting in their community and see values in action. Observing leadership in action can impart a sense of the strength of the community and help you identify potential key informants and advisers.
Finally, learn how to ask questions in sensitive ways. Most individuals are willing to answer all kinds of questions, if the questioner is sincere and motivated by the desire to learn and serve the community more effectively.

Source: Cross, T. (1995–96). Developing a knowledge base to support cultural competence. *Family Resource Coalition Report, 14*(3&4), 2–7.

Beginning with the family. Bowman and Stott (1994) suggest that in order to release the educational potential of poor minority students, schools must first understand how these children have learned to think, believe, and feel. Author and teacher Patsy Cooper argues that classrooms "must make room for each one of the children's stories," and that failure to do so may make it hard for children to build on their past experiences in the school environment:

> The real tragedy in failing to reach even the youngest children in our care does not stem from the children, or their much publicized "lack of preparation" for school, or their "unreadiness to learn," but from our lack of response to their personal and developmental histories—in other words, to who they are and how they think" (1993, p. 8).

According to Rosegrant (1992), a teacher in a multilingual kindergarten, the place to start is with the child's family. In order to create a "culturally safe" classroom, she finds out as much as possible about the family backgrounds and experiences of all the children. By surveying parents, by reading multiple books on the represented cultures, and by careful observation of children to "see what experiences seem to connect with them," she helps children feel valued and included. She describes a little girl from Africa who had listened to many African stories before one in particular connected to her experience:

> The story was *Bringing in the Rain to Kapiti Plain*, and in it a shepherd is depicted standing on one leg—like a stork. The child brightened immediately and yelled out, "That's how people stand in my country!" Her enthusiasm communicated to me that she feels culturally safe in our classroom (p. 146).

Encouraging children to bring pictures of their families and share favorite stories or songs from home, and asking family members to share aspects of their culture, can help children feel secure and valued for who they are (Boutte & McCormick, 1992). Parents and other family and community members may be encouraged to visit the school to read, tell stories, and share oral traditions, beliefs and values, and knowledge of traditional celebrations, art, music, poetry, and dance (Wolfe, 1992).

It is important to respect family beliefs about sharing culture and language; some families may feel that this practice is intrusive. It is also important to help children be comfortable with their parents' visits. Because English is a high-status language, children may learn early that other languages are less valued, and feel ashamed of their home language and culture. A teacher in a Northwest Head Start classroom tells how she dealt with a tense situation in her diverse classroom:

> Our children are used to diversity and tend to take most things in stride. But when Ruby, whose mother is deaf, entered our program, we noticed that she would ignore her mother, often going to the far end of the room to avoid her. We soon realized that Ruby was embarrassed by her mother's use of sign language in the classroom. So we began teaching sign in circle and using it throughout the day. We brought in books in sign language, and the children loved to study them. Over the next few weeks, we watched Ruby change from being ashamed of her mother to being proud of her and of her own ability to use sign language. They became the experts.

Culturally Inclusive Classrooms

In order to legitimize the contributions of all people, early childhood classrooms should include pictures, puppets, dolls, foods, and other objects for dramatic play that represent diverse cultures and people with disabilities. A wide variety of multicultural learning activities and materials ensures that all children see themselves and their families reflected in the classroom environment. "I think that we need to have more culturally relevant curriculum in our classrooms, so that when they're coming in to the classroom, they can recognize themselves in the whole educational process," notes a Washington district Indian education coordinator.

Literature is one of the best ways to learn about diverse cultures and ethnic groups. Both classroom and school libraries should provide easy access to a variety of high-quality books. A well-stocked library should include:

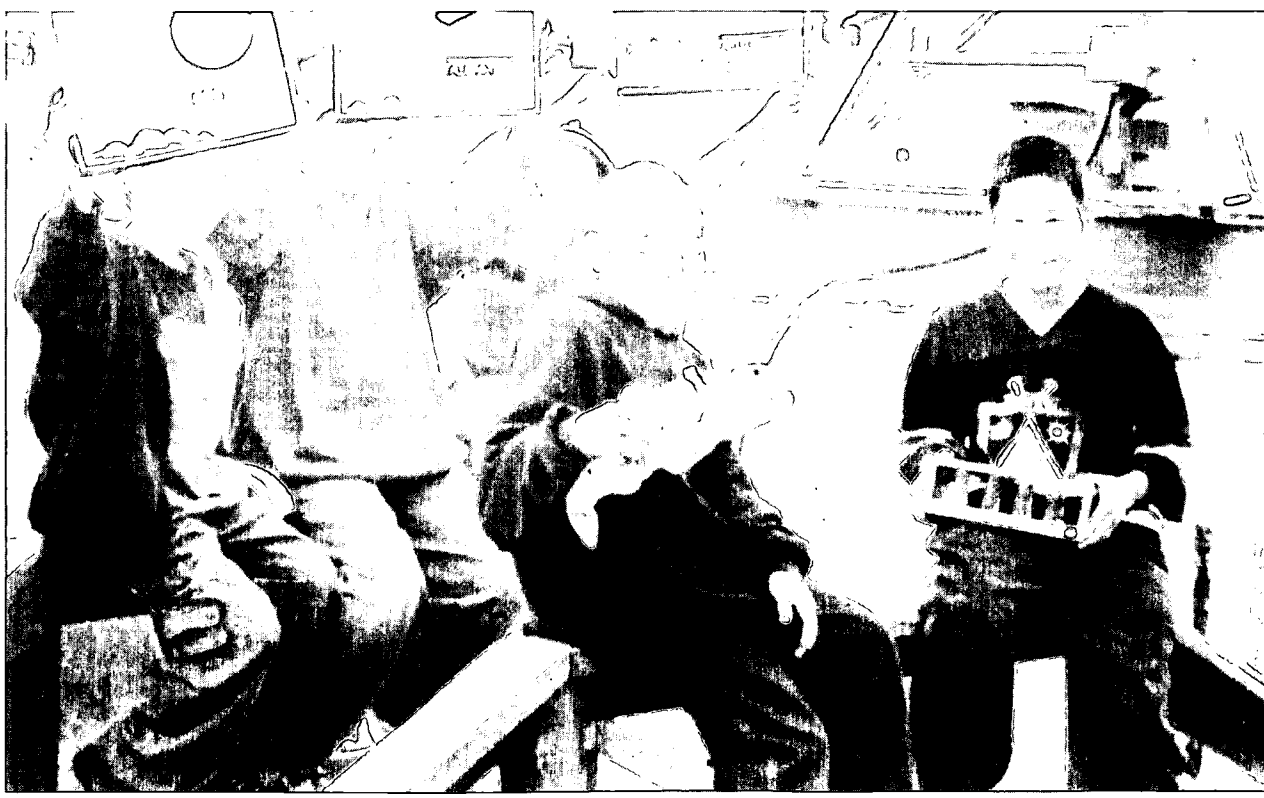
- Songs, literature, and nonfiction from a variety of cultures, lifestyles, and income groups—especially those represented in the classroom—should be an integral part of the classroom environment. Children need to see "people like themselves" in the stories they read.

- Creating a take-home library of children's books in diverse languages encourages parents to reinforce the heritage language as well as to read to their children.
- Books and tapes in diverse languages and from diverse cultural perspectives—rather than mere translations of English stories—are particularly salient for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. (See Handout 4.)

Using multicultural literature dealing with issues pertaining to race, class, gender, or disability can teach children to think critically and, at the same time, build a democratic classroom and school (Braxton, 1999). In Beverly Braxton's third-fourth-grade classroom, the children read *Crow Boy* by Yaro Yashima, a story about Chibi, a boy who for five years is made to feel alienated and isolated at school. Children respond to questions that identify different ways that people reinforce discrimination, consider the power of nonverbal messages, and encourage understanding of what it feels like to be excluded based on differences. To help her students empathize with Chibi, Braxton asks them how they might feel if they were he. She asks: "How was Chibi made to feel? How might you feel if you were Chibi? Why might you feel that way?" (Braxton, 1999, p. 25).

Learning the Value of Place

A curriculum that emphasizes projects and joint inquiry can also help all children feel comfortable in the school setting. Projects that involve exploring the local community can help children understand the region where they live and can serve as the basis for integrating skills in math, science, art, history, and language arts (Rowe & Probst, 1995). These authors describe "an adventure in learning" that began when a third-grade class in Alaska abandoned its traditional science text and participated in weekly projects and field trips to study their community of the Pribilof Islands. The authors report that the project gave the students opportunities to apply prior knowledge in ways



that validated their thinking, to learn what it means to be an Aleut, and to value their heritage.

Oral history projects. Creating stories and books based on interviews with local community members can help students develop their oral and written language skills, explore the use of technology, such as tape recorders and digital cameras, and bridge gaps between schools and communities. Project FRESA is an example of a project that provided elementary students with rich language and cultural experiences. Two teachers from Mar Vista Elementary School in Oxnard, California, created a multimedia, cross-curricular project to help students understand the relationship between their own lives and the strawberry crops that surround and sustain the local community. Project FRESA is the collaboration developed by fifth-grade teacher Michelle Singer and third-grade teacher Amanda Irma H. Perez. Most of their students are immigrants from Mexico who speak English and Spanish. Both teachers are also bilingual (http://equity4.clmer.csulb.edu/netshare/cti/%20FOR%20PSRTEC%20WEBSITE/Amada%20and%20Michelle/).

"Students can communicate in one language with their parents, analyze and present information gained in another."

In order to understand the importance of strawberries to local farmworker families, the environment, and the economy, students conducted family interviews, did research via the Internet, collected historical and geographical information, and used technology to share their findings with their school, their homes, and the global community. The interdisciplinary nature of the project meant that lessons crossed boundaries of language arts, math, geography, and the use of technology. Also central to the project was the teaching of critical thinking and education to combat racism. Giving students the opportunity and language skills to voice their daily reality was a goal throughout Project FRESA.

The ambitious project offered students many avenues to develop their language skills while investigating complex topics that affect their own lives. The project Web site—developed by students—highlights the following language arts activities that reach students of diverse backgrounds and learning styles:

- Accessing students' prior knowledge about strawberries through brainstorming and making charts to share "what we know, what we want to know, what we learned"
- Having students interview each other, family members, and neighbors
- Making oral presentations of their findings
- Conducting research through encyclopedias, newspapers, and magazines
- Doing quick writes on experiences related to the farmworker occupation and to the geographical area
- Writing journals
- Doing art and poetry projects
- Engaging in ongoing dialogue
- Developing problem-solving skills (posing a problem then developing an action)

Project FRESA illustrates how a well-planned, collaborative, integrated project can provide a medium in which students and families may voice their daily realities. Technology played a central role in Project FRESA, but was not the focus of the project. Students used tape recorders for interviews; still cameras, digital cameras, and video recorders for documentation; the Internet for research; word-processing software for writing; spreadsheets to create graphs of information; and scanners to convert artwork and photographs into digital images.

The project allowed students to use both their English and Spanish skills to read, write, speak, and listen. Teachers Singer and Perez point out:

> Students can communicate in one language with their parents, analyze and present information gained in another. Language is used for a purpose while developing vocabulary, grammar, research and technology skills. All students have equal access and opportunities to actively participate in the project no matter the language, ability, age, or fluency level.

Before turning in the next section to the topic of learning English as a second language, a discussion of styles of discourse and literacy follows. Culturally inclusive classrooms make room for different ways of talking and seeing the world, while, at the same time, helping children to learn Standard English.

Styles of Discourse and Literacy

> *Joe Lomack [a Yup'ik elder] and I conversed according to the eccentricities of his English. He seldom made assertions, except to explain that a person who went out on the tundra might "get dead." He told stories, and from the stories I was expected to infer theory. Joe had no interest in the bluntness of mere expositions; he made daily life into a series of fables, history into story, the world into an epic seen and not seen: literature.* (Shorris, 2000)

Although bilingual and bicultural children have the potential to enrich the classroom environment with diverse ways of seeing and understanding, their discourse and literacy styles are often seen as a liability. Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins (1988) cite the observations of a child who came to Canada from Hong Kong: "English style is very different from my style. English people do not like sentences to go around and around and the idea must be clear, but in our tradition, we tend to go around and around, and then at last the focus becomes narrower and narrower" (p. 36). It is likely that many teachers might see this narrative style as inferior to the topic-centered, linear style favored in Anglo classrooms and attempt to "fix" the problem by requiring the culturally favored approach.

Research by Michaels and Collins (cited in Bowers & Flinders, 1990) in an urban first-grade classroom provides an example of the taken-for-granted beliefs that may lead teachers to misinterpret the performance of culturally diverse students. During sharing time, white students followed and were reinforced for the expected pattern of storytelling: "a topic-centered, focused, explicit description of single events with a linear pattern of development" (p. 17). The African American students, however, used a pattern of presentation that used anecdotal associations and paralinguistic cues that were not understood by the teacher.

This style "made it difficult for the teacher to understand what the students were saying, as their accounts did not seem to have beginnings, middle, or ends" (p. 17). Because the teacher did not understand the topic-associating style, she would attempt to get the students to state the topic and to connect information together in an explicit and linear manner. Although she eventually instituted a guideline that stated that "sharing would involve telling about only 'one thing,'" (p. 18), all her attempts were both disruptive to the students' presentations and ineffective in helping the African American students to understand what she wanted.

An example cited by Delpit (1995) has a similar beginning but a happier ending. She cites the work of a teacher-researcher in Wyoming who was concerned that many of the stories that her Arapaho students wrote "didn't seem to 'go anywhere.'" The teacher wrote:

> The stories just ambled along with no definite start or finish, no climaxes or conclusions. I decided to ask Pius Moss (the school elder) about these stories, since he is a master Arapaho storyteller himself. I learned about a distinctive difference between Arapaho stories and stories I was accustomed to hearing, reading, and telling. Pius Moss explained that Arapaho stories are not written down, they're told in what we might call serial form, continued night after night. A "good" story is one that lasts several nights.
>
> When I asked Pius Moss why Arapaho stories never seem to have an "ending," he answered that there is no ending to life, and stories are about Arapaho life, so there is no need for conclusion. My colleagues and I talked about what Pius had said, and we decided that we would encourage our students to choose whichever type of story they wished to write: we would try to listen and read in appropriate ways (p. 62).

As this example shows, children and teachers of the dominant culture can learn from children from diverse cultures, enhancing their own lives and their ability to "become citizens of the global community" (Delpit, 1995, p. 69).

Dialect. Teachers often try to remediate the dialect of African American, Native American, and Alaska Native students. Many researchers and educators, however, contend that constant correction can have a damaging effect on children's self-esteem, attitude toward school, and ability and motivation to learn to read and speak Standard English (Cummins, 1986; Delpit, 1995). When teachers model respect and acceptance of children for who they are, children are much more likely to identify with teachers as role models and want to emulate their styles of speech and behavior.

Delpit (1995) provides this example from a Mississippi preschool, where a teacher had been drilling her three- and four-year-old students on responding to the greeting, "Good morning, how are you?" with "I'm fine, thank you." Posting herself near the door one morning, she greeted a four-year-old African American boy in an interchange that went something like this:

Teacher:	Good morning, Tony, how are you?
Tony:	I be's fine.
Teacher:	Tony, I said, How are you?
Tony:	(with raised voice) I be's *fine*.
Teacher:	No, Tony, I said *how are you?*
Tony:	(angrily) I done told you, *I be's fine* and I ain't telling you no more! (p. 51)

Delpit (1995) points out that it is unlikely that Tony will want to identify with this teacher, whose prompts encourage neither language nor manners. Yet, children like Tony may experience many such invalidating and confusing attempts to make them conform to Standard English, both in literacy instruction and everyday conversation.

Effective educators of culturally diverse children propose that children who use different dialects and have different styles of discourse and literacy should add new patterns, while their cultural style is supported and validated (Cummins, 1986; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995). For example, Indian English (the broad category of English dialects used by American Indians) is a way of reinforcing one's cultural identity for many American Indians, and is of particular importance where Indian English is the only Indian-related language in the community (St. Charles & Costantino, 2000).

Getting to the point. But what about standardized tests? How can children who use nonlinear speech patterns be successful on a test that requires the student to get quickly to the point, to identify the one right answer? Liz Padilla Flynn, the Pasco School District bilingual specialist, points out that teachers need to understand and support children's discourse patterns, while helping them to learn Standard English:

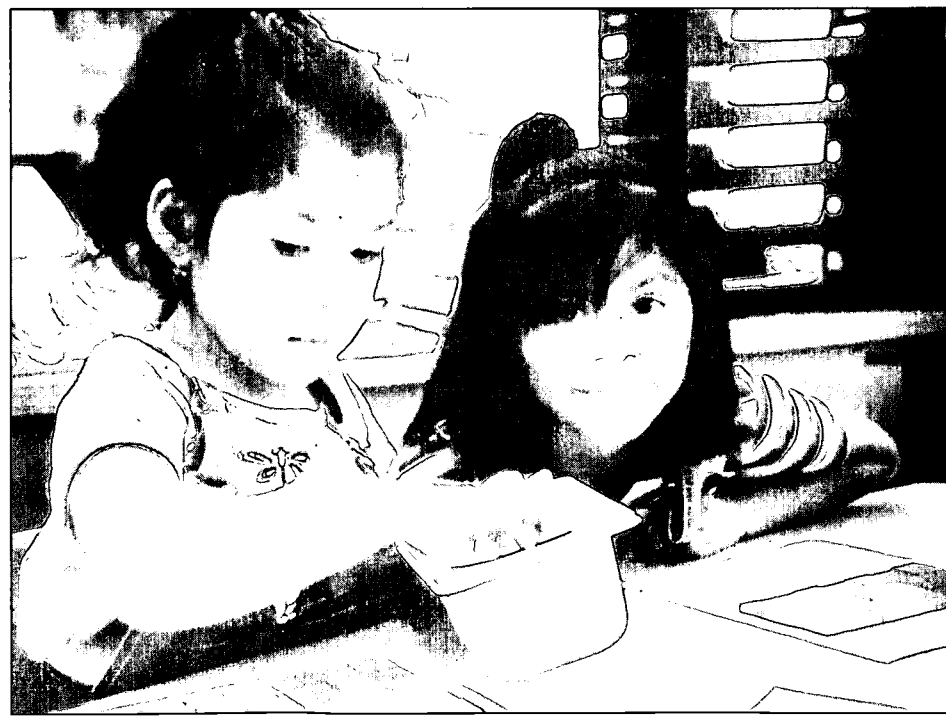
> Schools need to understand where kids are coming from. For example, discourse patterns. In my own speech, I don't get right to the point. I go in spirals, and cover a lot of things before I get back to the original question. But on standardized tests, they expect linear thought: 1, 2, 3—get to the conclusion quickly. Hispanic speech patterns are not that way. Asian American and Native American patterns also tend to be more like a spiral; we tend to go round and round until the focus becomes narrower.

> We have to start where kids are—then teach students to organize their thoughts orally and in writing. We need to help kids understand that it's OK to speak this way in their homes, but in order to progress in this society, they need to speak Standard English. We need to show kids how to write a formal paper, help them understand the difference between formal and informal dress and voice. There is a big difference between playground and academic English.

Strategies That Work

Helping children become aware of the speech patterns of various cultural groups, comparing and contrasting styles, is an effective way to expose children to alternative forms and to provide opportunities to practice them in a nonthreatening environment. In addition, all children are helped to realize the value and fun of knowing different ways to talk (Boutte & McCormick, 1992). Following are some strategies that have been identified by two well-known African American educators, Lisa Delpit and Gloria Ladson-Billings:

- In the sixth-grade classroom of Ann Lewis, students were permitted to express themselves in the language (in speaking and writing) with which they are knowledgeable and comfortable. "They were then required to 'translate' to the standard form. By the end of the year, the students were not only facile at this 'code-switching,' but could better use both languages" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 161).



- For younger children, discussions about the differences in the ways television characters from different cultural groups speak can provide a starting point. A collection of the many children's books written in the dialects of various cultural groups and audiotaped stories narrated by individuals from different cultures provide authentic ways to learn about linguistic diversity (Delpit, 1995, p. 54).
- Mrs. Pat, a teacher written about by Shirley Brice Heath, had her students become language "detectives," interviewing a variety of individuals and listening to the radio and television to discover the differences and similarities in the ways people talked (Delpit, 1995, p. 54).
- Alaska Native teacher Martha Demientieff helps her students understand "book language" by contrasting the "wordy," academic way of speaking and writing with the metaphoric style of their heritage language, where they say a great deal with a few words. Students work individually, in pairs, or in groups to write papers with enough words "to sound like a book." They then take these papers and try to reduce the meaning to a few sentences. Finally, students further reduce the meaning to a "saying" brief enough to go on the front of a T-shirt, and the sayings are put on little paper T-shirts that the students cut out and hang throughout the room (Delpit, 1995, p. 62).
- Demientieff also analyzes her students' writings for what has been referred to as Village English and fills half a bulletin board with these words, labeling it, "Our Heritage Language." On the other half of the bulletin board she puts an equivalent statement under the label, "Formal English." She and the students spend a long time on the "Heritage English," savoring the nuances and discussing how good it feels.

  Then, she turns to the other side of the board, and explains that there are people who will judge them by the way they talk or write; in order to get jobs, they will need to talk like "those people who only know and can only really listen to one way." She affirms that although they will have to learn two ways of talking, they will always know their Heritage English is best. She compares Formal English to a formal dinner and Heritage English to a picnic. The students then prepare a formal dinner in the class; they dress up, use fancy tablecloths, china, and silverware, and speak only Formal English. Then they prepare a picnic where only Heritage English is allowed (Delpit, 1995, p. 41).
- Teachers who do not share the culture and languages of their students can ask students to "teach" the teacher and other students aspects of their language. They can "translate" songs, poems, and stories into their own dialect or into "book language" and compare the differences across the cultural groups represented in the classroom (Delpit, 1995, p. 54).

Learning English as a Second Language

At an Eastern Washington elementary school, teachers are discussing the recently released Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) scores of their predominantly English-language-learner students:

Cindi: Only 33.8 percent of our kids passed the listening part of the test. If kids aren't passing the listening test, how can we expect them to understand what they read? We work so hard and we are so hopeful, and then you see the test scores.

Maria: Part of the problem is that third grade is a transitional year, where the ESL kids transfer into English-only classes. The majority of kids in fourth grade are ESL. When kids reach the first level of proficiency, they are pushed right into English. Yes, they can do it on a basic level, but we expect them to use higher-order thinking skills. They are

often barely reading at a basic level, and on the WASL, they have to draw conclusions and inferences. There is pressure to take tests. Some have only been here a year or two. We should look at the fourth-grade tests to compare with the seventh-grade tests—to show growth. We shouldn't focus on the fourth-grade tests.

Cindi: But a lot of kids only use English with me, they don't use it out of school. Children aren't learning and using English. We need to start immersing them in English sooner. We're expecting them to do all their work in English in the fourth grade—syntax, endings, verb placement, adjectives, pronouns. It's the hardest thing. It breaks my heart.

Sylvia: But kids do want to know English. Everything tells them to use English. The kids who are successfully transitioning into English-only classes are those who are proficient in their first language. We are transitioning what kids have. If they have the cognitive skills, yes, it does transfer the critical thinking. It's not more English they need, it's language experience in their own language. We need to infuse deeper thinking, weave this through everything we're doing. As a building, we need to focus on language development, so they can think at a higher level—not just ESL kids, but all our kids need this.

Michelle: Yes, language is in between thought and action. If you can't think, you can't talk, you certainly can't write.

Conversations such as these are happening in classrooms all across America. State assessments have highlighted the higher risk of reading problems associated with lack of proficiency in English on school entry (National Task Force on Minority High Achievement, 1999). These difficulties are often compounded by poverty, low levels of parental education, lack of access to preschool programs, and poor schooling. For example, many immigrants from Latin America have limited formal education because only a fraction of the population of these countries has access to K–12 education (National Task Force on Minority High Achievement, 1999).

Many educators, like Cindi in the conversation above, view the problem as "lack of English"; speaking other languages is thought to interfere with the acquisition of English—the solution to the problem. Helen Malagon, supervisor of Washington's transitional bilingual education program, observes:

> Because of the reform movement, teachers often want to teach English sooner, and because they don't understand the research, they can't support it. Many educators do not know the research; many are swayed by politics. The community inquires why we are teaching with non-English languages. Recently, I was talking with a parent. Her child's teacher had told her not to speak to her child in her native language at home. I asked the parent, "What other languages do you speak in the home?" And she replied, "I only speak Spanish." So basically, the teacher was telling her not to speak to her child!

Clearly, such well-intentioned advice can have serious consequences for the emotional, social, and cognitive development of linguistically diverse children. Researchers have found that a strong home language base actually facilitates children's second-language learning, and that literacy, conceptual development, and academic knowledge developed in the primary language transfer to the second language (Crawford, 1997; Thomas & Collier, 1997). "The reason is simple," says Krashen, "Because we learn to read by reading, that is by making sense of what is on the page, it is easier to learn to read in a language we understand" (1997, p. 1).

While bilingual education has always been a controversial political issue, recent research has provided evidence that high quality, well-implemented bilingual programs can provide the support that many children need to become proficient readers and writers in both their home language and English. The term bilingual is used to describe many different types of programs. (All employ some use, however minimal, of the student's native language combined with the teaching of English.)

"Because we learn to read by reading, that is by making sense of what is on the page, it is easier to learn to read in a language we understand."

In a longitudinal study involving more than 700,000 students, Thomas and Collier (1997) found strong evidence of the greater effectiveness of one-way (exposure to English speakers half the day) and two-way (exposure to English speakers all day) developmental bilingual programs. These programs develop full academic proficiency in both the first and second language for six or more years. They found that only these models succeeded in producing ELL achievement that reaches parity with that of native English speakers. In addition, the fewest dropouts came from these programs.

Thomas and Collier's (1997) data indicate that results through grade three actually favored the English-only comparison group when compared with two-way bilingual programs. The effectiveness of late-exit and two-way bilingual programs only became evident in the upper elementary grades; the differences favoring two-way and late-exit bilingual programs dramatically increased in the middle school years, and continued to widen throughout the high school grades (Salazar, 1998). These findings are in contrast to research that shows that gaps in academic performance of students learning English as a second language typically widen markedly in the fifth grade (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Thomas and Collier (1997) observe:

> Students with limited English proficiency being schooled in English only programs initially make dramatic gains in the early grades, whatever the type of program students (ESL, English Immersion, Sheltered English, etc.) receive, and this misleads teachers and administrators into assuming that the students are going to continue to do extremely well (in later grades). Since schools don't typically monitor the progress of these students in the mainstream (all-English) classrooms, the schools do not detect the fact that these students typically fall behind the typical achievement levels of native English speakers by each year, resulting in a very significant cumulative achievement gap by the end of their school years.

As the demand for higher-order thinking and comprehension skills, vocabulary, and conceptual knowledge increases, children who have not developed a strong foundation for these skills in any language fall further and further behind (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). These researchers state: "It illustrates the daunting task facing these students, who not only have to acquire oral and academic English, but also have to keep pace with native English speakers, who continue to develop their language skills" (p. 14).

Supporting the Home Language

The 1994 Bilingual Education Act is based on the principle that "proficient bilingualism is a desirable goal, which can bring cognitive, academic, cultural, and economic benefits to individuals and to the nation." Collier and Thomas (1999) concluded that "the 21st-century challenge to our field is to move school programs away from

focusing on remediation (fixing what is viewed as a problem) to *enrichment* ("adding to what students already know") (p. 1).

Bilingual education allows students to continue their academic development—to continue learning math, sciences, and social studies—in the four to seven years it takes to master academic English. Cummins (1992) suggests that "students' school success appears to reflect both the more solid cognitive/academic foundation developed through intensive primary language instruction and the reinforcement (rather than devaluation) of their cultural identity" (p. 25). It is important to note that these time frames are averages. Garcia (2000) points out:

> Depending on home and schooling conditions, an individual LEP student might acquire English to native-like proficiency in one to three years. Another LEP student might take from six to 10 years to gain such proficiency... Proficiency in this case includes the high levels of academic English necessary for learning core subject matter at grade level and for demonstrating this knowledge (p. 3).

In a qualitative study conducted in Washington by NWREL researchers (Novick, Fisher, & Ko, 2000), many Mexican American teachers and parents who were interviewed spoke with emotion about their experiences of "being thrown into English-only classrooms." A mother of two children said, "It took a couple of years just to know what was going on. It was horrible; I missed a lot. I remember just sitting in class—not picking up on anything."

A Mexican American elementary school teacher spoke of her humiliation at being placed in a first-grade classroom, two years below her grade level, where children took turns flashing flash cards with isolated words. "I would sit there, and I would get tired. But each child would go get another. The teacher didn't know what to do with me. Each year it did get easier, but there were no accommodations done well at that time."

There is substantial agreement among researchers on second-language learners that it is critically important that children maintain and continue to develop their home language, while they are gaining proficiency in English (Snow et al., 1998; Tabors, 1998). Researchers have found:

- Young children who are forced to give up their primary language and adjust to an English-only environment may not only lose their first language, but may not learn the second language well (Fillmore, 1991).
- When children have only a partial command of two languages, they may mix both languages in what Selenker called "fossilized versions of inter-languages," rather than using fully formed versions of the target languages (Fillmore, 1991). Mixing languages may be only a temporary stage before full mastery of two languages; however, children in environments (especially in households and neighborhoods with high and sustained poverty) that do not support language development may not fully master either language. This inability to speak, read, and write any language with proficiency puts children at high risk for school failure.
- The loss of the heritage language can seriously jeopardize children's relationships with their families, who may not be fluent in English. The inability to communicate with family members has serious consequences for the emotional, social, and cognitive development of linguistically diverse children (Cummins, 1992; Fillmore, 1991; Soto, Smrekar, & Nekcovei, 1999; Wolfe, 1992).
- Research on bilingual education shows that most children can pick up conversational or "playground" English in a year or two. However, many children *may* need more time (from four to seven years) to master academic English, regardless of whether they take part in bilin-

gual education programs or learn in English-only classrooms (Cummins, 1992; Hakuta, Butler, & Witte, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997).

- In the long run, maintaining the home language does not interfere with the acquisition of a second language. Reinforcing children's conceptual base in their first language throughout elementary school (and beyond) provides a foundation for long-term growth in English skills (August & Hakuta, 1997; Cummins, 1992).
- In our increasingly global economy, people who speak, read, and write more than one language are in high demand. In addition, their skills enable them to contribute to and strengthen their own communities.

At Whittier Elementary in Pasco, Washington, more than two-thirds of students are Mexican American, and are learning English as a second language in the school's bilingual program. Each year, the amount of instruction in English is gradually increased, as children become more proficient. By the second grade, if a child has been in the program since kindergarten, 30 percent of the instruction is in English. By the fifth grade, 80 percent of instruction is in English. In addition, all bilingual children engage in oral language activities in English for 45 minutes each day. Special classes, such as art, physical education, and music, are typically taught in English. The goal is to have students speak predominantly English in classes by the time they leave fifth grade. Literacy coach Sylvia Rivera explains:

> It's not our goal to keep them in Spanish-only classes forever. Our purpose is to give them enough instruction in their own language—give them a strong foundation in reading and writing, and then they can transfer it to English. We incorporate English as much as possible from kindergarten on. Even in bilingual classrooms, we don't speak Spanish all day long. We use English as much as possible in oral language, then in reading, and finally in writing.

By viewing the ability to speak Spanish as an asset rather than a problem, teachers understand the value of helping children build a strong foundation in their home language, while they learn English. Teacher Cynthia Case-Spilman sums up Whittier's philosophy on bilingual education:

> By knowing two languages they will have a huge asset. When you look at what they will become as citizens and employees, they are going to come out with dual language abilities to provide for their communities. They have the potential to become top wage earners. They will read and write and think in two languages.

While providing cognitively complex, on-grade-level instruction in the first language is not always

possible when multiple languages are present in a school community, teachers can communicate to children and parents that their language and culture are valued within the context of the school (Cummins, 1986). For example, teachers can learn as many words as possible in a linguistically diverse child's language, encourage children to teach the class a few words in their language, and provide bilingual signs around the classroom to convey to children and their families that diverse languages are valued. Color-coding the signs with a different color for each language draws children's attention to the different languages used in labeling. Parents, grandparents, community members, and students who speak the languages represented in the classroom can provide opportunities for children to use their home language.

Sheltered subject matter teaching. Well-implemented sheltered subject matter teaching (SSMT) can help children acquire the advanced vocabulary, grammar, and discourse structures necessary for fluent reading of complex texts in English, as they transition from bilingual programs into English-only programs. Based on the idea that children learning a second language need "comprehensible input," teachers use pictures, charts, real objects, and occasional reading in the student's first language (Krashen, 2001). Because pleasure reading in English can be a major source of background knowledge, vocabulary development, understanding linguistic structures, and becoming familiar with our culture, Krashen suggests combining a popular literature class with sheltered grade-level content instruction. Sheltered subject matter teaching is increasingly used to help transition children to English-only classrooms.

Building a Language System From Scratch

Learning a new language is a huge task, for both children and adults. While many educators believe that young children learn a new language with little effort, studies of the process reveal that mastering a new language takes time, perseverance, and support from adults and peers. Patton Tabors, professor and researcher from Harvard University, points out that children are building the language system from scratch and, in a busy classroom, they are primarily doing it themselves, without the one-on-one attention they enjoyed as infants (1998).

By understanding the way children learn a first language, teachers can apply these principles to help children learn English. While until recently ESL methods of teaching had a strong skills orientation, current practices emphasize the attainment of communicative competence as the goal of instruction. In a report submitted to the U.S. Department of Education, McLaughlin and McLeod (1996) state: "Children learn a language best—whether their first or second language—by using it to communicate rather than by studying it in isolation" (p. 12).

With the recognition that language is best learned through actual use in a nonthreatening social context, language use is encouraged by focusing on meaning rather than correctness of form, regarding errors as part of the learning process. Teachers can help children connect new words with meaning by using contextual cues, such as gestures, actions, pictures, and real objects. As Okagaki and Sternberg (1994) point out, for children with limited English skills, following teachers' directions and even "figuring out what to do to stay minimally out of trouble is an enormous task" (p. 18). To help linguistically diverse children feel secure and competent in the classroom setting, as well as to promote English proficiency, teachers provide as many cues as possible to aid understanding (see sidebar on next page).

Suggestions for Helping English Language Learners

- Use multimedia such as videos, pictures, and concrete objects to create connections with vocabulary words.
- Use gestures and body language.
- Speak slowly, and enunciate clearly. Do not raise your voice.
- Repeat information and review. If a child does not understand, try rephrasing in short sentences and simpler syntax.
- Try to avoid idioms and slang words.
- Try to anticipate words that might be unfamiliar and give explicit meaning to them.
- Make use of the excellent language learning that occurs among children by supporting play and small-group activities.
- Show children how much you enjoy them and appreciate their efforts to learn a new language.

Source: Neuman, S., Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (1999). *Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Stages of Second-Language Learning

Tabors and Snow (1994) argue that when young children are learning a new language (after the first language is established), they go through four distinct stages. First, children use the home language. When it becomes clear that others do not understand them, children may enter a nonverbal period, a period in which they do not talk at all. While this can be frustrating for teachers, who may refer children for special education services or mistakenly interpret the silence as stubbornness or noncompliance, Tabors advises teachers to try to understand the child's point of view. She offers this analogy to help adults understand why a child might choose this option. "You have just won an all-expense paid trip to Tibet. You get off the plane and enter a crowded airport. You are surrounded by unfamiliar people, sights, and sounds. Congratulations, you have just entered the nonverbal phase!" (1999).

After considerable practice, data gathering, and sound experimentation (a period that may last as long as a year), children may be ready to go public with a few individual words and memorized common phrases, such as "my turn," and "give it to me." Finally, children reach the stage of productive language use. At this stage children move from using a few formulaic patterns, such as "I wanna" coupled with names of objects (e.g., I wanna paper), to an understanding of the syntactic system of the language. At any stage, a child may use the strategies of an earlier stage. "Learning a second language is a cumulative process," explains Tabors. "It's highly volatile; at any point, a child might have it one minute and lose it the next. It's important for teachers to be aware of how a child feels, and provide lots of nonthreatening opportunities for the child to talk with adults and peers (1999).

Tabors (1998) points out that "high-pressure situations—such as being called on in front of a

group—can make even the most confident second-language learners unable to communicate effectively" (p. 23). Rowe (1998) found that providing ample time for children to answer questions increased the number and quality of responses for all children. Increasing the "wait time" from the usual one second or less to three or more seconds can provide needed time for children not only to reflect on their answers but also to form their words in a second language. Children may need to rehearse their response by first saying the words to themselves or in a low voice, before saying them out loud.

Preserving and Revitalizing Native Culture and Language

> *Losing a language is like burning down a library that is the repository of a people's entire culture, geography, and historical knowledge* (Briggs & Carter, 2001).

Supporting children's home languages and cultures requires a commitment on the part of schools and communities. The task is much more complex when the goal is to preserve and, in some cases, revive endangered languages. In recent years, after many native cultures and languages were lost due to a long history of colonization, armed struggle, and forced assimilation, many native peoples have been actively seeking ways to preserve and revitalize their cultural heritage (Van Hamme, 1996). John McCoy, executive director of governmental affairs of the Tulalip Tribe in Washington state, explains how education should help culturally diverse children to "walk in two worlds":

> I want our children to be able to have a full life in understanding and participating in their own culture, but also educated on the ways of the non-Indians so that they can survive in both worlds. We need to maintain our culture, recover our first language, and build on that but still be able to function in a world that's really not ours.

In 1989, Public Law 101–477 legitimized American cultures and languages and supported the rights of the people to practice, promote, use, and develop their languages. But, as Jon Reyhner (1996) points out, while Native people now have the legal right to maintain their languages and cultures, they "lack what may be termed the effective right to save their languages and cultures" (p. 1). Unless effective methods are created and implemented, linguists estimate that more than 90 percent of the more than 6,000 languages in the world will be lost during the next century (see sidebar, next page). Not only does this represent a great loss to the world of "different ways of being, thinking, seeing, and acting" (Reyhner, 1996), but for native people, language holds the key to survival of their cultural identity. Reyhner explains:

> For the majority of young natives today, culture and language, have, in fact, been separated. As a result, most of these young people are trying to "walk in two worlds," with only one language. This is a far more complex and stressful undertaking than the "two worlds" metaphor would suggest (p. 2).

The Tulalip-based curriculum. As educators understand more about the importance of language and cultural identity, many schools and communities are working together to recover endangered languages. Tulalip Elementary in Marysville, Washington, is a school that began the process of creating a curriculum based on Tulalip language and culture. "The Tulalip-based curriculum is the result of several years of work, and I think it really illustrates what we can accomplish when the school district and tribe work together," explains David Cort, teacher of the Tulalip-based classroom at Tulalip Elementary in Marysville. "It's the result of a partnership between the school district and the tribe. About four years ago one of our district administrators and one of our

tribal administrators were talking together and saying, 'We've had a bad history between us. What can we do to change things?'"

Their conversation resulted in the development of a committee with members from both the tribal administration and the school district. After two years of working together, the committee produced a working document and a vision that Marysville schools would include more Tulalip language and culture in their curriculum. Key to the committee's plan was that students be offered the option of being in a classroom where the curriculum is based on Tulalip language and culture, which would also meet state benchmarks. Two years ago, the curriculum was implemented in Cort's fourth-grade classroom. This year, the tribe is paying for language teacher Suzanne Ueberagga to work in the elementary school full time, and co-teaching a Lushootseed bilingual kindergarten class.

The Lushootseed Language

Lushootseed is the native language spoken on the east side of Puget Sound. Traditionally, native people have spoken this language from Puyallup and Nisqually in the south to the Skagit River in the north. Many pressures have acted on Lushootseed to the point where it is now the native language of only a handful of elders. However, young people and some of their parents at tribal schools throughout the Puget Sound are learning this beautiful, ancient language as a second language. Many hope for a revival of Lushootseed so that it will once again be spoken as a first language by native people of the Puget Sound.

The forces which have been so destructive to Lushootseed are typical of the forces operating against Native American languages in general, and in fact against minority languages throughout the world. The U.S. government attempted to eradicate the language through its boarding school policies beginning in the late 19th century. Children were separated from their families and taught at government boarding schools where they were forbidden to speak their native language. Erosion of the language continued after World War II when young people returning to the reservation from military service tipped the scales in favor of English.

The Tribal Council meetings at Tulalip began to be conducted in English after this point. By the 1960s when Thom Hess began to work with Tulalip elders, most young people were no longer interested in the ancestral language. Cultural pride movements contributed to a resurgence of interest in native languages, and a number of tribal language programs have developed over the past decades. But dominant-language media, such as television and the Internet, continue to erode the position of minority languages throughout the world.

Lushootseed is like the vast majority of small languages in the world which are struggling for survival. There are more than 6,000 languages in use today, but linguists estimate that more than 90 percent will be lost during the next century. These languages represent beauty and wisdom acquired by humanity over the course of countless generations. Their loss is a terrible loss for human culture. Take a small step to counteract the loss of diversity in our world: Begin to learn an endangered language. And if you live in the Puget Sound, there is no better language to learn than Lushootseed, the First Language of your home.

Source: David Cort, Tulalip Elementary Web site: www.msvl.wednet.edu/elementary/tulalip_site/

While Cort is not Native American nor from the Marysville area, he developed a passion for the first language and culture of the area when he first came to the Pacific Northwest and began taking lessons in Lushootseed, the native language of the eastern Puget Sound. The Tulalip-based classroom's curriculum that he helped to develop satisfies all state benchmarks, but uses Tulalip language, literature, and culture to do so. The curriculum includes not only Tulalip content, such as reading Tulalip literature or counting in Lushootseed, but also includes Tulalip processes, such as methods of Tulalip measurement and traditional storytelling form. On the school's Web site, Cort explains:

> While we are working to meet the standard benchmarks we will also expose students to the special features of Tulalip literature that are not noted by the state. Some of these features are special to oral literatures, and so tend to be overlooked when developing reading standards. Repetition is one such feature. In many oral literatures, like Tulalip literature, the artful use of repetition not only lends beauty to a story; it also helps listeners remember the story better, and makes listeners attend to patterns in the story.

In addition to learning the Lushootseed language and the special features of Tulalip literature, students focus on studying the local environment and community. For example, a science unit on the saltwater ecosystem will include a study of fishermen and their families. Students learn the scientific and cultural importance of the various subjects, studying both the traditional ways and the cultural ways of today. Several lesson plans, including how each lesson is aligned with state benchmarks in reading, math, science, history, geography, music, health and physical education, are described on the school's extensive Web site (www.msvl.wednet.edu/elementary/tulalip_site/).

In addition to providing support for a child's home language whenever possible, and support for learning the second language, a number of characteristics of effective programs for culturally and linguistically diverse children have been identified. St. Charles and Costantino (2000) suggest that teachers providing reading instruction to Native American children pay special attention to a number of instructional practices. The suggestions are equally relevant for all children:

- Developing oral language skills, including the building of Standard English skills
- Using culturally appropriate and relevant instructional materials
- Establishing a classroom environment that is respectful of the linguistic, social, and cultural heritage of students
- Utilizing a curriculum that capitalizes on the background knowledge and experiences that students bring with them to school

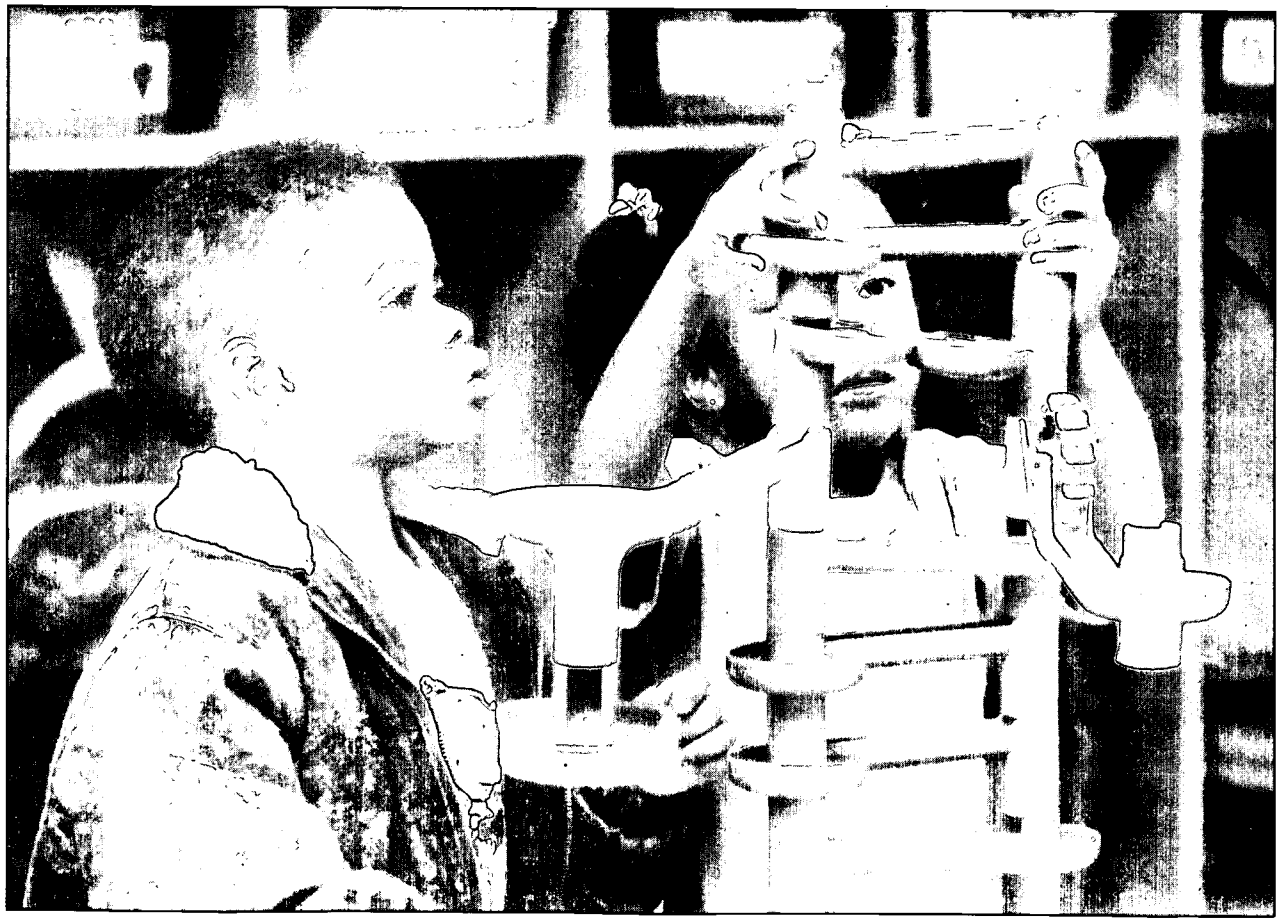
Effective practices include:

- **A good supply of books in both first and second languages.** Research shows that time actively engaged in reading and discussing high-quality books is strongly correlated with reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, and concept knowledge (Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Stanovich, 1986). Yet, studies have found that children read and write meaningful texts less than 10 percent of the time, and that schools with a majority of low-income children have 50 percent fewer books and magazines than more affluent schools (Allington, 1994). Krashen (1997) concluded that the biggest problem in bilingual education is the absence of books in both the first and second languages in the lives of students (both at school and at home) in these programs.

  Neuman and Celano (2001) recommend that school district funds be dedicated to build good libraries for children and for their families, as well. They cite the 2000 International

Reading Association position statement that argues for classroom libraries to ensure at least seven high-quality books per child.

- **Motivating children to want to read and to engage in reading.** Learning any skill—from tennis to public speaking—requires practice. Because motivation to read and write is essential to engagement, learning to read and write requires active participation in activities that have meaning in the child's daily life. Teachers, parents, and other caregivers who share their passion about literacy help children develop a deep and abiding love of reading and writing.
- **Creating safe havens.** In the preschool and early elementary years, learning centers—involving art, blocks, manipulatives, sand and water play, dramatic play—provide a place where children can use and develop competencies that support language. These centers serve as "safe havens" where second-language learners can watch and listen until they are ready to join in (Tabors, 1998).
- **Rhythm and repetition.** Using predictable books, poems, chants, and songs that include repetition of phrases helps children learn vocabulary and knowledge of story structure within enjoyable activities. Unusual vocabulary and complex word structures are often taken in stride when they appear in songs and poetry.
- **Cooperative learning.** Language-minority students need frequent opportunities to interact with their native-English-speaking peers in academic situations (Anstrom, 1997). Opportunities to engage in active listening and speaking enhance oral language, interpersonal, and small-group skills. In addition, even when instruction is primarily in English, speaking with peers in the native language helps chil-



dren learn new concepts and information in the "language that flows out of the mouth," in bilingual specialist Liz Flynn's words.

- **Multicultural literature.** Literature should contain themes relevant to the life experiences and cultures of language-minority students (see Appendix B). As a teacher in a child development center said, "Kids need to see themselves in the books that they read." Using a multicultural social studies curriculum as a base, teachers can emphasize and build on the cultural and world knowledge of language-minority students (Anstrom, 1997). For example, an oral history approach, in which students use language skills to interview and present information to classmates, can also involve parents and community members in the student's education. (See Pages 38-39.)
- **Language experience.** In an approach often referred to as language experience, teachers act as scribes, writing children's words as they dictate them, listening carefully for the narrative thread, and helping children clarify their thoughts. As these stories are reread by the author and his or her classmates, children begin to match the remembered words with the printed ones. Language experience activities integrate all aspects of literacy: speaking, listening, reading, and writing, which makes them particularly effective for children learning English as a second language. (See Pages 112-116.)
- **Project-based learning.** A curriculum that emphasizes projects, hands-on activities, and joint inquiry engages students in meaningful, indepth learning across content areas. Projects that involve exploring the local community can help children understand the region they live in and can serve as the basis for integrating skills in math, science, art, history, and language arts (Rowe & Probst, 1995). (See Pages 37-39.)
- **Developing metacognitive skills.** Helping children become aware of the speech patterns of various cultural groups, comparing and contrasting styles, is an effective way to expose children to alternative forms and to provide opportunities to practice them in a nonthreatening environment. The key is that bilingual students learn to look at language objectively, to become aware of rules and patterns, with the result that they develop enhanced abilities to analyze and process language. Instructional conversations about books teach children to think and to be aware of their thinking, leading to deeper and more personalized comprehension (Dalton, 1998).
- **School-family-community partnerships.** Family involvement is associated with numerous benefits, including increased academic achievement, improved student behavior, more favorable attitudes toward school, and higher academic self-concept (Bermudez & Marquez, 1996). Utilizing the expertise of teachers, parents, and other community members of diverse cultural and linguistic groups can do much to counter the deeply held and often unconscious biases that guide our behavior and that may cause us to value only one way of talking, understanding, and behaving (Delpit, 1995).

Summary

"Language," writes Nieto (1996), "is inextricably linked to culture. It is a primary means by which people express their cultural values and the lens through which they view the world." In learning communities, teachers help bridge the gap between home and school by acknowledging and nurturing the knowledge and background experience of all children. Narrow, culturally biased definitions of "readiness," "giftedness," and school success track and label children; low expectations restrict their opportunities and ability to learn. School, informed by families and the community, can broaden the definitions of learning and school success, enhancing the quality of life for all concerned.

Neuman and Celano (2001) concluded that in addition to changes in classroom practice, "a second and more dramatic accommodation is to broaden our definition of literacy from one that is school bound to one that is more situation based." They write:

> Strategies for learning about literacy need to be tied to real, authentic activity that is better connected to the more context-based problems and techniques of practical life. A better balance between decontextualized learning and functional activity might take advantage of what children bring to the school setting, focusing on a wider range of capabilities rather than perceived incapacities and deficiencies (p. 24).

Narrow, culturally biased definitions of "readiness," "giftedness," and school success track and label children; low expectations restrict their opportunities and ability to learn.

School-Family-Community Partnerships: An Interest That Comes From the Heart

> *Parents are the key; when they have an understanding of the system that their students need to be schooled in, then they can provide us with some guidance and resources, and can hold all of us, including themselves and their communities, accountable for what we need to do.* (Helen Malagon, Washington Supervisor of Bilingual Education)

By encouraging and providing opportunities for meaningful family involvement, schools play a critical role in bridging the gulf between home and school. "Just as with kids, it all goes back to the relationship," explains Debbie Fagnant, a teacher in a Northwest school. "It's the same with parents. Parents will be connected to school if they feel comfortable with us, their children's teacher. Establishing that relationship is a big part of our job" (Novick, 1998).

While traditional forms of family involvement focused on the supposed deficits of low-income and/or minority families, new models that reflect a family-support philosophy emphasize building on family strengths and developing partnerships with families based on mutual respect and responsibility. In these family-centered approaches, parents are involved as peers, collaborators, and the first teachers of their children, resulting in benefits for children, families, schools, and communities. The most powerful form of parental involvement occurs when parents are actively engaged with their children at home in ways that enhance learning. In a review of the literature on parent involvement in education, Thorkildsen and Stein (1998) reported that a number of activities —parents encouraging reading and homework, caring what happens in class, keeping track of school progress, and finding children a place to study—enhanced student achievement. Many educators and parents agree that the single most important parental activity for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.

Sharing Responsibility for Children's Learning

In a recent study, NWREL researchers conducted extensive interviews with more than 60 parents in Washington state (Novick, Fisher, & Ko, 2000). Parents representing a wide variety of cultures were asked, "What makes for a strong partnership between families and schools?" Many of the answers, not surprisingly, highlighted the importance of caring and support, positive expectations,

and opportunities for meaningful participation—the same characteristics that have been found to foster resiliency in children.

In this study, many parents reported that learning about their role as their children's first teacher was an empowering experience. Through school activity nights, volunteering at school, and on home visits, parents who thought that their only responsibility was "just to get them up, get them dressed, and send them off to school," learned how to teach colors and counting to preschoolers while washing dishes and doing other household chores. They learned how important it was to have their children read to them, even if they themselves couldn't read English or, indeed, any language.

The parents we talked with stressed the important role that both families and teachers play in helping children develop these competencies. Parents viewed children's learning as a shared responsibility—teachers and families working together, "like a community," to support children. While the most frequently mentioned barrier to supportive relationships was lack of trust between teachers and parents, parents offered many solutions to barriers to working together, including:

- Schools with a home-like atmosphere, with teachers and all staff who make families and children feel welcome "from the first time they step onto the school grounds"
- Opportunities to learn about their role as their children's first teacher
- Teachers and other school staff who speak the languages of children and families, preferably from the community
- Translators who do their best to relate not only the parents' words, but also the feelings behind the words—"what's coming from the heart"
- School staff representing the ethnicity of children and families
- Opportunities to discuss solutions to any problems before "they got out of hand"
- Curriculum that validates and reflects the cultures represented in the school
- Open communication, with multiple opportunities for families to engage positively with school staff; hearing that their child had been helpful, that she got along well with classmates, that she had mastered the alphabet were remembered with pride

Respecting and understanding the perspectives of families may mean changes in a number of practices, including parent-teacher conferences. Tulalip Elementary teacher David Cort (see also Pages 49-51) explains how he has learned to adapt his conferences to be more responsive to the predominantly Native American families:

> I used to have it in my head that I had to discuss the expectations, show them the child's portfolio, discuss their strengths and weaknesses, and I had to do it all in 20 minutes. I thought I was pretty responsive to the parents' culture, but last year my student teacher Mike Sheldon, who is a Tulalip tribal member, really told me how that type of conferencing wasn't right, and it has made me change the way I do conferences.
>
> He told me that in his opinion the relationship between the teacher and the parent was the most important, that I needed to take long periods of time to build that relationship. So we talk about their family, who they are related to, fishing. Maybe we won't get to all the other stuff, but in this parent's opinion, that's OK. He wanted a few strategies for how he could help at home. And he told me about the importance of having food, of having salmon dip and coffee for the parents. Parents feel more positively about the school because you've built that relationship.

Enhancing Family-School Collaboration

A number of strategies, both formal and informal, have been identified by practitioners and researchers to enhance family/school collaboration, without putting additional demands on already overburdened families. Frequent newsletters and positive phone calls, surveys, interactive journals, parenting education classes, home visits, family resource centers, and referrals to community resources help parents feel supported and informed. Nonthreatening and enjoyable activities—picnics, potlucks, work parties, multicultural celebrations, authors' parties, field days, family fun nights, literacy fairs—can help all families feel included in the school community.

It is important to keep in mind that while multiple strategies to involve and support families are important, the key to success is the way the activities and strategies are implemented. Carmelita Lopez, a home visitor in a predominantly Mexican American elementary school, reminds us, "everything about schooling—the relationships, the communication, the interest—all "must come from the heart."

From the Central Kitsop School District

Newsletters can help families feel informed and included by describing class activities, providing the words to recently learned songs, sharing recipes, and offering examples of children's work and suggestions for learning activities in the home. The Central Kitsap School District in Washington state offers these suggestions for reading aloud with children:

Reading aloud to children helps them to increase their vocabularies, improve their comprehension, and develop their written and spoken language skills. Try to:

- Be consistent with a time and place to read daily. Bedtime is often a favorite time.
- Choose a book appropriate to your child's intellectual, emotional, and social level.
- Stop and discuss what your own thoughts are as you read, and encourage your child to share opinions about characters and events.
- Maintain your enthusiasm and that of your child by selecting books you both find interesting. If neither of you is enjoying the book, discuss why, and choose a more appropriate book.
- Ask your child to make predictions about what will happen next. Read further, and through discussion, compare predictions with what really happened.
- Discuss events that really could happen and those that are pure fantasy, as found in animals talking and science fiction adventures.
- Take turns with your child. Take the part of listener while your child reads. The art of listening is an acquired one. It must be modeled, taught, and cultivated.
- Model your own reading habits. Let your child see you reading books, magazines, and newspapers. Talk about something you've read that you found interesting.

Supporting family literacy. Family literacy programs have been successful in bridging the gap between home and school by providing enjoyable intergenerational educational experiences. Based on the premise that the family's literacy environment is the best predictor of a child's academic success, the goal of family literacy programs is to provide opportunities for children and parents to learn together. Programs may include book giveaways, lending libraries for parents, workshops on storybook reading, early childhood programs, adult basic and parenting education, and coordination with other service providers.

In family literacy programs, parents are encouraged to see themselves as important teachers, even if they have limited (or no) reading skills. For example, parents are encouraged to engage in a variety of enjoyable activities with their children, such as singing; word play, such as tongue twisters and Pig Latin; and storytelling.

Linguistically diverse parents are encouraged to tell stories, read to children in their primary language, and share knowledge of their culture. Such activities help children connect their lives outside the school with literacy activities and may help parents enjoy reading for the first time. Liz Flynn, Pasco, Washington's bilingual specialist, is a second-generation Mexican American who attended public schools where English only was spoken. While she successfully graduated from high school with her class, she didn't develop a love of reading (and return to school) until much later:

> I didn't have a real appreciation of reading until I had my own children. I became a reader because I wanted my kids to be successful at school. So I read lots of books, nursery rhymes, and sang songs. I finally heard children's stories. Guess who was learning—me!

Neuman, Caperelli, and Kee (1998) have identified key principles of family literacy programs that include:

- **Family literacy is not something that can be "done" to people.** Programs that involve participants in planning engage their interest, respect, and active collaboration. Programs need to engage participants in their own education, connecting literacy—the discourse practices and ways of using language—with real-life social issues and concerns of the community.
- **Family literacy is not about changing people but about offering choices and opportunities to families.** Programs that provide essential information, reading strategies, and techniques for negotiating with schools engage families in multiple ways of using literacy in social practice.
- **Parents come with rich histories and experiences that should be honored and used in program development.** Although families may lack literacy skills, this does not mean they lack skills or a great diversity of talents in other areas.
- **Family literacy programs have both direct and indirect benefits.** One parent, after playing with her child, reported: "It's OK to make mistakes. I always thought I had to be a perfect parent." In the long run these unintended benefits may play a more central role in affecting parent-child relations than those anticipated through direct instruction.
- **Family literacy learning is a matter of "small wins."** Buying something on sale after having read the weekly circular, writing home to a relative, or voting in the town elections for the first time are examples of incremental, important changes in behaviors resulting from participation in family literacy programs (pp. 250–251).

Even without formal programs, schools can involve families in literacy activities in many ways. (See Handout 5.) Cummins (1986) cites an example of a successful project in Britain involving children from multiethnic communities, many of whose parents did not read English or use it at home. Yet, the researchers found that simply having children read to their parents on a regular basis resulted in dramatic changes in children's progress in reading, surpassing children who received extra instruction from an experienced, qualified reading specialist.

The researchers also found that, almost without exception, parents welcomed the project, agreed to hear their children read, and completed a record card showing what had been read. The teachers involved with the home collaboration found the work with parents worthwhile, and they continued to involve parents with subsequent classes after the experiment was concluded. Teachers reported that children showed an increased interest in school learning and were better behaved.

Family Engagement at Cherry Valley Elementary School: Creating a Protective Shield

Located on the outskirts of the Flathead Indian Reservation in Polson, Montana—1.2 million acres of lakes, mountains, and wilderness—Cherry Valley serves an economically and culturally diverse student body. Approximately 31 percent of Cherry Valley's first- through fourth-graders are Native American. Like faculty at most schools, Cherry Valley teachers found that while there is no trick to attracting white middle-class parents to school events, other families may be disinclined to come to school due to a variety of reasons, including lack of time, their own negative experiences in school, and cultural incongruity.

Understanding these barriers, Cherry Valley's Family Enrichment Coordinator organizes nonthreatening and enjoyable activities that provide opportunities for the whole family to participate. Frequently, transportation is provided, and since the whole family is invited, childcare is not a barrier. Because literacy "is the primary and essential goal for all students," families are encouraged to participate in a colorful array of literacy activities both at home and at school.

In the *Cherry Valley Literacy News,* a newsletter for families, teachers discuss a number of topics, including "Big Books," literacy in the preschool setting, process writing, and the role of phonics in the Cherry Valley literacy curriculum.

From the *Cherry Valley Literacy News*
Big Books

Have you heard about "Mrs. Wishy Washy" and "Hairy Bear" and wondered where your kindergartners meet such characters? The answer is Big Books. Big books are just that. They have enlarged text and illustrations for modeling the writing process.

Big books are used in many ways. Children learn to predict what will happen through pictures and shared reading of the book. They also learn about parts of a book, that we read from left to right, and that words match our speech as we read. The mechanics of reading is also a concept of the big book—letter, word, sentence knowledge, spacing between words, and punctuation marks. We predict the inside of a book by its cover and discuss the meaning of vocabulary in the text.

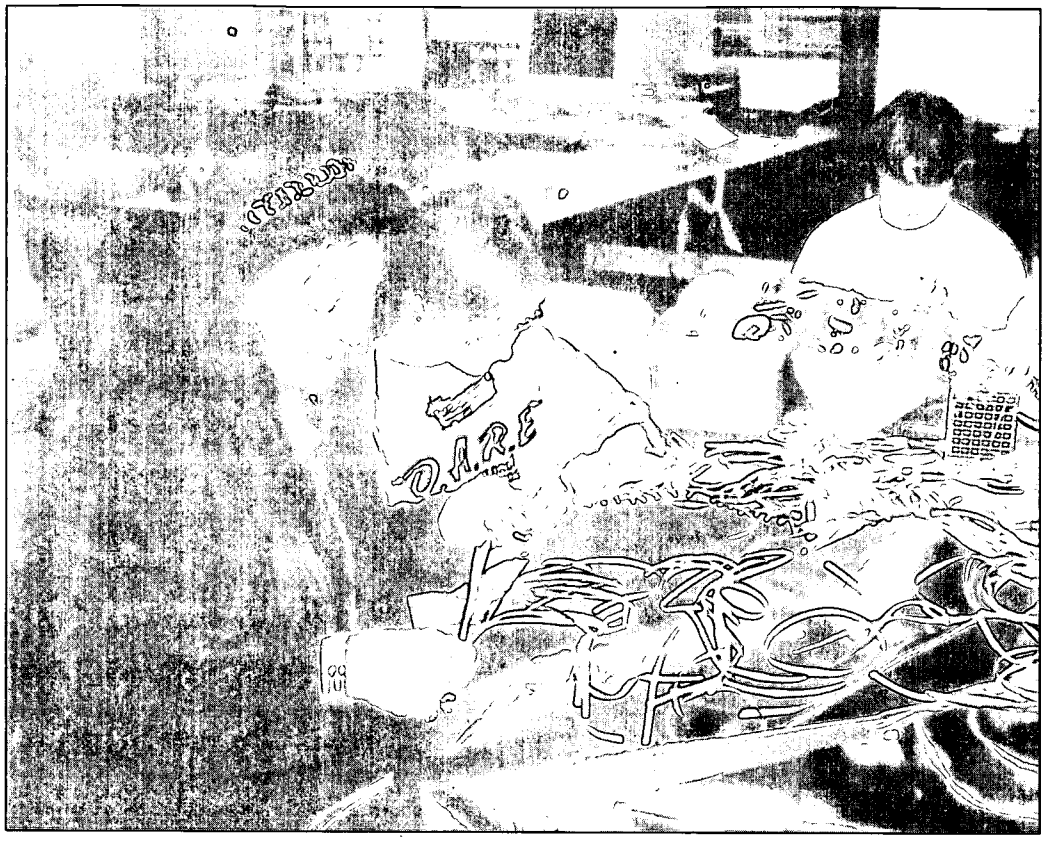
In kindergarten your children will be exposed to hundreds of books read to them by their teachers. The greatest gift you can give to your child is to read aloud to him or her and continue the process. Children initially learn about reading by listening to others read to them!

Multiple Opportunities for Participation

An emphasis on viewing the child holistically, within the context of the family and community, combined with a philosophy of building partnerships with families, has enhanced family participation in learning activities and helped establish reciprocally supportive relationships. While not all families agree with all of Cherry Valley's educational practices, engaging parents in a wide array of schoolwide activities helps break down barriers. The philosophy of including—rather than marginalizing—parents who have concerns ensures that conflict is dealt with in a positive way. Principal Elaine Meeks notes: "We have to communicate with parents. Our approach is not a rejection of the basics. We take current knowledge of learning theory and find better ways to teach and learn. We need to have the ability to articulate what we're doing."

Family fun nights. At family fun nights, families engage in a variety of open-ended art, literacy, music, and cooking activities with their children. These relaxed and engaging activities have played a key role in helping families feel comfortable and welcome in the school community. While some activities target one or two classes, others are schoolwide; all are averaging a 70 percent turnout. During one week, over three nights, a total of 276 parents and grandparents of kindergarten children made play dough together with their children. These informal evenings are not only a perfect setting for families to get to know each other and school staff but offer opportunities for teachers to talk about how family members can participate in their children's lives in positive ways. First-grade teacher Doug Crosby explains:

> In this country, we often read for extrinsic rewards, like pizza. It's the American way. What we need is intrinsic motivation, meaning sharing. We work very hard to get families involved in literacy activities with their children —not focusing on a particular set of words but establishing a habit that keeps going. Younger siblings see their older brothers and sisters reading with their parents. They see the enjoy-



ment, and they want to read, too. Often younger siblings of children in our Reading Recovery Program don't qualify for this program because of this early involvement with reading.

Traveling books. Creating "traveling books" is another effective strategy used in this small Montana school. Written as a group, with each child contributing a page on a shared topic, these books offer opportunities for families to see the progress of all the children in the class, as well as of their own child. Crosby comments:

> Think about a worksheet—it might take 10 or 15 minutes to fill out a worksheet, and it will be thrown away or hung on the fridge. Take a traveling book. It might take an hour to make it. Each child might read it with her mom and dad for 10 minutes. It comes back to the classroom, becomes part of the classroom library, and is read during the day. At the end of the year, it becomes part of the school library. How many hours of reading and enjoyment is that book giving to kids?

Authors' parties. Authors' parties, in which parents, grandparents, and friends are invited to listen to children read their own individually written and illustrated books, provide multiple opportunities for children to share books with adults. Adults first listen to their own child read, make written comments in the comment section, and then move on to another child. Parents have expressed to Cherry Valley staff that they are pleased with the opportunity to see not only their own child making progress, but all of the children developing into competent writers.

Creating a Child and Family Support Program

In 1993, the Polson Partnership Project (PPP), a school-based child and family support program, was established. Designed to "ensure that all children have a positive, successful school experience and to link families with needed services," the program is directed by a working team that includes the principal, classroom teachers, the project director, the family enrichment coordinator, child and family mentors, the school counselor, representatives of the Native American parent committee and the PTA, and the district superintendent.

The mission of the project is to define and create resiliency-based collaborations that build on family strengths, cultivate healthy attributes, and create a care-giving environment in the school. "The result," says Project Director Co Carew, "is a protective shield that helps ensure school success for all students." Program components have been added slowly over the years to address the needs of teachers, children, and families. They include:

- Providing teacher education, consultation, and support
- Incorporating cultural enrichment activities into the regular classroom and curriculum
- Early intervention for at-risk children in their families, including case management, referral and collaboration with community resources, individual and family counseling, and a child and family mentor program
- Parents as Teachers, early learning for children birth through age five
- After-school program focusing on cultural and creative arts activities
- Family literacy program
- Involving parents in their children's education and development in a wide variety of ways (see Handout 5)
- School-based family fun activities
- High school-aged role models for elementary/middle school-aged youth

It is important to note that these components have been added only after careful study and preparation for each innovation. When schools use such a comprehensive, integrated approach to school change, new programs and innovations enrich and support, rather than burden teachers and students.

Child and family partners. At the heart of the PPP is the opportunity for children to form a positive relationship with a caring, responsive adult. Based on resiliency research that has identified caring and support as a key protective factor for at-risk youngsters, child and family partners provide support and encouragement for children who are identified as needing individualized services. Working closely with Carew, a licensed clinical social worker and with school counselors, partners serve as "guides or pals to children," providing support and encouragement to children who are identified as needing individualized services, and forming strong relationships with families.

At the beginning of the year, teachers and project staff members assess strengths and risk factors of all children and families as part of a Child Find process. After referral, mentors visit children's homes to work with families to assess goals and objectives, identify needs, and begin referral services to community agencies if needed. Becoming a "resource guru" is an important part of the job, notes child and family partner Lori Johnson. Parents play an active role in their child's goals and are encouraged to spend time in the classroom, on the playground, and in the after-school program.

Forming respectful relationships with families is as essential to the project's success as community collaboration and networking. Working with native families, in particular, requires time for building trust and rapport. Former Cherry Valley partner Maggie Ryan explains:

> Respect is a major part of Indian culture. White culture has not respected Native families and their strengths. There is an expectation that the dominant culture won't err on the side of caution. And because we do see strengths, trust begins to develop. We provide support, not judgment. There is a need to move in a gentle way. Many Native families have legitimate concerns for expression.

Parenting classes are offered through the Family Resource Center—a large, inviting room, filled with comfortable furniture, a coffee pot, and

resources for parents to check out and take home (see Handout 6). In classes and informal conversations with Carew, with teachers, and with child and family partners, parents learn positive techniques for encouragement, praise, and discipline, as well as conflict resolution and problem-solving strategies.

Creating a culture of inquiry. At Cherry Valley, professional development based primarily on individual and collective inquiry into teaching practices has helped to create, in Meeks's words, "a culture of inquiry and reflectivity focused on teaching, learning, and success for all." This culture has extended to the Polson Partnership Project. Teachers, child and family mentors, counselors, and all staff members are asked to think about what they are doing and why, what's working, and what isn't. In a report to the school board, Meeks concluded:

> We are seeing that commitment to the project and eventual success for students is dependent on strong support from the school personnel. It is critical that the program be fully integrated as part of the school program with the understanding that to provide for human service needs is an important part in ensuring equity in education for all students.

The project offers training and support to all of Polson's elementary and middle school teachers through individual consultation and assistance regarding specific students and families, classroom presentations to address concerns such as impulse control or anger management, and professional development courses. Course topics have included resiliency, team building and group dynamics, critical feedback and communication skills, community collaboration, and cultural diversity. For example, in a course on the history of Native American schooling, an historical approach is utilized. Carew, who draws upon her own Native American heritage in her work with children, families, and teachers, adds:

> We talk about the boarding schools that were established to remove children from the cultural influences of community and family—where children were forbidden to speak their own languages. In order for non-Indian teachers to support Native children and their families, it is important for them to understand the very real historical baggage that many Native American parents bring to their interactions with schools.

Reducing relationship gaps. From the beginning, a primary goal of the project has been to help parents feel a sense of belonging to the school and to the larger community. In an annual report, Carew writes:

> A team process has been developed at Cherry Valley whereby responsibility is shared for all aspects of the school community. This creates an atmosphere where children and their families feel a sense of trust, attachment, and a sense of belonging to the school, but to their community as well. When families feel support and encouragement from the school community, they will most likely feel attached to that community, practice the values it promotes, and their children will succeed academically and socially.

While the project offers intensive and personalized services to the neediest children and families, most activities include the entire school community. Each year, Meeks reports, the project directly affects approximately 3,500 children and families through the child and family mentor program, family fun nights, counseling, literacy fairs, parent-teacher conferences, and an after-school pilot program. "A major strength," Carew says, "is the inclusive nature of our activities."

We intentionally avoid creating a separate group of high-risk children. Every child and family benefits from the activities of the project. We reduce relationship gaps—between teachers and families, between classrooms, between the generations, and between the school and the community. And the mutual support means that ideas feed off each other.

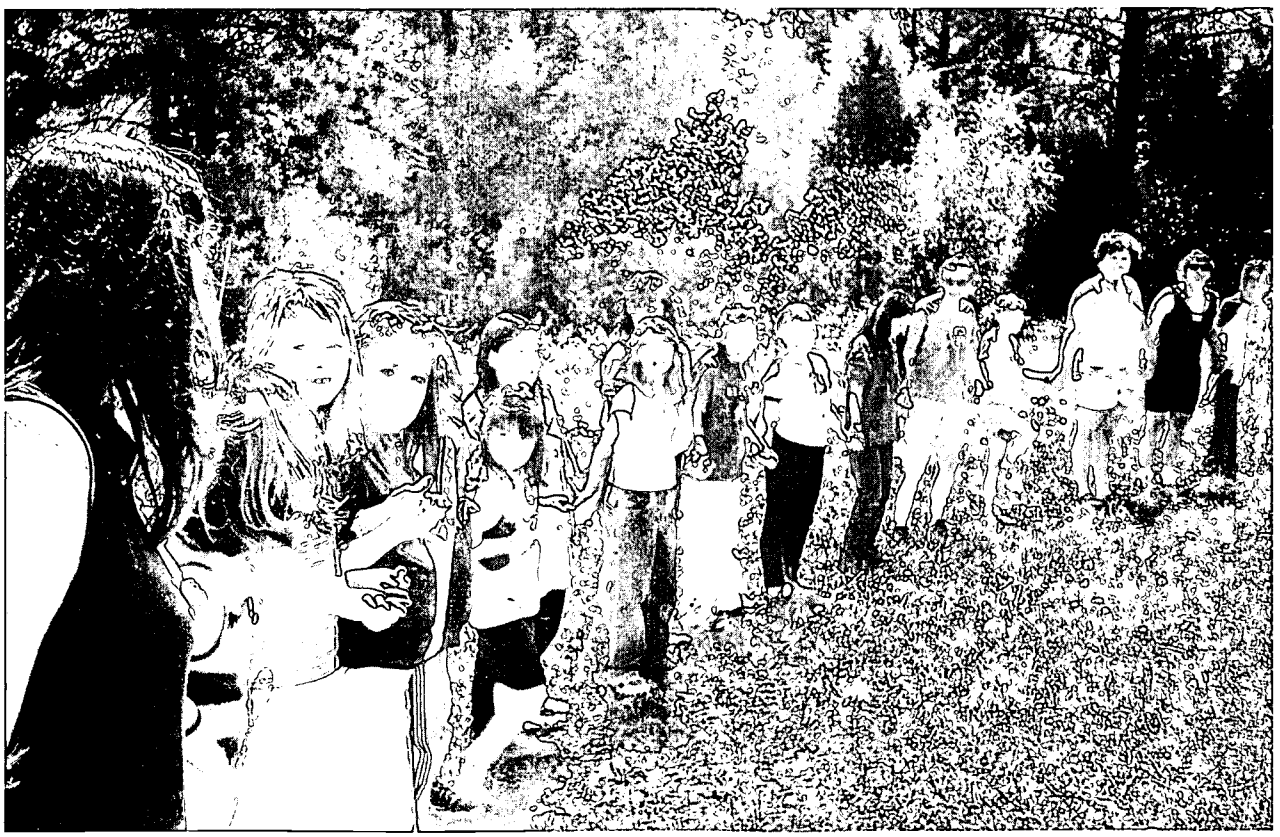
Thoughtful planning and ongoing evaluation have contributed to expanding the concept of a learning community. Outcomes include:

- Increased student achievement
- Increased student attendance
- Improved student behavior
- Increased parent involvement in their children's education
- Increase in jobs held by parents
- Increased knowledge of drug, alcohol, and violence prevention
- Increase in parenting skills
- Increased family literacy
- Increased services for children receiving medical, nutritional, physical, and mental health needs

Summary

The underlying philosophy that helped Cherry Valley's faculty develop their program can guide the design and implementation of effective child and family engagement and support programs in elementary schools:

- By understanding the family, school, and community as systems that directly influence children's development, all faculty are better able to work together to build bridges between these environments. Collaboration with tribal health, educational, and social services has not only enhanced cultural continuity and service delivery for native children, but has also led to



- the increasing role of the project as a liaison between the Native and non-Native people within the community. "The increased dialogue has led to a healing in the community," Carew says.
- While the project offers intensive and personalized services to the neediest children and families, most activities include the entire school community, and many include the larger community.
- Utilizing a team approach to decisionmaking and project implementation has encouraged shared leadership and responsibility.
- A focus on everyone's strengths has helped to change the culture of the participating schools from finger pointing to one of mutual support, respect, and appreciation among children, teachers, families, and the community.

SHARING BOOKS WITH CHILDREN: THE HEART OF THE EARLY ELEMENTARY LITERACY PROGRAM

> *Reading helps us to understand other people, their customs, and their cultures. We can walk in their shoes and feel what it's like to live inside another's skin when we read something written from their point of view. We can understand life in historical times when we experience it through an historical novel. Books help us realize that everyone shares feelings of sorrow, joy, confusion, and loneliness* (Cullinan, 1992).

There is no doubt that children who come from families who place a high value on literacy and who have a rich oral language vocabulary and extensive experience with storybook reading tend to be early and competent readers. Schickedanz (1986, pp. 38–39) notes that by the time such children enter school, they have already learned the following:

1. **How books work:** Books printed in English are read from front to back, left to right, and top to bottom.
2. **Print should make sense:** The discovery that words are placed together in meaningful ways is fundamental to learning to read.
3. **Print and speech are related in a specific way:** Storybooks provide many different samples of print for children to practice matching speech to print.
4. **Book language differs from speech:** "Written language, unlike oral language, must carry the total load of meaning without ambiguity. It is more formal, more complete, and more textured than spoken language" (Holdaway, 1979, p. 54).
5. **Books are enjoyable:** Positive feelings toward reading help children read often and for pleasure, persevering even when frustrated by a difficult text.
6. **Patterns of interacting characteristic of behaviors expected in a school setting:** Children gain confidence and competence when they can relate their knowledge to the school setting.

It is easy to see why children who enter school with these competencies are at a distinct advantage compared with children who have little experience with books. In *Beginning to Read* (1990), Marilyn Adams estimates that the typical middle-class child enters first grade with 1,000 to 1,700 hours of one-on-one picture-book reading, while the corresponding child from a low-income family averages 25 such hours. As discussed earlier, these disparities are compounded by vast differences in children's oral language learning environment. With such great differences in literacy backgrounds, how can teachers help all children become proficient readers and writers? Pasco, Washington's bilingual specialist Liz Flynn observes:

"We need to help teachers understand how important it is to convey a love for reading."

> Why do so many minority and low-income kids have a hard time with reading? It is simple—the kids need to read. It's very simple, but it's not easy. We need to help teachers understand

how important it is to convey a love for reading and not say, "It's time to read; pick up your book and read it." It needs to be, "Choose a book you want to read, and I will help you develop your own love of reading." It's really the quality of interactions you have with kids.

Inviting children into a "Literacy Club."
Flynn's remarks mirror the observations of educator Frank Smith who said that all children need to be invited into a literacy club by nurturing adults. In addition to responsive adults, *access* to high-quality literature is an essential ingredient of the literacy club. Yet, studies have shown that children read meaningful texts less than 10 percent of the time, and that schools with a majority of low-income children have 50 percent fewer books and magazines than more affluent schools (Allington, 1994).

Because of the powerful relationship between free voluntary reading, or pleasure reading, and literacy development, classroom and school libraries should help bridge the gap between low-income and more advantaged students. As Krashen points out, libraries "can be an equalizer" (1996, p. 4). Bisset (cited in Morrow, 1990) found that children in classrooms with their own collections of literature read and looked at books 50 percent more often than children whose classrooms housed no such collections.

Reading Aloud and Discussing Stories

Our students need to be fortunate enough to be read aloud to every single day by someone who values wondrous words and knows how to bring the sounds of those words to life in the listening writer's ears and mind and heart (Ray, 1999).

At the heart of effective literacy programs in the primary grades are the activities of reading aloud and having lively conversations about books. Reading beautiful books to primary-age children develops a deep and abiding love of stories and books. Long before children can read proficiently, they can *comprehend* texts that are far above their independent reading level. Listening to stories at a level that is more advanced than a child's independent reading level builds listening and comprehension skills and encourages engagement in reading. (See Handout 7.)

Engagement in the reading process is a critical factor in comprehension. Because the amount of time children choose to read and have opportunities to read is strongly correlated with reading proficiency, early positive experiences with reading play a critical role in helping children become successful readers. Reading and being read to at school and at home are the best ways for children to catch up with their peers in vocabulary, concept development, and content knowledge.

Repeated readings and discussions about what is read offer particularly rich opportunities for language acquisition (see Pages 90-91). Gunn, Simmons, and Kameenui (1995) concluded that "without sufficient storybook reading experience in early childhood—whether at home or at school—students may be missing a key part of the initial foundation of reading" (p. 13).

Choosing Good Books

What criteria should be used for choosing high-quality literature and nonfiction books? Both chapter books and picture books (fiction and nonfiction) can be enjoyed by primary-age children. Learning to follow a complex plot over time is a critical skill for all readers. At Helen Gordon Child Development Center in Portland, Oregon, chapter books such as *Stuart Little*, *Charlotte's Web*, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* are read throughout the day and help children calm down at nap time. "It's surprising how even the youngest children—three- and four-year-olds—listen well and remember a long, complicated story," notes teacher Laura West.

For reading aloud, literary quality is a must. Picture books must be reviewed for both literary and artistic qualities. Bishop and Hickman advise that the pictures and text "must seem as if they were made for each other" (1992, p. 8). Songwriter and educator Nellie Edge advises those who work with children to choose materials that build a "foundation for excellence":

> When we choose only the finest literature, songs, poems, and rhymes to give our children, it is because we know these language models are the seeds that will grow powerful writers and children who will appreciate wonderful words. We want imaginative language and poetic phrases to become a part of our children. These sounds of language will forever be on the walls of their minds and so we ask: "Is this worthy of the children?"

Fortunately, there are thousands of books to delight adults and children alike—books with rich language and enchanting illustrations. But how do busy teachers choose high-quality books from the thousands that are published each year? "The best reason of all to read a picture book to a group of students is simply because you love it," say Harvey and Goudvis (2000). Of course teachers should also look beyond their own experiences to choose literature that would resonate with children from other cultures in their classrooms.

Harvey and Goudvis (2000) make a number of suggestions for keeping up with the burgeoning supply of children's books:

- Share those books you love with your colleagues.
- Spend time each week talking about books.

- Get up close and personal with the library. School librarians and children's librarians in public libraries have indepth knowledge of children's literature.
- Read publications that review books that connect to a number of curricular topics, such as *Book Links: Connecting Books, Libraries, and Classrooms; Horn Book Magazine;* and *The Reading Teacher* (pp. 51–52).

The importance of informational texts. While narrative texts provide children with opportunities to use their imaginations, to get lost in a story, and to develop their own narrative voice, children's ability to read informational texts is a critical competency that should be nurtured as early as the preschool years. Children are naturally curious about the world they live in. Books about animals, the weather, volcanoes, or famous people (to name just a few) invite children to explore topics of interest and prepare them for the hard work of analyzing and comprehending increasingly complex expository texts—crucial competencies in contemporary American society.

In addition, Neuman (2001) points out that informational texts help children develop a broad base of experience in content knowledge, knowledge that is essential for developing complex skills, and provide the foundation for later learning. "It makes sense," Neuman writes, "that informational books and the conversational moves that support them, might serve as essential vehicles for increasing children's content knowledge" (p. 471).

Yet, often children spend little time with this genre. A Michigan State University study of 20 first-grade classrooms found a scarcity of informational texts in classroom print environments and activities (Duke, 1999). Children spent a mean of only 3.6 minutes per day with informational texts during classroom written language activities. Children in low-socioeconomic classrooms spent even less time with informational texts—a mere 1.9 minutes. Half the low-SES classrooms spent no time with informational texts during the days they were observed.

The study's principal investigator, Nell Duke, concludes that low levels of achievement in informational text experience for young children may be caused more by lack of exposure to these genres than by any difficulty inherent in the genre itself. She recommends several strategies for increasing attention to informational texts in the early grades, *without decreasing* attention to narrative texts, including:

- Curricular mandates
- Teacher training
- Linking informational reading and writing to science and social studies
- Increasing the budget for reading materials in the early grades
- Including such texts in home reading programs

Picture Books—Now and Forever

Becoming familiar with the many excellent children's book authors, including Kevin Henkes, Patricia Polacco, Robert McClosky, Eve Bunting, Cynthia Rylant, Charlotte Zolotow, Mem Fox, Eric Carle, Leo Lioni, and Maurice Sendak—to name just a few—can be an exciting adventure for adults, as well as children. While picture books are still most commonly enjoyed in the primary grades, good picture books can be enjoyed by people of all ages. In *Beyond Words: Picture Books for Older Readers and Writers*, Benedict and Carlisle (1992) explain how they use picture books for readers of all ages to:

- Examine genres, including:
  - historical fiction
  - legends
  - folk tales
  - fantasy
  - poetry

- Introduce and complement a unit on science or history
- Study a variety of writing styles
- Teach reference and research skills to intermediate students
- Use as models in writing class, to examine the linguistic features, vocabulary, and structures of writing

"Picture books can help eliminate the educational barriers that prevent less able students from finding appropriate texts from which to learn," explains high school teacher David Ludlam. It is easy to see how picture books such as Robert Coles's *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, Dolores Johnson's *Now Let Me Fly: The Story of a Slave Family*, Faith Ringgold's *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railway in the Sky*, and Floyd Cooper's *Coming Home, from the Life of Langston Hughes* can help launch a study of African American history. *Coolies* by Yin, *The Journey* by Sheila Hamanaka, and *The Lotus Seed* by Sherry Garland offer rich stories that illustrate the wide diversity of Asian American heritage. Robert McCloskeys's *One Morning in Maine, Make Way for Ducklings*, and *Time of Wonder* provide many opportunities to learn about science. Author and fifth-grade teacher Lenore Carlisle concludes:

> If we recognize the picture book as a legitimate art form and as a legitimate part of literature in general, then it seems only natural that we should return to the picture book genre as a place from which we will derive reason to be delighted, to be moved, to be amazed, or to feel any of the myriad emotions evoked in us by art and literature (1992, p. 57).

Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) From the Central Kitsap School

Selecting a Book for Your Child

Dear Parents,

There is such a large selection of books for children these days—how do you know which ones to choose to read to your child? Your objective as a parent is to get good books into the hands of your child, books that you think he will like. How do you know which book will strike the chord and turn your child onto something new, something creative that will capture the imagination?

Here are some hints in selecting a book for your child:

- Start with a child's interest—and then run with it! A good book in a particular subject matter will not only entertain your child but will be educational as well.
- Bring your child along—to the library or bookstore—when picking out a book. The more he takes an active interest in the project, the more interested he will be to read the book.
- Is the book age appropriate? Does the "type size" seem suitable? What about the amount of text?
- Find books with pictures, even if your child thinks the book looks like a "baby" book. The pictures help spark discussions. They unlock the imagination, and they promote creative storytelling.
- Select a book you enjoyed as a child and read it aloud with "excitement" and familiarity. Most likely, with this enthusiasm, your child will enjoy it, too.
- Select books that have received Newbery and Caldecott awards. These award-winning titles are selected by their content and are safe bets for satisfaction.
- Select ones that are fun for you to read. The more animated you sound when reading, the more fun your child will have listening; the experience will be enjoyable for you both.
- Select books that link a child to his everyday world. If you have just baked cookies and the characters in the story are baking cookies, you can relate the experience to one your child has just had, making the story more real.

Remember, you can always ask a librarian or bookstore professional to direct you to books you and your child might take home and enjoy. They are there to assist you with your specific needs and goals.

Here are some favorite books for kindergarten and first-graders that you might make part of your home library:

- *A, My Name is Alice* by Jane Bayer
- *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman
- *Anno's Counting Book* by Mitsumasa Anno
- *Bread and Jam for Frances* by Russell Hoban
- *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin
- *Caps for Sale* by Esphyr Slobodkina
- *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin
- *Feelings* by Aliki
- *Frog and Toad Are Friends* by Arnold Lobel
- *Good Night, Owl!* by Pat Hutchins
- *Ira Sleeps Over* by Bernard Waber
- *Owen* by Kevin Henkes
- *Song and Dance Man* by Karen Ackerman

Vocabulary Growth and Development

As discussed earlier (see Pages 13-15), a number of studies have shown that well before the age of three, children's language development is on a path that greatly influences further learning. In their longitudinal study, researchers Hart and Risley (1995) extrapolated from their data on the number of words per hour heard by children in the three types of families they studied. They concluded that by age three, the children in professional families would have heard more than 30 million words, the children in working-class families 20 million, and the children in welfare families 10 million.

These differences are correlated with differences in vocabulary growth rate, vocabulary use, and IQ test scores. Multiple-regression analysis showed that race made no contribution to child accomplishments over and above parenting style. In a more recent analysis of the results of their study, Hart and Risley (1999) concluded no matter what the SES, the more time parents spent talking with their child from day to day, the more rapidly the child's vocabulary was likely to be growing and the higher the child's score on an IQ test was likely to be at age three (p. 3).

In 1990, White, Graves, and Slater conducted comparison studies of vocabulary growth among three groups of children, from first through fourth grade. The groups were each composed of students from one of three schools: a white suburban school; an inner-city, predominantly African American school where students spoke an English dialect; and a semi-rural school with dialect-speaking, economically disadvantaged Asian Pacific students. The vocabulary size of first-graders in these three groups ranged from 5,000 words for the white students, to 3,500 words for the urban students, to 2,500 for the Asian Pacific students. Despite intensive vocabulary and decoding instruction, the vocabulary gap never closed, although the students in all three groups increased their vocabulary sizes considerably (cited in St. Charles & Costantino, 2000).

Some researchers have found even wider variation in vocabulary of young children. Whitehurst (2001) concluded that by first grade, linguistically advantaged children are likely to have vocabularies that are four times the size of their linguistically disadvantaged peers. Becker (1977) concluded that the primary difficulty with sustaining early gains in reading is the lack of adequate vocabulary to meet the broad academic demands that begin in the early upper-elementary grades and continue throughout schooling (cited in Baker, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995). These researchers observed, "One of the most alarming findings is that vocabulary differences between students appear early and the vocabulary gap grows increasingly large over time" (p. 6).

"Good vocabulary instruction helps children gain ownership of words, instead of just learning them well enough to pass a test."

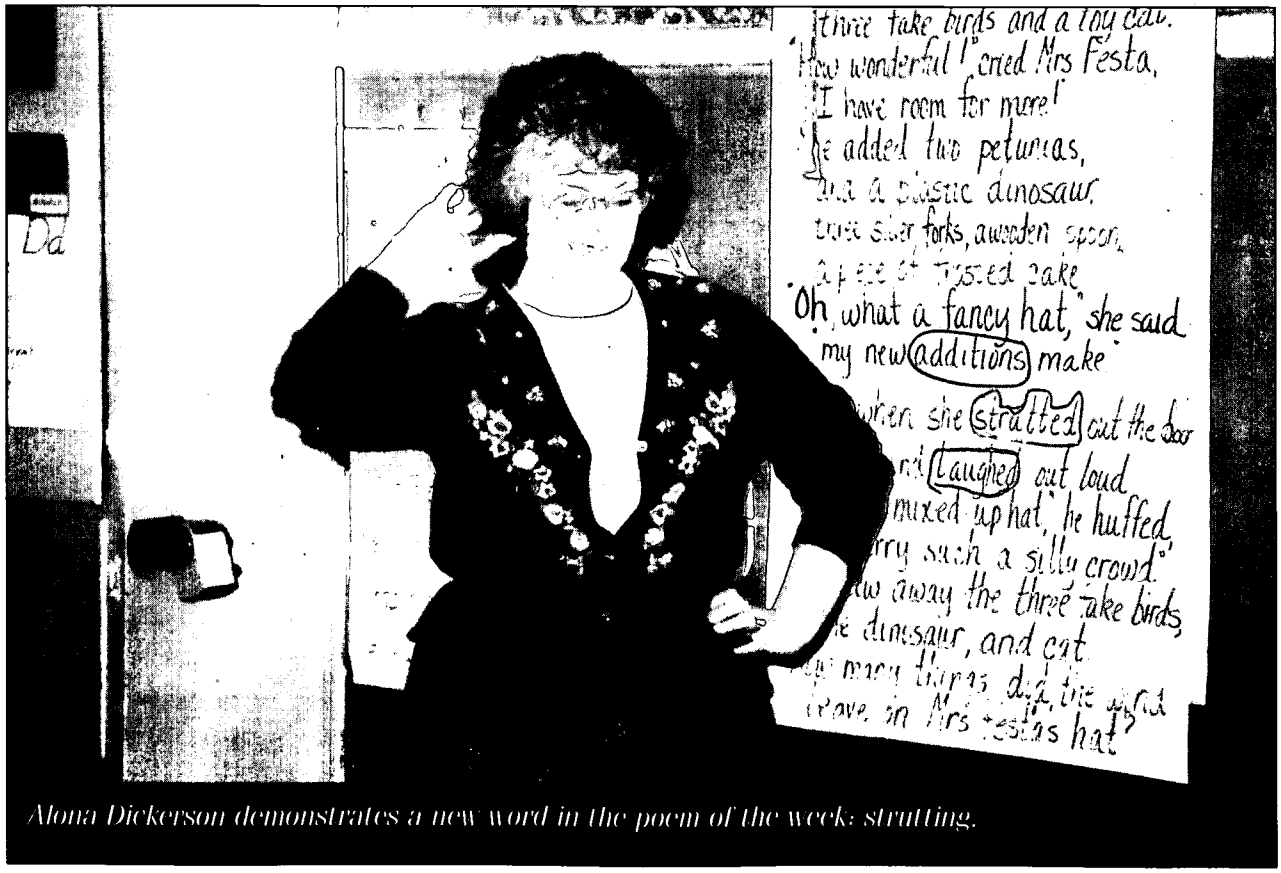
What schools can do. What can schools do to help close these enormous gaps in vocabulary growth and development? Estimates of the size of the educated adults' vocabulary range from about 40,000 to 150,000 words, and middle-class students pick up about 3,000 new words every year (Baumann & Kameenui, 1991). "Clearly, no vocabulary program can teach this many words," say researchers Nagy, Herman, and Anderson (1985, p. 19). Their research strongly suggests that vocabulary is more efficiently acquired in extended conversations that include "rare words," through independent reading, and by being read to than through direct instruction of words in isolation.

Nagy, Herman, and Anderson (1985) concluded that acquiring vocabulary through reading is 10 times as efficient, in terms of words learned per minute, as direct vocabulary instruction. In addition, as discussed earlier, extended conversations throughout the day are an important source of language development for young children. Dickinson and Tabors concluded that, "Conversation that engages children in extended discussion around a topic offers many opportunities for children to hear unusual words being used by more knowledgeable speakers and to make the connections with what they already knew" (2001, p. 109).

While there is considerable agreement that students learn the majority of the words they know through wide reading and discussions of new words, and through everyday oral communications, "it's important to teach some words directly," say researchers Stahl and Kapinus. "Good vocabulary instruction helps children gain ownership of words, instead of just learning them well enough to pass a test" (2001, p. 14). The National Reading Panel also advised that vocabulary should be taught both directly and indirectly. They stressed that learning in rich contexts, repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items, incidental learning, and use of computer technology all enhance vocabulary instruction.

Reading aloud and discussing what is read offer particularly rich opportunities for vocabulary growth. Dickinson and Tabor's Home-School Study (see Pages 14-15) reported:

- Reading books aloud offers particularly rich opportunities for vocabulary growth "because there are two sources of words: the words in the text of the book and the words spoken by the mother [teacher] in discussing the book with her child"
- Children are more likely to remember new words encountered in reading when parents and teachers stop and discuss the words



Alona Dickerson demonstrates a new word in the poem of the week: strutting.

- Caregivers and teachers can use new vocabulary in books as an opportunity to introduce new words and to talk about the meaning of the words during the shared reading experience (2001, p. 109)

Words and concepts. Templeton and Pikulski (1999) suggest that effective vocabulary instruction develops the relationship between words and concepts:

> *Concepts* are the basic units of thought and belief (Smith, 1995), and words are the labels for these thoughts and beliefs. If a concept is a familiar one, then the word that corresponds to this underlying knowledge will be understood, remembered, and used. Concepts grow and develop through experiences and through examining those experiences, concretely and through reading and writing. This in turn leads to learning and using more labels—words. The strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension exists because students bring this background knowledge, these thoughts and beliefs, to their reading (p. 2).

Fostering a word-learning environment that promotes "inquisitiveness, interest, and wordplay is important," say Templeton and Pikulski. These researchers describe four ways that vocabulary grows:

Elaborating conceptual knowledge underlying a known word. For example, a student learns that the word "cat" can refer not only to the familiar "garden-variety" family pet but to a family of wild animals, some of them quite large.

Relating new words to existing concepts. A new word, gigantic, is related to the familiar word/concept of huge; unfamiliar automobile is related to the familiar car.

Relating new concepts to existing words. A student who knows what a column of numbers means in arithmetic learns that column also refers to a type of article in a newspaper.

Learning both new words and new concepts. This involves helping students develop a concept for the process of condensation and helping them learn and remember the corresponding word (1999, p. 2).

Clearly, background knowledge, conceptual development, and word knowledge go hand in hand. Teachers, parents, and other caregivers can nurture the language development and potential of all children by providing environments rich in opportunities for meaningful experiences of many types. Bev Bos, preschool director, author, workshop presenter, and keynote speaker, writes passionately of children's need for a wide base of experiences:

> Before reading, children need experiences with wind, dirt, mud, water, experiences with other children, grandparents, running, walking, flowers, books, smells, gardens, balls, soft things, hard things, music, moving trains—to name just a few. Children need experiences—short, happy experiences—with grocery stores, libraries, bookstores. Children need experiences with wood, building, rolling, swinging, clouds, rain. And they need to talk about them, ask questions, point, make noise—in short, to use language with all of their experiences (1983, p. 16).

Ways of Sharing Books With Young Children

Shared reading experience. While there is no one right way to read a story to children, researchers have identified a number of features of effective story reading. Not surprisingly, these features are found in the bedtime story reading with successful early readers. Don Holdaway of

New Zealand introduced "shared-book experience" in order to "shift the enjoyment of a rich, open literature of favorite stories, poems, and songs right into the center of literacy instruction, and to develop teaching procedures which would make this possible" (in Park, 1982, p. 816).

Researchers agree that reading comprehension draws heavily upon oral language skills. However, written language is not just oral language written down. "Written language, unlike oral language, must carry the total load of meaning without ambiguity. It is more formal, more complete, and more textured than spoken language" (Holdaway, 1979, p. 54), and is designed to have the composer and receiver removed in time and place from each other (Sulzby, 1985). Sulzby explains how caregivers and teachers help children acquire decontextualized language skills, which are associated with literacy and school achievement:

> Fortunately, young children who are read to before formal school are ushered into an understanding of the relationships between oral and written language within a social context in which written language is used in hybridized fashion at first and then gradually takes on its more conventional nature. This hybridized form is evident particularly in parent-child storybook interactions in which characteristics of oral language enter into the parents' rendering of the "written text" (p. 460).

An example of a book reading provided by Strickland and Taylor (1989) demonstrates this hybrid form, which includes a mixture of verbatim reading of the text and conversational language. As the mother, Karen, reads *The Story of Babar* to her three-year-old daughter, Christina, she sensitively relates the extraordinary happenings in the life of an elephant in England to the everyday life of her little girl. These kinds of interactions help children use their knowledge to make sense of information from a book and show children how the information in the book can be related to their lives:

> Karen tells Christina what is happening in the story. "He goes into the store," she says, "and he goes into the elevator." Karen points to the elevator and asks Christina, "Does this look like the old broken down elevator in Mommy's office?"
> "Yes," replies Christina.
> "But this one's not broken," her mother says. "It goes up and down." Karen returns to the story. "And the man says, 'This is not a toy, Mr. Elephant. You must get out and do your shopping'" (p. 28).

Dialogic reading instruction. Assistant Secretary of Education for Research and Improvement Grover J. Whitehurst and colleagues have worked for more than 15 years on a technique for sharing picture books with two- and three-year-old children called dialogic reading. Designed to use book sharing as an opportunity to enhance children's vocabulary and cognitive growth, the technique requires a shift in roles. "Instead of the adult being the person who tells the story while the child listens, the child becomes the person who talks about the books, with the adult asking questions, expanding the child's answers, and in general serving as an audience and conversational partner for the child" (2001, p. 8).

After using the technique with children from low-income families, with children who have disabilities, with gifted children, and with children who speak languages other than English, Whitehurst concluded that "it is one of the best-validated interventions in the whole arena of preschool cognitive development" (2001, p. 8).

The transition from spoken to written language. In addition to the many benefits of story reading described in earlier sections, frequent story reading helps children make the transition from spoken to written language by familiarizing them with the many concepts and ways of saying found in written discourse. In his book for parents, *Raising Readers,* Bialostok (1992) discusses

how written language sounds different from oral language:

> I have not in recent memory started a conversation with, "Once upon a time," even though it is a familiar structure in fairy tales. If Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* was written to sound like oral language, instead of beginning with, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," it might read, "I've had mixed feelings about the past several years. Part of it was OK, but part of it stunk!" (p. 29).

Learning the special features of written language through reading aloud helps children use their expectations of upcoming structures and words to more accurately and quickly process (read) ongoing text (Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, & Freppon, 1995). This familiarity with the features of written language also appears to help children decode texts, even without explicit instruction. For example, Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein (1986) were surprised to find that children who had been read aloud to for 20 minutes each day not only outscored children in a more traditional classroom on measures of comprehension and active use of language, but also on measures of decoding. They hypothesized that at the beginning stage of reading, better comprehension already has an effect on decoding ability. Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, and Freppon remind us:

> Words are surface markers and place holders for concepts, and word knowledge allows one access to the concepts of written discourse. The greater the depth and breadth of one's word knowledge, the greater one's ability to comprehend the various genres of text at increasingly complex levels (1995, p. 681).

Books About Words for Primary Students

Templeton and Pikulski (1999) stress the importance of fostering a word-learning environment that promotes inquisitiveness, interest, and wordplay. They suggest these books for primary students:

Bunting, J. (1995). *My first action word book.* London, England: Dorling Kindersley.

Degen, B. (1983). *Jamberry.* New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Ernest, L.C. (1996). *The letters are lost!* New York, NY: Viking.

Farwell, C. (1998). *Word wizard.* New York, NY: Clarion.

Maestro, G. (1989). *Riddle roundup: A wild bunch to beef up your word power.* New York, NY: Clarion.

Merriam, E. (1993). *Quiet, please.* Illustrated by S. Hamanaka. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Most, B. (1991). *A dinosaur named after me.* San Diego, CA: Harcourt.

Most, B. (1994). *Hippopotamus hunt.* San Diego, CA: Harcourt.

Most, B. (1992). *There's an ant in Anthony.* New York, NY: Morrow.

Schneider, R.M. (1995) *Add it, dip it, fix it: A book of verbs.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Ziefert, H. (1997). *Baby buggy, buggy baby, a wordplay flap book.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Source: Templeton, S., & Pikulski, J.J. (1999). Building the foundations of literacy: The importance of vocabulary and spelling development [Online]. *Available: www.eduplace.com/rdg/hmsv/research*

Especially for struggling readers. Conversational readings in school settings are especially important for children who have had few experiences with one-on-one picture book reading, and who may struggle with reading. As the example above shows, the combination of reading and talking help build a bridge from oral to written language. While there are many opportunities for children to learn vocabulary and decoding strategies from teacher models and demonstrations during a shared book experience, Holdaway stresses that the experience should be one of "shared pleasure. Like the bedtime story, the learning environment is trusting, secure, and expectant. It is free from competition, criticism and constant correction, and sets up a natural intimacy between the teacher and children" (in Park, 1982, p. 815).

Importance of interaction and discussion. In a study by Morrow (1988), the responsiveness of children to the reading experience increased as the result of the interactive behaviors of the adults. Unlike a didactic approach, in which children are expected to recall information of a clearly specified type, an approach that emphasizes sharing ideas, experiences, and opinions helps children make personal connections with a story. Similarly, in a study by Dickinson and Smith (1994), lower vocabulary development was associated with a didactic style, in which teachers asked children to recall specific information.

Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, and Freppon (1995) identified three features of successful storybook-reading routines that resulted in significant gains by children from low-SES families. Children were given the message that they were to:

- First and foremost, make sense of the story
- Learn to anticipate the author's message
- Make personal connections with the story

Similarly, Shanahan and Hogan (cited in Morrow, 1988) compared the interactive behavior of adults during story reading with children's subsequent achievement on a test of print awareness. They found that three factors were the best predictors of the child's achievement on the measure used:

- The number of minutes spent reading per week
- The number of answers to the child's questions during readings
- The number of references to the child's own experiences

Both group reading and one-one-one story reading lead to significant gains in comprehension, creation of original stories, language complexity, decoding, and vocabulary development (Morrow, 1992; Morrow, O'Connor, & Smith, 1990; Purcell-Gates et al., 1995). Volunteers, including older children, parents, and senior citizens, can provide many opportunities for children to hear stories in a relaxed, social, one-on-one or small-group situation in a school setting. These individualized opportunities are particularly important for children who have had few experiences with reading stories. In group story reading, discussion that focuses on making predictions and interpretations, rather than correct answers, can challenge and expand children's thinking and helps children feel that they are participating in the classroom community (see Pages 82-86).

But what about independent reading? Won't kids become so dependent on being read to that they will lose motivation for learning to read the words themselves? In *Beyond Words: Picture Books for Older Readers and Writers*, Crockett and Weidhaas note:

> Reading aloud has made countless children throughout the ages long to read for themselves, to need to read for themselves so they can get to the good parts faster .... If we are sharing aloud good books that catch children in a carefully spun web of words, we can never read fast enough to satisfy them, and isn't that grand? (in Benedict & Carlisle, 1992, p. 66)

Choosing a "Just Right" Book

While the importance of reading aloud and discussing stories cannot be overemphasized, independent reading also plays an important role in the primary classroom. Choosing a book that provides just the right amount of challenge plays an important role in instruction and motivating children to read. In *The Nature of Effective First-Grade Reading Instruction*, five teams of researchers observed literacy instruction in 30 first-grade classrooms in diverse settings across five states. They observed, "time and again the most effective teachers made certain that students were reading books that were just a little bit challenging for them. That is, these teachers worked to match children with 'just right' books —not too hard, not too easy" (Pressley et al., 1998, p. 13).

In her latest book, *Conversations*, well-known author and teacher Regie Routman shares a newsletter for parents from Shaker Heights City School District. Parents are advised to use the "five-finger rule" to choose a "just right" book:

> Once your child has chosen a book ask him or her to read the first page aloud. As your child reads, he/she should count on one hand any unknown words. If there are five or more unknown words on a full page of text, this book is too difficult! If your child knows all the words, it may be too easy.

When reading a "just right" book:

- Reading should be fairly fluent (not too choppy sounding)
- Your child should be able to tell you about what he/she has read
- Your child should be interested in the topic (Appendix A, p. 135b)

In *Matching Books to Readers* (1999), authors Fountas and Pinnell provide an extensive book list, organized alphabetically by title and level, for use in guided reading instruction of children K–3. The book also includes numerous practical suggestions for implementing guided reading in the primary classroom. Guided reading can provide the support that children need to read a "just right" book to themselves.

Guided reading. In guided reading, the teacher works with small groups of children, talking, thinking out loud, and reading through a picture book, often picture by picture, with children. The teacher helps children relate the book to their own experience, offers questions, and invites children to ask their own questions, introduces new vocabulary, and prompts the children to stimulate their interest and understanding. Groups are flexible and change with the developing needs of students. According to Margaret Mooney, "Your role is one of support: ensuring that the children read with comprehension" (1997, p. 153).

Independent reading. Research has shown that the amount of time children spend actively engaged in reading is strongly correlated with reading achievements (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Stanovich, 1986). Of course, "active engagement" means that students are using a variety of strategies to monitor comprehension (see Pages 79-80). Merely calling the words or gazing at a book while the brain is otherwise engaged does not lead to proficiency in reading!

Donahue, Finnegan, Lutkus, Allen, and Campbell found that "reading for fun" had a positive relationship to performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). They found:

> If students, however, regard reading only as a school-related activity, as a duty rather than a pleasure, their future prospects for reading to understand themselves and the world are limited. For reading on one's own not only extends comprehension skills, but also enhances the understanding of what happens in life (2001, p. 54).

These findings may help explain why the National Reading Panel concluded that there is insufficient research to substantiate claims that amounts of independent reading directly affect reading and fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension. However, the panel made it clear that their findings did not negate the positive influence that independent silent reading may have on reading proficiency. They concluded that "independent silent reading should not be the only type of reading instruction to develop fluency and other reading skills, particularly with students who have not yet developed critical alphabet and word reading skills" (p. 11).

Braunger and Lewis (1997) summarize the benefits that independent reading may have for actively engaged readers. Independent reading provides opportunities for children to:

- Apply reading strategies independently
- Read for a sustained period of time
- Use strategies in a variety of texts
- Solve words independently while reading texts well within their control
- Develop fluency
- Develop confidence through sustained, successful reading
- Support each other through reading

The amount of time that children choose to spend reading is enhanced by a combination of opportunities for (a) social interaction; (b) an abundance of high-quality reading materials; (c) reading aloud to children; and (d) teacher emphasis on free reading (Morrow, 1992; Ng, Guthrie, Van Meter, McCann, & Alao, 1996; Sweet, 1993). In addition, there are many strategies that teachers can use to encourage independent reading, including:

- Independent book tubs or "browsing boxes" containing at least one book selected to match children's reading level (as evidenced by their ability to read the words with 95 percent accuracy) help ensure successful reading and build confidence. Additional books can be a combination of teacher- and child-chosen selections, but emphasis should be on the child's choice to ensure motivation and engagement. At Helen Baller Elementary School, the browsing box includes a favorite book, an "I can read" book, and a new book.
- Having a number of choices of reading material —including children's own learning logs and journals, poems and books that have been memorized, and print-filled walls—helps children be successful with a minimum of teacher guidance.
- Traveling book bags (containing several books that children take home every night) encourage children to read at home and also encourage family involvement in reading.

- Cooperative learning activities, such as buddy reading, can enhance enjoyment and increase competence. Permission and encouragement to share stories with a friend helps make learning fun and decreases the need for teacher direction. Teacher and author Kathy Short (1997) found that:

  > Young children need the support of reading with others and they seldom read silently. I was surprised to find the same need for partner reading with older students. While they spent more time reading alone than young children, they still enjoyed reading with a peer. Children who had experienced difficulty with reading were often reluctant to pick up a book on their own. However if they could read with another child, they actually did more reading when they had to read alone (p. 43).

- Literature circles, in which study groups read a book together, a little at a time, stopping along the way to discuss what's happening, provide opportunities for children to discuss literature, sharing ideas and confusions. Literacy expert Regie Routman describes literature circles as "the best way I know to get students excited about literature and talking on a deep and personal level" (2000, p. 171).

If children are to form the lifelong habit of reading in the primary school years, they need multiple opportunities to read many different kinds of texts, with varying levels of support—from reading aloud to independent reading. "What is critical," as Braunger and Lewis (1997) point out, is "that children do read—lots, for sustained periods of time, for meaning, and for real and authentic purposes" (p. 54).

Explicit Comprehension Instruction

> *When we read, thoughts fill our mind. We might make connections to our own life. We might have a question or an inference. It is not enough to merely think these thoughts. Strategic readers address their thinking in an inner conversation that helps them make sense of what they read* (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000).

While there is still considerable disagreement among educators regarding the best mix of strategies for teaching reading, there is unanimous agreement that the goal of reading is comprehension. Comprehension is a complex process that involves thinking and feeling, and draws on background knowledge and experience. The National Reading Panel defines reading comprehension as "a complex cognitive process and an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text" (2000, p. 13). It was a lot easier to teach reading when we thought reading was just saying the words! Fortunately, a growing body of research and practitioner knowledge can help teachers provide the experiences that all children need to comprehend texts of all kinds.

Just as we have learned a great deal about how children learn language and emergent literacy skills by studying the homes of children who read easily and well, researchers have enhanced our understanding of comprehension by systematically investigating the strategies used by proficient readers. For more than 20 years, researchers from the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois have conducted research on comprehension. Based on their research, Pearson, Roehler, Dole, and Duffy (1992) observed that proficient readers are actively engaged in making sense of text. They monitor their comprehension

during reading and use a variety of fix-up strategies to repair comprehension when it breaks down.

A growing number of researchers advise that teachers explicitly teach comprehension strategies to enhance comprehension for students from kindergarten through high school. Rather than waiting until children have honed their word-recognition skills, teaching comprehension strategies in the primary years, particularly through reading aloud and discussing stories, has demonstrated benefits on children's comprehension skills. Pressley concluded, "The case is very strong that teaching elementary, middle school, and high school students to use a repertoire of comprehension strategies increases their comprehension of text" (2001, p. 5).

The National Reading Panel concluded that explicit instruction in the application of comprehension strategies has been shown to be highly effective in enhancing understanding. Two widely read books, *Mosaic of Thought* (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997) and *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension To Enhance Understanding* (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000), build on the work of Pearson and other researchers to explore comprehension strategies in the real world of teaching.

The Role of Metacognition

When reading is seen as understanding, an important aspect of instruction is metacognition—thinking about thinking. When teachers become aware of their own reading process, and model their thinking out loud, they help children to learn the strategies used by active, thoughtful readers. Children learn to think when they read, to develop an awareness of their thinking, and to use strategies to help them comprehend (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). They also learn to identify with characters in stories, and to imagine what they might be thinking and feeling. For example, a teacher might ask: "What do you think he's thinking? Why do you think he thinks that? Show me the part in the text that lets you know that he thinks they're looking at him." Such complex questions can become part of shared and guided reading lessons beginning in kindergarten.

Actively using comprehension strategies can help children go beyond literal comprehension to a deeper understanding and appreciation of text. Keene and Zimmerman (1997) added visualizing to the list of comprehension strategies identified by Pearson, Roehler, Dole, and Duffy (1992). According to these researchers, proficient readers:

- Search for connections between what they know and the new information they encounter in the texts they read
- Ask questions of themselves, the authors, and the texts they read—before, during, and after reading
- Draw inferences (use prior knowledge and text clues to draw conclusions, make predictions, and unique interpretations) before, during, and after reading
- Visualize, creating rich sensory images
- Determine the most important ideas and themes in a text
- Are adept at synthesizing information within and across texts and reading experiences
- Use a variety of fix-up strategies to repair comprehension when it breaks down (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene and Zimmerman, 1997; Pearson et al., 1992).

Reading Aloud and Sharing Thinking

The strategies that active, thoughtful readers use to understand text often have their origins in the conversations young children and their caregivers have during reading. Recall that researchers have identified a number of effective strategies used by responsive adults while reading aloud, including relating the story to the child's own experience and answering children's questions (see Pages 62–64).

Making connections. In fact, reading out loud and sharing the thinking readers do when they read are central to the approach advocated by Harvey and Goudvis (2000). Good teachers of reading, remind these researchers, are avid readers themselves, making connections between the texts they read and their own lives. While they stress that all of the strategies listed above are essential to reading for understanding, making connections between our own lives and the texts we read provides the foundation for the others. We all use our background knowledge and experience to ask questions, make inferences, and visualize while we read.

Harvey and Goudvis advise teachers to:

> Find the book that you relate to above all others—your connection book. It might be an adult or kids' book. Read it to your students, sharing your connections as you read. There is nothing more powerful than a literacy teacher sharing her passion for reading, writing, and thinking. Passion is contagious. Kids will respond (2000, p. 4).

Using Comprehension Strategies

Keene and Zimmerman (1997) suggest that in order to provide plenty of time for practice and for learning the new vocabulary of comprehension strategies, teachers can introduce strategies one at a time, while stressing the interrelationships among the strategies. For example, when making connections with text, the authors suggest labeling three kinds of connections: text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world. Children can practice labeling the strategies as they read and listen to stories and nonfiction. Most young children have no trouble relating stories to their own lives when they are encouraged to do so. "That reminds me of _____" is often heard in primary classrooms.

Helping children to create rich mental images while they read is critical to effective instruction.

Questions that "hang in the air." Questions come naturally to young children. Harvey and Goudvis point out:

> Children come to school brimming with questions. Very young children brim with questions. If we didn't delight so in their youthful enthusiasm, they might drive us crazy with the sheer number that burst forth. Primary teachers know this. Kindergartners blurt out questions fast and furiously, often without raising a hand. Why is the moon out during the day? How do birds fly? Do animals talk to each other? Where did the cowboys go? Sadly, by fifth grade, kids' questions practically disappear. Schools do not foster questions. Schools demand answers—answers to teachers' questions, answers to literal questions in basal readers, and answers to math operations many kids can do but can't explain. For too many years, schools have focused on answers to the exclusion of questions (2000, p. 22).

Studies of classrooms during the last 20 years have found little change in these practices. Pressley reports that when he and his colleagues observed fourth- and-fifth-grade classrooms in the late 1990s, they saw little comprehension instruction; instead, they saw many teachers posing post-reading comprehension questions, just as they have done for decades (1998, p. 2).

In contrast, when questioning is introduced as a comprehension strategy, children are encouraged to use their own questions to clarify confusions and to anticipate what will happen next in the text. Teachers help children understand that not all questions are answered in the text. It is the unanswered questions that can help children reach a deeper level of understanding, and that "often stimulate the most stirring discussions," note Keene and Zimmerman, authors of *Mosaic of Thought*. These are the "questions that hang in the air and replay themselves in our minds. They are questions that lead to other questions" (1997, p. 84).

Using strategies together. In *Strategies That Work*, authors Harvey and Goudvis (2000) describe many activities used by teachers to engage children in actively making sense of texts. While strategies may be practiced individually at first, proficient readers often use a number of comprehension strategies at the same time. Once children are familiar with the individual strategies, Harvey and Goudvis suggest that teachers can practice using strategies together.

Practicing questioning and making inferences together helps children see the connections between the strategies. For example, when children have opportunities to ask their own questions, they often answer them with an inference. "I wonder _____" is often followed by "maybe _____" in discussions about books. Teachers can make two columns on chart-pack paper or an overhead projector, recording comments that begin with "I wonder" as questions and those that begin with "maybe" as inferences.

Visualizing, the authors point out, is a type of inference, only it means we think in pictures, rather than words. Helping children to create rich mental images while they read is critical to effective instruction (see Pages 137-142). What is important is that children have many opportunities to observe teachers modeling comprehension strategies, time for both guided and independent practice, and application in real reading situations.

In the following example of a guided reading lesson at Cherry Valley Elementary, teacher Julie Duford skillfully models and demonstrates a variety of comprehension strategies. As she models and explains the strategies, she invites the children in her multiage first- and second-grade classroom to join her in making inferences, asking questions, visualizing, and using a variety of fix-up strategies to repair comprehension when it breaks down. They are reading *The Greatest Binnie in the World* by Margaret Mahy. After a brief picture-walk to help children get familiar with the story, to make connections with their own lives, and to make predictions, the children read a page or two. Then they discuss what they have read together. Pointing to a picture of Binnie, who has just taken a spill off his bike, Duford asks:

"I wonder how he feels?" When no one offers a suggestion, Duford prompts, "What would you do if you fell off your bike? How would you feel? Can you picture that in your mind?"

"I think I'd feel a little hurt and also a little embarrassed," suggests Dylan.

"Yes, he might be feeling a little embarrassed," Duford agrees. "I've seen my kids fall off their bikes, and I've done it myself. That helps me have a picture in my mind."

"I wonder if he knows what the people are thinking," asks Melissa.

"That's a good question. Let's finish reading and see what happens. Don't be in a hurry; we want to interact with the book. Do you know what that means?"

"Making connections with the characters," offers Ali.

"Yes, it means you're making connections. You're thinking about yourself and what happens in your own life. And you guys are asking good questions when you read, the sign of a good reader. When we don't ask questions, we may not be paying attention. Even me, when I read books, I'm always asking questions while I read. Okay, now we're ready to see what happens."

"When I was in my first teaching position, I knew nothing about teaching reading," says Duford, continuing:

> There was no support or encouragement to learn more. If I had stayed in that school, I might not ever have learned what was out there. In college all we learned was the scope and sequence of a basal reader. I didn't know how to make accommodations for kids who weren't at grade level. One little boy I taught was an emergent reader in the third grade. There was nothing for him. He went to the resource room, but it was not what he needed. I was just correcting papers, with no real thought involved. Here at Cherry Valley, we read and discuss books, try out strategies, and support each other in the process. Our lesson plans are for us, to encourage us to be reflective—not just to fill out a form (see sidebar). We're always learning more.

Duford's comments illustrate the critical importance of ongoing professional development through book study, discussion, and working collaboratively to continuously improve the learning process for children and adults.

Focused Reading Instruction

Date: 10/25/01 **Teacher** Carla Farnstrom

Students: Whole class

Objective/Teaching Point: I am modeling asking questions to enhance understanding. Do students join the discussion and generate their own questions?

Instructional Approach: Model as a "read to" with think aloud. Students then write in journal.

Resource: *Because of Winn-Dixie* (read-aloud book). *Strategies That Work* by S. Harvey and A. Goudvis

Reflection/Notes: An important point is to model a "think aloud" to students, stopping at different places to engage students.

Source: Lesson plan, Cherry Valley Elementary School

The Gradual Release of Responsibility

Drawing on the work of Pearson, Harvey and Goudvis elaborate on four components of comprehension strategy instruction that follow a gradual release of responsibility approach:

Teacher Modeling

- The teacher explains the strategy
- The teacher demonstrates how to apply the strategy successfully
- The teacher thinks aloud to model the mental processes she uses when she reads

Guided Practice

- After explicitly modeling, the teacher gradually gives the student more responsibility for task completion
- The teacher and student practice the strategy together
- The teacher scaffolds the students' attempts and supports student thinking, giving feedback during conferring and classroom discussions
- Students share their thinking processes with each other during paired reading and small- and large-group discussions

Independent Practice

- After working with the teacher and with other students, the students try to apply the strategy on their own
- The students receive regular feedback from the teacher and other students

Application of the Strategy in Real Reading Situations

- Students apply a clearly understood strategy to a new genre or format
- Students demonstrate the effective use of a strategy in more difficult text (2000, p. 13)

Harvey and Goudvis suggest that before modeling a strategy, teachers:

- Identify the important concepts and key themes in the book before reading with students
- Think about how your own experience (questions, inferences, visualizations) relate to these themes
- Identify where you might pause and think aloud for the students about the connections, questions, inferences, and visualizations you make (p. 13).

While the strategies can be invaluable for enhancing comprehension, they should not be used as a checklist. The goal is to deepen comprehension and enjoyment of reading; they are not an end in themselves. "We need to remember to share books for the sheer joy of reading as well as for strategy instruction," say Harvey and Goudvis. They add:

> Successful comprehension instruction requires that we create an environment that builds a community of thinkers and learners, a community where kids and teachers care and wonder about each others' interests and ideas and take time to talk about them, think about them, and explore them (p. 29).

Summary

Clearly, sharing books with children through reading aloud, guided reading, discussing stories, and explicit instruction in comprehension strategies continues to play an important role in children's lives long after children become independent readers. So important are reading aloud and discussing what is read that a number of researchers strongly recommend that even teachers in the higher grades regularly read to their classes to increase reading enjoyment and proficiency (Bialostok, 1992; Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990; Cullinan, 1987). In a survey of 1,765 sixth-graders, students reported that they valued both independent reading and the teacher reading aloud, particularly dramatic performances of high-interest books (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001).

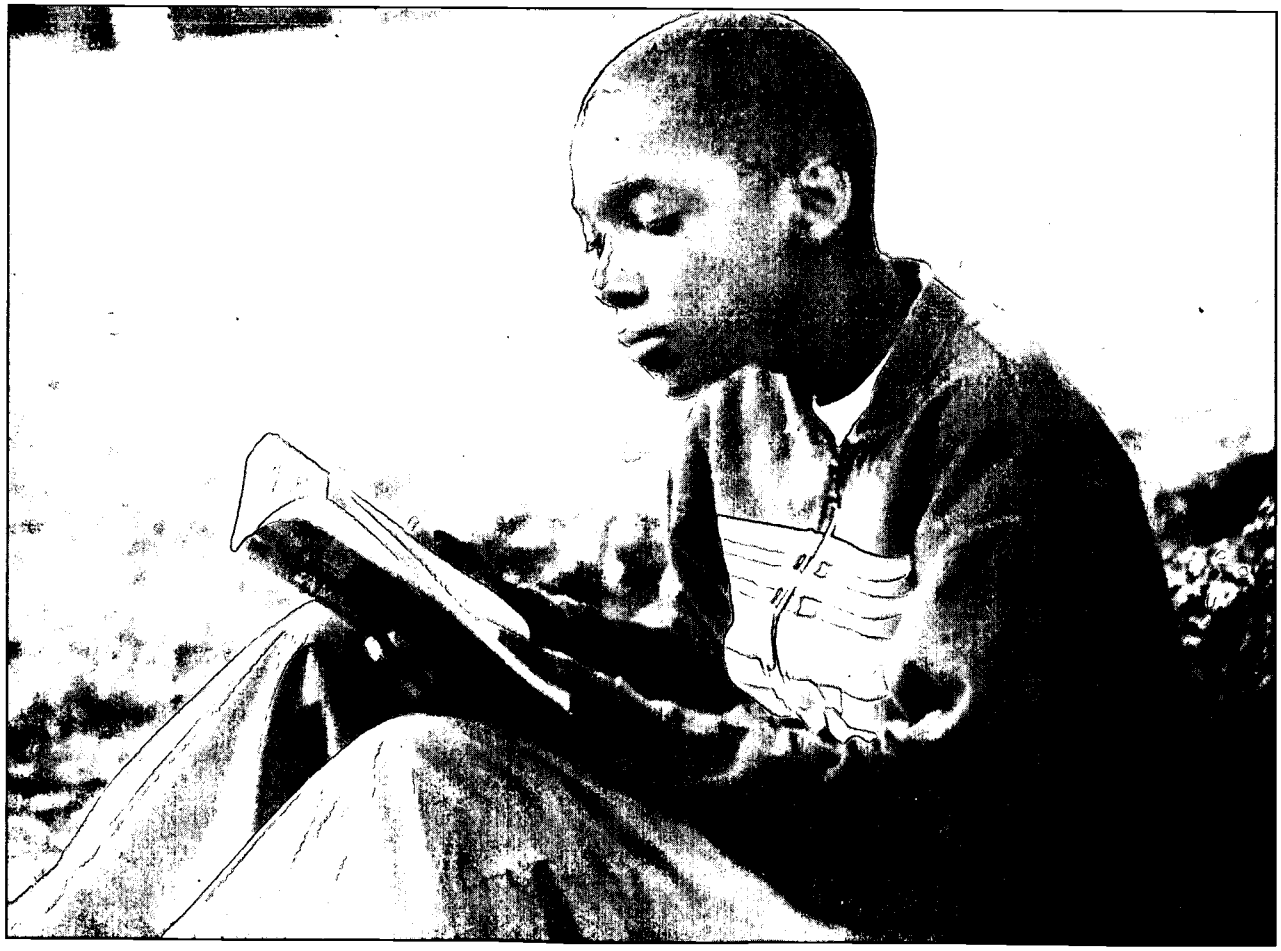
In summary, researchers have found that listening to stories in the context of a pleasurable social interaction:

- Builds vocabulary and conceptual knowledge
- Aids development of sophisticated language structures
- Enhances comprehension, memory, imagination, attention span, and listening skills
- Helps children think in more complex, abstract, and creative ways
- Broadens children's range of experience
- Helps children learn the structure as well as the linguistic features of stories or narrative text
- Enhances print knowledge and decoding ability
- Helps develop a love of reading
- Aids the development of phonemic awareness through rhyme and alliteration (Chomsky, 1972; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Purcell-Gates, 1990; Schickedanz, 1986, 1999; Wells, 1986)

No wonder that a number of researchers and practitioners agree that reading aloud is the "single most important structure there is" (Ray, 1999, p. 65). Ray explains:

> I used to read aloud to my students to get them to be good: "If you'll just be good this morning, I'll read to you after lunch." I thought of the read aloud as being like candy—the kids loved it, but it seemed not so good for them—like time away from what we *should* have been doing. I still think of the read aloud as something deliciously edible, only now I see it as a wonderful vegetable—something so good for us as a class that we need several helpings a day (p. 65).

Teachers know that sharing good literature helps to build a community of learners, a community that extends beyond the classroom. Literature can help bridge cultural differences by exposing children to other ways of seeing and experiencing the world, and by broadening children's range of experiences. Cullinan (1992) points out, there is a reciprocal influence between reading and life experience: "Children use real life experiences to help them understand books, and books help them to understand real life."



TEACHER DEMONSTRATIONS OF STRATEGIES FOR DECODING AND WORD RECOGNITION

In the hushed quiet of Doug Crosby's room, there is an air of expectancy. Children are sprawled on the braided rug and on the sofa, some holding stuffed animals and puppets. All eyes are on their teacher, who holds a Big Book and is ready to introduce it. Full-page pastel pictures provide visual cues for the simple and predictable text, aiding children's attempts to match print to sound. Crosby begins, "The book we're reading is called Along Comes Jake *by Joy Cowley. Remember when I'm reading out loud, you're reading up here (pointing to his own head). Listen carefully because I might have some trouble."*

Pointing to the words with a pointer, Crosby reads the first page, featuring a picture of children digging in a garden: "Ben helps Ann with the ____." Stopping here, Crosby tells the group, "I think I need some help."

"Look at the first letter of the word," suggests Brittany.
"OK, it's a g—that's a gu sound. Is there anything else that can help me?"
"Look at the picture," offers Mark.
"Oh, is it this thing here?" asks Crosby, pointing at the spade and shovel. "Ann helps Dad with the digging."
"No," comes a chorus of voices.

"You're right, digging doesn't start with a 'g'," agrees Crosby, "I guess I was looking at the picture. What's going to help me?" In response to a child's merely shouting out the word "garden," Crosby advises, "just telling me the word won't help me figure it out. OK, we looked at the first letter. What else can we do? But, you're right, when we look at the picture, it looks like a garden." After rereading aloud the sentence, "Ben helps Ann with the garden," Crosby asks, "Does that make sense?" The group agrees that it does. "Would it make sense if we said 'digging?' Yes, but it doesn't look right, does it? Digging starts with a 'd,' not a 'g'. And you're right, Amy, there's an -ing on the end. We've talked about that before."

While most children are actively engaged in listening for their teachers' miscues and offering suggestions, two children are not paying attention. Crosby invites them to rejoin the group. "Come closer," he suggests quietly. Without missing a beat, he continues on to the next page, a picture of a bathroom with a bathtub full of bubble bath, and confidently reads the entire sentence, "Ben helps Mom with the bubbles."

While the children giggle and shake their heads, Crosby points to the last word again, saying, "That's a long word; I need some help. I looked at the picture and I saw bubbles but that doesn't look right. But there's a way to work it out. Today, we're going to learn a new strategy. Sometimes a long word has another word inside it. If I cover up this part (room), I can see that there are actually two words. That's right, this word is 'bath.' Then if I cover it up, we have—yes, 'room.' Now we put them together and we have 'bathroom.' So remember to look inside the big word and see if you can find the little ones."

And so goes the process of distinguishing bathroom from bubbles, digging from garden, clothes from washing, and chain saws from chopping. Although this type of instruction makes up only a small part of each day, many of the strategies children will need to become successful readers are introduced here. Individual and small-group activities reinforce these strategies and provide opportunities for practice and individualized instruction. When reading more complex stories that have a developed story line, children are encouraged to reflect on the plot and the characters. Critical thinking is facilitated by such questions as: "What do you think might happen? What's the problem people have in the story? What else do you know about this topic?"

Clearly, as this demonstration from Cherry Valley's first-grade teacher Doug Crosby's classroom illustrates, "comprehension and decoding can exist side-by-side as instructional goals and valued student outcomes" (Duke & Pearson, in press). Reading aloud and discussing books that are well above children's independent reading level build background and conceptual knowledge, vocabulary, and familiarity with complex linguistic structures. Simple, predictable books, such as *Along Comes Jake,* support children's efforts to match print to sound and lead to independent reading. As G. Reid Lyon, chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), observed in this testimony before Congress: "Classroom instruction that explicitly addresses the connections between letters and sounds within a literature-rich classroom environment can make a difference between reading failure and reading success" (p. 4).

Repeated Readings

If one cannot enjoy reading a book over and over and over again, there is no use in reading it at all (Oscar Wilde).

Big Books and Predictable Books

Children need a range of flexible strategies for making sense of text, for word recognition, and for fluent processing of text. Children should also be exposed to a variety of texts, and the literature should be carefully chosen for its high quality of language and illustrations (Routman, 1994). Frequently, Big Books are used, and an experienced reader points to the text and invites children to read along. Both illustrations and predictable patterns (refrains, rhyme, rhythm, and repetition) provide scaffolds for young readers and allow children to recognize whole-language sequences.

While a steady diet of predictable books is not necessary, books with predictable patterns do encourage children to predict and remember larger parts of the text. When children can chime in with "Run, run, as fast as you can" or "And Pierre said, 'I don't care,'" they learn to associate written words with the oral words they recite from memory. Unlike word-for-word processing, these early recitations have the fluency of real language (Park, 1982).

Bill Martin Jr.'s *Brown Bear, Brown Bear: What Do You See?* (1967) was one of the earliest predictable texts and, as Hiebert (1997) explains, it "became the prototype for the predictable text, as did his notion of 'whole-book-success,' that children could read the whole book successfully when the syntactic pattern was predictable, and thus grasp the power and pleasure of reading before they had acquired word recognition" (p. 5).

Hiebert advises that beginning texts should have a small predictable unit that accounts for a high proportion of the text. As children's ability to recognize words grows, the proportion of the text accounted for by the predictable unit should be decreased. Illustrations that depict concepts with which young children are highly familiar and that can be easily figured out act as scaffolds for young children's word identification. Later, illustrations may continue to help convey events in a story episode, rather than individual words (Hiebert, 1997).

Following story reading, just as children do at bedtime, they should have opportunities to reread the books, poems, and songs independently. When enlarged texts are used, tape recordings of many selections and little books of the same title should always be available (Routman, 1994). Children who have had few prior book experiences, in particular, need numerous experiences with different kinds of texts to focus on critical features and to remember them (Hiebert, 1997).

Repeated readings of storybooks are often not a part of the curriculum in many traditional classrooms. However, as any parent or teacher knows, young children love to read favorite books over and over again. According to Dickinson and Tabor, "Picture book reading is a unique opportunity for language development in that the mother and child can return to the same story time after time. Repeated readings and discussions of the same page in a book are rich settings for language acquisition" (2001, p. 42).

Holdaway (cited in Park, 1982) describes the three phases of experience through which a favorite book passes in the bedtime story:

> First there is a successful introduction to the book for the purpose of enjoyment. There may be considerable participation and questioning by the child in a relaxed and unpressured way. ... Second, the child demands many repetitions over the next few days or weeks—the "read-it-again" phenomenon. ... Third, the child spends many happy hours independently with the favorite book, role-playing as reader and re-creating the familiar experience with increasing sophistication. (p. 816).

Forbidden Reading

For centuries, many people learned to read by memorizing Bible verses and following along as hymns were sung in church. In America, slaves who were forbidden to learn to read often began their illicit studies with the New Testament. In *A History of Reading*, Alberto Manguel describes how Thomas Johnson, a slave who later became a well-known missionary preacher in England, learned to read:

> He explained that he had learned to read by studying the letters in a Bible he had stolen. Since his master read aloud a chapter from the New Testament every night, Johnson would coax him to read the same chapter over and over, until he knew it by heart and was able to find the same words on the printed page. Also, when the master's son was studying, Johnson would suggest that the boy read part of his lesson out loud. "Lor's over me," Johnson would say to encourage him, "read it again," which the boy often did, believing that Johnson was admiring his performance. Through repetition, he learned enough to be able to read the newspaper by the time the Civil War broke out, and later set up a school of his own to teach others to read (1996, p. 281).

Source: Manguel, A. (1996). *A history of reading*. New York, NY: Viking.

Storybook Reading by Children Who Are Not Yet Reading

Through repeated readings, and with the help of illustrations and their growing understanding that print makes sense, children develop their storybook-reading ability. Long before they can actually read print, children often "read" the illustrations of a book or a memorized rhyme or story to themselves, and to parents, friends, pets, and stuffed animals.

Through repeated readings, and with the help of illustrations and their growing understanding that print makes sense, children develop their storybook-reading ability.

Increasingly, researchers consider storybook reading by children who are not yet reading an important part of literacy development (Hiebert, 1997; MacGilllivray, 1997; Sulzby & Teale, 1991). (See Handout 8.)

After reviewing the literature and listening to children from two to five years old read their favorite picture storybook, Sulzby (1985) developed broad categories for a classification scheme of patterns of young children's storybook-reading behaviors.

- Children's early attempts to read (when asked to read to an adult) are based on pictures, and stories are not yet formed. At this stage, children merely describe the pictures in a storybook without using book language.
- Next, children still rely on pictures, but stories are formed. These first reading attempts sound like oral language and may not closely follow the text.
- Before children can decode the printed word, their storytelling becomes increasingly like written language. They progress from treating individual pages of storybooks as if they are discrete units to treating the book as the unit. At this stage, children weave stories across the book's pages, progressing from a mixture of oral and written language-like reading to "reading" that is quite similar to the original story.
- In these later stages, although the illustrations still may be needed to jog their memory of the story, children demonstrate that they are learning the structure as well as the linguistic features of stories by "talking like a book" (Clay, 1979). By now, children who have been read to frequently have developed a number of expectations about stories; first and foremost, they expect a story to make sense.
- Finally, children's attention begins to focus on print, as well as on illustrations. In the early stages of attending to the printed text, children may focus on a few known words, a few letters and associated sounds, or the remembered text (Sulzby, 1985). During these first stages of reading the printed word, children may use several strategies to keep stories meaningful, including reading word for word from a memorized or predictable book and telling stories from pictures when the print is too difficult to decode verbatim.

MacGillivray (1997) reported that in her study of first-graders, children regularly switched strategies to meet different circumstances. For example, a reader might sound out every word while reading to a parent and then, when in front of peers, shift into a retelling to keep listening friends entertained.

Sulzby (1985) found that the familiarity that comes from repeated readings enables children to reenact stories or attempt to read stories on their own. These reenactments model the adult's storybook reading and draw children's attention to print. Hiebert observes, "When the information at the word level is not yet available to children, their text expectations draw their attention to individ-

ual words and support the development of an ever-expanding reading vocabulary" (Hiebert, 1997, p. 216).

Morrow (1988) studied the effects on children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds of repeated readings of storybooks in school settings. These one-on-one story readings encouraged interaction between the teacher and child. She found that children in the repeated-book group had significantly more responses dealing with print and story structure, and more interpretive and predictive responses. Children with lower ability skills, in particular, benefited from repeated readings, making more comments and questions than those of higher ability in the repeated reading group:

> Repeating books offers the child familiarity with the words, story, and illustrations. By the third reading, the children's habits of asking detail questions had changed and developed into more complex, more interpretative behavior. They began to make associations, judgments, and elaborative comments. They predicted more frequently, using prior knowledge, and they attempted pre-reading by reciting or narrating stories from memory, or actually reading a word here and there (p. 103).

The National Reading Panel concluded that repeated reading procedures that offer guidance and feedback are effective for improving word recognition, fluency, comprehension, and overall reading achievement through grade five (2000).

Predictable Books

Books with predictable patterns encourage children to predict and remember parts of the text. Both illustrations and predictable patterns (refrains, rhyme, rhythm, and repetition) provide scaffolds for young readers' word identification, and allow children to recognize whole-language sequences. When children can chime in with "Run, run, as fast as you can" or "And Pierre said, "I don't care," they learn to associate written words with the oral words they recite from memory.

Popular books include:

Brown, M.W. (1947). *Goodnight moon*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
Carle, E. (1969). *The very hungry caterpillar*. Cleveland, OH: Collins-World.
Carle, E. (1977). *The grouchy ladybug*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
Carle, E. (1984). *The very busy spider*. New York, NY: Philomel.
Carle, E. (1987). *A house for a hermit crab*. Saxonville, MA: Picture Book Studio.
Carle, E. (1990). *The very quiet cricket*. New York, NY: Philomel.
Galdone, P. (1975). *The gingerbread boy*. New York, NY: Seabury.
Guarino, D. (1989). *Is your mama a llama?* New York, NY: Scholastic.
Lowrey, J.S. (1970). *The poky little puppy*. New York, NY: Golden Books.
Martin, B., Jr. (1983). *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
Martin, B., Jr. (1992). *Polar bear, polar bear, what do you hear*? New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
Numeroff, L.J. (1985). *If you give a mouse a cookie*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
Peek, M. (1981). *Mary wore her red dress*. New York, NY: Clarion.
Rosen, M. (1989). *We're going on a bear hunt*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
Rylant, C. (1982). *When I was young in the mountains*. New York, NY: Dutton's Children's Books.
Sendek, M. (1990). *Pierre: A cautionary tale in five chapters and a prologue*. New York, NY: Harper Trophy.
Sendek, M. (1990). *Chicken soup with rice: A book of months*. New York, NY: Harper Trophy.
Wood, A. (1984). *The napping house*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

A Flexible Range of Decoding and Word Recognition Strategies

While the *meaning* and *content* of reading are critical to the reading and writing process, the emergent reader also needs to be aware of the form and mechanics of reading and writing. It is clear that being aware of the separate sounds in words (phonemic awareness) and learning to match these sounds to letters (phonics) are crucial for independent reading and writing. As discussed earlier, for some children—even those who have extensive experience with storybook reading—this last step is somewhat of an "unnatural act." Philip Gough of the University of Texas (1997) explains:

> The child's awareness that a word is composed of phonemes is typically not there. If you take the average four-year-old and say what's the first sound in "fish," they say, "Fish don't make sounds." That is, what they're obsessed with is the meaning of words. And what we have to do in kindergarten or the first grade is draw their attention to the sounds and words which they have been looking right through to the meaning.

How teachers help children accomplish this task may have profound effects on children's ability and motivation to read and write. They must help children maintain and strengthen their focus on the whole of language—the meaning—while they draw their attention to the parts of language—the letters and words. Without this dual focus, children may learn to "call the words," but at the expense of comprehension, verbal reasoning, and motivation to read and write. Children who have had few experiences with stories are particularly at risk for losing track of the fact that reading is supposed to make sense.

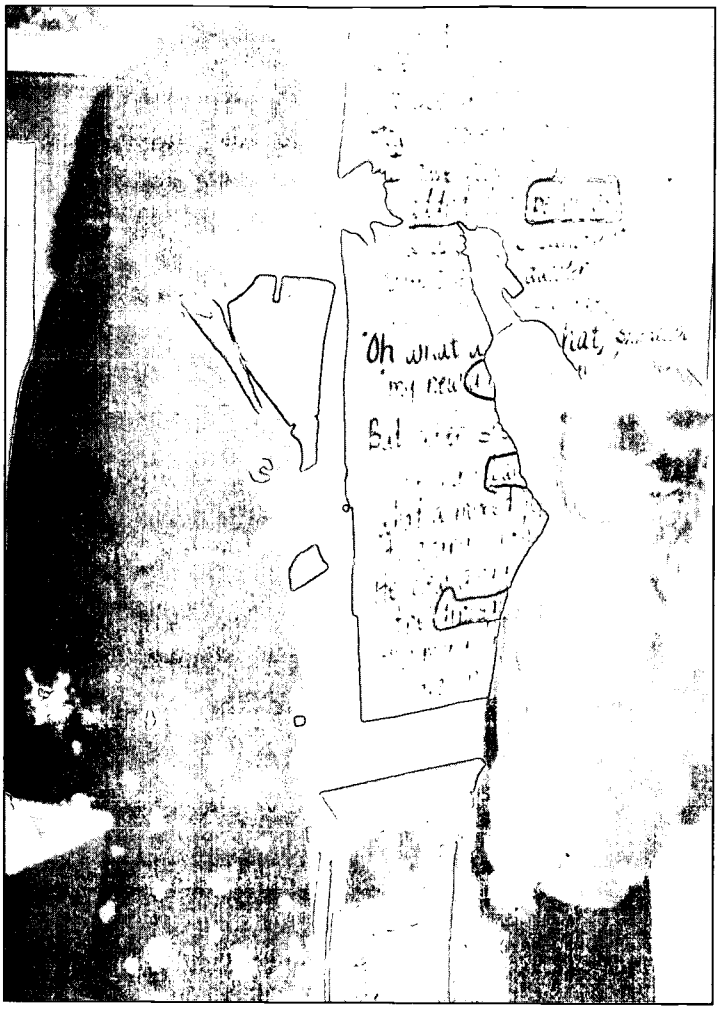
When children in the primary grades have difficulty manipulating the separate sounds in words and matching print to sound, they may be seen by their teachers as "reading disabled." In turn, these early labels may lead to low expectations that become internalized by the child. The National Reading Panel cautioned:

> It is important not to judge children's reading competency solely on the basis of their phonics skills and not to devalue their interest in books because they cannot decode with complete accuracy. It is also critical for teachers to understand that systematic phonics instruction can be provided in an entertaining, vibrant, and creative manner (2000, p. 11).

The panel further advised, "Programs that focus too much on the teaching of letter-sound relations and not enough on putting them to use are unlikely to be very effective" (p. 10). For example, many kindergarten teachers teach the alphabet through a "letter of the week" approach. Kindergarten teacher Dan Wuori explains how this approach can send a message that meaning is unimportant:

> By removing the alphabet from the meaningful context of written language, many teachers, I fear, are sending children an unintentionally distorted message about the purpose and importance of letters in isolation. When the curriculum itself builds around corresponding themes (for example, a study of apples during the week of "A"), the message becomes even more disturbing: What we explore in the classroom is unimportant. Any topic is as good as the next, as long as the initial letter sound corresponds to the designated schedule (1999, p. 24).

And all too often, teachers report that by the sixth week of school, when the focus is on "G," children have forgotten the first three letters. Fortunately, just as emergent literacy has informed our understanding of how children learn to make sense of text, we also know a great deal about enhancing phonemic awareness and about the process of learning to decode the printed word.



The National Reading Panel points out that children vary greatly in the skills they bring to school; the most effective phonics instruction is tailored to the individual needs of students. Similarly, Pressley, Allington, and Morrow concluded that effective teachers "were often quite explicit when developing word level skills and strategies, but they also contextualized this explicit instruction in real reading and writing activities and tailored the instruction to children's specific needs" (1998, p. 16).

A Juneau, Alaska, classroom. In Debbie Fagnant's classroom, interactions between children and adults reflect the high value placed on following children's lead and cooperative learning. But despite the emphasis on individualizing learning experiences, multiage K–2 teacher Debbie Fagnant's literacy program is anything but haphazard. The incorporation of Reading Recovery (a successful early intervention for first-graders) strategies for the last nine years has helped to provide structure to the underlying literature-based approach. "We don't just give them a book and say read it," assures Fagnant. Running records, a form of miscue analysis, are used to identify books that children can read with 90–94 percent accuracy, and the centralized library ensures that children have access to a wide variety of inviting books.

Although children are encouraged to use developmental spelling for first drafts of papers, they are helped to move to standard spelling in a variety of ways. Fagnant uses a number of measures to test children's understanding and use of phonics to spell words, including examining their developmental spelling in draft writing. "You can tell where the holes are, if they need help with 'sh' or 'ing,' and I target that." A high-frequency word list is also used to identify words for children to take home and practice with parents. Fagnant explains:

> How could you not individualize, when some children have learned to spell 30 words and some 600? It's my job to know through assessment where kids are skill-wise and support building these skills they're ready to learn. I taught from basal readers for six years, and I believe that phonics is important. I believe in a balance. We owe it to kids to give them tools, and some of those tools are skills. The children are flourishing with this approach; they are much stronger readers, much earlier.

"'W" Begins with a "D"'

Many preschools and kindergartens have successfully helped children who have had few experiences with print to get a strong start on learning the alphabet and matching sounds to print. By focusing on letters that have personal signifi-

cance, such as letters that appear in their own names, and those of friends, family members, pets, and favorite words, such as dinosaur, children are motivated to learn the meanings of those odd shapes that make up our alphabet. Such an approach draws on the insights of Sylvia Ashton-Warner, an author and educator, who as a teacher in a rural Maori school in New Zealand developed what she referred to as "organic vocabulary." Holdaway describes her approach:

> Basically, her insight was that reading should be motivated by the deepest springs of meaning in the human heart. Working from the tradition of look-and-say and language experience, she provided her children on request with those words which most powerfully engaged them, words from the center of their deepest fantasies—kiss, fight, beer, hit, Mom, airplane, fast car, blood, skeleton. These were once-seen-never-forgotten words, which established an instant vocabulary for both reading and writing (1979, p. 31).

Name tickets. Award-winning California kindergarten teacher Suzie Hass helps her children learn to print their names in a meaningful and risk-free way by introducing "name tickets" on the third day of school. So that each child can be successful, she provides individualized instruction and encourages parents to help by sending home a laminated name card for additional practice. The children write their names on name tickets for a variety of purposes: to sign up for the day, to attach to work that will be displayed, to go to lunch, and to show ownership of a class-made book. Within three to six weeks, most children are able to print their names, as well as recognize letters (Edge, 1999, p. 89).

Tongue Twisters, Pig Latin, Silly Songs, and Mother Goose. When children lack phonemic awareness, teachers can provide many enjoyable activities that promote the development of this important competency. We know that children develop phonemic awareness from the oral and written language they are exposed to during their preschool and primary years. In particular, books and songs with rhymes and alliteration and language play, such as tongue-twisters and Pig Latin, help children learn to hear and manipulate the separate sounds in words. Several studies have found that nursery rhyme knowledge at three years was related to reading ability at six years, even after differences in social background and IQ were taken into account (Bryant, Bradley, MaClean, & Crossland, 1989).

Author Nellie Edge describes nursery rhymes as "basic cultural literacy—they are gifts of language children deserve to win" (p. 33). She describes how a visit from a real Mother Goose who leads children in favorite rhymes is a memorable experience. One kindergarten class found a large letter from Mother Goose, a bag with a favorite nursery rhyme props, and white tail feathers waiting for them after recess. "So they began reciting nursery rhymes on the first day of school" (1999, p. 7).

Children enjoy word play, such as deleting the first letter of a word and substituting another letter. At Cherry Valley Elementary, kindergarten teacher Doug Crosby takes attendance by singing a number of versions of the popular children's song, "Willaby, Wallaby, Wu, an elephant sat on Sue." When children learn to recognize the sound of their name with a different first letter, they are developing the ability to hear the separate sounds in words. Today's letter is "B." Accompanied by 20 kindergartners sprawled on the circle rug, Crosby sings, "Billamy, Ballamy, Bali, an elephant sat on _____? "Ali," sings back a proud five-year-old. Crosby and the class continue: "Billmay, Ballamy, Bax, an elephant sat on _____? "Max," comes the confident reply. And so the morning roll call continues, as each child begins to develop phonemic awareness in an enjoyable group activity.

Summary

By teaching phonemic awareness and decoding strategies in engaging reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities throughout the day, children have multiple opportunities to understand how sound maps onto print. In summary, while some children may need more explicit, one-on-one instruction than others, for all children, phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge are promoted by a number of activities for exploring the oral and written word, including:

- Drawing children's attention to letter/sound patterns in familiar words as they read aloud and write
- Teacher-modeled writing
- Pointing to and stretching out the sounds in words on charts and Big Books
- Repeated readings of storybooks, especially those with predictable patterns and rhymes (See Pages 88-91)
- Name tickets
- Alphabet songs, books, blocks, puzzles, magnetic letters, and bingo games
- Chants, poetry (especially nursery rhymes)
- Wordplay, such as tongue twisters, rhyming games, Pig Latin, and songs that play with sounds
- Word walls (See Page 102)
- Journal writing, and other writing, using invented spelling (See Pages 96-97)

In a Northwest classroom, after many engaging activities to explore how sound maps on to print, a five-year-old made an important announcement: "Teacher, teacher, 'W' begins with a 'D,'" she shouted, the thrill of discovery evident in her voice.

Developmental (Invented) Spelling

Encouraging the use of invented or developmental spelling is a strategy that builds both phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge. (See Handout 9.) Snow, Burns, and Griffin, authors of the *Preventing Reading Difficulties* report, advised:

> Writing instruction should be designed with the understanding that the use of invented spelling is not in conflict with teaching correct spelling. Beginning spelling with invented spelling can be helpful for developing understanding of the identity and segmentation of speech sounds and sound-spelling relationships (1998, p. 7).

In 1988, Clarke compared the effectiveness of invented spelling in first-grade classrooms. The children who had invented spellings were superior to the others on measures of word decoding at the end of the year. Furthermore, this invented spelling and decoding connection was particularly striking for the children who had been designated as having low readiness at the beginning of the year (cited in Routman, 2000).

Learning to spell, like learning oral language, is a developmental process, and contributes to letter and word recognition. It begins the first time a child picks up a writing instrument and makes a mark on a page (Griffith & Leavell, 1995/1996). Marie Clay (1979) describes three stages of scribbling:

- Random scribbling for pleasure that may have certain characteristics of print; for example, rectangular rather than circular or horizontal rather than vertical
- Scribbling with the understanding that symbols can convey meaning
- Creating mock messages, in which mock letters and beginning letter forms appear

In the developmental view of writing, invented spelling is not a sign of incompetence. Rather, it is viewed as an important stage of writing, as Schickedanz (1986) explains:

> After much exploration, and after much exposure to print, children discover that letters represent phonemes, and not some larger unit of speech, such as a syllable or a word. This is a very important discovery. ... Many preschool teachers know that the words children first create when they try to represent words in terms of their sounds do not resemble conventional spellings. Children may write kt for cat, grl for girl, and mdpi for mudpie. What may not be readily apparent is how systematic these invented spellings are and how much they reveal children's keen ability to detect similarities and differences between the ways various sounds are produced (p. 88).

At first, children are likely to write only the first sound of words. Next, they commonly write the first and last sounds (especially when these are consonants). Vowels typically come later because, as Cunningham (2000) points out, "in English, vowels are variant and unpredictable"; some have as many as six different sounds. Developmental spelling is a powerful tool for developing phonemic awareness and offers teachers an observation window into children's emerging understanding of symbol-sound correspondence.

A kindergarten teacher who initially "had a hard time" with invented spelling became convinced of its usefulness after watching her young students make progress in spelling and develop a love of writing:

> I am now a firm believer in the use of invented spelling. When explaining why to skeptical parents, I give two examples:
>
> - I tell parents that when their child first learned to make sounds she or he might have said something like "da." Immediately, everyone celebrated the fact the child said "Daddy!" They did not panic and enroll their child in speech class because she or he was only pronouncing the first part of the word.
> - When their child first learned to walk, she or he probably took one small step and fell down. Again, this was celebrated. The child began to walk! Parents did not panic and enroll their child in physical therapy class because she or he didn't take enough steps.
>
> When they hear these two examples, they smile and nod their heads. Like speaking and walking, spelling is a process. We need to celebrate our children's ability to take the small steps, and help them achieve their final goal.

Phonics Knowledge: Essential for Fluent Reading and Spelling of Words

While there is much debate regarding the optimal mix of practices that leads to efficient decoding, there is considerable agreement on the goal of phonics instruction: Children should learn to read (understand) many words automatically and fluently. Of course, not all children learn in the same ways. As in all good teaching, individualized instruction based on careful assessment is crucial. The National Reading Panel recommended, "Teachers need to be flexible in their phonics instruction in order to adapt to the individual needs of students, and should be able to assess the needs of the individual students and tailor instruction to meet specific needs. (p. 11).

The National Reading Panel examined three types of phonics programs: (1) synthetic phonics programs that emphasized teaching students to convert letters (graphemes) into sounds (phonemes) and then to blend the sounds to form recognizable words; (2) larger-unit phonics programs that emphasized the analysis of blending of larger

subparts of words (i.e., onsets, rimes, phonograms, spelling patterns) as well as phonemes; and (3) miscellaneous phonics programs that taught phonics systematically, but did this in other ways not covered by the synthetic or larger-unit categories or were unclear about the nature of the approach (§2, p. 89, 176).

The panel concluded that "specific systematic phonics programs are all more effective than non-phonics and they do not appear to differ significantly from each other in their effectiveness, although more evidence is needed to verify the reliability of effect sizes for each program" (§2, p. 132). In addition, they found that systematic phonics instruction was more effective in improving children's ability to decode regularly spelled words and pseudowords than irregularly spelled words.

Onset, Rime, and Analogy

Based on current research, it seems that there is not one best way to teach phonics. What is important is that it be taught explicitly, and that it be taught in ways that motivate children to read and write for authentic purposes. When looking for a place to start, however, teachers might want to consider focusing on what comes easily to children in their first attempts to match print to sound: their sensitivity to rhymes.

Based on a number of research studies (Gunning, 1995; Moustafa, 1995; Treiman, 1985), as well as reports from reading teachers (Routman, 2000), phonemic segmentation is not easily grasped by young children. The National Reading Panel explains why a letter-by-letter strategy (synthetic phonics) presents difficulties for children. They provide this example: Blending "Tuh-a-puh" requires deleting the "uh" sound to produce the blend "tap." In addition, they point out that "when the sounds that need to be blended exceed two or three, it becomes harder to remember and manage the ordering of all those sounds; for example, blending "s-tuh-r-ea-m" to say stream" (§2, p. 104).

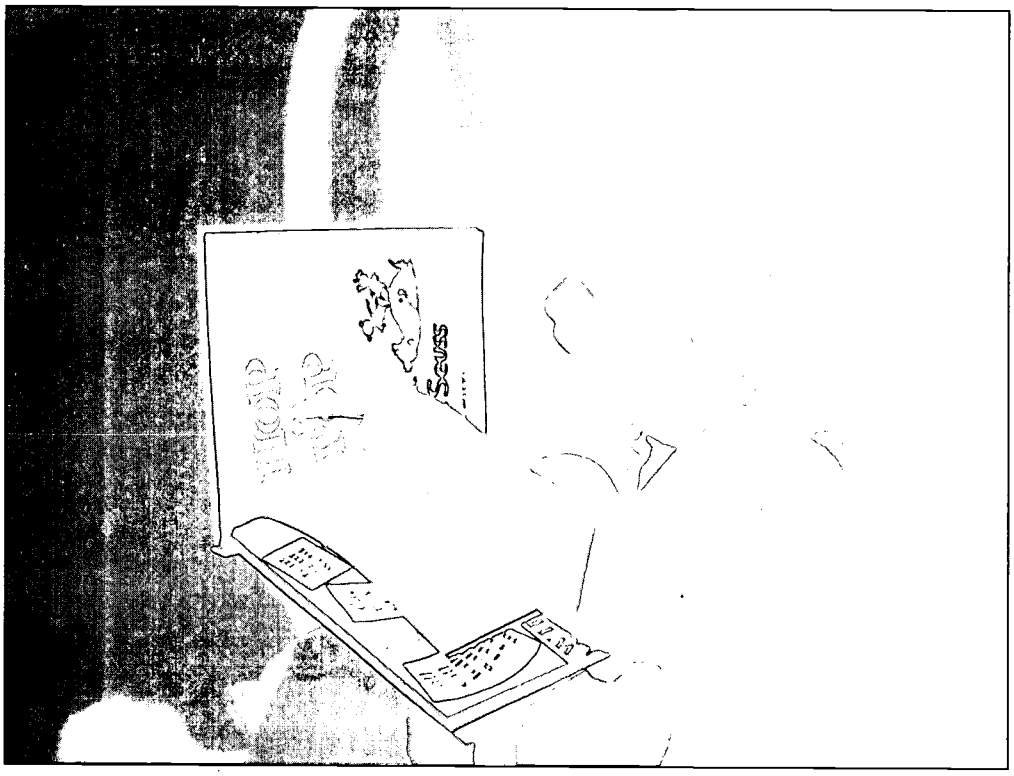
However, children become sensitive to rhyme at an early age. Bryant and colleagues (1989) showed that nursery rhyme knowledge at three years was related to reading ability at six years even after differences in social background and IQ were taken into account. Goswami and Bryant (1992) suggested that the linguistic units onset and rime may be crucial in explaining the robust link between rhyming and reading. Onset is the initial

consonant or consonant clusters, and rime is the vowel of a syllable plus any consonants that might follow. For example, in the word "cat," c is the onset and at is the rime; in the word "splat," spl is the onset and at is the rime.

Following are some of the insights we have gained into how many children begin with onsets and rimes to build more extensive phonics knowledge.

- When young children begin to utilize rules of phonics, they tend to rely largely on initial consonants, and it is these correspondences that are the most regular (Routman, 1994).
- Most young children have difficulty analyzing words into separate sounds; for example, separating "cat" into its three letters and corresponding sounds. This is because phonemes are not discrete units. The attributes of a phoneme spill over into those that come before it and follow it in a word (Adams, 1990; Gunning, 1995; Treiman, 1985). By pronouncing each letter in "cat," "Cu"-"a"-"tu," the resulting sounds no longer sound like "cat."
- While traditional approaches to phonics instruction require children to decode every word with synthetic phonics (a letter-by-letter method), described above, adults as well as children tend to read unfamiliar words in pronounceable chunks. For example, in the word "provide," a reader will divide the word "provide" into "pro" and "vide," or the word "whipsawed" into "whip" and "sawed," not letter by letter. The ability to identify the syllables or sound chunks in words tends to develop as children gain experience with language and manipulating sounds in words (Wasik, 2001).
- Wise, Olson, and Treiman (1990) found that first-grade readers who learned to read words by segmenting them into onset and rime subunits remembered how to read the words better than readers who segmented the words into other units.
- Moustafa's study of 75 seven-year-old children found that the onset-rime analogy explanation accounted significantly better for the children's correct recodings of pseudowords than the phoneme-blending explanation (1995).
- The results from a longitudinal study that monitored the phonological awareness and progress in reading and spelling of 65 children from the ages of four years, seven months to six years, seven months demonstrated the importance of early rhyming skills. The study found:
  - There was a strong, consistent, and specific relation between children's phonological skills and reading.
  - Sensitivity to rhyme and alliteration are developmental precursors of phonemic detection, which, in turn, plays a considerable role in learning to read.
  - Sensitivity to rhyme also makes a direct contribution to reading, probably by helping children to group words with common spelling patterns (Bryant et al., 1989).
- Children who recognize onsets and rimes can learn to make analogies between spelling patterns in words to help them read new words. For example, a child who can read table can more easily learn to read stable, cable, gable, and fable. Adams (1990) concluded that an analogy approach is not only a strategy used by skilled readers, but also an effective method for teaching students to decode.
- Several studies (Goswami 1986, 1990; Trieman, 1985) found that reading words by analogy develops earlier than reading words by sequential (letter-by-letter) decoding.
- The more print words children recognize, the better children are able to make analogies between letter strings representing onsets and rime (Ehri & Robbins, 1992).

- The ability to make analogies (e.g., from *cat* to *mat*, *smile* to *vile*, *table* to *stable*, *beak* to *peak*) eliminates the need for the child to blend phonemes in the rimes of new words because the blended rimes are supplied by the reader's memory for the known words. Because blending is known to be a difficult operation, this ability leads to more efficient word recognition (Ehri & Robins, 1992).



Based on these findings, an initial focus on onsets and rimes can help children develop phonemic awareness and learn to make analogies between spelling patterns in words to help them read new words. At the same time, in order to divide words into onsets and rimes, children are learning to understand how letters symbolize sounds and how to blend parts of known words with parts of new words (Erhi & Robbins, 1992). For example, a child who can read cat can more easily learn to read bat, sat, mat, pat, and that.

Magical memory reading. If this sounds a lot like a Dr. Seuss story, it is not a coincidence. Reading books that emphasize sounds, such as nursery rhymes, Dr. Seuss books, and song picture books, has provided a scaffold for many children to memorize text and "teach themselves to read." Song picture books, which build on familiarity, enjoyment, and repetition, provide opportunities for children to engage in what author and songwriter Nellie Edge refers to as "magical memory reading."

Rather than needing phonics knowledge in order to begin to read texts, there is a great deal of evidence that there is a reciprocal relationship between reading, writing, singing, word play, and phonics knowledge; that is, each one facilitates and reinforces the other (Perfetti, Beck, Bell, & Hughes, 1987; Weaver, 1997). Moustafa (1997) points out that as "children learn to recognize more and more print words in the context of familiar language, they use their knowledge of words they already recognize to pronounce words they don't recognize" (p. 85).

Instead of memorizing lists of words, a task that can be daunting for young children, children can develop a core group of high-frequency words through reading predictable texts and through writing individual and group poems, songs, and stories, using these words. At Mary Harrison Elementary in Toledo, Oregon, a multiage first- and second-grade class created an "earth rap" (see the following sidebar). Written and illustrated

collaboratively by the whole class, the poem provided an introduction to rhyming and shows Mary Harrison's strong emphasis on conservation and respect for the earth.

Wylie and Durrell's research (cited in Hiebert, 1997) found that 37 rimes account for 500 words that occur in primary-level text, though their frequencies vary:

ack	ain	ake	ale	ame	an	ank
ap	ash	at	ate	aw		
ay	eat	ell	est	ice	ick	ide
ight	ill	in	ine	ing		
ink	ip	ir	ock	oke	op	or
ore	ot	uck	ug	ump		
unk						

Creating group poems is one of the many ways that teachers at Mary Harrison Elementary School in Toledo, Oregon, encourage collaborative learning.

Earth is earth. Oh earth is earth.
She is the one who gives us birth.

Earth is our home. It's the only one we got.
It's getting real trashed up, and don't say it's not.

We can help the earth. We can start a new day.
So let's get together and have it this way.

Trees and forests disappear into sand.
And if we don't do something, it will ruin all the land.

Animals grow. Animals die.
If we work together, we can clear the sky.

So stop your littering. Reduce your trash.
Or our beautiful planet will start to crash.

If you help today, and you help tomorrow.
Then we'll clear the trash that made this sorrow.

Recycle, reduce, reuse, and close the lid
Because all this trash is stuff we did!

Earth is earth. Oh earth is earth.
She is the one who gives us birth.

Word Walls

In *Phonics They Use: Words for Reading and Writing*, Cunningham (2000) refers to these *rimes* or *word families* as *spelling patterns* because children learn that you spell based on patterns—which include the vowel and the letters that follow. Cunningham explains:

> Brain research suggests that the brain is a pattern detector, not a rule applier, and that, while we look at single letters, we are looking at them considering all the letter patterns we know. Successfully decoding a word occurs when the brain recognizes a familiar spelling pattern or if the pattern itself is not familiar, searches through its store of words with similar patterns (p. 178).

Many teachers display these word families with a picture on a word wall to help children learn the patterns that help them spell many other words. The ready availability of many different kinds of word walls help children develop automatic word recognition, and to use these words in reading and writing. "What is important," says Cunningham, is that "we include words students will need often in their reading and writing, words that are often confused with other words" (p. 60).

For example, teachers can display high-frequency words such as *the, of, and, a, to, in, is, you, that,* and *it*. These 10 words account for a high percentage of the words we read and write. But for struggling readers, Cunningham advises that having a word wall is not enough; "you have to do the word wall." Doing a word walls means:

- Being selective and limiting the words to those really common words that children need a lot in writing
- Adding words gradually—five a week
- Making words accessible by putting them where everyone can see them, writing them in big block letters, using a variety of colors so that the constantly confused words (for, from, that, they, this, etc.) have different colors
- Practicing the words by chanting and writing them, because struggling readers are not usually good visual learners and can't just look and remember words
- Doing a variety of review activities to provide enough practice so that the words are read and spelled instantly and automatically
- Making sure the word-wall words are spelled correctly in any writing students do (p. 60).

Using analogies to decode words. Once children learn many of these high frequency words through repeated readings, word walls, and reading and writing, reading often progresses quickly. Martin and Hiebert (1997) demonstrated that "initially struggling readers who became successful readers during first grade knew few words by mid-year, but once they had acquired a core group of high-frequency words, they progressed rapidly in their word recognition skills."

An example by Gaskins, Gaskins, and Gaskins (1991) shows one way that children can be helped to accomplish this task. The researchers use an explicit instruction program to teach children to use analogies to decode words. Through the method called "compare-contrast," children are taught through modeling, guided practice, and teacher feedback. Children are told what they will be taught, why it is important, when it can be used, and how to use it.

The authors describe Tom, a nonreader in the second grade, who had poor receptive and expressive language skills, and who had participated in the program for several months. While reading a predictable book, he came upon a word he did not know how to pronounce. To the "teacher's amazement," Tom declared:

"I know the pair/trast strategy. I know table; this is stable!" This was the first time that Tom had used the compare-contrast strategy independently, and it was truly a breakthrough for him as a reader. He now had a way to decode unknown words. Tom himself seemed to realize the value of the strategy, for he promptly used it again in the second sentence to figure out sty. He said, "I know cry, so this is sty" (p. 221).

Metacognition and the Effective Use of Strategies

Children who have a range of flexible strategies to use when they are stuck on a word are able to take an active approach to solving problems encountered in the reading process. When learning is viewed as understanding, an important element of a reading program is to help children become aware of how they go about their thinking and learning (metacognition). Key to a metacognitive approach is the flexible use of strategies. Speigel (1995) explains:

> Skills are used in a reflexive manner whereas strategy usage involves conscious selection of an approach to solve a problem. Effective strategy utilization is metacognitive. The learner knows a problem exists, identifies the problem, and puts into effect a fix-up strategy to bypass or solve the problem.

Learning to read, Weaver (1997) points out, "involves developing strategies for making sense of text." Teachers can model strategies by thinking out loud, which in turn helps children to be aware of their thinking as they read. Pressley, Allington, and Morrow concluded that effective teachers teach children to attend to multiple cues, including letter and sound cues, pictures, meaning, and grammatical cues (1998). While proficient readers can pronounce words equally well in isolation and in context, experimental studies have consistently found that early readers read print words better in the context of a story than in isolation (Moustafa, 1997).

A number of strategies are recommended by reading specialists for beginning readers, including:

- Keep your finger on the word and stretch out the letters (e.g., mmoomm for mom).
- Look for a known chunk or small word (e.g., child in children).
- Divide the word into pronounceable chunks (e.g., "pro" and "vide" in the word provide).
- When possible, segment the word into onset and rimes (e.g., "c" and "at" in the word cat).
- Read the word using only the beginning and ending sounds.
- Read the word without the vowels.
- Think of a word that looks like the difficult word.
- Find the small word or words in the big word (e.g., bath and room in bathroom).
- Find the ending or beginning of a word in the main word (e.g., playing, repay).
- Look at the picture and the first letter of the word. Then look at the rest of the word to confirm or correct.
- Keep your finger on the word, and read to the end of the sentence.
- Substitute a word that makes sense—Think about the story. Does the word you are using make sense? Does it look right? Does it sound right?
- Link to prior knowledge.
- Predict and anticipate what could come next.
- Read the passage several times for fluency and meaning.
- Write words you can't figure out and need to know on sticky notes.
- Go back to the beginning of the sentence and try again.

It is important to reiterate that these are strategies used by beginning readers. Although proficient readers may use only a few of these strategies during reading, these strategies play an important role in helping young children learn to decode words fluently and automatically. It may take children with few prior experiences numerous experiences with texts to focus on critical features and remember them (Hiebert, 1997).

Just as young children learning to walk and talk are allowed to practice, experiment, and make approximations toward a goal, children learning to read and write benefit from these opportunities. Temporary, adjustable help (scaffolds) support children's early learning in a variety of ways: coffee tables to support walking, training wheels on bikes, life jackets for swimming, and a supportive caregiver who idealizes and expands on their early communicative attempts. Similarly, young children who read early and well are allowed and encouraged to develop many strategies to make sense of text. Struggling readers, in particular, need to be taught a range of flexible strategies and have access to numerous texts that scaffold their reading and build fluency and comprehension.

Summary of Strategies To Facilitate Learning the Alphabet and Decoding

Clearly, there are a wide variety of ways that teachers can directly help children develop phonics knowledge that they can use in reading and writing. Weaver, Gillmeister-Krause, and Vento-Zogby (1996) offer these suggestions. Many of these suggestions have been discussed earlier; they are presented here to serve as a summary:

- Read and reread favorite nursery rhymes to reinforce the sound patterns of the language, and enjoy tongue-twisters and other forms of language play together.
- Read aloud to children from Big Books or charts large enough for all children in the group or class to see the print easily. Run a pointer or your hand or finger under the words to help children make the association between spoken words and written words.
- Part of the time, choose Big Books and/or make charts of stories, poems, and rhymes that make interesting use of alliteration, rhyme, and onomatopoeia.
- When sharing Big Books or charts, focus children's attention on the beginnings and ends of words. It is helpful to focus on elements that alliterate and rhyme before focusing on individual sounds.
- The most effective and efficient phonics instruction focuses children's attention on noticing onsets and rimes. During the discussion of onsets and rimes, you and the children can make charts of words with the same sound pattern (to help children use analogies to read new words).
- Read alphabet books with children, and make alphabet books together.
- Read with children other books that emphasize sound—books such as *Noisy Poems,* edited by Jill Bennett; *Deep Down Underground,* by Oliver Dunrea; and Dr. Seuss books. Comment on sounds.
- When reading together, help children use prior knowledge and context plus initial consonants to predict what a word will be; then look at the rest of the word to confirm or correct.
- Talk about letters and sounds as you write messages to children and as you help them compose something together or individually. This is a very important way of helping children begin to hear individual sounds in words as well as learn to spell some of the words they write.

- Help children notice print in their environment—signs, labels, and other print.
- When children demonstrate in their attempts at writing that they realize letters represent sounds, help them individually to write the sounds they hear in words.
- Provide tape recordings of many reading selections for children to listen to as they follow along with the written text. It helps to provide small copies of the text, not just a Big Book or chart (Weaver et al., 1996).

Teachers can conduct research in their classrooms to see which strategies and combination of strategies are effective for children. For struggling readers, it is essential to identify early what works and what doesn't, and to provide individual support for decoding, automatic word recognition, and comprehension.

Fluency

Many children who are able to use phonics knowledge to decode texts are unable to do so fluently and automatically. The National Reading Panel concluded that fluency, an important component in skilled reading, is often neglected in the classroom. James Hoffman, an affiliated research scholar with the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA), uses the phrase build-up reading to refer to a set of instructional strategies that promote more automatic levels of processing. Fluency is defined as: "the facile processing of continuous text that supports and reflects meaning seeking strategies" (1998, p. 11). (See Handout 10.)

According to CIERA's research, two elements of instruction appear to be influential:

- Extensive practice in text that is relatively easy for the student (few challenging words)
- Direct instruction by the teacher in fluent reading

Hoffman suggests that teachers look for texts that:

Stopping to savor the language and art of a beautiful picture book and the metaphorical language of poetry enriches our understanding of the text.

- Provide support through pictures—in particular, pictures that will cue difficult words for the students
- Provide support through repeated phrases or words
- Provide support for students because they offer rhyme or rhythm cues
- Provide support for students because they build on familiar associative conceptual patterns (e.g., the sun shines; cows give milk)
- Offer a supportive conceptual organizing pattern (e.g., days of the week, letters of the alphabet)
- Build cumulatively through a story sequence (e.g., This is the house that Jack built; I know an old lady)
- Provide repeated sound patterns within words (e.g., many "at" words; many words that begin with the same consonant (such as pitter, patter).

The researchers identified three aspects of fluency in oral reading as being important. They encourage teachers to provide explicit explanations about fluency—talking about and modeling how these three aspects of fluency are important:

- Word emphasis
- Phrasing
- Pauses (within sentences and between)

They suggest these instructional strategies:

- **Impress Reading:** The teacher reads along while the student is reading aloud.
- **Echo Reading:** The teacher reads (with expression) a section of the text; the student reads the same section.
- **Story Reading:** The teacher reads the entire story. She shares her enjoyment of it. The teacher and student talk about it. The student reads it.
- **Repeated Readings** of the story by the student, with or without the teacher
- **Reading along with a tape recording of a story** by the student, with or without the teacher (Hoffman, 1998)

Children can practice reading aloud at home to their pets, to teddy bears and family members, and at school with friends. At Helen Baller Elementary School in Camas, Washington, after children have practiced reading a book of their choice, they play "Four Corners." In this activity, four children (one in each corner of the room) read from their chosen book to a group of classmates. Because each child chooses a book that is relatively easy for him or her to read, each child can be successful.

A caveat. It is important to note that while fluency is a crucial competency for all good readers, fluent reading is not just "fast" reading. Understanding and interpreting text often requires that we go slowly, stopping to reflect on what we are thinking and feeling as we read. Stopping to savor the language and art of a beautiful picture book and the metaphorical language of poetry enriches our understanding of the text, and helps us to become better readers and writers.

Children Identified With Reading Problems

Research has shown that programs that identify at-risk children in the first grade and begin intervention before a history of failure has set in can provide children with the experiences they need to be successful at school. Effects of programs that begin after first grade are much less significant (Slavin, Karweit, & Wasik, 1993; Spiegel, 1995). The authors of *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* concluded that "deferring intervention until third or fourth grade should be avoided at all costs" (p. 326). While effective interventions with young children at risk for reading difficulties are clearly preferred over later ones, it is important to point out that children are not "all washed up" if they are not reading at grade level by grade three. According to Schoenbach and colleagues (1999):

> The assumption that children who have not become good readers in the early grades will never catch up is both incorrect and destructive. Further, the companion assumption that children who learn to read well in those early years have no further need for reading instruction is also misguided (p. 6).

Similarly, Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) concluded that the "worldwide success of adult literacy programs provides clear evidence that one can be taught to read at any age from late preschool through adulthood" (p. 865). He attributes the difficulty that children experience when they enter elementary school with low levels of emergent literacy skills to the fact that schools provide an age-graded rather than a skills-graded curriculum. "Early delays are magnified at each additional step as the gap increases between what children bring to the curriculum and what the curriculum demands" (p. 865).

Getting children "ready for next year." Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Czibo, and Hurwitz caution that for the lowest-skilled readers in middle and high school, problems with comprehension are often widespread. However, decoding is often assumed to be the problem. "For such students, being sent back to the beginning of reading instruction, only reinforces their misconception that reading is just saying the words," they explain (p. 7). In the rush to "get children ready for next year," it is important for primary teachers to keep this finding in mind and to see that reading for understanding is a lifelong task. Unless children understand that reading is a meaningful and enjoyable activity, they are unlikely to become good readers.

When children spend large amounts of time learning isolated skills, such as decoding, they may initially score well on standardized tests that measure these skills. However, after grade three there is no longer a strong relationship between phonics knowledge and reading proficiency (Chall, 1983). After that time, comprehension increasingly depends on vocabulary, conceptual knowledge, verbal reasoning, and the ability to sustain attention.

The National Reading Panel found that while phonics instruction produced substantial growth among younger children at risk for developing future reading problems, it "failed to exert a significant impact on the reading performance of low-achieving readers in 2nd through 6th grades" (§2, p. 133). They concluded that further research is needed to determine what constitutes adequate remedial instruction for low-achieving readers.

We know that many rich and varied language and literacy experiences in the preschool and primary years help children develop the skills and attitudes that lead to lifelong reading and writing. As discussed earlier, reading aloud and discussing stories are two of the best ways for children to develop a love of reading and, in turn, become proficient readers. (See Pages 65-86.) But whole-class reading may not be sufficient for children who have had few experiences with storybook reading. Based on her work as a teacher and researcher, Moustafa concurred with Wells (1986) finding that many opportunities for "one-on-one interaction with an adult centered on a story" is required for children who have seldom been read to in their preschool years. She advises, "If a child is experiencing difficulty in learning to read we should not ask if he or she knows the sounds of letters but if he or she has been read to extensively" (1997, p. 79). The development of phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge begins in these early reading activities.

Effective reading instruction for all children. The report by the National Reading Research Council, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow et al., 1998), concluded:

> There is little evidence that children experiencing difficulties learning to read, even those with identifiable learning disabilities, need radically different sorts of supports than children at low risk, although they may need more intensive support. Childhood environments that support early literacy development and excellent instruction are important for all children. Excellent instruction is the best intervention for children who demonstrate problems learning to read.

Among the recommendations of this landmark synthesis are:

- Schools with greater numbers of children at risk for reading difficulties must have extra resources. These resources should be used to reduce class size and student-teacher ratios, teacher preparation and experience, availability and qualifications of specialists, quality and quantity of instructional materials; school libraries and physical environments will be at

least equal to those of schools whose students are less likely to have difficulties learning to read (p. 328).

- Supplementary programs can neither substitute nor compensate for poor-quality classroom reading instruction. Supplementary instruction is a secondary response to learning difficulties. Although supplementary instruction has demonstrated merit, its impact is insufficient unless it is planned and delivered in ways that make clear connections to the child's daily experiences and needs during reading instruction in the classroom (p. 328).
- Instruction should be provided by a well-qualified reading specialist who has demonstrated the ability to produce high levels of student achievement in reading (p. 327).
- Volunteer tutors are effective in reading to children, for giving children supervised practice in oral reading, and for allowing opportunities for enriching conversation, but not usually in providing instruction per se, particularly for children having difficulties.

Summary

Healy (1990) observes that "coming to grips with verbal logic, wrestling one's mind into submission to an author's unfamiliar point of view, and struggling to make connections appear to be particularly taxing to today's young intellects" (p. 25). Throughout their preschool and school years, children need many engaging and rewarding experiences with oral and written language to build a strong foundation for thinking, feeling, imagining, interpreting, synthesizing, and creating. Gaining phonics knowledge in the context of meaningful reading, writing, and wordplay activities helps children use this knowledge to read fluently, automatically, and with comprehension.

Books That Facilitate Phonemic Awareness

Teachers can provide many enjoyable activities that promote the development of this important competency. We know that children develop phonemic awareness from the oral and written language they are exposed to during their preschool and primary years. In particular, books and songs with rhymes and alliteration, and language play, such as tongue-twisters and Pig Latin, help children learn to hear and manipulate the separate sounds in words.

Nursery rhymes are a particularly rich source of rhymes and rhythm, and have helped generations of children develop phonemic awareness. Author Nellie Edge describes nursery rhymes as "basic cultural literacy—they are gifts of language children deserve to win" (1999, p. 33).

Dr. Seuss's many rhyming books have long enchanted readers—from toddlers to adult:

The cat in the hat. (1957). New York, NY: Random House.
The cat in the hat comes back. (1958). New York, NY: Random House.
Green eggs and ham. (1960). New York, NY: Random House.
Hop on pop. (1963). New York, NY: Random House.
There's a wocket in my pocket. (1974). New York, NY: Random House.
One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish. (1981). New York, NY: Random House.
Dr Seuss's ABC book. (1986). New York, NY: Random House.
Fox in sox. (1990). New York, NY: Random House.

Rhyming books by popular children's author Maurice Sendek include:

Chicken soup with rice. (1990). New York, NY: Harper Trophy
Pierre: A cautionary tale in five chapters and a prologue. (1990). New York, NY: Harper Trophy.
Alligators all around: An alphabet. (1991). New York, NY: Harper Trophy.

More Favorites:

Hughes, S. (1998). *Alfie's ABC's.* New York, NY: Lothrop Lee and Shepard.
Archambault, J., & Martin, B., Jr. (1989). *Chica chica boom boom.* New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
Berenstain, J., & Berenstain, S. (1987). *Berenstain bear book.* New York, NY: Random House.

STORYTELLING, STORY ACTING, AND WRITING: ESSENTIAL LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE FOR ALL CHILDREN

> *The richer the repertoire of storytelling styles a child is exposed to, the more possibilities for that child to develop his or her own powerful narrative voice, one that reflects both his community, his family, and his inner life* (Engel, 1997).

Anyone who has been around young children knows that they can be great storytellers. By the age of four, many children can tell complex stories about personal experiences, but the beginnings of storytelling start much earlier. Researchers (including parents) have found that around the end of the second year, a "narrative sense of self" emerges. These narratives help to "get ordinary life under control" by anticipating the day's events, sorting out the week's routines, and recounting experiences, both real and imaginary. Combining fantasy and reality comes easily to toddlers, as this story related by a mother of her two-and-a-half-year-old son Sebastian demonstrates:

> Yesterday Sebastian picked up one of my books and opened it and said, "Sit down, Mommy, I am going to tell you a story." And then he started off: "Once upon a time there was a giant who drank his milk. And then his tummy hurt so he went home and threw up. And then he closed the door. And then he went on an airplane to visit his grandma."

Studies have shown that forming a narrative of a personal experience aids retention of personal memory and that children can more easily remember facts when they are put into narrative form. Wells (1986) studied children in Bristol, England, and found that those who told and heard stories at home under the age of four were the most likely to learn to read easily and with interest once they got to school.

Children who may feel uncomfortable with the written word may be quite adept at storytelling. According to researcher Penelope Engel, "storytelling is perhaps the most powerful way that human beings organize experience and the single strongest predictor of literacy" (1997, p. 3). She explains:

> Storytelling is an essential, perhaps the essential activity of human beings. It serves a myriad of functions for the young child. Stories allow children to learn about their culture, but also serve as a kind of passport into the culture. Children tell stories as a way of solving emotional, cognitive, and social puzzles and to sort out problems or concerns. Perhaps most importantly, stories are one of the fundamental ways in which we each create an extended self. The developing child's cumulative repertoire of stories gives him or her a sense of self across time and situation (p. 8).

Children's stories provide valuable insight into what they think about and how they interpret their experiences. When children attempt to recount an event, attentive listening and substantive questions encourage children to build the story and

help them to "build a relationship that extends beyond the immediate context" (Engel, 1997, p. 9). By participating in genuine conversations—discussing past events and shared experiences—adults and children are building a shared past, a past on which to build long-lasting relationships. Engel suggests three kinds of experiences that promote storytelling ability during the early years:

- Having conversations—plenty of them, and long ones—with adults
- Talking about the past and the future, even before your child can do this on her own
- Hearing and participating in stories of all kinds

Many children enter school filled with poetic images and unique word usage and are attuned to the different rhyming patterns of poetry. A study by Engel found that four-year-olds are quite attuned to the different types of rhyming patterns, formats, and metaphoric imagery of poetry. After listening to authors such as Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath, the children in her study were invited to dictate their own stories in response. In their stories, they incorporated the styles used by these authors. Similarly, Bearse (1992) found that in her study in which third-grade children read and discussed fairy tales, then wrote their own fairy tales, the children internalized the cadences, rhythms, and particular phrases characteristic of fairy tales.

Dictating stories to an attentive adult can help children develop their storytelling ability and develop an understanding of how sound maps onto print.

When teachers and children together explore different genres (e.g., folk tales, fantasy, historical fiction, nonfiction, first-person monologues, poetry, and third-person narration), teachers can help children attend to the linguistic features, vocabulary, and structures of written language. An example mentioned earlier from a first-grade classroom that had been studying Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories* illustrates how children then incorporate the language patterns of literature into their own stories. An imaginative six-year-old provided this explanation of why ladybugs are all female:

> Once up a time there were ladybugs and man-bugs. But they were attacked by an army of ants. The man-bugs were very brave and fought back. But the ants were too strong, and the man-bugs all died defending their wives and children. To this day, there are only ladybugs.

Clearly, when young children's storytelling is encouraged, children's narrative voice can have a valued place in classrooms.

Language Experience

Just as reading a story requires the reader to *enter* an imaginary world, writing a story requires the writer to *create* an imaginary world. For young children, writing is often an arduous task. A young writer must be able to physically manipulate a pencil and reproduce print from memory in order to say what he or she has to say (Cooper, 1993). Although learning to write independently is an important goal in the primary years, dictating stories eliminates the necessity to learn everything at once; children's emerging narrative voice can be temporarily freed from the constraints of the mechanics of writing. Dictating stories to an attentive adult can help children develop their storytelling ability and develop an understanding of how sound maps onto print. (See Handout 11.)

In this approach, often referred to as language experience, teachers act as scribes, writing children's words as they dictate them, listening carefully for the narrative thread, and helping children

clarify their thoughts. As these stories are reread by the author and his or her classmates, children begin to match the remembered words with the printed ones. Language experience activities integrate all aspects of literacy: speaking, listening, reading, and writing, and are particularly effective for children learning English as a second language.

When adults write down children's stories as children tell them, children learn that:

- What I *think* I can say and discuss with others
- What I *say* can be written and shared with others
- What I *write* can be read by myself and others
- What we *read* can be thought about, shared, and discussed (Nelson & Linek, 1999, p. vii).

In addition to writing original stories, students and teachers can share an experience, such as a visit to a museum or a beach. Together, they discuss the experience, and the teacher writes children's observations and descriptions on the board or chart-pack paper. After writing several sentences, the teacher asks the students to read what they have all just written together. It is easy to see how these activities help to build the classroom community. Patsy Cooper observes:

> Each teacher must strive to know who the children are who have come to share their very lives with her. In every way possible, her classroom and curriculum must make room for each one of the children's stories, for only then will the children be free to trust teachers, and, thus, free to learn (1993, p. 8).

A variety of strategies may be used. For each strategy, you can ask children to read the words they have dictated to you while you point to the words, drawing their attention to letters and words. In order to help children feel comfortable recounting their own experiences and to demonstrate your own interest in stories, teachers can tell their own stories, based on personal experience or imagination.

Story starters—such as asking for a dream or an adventure, responding to a picture (one that the child draws or paints or a photograph or painting), or merely prompting with "once upon a time," —can help children get started. Dramatic play offers an especially rich source of stories that can be incorporated into storytelling activities, particularly group storytelling (Soundy & Genisio, 1994).

When teachers observe children's play, they can record interesting and entertaining incidents to use during storytelling. For example, in a group setting, teachers can remind children of a previously observed dramatization of a picnic, a voyage to outer space, or a monster's invasion of the school. Props such as puppets, flannel boards, and music help spur children's imagination; pillows and mats can add to the relaxed, collaborative atmosphere that encourages genuine sharing (Soundy & Genisio, 1994).

Expressing Thoughts and Feelings With Words

> *One day there was a sunshine. And the sunshine was unhappy. And why? Because no other suns didn't want to play with him and the sunshine said "And I don't want to play with the other sunshines either." And she went to play with the sunshine.*

Once upon a time there was a little girl named Emily,
And it was a sad time for her because she fell down at school.
Her mother and father were not at home
And they never came to pick her up.

I'm so mad at Kagan. If you be in front of me, I'll be in front of you. I didn't like it when Kagan sat in front of me. I was there first. I was there before you.

Helping children express thoughts, feelings, and opinions verbally and in writing can begin in preschool and continue throughout a child's school years. At Helen Gordon Child Development Center in Portland, Oregon, children are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings—in letters to friends and parents, in poems, and in stories. Supported by teachers who write children's dictated words just as they are spoken, children write about rejection, fears of abandonment, and injustice, as illustrated by the stories above. As Steve Franzel, a teacher of three- through six-year-olds, explains:

> I usually use writing as a means to a goal, to validate children's feelings about separation, to help resolve conflict—as crisis prevention. I hear someone screaming and I go over to help them use their words to express their needs and feelings. Then I ask the child, "Do you want to write it down, write a letter?"

The process is such an integral part of the day's activities that the children explain it to new adults in the classroom and expect them to take dictation, just as they might expect their shoes to be tied. Frequently throughout the day, children use writing to sort out their feelings and at times to come to terms with their own behavior. For example, the following letter was written after four-

year-old Tony watched his classmate leave for the doctor to have stitches in his forehead, following an altercation involving a broom. As Tony thought about what to write to Mark, anger was replaced by a sense of responsibility:

> I'm sorry Mark. I hit you with the broom. Why did you want to take my broom? I was just about to color with the chalk and you were trying to take my broom. I was coloring in five seconds. I wanted to give him a hug before he left.

Four-year-old Heidi expressed her complex thoughts on friendship and rejection in a prose poem written about and to her friend Olivia:

> Olivia is a good friend.
> Sometimes she doesn't play with me.
> Today she said, "Don't follow me."
> I was upset.
> Then I was angry.
> Then I said, "Bad Olivia."
> Then I walked away.
> Just like Olivia
>
> Read this note and then you will
> Find out about me
> And your friend Heidi.
> Love, Heidi
> To Olivia

Resolving conflict through negotiation and problem solving, and learning to imagine how others think and feel are critical competencies for all adults. Language experience activities can provide young children opportunities to learn these lifelong skills. Franzel concludes: "Language becomes a way to support children's power—their ability to deal with a peer, with conflict, with sad or scary feelings. Words empower them to express themselves—to handle life."

Some Suggested Language Experience Activities

- Spread pictures out on a table.
  Ask children to choose one that they find interesting and to think about the picture.
  Ask children to dictate a story, poem, or impression.
  Ask children to illustrate their stories.
- To encourage storytelling, ask children for a story, a dream, or an adventure or prompt with "Once upon a time" and other story starters.
  Write down what was said.
  Ask children to illustrate their stories.
- When reading aloud, ask children to close their eyes and visualize the scene.
  Ask them to share their visualizations.
  Ask children to illustrate their scene.
  Finally, ask children to tell you about the picture while you write down what was said.
- After a field trip or other experience, ask children to tell you about the experience while you write down what was said.
- Read a story, poem, song, or legend.
  Ask children to retell the story.
  Write down their words on chart-pack paper.
  Illustrate the story. These stories make good "wall" stories.
  Read the children's retelling out loud with the child's (children's) help.
- Read a story to the class. Identify the story grammar—plot, setting, characters, themes.
  With the class, write a story with similar grammar, but with the children's own ideas and words.
  Record their story on chart-pack paper.
  Ask children, individually or in a group, to illustrate the story.
- Tape recorders can be useful resources for early literacy experiences. Children can listen to songs, or follow along in a book as they listen to it being read aloud on tape. Children can record family stories; their own made-up sto-

ries, poems, and songs; or themselves reading aloud. And they can listen to them again and again. Hearing a recording offers children an opportunity to revise a story to add more details, a different ending, or new characters.

- While reading aloud, ask children to think about what it reminds them of from their own experience. Children can expand on their individual connections to write stories from their personal experience.
- When children are experiencing strong emotions about an event or another person, ask them if they would like to write a letter, poem, or story expressing how they feel.

Many of these activities can be done individually or in groups. Stories can be published and become an important part of classroom and school libraries. Children's stories, poems, and letters can be displayed in classrooms and hallways and published in laminated books that can stay in the classroom and be sent home to families. Children often read their own messages to themselves after they are written, matching print to their remembered words. They also learn to recognize their classmates' entries.

Pretend play, in which children make up increasingly complex stories and act them out, leads children into storytelling, writing, and reading.

Making inferences is a process of creating a personal meaning from text—combining what is read with relevant prior knowledge or schema (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). Several studies have found that children comprehend and make inferences better when reading child-authored texts than when reading other texts. Because children's own words reflect their own experience, children develop the habit of bringing their background knowledge and experience to reading and writing, enhancing comprehension and engagement.

Acting Out Stories

While all of these language experience activities aid the development of and an appreciation of literacy, acting out stories brings them to life and links children's love of dramatic play to more formal storytelling. Pretend play, in which children make up increasingly complex stories and act them out, leads children into storytelling, writing, and reading. McLane and McNamee (1991) explain:

> When children create imaginary situations in pretend play, they invent and inhabit "alternative" or "possible" worlds. This is similar to what they do when they listen to storybooks, and to what they do when they read or write stories themselves. Indeed, there are similarities between pretend play and storytelling, and in the kinds of competence the two require. Many children make up their first stories in the context of pretend play, creating and enacting their own dramatic narratives (and reenacting stories they have heard being read aloud). Indeed, one of the things that attracts young children to pretend play is the chance to tell stories. Later, many children are attracted to writing and reading for the same reasons: They find they can participate in stories told by others (p. 3).

Studies of the play-literacy connection have found that the social nature of play has a positive effect on measures of print knowledge, emergent story reading, and story recall (Rowe, 1998). Dramatic play supports cognitive development by providing opportunities for symbolic manipulation and verbal reasoning, and social development through social interaction and opportunities for collaborative problem solving (Berk & Winsler, 1995). In sum, fantasy play contributes to social maturity

and the construction of diverse aspects of language and cognition to enhance:

- Overall intellectual performance
- The generation of creative ideas
- Memory for diverse forms of information
- Language competence, especially the capacity to reason theoretically
- The differentiation of appearance and reality
- The playful stream of verbal narrative that comments on and assists us in coping with our daily life (Berk & Winsler, 1995)

Linking Fantasy Play to Story Reading

Just as children often make up their first stories in the context of pretend play, children's fantasy play is enriched by hearing and telling stories. Teachers can link children's fantasies with storytelling by encouraging children to act out stories from books and by creating stories from children's play. For example, when teachers listen carefully to children's pretend play, they can bring the fantasies back into the classroom by including them in group storytelling.

In addition, teachers can place props and books in activity centers—a boat with plastic farm animals for *Mr. Gumpy's Outing*, hats and costumes for the *Little Red Hen*. Cooper (1993) tells about a preschool teacher who placed a copy of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (which she had read aloud earlier) and a small wooden boat in the housekeeping corner. She was delighted to see one four-year-old immediately begin to act out the story upon finding the props. Rowe (1998) found that children in her study had a strong need to link play and books, and skillfully shifted between book-talk and book-related play.

Acting out storybooks, songs, poetry, and children's own dictated stories aids the development of narrative skills. These activities enhance overall intellectual performance and the generation of creative ideas, memory, and language competence. Teachers can strengthen the dramatic play-storytelling connection by encouraging children to act out their own dictated stories and the stories they hear in the classroom. Glazer (1989) suggests the use of paper-bag prop stories to stimulate acting out stories:

> Put a book familiar to the children in each of three to five different paper bags. Fasten the book jacket or a photocopy of one picture from the book onto the front of the bag. Put props associated with each story into the appropriate

> bag. Props should represent story objects, settings, characters, sequence, and other elements important for the child's role-playing (p. 23).

Acting out stories can help students of all ages to become actively involved in a story. In *You Gotta Be the Book*, author Jeffrey Wilhelm outlines practical ideas for helping reluctant adolescent readers go beyond word identification to visualizing and feeling the text through drama and art activities. For younger children, both spontaneous story acting and teacher-guided story acting help children connect literacy with drama. Acting out stories, both child- and adult-authored:

- Brings stories to life—enhancing story recall, imagination, and emergent story reading
- Encourages the creative use of language
- Gives children the opportunity to sort out problems and concerns
- Helps children make the transition from oral to written language (Berk & Winsler, 1985)

Based on 80 reports examined by Harvard's Project Zero, a causal link was found between classroom drama (enacting texts) and a variety of verbal areas. The researchers reported that:

> Drama not only helped children's verbal skills with respect to the texts enacted; it also helped children's verbal skills when applied to new, non-enacted texts. Thus, drama helps children build verbal skills that transfer to new materials. Such an effect has great value for education: verbal skill is highly valued, adding such drama techniques costs little in terms of effort or expense, and a high proportion of children are influenced by such curricular changes (Winner & Hetland, 2000, p. 4).

Vivian Paley, a preschool and kindergarten teacher and author of a number of books about her experience as a teacher, describes how she made the shift from a teacher-directed classroom (in which she was determined to teach the concepts that were in her mind) to a classroom in which she sought daily to uncover and describe the child's point of view. Over the years, storytelling, story acting, and fantasy play became her core curriculum.

Vivian Paley's Approach to Storytelling and Fantasy Play

> *A day without storytelling is, for me, a disconnected day. The children at least have their play, but I cannot remember what is real to the children without their stories to anchor fantasy and purpose. I listen to the children's stories three times: when they are dictated, when we act them out, and finally at home, as I transcribe them from my tape recorder. After that, I talk about them to the children whenever I can. The stories are at the center of this fantasy of mine that one day I will link together all the things we do and say in the classroom* (Paley, 1990).

In *Bad Guys Don't Have Birthdays*, Paley (1988) describes her transition from a Great Books discussion leader to kindergarten teacher. She writes that although the Great Books discussions often "sounded as if they were real discussions ... what I wanted desperately, was to avoid awkward silences" (p. 7). When she became a kindergarten teacher she had curriculum guides instead of printed questions:

> I still believed it was my job to fill the time quickly with a minimum of distractions, and the appearance of a correct answer gave me the surest feeling that I was teaching. It did not occur to me that the distractions might be the sound of the children thinking. ... Then, miraculously, I discovered the tape recorder and knew I could become my own best witness. To

> begin with, it revealed why my discussions seldom had the ring of truth; I had not yet figured out which truths the children wanted to pursue (p. 9).

For more than 20 years, Paley recorded children's conversations, stories, and acting-out stories, providing a rich documentation and analysis of children's points of view. She soon discovered that the themes which occupied free play were those that could not be discussed—fears of abandonment and rejection, new babies in the family, quarreling parents. Fantasy play, writes Paley, "is the first defense against every kind of fear" (1990, p. 162), providing a way to work out unspoken dilemmas in the safety of a pretend world. She also uncovered ample evidence of Vygotsky's observation that representational play contains rules for behavior that children must follow to successfully act out the play scene. Writes Paley (1990): "Fantasy play is not the least structured activity, though the structure is not provided by the teacher. The children are using the most reliable structure ever invented for thinking about anything: story" (p. 93).

Paley's books provide numerous examples of recorded conversations and stories that reveal that the "sounds of the children's thinking" are rich with philosophical debate; impeccable logic often is embedded in magical thinking; and private fantasy mingles with television cartoons and fairy tales. She writes:

> I record their fantasy play because it is the main repository for secret messages, the intuitive language with which the children express their imagery and logic, their pleasure and curiosity, their ominous feelings and fears. For the price of keeping order in the room I am privileged to attend the daily performance of private drama and universal theater that is called a preschool classroom (1988, p. vii).

Story Dictation and Story Dramatization

Although recording class discussions and children's fantasy play provided rich insight into the child's point of view, it was the connection between more formal storytelling and play that remained elusive for Paley. Dramatic play—both children's pretend play and acting out fairy tales, storybooks, poems, and songs—were popular activities. Children were also encouraged to dictate their own stories.

However, few children (and these were mostly girls) chose to tell a story "if they could do something else instead" (1981, p. 11). Obviously, writes Paley, "the words did not sufficiently represent the action, which needed to be shared" (p. 12). *Only when they began acting out each story the day it was written* (with the author as director), did story writing become a popular activity. "For this alone, the children would give up play time, as it was a true extension of play" (p. 12). According to Paley (1990):

> Stories that are not acted out are fleeting dreams; private fantasies, disconnected and unexamined. If in the press of a busy day, I am tempted to shorten the process by only reading the stories aloud and skipping the dramatizations, the children object. They say, "But we haven't done the story yet" (p. 25).

By the time Paley wrote *Wally's Stories* (1981), "acting had become the major integrating factor of the day, encircling and extending every other interest" (p. 66). On the 12-foot painted circle that was the stage, children dramatized three kinds of stories: picture-book stories, the children's own material, and fairy tales. Now the children's play and story writing were connected and enriched through stories of all kinds. Stories written by adults helped children learn new words and think in more complex and abstract ways. Fairy tales, in

particular, "with their superior plot and carefully structured dialogue, set the tone and established the themes that enabled us to pursue new ideas and look more deeply at old ones" (p. 67). Writes Paley (1981), "Fairy tales stimulate the child's imagination in a way that enlarges the vocabulary, extends narrative skills, and encourages new ideas" (p. 128).

The Power of Magic

"The key to the fairy tale is magic. Just thinking about magic was satisfying to the children," explains Paley. While many adults are disturbed by the magical thinking of children and believe that by confronting children with the errors of their "immature" thinking they can force children to move to an adult point of view, Paley views magic as the "common footpath from which new trails are explored. I have learned not to resist this magic, but to seek it out as a legitimate part of 'real' school" (1981, p. 4). In doing so, she discovered that "magic can erase the experiential differences among children." In *Wally's Stories* (1981), Paley describes a Japanese girl who was not comfortable with the other children and was afraid to speak English. But through memorizing lines from fairy tales, which she "carried around like gifts, bestowing them on children in generous doses," Akemi began to conquer English:

> "I am the wishing bird," she said, flying gracefully into the doll corner. "I wish for a golden crown," Jill responded, whereupon Akemi delicately touched her head with an invisible wand.
>
> Adults who go about quoting poetry seldom receive encouragement, but the children rewarded Akemi by repeating her phrases and motions. She correctly interpreted this as friendship. Whenever a child copied her, Akemi would say, "Okay. You friend of me" (p. 124).

Through the magic of fairy tales, Akemi progressed from memorizing phrases, to telling imaginative and complex stories, to story acting in a remarkably short time. Similarly, in *The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter* (1990), Paley tells the story of Jason, "the quintessential outsider," who, in the beginning of the school year, "speaks only of helicopters and broken blades, apparently indifferent to the play and stories that surround him" (p. 11). Gradually Jason learned to listen to and observe the other children, and through the context of play, entered the classroom community. A tape-recorded conversation between Jason and his classmates also provides evidence of Holbrook's contention that many children enter school with poetic images and unique word usage (1981, p. 94):

> "Pshush! Turn to one sword! Two swords can turn to one sword. One sword can turn into a hundred swords."
> "Save me, Superman! Turn my sword into a hundred swords."
> "Okay. There! The hundred rainbows. Now I turned them into a hundred arrows until God."
>
> Their unrehearsed poetry is astonishing. Only in play can they climb so high and so far, and Jason is as much a poet as anyone. He comes in from the playground to use the toilet and stops in the doorway.
>
> "Hi Jason," Samantha says. "You can be the rainbow baby. Joseph is the dad."
> "I can't. I have to go back outside."
> "Why do you?"
> "Because I'm running back and forth as fast as the sky and faster than the clouds" (Paley, 1990, p. 94).

Clearly, children, as well as adults, provide children with language models and conversational partners, and help children connect what they know to new knowledge and understanding. Teachers who have incorporated dictating and

acting out stories into their classrooms agree that there are many benefits—to children, parents, and the classroom culture. An early childhood teacher observed:

> What do I think the children learn? Well, they see me writing their words and reading their words, so they see the benefit of written text, for starters. They hear the words back a few hours later, see their word made flesh. We also publish their stories twice yearly, to accentuate the literacy benefits.
>
> But I believe that Paley's overall belief was that this program brings together the children in the room. They get to know about each other in a way that is truly meaningful to them. There is a relationship between their fantasy play and this program, and the storytelling becomes a forum for their unique expression in which the others participate.
>
> It provides the teacher with a vocabulary for communication that is made up of the images, symbols, and fears that are specific to those children. (We know, for example, how a particular child feels about bears. He fears them and is at the same time fascinated with them. He often chooses to play bears in other children's stories. The other children think of him when they see a bear in a book. They know how he feels, and his feelings affect their storytelling.). Paley said the stories became the culture of her classroom. Perhaps it is important for us to think about what makes the culture of our own classroom.

In *Wally's Stories*, Paley (1990) concludes, "Friendship and fantasy form the natural path that leads children into a new world of other voices, other views, and other ways of expressing ideas and feelings they recognize as similar to their own" (p. 34). When children and teachers create a classroom culture with shared vocabulary, meaning, and experiences, Paley's books demonstrate that it is friendship, fantasy, and literacy that flourish.

Leading children into literacy. Dictating and acting out stories are activities that lead children into literacy. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (1997), "The comfort zone of the oral tale can be the path by which they reach the written one." At the same time children's oral stories are becoming part of the classroom, opportunities to write independently are critical for literacy development. Author and teacher Donald Graves observes:

> Children want to write. They want to write from the first day they attend school. This is no accident. Before they went to school they marked up pavements, walls, newspapers with crayons, chalk, pens or pencils ... anything that makes a mark. The child's mark says, "I am."
>
> "No, you aren't," say most schools' approaches to the teaching of writing. We ignore the child's urge to show what he knows. We underestimate the urge because of a lack of understanding of the writing process and what children do in order to control it. Instead, we take the control away from children and place unnecessary road blocks in the way of their intentions. Then we say, "They don't want to write. How can we motivate them?" (1983, p. 3)

Opportunities To Write, With Various Levels of Support

> *The written language puzzle is a complex one. And as with most puzzles, children cannot solve it by being given only one piece at a time* (Dyson, 1982).

Just as research on emergent literacy has focused our attention on the interrelatedness of oral and written language, this same research has demonstrated the strong relationship between reading and writing. Like talking and listening, reading and writing are inseparable processes, each one informing and transforming the other (Ministry of Education, 1992; Sweet, 1993). Holdaway (cited in Ministry of Education) comments:

> Instruction has persistently separated reading from writing in a way that would be insufferable in learning to listen and talk. The two modes form an integral nexus of learning around common processes, and this, too, may be readily reflected in teaching. There are no logical or practical excuses for the dismemberment of literacy-only instructional precedents (p. 10).

Research shows that when reading and writing are taught together, the benefits are greater than when they are taught separately. When children write words, they attend to the details of those words. In this way, writing leads to improved phonemic awareness and word recognition, which in turn lead to improved reading. When children read, they attend to the linguistic features, vocabulary, and structures of written language that they learn to incorporate into their writing. Bearse (1992) found that in her study in which third-grade children read and discussed fairy tales, then wrote their own fairy tales, the children internalized the cadences, rhythms, and particular phrases characteristic of fairy tales. They also borrowed from the stories they read, sometimes unconsciously blending several stories into their own.

The example mentioned earlier from a Northwest classroom that had been studying fables illustrates how children incorporate the language patterns of literature into their own stories. The children in this classroom were encouraged to use developmental spelling in first drafts and in their journals:

> Chapter 1: Why do dogs chas CATS?
> Once apan a time in a far away land thar was a yung cat and Tow kitins. One day a dog came. But in this land dogs don't chas cats thaey like cats. And the dog saw the kitins and wanted to play with them so he askt the yung cat. And He said NO! so the dog got mad and foght. So for now on thay set a egsampel for ether dogs.

But long before children can express their thoughts with such sophistication, children are, in Durkin's words, "paper and pencil kinds—they scribble, copy letters of the alphabet, and write the names of friends and family members (cited in Dyson, 1982). Many teachers have found that among preschoolers, writing was the most popular beginning reading activity. Yet, by first grade, many children have lost their initial enthusiasm for writing. How can we help children become competent and enthusiastic writers? By letting them write, advises Graves. He describes a first-grade teacher who passed out blank page, hard-cover books with children's names embossed on the covers the first day of school:

> She simply said, "You can write in these books." They all did ... in their fashion. They drew pictures, wrote their names, made columns of numbers. Some wrote phrases, made invented spellings, and several wrote in sentences. The important thing is they all believed they could write. No one said, "But I don't know how" (1983, p. 3).
>
> Before the year was out these 25 first-grade children composed 1,300 five- to six-page booklets and published 400 of the best in hard-cover for their classmates to read. A third of these children used quotation marks accurately because they get them when they need them, when someone is talking on their pages. I struggled with quotation marks when I first taught them to my seventh-grade English class (1983, p. 4).

Beginnings

It is often said that children cannot write before they can read. But, as this example shows, in their first attempts at writing, children explore how written language works—"how meaning is conveyed through, and retrieved from, print" (Dyson, 1982). Young children often mix drawing and writing; they may assign meaning after writing, and they may express surprise that what they have written is not what they intended. Dyson (1982) provides these two examples of conversations with two five-year-old children who have just written a string of letters:

The use of developmental spelling helps children solve the puzzle of how print maps onto sound.

> "Is this a word, Mom?" asked five-year-old Chad.
> "No, that's not a word, Chad."
> "Well, when's it gonna be a word, Mom? And another thing, if it's a bad word, are you gonna get mad at me?"
>
> Sance: Guess what this spells? (Sance has written Loeed).
> Dyson: What does it spell?
> Sance: You gotta' guess it.
> Dyson: Okay. *Lo-eed.*
> Sance: Huh?
> Dyson: *Loeed.*
> Sance: *(with surprise)* That's not my dog's name.

Clearly, at this point, both Sance and Chad have a great deal of work to do before they have a working understanding of the relationship between spoken and printed words. How do Sance and Chad become the second- or third-graders who solve age-old problems regarding animal behavior, create their own poems and fairy tales, and write letters to pen pals? The answer, based on research in literature-based classrooms, is the opportunity to engage in many meaningful reading and writing activities (Dahl & Freppon, 1995; Purcell-Gates et al., 1995). While traditional writing lessons have focused on neatness, correct spelling, and letter formation, research on emergent literacy has drawn our attention to the paramount importance of meaning and purpose in the

process of learning to write. Daiute (1985, cited in Cummins, 1986) observes:

> Children who learn early that writing is not simply an exercise gain a sense of power that gives them confidence to write—and write a lot. ... Beginning writers who are confident that they have something to say or that they can find out what they need to know overcome some limits of training or development. Writers who don't feel that what they say matters have an additional burden that no skills training can help them overcome (pp. 5–6).

Through writing, children gain understanding of the written language system, of the relationship between print and oral language. As the two previous examples illustrate, young children's understandings of our language system are often very different from adult perspectives. Griffith and Leavell (1995/1996) observe:

> Children's initial explorations with written language will lead them to understand that a written word has characteristics separate from the characteristics of the "thing" it represents. One six-year-old was astonished that the letters "o" and "x" were read as "ox" because, as he explained, "That word isn't big enough to be ox." The child had not yet grasped the symbol system of written English (p. 85).

The use of developmental spelling (see Pages 96-97) helps children solve the puzzle of how print maps onto sound (see Handout 9). In addition, in their early attempts at writing, children learn to detect similarities and differences between the ways that various sounds are produced, and spelling, rather than random letters, becomes phonetic (Gough, 1997; Schickedanz, 1986). When children are able to express their thoughts while using their best phonetic spelling, they can focus on using language to communicate.

Because thinking is, of course, crucial to good writing, both writing and thinking benefit when young children are encouraged to concentrate on the content of writing rather than the form or mechanics of writing (Sweet, 1993). In *Dancing With the Pen* (Ministry of Education, 1992), the authors explain: "Allowing children to attempt spelling enables them to use vocabulary from their oral language which then flows on into their writing. Spelling is functional—it enables writers to express meaning. It is, therefore, a tool for writing; not a barrier to the writing process" (p. 59).

Moving to standard spelling. Teachers can encourage young children to move to standard spelling by modeling writing and providing an environment rich in opportunities to explore purposeful and meaningful print. "Spelling is much more than a courtesy to one's reader; understanding how words are spelled is a means to a more efficient and proficient writing and reading," say researchers Donald Bear and Shane Templeton (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2000, p. 223). In *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction*, the authors provide more than 250 word study, spelling, vocabulary, and phonics activities organized in a developmental sequence. A thorough discussion of the theoretical foundation for teaching spelling as a developmental process helps teachers plan activities appropriate to children's developmental level.

Walls filled with print—word walls, charts, word lists of various types, posters, children's work, poems and songs on chart-pack paper, and word cards with frequently used words—provide many ways for children to learn the standard spelling of a word. Dictionaries of various sizes and degrees of complexity and "banks" of juicy words (adjectives and verbs) help children to be confident and independent writers. In this way, children learn spelling in the context of reading and writing. Teachers can also target words from children's draft writing for additional practice; targeted

words should be those that children consistently spell almost correctly. However, even intermediate-age children often use invented spelling in a first draft, using standard spelling when their writing is for others.

"Writing Floats on a Sea of Talk."

In the early elementary years, it is the child's narrative voice that must find its way into the classroom. Vickie Spandel (1996) describes voice as the "writer coming through the writing. It is the heart and soul of writing, the magic, the wit, the feeling, the life and breath. ... At the primary level, voice is first noticeable in speaking, oral storytelling, and art" (pp. 11–15). By building on these competencies, teachers can help children develop their writing voice, as well.

"Writing floats on a sea of talk," reminds Britton (1970). Sharing and enjoying are critical aspects of writing. When children read and write their own stories and read those of other children, they share ideas and opinions and extend each others' stories (Dyson, 1987). In the process, they not only gain a sense of themselves as writers, but their reading comprehension is also enhanced.

By talking to each other about their work, bouncing ideas off each other, and helping each other solve problems, children learn to consider the needs of their audience, to think critically, and to connect their concerns with academic learning (Dyson, 1987). Dyson found that in her studies of young children's collaborative story writing, "the most elaborate verbal stories and the most flexible manipulation of narrative time and space occurred, not in the texts themselves, but in the children's talk" (1987, p. 415).

What To Write

Opportunities to write are limited only by the imaginations of children and teachers. Children can write individually and in groups; they can write in functional ways by making lists, charts, labels, and calendars, and by using sign-in sheets. They can write creatively by writing:

- Letters and e-mails to friends, relatives, and pen pals
- Wall stories (in which children retell an adult story or create a new story and illustrate it on large paper)
- Big Books (an original narrative, or a variation based on an adult-written book)
- Poetry, newspapers, and stories for publication
- In journals—about daily experiences, an adventure, a dream, a fantasy, a feeling, or to solve a problem
- In double-entry journals that provide two columns—one column for the student to copy a quotation or passage from the text, and another for the student to take notes and add his or her own reflections while reading
- Throughout the day in literacy-enhanced learning centers
- In response to art or to stories read or listened to; to rewrite a story ending; to write a sequel
- For research projects

While some topics can be teacher directed, choice is an important part of writing. In *Dancing with the Pen* (Ministry of Education, 1992, p. 27), the authors suggest that when learners choose topics successfully, they will:

- Value firsthand experience and their own knowledge
- Make use of their surroundings, both inside and outside school
- Discuss their ideas freely
- Research their ideas in a variety of ways

- Adapt and make use of their own and others' material and suggestions
- Show initiative in selecting their own topics for writing
- Feel confident enough to muse on selecting a topic

By modeling writing and thinking out loud while doing so, teachers can help children learn to think about not only letters and sounds but also how writers go about the task of thinking of what to say and how to say it. By responding positively to children's written communications, just as parents do to their children's first attempts at speech, teachers can help each child develop his or her own narrative voice.

Supporting the Writing Effort

Young children exhibit a wide range of proficiency in writing in the same ways they do with reading. While some kindergarten children's writing may consist primarily of drawing intermixed with a few letters, others may be writing full paragraphs. But all children can be successful when goals are individualized and when their efforts are supported. Teachers can support children's writing in a number of ways. Teachers who model thinking and writing can help children learn to think about letters and sounds and to see how writers go about the task of thinking of what to say and how to say it (Freppon & Dahl, 1991).

A kindergarten teacher reported that she saw a big change in children's ability to write when she began to use this metacognitive strategy: "It is not all right for me as a teacher to write without talking. Children need to see me thinking through the process. I model my thinking, and I see them learning to think about letters and sounds" (Freppon & Dahl, 1991).

Before children can write independently, they need a variety of demonstrations, as well as many opportunities to write with varying levels of support. In *Guided Reading, Good First Teaching for All Children*, Fountas and Pinnell (1996) describe four levels of support for writing:

- In shared writing, the teacher acts as a scribe while children dictate stories, although children may also do some of the writing.
- In interactive writing, all children participate in composing a large-print piece, which can be a list, a chart, pages of a book, or another form of writing. Teachers provide a high level of support with models and demonstrations, but individual children are involved in the writing.
- In guided writing or writing workshop, mini-lessons are provided on a variety of aspects of writing in group and individual settings. Individual conferences provide selected feedback.
- In independent writing, children use each other and the room as resources, with little teacher guidance.

"Reading Like a Writer"

Stories of all kinds enrich children's writing. We have seen that even young children spontaneously incorporate the rhythms, cadences, and language patterns of books they hear and read into their own writing. With a large library of books with rich language available, children have many models of good writing that will find their way into their own writing. In *Wondrous Words*, Ray (1999) explains how she can't help students write well all by herself:

> I need lots of help doing the teaching work, and I have found that help on the shelves of my library .... Day after day as I teach writing to many different students, I let writers like Georgia Heard and Gary Paulson and Cynthia Rylant and Jane Yolen help me do the important work of teaching students to write as well (p. 9).

When readers intentionally and deliberately study the craftsmanship of writers, they are, in Frank Smith's words, "reading like a writer." For example, picture books can be used by both older and younger readers and writers to examine form and structure, style and voice. Benedict and Carlisle (1992) point out that picture books provide the reader or listener with a "concentrated opportunity to examine an individual author's or illustrator's work, compare the work of several authors, explore a genre, and sample the wide range of possibilities available to writers" (p. 34).

Writing for an Audience

While extensive revision of written work can be a laborious task for young children, children of all ages can be encouraged to publish some of their work. When children know that their work will be read by real audiences, editing is seen as less of a chore. New Zealand educators have noted that "where publication has not been part of the writing program, or has been treated in a casual manner, there has been a general lack of interest in writing" (Ministry of Education, 1992, p. 72). Cummins (1999) observes:

> Children who learn early that writing is not simply an exercise gain a sense of power that gives them confidence to write—and write a lot. Beginning writers who are confident that they have something to say or that they can find out what they need to know overcome some limits of training or development. Writers who don't feel what they say matters have an additional burden that no skills training can help them overcome (pp. 5–6).

Students at Whittier Elementary School in Pasco, Washington, put their persuasive writing skills to the test in one of the many projects designed by staff and volunteers for the after-school program. In a multiage group of bilingual children in kindergarten through grade five, helium balloons with messages designed to persuade the person who found the balloon to write back, were sent aloft. "We received messages from as far away as Idaho. The kids were amazed," says their teacher.

At Cherry Valley Elementary School, the writing process is described as a recursive process that starts with sharing and enjoying, and progresses through a flexible process that includes the idea, a draft, editing, a closer look, publishing, and sharing and enjoying. (See Page 17.) Children begin in kindergarten to write for an audience and to think of themselves as authors. In Carla Farnstrom's fourth-grade class, children begin by sketching out a schematic overview of what the story will be about. Just as teachers do in kindergarten through third grade, Farnstrom encourages children to write about what interests them, what they know about or like. Each child works at the grouped desks to perfect his or her story, brainstorm ideas, or edit. They work at their own pace, with constant support from their fellow students and their teacher. The process goes like this:

Even young children spontaneously incorporate the rhythms, cadences, and language patterns of books they hear and read into their own writing.

- Each student writes the main topic in the center. It is circled, and surrounded by the ideas that they brainstorm about the topic. This sketch is always the first page of every student's story.

- Because all writing is for an audience, rather than simply an exercise, they also write at the top of the page: Topic, Audience, and Purpose. They decide whether they're writing a poem or story, whether it is to inform or delight, and whether the language is for a formal or casual reader.
- Then, after careful brainstorming of the topic and genre, they write.
- Each student's work is an ongoing work in progress that does not end by handing the piece in to the teacher. Students review and edit their own work so that they learn to correct grammatical and spelling mistakes, but also to read with a critical eye.
- Farnstrom reads each story and selects a few key things to concentrate on in her editing. At this point, although the spelling may be uneven, she may note that there are verb agreements that need attention and edit only those mistakes.
  - When students' work is returned to them at this stage, they may sign up for a conference with Farnstrom. The conference is a final collaborative editing session that is the precursor to the story's publication.
  - At these conferences, Farnstrom talks to students about their assessment of the piece and what they consider might need to be done to get it in final shape for publishing.

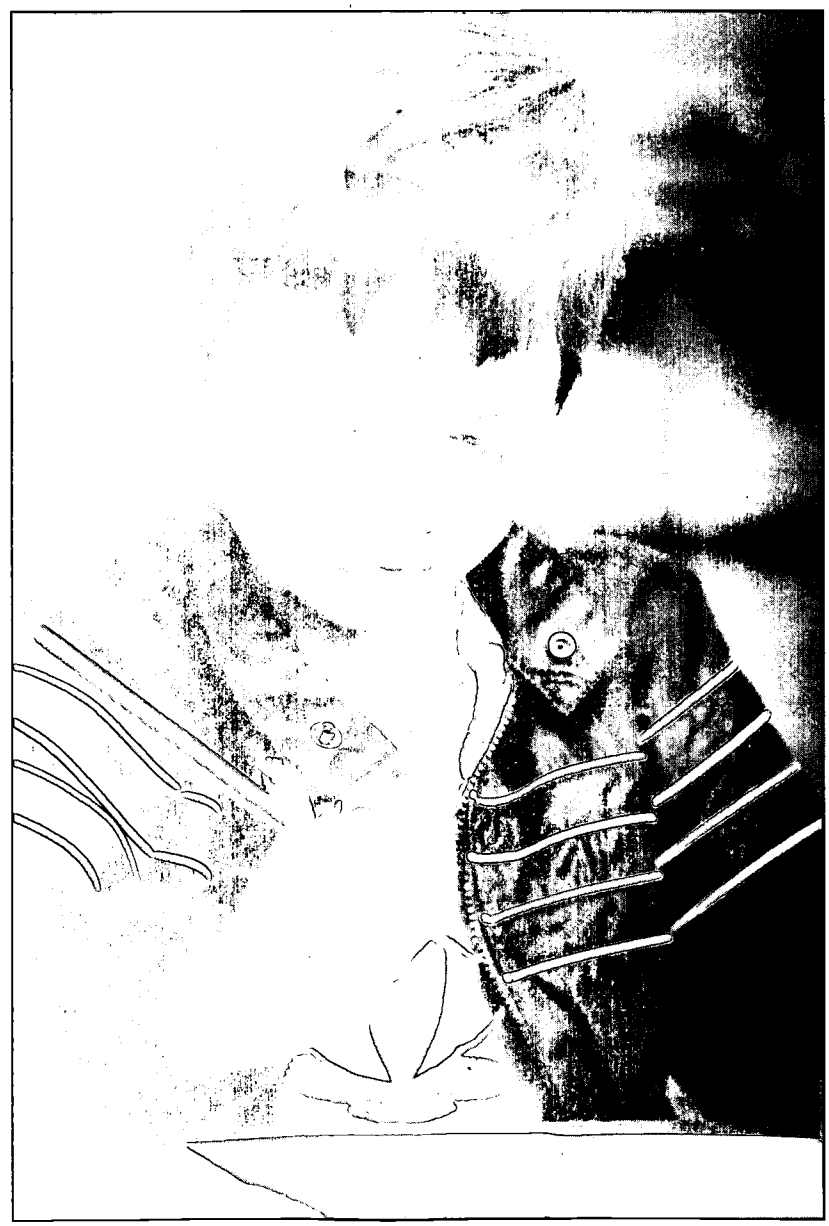
A busy publishing center. For years, children have been publishing their books, which are displayed in classrooms and the library, as well as traveling home with children to be enjoyed by the whole family. It soon became clear that teachers could not keep up with the volume of books that were ready for publishing.

This year an open, multipurpose room serves as a publishing center, complete with several older computers and a couch and rug. Manned by numerous parent and community volunteers who do some of the typing and all of the binding and laminating, the room is always full of groups of children anxious to see their book become part of the school community. Recently, their work has found a larger audience, due to a number of parents who regularly bring children's published books to Polson's doctors' and dentists' offices. Now, along with copies of *Field and Stream* and parenting magazines, local residents can not only read the latest student works, but they can also sign their name and write responses to the books on the comment page.

In addition, children's books can be found in a local nursing facility. This year, both in multiage groups and with their classrooms, children have been visiting a local nursing home and establishing relationships with one or more residents. Children then interview the residents, who frequently tell stories about their lives. Young children may simply remember as much as they can of these stories, while older children take notes or use tape recorders. They then write the stories, and bring them back to the residents for editing. Once published, stories are brought back to the nursing home, where the children read the stories to the elderly residents. The project has been met with enthusiasm from the staff at the nursing facility and the residents themselves. A social worker at the facility writes:

I have witnessed contacts between young and old, which can only be described as "touching." Residents are able to hold a child's hand or see a bright young smile. They look forward to these visits and are delighted by the children's eagerness to please and entertain. These intergenerational exchanges are a benefit for both age groups. They nurture an understanding and acceptance of age difference.

From a literacy standpoint, the project is well designed for many reasons. Students know that



they will share their products with residents in the nursing home. This makes the project more meaningful—they know their work will have an audience. The project is designed to spark conversations between generations—dialogues certain to expand students' vocabularies and to inform students about their community's history. As students revise and edit their work, they gain proficiency in their skills as writers.

Summary

As early as age two, children begin telling stories to organize their experiences, understand their culture, and hold onto their memories. Researchers consider storytelling to be an essential human activity. For children, storytelling fulfills a variety of important functions, including the development of a narrative "sense of self."

A variety of early language experiences can encourage children's natural storytelling abilities at a time when the mechanics of writing might stop the flow of their thoughts or stifle their budding imagination. Effective language activities integrate all aspects of literacy: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Classroom strategies include:

- Encouraging children to dictate their stories or describe their feelings to adult "scribes"
- Inviting children to act out stories, songs, poems, and other written words
- Encouraging children to engage in pretend play, and linking fantasy play with story reading and other classroom activities
- Teaching reading and writing together, and providing support appropriately matched to children's language proficiency
- Encouraging children to share their stories with an audience

As author Vivian Paley explains, paying careful attention to children's storytelling reveals "the sounds of the children's thinking," and helps teachers lead them toward literacy.

NURTURING EMOTIONAL AND AESTHETIC LITERACY: Learning To Read the Heart

Richmond Elementary teacher Ardine Kapteyn sits with a group of third-graders on the well-worn circle rug, reading a story. Despite the hour—lunchtime is fast approaching—Kapteyn has no difficulty keeping the attention of the 24 nine-year-olds, who are anxious to find out if the hero of The Small Person Who Had Feelings *will be able to cover up the feelings that he wears on his sleeve.*

"I wonder why a person would want to cover his lonely feelings with anger?" asks Kapteyn.

"Maybe he was afraid," offers Ruby.

"Yes, isn't that interesting, inside he was lonely and afraid, and outside he was ... What?"

"Angry," a chorus of voices answers.

"Yet even with all the angry patches he put on his sleeve, loneliness and fear were sticking out among the patches. So what do you suppose he did? From his father, who believed it was important for boys never to show fear, he borrowed "tough." Now he couldn't find room for any other feelings. There was only room for tough and angry."

But the story has a happy ending and a new "feeling" word to add to the children's vocabulary—acceptance. When the small person finds a friend and feels acceptance, all his real feelings are able to come out—proud, sad, happy, scared, lonely—"many of the feelings we have talked about," reminds Kapteyn.

Academic and Emotional Literacy Go Together

In schools such as Richmond Elementary, academic and emotional literacy go together. Tying literacy to emotional development is at the core of the curriculum at Richmond Elementary School (see above vignette), which ranks eighth of 754 Oregon schools in serving the highest number of children in poverty. Approximately three-fourths of the children in this Spanish bilingual school are learning English as a second language. Since the arrival of Principal Kathy Bebe 11 years ago, creating a common vocabulary and language for helping children deal with their emotions and behavior has been a primary goal.

Reading stories aloud, particularly stories that offer rich opportunities to discuss emotions, is a frequent activity. Children's author Katherine Paterson emphasizes the importance for young children to explore feelings and internal expressions—from happiness to creativity to grief and imagination—through stories. At Richmond, teachers use reading aloud as a springboard for discussing times when children felt frightened and lonely, proud and happy. Without interrupting the story's narrative thread, teachers help children to relate stories to their lives and to other stories they have read, and to build vocabulary and concept knowledge. Open-ended questions during and after reading keep children involved and encourage reflection: "How do you think Pisca felt when her dad said he was proud of her?" "When you have courage, does it mean you are not afraid?" "What does it mean to feel accepted?"

"Tying emotional development to literacy is hard to do in the electronic age of TVs and computers," Kapteyn says. "Kids are used to a sitcom where everything is resolved in half an hour. It is critical to share good literature with kids, and while we read, we share lessons along the way." These lessons not only help children develop an understanding of their own and others' feelings; they play an important role in meeting state assessment standards. "The goal is to raise the thinking level of the class," explains Kapteyn. "Our job is to help them learn high-level comprehension and interpretive skills, not just literal comprehension."

Through guided discussions of literature, children learn to make predictions, to imagine a setting, to identify with characters, to use the context to understand new words, to ask questions, and to become aware of the skills they are using to make sense of text—all the earmarks of active engagement in the reading process. "Oral language is the key component," Kapteyn says. "Many of our children enter kindergarten with language delays of two or three years, due to lack of experience. It's up to us to provide the experiences they need to develop strong language skills." Kapteyn continues:

> I try to figure out how children are learning language. Many of our kids come from backgrounds with low literacy. And in second or third grade, most children—even middle-class children—can't articulate their feelings very well yet. If you ask them how they are, they usually say happy or sad. But if I ask "what else?" they can come up with other words—disappointed, angry, proud, glad, curious. It's amazing, really, how their vocabulary and concept knowledge is growing and how much they do internalize of what we teach.

Beginning Early

Helping children express thoughts, feelings, and opinions verbally and in writing can begin in preschool and continue throughout a child's school years. In a Seattle Public Schools Head Start classroom, teachers read aloud Hans Christian Andersen's story of *The Ugly Duckling,* and the whole class talks about how the ugly duckling must have felt when everyone made fun of him. When a child uses a word that hurts another child's feelings, children are encouraged to call it "an Ugly Duckling word," and to make it clear that such words are not acceptable. "Ugly Duckling words are those that hurt your heart. Ugly Duckling actions are those that hurt your body," explains their teacher.

In *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension To Enhance Understanding*, authors Harvey and Goudvis (2000) describe inferring as the "bedrock of comprehension." "We infer in many realms. Inferring is about reading faces, reading body language, reading expressions, and reading tone as well as reading text" (p. 105). The authors describe a kindergarten teacher who organizes a game with a twofold purpose: She wants her students to have an opportunity to explore feelings, and she hopes to help them get a beginning handle on the notion of inferential thinking.

Every few days, she introduces an emotion—mad, sad, happy, disappointed, and frustrated—and writes it on a card. She reviews the nature of these feelings and then chooses one of the cards. She then pins it on the back of a class volunteer, who stands in the middle of the circle and turns around several times slowly so that everyone has an opportunity to see the card. The volunteer doesn't know which card she wears on her back. Classmates offer clues, always beginning with "I felt that way when _____," followed by a sentence that completes the clue, such as: my dog died, my dad didn't let me go to the movies, etc. From such clues, the volunteer infers the feeling (p. 106).

Making a Personal Connection With Text

Connecting emotions and background experiences with texts and integrating higher-level comprehension skills into a reading curriculum may take practice and persistence on the part of teachers and students alike. (See Handout 12.) Michelle McDonald, a former fourth-grade teacher at Captain Gray Elementary in Pasco, Washington, describes a literacy activity that began with little student enthusiasm, but became "a time of reflection, sharing, and empathy." In order to encourage children to make personal connections with stories, McDonald chose *Maniac McGee* by Jerry Spinelli, a book about a boy who runs away from a dysfunctional home and encounters racial segregation in the town where he lives. After a discussion of the basic premise of the book, she began trying to elicit from the students any experiences they may have had with racism and with feeling frightened and alone. McDonald explains:

"Ugly Duckling words are those that hurt your heart. Ugly Duckling actions are those that hurt your body."

> The discussion was lagging until I started talking about a movie that the book reminded me of. I shared the story line from the movie *The Outsider* produced by Francis Ford Coppola from the book by the same title, written by S. E. Hinton. This happened to be one of my favorite movies as a child. I told the students about my running home from school as fast as I could to see the opening credits when it happened to be on HBO. They got a real kick out of

hearing a personal story about their teacher. Once I described the story they began to come up with lots of examples. They shared about movies and stories they had seen or read, and about personal experiences. This really started the discussion off on the right foot.

Throughout the story, McDonald paused to have long conversations about how the little boy was feeling, and why he acted the way they did. At first, she got the "typical canned answers: bad, mad, sad, etc. I wanted more than that. I wanted the students to really think and connect with how he was feeling." So she kept probing: "What do you mean by mad?" "Where in his body do you think he felt that emotion?" "Have you ever felt that way?" Through such questioning, the students began to connect with the feelings of the character. They also shared some personal experiences of times they had felt overwhelmed with emotion.

"Students began to talk beautifully about the feelings illustrated in the book. It even began to spill into other areas of the day. The students became more eloquent about sharing their own feelings as well as predicting the feelings of their fellow students," says McDonald. The discussions continued when a student suggested that the class read aloud the *Diary of Anne Frank,* a book she had been reading during sustained silent reading (SSR). In order to provide the students a foundation from which to build, McDonald gave the students a mini-history lesson and helped them to connect it to the story of *Maniac McGee*:

> Once we got started, the students really were hooked; they wanted me to read and read and read and read. I would read, we would stop and discuss, I would read some more, and before I knew it an hour had passed like a minute. Our read-aloud book had become more than a transition between subjects or a relaxing listening time. It truly has become a time of reflection, sharing, and empathy. As a result of our discussion and sharing I truly believe that students have a better understanding of the texts we read and connect with them on many, many levels.

Songs, Poetry, and Visual Art

> *Each writer must lead us musically through the pages of words, like a conductor leading an orchestra. Poetry began as oral art; like picture books, it is meant to be read aloud. Poems began as chants that invoked magic or told the story of a people and were handed down from generation to generation. The rhythm of words and lines was a way to help people sing and dance and remember the poems. We are bound to rhythm by the beat of our hearts, the passing of our breath, the cycles of the days and seasons* (Heard, 1992).

Infants are biologically primed to respond to the human voice, its rhythms and melody. Infants and young children love to rock, walk, dance, and bounce to the steady beat of a nursery rhyme; they are soothed by the soft sounds of a lullaby. And all the while, singing boosts early language skills, enhances memory and listening skills, and increases attention span. Song picture books provide a natural bridge between art, music, literature, and language. When children have opportunities to read along with a memorized song, they engage in what songwriter and author Nellie Edge refers to as "magical memory reading." According to Jalongo and Ribblett (1997), these books support literacy by:

- Building on familiarity and enjoyment
- Providing repetition and predictability
- Expanding vocabulary and knowledge of story structures
- Promoting critical thinking and problem solving
- Fostering creative expression and language play

Although songs and finger plays usually play a central role in preschools, they are less likely to be a part of elementary classrooms. But singing can and should be an important part of every young child's school day. Poetry and songs are fun to memorize and can last a lifetime. How could we possibly memorize the alphabet—26 unrelated sounds—without singing the well-known song?

Unusual vocabulary and complex word structures are often taken in stride when they appear in songs and poetry. It is likely that a whole generation of moviegoers still remembers the Pythagorean theorem, not from their high school geometry class, but from Danny Kay's spirited song about this theory in *Merry Andrew*. "The brain is a musical brain," says songwriter and author Nellie Edge:

> The rhythms of sound have a powerful impact on cognition. The language you remember with word for word accuracy from childhood is songs and rhymes. Singing can create a relaxed, joyful mood—the optimal state for language learning. Songs allow the brain to chunk large amounts of information into a single memory space, thereby accelerating learning naturally. Music and rhymes are powerful hooks to memory (1999, p. 23).

Playing and experimenting with language can lead to expanded vocabulary and to creative use of language—rhythm, alliteration, rhyme, and imagery. The ability to hear and use these aspects of language is strongly correlated with learning to read. In particular, children develop phonemic awareness as a result of the oral and written language they are exposed to during their preschool and elementary years. Books and songs with rhymes and alliteration play a large role in this development (Adams, 1990; Cunningham & Allington, 1994).

Accompanying songs and poems with body motions, dance, and finger play aids large and small muscle development and helps children integrate language, social, cognitive, and physical competencies. Research has shown that the right and left hemispheres of the brain can be stimulated to work more efficiently together through movement. From a baby's first attempts at pat-a-cake and peek-a-boo to the elaborate finger plays and dances of preschool and elementary school, songs and poetry help children develop humor, creativity, and a love of language in all its richness and complexity.

"Poetry Is Like Directions for Your Imagination"

Children's natural ability to attune to rhyming patterns, cadences, sounds, and metaphoric imagery can be enhanced by early experiences with reading and writing poetry. After completing a successful unit on poetry, first-grade teachers Duthie and Zimet (1992), concluded that, "It is a genre that is not only accessible to primary children, but can be the genre that excites children and motivates them to read and write" (p. 14). "Poetry," one child concluded, "is like directions for your imagination."

Reading and writing poetry help us to attend closely to language—the metaphor and image. Teachers can help children create words that "paint pictures" in our minds. Poet and teacher Georgia Heard explains:

> Poems rely on sounds as well as pictures to create a world. But in poetry the images embedded in the text are then painted in our minds. When I teach children to write poems, I suggest they try a technique I sometimes use when I write: try and see in their minds the image of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. I tell them to gather the world around them—what they see, what they hear, taste, smell, and touch—and try and paint it, using words (1992, p. 116).

Utilizing the expertise of local writers can help both teachers and children get started. NWREL editor/writer Tony Kneidek found that young children—even those who have had little experience with poetry—respond enthusiastically to an approach that includes reading, discussing, writing, and illustrating poems. In his workshops, he often began by talking about his own interest in poetry and learning about the interests and experiences of the children. After reading and discussing several poems written by poets as diverse in their style and content as Maya Angelou, Shel Silverstein, Dr. Seuss, and Countee Cullen, he then introduced a prop to help children brainstorm (as a group) a number of descriptive words that they then incorporated into individually written poems.

In a poetry workshop with first- and second-graders, children generated an imaginative list of words to describe the taste, feel, smell, sounds, and sights of wind chimes. The children's words were transcribed in large letters to a chart pack. Then the children selected and arranged the words into whatever form and order they wanted to create their own poems, and illustrated them. "The beauty of the exercise," Kneidek said, "is that there is no way they can do anything wrong, and they know this." While many of the words used in the poems were the same, the children's writing and illustrations reflected their own feelings, thoughts, and imagination.

Poems and songs, which often contain rhyming words, alliteration, and repetitive structures, also provide support for early reading experiences. Through regular opportunities to sing songs and read poems as their teacher points to the words, children can learn words, phonics, punctuation, and spelling rules.

Alona Dickerson's Classroom, Camas, Washington

In Alona Dickerson's second-grade classroom, many reading strategies are learned through poems and songs that the class recites and sings as a group, while Dickerson or children point to the words. At the beginning of each week, all first- and second-grade classrooms are introduced to a new rhyming poem or song that is easily memorized. As a group, children identify words that they do not yet know by sight. Because they learn the new words in an enjoyable group activity, it is easy for children to read them and to find them in other contexts. "Learning new words, phonics, punctuation, and spelling rules through poems and songs helps children see connections everywhere," notes Dickerson:

> Children say, "Look, I see a c followed by an e." They begin to see patterns. We catch them in different ways—we catch them with music, with the visual arts—everyone learns differently. And singing also builds community. Every week, an illustrated poem book goes home and parents are included in the community through sharing the poem with their children.

Dickerson is an articulate and enthusiastic spokesperson for the philosophy and practices she learned in her visit to New Zealand and from subsequent study. However, she wasn't always convinced of the worth of literature-based approaches. "I was the ditto queen," confesses Dickerson. "I believed that my job was to keep the kids busy while I worked with reading groups. It took a while before it felt OK to read out loud and to give kids time to read and discuss what they read." But seeing children, particularly struggling readers, become successful and confident readers and writers has allayed her earlier fears that children's skills might suffer in a nontraditional classroom.

Mary Harrison Primary School, Toledo, Oregon

The ease with which music is integrated into classroom activities reflects the early childhood background of many of Mary Harrison's primary teachers. Soft music—*Peer Gynt Suite,* Native American flute music, African vocal harmony, and music from the Shaker religion—plays in the background of many classrooms, as children explore the inviting activity centers or read quietly with a friend. Classes read poetry individually and in groups, and singing together is a frequent activity that eases transitions between activities, enhances class solidarity, and provides nonthreatening opportunities for rhyming and rhythm, important activities for developing phonemic awareness.

Creating group poems is one of the many ways that teachers encourage collaborative learning. (See Page 101.) To help children become comfortable with writing poetry, music and poetry are interwoven into classroom activities. Karen Johnson, a first- and second-grade teacher, encourages children to start their writing with non-rhyming poems and with topics that children know well. A seven-year-old's poem about art surpassed even Johnson's expectations. It begins "I LOVE ART. Art is your imagination. It is expressing feelings. It is COLORS."

Creating Rich Sensory Images

Creating mental images during reading enhances understanding and brings life to reading. The propensity to create vivid images during reading correlates highly with overall comprehension (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Linking children's stories to pictures—their own and others'—fosters the creative use of language, aesthetic sensitivity, and abstract thinking, and helps children construct rich mental models as they read.

Picture books, which often have some of poetry's qualities, can inspire children of all ages to connect art and poetry. Poet and teacher Georgia Heard helps her students create picture books from poems and turn poems into picture books:

> Sometimes I ask students to choose a poem they love, one they've written or read, and turn it into a picture book. I suggest they study poems that have been turned into picture books like Robert Frost's *Birches* or *Stopping by Woods,* and then illustrate the central images of the poems they've chosen. In this process, the poem's images must be clear enough to illustrate; every word must be accurate and essential to the painting of the poem. Art then becomes a way of interpreting poems, and a way to help revise, making clear what doesn't belong (1992, p. 119).

At Helen Gordon Child Development Center, teachers have found that writing in response to a picture fosters the creative use of language, aesthetic sensitivity, and abstract thinking. Pictures are spread out on a table and children choose their own picture, one that is interesting to them. Children are asked to "think about the picture and dictate a story or impression." Teacher Jacobson explains, "Just to be able to think of a story is extremely abstract—to look at a picture of an animal or person and think of something that could be happening and build on it." In this response to a picture, Justin moves from description to fantasy:

> The mountain is wonderful. I like it a lot. I like people climbing on it. Sometimes I like to climb down the mountain and swim in the water. That's a sun shadow on the picture. It looks like a rock in the water. I see cracks on land. I see bushes in the back. I think I would like to see a seagull. I want to ride on a whale's back.

Inspired by poems read to her by her grandfather and in the classroom, a four-year-old wrote a poem in this response to a picture of a forest scene. She entitled it "Green":

> Birds are colorful.
> The rainbow that's not there.
> Why do I wonder 'why' everyday?
> Because I can't remember why.
> Birds like rainbows—flutter in the sky.
> But where is the rainbow?

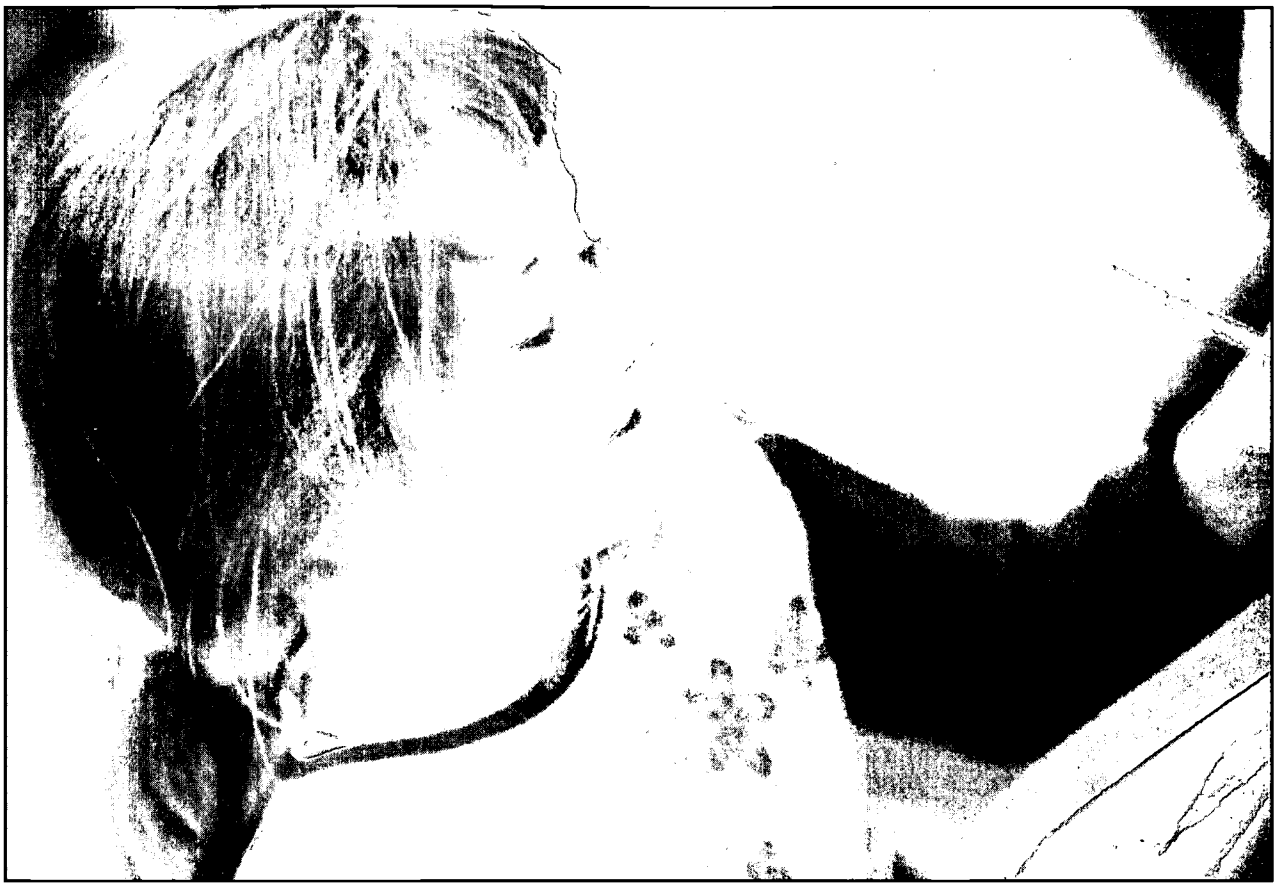
Art and Literacy

From the *Cherry Valley Literacy News*

The contribution of art to literacy is multilayered. Since most young children are wildly creative, experiences in various artistic mediums allow for expression of this creativity.

The opportunity to discuss a piece of art with a sensitive adult not only helps a child clarify his thoughts and feelings about his piece, but also validates his perceptions. Discussion of a child's artwork enables the teacher to gain insight into the child's interests, hopes, and dreams in an unobtrusive way, thereby increasing her understanding of the child.

Art projects provide a natural springboard for oral and written language activities, which are an integral part of literacy. What better way to encourage speaking and writing skills than to speak or write that which you have created yourself and know best?



Art and struggling readers. Particularly for children who have trouble engaging with a text, linking art and literacy is critical. True engagement involves the ability to enter into the world of the story—to imagine a setting, to interpret a plot, to build relationships with characters, to visualize or "see" what is being read. Readers who cannot visualize their reading are unlikely to want to read (Eisner, 1992; Enciso, 1992; Wilhelm, 1995). One frustrated young reader, when asked his thoughts on a reading assignment, exploded: "I can't think about it, talk about it, do anything about it, if I can't see it!" (Wilhelm, 1995, p. 476).

Asking children to create visual art as a response to reading and to write stories as a response to visual art helps children build rich mental models as they learn to read and write. Honigman and Bhavnagri (1998) point out, "when children reflect on artists' work and create their own artwork, they develop an understanding that shape, color, and composition are elements of a language, just as the spoken and written word and nonverbal gestures are elements of a different kind of human language" (p. 211).

Comparing the work of well-know artists, such as van Gogh and Matisse, and creating original art using the style of these artists can help all children learn the techniques that artists use, at the same time becoming familiar with great art. Comparing the art in picture books offers many opportunities for children to make connections between art and print. On the Eric Carle Web site, two teachers discuss the projects they engaged in with their students after reading multiple books by Eric Carle and watching a video that describes his work;

> In my art classes, I compare the two artists Eric Carle, who was raised in Germany, and Romare Bearden, an African American artist.

Both of these artists used the medium of collage. My second-graders enjoyed making their own collages and seeing the art of the two artists who use the same medium from different perspectives.

Including parents in art projects adds to the excitement. A first-grade teacher wrote:

My first-graders are absolutely enthralled by Eric Carle's books. As a culminating activity to our author study, we invite parents to join us for a morning of creativity. We watch the Eric Carle: Picture Writer video and then we paint! Each parent-child pair makes six papers using watercolors. As the pictures dry, the children read aloud from their favorite books—*The Very Lonely Cricket, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Little Cloud*. When the papers are dry, the parent and child work together to make a collage of their own. I laminate all finished creations after the artists sign their work. We then have a snack—a sheet cake frosted to look like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar.* Students who are now in high school come back to tell me that they still have their collages! What a wonderful way to celebrate books and reading! (www.eric-carle.com/bb-picture.html)

Readers who cannot visualize their reading are unlikely to want to read.

Looking at, talking about, and reflecting on visual artwork also helps children develop aesthetic sensitivity. They learn that art consists of symbols that communicate ideas, experiences, and feelings that can be shared (Honigman & Bhavnagri, 1998). In a thematic study of reading and great artists, children in second-grade teacher Jane Kolakowski's class listen to and read stories about artists' lives and work. In their projects, children develop and refine the visual senses and extend their understanding of story elements by first discussing and exploring paintings, and then imagining that they can enter a painting. One seven-year-old wrote (using developmental spelling) the following in response to the painting *Stafford Heights* by Garl Melchers:

I smell grain in the field. not that many houses are around. There are many trees. It is sunny and there is a dirt path. There's a field on a hill. It is bright outside the air is sweet the trees smell lik pinecones. There are no flowers here. My mouth waters when I tast sweet graps. You can not hear the birds singging. You can feel a breeze. You can't see anyone outside. The wind plays tug-of war with my hair (Kolakowski, 1995, p. 28).

Kolakowski comments that the insight and maturity expressed in the metaphor of the last sentence is brought out by the child's interaction with art:

The study verifies for me the research of Elliot Eisner (1992) in which he writes that the arts' contribution is its offer to everyone of an ability to feel and participate in the lives of others. Art is communication with oneself and others. Art unites the rational and the emotional. ... I want my students to feel, to dream, and to know that they have something to share with the world. This is the process that art study begins (p. 35).

Mimi Walker's Classroom, Juneau, Alaska

In Walker's classroom, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci are not just Ninja turtles; they are objects of indepth studies by the entire class. Children's artwork covers the walls, inside and outside the classroom, including children's renditions of the *Mona Lisa* and portraits of Matisse and van Gogh. To achieve the effect of a "real" portrait, Walker introduced a technique described in Betty

Edwards's best seller, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. Children take a line drawing of an original painting and, turning it upside down, they then carefully copy what they see (with special attention to negative space), rather than what they know to be there. The portraits, which are devoid of stereotypic renderings of eyes, nose, and mouth, bear a striking resemblance to the original paintings.

Walker also uses her training in educational approaches popular in Reggio Emelia (a town in Northern Italy renowned for its innovative schools) to help children expand their artistic awareness and develop techniques not typically used by such young children. For example, for Mother's Day the children created portraits of themselves and their mothers after studying the life and work of American Impressionist Mary Cassatt, an artist who is well known for her mother-and-child portraits. "Kids need to understand and grab hold of something," says Walker. "To make her real, we talked about her life, about how she never had children but painted beautiful portraits of mothers and children. The kids really get the connection; they'll say, 'She must have really loved children.'"

While Walker enjoys the ubiquitous stick figures that are the hallmark of five- and six-year-old children, for this project she wanted them to capture the softness and feeling of a Cassatt painting. Employing a Reggio Emilia technique, she projected a slide of one of Cassatt's paintings through a clear easel; the children then traced the outline of mother and child onto their blank paper on the other side of the easel. Using oil pastels, children added features and other details to individualize their portraits. The results surpassed even Walker's expectations and served to honor parents and include them in the school community.

Summary

There is some research that suggests that art and music support children's overall academic development. In particular, spatial reasoning—a skill critical for success in science and math—may be enhanced by musical experiences. According to a University of California at Irvine study, three- and four-year-olds learning piano scored an average of 34 percent higher on a test of spatial reasoning than children instructed in computer use. Music, drama, and arts instruction have been tentatively linked to higher SAT scores and higher scores on tests of creative thinking, art appreciation, reading, vocabulary, and math (Winner & Hetland, 2000).

Yet, in response to meeting higher standards, there is a tendency to narrow the curriculum, to view art and music as expendable, to view social emotional development as outside of the school's purview. And this narrowing is occurring just when the world is moving toward multiple kinds of communication, toward oral language, pictures, sounds, diagrams, videos—a world that increasingly requires creative and collaborative problem solving, imagination, and multicultural competence. To be successful in such a world, children need many opportunities to cultivate their imaginations and engage their emotions through drama, athletics, art, music, and dance. Integrating these separate disciplines into the curriculum supports the development of literacy—written, oral, and aesthetic.

While researchers have been able to demonstrate some relationships between studying the arts and academic achievement, researchers from Harvard's Project Zero argue that justification for arts programs must be based on their inherent merit. "The arts offer a way of thinking unavailable in other disciplines." Winner & Hetland conclude:

> Let us remember why societies have always included the arts in every child's education. The reason is simple. The arts are a fundamentally important part of culture, and an education without them is an impoverished education leading to an impoverished society. Studying the arts should not have to be justified in terms of anything else. The arts are as important as the sciences; they are time-honored ways of learning, knowing, and expressing (2000, p. 7).

MONITORING CHILDREN'S PROGRESS

> *Evaluation practices, particularly testing practices, operationalize the school's values. More than what educators say, more than what they write in curriculum guides, evaluation practices tell both students and teachers what counts* (Eisner, 1991).

As Eisner (1991) points out, evaluation practices have a profound influence not only on instruction but also on the school climate itself. In schools that support children's emergent literacy, authentic assessments that reflect the child's performance during typical activities in the classroom are the primary assessment strategy. Teachers are encouraged to be "kid watchers" (a term coined by Yetta Goodman in 1978), seeking to understand learning from the child's point of view. Vivian Paley (see Pages 118-121) writes about the important role of self-reflection and sensitive attention to children's perspectives:

> The act of teaching became a daily search for the child's point of view, accompanied by the sometimes-unwelcome disclosure of my hidden attitudes. The search was what mattered—only later did someone tell me it was research—and it provided an open-ended script from which to observe, interpret, and integrate the living drama of the classroom (1989, p. 7).

In the last 10 years there has been a proliferation of authentic assessment strategies that provide a comprehensive picture of children's learning and development. These strategies provide valuable information to share with parents, and they provide information to individualize and improve instruction. The nature and content of these assessments need to reflect the myriad ways that children gain knowledge about language and the strategies that emergent readers have developed to construct meaning from text. Since learners move through multiple stages of development in their journey to proficiency, teachers need assessment tools to monitor children's progress at benchmark points (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). It is crucial that these assessments be easy to administer in brief periods of time and the results be useful to teachers as they plan instruction or as they attempt to diagnose the literacy problems of struggling readers.

Following are brief summaries of authentic assessments that can help guide instructional decisions regarding literacy.

Writing Assessment

Many teachers are familiar with the six writing traits used to assess children's writing in grades three and above, developed at NWREL by a number of researchers. The traits have been adapted for children in the primary grades (Spandel, 1996). At the primary level, these traits are noticeable in artwork, storytelling, and speaking before children are able to reproduce these features in their own writing:

- **Ideas:** Look for details in children's artwork and storytelling.
- **Organization:** Think balance and harmony.
- **Voice:** Individuality! Sparkle! Love of writing, drawing, life itself.

- **Word choice:** Look for original expression, and note children's curiosity about word meanings or usage.
- **Sentence fluency:** Listen for the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of the word pattern. Fluent writing has cadence, power, rhythm, and movement.
- **Conventions:** Notice and acknowledge beginning use of conventions, such as writing from left to right, beginning at the top of the page, facing all the "E's" the same way, and putting spaces between the words. Later, children will attend to spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar.

Analyzing children's invented spelling offers teachers an observation window into children's emerging understanding of symbol-sound correspondence. As children progress from writing only a few consonants to represent a word, gradually adding vowels, and discovering that letters represent phonemes, teachers can relate spelling instruction to the child's level of understanding. (See Pages 96–97.)

Retellings are both good instruction and good assessment.

Retellings

In a retelling, children—orally or in writing—retell a selected text to convey their understanding of it, including all relevant details, responses, inferences, and associations. Obviously, oral retellings are more appropriate until students are able to write independently. Retellings are both good instruction and good assessment. The benefits include greater oral language complexity, improved reading comprehension, increased awareness of the different ways in which texts are structured, greater articulation of connections within and between texts, and heightened use of literacy language and genre-specific conventions in students' own writing and speaking. Retellings provide the teacher with a window into students' reading strategies, background experiences relevant to the text, and understandings of particular texts (Braunger, 1996).

Retellings enrich students' language in all its forms—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—and help to develop an interest in learning to read, as the following example provided by reading researcher Jane Braunger illustrates:

> After reading *Tacky the Penguin* to a first-grade class, I invited them to retell the story. I wrote their composite retelling on a chart pack. Predictably, momentum built for the retelling after the first few contributions, and soon the room echoed with shouts of "And then he ...," "It was funny when he ..." and "But then what happened was ..." Several sheets of paper and about 20 minutes later, they helped me read their group retelling aloud. It contained all the major events of the story, the faithfully repeated refrain, "Tacky was a weird bird," as well as students' responses to characters and situations in the story. The children planned to illustrate their version and bind it so they could enjoy reading it—just like the book it was based on—again and again. The supportive, interactive group process here had the immediate benefit of increasing students' engagement with and enjoyment of the text. It also provided a safe group experience as a model of how students would later produce retellings on their own (pp. IV–12).

Retellings for assessment purposes. Braunger advises that when retellings are used for assessment purposes:

- Students should be told before reading or listening to a text that they will be asked to retell it
- The use of retellings should come after students have had extensive experience with retellings in instruction

- Students should be encouraged to read the text as many times as necessary to feel comfortable writing or orally retelling without referring back to it

Assessing Concepts of Print, Directionality, and Knowledge of Letters and Words

Authentic assessments of children's initial understandings of print involve students in activities similar to those found in most primary classrooms. The assessments examine children's concepts of print, directionality, letters, words, the alphabetic principle, and their attitudes about and interest in reading books. A more formal assessment developed by Marie Clay (1985) is the *Concepts About Print Test* (CAP). The scoring sheet for this individually administered test is a checklist in which teachers identify the skill the student demonstrates. The test is divided into three sections:

- **Book Orientation Concepts** (can locate the front of the book, knows that print—not the picture—tells the story, knows where the story starts, etc.)
- **Directionality Concepts** (moves finger to the right on any line, shows that left pages precede right, pages, tracks words as the teacher reads, etc.)
- **Letter and Word Concepts** (uses word-by-word matching, observes change in letter or word, can identify upper- and lower-case letters, observes punctuation marks, etc.) (Clay, 1985)

Teachers can use the CAP or develop their own versions with materials that are available and familiar to their own students. In addition to the CAP, Clay (1985) also developed the Observational Survey to check children's knowledge of letters, phonics, and word recognition. The types of items in Clay's materials are also available from a variety of informal inventories that can be of assistance in determining student performance at the emergent level. As students progress toward early reading teachers can use the Running Record described in the next section to assess word identification skill and fluency.

Running Records of Oral Text Reading

In *Highlight My Strengths: Assessment and Evaluation of Literacy Learning*, Leanna Traill (1993) describes Running Records as "the most insightful, informative, and instructionally useful assessment procedure you can use for monitoring a child's progress in learning to read." Developed by Marie Clay, Running Records are a form of miscue analysis. Regie Routman (1994) explains:

> The teacher observes, records, and analyzes any unexpected words the child says in the process of reading aloud a connected text. Running Records are used for instructional purposes to evaluate the child's reading behaviors and set directions for teaching, to check the difficulty of a text for a child, and to monitor progress. Although it is possible to teach yourself to take a Running Record, the easiest and best way to learn it is to have a trained Reading Recovery (a short-term early intervention designed to reduce and prevent reading failure) teacher demonstrate for you and practice with you (p. 325).

Running Records can provide information that helps teachers match books with children's reading level, as evidenced by their ability to read the words in the text with 90 to 95 percent accuracy. Based on careful assessment, teachers can also provide "mini-lessons" tailored to the needs of each child. For example, if a child is consistently having trouble reading or writing particular combinations of letters, such as "br" or with endings or beginnings of words, teachers can target these sounds.

Using Assessment To Individualize Instruction

These two assessments used together—Running Records and retellings—can provide information on both decoding and comprehension. Routman (1994) recommends combining Running Records with retellings and using Running Records with good readers about three times a year, and about every six weeks with struggling readers. In addition, careful observation of children's literacy activities and frequent conferences in which teachers talk things over with children can provide information about learning styles, attitudes, strategies used, strengths, and needs.

Literature logs of books read provide another important piece of information. Asking children to include their favorite language, character, information, or event from the book encourages children to value the book for its literary and informational value rather than just sheer numbers of books read. In addition, strategy logs in which children record the strategies they use to decode words and to understand text help children become aware of their thinking as they read. (For example, "Reread to increase understanding," or "Found the small word in the big word.") These logs also give teachers insight into the strengths and needs of each child.

"It's not just reading or not reading." Developmental continua can provide important information about a child's literacy growth. Developmental continua reflect a developmental view of teaching and learning and provide evidence of an overall pattern of development. They make explicit some of the indicators, or descriptors of behavior, which provide guideposts for teaching. For example, the Juneau School District has developed a reading continuum that describes key behaviors for emergent, beginning, developing, expanding, and independent readers in the areas of comprehension, skills/strategies, and attitudes and behaviors (see sidebar). According to the continua, an emergent reader in the area of comprehension:

- Relies on memory for reading
- Responds to stories
- May label pictures
- May tell a story from pictures using oral language
- May pretend to read
- May invent text with book language
- Focuses on meaning from pictures rather than print

The skills and strategies an emergent reader demonstrates include:

- Identifies own name in print
- Understands how books work, e.g., top to bottom and front to back

The attitudes and behaviors of an emergent reader include:

- Shows curiosity about print in environment
- Participates in the oral reading of familiar stories

Literate behaviors and dispositions. As the continua show, observation and keeping records of children's literate behaviors, as well as literacy skills, can yield important information about literacy development. Dahl and Freppon (1995) define literacy skills as the concepts and behaviors that learners use to read and write, such as decoding, writing, spelling, and grammar. Literate behaviors include a broad range of behaviors and dispositions that are important for engagement in reading and writing, including:

- Learners reflecting on their own literate activity, such as talking about what they know how to do, what they are going to do next, and what they see as a challenge

- Using oral language to interact with written language by reacting to a story
- Explaining a piece of writing
- Describing a favorite book to another person
- Choosing and persisting in literacy interactions
- Valuing one's own experience and personal language and connecting them with written language
- Communicating about written language experiences

Linking early language and literacy experiences with school. In order to link the experiences of early childhood with eventual success in school, Washington state's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Early Childhood Literacy Task Force has identified characteristics of young children in the areas of verbal communication, reading, and writing. The "Framework for Achieving the Essential Academic Learning Requirements in Reading, Writing, and Communication" includes:

- An outline of the continuum of emergent literacy and literacy development (reading, writing, speaking) in the context of early childhood education (birth to eight years of age)
- Identification of "emergent literacy benchmarks" for early childhood education
- Identification of appropriate instructional strategies—developmentally and individually appropriate
- Strategies for assessing progress toward benchmarks
- Information on how to use assessment information to inform education decisions
- Information that facilitates the transition from early childhood education to K–3 education

Developmental continua can help teachers see the continuity of language and literacy development. By identifying the behaviors that lead to reading and writing, teachers can see, in one teacher's words, that "it's not just reading or not reading, meeting standards or not meeting standards." Rather, behaviors such as pretending to read and creating mock messages are seen as important developmental milestones.

Portfolio Assessment: Developing Shared Memories

In the last few years, the use of portfolios for children of all ages has gained in popularity. Portfolios are an organized collection of children's work that provides a continuous record of a child's progress over time, and portfolios typically travel with the child throughout the primary grades. One of the strengths of portfolios is that they reflect multiple voices and perspectives: those of children, parents, and teachers. Based on the assumption that children should be active participants in their own assessment (rather than passive objects of assessment), children are encouraged to make judgments about their own work and reflect on their progress during frequent individual and group conferences. Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer (1991) observe:

> Portfolios have the potential to reveal a lot about their creators. They can become a window into the students' heads, a means for both staff and students to understand the educational process at the level of the individual learner. They can be powerful educational tools for encouraging students to take charge of their own learning (p. 61).

Language arts portfolios may include writing samples, artwork, self-portraits, stories, audiotapes of children's oral reading and speaking, photographs, teacher and parent reflections, summaries of progress, and children's reflective comments about their work. Because portfolios are the result of a collaboration between teachers, children, and parents, they play a critical role in helping to develop shared meaning and shared memories.

In summary, effective classroom assessment is integrated with curriculum content and instructional strategies, providing information that is valued by teachers, parents, and children. Such an approach, in Meisels, Dorfman, and Steele's words (1995), "puts assessment back where it belongs—in the hands of teachers and children, and in the classrooms in which they work."

Developing Authentic Literacy Assessment in Juneau, Alaska

Ten years ago, when Juneau schools moved toward integrated curricular approaches that emphasize understanding over rote learning, primary teachers sought alternatives to the psychometric method of assessment; they found few models that met their needs. They wanted assessments that would address a broader definition of intelligence than that of standardized tests; encourage children to become reflective, self-directed learners; provide information to individualize instruction; and help parents to see their children's progress.

They wanted a lot, and during the next few years, a number of the district's primary teachers worked together to develop a language arts portfolio system that would meet all these criteria. The language arts portfolios developed by Juneau primary teachers are now used in all the district's first- through fifth-grade classrooms and are increasingly used in districts throughout the state. They include a student reflection letter, written teacher narratives, reading and writing samples, a reading attitude survey, observations of speaking and listening, and reading and writing continua.

The continua not only chart student performance but also provide guideposts for teaching. "They provide the best training," says Mary Tonkovich, a district librarian. "In developing and using the continua, some already good teachers have become very excellent teachers by really thinking about the process of learning to read and write" (cited in Sherman, 1996, p. 10).

CONCLUSION

> *Do not underestimate your power as an educator: your power to make all of your students feel included, and perhaps most importantly, your power to plant hope* (Wu, 1992).

At the heart of a comprehensive literacy curriculum is the understanding that reading is language. Clearly, children need many enjoyable experiences with listening to, reading, and writing meaningful texts. They need demonstrations of strategies for decoding and comprehension. And they need numerous opportunities to share ideas and opinions, to contribute to joint writing of prose and poetry, and to share and extend each other's stories. But, as Cambourne (1995) points out, the key to successful literacy experiences is engagement: "It didn't matter how much immersion in text and language we provided. It didn't matter how riveting, compelling, exciting, or motivating our demonstrations were; if students didn't engage with language, no learning could occur" (p. 186).

Entering an imaginary world through reading and creating an imaginary world through writing are intellectually demanding tasks. In order to do so, children must be able to meaningfully connect new information with prior knowledge and experience, make the sustained effort required by reading and writing for meaning, and be confident in their ability to be successful. Children who have had few positive experiences with reading and writing may struggle with one or all of these necessary conditions for true engagement.

Research on resiliency has highlighted the pivotal role of teachers in the lives of young children. According to Cambourne (1995), "Learners are more likely to engage with demonstrations given by someone they like, respect, admire, trust, and would like to emulate" (p. 188). If schools are to help all children to become lifelong readers and writers, careful attention to relationships—both within the school and between the school and families and the larger community—is crucial. In an action research project at a Missouri school, teachers began an effort to improve children's writing with the goal of "fixing the students' writing." Through the case-study research, that goal shifted to "fixing the teaching methods," and finally to "fixing the relationships between teachers and students" (Krater, Zeni, & Cason, cited in Braunger & Lewis, 1997).

Schools, Benard (1993) points out, have become a vital refuge for a growing number of children, "serving as a protective shield to help children withstand the multiple vicissitudes that they can expect of a stressful world" (Garmezy, 1991). Benard has identified three key features of families, schools, and communities that have protected children growing up in adversity: caring and support, positive expectations, and ongoing opportunities for meaningful participation.

A major theme of this book is the importance of building on the experiences that children bring to school. By validating children's everyday conversations, oral storytelling, art, and writing, and by helping children connect writing with their prior knowledge and experience, teachers can help each child develop his or her own narrative voice. When children have opportunities to write their

own stories, to read their own and others' stories, to write in response to reading and art, and to act out stories, they are able to employ much of their knowledge of literacy in meaningful and purposeful ways.

When teachers strive to uncover and describe the child's point of view, children can bring all their capabilities to feel, think, and imagine to the classroom and beyond. And as the following example from Cynthia Wilmarth, a child development specialist and mother of two young daughters, illustrates, abstract thinking and creativity are encouraged by nurturing adults, who, in educator Frank Smith's words, "invite children into the 'literacy club'":

> This morning my daughters and I were watching the moon set, a gorgeous full orange moon sinking into a brightly lit Pacific. My almost two-year-old daughter, who has a complete fascination with the moon, was speechless and had eyes as big as the moon itself. My six-year-old daughter, however, gave me her thoughts on the situation. "You see, Mom, the moon is really the sun at night, and the reason we can look at it so easily without hurting our eyes is that the stars take away the bright light and then it's sprinkled all over the night sky." "Wow, honey, that is some very creative thinking, let's write that one down!" I told her. The moon slipped into the ocean, we made French toast and then we wrote it in her journal.

Only when young children have many such language and literacy experiences—experiences that help them feel valued and supported—are they free to use and appreciate oral, written, and aesthetic language in all its richness and complexity.

Appendix A

Professional Learning Teams To Enhance Learning and Teaching

> *Teachers learn best by studying, doing, and reflecting; by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students' and their work; and by sharing what they see* (Darling-Hammond, 1994).

The last few years have brought increasing recognition that teachers and teachers' knowledge gained from and embedded in their everyday work with children should be at the center of reform efforts and professional development activities (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Lieberman, 1995). The increased appreciation for practical knowledge enriched by critical reflection has produced a rich body of literature that supports teachers' need to become actively involved in their own learning process. Little (1997) suggests that the "test of effective professional development is whether teachers and other educators come to know more about their subjects, their students, and their practice, and to make informed use of what they know."

In schools designed as learning communities, all members work collaboratively to improve the learning process for both students and adults. The learning environment supports shared responsibility and leadership, risk taking, collaboration, asking and answering questions related to educational practices, and self-awareness.

Newmann and Wehlage (1995) describe three general features of a professional community:

- Teachers pursue a clear shared purpose for all students' learning
- Teachers engage in collaborative activity to achieve the purpose
- Teachers take collective responsibility for student learning

Collaborative inquiry can only thrive in a climate of mutual respect and interdependence. Key to the establishment of a community of learners is a principal who encourages teachers to examine teaching and learning, and implement ideas and programs that result from reflective practice (Reitzug & Burrello, 1995). Sagmiller explains:

> Traditionally, principals have been thought of as managers; they have been trained to think in terms of "time to be allocated," and classrooms to be designed. In this role, they often have thought of teachers and children as "things to manage," rather than as rich sources of knowledge and expertise. In a community of learners, what counts are relationships, dialogue, facilitating joint inquiry, and building a climate of trust (1998, p. 132).

In such a climate, teachers are viewed and view themselves as professionals, who are able and expected to articulate their own beliefs about teaching and learning, as well as understand the latest theory, research, and current thinking in education. In addition, teachers engage in their own research (often in concert with students and families), creating new knowledge to inform instructional practices, and design authentic learning situations (Carr & Braunger, 1998).

Professional Learning Teams

Organizational structures that reduce isolation are critical to creating an environment that fosters collaborative inquiry and collective responsibility for students (Lieberman, 1995; Meier, 1995; Reitzug & Burrello, 1995). Structures such as study teams increase opportunities for teachers to read and discuss research, share ideas, strategies, concerns, and students. Teaming leads to a sense of collective responsibility for one another and for students and provides an emotional and instructional support network, key characteristics of a learning community (Reitzug & Burrello, 1995).

Teams can take many forms and include many activities, including examining student work, collaborative planning, and sharing expertise and practices through demonstration and visiting each others' classrooms. Pasco, Washington's district bilingual specialist Liz Flynn notes:

> Teachers are often not given the chance to stop, to sit down with what they've learned and integrate it into their own knowledge base and apply it in a systematic manner. They need to have time to sit down with their colleagues and say, "I have a child who just isn't learning as much as I know she can. Can you give me some ideas to help motivate her?" Sharing strategies with colleagues usually works better than someone coming in and saying, "You should be doing these things."

In addition to sharing expertise with each other, book groups provide opportunities for teachers to explore children's and professional literature, "contributing to the rich, literate environment of classrooms" (National Council of Teachers of English, 1997). When professional development teams tie what is learned from book study to classroom practice and examining student work, teaching and learning are enhanced.

Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, and Hurwitz (1999) suggest that the process for enhancing professional conversations should include:

- Routines for reflection and exchange of ideas, resources, and problem solving
- Inquiry processes for exploring classroom issues and data
- A clear set of agreed-upon ground rules for the discussion and individuals prepared to facilitate conversation with these ground rules in mind

Making time. Of course, all these processes take time. The National Staff Development Council recommends that educators spend 20 percent of their work week engaged in learning and collaborative efforts—the equivalent of one day out of every week (Hirsch, 1997). "Reform efforts that rely on teachers donating additional time from their personal lives risk increasing teacher resistance or burnout, trading one resource for another," Northwest educator Dawn Dzubay points out. Fortunately, a number of

options exist to provide time for teachers to be actively engaged in their own learning process. Of course, in order to implement these options, support for professional development embedded in the everyday life of the school must be supported at the district and state level. Options include:

- Cluster specialized classes—art, music, physical education, library, and computer lab—on the same day of the week, creating a "resource day" and freeing teachers for development activities
- Lengthen the school day on four days and have a shorter school day on the fifth
- Use regular faculty meetings for planning and growth, rather than informational or administrative purposes
- Schedule common planning periods for colleagues in study groups or other collaborative partnerships

At Cherry Valley Elementary School, teachers have worked out a way to have an extra hour every other week to work on curriculum together, in addition to the districtwide weekly early release time. It works like this: Teachers arrive at school at 8 a.m., and children arrive at 8:30.

Once a week, at 8:30, children from the primary grades and the third- and fourth-graders engage in a half-hour of buddy reading together. One week, all the primary children go to the third- and fourth-grade classrooms, and the next week, the older children go to the younger children's rooms.

"We can't control when school begins and ends, but we can figure out ways to effectively use the time we have," says Principal Elaine Meeks. "What we do is build on what we are already doing. The kids have been doing buddy reading for years, and our teachers are used to sharing strategies, ideas, and leadership. This hour is time well spent for everyone."

The Curriculum Inquiry Cycle

A commitment for continuous improvement means that it is second nature for teachers to continually assess what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how they can more effectively help children learn. The Curriculum Inquiry Cycle, developed at NWREL, is a process that supports teachers as inquirers into what they do and how they might do it better. According to authors Maureen Carr and Jane Braunger, "Curriculum inquiry involves teachers in determining the critical experiences necessary to engage students in meeting challenging standards" (1998, p. 8). The recursive process involves examining current practice, making decisions, creating optimal learning environments, and researching classrooms. Carr and Braunger explain:

> Through the curriculum inquiry cycle teachers can look deeply into their ideas about knowledge, the roles that students and teachers play in the development of knowledge, and the relationship between their conceptions of learning and teaching and the kind of learning that occurs in classrooms (p. 7).

The ongoing cycle of curriculum renewal is based on the premise that professional development should assist teachers to get in touch with their implicit theories or beliefs about teaching and learning to form coherent, rational theories based on evidence. A major goal of this NWREL process is to assist teachers and schools to create self-sustaining processes for improving curriculum and instruction. It is prompted by key questions central to teaching and learning:

- **Examining Current Practice**
  What does my teaching look like? Why do I work this way?
  What does this tell me about how I think about curriculum?
  Is my current practice making a difference in student learning?
- **Setting Priorities**
  Are my practices consistent with what is known about how people learn? Are content and performance standards reflected in my teaching practice? Am I aware of alternative models of teaching to meet the needs of diverse learners?
- **Creating an Optimal Learning Environment**
  What are the dynamics of an optimal learning environment for all children?
  What learning experiences are essential? What assessments are appropriate?
- **Expanding Teacher Knowledge Through Classroom Research**
  What dilemmas, questions, or concerns about teaching and learning do I want to explore?
  How can I collaborate more with colleagues and community members? How will I share my research?

When teachers reflect on their beliefs and practices, and generate and seek answers to their own questions, everyone in the learning community is both teacher and learner. Authors Carr and Braunger conclude:

> Teachers actively involved in collaborative research open the doors of inquiry to their students. They model the importance of asking questions, looking beneath the surface of ideas to develop deeper understandings and the need to discuss and share what they learn. Students who operate in an atmosphere of reflective inquiry learn that knowledge changes as it is revisited and new meanings arise for learners as they review and research classroom questions with their teachers and peers (1998).

Questions for Discussion

These questions, based on the sections in the guidebook, are designed to spur discussion of effective language and literacy practices. They are not to be used as a checklist; rather, they are meant to provide opportunities for teachers, parents, and other members of the school community to share effective practices with each other, to examine research, and to reflect on their practices.

Learning To Read and Write: A Place To Start

How do I define literacy?
How do I use reading and writing in my own life?
What do I remember about learning to read? How does my experience affect my teaching?
What are some of my favorite children and adult books and authors?
How is the environment in my school and classroom print-rich?
How do we encourage children to read, write, share ideas and strategies, and challenge each others' thinking?
How do we encourage children's creativity and imagination?
How do we engage children in extended conversations—conversations that include personal narratives, explanations, pretend, talk about past and present events, and discussion of ideas? How can we create more opportunities for rich discussions with children?

Elements of Effective Early Elementary Literacy Programs

Creating a Caring Community of Learners

How do we help children to feel connected, valued, and known in our classrooms and school?
How do we meet the needs of children who may need additional social and emotional support?
How do we build on the knowledge and experiences that children bring to school?
How do we find out how our children feel, think, and believe?
How do we learn about the cultures of the children in our school?
How do we help children maintain their home language and become proficient in English?
Do the books and songs reflect the cultures of the children in our school? Can children find "people like themselves" in the books that they read?
How do we form effective partnerships with families?
What are the multiple ways we encourage families to participate in their children's education?
How do we create a school climate that is welcoming and supportive to families?
How do we support family literacy?

Sharing Books With Children: The Heart of the Early Elementary Literacy Program

How do we help children develop a love of reading?
How do we choose books for our classrooms? Is there a balance between fiction and nonfiction texts?
How much of the time do children have opportunities to choose their own reading material?
What strategies for vocabulary development work best for your students? Do some strategies work better for some students than others? Why?
What opportunities do our students have for sharing and discussing stories? For guided, buddy, and independent reading?
What strategies do we use to help children go beyond literal comprehension to a deeper understanding and appreciation of text? What strategies have been most effective? Why?
How do we encourage children to make a personal connection with text, to ask their own questions, to make inferences, to visualize what they read, to identify main ideas, and to synthesize information?

Teacher Demonstrations of Skills and Strategies for Decoding and Word Recognition

What opportunities do children have for repeated readings of favorite storybooks? For reading predictable books, songs, and poems?
How do we help children develop a flexible range of strategies for learning the alphabet, decoding, and word recognition?
What types of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction seem to be most effective? Are they the same for all children? How do we know?
How do we help children develop fluency in reading?
How do we provide additional support for children experiencing difficulty in learning to read?

Storytelling, Story Acting, and Writing: Essential Language Experience for All Children

How do we encourage storytelling in the classroom?
How do we provide opportunities for children to dictate their own stories before they are able to write proficiently?
How do we encourage children to act out stories—from story books, songs, poems, and their own stories?
How do we help children to become competent and enthusiastic writers? What strategies have been most effective?
How do we help children move from developmental (invented) spelling to standard spelling? How do we decide when developmental spelling is appropriate?
How do we ensure that children have opportunities to publish some of their writing, and that it is read throughout the school community?

Nurturing Emotional and Aesthetic Literacy

How do we help children express feelings and opinions orally and in writing?
How do we help children develop empathy? Develop an understanding of diverse cultures and ethnic groups?
How do we include singing and poetry in our school and classrooms?
How do we link literature and art in our classrooms?
How do we help children construct rich sensory images as they read?

Monitoring Children's Progress

What assessments do we use to inform instruction? Are they providing the information we need?
How do our assessments provide meaningful information to children and parents?
How do assessments help children to become reflective, self-directed learners?
How do we chart individual progress? How do we know that a child is making adequate progress in learning to read and write?

Appendix B

A Few Favorite Picture Books

Reading aloud and discussing stories are some of the best ways for children to build vocabulary and conceptual knowledge, enhance memory, imagination, attention span, listening, and comprehension skills. In addition, as Washington elementary teacher Michelle McDonald says, these activities "can become a time of reflection, sharing, and empathy." Listed below are some of the many picture books that can spur rich conversations about such themes as intergenerational relationships, courage, friendship, overcoming adversity, prejudice, grief, rejection, and loneliness.

In addition to popular children's authors, such as Maurice Sendak, E. B. White, Leo Lionni, and Eric Carle, whose books are enjoyed in classrooms throughout the country, we recommend a few of our favorite authors. But don't stop here. There are hundreds of Web sites and printed materials that provide detailed descriptions of the ever-growing list of wonderful children's books. At the end of this section are a few of these sites.

Verna Aardema

Verna Aardema was born in 1911 and spent hours as a child making up stories and telling them to children in the cypress swamp near her home. She began writing children's books when her daughter refused to eat without a story. Aardema thoroughly researched her African folktales, exploring the customs and traditions from which the stories emerged. For more information, visit http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/aardema.htm.

Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain: A Nandi Tale

A drought plagues the Kapiti plains in this story told with strong rhythm and rhyme. The herder Ki-pat endeavors to save his cows in this authentic Kenyan folktale. Illustrated by Beatriz Vidal. (Grades PreK–3)

Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale

Aardema teamed with illustrators Diane and Leo Dillon to create this 1976 Caldecott Award winner. Mosquito irritates Iguana who slights Python who scares Rabbit who startles Crow who spreads an alarm throughout the forest. This is a wonderful read-aloud book with predictable cause-and-effect sequences and magical language. (Grades PreK–3)

Who's in Rabbit's House?: A Masai Tale

Masai dancers wear animal masks to tell the story of a brave frog who tricks a caterpillar into emerging from rabbit's house. Another collaboration with illustrators Leo and Diane Dillon. (Grades PreK–3)

Laurence Anholt

Laurence Anholt has written numerous books for children, often working with his wife and illustrator, Catherine Anholt. He grew up in Holland where he developed an abiding appreciation for Vincent van Gogh, who is the first artist in a series of books Anholt has written and illustrated that tell of the encounter between a child and a famous artist. The stories are based on actual encounters between real children and the famous artists depicted. More information on Laurence and Catherine Anholt and their books can be found at www.anholt.co.uk/.

Leonardo and the Flying Boy

Zoro, an apprentice in Leonardo da Vinci's studio, discovers a flying machine the master has been building. He takes it on a test flight, which fails, but the flight leads to improvements in the design. (Grades PreK–3)

Camille and the Sunflowers

Camille picked a huge bunch of sunflowers to welcome the painter with no money and no friends. This tale is based on a real encounter between the artist, Camille, and his family. (Grades PreK–3)

Picasso and the Girl With the Ponytail

Sylvette David, a shy teenager, catches the eye of Picasso, the world's most famous painter. For one summer she is his model and muse. Her profile and ponytail become an icon of her times. Based on a true story, Anholt explores Picasso's art. (Grades PreK–3)

Degas and the Little Dancer

Marie, who wanted more than anything to be a ballerina, gained admission to the Paris Opera House school of ballet. She encounters a very grouchy man who came to the theater to paint the ballerinas. She becomes his model to earn enough money to continue her lessons. Marie was the inspiration for Degas' most famous sculpture, The Little Dancer. (Grades PreK–3)

Joseph Bruchac

Joseph Bruchac is a poet, storyteller, and publisher who has received many literary honors, including the American Book Award and the PEN Syndicated Fiction Award. Bruchac was raised by Abenaki Indian and Slovak grandparents in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York. His reverence for Native American stories, legends, and songs was sparked by the stories of his Abenaki grandfather and his old friends. More information about Bruchac and his many books can be found at www.josephbruchac.com/.

Between Earth & Sky: Legends of Native American Sacred Places

Little Turtle of the Delaware tribe learns from the elder, Old Bear, that all people create special places that become sacred. Old Bear tells the legends of different tribes from the Smoky Mountains to Niagara Falls explaining their sacred places and why the places are so revered by these tribes. The sacred places are depicted in lovely full-page oil paintings. Illustrated by Thomas Locker. (Grades 2–5)

A Boy Called Slow: The True Story of Sitting Bull

Another coming-of-age story about a boy who lived in the shadow of a great warrior and was named Slow as a child. Despite early difficulties this boy grew into the great chief we know as Sitting Bull. Struggling as a child to be the best rider, hunter, wrestler, Slow at 14 leads a war party and sends the enemy Crows running. With great pride Slow's father renames him Sitting Bull. Illustrated by Rocco Baviera. (Grades 1–4)

The Circle of Thanks

This book is a collection of original poems derived from Native American chants, songs, and prayers. Some tribes represented are the Mohawk (mother earth prayer), the Kwakiutl (cedar roots prayer), and the Pawnee (prayer to the guiding stars). The illustrations and the text move together to reveal the cultural significance of the stories. Illustrated by Murv Jacob. (Grades 1–5)

Crazy Horse's Vision

Even though this book is identified for younger students, all ages will appreciate the beautifully told story and the marvelous illustrations. This is the story of the boy Curly who goes on an unauthorized vision quest that becomes the guidepost for his whole life. Bruchac writes of the special qualities of the young Crazy Horse that lead peers and adults to be inspired by his beliefs and actions. Illustrator S. D. Nelson is a Lakota and uses the colors and styles of the Lakota to show the connection between the spirit world and the world of the Plains Indian. (Grades 2–4)

Dog People: Native Dog Stories

This story takes the reader back 10,000 years to a time when children and dogs had a special relationship. The reader meets Muskrat and his dog Kwaniwibid, and Cedar Girl and her dog Azeban as they track bears and use their intelligence to survive in a harsh, snowy world. Illustrated by Murv Jacob. (Grades 3–6)

First Strawberries: A Cherokee Story

This is an old Cherokee story of how strawberries came to exist on the earth. After a quarrel the Sun sends a gift of strawberries that land at the feet of a wife running from her husband's harshness. The wife stops long enough for her husband to catch up to her and make amends. A book about love and respect. Illustrated by Anna Vojtech. (Grades 2–5)

Thirteen Moons on Turtle's Back: A Native American Year of Moons

This is a combination of poetry and folklore retelling the Native American legend of the lunar calendar. Included in the story and the illustrations are the various ways in which tribes see seasonal patterns. Tribal beliefs from the Abenaki, Potawatomi, Cree, and Huron are honored in poem and paintings. Illustrated by Thomas Locker. (Grades 2–5)

Eve Bunting

Born in Northern Ireland in 1928, Eve Bunting immigrated to the United States in 1959. Her first inspiration was her father, who read a variety of books to her every day, especially poetry. She started writing her own stories as a child and read and discussed them with her father. She has published more than 130 children's books, some under the names of Evelyn Bolton or A.E. Bunting. Her picture books offer children's views of real-world issues and the complex feelings faced by them and their families. For more information, see http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/bunting.htm.

A Day's Work

A boy and his Mexican grandfather wait on a street corner for someone to offer them a day's work. The boy is excited about the money they will earn when he convinces a man to choose him and his grandfather for a gardening job. But his lie that they know how to garden is revealed and he learns a lesson about honesty. Illustrated by Ronald Himler. (Grades PreK–3)

Fly Away Home

A homeless boy and his father live in an airport. The child describes how they work to not be noticed and to save money for an apartment. The story describes the loneliness and anger he sometimes feels, and his hopes for someday being free. Illustrated by Ronald Himler. (Grades PreK–3)

The Wednesday Surprise

Anna has been teaching her grandmother how to read, a birthday surprise for Anna's father. Illustrated by Donald Carrick. (Grades PreK–3)

Going Home

A farm worker family goes home to Mexico for Christmas and the children begin to understand why their parents love the home they left behind, and why their parents have brought them to the United States. Illustrated by David Diaz. (Grades PreK–3)

Smoky Night

Riots in the neighborhood cause a boy and his mother to evacuate their burning apartment building. Amid the feelings of fear and loss, the family begins to form a friendship with a woman different from them, who they had stayed away from before. A Caldecott winner. Illustrated by David Diaz. (Grades PreK–3)

Demi

Author-illustrator Demi was born Charlotte Dumaresq Hunt in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1942, and raised in a family of artists. Her travels in India as a Fulbright scholar, her Chinese husband, and her Buddhist faith all inform her stories of Asian culture and heroes. More information about Demi can be found at http://www2.scholastic.com/teachers/authorsandbooks/teachingwithbooks/authorhome.jhtml?authorID=2196&collateralID=5141&displayName=Biography.

The Dalai Lama

This biography of the spiritual leader of Tibet begins with an open letter from the Dalai Lama addressing the political situation in Tibet. The story and beautiful illustrations introduce the reader to Tibet, the Buddhist religion, and the life of the Dalai Lama. (Grades 3–6)

Ghandi

"If you want to see the brave, look at those who can forgive. If you want to see the heroic, look at those who can return love for hatred." (Grades K–6)

Kites: Magic Wishes That Fly Up to the Sky

A mother orders a kite from a painter of holy pictures so that her son might be strong and wise. When the kite flies, it sends messages and wishes to the gods. And, indeed, the boy becomes "bigger, stronger, richer, and nobler." (Grades PreK–3)

Mem Fox

Mem Fox was born Merrion Frances Partridge in 1946 in Melbourne, Australia, and grew up with her missionary parents in Zimbabwe. She attended drama school in London and with her husband Malcolm Fox returned to Melbourne in 1970. Fox was both a teacher and a great storyteller. In 1969 her storytelling ability was evident as she produced her first book, *Hush, the Invisible Mouse.* Australian settings and characters are featured in all her children's books. The books use rhythm, rhyme, and repetition to bring home specific themes to young readers. Fox has written more than 40 books with 29 titles devoted to young children. More information about Fox and her books can be located at www.memfox.net/.

Guess What?

This is the story of Daisy O'Grady. The format is a series of yes-or-no questions that let children discover that Daisy is a witch complete with broomstick. Illustrated by Vivienne Goodman. (Grade PreK)

Koala Lou

When other babies come along Koala Lou decides her mother does not love her any more. To gain back attention she enters the Bush Olympics tree-climbing contest. Since she only wins second prize Koala Lou thinks she has failed but her mom tells her that Koala Lou will always be loved no matter what. Child ratings from Amazon.com indicate that not only do kids find this a fun read they learn that parents love kids unconditionally. Illustrated by Pamela Lofts. (Grades PreK–3)

Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge

Wilfrid loves his friend, 96-year-old Nancy Alison Delacourt Cooper, for many reasons, not the least of which is that they both have four names. Nancy is just one of the many friends Wilfrid makes in the nursing home next door to his house. Wilfrid soon discovers that Nancy has lost her memory and sets about helping her to find it. A charming portrayal of the relationship between the very young and the very old. Illustrated by Julie Vivas. (Grades PreK–3)

Harriet, You'll Drive Me Wild!

If you have ever been a child who tends toward frequent messy accidents you will understand Harriet Harris. Harriet does not mean to spill, break, or explode feathers all over the place. However, Harriet's mother finally loses it and yells until she is blue in the face. Happily, in the midst of all this mother and daughter find humor as they clean up the big mess and there are hugs all around, proving that Moms love you no matter what. Illustrated by Marla Frazee. (Grades PreK–3)

Wombat Divine

A delightful visit with Australian animals all decked out for the Nativity play. All but Wombat, of course. Too short, too heavy, too sleepy to play significant parts, poor Wombat seems unlikely to fulfill his passion for acting this Christmas. However, one of the group comes up with the perfect part—Wombat can even sleep through it if he likes. Illustrated by Kerry Argent. (Grades PreK–3)

Sophie

Robinson's striking acrylic paintings and Fox's story combine to illustrate the continuity of family connections. The story and the illustrations depict Sophie and Grandpa's love for each other. As Sophie's little hand becomes stronger and bigger, Grandpa grows old and his hands become weaker and smaller until he is no more. Again Fox has portrayed the special love between the very young and the very old. Illustrated by Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson. (Grades K–3)

Hattie and the Fox

Hattie the Hen sees a nose in the bushes and all her friends want to add their opinions of the source of the nose. This is a cumulative tale that is a fun read for young children. Kids and adults won't be able to resist chiming in on the refrains. Illustrated by Patricia Mullins. (Grades PreK–3)

Florence Parry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland

Florence Parry Heide and her daughter Judith Heide Gilliland are co-authors of award-winning children's literature, including three books with Middle Eastern themes. Their work connects young readers with the experience of children in the countries and cultures of both the ancient and contemporary Middle East. More information on Florence Parry Heide's books can be found at http://hallkids.com/H/11.shtml.

The Day of Ahmed's Secret

The karink, rink, rink of young Ahmed's cart joins him inextricably to the fabric of Cairo life all around him. The loudest noise of all is the secret that burns inside him. At the end of his day of delivering cooking gas canisters, he is finally able to share with his family his new ability to write his name and his hope that his written name will survive a thousand years just like the buildings of old Cairo. Illustrated by Ted Lewin. (Grades PreK–3)

Sami and the Time of the Troubles

Ten-year-old Sami lives in Beirut during "the time of the troubles ... a time of guns and bombs." After days of hiding in a basement sanctuary with his family, he is able to go outside to discover that the fort he built with his friend Amir has been destroyed by the bombs while the life of the city goes on. Illustrated by Ted Lewin. (Grades PreK–3)

The House of Wisdom

Set in Baghdad in 830 A.D., this tale is based on a true story. Ishaq lives in the House of Wisdom, a library built by the ruler of Baghdad. Sent by the Caliph to collect more books, Ishaq travels to the Ganges, the Nile, the Sahara, India, China, and Athens in search of knowledge and wisdom, returning to become a translator and scholar of Aristotle. Winner of the 2000 Middle East Book Award. Illustrated by Mary Grandpre. (Grades 3–5)

Kevin Henkes

Kevin Henkes writes and illustrates picture books that show how childhood problems are managed in a secure, loving world. With humor children and parents both will appreciate, Henkes portrays the emotional ups and downs of courageous, frightened, worried, playful, and very real children. More about Henkes and his books can be found at www.kevinhenkes.com/.

Wemberly Worried

Wemberly worries about everything, especially her first day of school. Her caring teacher helps her find a like-minded friend with whom she can put her worries aside—for a while. (Grades PreK–3)

Chrysanthemum

A little girl loves her name until classmates tease her. They tease her until a beloved teacher, Delphinium, reveals the beauty of long, difficult flower names. (Grades PreK–3)

Chester's Way

Chester and Wilson love order, tied shoes, and being two peas in a pod. Then Lilly, "queen of everything," reveals the splendor of new friends and a bit of wildness. (Grades PreK–3)

Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse

Lilly returns with a favorite teacher, a love of writing, and a purse she wants to show everyone. When her teacher must stop her from disrupting class, her range of emotions and the ways she and the grown-ups around her resolve her troubles offer guidance and a wonderful, funny story. (Grades PreK–3)

Words of Stone

A novel for older kids, this book is about a fearful boy, Blaze, whose mother has died and who embarks on a difficult friendship with Joselle, a girl who lies and, because of her own uneasy relationship with her mother, sets out to disturb Blaze. (Grades 4–6)

Naomi Shihab Nye

Born in 1952, the child of Palestinian and American parents who was raised in Missouri, Texas, and Israel, author and editor Naomi Nye brings a cross-cultural perspective to her books of fiction and poetry for children. Her poetry captures everyday moments that mirror cultural identity and heritage and her compilations of poetry capture the flavor of life in Mexico and the Middle East. For more information, visit http://voices.cla.umn.edu/authors/NaomiShihabNye.html.

Sitti's Secret

Young Mona speaks of visiting her grandmother, called Sitti in Arabic, who lives in a village on the other side of the earth. Between Mona and Sitti are, "buses and fields and presidents and clotheslines and...signs that say DO NOT ENTER." On her return, Mona writes to the President of the United States to tell him of Sitti and Sitti's lemon tree and to vote for peace. Illustrated by Nancy Carpenter. (Grades PreK–3)

The Tree Is Older Than You Are

The opening poem in this collection of poems from Mexico reminds readers that if they climb the lemon tree they may find stories in its branches. The book, written in both English and Spanish, is richly illustrated with work of Mexican artists conveying both the meaning and the magic of the poetry. (Grades 8–12)

The Space Between Our Footsteps

Similar in concept to *The Tree Is Older Than You Are,* poets and artists of the Middle East speak of homeland, war, peace, exile, family, and more. (Grades 8–12)

Patricia Polacco

..."when you write, keep the stories small and close to your heart. When you get too far away from your heart, you can't find your way back" ... This is Polacco's advice to young writers and this idea of writing from the heart is apparent in all her stories and illustrations. Born in 1944 in Lansing, Michigan, Polacco credits her grandmother for much of her inspiration and says that many of her characters embody the best qualities of Babushka. More information on Polacco and her books can be found on her Web site at www.patriciapolacco.com/.

Aunt Chip and the Great Triple Creek Dam Affair

The people of Triple Creek are glued to their TV sets. They watch TV all day and all night until Aunt Chip decides to pull the plug in favor of reading great books. Like many of Polacco's stories, this has its roots in her own life. Having grown up without TV in her household, she found books and reading of great interest and importance despite the dyslexia that plagued her early school years. Polacco's mother posed for the photograph of Aunt Chip that is included in the book. (Grades PreK–3)

Babushka Baba Yaga

Baba Yaga is the Russian version of the "boogie man" who lives in the forest. This Baba Yaga yearns to be a Babushka or grandmother and disguises herself and becomes part of a loving family. However, when the little boy, Victor, hears all the evil tales about Baba Yagas from other grandmothers he becomes afraid and Baba Yaga sadly returns to her forest home. When wolves attack little Victor, Baba Yaga saves the boy and is then accepted by the other Babushkas. Like many of Polacco's stories this one has a moral—believe what people are by what they do and what is in their hearts, not by what others may say about them. (Grades PreK–3)

The Bee Tree

Polacco dedicates this book to her mom and her mom's friends. The story tells of Mary Ellen and her desire to do something more exciting than reading. Grandfather suggests finding the bee tree. A bee is captured and then let go and Grandfather and Mary Ellen follow the bee through farm, meadow, and wood. Along the way they pick up many neighbors who join the chase. When Grandfather gets the honey from the bee tree he pours it over the cover of Mary Ellen's book and has her taste the honey. She finds it sweet and pleasant. Grandfather says that what's in the book is just like what is on the outside, sweet and pleasant to the taste. (Grades PreK–3)

Betty Doll

Mary Ellen loses all five of her dolls in a house fire. Her mother makes her a new doll that is named Betty. Betty Doll sees Mary Ellen through the joys and sorrows of her life. When Mary Ellen is old and ill with cancer she writes a letter to her own daughter chronicling her life through Betty Doll's eyes. (Grades PreK–3)

Just Plain Fancy

Ruth and Naomi are two Amish girls who complain that everything in their lives is plain and just once they would like something fancy. The girls find an interesting egg and give it to Henny the chicken to care for. Much to the girl's surprise the chick hatches sprouting colorful, fancy feathers. As time goes on the chick grows into a beautiful peacock and Naomi and Ruth are afraid that the elders will shun him because he is fancy. The girls learn that their culture can make room for fancy if the fancy is one of God's creatures. (Grades PreK–3)

Mrs. Katz and Tush

Larnel Moore and his mother pay a sympathy visit to the newly widowed Mrs. Katz. Later Larnel brings Mrs. Katz a kitten with no tail that they dub Tush. As their friendship grows Larnel learns about Jewish customs and language and the similarity of experience between the Jewish people and African Americans. Over time Mrs. Katz becomes a grandmother to Larnel's family and when she dies they have her headstone inscribed: Mrs. Katz, Our Bubee ... Such a Person! (Grades PreK–3)

Pink and Say

This is the story of two teens who become friends during the American Civil War. Pink is the son of slaves who rescues Say, the son of poor whites. Pink's mother and family nurse Say back to health. Later mother and Pink's brothers are murdered in a raid and Pink and Say are taken to Andersonville prison. Pink is hanged in prison but Say survives to pass down the story to his children and grand-

children. A beautiful illustration shows Pink and Say's hands clutched together as Pink is taken by the guards. Later in life Say shakes hands with Abraham Lincoln and sees a physical connection from Lincoln to Say to Pink. While reviews indicate this story is for K–3, the content and concepts involved are really more appropriate for upper elementary. The book is also a great introduction to the Civil War for middle and high school students. The book is available in both Spanish and English editions. (Grades 3–5)

My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother

This is another autobiographical story that explores the relationships in an extended family. The focus is Richard, who is four years older than Patricia and brags that he can do everything bigger and better. There is conflict between brother and sister. Patricia tries to emulate her brother both because she loves him and because, just once, she would like to win the competition. (Grades K–3)

Thundercake

Like many of her stories this tale arises out of Polacco's childhood. It is the story of a little girl terrified of thunderstorms who is helped by her grandmother to overcome her fear. This is done through the baking and eating of a thundercake. A recipe for thundercake is included in the book. (Grades PreK–3)

Beatrix Potter

Potter (1866–1943) wrote, drew, farmed, and raised sheep in England. Her love of gardens, plants, and animals is evident on every page of her timeless stories of animals' plights and resolutions. She introduces lovely, engaging language to young children as well as the range of behaviors little ones and their parents are likely to suffer or enjoy. She wrote more than 27 books, which have sold 100 million copies since 1984. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit,* first published in England in 1902 has been reprinted more than 250 times and translated into 35 languages. For more information, visit www.kirjasto.sci.fi/bpotter.htm

The Tale of Peter Rabbit

The classic, well-loved tale of the mischievous rabbit who pays for his sumptuous meal in Mr. McGregor's garden with a terrifying chase and indigestion while his calmer siblings eat berries and milk. (Grade PreK–2)

The Tale of the Pie and the Patty Pan

Duchess the dog accepts an invitation to tea at Ribby the cat's. Fearful of being served mouse pie, Duchess slips her own meat pie into Ribby's oven and only her desperate attempt to find her beloved patty pan gives away her plot and its foiling. (Grade PreK–2)

The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin

Nutkin teases owl, to whom the other squirrels bring offerings of food so they may be granted permission to gather nuts on owl's island. Nutkin asks riddles and plays; he gathers no nuts. Owl, dozing and eating the squirrels' offerings, rouses himself and attends to Nutkin. (Grade PreK–2)

The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher

Fisher the frog goes to fish a lovely meal for dinner guests, but the lively pond is full of surprises and some danger. (Grade PreK–2)

The Tale of Two Bad Mice

Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca prepare for a feast at the doll house and are not pleased to discover that dolls do not eat real ham and pudding. (Grade PreK–3)

Faith Ringgold

Author and artist Faith Ringgold is best known for her textile arts, painted quilts that tell stories of heroes of black history and culture. The children in her books fly, talk to paintings, and dance at the Louvre. Ringgold was born in 1930 and grew up in Harlem. More information about Ringgold and her work can be found at www.faithringgold.com/.

Talking to Faith Ringgold

Ringgold introduces herself and her work to young readers. She discusses the nature of art, the Civil Rights Movement, and some of the historical figures she portrays in her story quilts. (Grades PreK–3)

Tar Beach

Cassie Louise Lightfoot, only eight years old and in the third grade, flies over New York City, claiming the George Washington Bridge for her own. Her father, a steelworker, worked on that bridge and is now working on a union building. But he cannot join the union because he is "colored and a half-breed Indian." Ringgold won a Caldecott and a Coretta Scott King award for this story of enchantment and empowerment. (Grades PreK–3)

Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky

Cassie flies again, meeting Harriet Tubman on her Underground Railroad in the sky. Aunt Harriet explains the northward journey of escaped slaves, leading Cassie on a dangerous journey to freedom. (Grades PreK–3)

Dinner at Aunt Connie's House

Melody and her cousin Lonnie discover portraits of 12 women in Aunt Connie's attic. Rosa Parks, Zora Neale Hurston, Harriet Tubman, Bessie Smith, and others inspire the children with stories of their accomplishments. (Grades PreK–3)

Cynthia Rylant

Many of Cynthia Rylant's more than 50 books for children and young adult readers are set in her native Appalachia where she was born in 1954. In spare, lyrical language she speaks of the interconnectedness of all living things, the importance of family, and the need to belong. More information about Rylant and her books can be found at www.tetranet.net/users/stolbert/research/rylant.html.

When I Was Young in the Mountains

In this Caldecott winner a young girl lovingly tells of life in the mountains. She concludes, "I never wanted to go anywhere else in the world, for I was in the mountains. And that was always enough." Illustrated by Diane Goode. (Grades PreK–3)

The Relatives Came

Another Caldecott winner, this is the joyous story of a summer when relatives from Virginia came to visit, filling the house with hugs and music while they ate up all the strawberries and melons. And when the relatives left, the family crawled back into beds that felt too big and too quiet. Illustrated by Stephen Gammell. (Grades PreK–3)

Appalachia: The Voice of Sleeping Birds

In Rylant's Appalachia, the owners of mostly good dogs work in coal mines, have quilts made by someone in the family, keep little plates of leftovers on the back of the stove, and nearly all of them go to church on Sundays. Houses smell of bacon and fried chicken and are filled with visiting relatives on Sunday afternoons. Illustrated by Barry Moser. (Grades PreK–3)

Allen Say

Author/Illustrator Allen Say was born in Japan in 1937. He was 12 years old when his parents divorced and he went to live with his grandmother in Tokyo. He sought out an artist as a mentor and surrogate father and began to develop the art that would lead to numerous lovely and award-winning children's books. More information on Say and his books can be found at www.eduplace.com/rdg/author/say.

Grandfather's Journey

When Say was 16 he immigrated to the United States with his father. He recognized a cycle in his family that he describes in this book about a family with affection and longing for two very different countries and cultures. A Caldecott winner. (Grades PreK–3)

Tree of Cranes

A boy's mother decorates a pine tree planted at his birth with silver origami cranes and candles. She describes an American holiday when strangers smile at each other and enemies stop fighting and the child celebrates his first Christmas. Say based this story on a tree of cranes his mother made for him when he was a boy in Japan. (Grades PreK–3)

Emma's Rug

Emma, a Japanese American child, amazes her family, school, and city with her art. She says she simply copies what she sees. Then her mother washes a rug Emma has carried since she was born. Emma despairs that the inspiration for her art is gone until she begins to see other wild and beautiful patterns in the world around her. (Grades PreK–3)

Chris Van Allsburg

Chris Van Allsburg, writer and illustrator of children's literature that explores the boundary between reality and fantasy, was born in 1949 and grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Speaking about his writing, he said, "Stories begin as fragments of pictures in my mind. I create a story by posing questions to myself. I call it the 'what if' and 'what then' approach ... *The Polar Express* began with the idea of a train standing alone in the woods. I asked myself, 'What if a boy gets on that train? Where does he go?'" More information on Van Allsburg and his books can be found at http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/allsburg.htm.

Garden of Abdul Gasazi

A young boy pursues a dog into the topiary gardens of a magician, Gasazi. The book was labeled ominous and disquieting by some, and won the *Boston Globe*-Horn Book Award for illustration. (Grades PreK–3)

Jumanji

The book, on which the Robin Williams film is based, tells of two children who find a game. This cautionary adventure delights and leaves readers spellbound. A Caldecott winner. (Grades PreK–3)

The Sweetest Fig

A dentist is given two figs by a woman who cannot pay. At first he does not believe it when she says they can make his dreams come true, but they can. Another tale that explores the boundary of reality and fantasy. (Grades PreK–3)

The Polar Express

A boy boards the Polar Express, travels to the North Pole, and meets Santa Claus. He is given a silver bell that can be heard only by those who believe in the impossible, in Santa Claus. This story of faith, as Stephanie Loer has said, "is perceptively conveyed through a felicitous blend of pictures and narrative; the combination radiates with childlike wonder while reverberating with mysterious intensity." A Caldecott winner. (Grades PreK–3)

The Stranger

Another ordinary tale of the fantastic: a stranger is hit by a farmer's truck and stays on, gently, quietly, and lovingly through fall, though the season doesn't change until the stranger goes. (Grades PreK–3)

Jane Yolen

Past president of the Science Fiction Writers of America, Jane Yolen is the author of more than 200 books for children ranging from science fiction and fantasy to poetry and folktales. *Newsweek* has called her the "Hans Christian Andersen of America." Yolen was born in 1939 in New York City. More information can be found at www.janeyolen.com

Encounter

An old Taino man recalls the arrival of Christopher Columbus. As a child, the man had dreamed of "three great-winged birds with voices like thunder that rode the wild waves," their mouths filled with sharp white teeth. But no one would listen to the warnings of a child. "So it was," the old man recalls, "we lost our lands to the strangers ... gave our souls to their gods," and "took their speech into our mouths." Illustrated by David Shannon. (Grades 4–7)

Owl Moon

In this gentle 1988 Caldecott winner, a child and her father take a wintry late-night walk to look for the Great Horned Owl. The soft watercolor illustrations show the other animals of night in the forest, as father and child call and eventually find the owl. Illustrated by John Schoenherr. (Grades PreK–3)

Not One Damsel in Distress: World Folktales for Strong Girls

This collection of folk tales begins with an open letter to Yolen's daughter and granddaughters. In tales from China to Argentina, girls demonstrate their intelligence, prowess, and kindness as they engage in heroic deeds. Illustrated by Susan Guevara. (Grades 4–7)

Charlotte Zolotow

Born in 1915 in Norfolk, Virginia, Charlotte Zolotow is an educator, editor, and prolific writer of children's books. More than 90 children's books are available through online book services. Zolotow was the youngest in her family, six years younger than her sister, Dorothy, whom children have read about in the book *Big Sister and Little Sister.* A series of family moves, ill health, and a shy personality made it difficult for Zolotow to make friends and to feel like she belonged. She used writing as a way to express her feelings and ideas and never forgot the challenges and feelings that plagued her as a child. Zolotow maintained that while adults have learned to cover up feelings better, these feelings are real for them and they are real for kids. The importance of feeling and spirit come through her writings regardless of whether the topic is nature, family, or neighborhoods. More information on the author and her books can be found at www.charlottezolotow.com

Over and Over

This story depicts the changes of seasons and the celebrations that occur in children's lives throughout the years. The lovely thing is that each year the cycle will repeat itself, allowing us to enjoy natural changes and family festivities again and again. Illustrated by Garth Williams. (Grades PreK–3)

My Grandson Lew

Zolotow was fascinated by nature and its cycles. In 1974, this story opened the topic of death and dying for young children and their parents. Lew's grandfather died when he was very young but he misses him anyway and so does his mother. Mom and Lew share memories of his grandfather, which makes him more real for Lew and brings joy back to his mother. Illustrated by William Pene du Bois. (Grades PreK–3)

Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present

This Caldecott winner is the result of collaboration between Zolotow and Maurice Sendak. Rabbit is trying to help a little girl locate a present for her mother. All he knows is that her mother loves color. It is a happy journey as Mr. Rabbit tries to come up with the perfect gift. (Grades PreK–3)

William's Doll

Zolotow is always ready to tackle ticklish subjects from the child's point of view. This time the subject is sexism. Why shouldn't a boy have a doll if he wants one, William wonders? His brother and his father are against it and the neighborhood boys call William a sissy. Kids will enjoy finding out how William gets his wish. Illustrated by William Pene du Bois. (Grades PreK–3)

The Hating Book

Adults often believe that children's problems with relationships are trivial, but not Charlotte Zolotow. This is the story of a little girl who is having difficulty understanding her friend's angry behavior toward her. Anybody who ever wondered as a child why a friend did not talk, wouldn't play, or sit with them on the school bus will appreciate the struggle this child is having. Illustrated by Ben Shecter. (Grades PreK–3)

Following is a list of Web sites that provide descriptions of the ever-growing list of wonderful children's books.

http://library.usask.ca/education/newbery.html

The University of Saskatchewan Education Library Guide offers a complete list of Newbery and Caldecott medal winners. The John Newbery Medal was established in 1922, and is presented annually to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children published in the United States in the preceding year. The Randolph Caldecott medal, established in 1938, is presented each year to the illustrator of the most distinguished American picture book for children published in the United States in the preceding year.

http://latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/Latino_Bibliography.html

This site offers an annotated bibliography of children's literature focusing on Latino people, history, and culture, fiction and nonfiction, with additional resources for teachers and librarians. There are two main sections. The first section lists resources, in the form of bibliographies, for librarians, teachers, and parents. The second section lists actual literature for children. It is divided into picture books, fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. The nonfiction list includes bibliographies, reference books, and histories.

www.oyate.org/aboutus.html

Oyate, the Dakota word for people, is a Native organization "working to see that our lives and our stories are portrayed honestly, and so that all people will know our stories belong to us." Their Web site includes evaluation of texts, resource materials, and fiction by and about Native people, including a section about books to avoid because of stereotyping and negative portrayals of Native people.

www.hbook.com/mag.shtml

The *Horn Book Magazine* Web site includes a sample of indepth reviews of the newest and best books for children and young adults that appear in their bimonthly magazine.

Appendix C

As discussed in Appendix A, study teams increase opportunities for teachers to read and discuss research, share ideas, strategies, concerns, and students. In addition to sharing expertise with each other, book groups provide opportunities for teachers to explore children's and professional literature, "contributing to the rich, literate environment of classrooms" (National Council of Teachers of English, 1997). Following are some of the many professional development resources available for educators. They are organized by the chapter headings in this book.

Learning To Read and Write: A Place To Start

Dickinson, D.K., & Tabors, P.O. (Eds.) (2001). *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

In this readable and practical book, researchers Dickinson and Tabors report the results of the Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development. This longitudinal study reinforces and enriches our understanding of why language and literacy development depend on environments at home and at school that are "language-rich, with lots of words used during interesting conversations, and should be enriched by stories and explanations."

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Washington, DC: Author.

The panel, composed of leading scientists in reading research, representatives of colleges of education, reading teachers, and educational administrators explored and summarized research (only studies that employed experimental and quasi-experimental designs were included) in alphabetics, fluency, comprehension, teacher education and reading instruction, and computer technology and reading instruction. President Bush has cited the report as the foundation of his "Reading First" literacy initiative, which has received bipartisan support in Congress.

National Research Council. (1999). *Starting out right: A guide to promoting children's reading success.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Based on a major report of the National Research Council, entitled *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, this guide contains checklists of specific accomplishments from preschool through third grade, 55 activities to do with children, a list of 100 recommended books, a guide to computer software and CD-ROMs, and a list of Internet resources.

Neuman, S.B., Copple, S., & Bredekamp, S. (2000). *Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The joint position statement of the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children is brought to life with photographs, concrete guidelines, and research-based strategies for the classroom. Examples of projects and activities are described in detail, following eight themes: the power and pleasure of literacy, the literate environment, language development, building knowledge and comprehension, knowledge of print, types of text, phonological awareness, and letters and words. Instructional tips, such as suggestions for working with English Language Learners, are given in a concise format that is quick to read.

Routman, R. (2000). *Conversations: Strategies for teaching, learning, and evaluating.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

In order to change to more meaning-focused approaches to reading and writing, many teachers have formed study groups to discuss acclaimed author and language arts coach Regie Routman's books, *Invitations and Transitions*. Routman's latest book, filled with an array of field-tested teaching ideas, detailed strategies, reviews of research, and lists of annotated resources, is another invaluable resource for teachers. "Only by becoming teachers who know and can articulate what we do and why we do it and who stand up for what we know and hold dear can we make our schools viable for our most precious natural resources, our students," says Routman.

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

"Excellent instruction is the best intervention for children who demonstrate problems learning to read," states this landmark report written by a committee of people with wide-ranging views. Convened at the request of the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the report provides a synthesis of research on early reading development and how its development can be promoted from preschool through third grade. Research on selected intervention strategies and programs is also summarized.

Creating a Caring Community of Learners

Caine, R., & Caine, G. (1997). *Education on the edge of possibility.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Building on brain research that explores the way people learn, Caine and Caine develop ways to actualize this research in the classroom. They describe their work in two schools, exploring how understanding the working of the brain is a way to initiate and affect school change processes and education itself. They worked to build environments in which change can be contemplated and enacted and from there move to transform mental models of teaching and learning.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Learning to interpret across cultures demands reflecting on our own experiences, analyzing our own culture, examining and comparing varying perspectives. "We must consciously and voluntarily make our cultural lenses apparent," writes Delpit. In this book Delpit explains some of the behaviors and situations of minority and poor students that white, middle-class teachers may misinterpret. She argues that the dilemma is not really over the instructional methodology to use, but rather how to communicate across cultures and address the issues of power that are enacted in classrooms. She gives examples of how teachers can acknowledge and validate students' home language and culture without using it to limit students' potential, and to give students the ability to function in a larger society without rejecting their home identity and values.

Harwayne, S. (2000). *Lifetime guarantees: Toward ambitious literacy teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Shirley Harwayne is a teacher, staff developer, codirector of the Teachers College Writing Project, children's author, and founding principal of the Manhattan New School. In her latest book, Harwayne explores the many creative ways to create a rich and engaging literacy environment suited to the needs of each child, based, in large part, on her work at the Manhattan New School. The book's title reflects Harwayne's promise to parents of students at the New School: "Your children will not just learn how to read and write. They will choose to read and write. Now and forever."

Hiebert, E.H. (Ed.). (1991). *Literacy for a diverse society: Perspectives, practices, and policies*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

A collection of articles on literacy from a constructivist perspective, "shows literacy in American schooling as a set of constructing practices that are organized within and across the activities of individual learners, of classrooms as immediate scenes of pedagogical interaction and curricular engagement, of schools as formal organizations, and of society as a whole" (viii). The articles explore an approach to literacy that focuses on the relationship between the reader and text, and not the text alone. The importance of the reader means that issues of ethnicity, class, and cultural diversity are critical issues that affect literacy teaching, assessment, and policies.

Morrow, L.M. (Ed.) (1995). *Family literacy: Connections in schools and communities*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

This collection embraces a broad, culturally relevant definition of family literacy. The various chapters in the book highlight programs that invite active participation from community members, students, families, and school staff. They offer innovative ways to include all families in comprehensive, coordinated networks of service that are anchored by literacy classes and opportunities to tutor. By providing ethnographic data and maintaining an inclusive definition of literacy, they are able to challenge assumptions people may have about hard-to-reach students and families.

Nieto, S. (1999). *The light in their eyes: Creating multicultural communities.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Looking at multicultural education through the experiences of students and teachers in the classroom, this book offers teachers ways to educate every child, not in spite of, but fully respectful of culture. Nieto explores her own experiences and the insights of many classroom teachers to enable an understanding of how culture affects learning. With section headings such as "Curriculum and Pedagogy as Beliefs and Values," and "Becoming a Learner of Students," Nieto shows us how connections among teachers and between students and teachers allow cultural differences to become a rich foundation on which to build strong academic skills rather than a barrier to developing those skills. Nieto's contribution is to show teachers how to move from an intuitive understanding that "all children can learn" to the classroom and personal strategies they need to ensure that that happens every day.

Slapin, B., & Seale, D. (Eds.). (1998). *Through Indian eyes: The native experience in books for children.* Berkeley, CA: Oyate.

The first section of this book is a collection of articles and stories by Native American educators, writers, and artists. They write of their experiences as children confronted by exaggerated or monolithic stereotypes of native peoples—or by a complete absence of images of themselves and their people. They offer suggestions on how to reinvent teaching about and to Native peoples. The second part of the book is an annotated bibliography of children's literature by and/or about Native American people. Each annotation carefully discusses whether the text includes cultural or historical inaccuracies or authentic, honest representations.

Sharing Books With Children: The Heart of the Primary Literacy Program

Daniels, H. (1994). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Literacy expert Regie Routman describes literature circles as "the best way I know to get students excited about literature and talking on a deep and personal level" (2000, p. 171). In this description of the unique model of literature circles developed by a team of Midwest teachers, Daniels book includes:

- Specific techniques for starting and managing literature circles
- Variations that may suit different students, grade levels, and teaching styles
- Photocopiable role sheets in English and Spanish
- Ideas and suggestions for extending literature circles across the curriculum

Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (1996). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Fountas and Pinell have written a comprehensive guide to implementing guided reading in the context of a balanced literacy program. The guide includes designing and organizing the learning environment, classroom management, using assessment to inform teaching, using running records, grouping, leveling, selecting and introducing books, teaching reading strategies, and learning about words and letters. Each chapter concludes with suggested reading for professional development, encouraging teachers to engage in reflective practice and classroom-based research.

Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (1999). *Matching books to readers: Using leveled books in guided reading, K–3*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Matching Books to Readers is a companion to Fountas and Pinnell's *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children.* They describe how to create a continually evolving, well-organized collection of high-quality books, leveled to match readers' ability and chosen to match readers interests. Included are book lists organized by both reading level and title to guide teachers in matching books to readers. Each chapter ends with a suggested list of items for an action plan, which would be appropriate for teacher study or professional learning teams.

Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A. (2000). *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension to enhance understanding*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

"Getting readers to think when they read, to develop an awareness of their thinking, and to use strategies that help them comprehend are the primary goals of the comprehension instruction outlined in this book," state the authors in a book that addresses the what-am-I-going-to-do-tomorrow question (p. 5). This book describes how to teach students to use the comprehension strategies described in *Mosaic of Thought* (Keene and Zimmerman, 1997), through the use of explicit instruction and the gradual release of responsibility approach. More than 40 K–8 strategy lessons are explained in depth, including suggested fiction and nonfiction resources.

Keene, E., & Zimmerman, A.S. (1997). *Mosaic of thought: Teaching comprehension in a reader's workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

In this indepth study of the comprehension strategies used by proficient readers, Keene and Zimmerman create "portraits of classrooms in which explicit comprehension has been successful: classrooms that provide intimate places for children to read; places where books line the walls, where teachers continue to learn about reading for themselves and their children, and where children are learning to be skillful and thoughtful readers" (p. xv).

Short, K.G., & Bird, L.B. (1997). *Literature as a way of knowing*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

"Literature has the potential to transform children's lives," writes educator and author Kathy Short. In this practical book, Short demonstrates that by making literature an integral part of the curriculum, literature:

- Helps students learn to read and write
- Enhances learning in context areas: social studies, science, mathematics, and the arts
- Is an important pathway to knowing and understanding the world
- Opens up an awareness of society and culture.

Trelease, J. (1985). *The read-aloud handbook*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Group.

Divided into two sections, this is the quintessential how-to-and-why-read-aloud-to-your-kids book. The first section talks about why it is important to read aloud to children, when, and how to do it. Trelease also discusses the pervasive and impeding influence of television, including suggestions on how to overcome its presence. The second half of the book is a wonderful annotated list of some of the best read-alouds. From picture books to novels, we are given countless opportunities to enthrall children and inspire their love for learning.

Teacher Demonstration of Strategies for Decoding and Word Recognition

Bear, D.R., Invernizzi, M., Templeton, S., & Johnston, F. (2000). *Words their way: Word study for phonics, vocabulary, and spelling instruction* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

In *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction*, the authors provide more than 250 word study, spelling, vocabulary, and phonics activities organized in a developmental sequence. A thorough discussion of the theoretical foundation for teaching spelling as a developmental process helps teachers plan activities appropriate to children's developmental levels.

Cunningham, P. (2000). *Phonics they use: Words for reading and writing*. New York, NY: Longman.

In this updated resource for teaching phonics as "part of a good balanced reading program," Cunningham emphasizes the need for variety in teaching phonics and spelling to reach the many learning personalities of our children. Discussions of shared reading and writing, predictable charts, alphabet books and rhyming books, "doing" word walls, using phonics and spelling patterns, and helping children to become "word detectives" provide practical research-based strategies.

Moustafa, M. (1997). *Beyond traditional phonics: Research discoveries and reading instruction.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

"Learning to read doesn't have to be hard and frustrating. It can and should be a joyous adventure, as exciting for youngsters, their families, and their teachers as when children learn to walk and talk," says writer and researcher Margaret Moustafa. In this accessible book, Moustafa describes the latest research on how children use their knowledge of the world and of language to make sense of print. She discusses the critical importance of being read to and having access to age-appropriate books on children's literacy development. She describes a new method of teaching phonics that is explicit, systematic, extensive, and based on our latest understandings of how children learn letter-sound correspondences and "begin their journey into literacy."

Schickedanz, J.A. (1999). *Much more than the ABCs: The early stages of reading and writing.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

In this revised and expanded edition of the popular *More Than the ABCs*, Schickedanz argues that learning to read and write depends on many motivating, meaningful experiences with language and print. Nurturing children's love of learning and curiosity includes exploring, experimenting with, and mastering the alphabet, as well as oral language, art, science, and math. "If reading is to make sense to children, they must see how it is used in life," says Schickedanz.

Storytelling, Story Acting, and Writing: Essential Language Experience for All Children

Brown, V., & Pleydell, S. (1999). *The dramatic difference: Drama in the preschool and kindergarten classrooms.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Promoting active learning, the authors explore how dramatic and free play are essential to intellectual, emotional, and physical development. Drawing on brain research, they show how critical children's sensory interactions with their environment are to initial and ongoing elaboration of brain development.

Cooper, P. (1993). *When stories come to school: Telling, writing, & performing stories in the early childhood classroom.* New York, NY: Teachers and Writers Collaborative.

By placing children's own stories at the center of the early childhood curriculum, Cooper offers readers, from parents to teachers, a natural way to help children begin to read and write. Cooper observes, "The real tragedy in failing to reach even the youngest children in our care does not stem from the children, or their much publicized 'lack of preparation' for school, or their 'unreadiness to learn,' but from our lack of response to their personal and developmental histories—in other words, to who they are and how they think" (p. 8).

Fletcher, R., & Portalupi, J. (1998). *Craft lessons: Teaching writing K–8*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Ralph Fletcher writes about writing, to the delight of the many teachers who have come to rely on his numerous books. In *Craft Lessons* Fletcher teams with Joann Portalupi to offer mini-lessons in the decisions a writer must make between conceiving an idea and editing the final draft. *Craft Lessons* provides teachers with lessons to guide their student writers to make skillful decisions about voice, structure, supporting detail, setting, mood, and character. Lessons are arranged for K–2, 3–4, and 5–8, with generous appendices that provide examples of student writing. Fletcher says, "Craft is the cauldron in which the writing gets forged." *Craft Lessons* guides teachers in crafting a cauldron of good writing in their classrooms.

Vivian Paley is the quintessential teacher researcher and "kid-watcher." Her books reflect her view that teachers of young children should seek daily to uncover and describe the child's point of view. Story reading and telling, acting out stories, and fantasy play are not only the core curriculum in her classrooms, but also the vehicle by which young children discover themselves and learn to confront new problems in their daily experience. Titles include:

Wally's stories. (1981). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Boys and girls: Superheroes in the doll corner. (1984). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Mollie is three: Growing up in school. (1986). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Bad guys don't have birthdays: Fantasy at four. (1988). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
The boy who would be a helicopter. (1990). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
You can't say you can't play. (1992). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
Kwanzaa and me: A teacher's story. (1995). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
The kindness of children. (1999). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
White teacher. (2000). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ray, K.W. (1999). *Wondrous words: Writers and writing in the elementary classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

In *Wondrous Words*, writing teacher Katie Wood Ray draws on her years of working with the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project to explain in practical terms how students learn to write from studying the work of good writers. Through the use of classroom stories and examples of student writing, Ray discusses the role of reading aloud and prewriting, and invites students and teachers to discover the joy and value of literature.

Nurturing Emotional and Aesthetic Literacy

Ashton-Warner, S. (1986). *Teacher*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

A western trained teacher of Maori children learns how to connect to children as emotional, cultural, and intellectual beings. Ashton-Warner has had a tremendous impact on literacy teaching and on teachers for decades. Her encounters with Maori children taught her how to nurture and engage the whole child—his or her experiences and imagination—in the learning process. She encourages children to imagine what is meaningful to them to create the ideas and stories that further language development.

Benedict, S., & Carlisle, L. (Eds.). (1992). *Beyond words: Picture books for older readers and writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Edited by two teachers, the message from all the contributors to this celebration of the picture book is that picture books can be enjoyed by people of all ages. As librarian Carolyn Jenks writes in her chapter: "There are so many good picture books, fiction and nonfiction, that with a little imagination one can weave them into a study of nearly any subject. In fact, we need them to enrich the fabric of our findings, to add color, to provide for the reluctant reader, and to bring the group together."

Bosma, B., & DeVries Guth, N. (Eds.) (1995). *Children's literature in an integrated curriculum: The authentic voice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

The authors state: "Educators who wish to integrate curriculum are committed to a view of learning that sees all disciplines as interconnected and related to the life of the learner." They discuss theories of how the brain works, child-centered research and curriculum, and collaborative learning in support of their strategies for incorporating children's literature across the curriculum. Chapters offer suggestions for literature-based science programs; literature and content instruction in language arts; engaging at-risk youth; and a number of other topics.

Clemens, S.G. (1983). *The sun's not broken, a cloud's just in the way: On child-centered teaching*. Mt. Rainier, MD: Gryphon House.

The author discusses what she believes are the critical issues for teachers: the interrelationship of feeling and learning, the role of the senses in skill development, and the influence of the school schedule upon the teacher's goals. She emphasizes how important adult awareness of each child's developmental level, learning style, and affective needs is. Her approach feeds into positive, effective literacy strategies for very young children. She incorporates play and attention to emotional needs in individualized approaches to each child.

Gibbs, J. (2001). *Tribes: A new way of learning and being together*. Windsor, CA: Center Source Systems.

Many teachers rely on this classic guide to building a learning community to get the school year off to a good start. Gibbs draws on more than 20 years of experience to outline a process for building collaboration, cooperative problem solving, and inclusion in the classroom.

Monitoring Children's Progress

Cambourne, B., & Turbill, J. (Eds). (1994). *Responsive evaluation: Making valid judgments about student literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Responsive evaluation is the model developed by the authors with the assistance of teacher researchers, literacy researchers, and administrators to fit the way that literacy is commonly taught in classrooms. Readers not only learn how the responsive evaluation model can help integrate teaching and learning but also will come to understand the valuable knowledge than can be derived from the collaboration of teachers, college researchers, curriculum specialists, and principals. An excellent aspect of the books is the way in which the connections are made between evaluation theory and learning theory and the effect of theory as a foundation for classroom practice. Lots of examples and illustrations add to the reading ease and this is also facilitated by the large print and clear format.

Clay, M.M. (1985). *The early detection of reading difficulties* (3rd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

This is an excellent text for understanding appropriate assessments for non-readers and early readers, and also for a thorough description and research base for Reading Recovery. The diagnostic survey that is the hallmark of the Reading Recovery program is explained in detail with many excellent examples from Clay's research. Perforated pages of the assessment can be copied for use with students. Analysis and interpretation instructions are clear with many illustrations. The downside is that this third edition was last printed in 1993 and is now out of print. However, there are many services and book stores that may either have a copy or can locate one.

Glazer, S.M. (1998). *Assessment is instruction: Reading, writing, spelling, and phonics for all learners*. Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon.

This is a comprehensive text that leads the reader through the complex task of creating classroom environments that integrate assessment and instruction. Using samples of classroom activities with illustrations from "real" classrooms makes the ideas come alive for educators. It is an enjoyable and informative read. Teachers should have this available as they try to develop appropriate instruction for a diverse population and to design assessments that provide an accurate picture of all students' capabilities. The appendices provide literature suggestions for developing reading and writing skills, checklists of reading and writing behaviors, sample report forms for parents, and a glossary that helps bring a myriad of terms together in ways teachers can understand.

Griffin, P., Smith, P.G., & Ridge, N. (2001). *The literacy profiles in practice: Toward authentic assessment*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

In this text, the authors describe and explain the use of a literacy profile to analyze and interpret student growth in literacy. The initial profiles were developed in Victoria, Australia, in 1986 but have had several revisions, including the introduction of the American Literacy Profile Scales in 1995. This new series is an attempt to integrate assessment and instruction. The text outlines classroom contexts in which the profiles are useful as well as identifying activities that can be used to develop literacy skills. The appendices include information on literacy bands (reading, writing, speaking, and listening)

and black line masters that teachers can use for various profile activities. In addition to this text a reporting CD-ROM and manual are available. Further information is also available on the Web site www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/arc/profiles

IRA/NCTE Joint Task Force on Assessment. (1994). *Standards for the assessment of reading and writing.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Our changing understanding of learning and the nature of knowledge must be reflected in the assessment process. If we understand learning to be the result of inquiry into questions and issues of concern, and knowledge and language to be dynamic, then assessment must serve the needs of the teacher and the learner. This brief text outlines 11 standards and provides the rationale and implications for each with the addition of case studies for standards 3, 4, 8, and 9. Briefly the standards say that assessment is for the purpose of informing instruction, should allow for critical inquiry, reflect the complex nature of reading and writing, involve parents and teachers as essential parties, and include multiple measures; perspectives should be evident. A succinct message about a complex topic that focuses on the essentials.

Leslie, L., & Caldwell, J. (2001). *Qualitative reading inventory—3.* New York, NY: Longman.

This is a wonderful individual assessment tool both for teachers in the classroom and reading teachers who work with special populations. One advantage of the inventory is that it spans the elementary and high school years. The technical development of each section of the QRI is clearly and thoroughly explained in both narrative and graphic form. Particularly useful is the combination of retelling and direct comprehension questions, which broadens the information that can be gained through the assessment. The elementary and middle school portions also contain word list and miscue analysis components. Comprehension is checked both by direct recall of passage information and what is called "look back." Students during this phase can refer to the reading to respond to follow-up questions or to correct responses that were not accurate. Because the test developers recognize the importance of prior knowledge to understanding, there are sets of conceptual questions that examiners discuss with students prior to reading the passages. The data derived from the assessment are meant to help teachers determine the appropriateness of text as well as the strengths and needs of individual students. Levels reported are the traditional levels derived in IRIs—independent (90 percent comprehension), instructional (70 percent comprehension), and frustration (less than 90 percent word recognition and less than 70 percent comprehension). A feature that has been added to the high school section is a think-aloud for specific passages that allows examiners to determine how students are processing the reading material.

Rhodes, L.K. (Ed.). (1993). *Literacy assessment: A handbook of instruments.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

This text includes a variety of ready-to-use assessments for reading and writing. Measurements are informal and include interest and attitude surveys, comprehension checklists, sort form miscue analysis, self-assessments for literature discussion groups, and interviews. The bibliography includes suggestions of other instruments that would be useful for both classroom teachers and reading specialists. A very good collection of ready-to-use assessments for teachers to have available.

Assessment Web Sites

Center for Equity and Excellence in Education Test Database
www.ericae.net/eac/ (LEP Assessment database)
This database contains the 200 instruments most commonly used with English Language Learners. Inclusion in the database does not mean that the sponsors endorse the tests.

ETS Test File
www.ericae.net/testcol.htm#ETSTF (ETS Database Files)
This searchable database contains more than 10,000 tests and research instruments verified as commercially available after 1989.

The National Center for Fair & Open Testing
www.fairtest.org
The following issues of concern are identified on the Fair Test site:

1. Standardized tests, especially norm-referenced, multiple-choice tests, are harmful to children and to education
2. Basing high-stakes decisions on standardized tests (high school graduation, advancement, etc.) is bad educational practice
3. Alternatives to standardized tests, such as performance assessment and portfolios, must be implemented at all levels, from individual classrooms to large-scale assessment

Information can be obtained through the Web site and also by contacting Fair Test at:

342 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 864-4810
FAX (617) 497-2224

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) Reading Assessment Database
www.sedl.org/work/literacy.html
This database includes more than 125 reading assessment tools appropriate for children who have not yet entered the third grade, presented in an easy-to-use, Internet-accessible format. The database consists of a compiled list of instruments with basic information on the elements of each assessment. Each assessment tool can be clicked to provide the name of the test, a short description of what the test purports to measure, reliability and validity information, data reporting, administration information, availability in languages other than English, and ordering information. SEDL is not affiliated in any way with any of the publishers of these assessment tools.

Professional Learning Teams

Bisplinghoff, B.S., & Allen, J.B. (Eds.). (1998). *Engaging teachers and researching relationships.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Written by classroom teachers across the grades who worked individually and collaboratively to explore the issues of time, methods, and relationship in an effort to develop meaningful and organic research practices, these essays also explore the tensions and conflicts involved in teacher research. In one of the essays, the teacher-researchers conclude that "teacher research is different (from university researchers) because what matters most is what is best for the students at any moment in time. Thus, the goals of the research must be continuously evaluated and accordingly revised in light of the students' best interests. If at any time some aspect of the research conflicts with student needs, then it is necessary to abandon, alter, or postpone the research" (p. 41).

Chandler, K., & Mapleton Teacher-Research Group. (1999). *Spelling inquiry: How one elementary school caught the mnemonic plague.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Written by classroom teachers using a unique collaborative process, the book has a twofold emphasis on inquiry. The authors discuss how to foster inquiry-based learning about spelling in their classrooms and also provide a detailed look at the workings of their schoolwide teacher research group. (The book is dedicated to Power and Hubbard, whose work inspired the project).

Graves, D. (2001). *The energy to teach.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

In 18 months of interviews with educators across the country, Donald Graves asked, "What gives you energy, what takes energy away, and what, for you, is a waste of time?" Graves offers insights into how teachers can maintain the energy necessary to support their commitment in the face of public criticism, the demands of their classrooms, and the realities of their students' lives. In this book, Graves draws on his extensive experience as an educator and researcher, to indicate how teachers can tap sources of energy and inspiration to teach effectively in the face of daunting, enervating challenges.

Power, B.M., & Hubbard, R.S. (1993). *The art of classroom inquiry: A handbook for teacher-researchers.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

In *The Art of Classroom Inquiry: A Handbook for Teacher-Researchers*, Hubbard and Power present the nuts and bolts of research strategies—interviewing and notetaking techniques, methods for categorizing data, and avenues for publishing research. The text includes hands-on activities designed to help teachers test out research methods and hone their skills. The book "is a celebration of what is possible in classrooms when teachers pursue their wonderings, asking and answering their own questions about learning."

Power, B.M., & Hubbard, R.S. (1999). *Living the questions: A guide for teacher-researchers.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

In *Living the Questions: A Guide for Teacher-Researchers*, authors Ruth Hubbard and Brenda Power "share the passions and constraints of teacher-researchers from throughout the world who have tackled all sorts of research projects and in the process developed creative methods for making research a vital part of their lives." Each chapter includes a snapshot of teachers doing research (28 projects in all). The authors distill their best advice about research methods and strategies into brief, practical essays. A research workshop section offers tips on research activities to try, and the chapter closes with a featured Teacher-Researchers section, showing a range of strategies used by teacher-researchers in their work.

Power, B.M., & Hubbard, R.S. (Eds.). (1996). *Oops: What we learn when our teaching fails.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Have you read enough books about impossibly great teachers who always do everything right? In *Oops: What We Learn When Our Teaching Fails*, Brenda Power and Ruth Hubbard have collected true tales of real teachers who have made—and learned from—real mistakes in their classrooms. What makes these teachers great is their ability to reflect on, and benefit from, well-intentioned lessons gone awry. The stories are humorous. The process of learning the craft of teaching by becoming a reflective practitioner is inspiring.

Building a Strong Foundation in Oral Language

Teachers are well aware that success or failure in learning to read does not begin in kindergarten. Vocabulary growth rate, vocabulary use, conceptual development, comprehension, verbal reasoning, motivation to read, and the ease with which children learn to match print to sound are all affected by a child's language and literacy history. When children are offered a rich literacy environment with many meaningful opportunities to engage with oral and written language throughout their preschool and school years, we help them build a strong foundation for thoughtful reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

It is an exciting time to be a teacher of young children. Research, including research on early brain development, has confirmed that the experiences that many parents and early childhood educators provide in their homes and school settings promote language development and early literacy (Caine & Caine, 1990; Shore, 1997). Teachers no longer have to worry **that reciting nursery rhymes, playing word games, and singing songs** such as Raffi's "I love to eat, eat, epples and benenes" are frivolous activities. Rather, they are helping children develop phonemic awareness (the ability to hear and manipulate the separate sounds in words), a prerequisite for phonics knowledge (understanding that letters stand for the sounds in spoken words). In addition, singing boosts early language skills, enhances memory and listening skills, and increases attention span.

Reading aloud need not be seen as a frill to be engaged in only after important seatwork is completed; instead, listening to and discussing stories are perhaps the most important activities for young children's literacy development. Illustrating stories and creating stories in response to pictures help children create rich mental models; these activities are particularly critical for children who have trouble engaging with text, and enhance comprehension for all children.

Similarly, the link between **dramatic play, storytelling, and story reading** has never been more secure. Pretend play is enriched by stories of all kinds, and acting out stories can bring the written word to life—enhancing story recall, overall intellectual performance, and social competence (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). All of these activities—child-centered conversations, storytelling, singing, a print-rich environment, painting and drawing, repeated reading of favorite story books, and pretend play—promote oral language development while they build a bridge from oral to written language. Many long-term studies have shown that children superior in oral language in kindergarten and first grade are the ones who excel in reading and writing in the middle grades (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1999; Snow et al., 1998; Wells, 1986).

Learning To Talk

Psychologist George Miller estimated that infants must add words to their vocabulary at an average rate of one every hour they are awake, a total of several thousand a year. Children learn grammar with a complexity that defies linguistic analysis (Bruner, 1983). How do children manage such a theoretical impossibility? Discovering how children learn language continues to fascinate generations of philosophers and linguists; in recent years, a broad-based approach, usually referred to as the "interactionist perspective," has emerged as the most influential theory in the field. Its basic premise is that at birth, infants are psychologically prepared to learn to talk and learn to do so within the context of reciprocal, everyday social interactions with caregivers (Bruner, 1983).

Differences in Language Environments

The optimal environment for stimulating language development is one of responsiveness to and acceptance of the child's communicative attempts. When children's communicative attempts are encouraged and responded to in a way that fosters further talk, language and thinking are enhanced (Bruner, 1983; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1995, 1999). In contrast, parents and teachers may actively discourage thinking and hinder the development of curiosity and interest in the world. In a longitudinal study, Hart and Risley (1995) found that low socioeconomic status (SES) children frequently experience a **language-impoverished environment**, receiving substantially less parenting per hour than children in middle-class families, and that these differences were strongly correlated with subsequent IQ measures of the children.

In addition, in Hart and Risley's study, a substantial proportion of low-income parents' speech to children functioned to **prohibit** children's activities. The children in welfare families heard a prohibition—such as "Don't," "Stop," "Quit"—twice as often as they heard affirmative feedback. These researchers found a significant inverse relationship between the rate of prohibitions and children's IQ. They concluded that the strong relationship between even low prohibitions and unfavorable child outcomes suggests that prohibitions have a toxic effect on children's speech development.

A cumulative, ever-widening gap. Hart (1982) found that although the language of poor children displayed as great a variety and complexity as that of middle-class children, less advantaged children used complex structures less frequently. In addition, poor children added new words and structures more slowly than advantaged children. The result was "a cumulative, ever-widening gap between the size of the lexicon in use by children in poverty vs. advantaged children" (p. 209).

It is clear that well before the age of three, children's language development is on a path that greatly influences further learning. In their longitudinal study, researchers Hart and Risley (1995) extrapolated from their data on the number of words per hour heard by children in the three types of families they studied. They concluded that by age three, the children in professional families would have heard more than 30 million words, the children in working-class families 20 million, and the children in welfare families 10 million.

These differences are correlated with differences in vocabulary growth rate, vocabulary use, and IQ test scores. Multiple-regression analysis showed that race made no contribution to child accomplishments over and above parenting style. In a more recent analysis of the results of their study, Hart and Risely (1999) concluded: No matter what the SES, the more time parents spent talking with their child from day to day, the more rapidly the child's vocabulary was likely to be growing, and the higher the child's score on an IQ test was likely to be at age three (p. 3).

Whitehurst (2001) concluded that by first grade, linguistically advantaged children are likely to have vocabularies that are four times the size of their linguistically disadvantaged peers. Becker (1997) concluded that the primary difficulty with sustaining early gains in reading is the lack of adequate vocabulary to meet the broad academic demands that begin in the early upper-elementary grades and continue throughout schooling (cited in Baker, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995). These researchers observed, "One of the most alarming findings is that vocabulary differences between students appear early and the vocabulary gap grows increasingly large over time" (p. 6).

What Schools Can Do

Schools can help to close the cumulative, ever-widening gap in language development by providing a language-rich and responsive environment. In addition to singing, dramatic play, and other language-rich activities, teacher-child conversations play a critical role in language development. A number of studies of outcomes of preschool experiences have found that the amount and quality of verbal interaction engaged in by teachers and children emerged as the strongest predictor of positive child outcomes (Phillips, 1987; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). Data suggest that 20 minutes three times a week of one-to-one interaction can lead to dramatic gains in children's language competence

The Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development conducted by researchers Dickinson and Tabors (2001) found strong evidence that teacher-child conversations, in which children play an active part, have an important role in shaping children's language and early literacy development. In their book about the study, *Beginning Literacy With Language,* they reported that:

- Children tended to do better on kindergarten emergent literacy tasks if their teachers had engaged them in **conversations that included personal narratives, explanations, pretend, talk about past and present events, and discussion of ideas.**
- The quality of teacher-child **extended conversations** throughout the day (talk that requires participants to develop understandings beyond the here and now, and that requires the use of several turns) has a significant bearing on the child's long-term language and literacy development.
- Exposure to conversations that include low-frequency vocabulary words **(rare words)** had a beneficial effect on children's language development. Talking about the meaning of the words during shared reading helped children remember new words.
- The amount of time that kindergartners were observed **talking about literacy-related topics** (talking about a book, sharing writing, telling stories) was related to assessments of their early literacy skills.
- **Reading books aloud** offers particularly rich opportunities for vocabulary growth "because there are two sources of words: the words in the text of the book and the words spoken by the mother [teacher] in discussing the book with her child."
- **Picture book reading** is a unique opportunity for language development in that the mother [teacher] and child can return to the same story time after time. Repeated readings and discussions of the same page in a book are rich settings for language acquisition.
- Kindergarten performance was better when the children as four-year-olds had **teachers who limited their own talking, gave children more time to talk, and responded in a way that encouraged more talk.**

Vocabulary growth and development. Research strongly suggests that vocabulary is more efficiently acquired in extended conversations that include "rare words," through independent reading, and by being read to than through direct instruction of words in isolation. Dickinson and Tabors concluded: "Conversation that engages children in extended discussion around a topic offers many opportunities for children to hear unusual words being used by more knowledgeable speakers and to make the connections with what they already know" (2001, p. 109).

Yet, "it's important to teach some words directly," say researchers Stahl and Kapinus (2001). "Good vocabulary instruction helps children gain ownership of words, instead of just learning them well enough to pass a test" (p. 14).

The National Reading Panel also advised that **vocabulary should be taught both directly and indirectly**. They stressed that learning in **rich contexts, repetition and multiple exposures** to vocabulary items, **incidental learning**, and **use of computer technology** all enhance vocabulary instruction.

Words and concepts. Templeton and Pikulski (1999) suggest that effective vocabulary instruction develops the relationship between words and concepts.

> **Concepts** are the basic units of thought and belief (Smith, 1995), and **words** are the labels for these thoughts and beliefs. If a concept is a familiar one, then the word that corresponds to this underlying knowledge will be understood, remembered, and used. Concepts grow and develop through experiences and through examining those experiences, concretely and through reading and writing. This in turn leads to learning and using more labels—words. The strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension exists because students bring this background knowledge, these thoughts and beliefs, to their reading (p. 2).

Fostering a word-learning environment that promotes "inquisitiveness, interest, and wordplay is important," say Templeton and Pikulski. These researchers describe four ways that vocabulary grows:

Elaborating conceptual knowledge underlying a known word. For example, a student learns that the word "cat" can refer not only to the familiar "garden-variety" family pet but also to a family of wild animals, some of them quite large.

Relating new words to existing concepts. A new word, *gigantic*, is related to the familiar word/concept of *huge*; unfamiliar *automobile* is related to the familiar *car*.

Relating new concepts to existing words. A student who knows what a *column* of numbers means in arithmetic learns that *column* also refers to a type of article in a newspaper.

Learning both new words and new concepts. This involves helping students develop a concept for the process of *condensation* and helping them learn and remember the corresponding word (p. 2).

Clearly, background knowledge, conceptual development, and word knowledge go hand in hand. Teachers, parents, and other caregivers can nurture the language development and potential of all children by providing environments rich in opportunities for meaningful experiences of many types. Bev Bos, preschool director, author, workshop presenter, and keynote speaker, writes passionately of children's need for a wide base of experiences:

Before reading, children need experiences with wind, dirt, mud, water, experiences with other children, grandparents, running, walking, flowers, books, smells, gardens, balls, soft things, hard things, music, moving trains—to name just a few. Children need experiences—short, happy experiences—with grocery stores, libraries, bookstores. Children need experiences with wood, building, rolling, swinging, clouds, rain. And they need to talk about them, ask questions, point, make noise—in short, to use language with all of their experiences (1983, p. 16).

Oral history projects. Creating stories and books based on interviews with local community members can help students develop their oral and written language skills, explore the use of technology, such as tape recorders and digital cameras, and bridge gaps between schools and communities. Project FRESA is an example of a project that provided elementary students with rich language and cultural experiences. Two teachers from Mar Vista Elementary School in Oxnard, California, created a multimedia, cross-curricular

project to help students understand the relationship between their own lives and the strawberry crops that surround and sustain the local community. Project FRESA is the collaboration developed by fifth-grader teacher Michelle Singer and third-grade teacher Amanda Irma H. Perez. Most of their students are immigrants from Mexico who speak English and Spanish. Both teachers are also bilingual (http://equity4.clmer.csulb.edu/netshare/cti/%20FOR%20PSRTEC%20WEBSITE/Amada%20and%20Michelle/)

In order to understand the importance of strawberries to local farm worker families, the environment, and the economy, students conducted family interviews, did research via the Internet, collected historical and geographical information, and used technology to share their findings with their school, their homes, and the global community. The interdisciplinary nature of the project meant that lessons crossed boundaries of language arts, math, geography, and the use of technology. Also central to the project was the teaching of critical thinking and education to combat racism. Giving students the opportunity and language skills to voice their daily reality was a goal throughout Project FRESA.

The ambitious project offered students many avenues to develop their language skills while investigating complex topics that affect their own lives. The project Web site—developed by students—highlights the following language arts activities that reach students of diverse backgrounds and learning styles:

- Accessing students' prior knowledge about strawberries through brainstorming and making charts to share "what we know, what we want to know, what we learned"
- Having students interview each other, family members, and neighbors
- Making oral presentations of their findings
- Conducting research through encyclopedias, newspapers, and magazines
- Doing quick writes on experiences related to the farmworker occupation and to the geographical area
- Writing journals
- Doing art and poetry projects
- Engaging in ongoing dialogue
- Developing problem-solving skills (posing a problem, then developing an action)

Project FRESA illustrates how a well-planned, collaborative, integrated project can provide a medium in which students and families may voice their daily realities. Technology played a central role in Project FRESA, but was not the focus of the project. Students used tape recorders for interviews, still cameras, digital cameras, and video recorders for documentation; the Internet for research; word processing software for writing; spreadsheets to create graphs of information; and scanners to convert artwork and photographs.

The project allowed students to use both their English and Spanish skills to read, write, speak, and listen. Teachers Singer and Perez point out:

> Students can communicate in one language with their parents, analyze and present information gained in another. Language is used for a purpose while developing vocabulary, grammar, research and technology skills. All students have equal access and opportunities to actively participate in the project no matter the language, ability, age, or fluency level.

Defining Excellence in Kindergarten Literacy
By Nellie Edge

Excellence in kindergarten literacy is the vital foundation for school reform. Professionally, I cannot separate one aspect of excellence in literacy development from the total experience of immersing children in meaningful language and literacy experiences within a joyful, caring community. I cannot separate literacy events and "powerful, research-based teaching practices" from the affective elements that support an optimal kindergarten environment—the respect, high expectations, and care shown to the individual child and the child's family.

Experiences in the educational arts engage children's multiple ways of knowing. Developing social-emotional skills support the growing children in literacy and life skills, in school and out. So my definition includes reflective teaching, rich experiences in the arts, respectful and supportive parent connections, a language-intensive environment, phonological sensitivity and letter knowledge training, within a comprehensive brain-friendly literacy program of:

Language Play—Everyday
Books and Songs—All Day Long

Our kindergarten classrooms are made up of diverse children, each with unique strengths, varied prior language learning experiences, and preferred learning styles. Excellence in kindergarten literacy acknowledges the complexity inherent in meeting the individual needs of today's learners. It is vital that the teacher provides instruction that both supports and challenges all children.

Kindergarten is for language. It is the familiarity with the English language that precedes and underlies excellent phonemic awareness instruction. It is this familiarity that allows the child's eventual decoding to be error-free and reading to be fluent. We must skillfully accelerate language learning—both think and oral communication—to begin bridging the achievement gap and prevent later reading difficulties. So we invite kindergartners to rehearse language as singers, signers, and storytellers. Lively discussion about quality literature allows us to connect books with children's lives and provide the vehicle for explicit teaching of comprehension strategies. We memorize, recite, and perform language. We engage children in "magical memory reading." Our curriculum invites children to talk. Developing the child's capacity for language and thought underlies everything we do in kindergarten.

When I think of the language of math and science explorations, I am always conscious that we are building the vocabulary and experience base to support children as ambitious readers and writers and disciplined creative thinkers. Rich experiences in the many languages of art, music, drama and storytelling help children find personal meaning in school literacy. We want them to have the motivation to put their heart and mind into the learning process. Developing literacy skills can be at least partially assessed. The more important teaching—the love of language and respect and care children develop for others, the willingness to express themselves and take risks, self-discipline and responsibility to follow through on projects—those are not easy to measure. They are the bigger picture of why we do what we do. They are the foundation for "excellence," the habits of mind that all children deserve to acquire.

When we choose traditional interactive songs in English, Spanish, and sign language to enhance literacy and build friendships within our multiethnic communities, it is with the hope that these respectful bonds will carry

with the children into the years beyond kindergarten. We teach children to care and share together because that creates healthier lives for them and ultimately healthier lives for their communities. We also know, as Ralph Peterson so wisely reminds us in his book *Life is a Crowded Place*, "Once you get the community right, the levels of learning soar."

When we choose only the finest literature, songs, poems, and rhymes to give our children, it is because we know these language models are the seeds that will grow powerful writers and children who will appreciate wonderful words. We want imaginative language and poetic phrases to become a part of our children. These sounds of language will forever be on the walls of their minds and so we ask—"Is this worthy of the children?" Walter de la Mare, in *Bells of Grass*, speaks so eloquently: *"I know well that only the rarest kind of best in anything can be good enough for the young."*

When we structure the classroom so children can collaborate and make choices and move in and out of different social settings, we are aware of how important a child's—and our own—social-emotional development is. We think of the critical life choices these children may face just five or six short years down the school road. We know that the kindergarten child who finds meaning and sense of belonging in school is more likely to make healthy choices and to stay in school.

When we model respectful, caring language it is because we want kindergarten children to speak to others in their classroom and others in their lives in kind and helpful tones so their voices will be heard. We give them "challenging yet achievable literacy tasks," such as printing their name efficiently, and encourage them to work diligently and form each letter correctly. We know that accomplishing this relevant task will build their confidence and ability to express their voice as a writer. Kindergarten children love to write.

Bruno Bettleheim's research reminds us that how children perceive themselves in the act of learning to read generalizes to the whole self-concept. How we teach reading and build foundation literacy skills and attitudes can influence a child for a lifetime.

There is not a packaged program that could possibly meet the diverse language and literacy needs and honor the unique cultural backgrounds children bring to kindergarten. Scripted programs do not understand human motivation. However, given quality, ongoing early literacy training and support, kindergarten teachers can teach with integrity, compassion, and renewed energy. As reflective practitioners they can build a scaffold of success for every child, every day.

Young children deserve a comprehensive literacy program within a joyful, caring community of learners—a *child's garden*. Their lives must be valued, celebrated, and incorporated into the literacy curriculum. That's not an easy task, but it is worth putting our combined passion and energy into. It appears to be the neglected foundation for school reform.

Source: Defining Excellence in Kindergarten Literacy. In *Create Celebrations of Language in Your Kindergarten: A Joyful Look at Good First Teaching*. Salem, OR: Nellie Edge Seminars.
For more information: www.nellieedge.com

New Thinking About Early Brain Development

- Babies are born with 100 billion brain cells; however, only a relatively small number of neurons are connected. In the first decade of life, a child's brain forms trillions of connections.
- How a brain develops hinges on a complex interplay between the genes you're born with and the experiences you have. "It's not a competition; it's a dance," says psychiatrist Stanley Greenspan.
- Research on brain development has provided physiological evidence that early experiences and interactions do not just create a context for early development and learning, they directly affect the way the brain is wired. In turn, this wiring profoundly affects emotional, language, and cognitive development.
- Brain development is especially rapid during the first year. Brain scans show that by the age of one, a baby's brain qualitatively resembles that of a normal young adult.
- By age three, a baby's brain has formed about 1,000 trillion connections—about twice as many as adults have.
- The years between three and 10, described as "years of promise" by the 1996 Carnegie Task Force, are a time of rapid development of social, linguistic, cognitive, and physical competencies, corresponding with dramatic neurological changes (Carnegie Task Force, 1996).
- At age 11, the brain begins to prune extra connections at a rapid rate. The circuitry, or "wiring," that remains is more specific and efficient (Shore, 1997).

  The brain has been called the ultimate example of the saying "use it or lose it." Connections that are used repeatedly in the early years become permanent; those that are not are eliminated. While the brain continues to form new connections throughout the life cycle, there are periods during which the brain is particularly efficient at specific types of learning.

- Brain research helps us understand not only how and when the brain develops, but what kinds of experiences and environments support development:
  - **Social relations are central to every aspect of a child's development.** Active and engaged care is essential for children's brain maturation and for social, emotional, and intellectual development. For older children, caring adults are still vitally important. In addition, sharing ideas, experiences, and opinions with peers both challenges and expands children's thinking and builds social competence.
  - **Children learn best in a psychologically safe environment.** Brain research indicates that emotional intelligence is the bedrock upon which to build other intelligences, and that it is more closely linked to lifelong success than is IQ (Goleman, cited in O'Neil, 1996). Research has demonstrated that emotions can speed up or inhibit the thinking process. Under conditions of high stress, the brain goes into "survival mode," and higher-order thinking is impeded.

    Gunnar's (1996) research on cortisol, a hormone that is easily measured because it is present in saliva, helps to explain why stressful and/or abusive environments have an adverse effect on brain development. Adverse or traumatic events elevate the level of cortisol in the brain. Excessively and chronically high levels of cortisol alter the brain by making it vulnerable to processes that destroy brain cells responsible for thought and memory. Just as important, cortisol reduces the number of connections in certain parts of the brain.
  - **The brain is designed as a pattern detector; perceiving relationships and making connections are fundamental to the learning process** (Caine & Caine, 1990). The brain resists learning isolated pieces of information, such as unconnected facts and words that don't make sense. Children (and adults) learn best when they can actively make sense of their experience.

- **Effective teaching builds on the experience and knowledge that children bring to school.** In order to make sense of their experiences, children need help to make connections between the known and unknown. For example, a child who has had little experience with storybooks, but who loves to tell stories and engage in dramatic play, can be encouraged to act out a story that is read aloud.
- **Effective teaching enables children to use all their senses and intelligences.** Music, drama, and arts instruction have been tentatively linked to higher achievement-test scores and higher scores on tests of creative thinking, art appreciation, reading, vocabulary, and math. "The brain is a musical brain," says songwriter and author Nellie Edge. "The rhythms of sound have a powerful impact on cognition. The language you remember with word-for-word accuracy from childhood is songs and rhymes. Singing can create a relaxed, joyful mood—the optimal state for language learning. Songs allow the brain to chunk large amounts of information into a single memory space thereby accelerating learning naturally. Music and rhymes are powerful hooks to memory" (Edge, 2000, p. 23).

  It is important for children to be physically active in the classroom. Physical movement juices up the brain, feeding it nutrients in the form of glucose and increasing nerve connections—all of which make it easier for kids of all ages to learn (Hancock, 1996). Generally speaking, the younger the child, the more important is active engagement with materials, peers, and teachers in order for learning to take place.

  We live in a world that is moving toward multiple kinds of communication, toward oral language, pictures, sounds, diagrams, videos—a world that increasingly requires creative and collaborative problem solving, imagination, and multicultural competence. In order to be successful in such a world, children need many opportunities to cultivate their imaginations and engage their emotions through drama, athletics, art, music, and dance. Integrating these separate disciplines into the curriculum supports the development of literacy—written, oral, and aesthetic.

Creating a Culturally Responsive Classroom

What Is Multicultural Education?

- Multicultural education is not an add-on to the regular curriculum. It is a perspective that is integrated into the daily activities of the classroom.
- The environment is both responsive and challenging, an environment in which children's multiple intelligences are recognized and nourished.
- Effective teachers acknowledge and build on cultural differences, while at the same time preparing children to live successfully in both worlds—their home culture and the larger society.

A Place To Start

- Teachers engage in reflective self-analysis to examine their own attitudes toward different ethnic, racial, gender, and social class groups.
- Teachers strive to understand how children have learned to think, behave, and feel. Schools can start with finding out as much as possible about the families' backgrounds and experiences of all children in the classroom, by:
  - Surveying parents
  - Reading multiple books on the represented cultures
  - Careful observation of children to see what experiences seem to connect with them
  - Making room for each child's story in the classroom

What Does the Classroom Look Like?

A wide variety of multicultural learning activities ensures that all children see themselves and their families reflected in the classroom environment. Classrooms should include:

- Pictures, puppets, dolls, foods, and other objects for dramatic play that represent diverse cultures and people with disabilities
- Learning centers—art, blocks, music, manipulatives, games, sand and water play, dramatic play—provide a place where children can use and develop competencies other than language. These centers serve as "safe havens" where second-language learners can watch and listen until they are ready to join in.
- Songs and literature (on tape, in books, on chart pack) from a variety of cultures, lifestyles, and income groups (especially those represented in the classroom) displayed throughout the room and in the book corner—light, bright, and complete with a cozy reading nook. Plenty of nonfiction books, newspapers, and magazines offer a wide range of reading materials. In this inviting corner, children read individually and with peers as they develop literacy skills and the enjoyment of reading.
- A writing center, well stocked with a variety of writing, painting, and drawing tools and surfaces—portable chalkboards, easels, dry-erase boards, alphabet blocks, letter tiles, an assortment of alphabet puzzles, and an alphabet pocket chart.
- A take-home library of children's books and tapes in the languages represented in the classroom, to encourage parents to reinforce the home language, as well as to read to their children
- Multicultural literature dealing with issues pertaining to race, class, gender, or disability to teach children to think critically and, at the same time, build a democratic classroom and school

Family-School-Community Relationships

Developing strong family-school-community relationships is essential to providing cultural continuity for children. A number of strategies can be used to enhance continuity and help children feel valued and secure. It is important to respect a family's beliefs about sharing their culture and language—some families may feel that this practice is intrusive. If families are comfortable with these activities:

- Children can bring pictures of their families and share favorite stories or songs from home
- Parents and other family and community members may be encouraged to visit the school to share aspects of their culture—reading, telling stories, sharing oral traditions, beliefs, and values, and knowledge of traditional celebrations, art, music, poetry, and dance
- Families are encouraged to use their home language in the home—talking, reading, telling stories, and singing with children

Second Language Acquisition

The most successful bilingual programs appear to be those that emphasize and use children's primary (home) language, while at the same time helping children to learn English. Research on both first and second language acquisition shows that language is best learned through actual use in a non-threatening social context. Learning a new language is encouraged by:

- Focusing on meaning rather than correctness of form, regarding errors as part of the learning process
- Learning as many words as possible in a linguistically diverse child's language
- Providing bilingual signs around the classroom
- Encouraging children to teach the class a few words in their language
- Helping children connect new words with meaning by using contextual cues, such as gestures, actions, pictures, videos, and real objects
- When posing a question, increasing the "wait time" from the usual one second or less to three or more seconds
- Using lots of predictable books, songs, chants, and poetry with rhyme and repetition

Suggestions for Helping English-Language Learners from *Learning To Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*

- Use multimedia such as videos, pictures, and concrete objects to create connections with vocabulary words
- Use gestures and body language
- Speak slowly, and enunciate clearly. Do not raise your voice.
- Repeat information and review. If a child does not understand, try rephrasing in short sentences and simpler syntax.
- Try to avoid idioms and slang words.
- Try to anticipate words that might be unfamiliar and give explicit meaning to them.
- Make use of the excellent language learning that occurs among children by supporting play and small-group activities.
- Show children how much you enjoy them and appreciate their efforts to learn a new language (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 1999).

Suggestions for Including Families in Literacy Activities

The Writer's Briefcase. Filled with paper, blank books, stapler and staples, crayons, markers, pens, pencils, stencils, envelopes, clipboard, scissors, pencil sharpener, paper clips, paper fasteners, a variety of stickers and gummed labels, and an article for parents explaining the reading/writing process you use in your classroom, this briefcase can be taken home by a different child every night.

Student-made school and/or class newsletters. Newsletters can help families feel informed and included by describing class activities, providing the words to recently learned songs, sharing recipes, and offering examples of children's work and suggestions for learning activities in the home.

Book in a bag. Children take home a book in a bag or backpack for home reading with family members. Adding both a comment section and a "tips for parents and caregivers" section encourages active family involvement.

Literacy fairs. Literacy fairs are a great way to celebrate literacy accomplishments and educate the community about your approach to literacy instruction.

Family stories. Family stories are narratives in which the youngster or other relatives are the featured characters in simple home adventures of days gone by. Buchoff (1995) writes, "Every family has its own unique body of stories that can be transmitted to the children of the family through the pleasure of story telling. Since it is often difficult for adults to recollect a special memory or specific anecdote on the spur of the moment, it can be quite helpful when children are provided with a list of 'Tell me about' prompts. Examples of such prompts might include: 'Tell me about something I did when I was little' or 'Tell me about when you got lost on the mountain'" (p. 231). Young children can record their stories on audiotape or videotape and the teacher can transcribe them, or children can dictate the stories to an adult or older child. Children can also illustrate their stories and act them out.

The Mom and Dad Book. Jennifer deGroot-Knegt, child-care director at Kente Kinder Centre in Ontario, Canada, offers this suggestion: "We ask children to bring pictures of parents, grandparents, or other caregivers to make a cooperative class book. One page is allotted for each child. We ask children to dictate stories about what their parents do and what they like them to do with them. Children also illustrate their stories. It is wonderful to read through when they are missing their parents throughout the day. These books can also be checked out and taken home by children."

Bulletin board. Sydney Gewurtz-Clemens, author and teacher, suggests that classrooms make a special bulletin board for displaying drawings and writing by children about their families and *invite* children to contribute. So that children aren't pressured to participate, this activity should not be required.

Technology and family memory books. To help families increase computer literacy while engaging in enjoyable family literacy activities, staff at Richmond Elementary in Salem, Oregon, procured grant monies to purchase computers and digital cameras to offer night classes to all families. During structured classes open to four families over a six-week period, parents and children together learn to use the Internet and the digital cameras, including editing their photographs on the computer. After discussing their family background with extended family members and researching their family history on the Internet, children and parents together decide what pictures and stories to include in their jointly created memory books. Recently, their stories and pictures were displayed at an open house at school and at the Marion County Fair.

Bilingual assistant Irene Valdivia says: "This is hands-on learning, and they pick it up quickly. And the money that comes into the school goes out into the community. Families take their new skills and help other families. It's their way of giving back."

Continued access to the computers and cameras after school enables families to continue the project after the classes end. One family comes in almost daily to do homework together. "It's impressive," fourth-grade teacher Rawlins says, "to see the entire family—Mom, Dad, and all their children—making homework a family activity."

This project illustrates the benefits of integrating technology instruction into broader literacy goals. Rather than teaching computer skills or literacy skills in isolation, this innovative project teaches families to use technology as the tool for creating an heirloom that is rich in meaning for parents and children alike. Children's language skills grow as they engage in the activities of talking, listening, reading, and writing in the company of their own extended family members.

The decisionmaking that goes into creating the memory books (for example, making choices about which photographs to include, which stories to tell) offers children more opportunities to use their language skills in meaningful ways. Making use of the Internet for research connects children with the larger world and opens new doors for using their language skills.

Meet the teacher day. A Northwest child-care director suggested: "As school is starting, to help get to know each other, we send a bag home with families who attend 'Meet the Teacher Day.' We ask the students to put five things they like in the bag or five things about themselves or their families. Attach a note to each bag to welcome the student and explain the purpose of the bag. Put together a bag for yourself that goes home with the children's bags. If a child misses the meeting, we send the bag in the mail. Each child then brings the bag to the first day of school."

Family banner. At a child-care center, teachers supply a kit for each child to take home to make a family banner. The kits contain fabric, glue, scissors, markers, and other materials, at a cost of about $1. Each family designs its own banner, which is displayed throughout the year, hanging from the ceiling. They then display the banners at a family picnic in a nearby park.

Supporting multicultural awareness. In a recent workshop, teachers in a migrant-education program were discussing how difficult it was when Mexican American families planned a return to Mexico to visit relatives during the middle of the school year, just when the students are finally learning to read. Because when the children return they frequently have not maintained their literacy skills and have to "start all over again," some teachers had been trying unsuccessfully to persuade families to postpone their trips home until summer (at the height of the harvest season) or even not to go at all.

One teacher, however, reported that her school staff had struggled with this issue, but "since visiting family was a vital part of the Latino culture that was unlikely to change," they had come up with a plan that benefited all concerned. An investment in inexpensive instant cameras for the children to take to Mexico, with instructions to "take pictures of all your relatives and write a story about each one to share with the class," enabled the children to use their literacy skills in a way that connected their families and culture to a meaningful learning experience that enriched the entire class. Some mothers also organized a workshop where they hand-stitched covers for the cameras and taught their skill to other parents.

From Cherry Valley Elementary School, Polson, Montana:

Traveling books. Written as a group, with each child contributing a page on a shared topic, these books offer opportunities for families to see the progress of all the children in the class, as well as their own child. Teacher Doug Crosby comments:

> Think about a worksheet—it might take 10 or 15 minutes to fill out a worksheet and it will be thrown away or hung on the fridge. Take a traveling book. It might take an hour to make it. Each child might read it with their mom and dad for 10 minutes. It comes back to the classroom, becomes part of the classroom library and is read during the day. At the end of the year, it becomes part of the school library. How many hours of reading and enjoyment is that book giving to kids?

Children's own published books. Children's published books go home with children to be shared with family members. Including an "about the author" section and a comment page for parents and visitors to use in responding to the book adds to their interactive nature. Children who have difficulty coming up with their own story can be encouraged to retell a traditional story, such as *Thumbelina*, or to create an innovation of a familiar story, such as Red Deer, Red Deer. In order to include the larger community, parents regularly bring children's published books to Polson's doctors' and dentists' offices. Now, along with copies of *Field and Stream* and parenting magazines, local residents can not only read the latest student works, but they can also sign their name and write responses to the book on the comment page.

Celebrating families. At Cherry Valley, celebrating the lives of family and community members takes many forms, and often integrates many aspects of literacy—oral, written, and the visual arts. Each year, at a Family Heritage Museum in the school cafeteria, children display the results of their research on their own family tree. Interviews with parents and grandparents yield rich stories, which the children write and accompany with photographs and illustrations. Recently, the use of technology—including computers for word processing and publishing, tape recorders, and digital cameras—has added to the excitement of this popular project.

Encouraging intergenerational relationships. Establishing a relationship with residents at a local nursing home can benefit all concerned. For several years, both in multiage groups and with their classrooms, children have been visiting a local nursing home and establishing relationships with one or more residents. Children then interview the residents, who frequently tell stories about their lives. The use of tape recorders helps students tell the stories, using the words of the residents. In addition, older students take notes. They then write the stories, share them with the residents who make suggested changes and edits, publish the stories, and take them back to the nursing home, where they read to the elderly residents. Parents staff the busy publishing center, making possible a high volume of published books to meet the increasing demands of the community. The project has been met with enthusiasm from the staff at the nursing facility and the residents themselves. A social worker at the facility writes:

> I have witnessed contacts between young and old, which can only be described as "touching." Residents are able to hold a child's hand or see a bright young smile. They look forward to these visits and are delighted by the children's eagerness to please and entertain. These intergenerational exchanges are a benefit for both age groups. They nurture an understanding and acceptance of age difference.

Authors' parties. Families and friends are invited to listen to their child read his or her own individually written and illustrated books, make comments in the comment section, and then move on to another child.

Floppy Rabbit's Journal. Each night, a stuffed rabbit named Floppy goes home with a different child, armed with a reading bag that contains a draft writing book, a journal, and colored pencils. On the first page, "Welcome to Floppy Rabbit's Journal," it is explained to parents that because "Floppy is not too good at writing yet," it is up to the person who takes Floppy home to confer with parents to correct spelling and punctuation, and to "help it make sense." Then the adventure is written into Floppy's journal, accompanied by a colored picture. In addition, parents are encouraged to write their own version of Floppy's stay, so children can see that their parents also like to write.

Kinder Nights, Garfield Elementary, Toppenish, Washington

The goal of Garfield Elementary's Kinder Nights is to educate parents about what they can do at home to help their child succeed in school and be ready for first grade. There has been a broad range of activities at the Kinder Nights. At the first meeting, an outside speaker from the Yakima Valley Farm Worker's Clinic spoke about good parenting. "The first night we gave each parent an apple because we said they're the teacher, so they get the apple, indicating the respect and rapport they are trying to build with parents," says Kathy Garza, who coordinates the Kinder Nights.

At reading and math nights, discussions about literacy activities and books are held in both English and Spanish, while students meet in another room to do a related activity. Parents and children also act out stories, sing, and dance. Packets that contain books, activities, and games for kids, as well as booklets (in English and Spanish) for parents with ideas on how they can help children learn are sent home with families. Kinder Nights are advertised through the city newspaper, school newspaper, reader board, flyers sent home with students, and the Spanish radio station. The whole family is invited, and childcare is provided for siblings.

Books and Babies Shower, Nespelem Elementary, Nespelem, Washington

"Finding ways to spread the word and get parents of newborns to understand how important it is to spend time with their children and read and talk to their baby is critical," says reading specialist Judy Sprankle. "We needed a forum that would allow us to get this information to parents in a very comfortable setting so that they could just hear it, take information, take materials, and then decide for themselves how they would use these in the home." Nespelem Elementary's approach was a baby shower for parents of infants up to 18 months of age.

In addition to traditional shower activities such as cake, refreshments, games, and prizes, parents and teachers discuss the kinds of language experiences that can help prepare children for school. Each parent chooses five books to take home with them and receives crayons, pencils, and a T-shirt for their child that states, "I love books and Nespelem School loves me."

Childcare is provided for the infants and their siblings, and the local WIC program has volunteered to provide transportation to those who need it. WIC and the tribal newspaper also help to advertise the event. Those who have attended have appreciated hearing about the importance of reading and talking to their children and learning about books. "When parents have a newborn, it's a very exciting time in their lives and their baby's life. So I think it's a really key time to link up with them. Some of these children we may never see in our school; however, I think that what we're doing is very valuable for the community as a whole. No matter where these children go they need to be educated and they need a solid foundation in literacy."

Talking Books and Stories Told by Elders

Teachers at Tulalip Elementary, in Marysville, Washington, have found that a classroom technology project can also serve to provide young children at home with unique literacy and technology experiences that help to prepare them for school. Recently, when staff members brainstormed ideas of what to include in a take-home packet for the prekindergartners attending the upcoming kindergarten registration, the typical assortment of books and magnetic letters was what first came to mind. But excitement grew when fourth-fifth grade teacher David Cort suggested putting together a "talking book" of a traditional Tulalip story on CD-ROM. Since the Tulalip Tribes have given each family in the tribe a computer, the CD-ROM would be a software resource that could be used by all families.

Supported by the school district and the Tulalip Tribes, school and tribal teachers have been collaborating to infuse more Tulalip language and culture into the curriculum. Some of the non-Native teachers have been taking lessons in Lushootseed, the native language of the eastern Puget Sound, and teaching it to their students. Until recently, this language was spoken by only a handful of elders. In addition, Cort's reading curriculum includes reading and retelling traditional Tulalip stories.

Accordingly, in a project that links technology with literacy, Cort's students are designing the talking book. To do so, they are learning to use Macromedia Flash 4, a widely used Web page design tool. The students' enthusiasm is apparent as they show visitors the witty animation and sounds that they have created for the book's illustrations—a baby frog catching a buzzing fly, a group of ants marching across the screen, a spider spinning a web around the baby frog. The student drawings of the main characters of the story are artistic in their own right. They were modeled after the traditional Tulalip way of drawing or carving, which was very simple and realistic compared to the more stylized art commonly associated with Northwest Native art.

The talking book tells the story "Owl and Frog," a traditional story told by Martha Lamont, a Tulalip, and recorded by Thom Hess in 1964. It was transcribed by Vi Hilbert and translated into English by David Cort. The story describes how the owl and frog came to be the animals they are. It uses Lushootseed story features such as repetition and circular figures. These story features not only lend beauty to the tale, but also help listeners remember the story better and makes them attend to the patterns in the story, according to Cort.

The story is told in both English and Lushootseed, with both languages displayed side-by-side on the computer screen. Each phrase is sounded aloud when a user clicks on it with the computer mouse, and one can hear certain words pronounced again by clicking on them. Students provided the expressive voices for the English version, and Lamont's recording is the voice of the Lushootseed version. There is also an option to hear the Lushootseed version uninterrupted. Featuring a picture of Lamont, this option exudes the feeling of hearing a story told by a grandmother.

This project integrates literacy, technology, art, and culture into a meaningful activity that benefits Cort's students, prekindergartners, and their parents and family members.

Organizing a Successful Family Center in Your School

What Is a Family Center?

A family center:

- Provides parents with a room or space for their own use at the school (or district) and facilitates communication between families and the school
- Provides opportunities for parents to get to know each other and network
- Offers educational and socializing opportunities
- Serves various needs of families so that parents and other adults can turn their attention to helping and supporting children

What Are the Advantages of a Family Center?

A well-designed center will:

- Make the school an accessible, safe, and friendly place for parents to gather
- Improve communication among families and between home and school
- Promote greater multicultural understanding among the school's families
- Demonstrate tangibly that parents are welcome at the school
- Serve as a hub for promoting parent education by linking with community resources
- Carry out a wide range of home-school partnership activities that enhance students' learning
- Serve as the center for partnerships
- Help develop leadership and advocacy skills and opportunities for parents to participate in the school community
- Coordinate parent and community volunteer services that are available to teachers and the school

Key Points for a Successful Family Center

- Everyone—including families, school staff members, and the community—should experience the benefits offered by the family center.
- As many different parent, school, and community perspectives as possible should be involved from the start to engender a sense of common ownership.
- A timeline should be set, tasks and responsibilities should be assigned, and momentum should be maintained.
- Wherever the family center is located, it must be perceived as an accessible and safe place to go. The center should offer a welcoming and friendly atmosphere where parents can relax, visit with one another and with staff members, and obtain help and services that will meet their families' needs.
- A family center does not need a large budget to get started. What is more important is a firm commitment to the idea and a willingness to explore all possible sources of support.
- Participants can share in the responsibility of decorating, furnishing, and supplying the family center. Involvement in those aspects will lead participants to take pride in the center and feel at home there.

- The successful functioning of a family center depends on the selection and training of effective staff and the support and encouragement of the administration.
- Families and school staff members will support the center if the activities meet parents' needs and if teachers perceive that the center is enhancing children's learning.
- Success in reaching out and involving all families requires the center to be a caring and inviting place that meets families' needs.
- From the beginning, clear objectives should be set and evaluation should be planned.

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (1996). *Organizing a successful family center in your school: A resource guide.* Madison, WI: Author.

Reading Aloud and Discussing Stories: The Heart of the Early Elementary Literacy Program

At the heart of effective literacy programs in the early elementary grades are reading aloud and having lively conversations about books. Reading beautiful books to primary-age children develops a deep and abiding love of stories and books. Long before children can read proficiently, they can comprehend texts that are far above their independent reading level. Listening to stories at a level that is more advanced than a child's independent reading level builds listening and comprehension skills and encourages engagement in reading.

Engagement in the reading process is a critical factor in comprehension. Because the amount of time children choose to read and have opportunities to read are strongly correlated with reading proficiency, early positive experiences with reading play a critical role in helping children become successful readers. So important is reading aloud and discussing what is read that a number of researchers strongly recommend that even teachers in the higher grades regularly read to their classes to increase reading enjoyment and proficiency (Bialostok, 1992; Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990; Cullinan, 1987). In summary, researchers have found that listening to stories in the context of a pleasurable, social interaction:

- Builds vocabulary and conceptual knowledge
- Aids development of sophisticated language structures
- Enhances comprehension, memory, imagination, attention span, and listening skills
- Helps children think in more complex, abstract, and creative ways
- Broadens children's range of experience
- Helps children learn the structure as well as the linguistic features of stories or narrative text
- Enhances print knowledge and decoding ability
- Aids the development of phonemic awareness through rhyme and alliteration (Chomsky, 1972; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Purcell-Gates, 1990; Schickedanz, 1986; Wells, 1986)

No wonder that a number of researchers and practitioners agree that reading aloud is the "single most important structure there is" (Ray, 1999, p. 65). Ray explains:

> I used to read aloud to my students to get them to be good: "If you'll just be good this morning, I'll read to you after lunch." I thought of the read aloud as being like candy—the kids loved it, but it seemed not so good for them—like time away from what we should have been doing. I still think of the read aloud as something deliciously edible, only now I see it as a wonderful vegetable—something so good for us as a class that we need several helpings a day (p. 65).

Teachers know that sharing good literature helps to build a community of learners, a community that extends beyond the classroom. Literature can help bridge cultural differences by exposing children to other ways of seeing and experiencing the world, and by broadening children's range of experiences. Cullinan (1992) points out, there is a reciprocal influence between reading and life experience: "Children use real life experiences to help them understand books, and books help them to understand real life."

Repeated Readings of Storybooks: Easing the Transition From Oral to Written Language

Research on storybook reading during the early years has identified a number of ways that reading aloud helps children to become motivated and competent readers and writers. Holdaway, who introduced "shared book" experience into school classrooms, describes the three phases of experience through which a favorite book passes in the bedtime story:

> First there is a successful introduction to the book for the purpose of enjoyment. There may be considerable participation and questioning by the child in a relaxed and un-pressured way. ... Second, the child demands many repetitions over the next few days or weeks—the "read-it-again" phenomenon. ... Third, the child spends many happy hours independently with the favorite book, role-playing as reader and recreating the familiar experience with increasing sophistication (Park, 1982, p. 816).

Through repeated readings, and with the help of illustrations and their growing understanding that print makes sense, children develop their storybook-reading ability. Children who learn to read without formal instruction have often been described as teaching themselves to read from favorite storybooks. Long before they can actually read print, children often "read" the illustrations of a book or a memorized rhyme, song, or story to themselves, parents, friends, pets, and stuffed animals. These reenactments model the adult's storybook reading and draw their attention to print. Hiebert observes, "When the information at the word level is not yet available to children, their text expectations draw their attention to individual words and support the development of an ever-expanding reading vocabulary" (1997, p. 3).

Increasingly, researchers consider storybook reading by children who are not yet reading an important part of literacy development (Hiebert, 1997; MacGillivray, 1997; Sulzby, 1985). After reviewing the literature and listening to children from two- to five-years old read their favorite picture storybook, Sulzby (1985) developed broad categories for a classification scheme of patterns of young children's storybook-reading behaviors.

- **Children's early attempts to read** (when asked to read to an adult) are based on pictures, and stories are not yet formed. At this stage, children merely describe the pictures in a storybook without using book language.
- **Next, children still rely on pictures, but stories are formed.** These first story-reading attempts sound like oral language and may not closely follow the text.
- **Before children can decode the printed word, their storytelling becomes increasingly like written language.** They progress from treating individual pages of storybooks as if they are discrete units to treating the book as a unit.
- **When children treat the book as a unit, they weave stories across the book's pages,** progressing from a mixture of oral and written language-like reading, to "reading" that is quite similar to the original story.
- In these later stages, although the illustrations still may be needed to jog their memory of the story, **children demonstrate that they are learning the structure as well as the linguistic features of stories by "talking like a book"** (Clay, 1979). By now, children who have been read to frequently have developed a number of expectations about stories; first and foremost, they expect a story to make sense.

- **Finally, children's attention begins to focus on print, as well as on illustrations.** In the early stages of attending to the printed text, children may focus on a few known words, a few letters and associated sounds, or the remembered text (Sulzby, 1985). During these first stages of reading the printed word, children may use a number of strategies to keep stories meaningful, including reading word for word from a memorized or predictable book and telling stories from pictures when the print is too difficult to decode verbatim.

During a storybook reading, adults often engage children in conversations about the book. They may:

- Relate the story to children's experience
- Ask children questions to assist problem solving (e.g., "How do you think Max is feeling? Have you ever felt that way?")
- Provide information (e.g., labeling objects)
- Read only part of a story while allowing the child to "read" the predictable text, such as a refrain of a song

By providing many relaxed, interactive experiences with reading and writing, children are helped to develop skills and strategies to understand written texts. In this way, children transition from **oral** language, which is face-to-face and interactive, to written language, which is more formal and lacks contextual cues, such as gestures and intonation.

Repeated readings. Both reading aloud and encouraging repeated readings of storybooks can be an important part of the curriculum in early childhood classrooms. Following story reading, just as in the homes of successful early readers, children should have opportunities to reread the books, poems, and songs independently. When enlarged texts are used, tape recordings of many selections should be available, and little books of the same title should always be available (Routman, 1994). Children who have had few prior book experiences, in particular, need numerous experiences with texts to focus on critical features and to remember them (Hiebert, 1997).

Morrow (1988) studied the effects of repeated readings of storybooks in school settings on children of lower socioeconomic status. These one-on-one story readings encouraged interaction between the teacher and child. She found that children in the repeated-book group had significantly more responses dealing with print and story structure, and more interpretive and predictive responses. Children with lower-ability skills, in particular, benefited from repeated readings.

> Repeating books offers the child familiarity with the words, story, and illustrations. By the third reading, the children's habits of asking detail questions had changed and developed into more complex, more interpretive behavior. They began to make associations, judgments, and elaborative comments. They predicted more frequently, using prior knowledge, and they attempted pre-reading by reciting or narrating stories from memory, or actually reading a word here and there (p. 103).

Predictable books. Books with predictable patterns encourage children to predict and remember parts of the text. Both illustrations and predictable patterns (refrains, rhyme, rhythm, and repetition) provide scaffolds for young readers' word identification, and allow children to recognize whole-language sequences. When children can chime in with "Run, run, as fast as you can" or "And Pierre said, 'I don't care,' they learn to associate written words with the oral words they recite from memory.

HANDOUT 8

Popular books with predictable patterns include:

Brown, M.W. (1947). *Goodnight moon*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Carle, E. (1969). *The very hungry caterpillar*. Cleveland, OH: Collins-World.

Carle, E. (1977). *The grouchy ladybug*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Carle, E. (1984). *The very busy spider*. New York, NY: Philomel.

Carle, E. (1987). *A house for a hermit crab*. Saxonville, MA: Picture Book Studio.

Carle, E. (1990). *The very quiet cricket*. New York, NY: Philomel.

Galdone, P. (1975). *The gingerbread boy*. New York, NY: Seabury.

Guarino, D. (1989). *Is your mama a llama?* New York, NY: Scholastic.

Lowrey, J.S. (1970). *The poky little puppy*. New York, NY: Golden Books.

Martin, B., Jr. (1983). *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Martin, B., Jr. (1992). *Polar bear, polar bear, what do you hear?* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Numeroff, L.J. (1985). *If you give a mouse a cookie*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Peek, M. (1981). *Mary wore her red dress*. New York, NY: Clarion.

Rosen, M. (1989). *We're going on a bear hunt*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Rylant, C. (1982). *When I was young in the mountains*. New York, NY: Dutton's Children's Books.

Sendak, M. (1990). *Pierre: A cautionary tale in five chapters and a prologue*. New York, NY: Harper Trophy.

Sendak, M. (1990). *Chicken soup with rice: A book of months*. New York, NY: Harper Trophy.

Wood, A. (1984). *The napping house*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Developmental (Invented) Spelling

Encouraging the use of invented or developmental spelling is a strategy that builds both phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge. Snow, Burns, and Griffin, authors of the *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* report, advised:

> Writing instruction should be designed with the understanding that the use of invented spelling is not in conflict with teaching correct spelling. Beginning spelling with invented spelling can be helpful for developing understanding of the identity and segmentation of speech sounds and sound-spelling relationships (1998, p. 7).

Learning to spell, like learning oral language, is a developmental process, and contributes to letter and word recognition. It begins the first time a child picks up a writing instrument and makes a mark on a page (Griffith & Leavell, 1995). Marie Clay (1979) describes three stages of scribbling:

- Random scribbling for pleasure that may have certain characteristics of print, for example, rectangular rather than circular or horizontal rather than vertical
- Scribbling with the understanding that symbols can convey meaning
- Creating mock messages, in which mock letters and beginning letter forms appear

In the developmental view of writing, invented spelling is not a sign of incompetence. Rather, it is viewed as an important stage of writing, as Schickedanz (1986) explains:

> After much exploration, and after much exposure to print, children discover that letters represent phonemes, and not some larger unit of speech, such as a syllable or a word. This is a very important discovery. ... Many preschool teachers know that the words children first create when they try to represent words in terms of their sounds do not resemble conventional spellings. Children may write kt for cat, grl for girl, and mdpi for mudpie. What may not be readily apparent is how systematic these invented spellings are and how much they reveal children's keen ability to detect similarities and differences between the ways various sounds are produced (p. 88).

At first, children are likely to write only the first sound of words. Next, they commonly write the first and last sounds (especially when these are consonants). Vowels typically come later because, as Cunningham points out, "in English, vowels are variant and unpredictable"; some have as many as six different sounds. Developmental spelling is a powerful tool for developing phonemic awareness and offers teachers an observation window into children's emerging understanding of symbol/sound correspondence. A kindergarten teacher, who initially "had a hard time" with invented spelling, became convinced after watching her young students make progress in spelling and develop a love of writing:

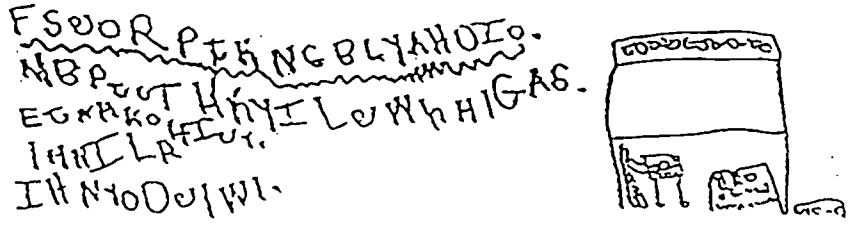
> I am now a firm believer in the use of invented spelling. When explaining why to skeptical parents, I give two examples:
>
> > I tell parents that when their child first learned to make sounds she or he might have said something like "da." Immediately, everyone celebrated the fact the child said "Daddy!" They did not panic and enroll their child in speech class because she or he was only pronouncing the first part of the word.
> >
> > When their child first learned to walk, she or he probably took one small step and fell down. Again, this was celebrated. The child began to walk! Parents did not panic and enroll their child in physical therapy class because she or he didn't take enough steps.

When they hear these two examples, they smile and nod their heads. Like speaking and walking, spelling is a process. We need to celebrate our children's ability to take the small steps, and help them achieve their final goal.

Following are some examples of the development of spelling, from beginnings to standard spelling:

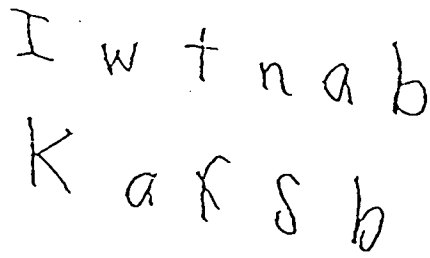
Beginnings

Translation: My Mom took us to the store to get some tomato juice.



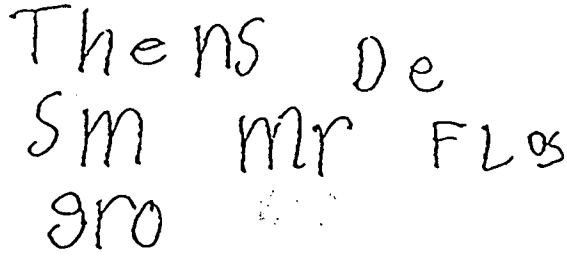
Consonants

One letter, usually the first one heard, is used to represent the word.
Translation: I went out on a boat and caught a fish this big.



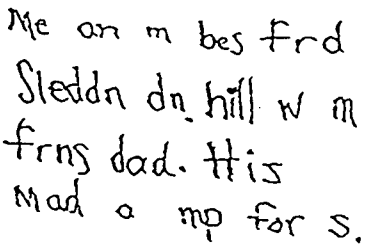
Initial and Final Consonants

The first and last sounds are represented.
Translation: The next day some more flowers grew.



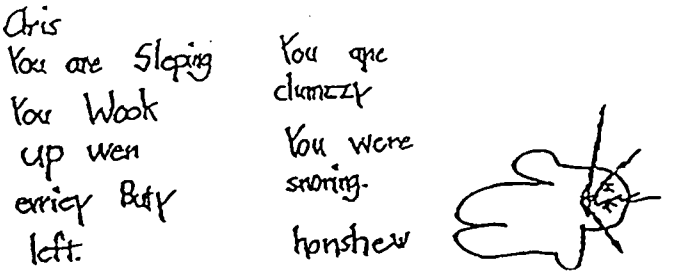
Vowel/Consonant Combinations

Consonants and vowels start to appear in the middle of words.
Translation: Me and my best friend sledding downhill with my friend's Dad. His [Dad] made a jump for us.



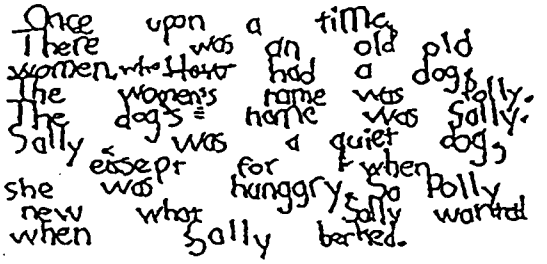
Words

All syllables in the words are represented.
Translation: Chris, you are sleeping. You woke up when everybody left. You are clumsy. You were snoring. Zzzzzzz.



Standard Spelling

Children begin to build a repertoire of spelling patterns, and add to their store of sight words.
Translation: Once upon a time, there was an old old woman who had a dog. The woman's name was Polly. The dog's name was Sally. Sally was a quiet dog, except for when she was hungry. So Polly knew what Sally wanted when Sally barked.



Source: Cherry Valley Elementary School, Polson, Montana.

Developing Fluency

Many children who are able to use phonics knowledge to decode texts are unable to do so fluently and automatically. The National Reading Panel concluded that fluency, an important component in skilled reading, is often neglected in the classroom. James Hoffman, an affiliated research scholar with the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) uses the phrase **build-up reading** to refer to a set of instructional strategies that promote more automatic levels of processing. Fluency is defined as: "The facile processing of continuous text that supports and reflects meaning seeking strategies" (1998, p. 11).

According to CIERA's research, two elements of instruction appear to be influential:

- **Extensive practice** in text that is relatively easy for the student (few challenging words)
- **Direct instruction** by the teacher in fluent reading

Hoffman suggests that teachers look for texts that:

- Provide support through **pictures**—in particular, pictures that will cue difficult words for the students
- Provide support through **repeated phrases or words**
- Provide support for students because they offer **rhyme or rhythm cues**
- Provide support for students because they **build on familiar associative conceptual patterns** (e.g., the sun shines; cows give milk)
- Offer a supportive **conceptual organizing pattern** (e.g., days of the week, letters of the alphabet)
- **Build cumulatively through a story sequence** (e.g., This is the house that Jack built; I know an old lady)
- Provide **repeated sound patterns within words** (e.g., many "at" words; many words that begin with the same consonant (such as pitter, patter)

The researchers identified three aspects of fluency in oral reading as being important. They encourage teachers to provide explicit explanations about fluency—talking about and modeling how these three aspects of fluency are important:

- **Word emphasis**
- **Phrasing**
- **Pauses (within sentences and between)**

They suggest these instructional strategies:

- **Impress reading:** You read along while the student is reading aloud
- **Echo reading:** You read (with expression) a section of the text; the student reads the same section
- **Story reading:** You read the entire story—enjoy it, talk about it; then the student reads it
- **Repeated readings**
- **Reading along with a tape recording** of a story (p. 11).

Children can practice reading aloud at home to their pets, to teddy bears and family members, and at school with friends. At Helen Baller Elementary School in Camas, Washington, after children have practiced reading a book of their choice, they play "Four Corners." In this activity, four children (one in each corner of the room) read from their chosen book to a group of classmates. Because each child chooses a book that is relatively easy for him or her to read, each child can be successful.

A caveat. It is important to note that while fluency is a crucial competency for all good readers, fluent reading is not just "fast" reading. Understanding and interpreting text often requires that we go slowly, stopping to reflect on what we are thinking and feeling as we read. Stopping to savor the language and art of a beautiful picture book, and the metaphorical language of poetry enriches our understanding of the text, and helps us to become better readers and writers.

Storytelling and Story Acting: Essential Language Experiences for All Children

"The richer the repertoire of storytelling styles a child is exposed to, the more possibilities for that child to develop his or her own powerful narrative voice, one that reflects both his community, his family, and his inner life" (Engel, 1997, p. 9).

Anyone who has been around young children knows that they can be great storytellers. By the age of four, many children can tell complex stories about personal experiences, but the beginnings of storytelling begin much earlier. Researchers (including parents) have found that around the end of the second year, a "narrative sense of self" emerges. These narratives help to "get ordinary life under control" by anticipating the day's events, sorting out the week's routines, and recounting experiences, both real and imaginary. Combining fantasy and reality comes easily to toddlers, as this story related by a mother of her two-and-a-half-year-old son Sebastian demonstrates:

> Yesterday he picked up one of my books and opened it and said, "Sit down, Mommy, I am going to tell you a story." And then he started off: "Once upon a time there was a giant who drank his milk. And then his tummy hurt so he went home and threw up. And then he closed the door. And then he went on an airplane to visit his grandma."

Studies have shown that forming a narrative of a personal experience aids *retention of personal memory* and that children can more easily remember facts when they are put into narrative form. Wells (1986) studied children in Bristol, England, and found that those under the age of four who told and heard stories at home were the most likely to learn to read easily and with interest once they got to school.

According to researcher Penelope Engel (1997), "storytelling is perhaps the most powerful way that human beings organize experience" and the "single strongest predictor of literacy" (p. 3):

> Storytelling is an essential, perhaps the essential activity of human beings. It serves a myriad of functions for the young child. Stories allow children to learn about their culture, but also serve as a kind of passport into the culture. Children tell stories as a way of solving emotional, cognitive, and social puzzles and to sort out problems or concerns. Perhaps most importantly, stories are one of the fundamental ways in which we each create an extended self. The developing child's cumulative repertoire of stories gives him or her a sense of self across time and situation (Engel, 1997, p. 8).

Children's stories provide valuable insight into what they think about and how they interpret their experiences. When children attempt to recount an event, attentive listening and substantive questions encourage children to build the story and help them to "build a relationship that extends beyond the immediate context" (Engel, p. 9). By participating in genuine conversations—discussing past events and shared experiences—adults and children are building a shared past, a past on which to build long-lasting relationships. Engel suggests three kinds of experiences that promote storytelling ability during the early years:

- Having conversations—plenty of them, and long ones—with adults
- Talking about the past and the future, even before your child can do this on her own
- Hearing and participating in stories of all kinds

Where Have All the Stories Gone?

Many children enter school filled with poetic images and unique word usage and are attuned to the different rhyming patterns of poetry. Egan (1987) reports that nursery school children are much more likely than older children to use a metaphor to complete a sentence of the form: "He looks as gigantic as _____." A few examples illustrate this tendency:

> An eight-year-old surprised her teacher with this lead to a draft of a story: "A cheetah would make a sports car look like a turtle" (Graves, 1983, p. 3).
>
> A five-year-old gave this explanation for the recurrence of rainbows: There are only one or two rainbows in the world. They come back, taking turns. Rainbows never wear out (Wilson, 2000/2001).
>
> In response to a teacher's question, "What is a shadow?" children replied: "It's night lying down." "Day is night time for the shadow" (Wilson, 2000/2001).

As these examples illustrate, children often use language to explain their world. Educator and author Vivian Paley points out: "As soon as he learns a language well enough, and before he is told he cannot invent the world, he will explain everything. This ability to imagine the beginnings and ends of events is most highly developed during the kindergarten year" (1981, p. 31). When schools encourage creative use of language, children's imaginations continue to develop. A first-grader provided this explanation of why ladybugs are all female:

> Once up a time there were ladybugs and man-bugs. But they were attacked by an army of ants. The man-bugs were very brave and fought back. But the ants were too strong, and the man-bugs all died defending their wives and children. To this day, there are only ladybugs.

An example for a Northwest classroom that had been studying fables illustrates how children incorporate the language patterns of literature into their own stories. The children in this classroom were encouraged to use developmental spelling in first drafts and in their journals:

> Chapter 1: Why do dogs chase CATS?
> Once apan a time in a far away land thar was a yung cat and Tow kittins. One day a dog came. But in this ladn dogs don't chas cats thaey like cats. And the dog saw the kittins and wanted to play with them so he askt the yung cat. And He said NO! so the dog got mad and foght. So fro now on they set a egsample for ether dogs.

Yet all too often these poetic images and imaginative stories disappear as children undergo "proper" language training. Because of the importance of phonics knowledge in learning to read, kindergarten and first grade are often a time when the instructional focus is on learning decoding skills and independent writing. While these skills play a critical role in early literacy, story reading and storytelling:

- Build vocabulary and conceptual knowledge
- Aid the development of sophisticated language structures
- Enhance memory, imagination, attention span, listening, and comprehension skills
- Help children think in more complex, abstract, and creative ways
- Broaden children's range of experience
- Aid the development of phonemic awareness through rhyme and alliteration

Children who may feel uncomfortable with the written word may be quite adept at storytelling. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (1997), "The comfort zone of the oral tale can be the path by which they reach the written one."

Language Experience

Dictating stories to an attentive adult can help children develop their storytelling ability and develop an understanding of how sound maps onto print. Teachers act as scribes, writing children's words as they dictate them, listening carefully for the narrative thread, and helping children clarify their thoughts. When adults write down children's stories as children tell them, children learn that:

- What I **think** I can say and discuss with others
- What I **say** can be written and shared with others
- What I **write** can be read by myself and others
- What we **read** can be thought about, shared, and discussed

Language experience activities integrate all aspects of literacy—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—and are particularly effective for children learning English as a second language. A variety of strategies may be used. For each strategy, you can ask children to read the words they have dictated to you while you point to the words, drawing their attention to letters and words.

In order to help children feel comfortable recounting their own experiences and to demonstrate your own interest in stories, tell stories of your own, based on your experience or imagination. When children and teachers create a classroom culture with shared vocabulary, meaning, and experiences, then friendship, fantasy, and literacy flourish.

Linking Reading With Writing and Art

Research shows that when reading and writing are taught together, the benefits are greater than when they are taught separately. Reading leads to better writing performance and combined instruction leads to improvements in both areas. When reading and writing are taught together in the context of meaningful activities, children are required to use a higher level of thinking than when either process is taught alone. Children's story telling can be enriched by stories of all kinds—poetry, songs, trade books, Big Books, fairy tales, children's own dramatic play, and reading each other's stories.

Creating mental images during reading enhances understanding and brings life to reading. The propensity to create vivid images during reading correlates highly with overall comprehension (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Linking children's stories to pictures—their own and others'—fosters the creative use of language, aesthetic sensitivity, and abstract thinking, and helps children construct rich mental models as they read. A four-year-old in a child development center wrote this response to a picture of a blue heron. She entitled it "Green":

Birds are colorful.
The rainbow that's not there.
Why do I wonder 'why' everyday?
Because I can't remember why.
Birds like rainbows—flutter in the sky.
But where is the rainbow?

Nurturing Emotional Literacy

Helping children express thoughts, feelings, and opinions verbally and in writing can begin in preschool and continue throughout a child's school years. At Helen Gordon Child Development Center in Portland, Oregon, children are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings—in letters to friends and parents, in poems, and in stories. Supported by teachers who write children's dictated words just as they are spoken, children write about rejection, fears of abandonment, and injustice. As Steve Franzel, a teacher of three- through six-year-olds, says: "Language becomes a way to support children's power—their ability to deal with a peer, with conflict, with sad or scary feelings. Words empower them to express themselves—to handle life." Franzel explains:

> I usually use writing as a means to a goal, to validate children's feelings about separation, to help resolve conflict—as crisis prevention. I hear someone screaming and I go over to help them use their words to express their needs and feelings. Then I ask the child, "Do you want to write it down, write a letter?"

The process is such an integral part of the day's activities that the children explain it to new adults in the classroom and expect them to take dictation, just as they might expect adults to tie their shoes. Frequently throughout the day, children use writing to sort out their feelings and at times to come to terms with their own behavior. For example, the following letter was written after four-year-old Tony watched his classmate leave for the doctor to have stitches in his forehead, following an altercation involving a broom. As Tony thought about what to write to Mark, anger was replaced by a sense of responsibility:

> I'm sorry Mark. I hit you with the broom. Why did you want to take my broom? I was just about to color with the chalk and you were trying to take my broom. I was coloring in five seconds. I wanted to give him a hug before he left.

Four-year-old Heidi expressed her complex thoughts on friendship and rejection in a prose poem written about and to her friend Olivia:

> Olivia is a good friend.
> Sometimes she doesn't play with me.
> Today she said, "Don't follow me."
> I was upset.
> Then I was angry.
> Then I said, "Bad Olivia."
> Then I walked away.
> Just like Olivia
>
> Read this note and then you will
> Find out about me
> And your friend Heidi.
> Love, Heidi
> To Olivia

Some Suggested Language Experience Activities

- Spread pictures out on a table.

  Ask children to choose one that they find interesting and to think about the picture.

  Ask children to dictate a story, poem, or impression.

  Ask children to illustrate their stories.

- To encourage story telling, ask children for a story, a dream, or an adventure or prompt with "Once upon a time."

  Write down what was said.

  Ask children to illustrate their stories.

- When reading aloud, ask children to close their eyes and visualize the scene.

  Ask them to share their visualizations.

  Ask children to illustrate their scene.

  Finally, ask children to tell you about the picture while you write down what was said.

- After a field trip or other experience, ask children to tell you about the experience while you write down what was said. This activity can be done individually or in a group.

- Read a story, poem, song, or legend.

  Ask children to retell the story.

  Write down their words.

  Illustrate the story. These stories make good "wall" stories.

  Read the children's retelling out loud.

  This activity can be done individually or in a group.

- Read a story to the class. Identify the story grammar—plot, setting, characters, themes.

  With the class, write a story with similar grammar, but with the children's own ideas and words.

  Record their story on chart-pack paper

  Ask children, individually or in a group, to illustrate the story.

- Tape recorders can be useful resources for early literacy experiences. Children can listen to songs, or follow along in a book as they listen to it being read aloud on tape. When children's own stories are taped, as well as written down, children can listen to them again and again.

- While reading aloud, ask children to think about what it reminds them of from their own experience. Children can expand on their individual connections to write stories from their personal experience.

- When children are experiencing strong emotions about an event or another person, ask them if they would like to write a letter, poem, or story expressing how they feel.

Making Connections

Children's stories, poems, and letters can be displayed in classrooms and hallways and published in laminated books that can stay in the classroom and be sent home to families. Children often read their own messages to themselves after they are written, matching print to their remembered words. They also learn to recognize their classmates' entries.

Making inferences is a process of creating a personal meaning from text—combining what is read with relevant prior knowledge or schema (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). Several studies have found that children com-

prehend and make inferences better when reading child-authored texts than when reading other texts. Because children's own words reflect their own experience, children develop the habit of bringing their background knowledge and experience to reading and writing, enhancing comprehension and engagement.

Acting Out Stories

While all of these language experience activities aid the development of and an appreciation of literacy, acting out stories brings them to life and links children's love of dramatic play to more formal storytelling. Acting out storybooks, songs, poetry, and children's own dictated stories aids the development of narrative skills. These activities enhance overall intellectual performance and the generation of creative ideas, memory, and language competence. Children can act out their own stories and stories that they hear and read to themselves.

Author Nellie Edge describes how a "visit from a real Mother Goose who leads children in favorite rhymes is a memorable experience. One kindergarten class found a large letter from Mother Goose, a bag with a favorite nursery rhyme prop and white tail feathers waiting for them after recess. So they began reciting nursery rhymes on the first day of school" (2000, p. 7).

Teachers can strengthen the dramatic play-storytelling connection by encouraging children to act out their own dictated stories and the stories they hear in the classroom. Glazer (1989) suggests the use of paper-bag prop stories to stimulate acting out stories:

> Put a book familiar to the children in each of three to five different paper bags. Fasten the book jacket or a photocopy of one picture from the book onto the front of the bag. Put props associated with each story into the appropriate bag. Props should represent story objects, settings, characters, sequence, and other elements important for the child's role playing (p. 23).

For younger children, both spontaneous story acting and teacher-guided story acting help children connect literacy with drama. Acting out stories, both child- and adult-authored:

- Brings stories to life—enhancing story recall, imagination, and emergent story reading
- Encourages the creative use of language
- Gives children the opportunity to sort out problems and concerns
- Helps children make the transition from oral to written language (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

When children have opportunities to write their own stories, to read their own and others' stories, to write in response to reading and art, and to act out stories, they are able to employ much of their knowledge of literacy in meaningful and purposeful ways. When teachers strive to uncover and describe the child's point of view, children can bring all their capabilities to feel, think, and imagine to the classroom and beyond. And as the following example from a mother of two young daughters illustrates, abstract thinking and creativity are encouraged by nurturing adults, who, in educator Frank Smith's words, "invite children into the 'literacy club'":

> This morning my daughters and I were watching the moon set, a gorgeous full orange moon sinking into a brightly-lit Pacific. My almost 2-year-old daughter, who has a complete fascination with the moon, was speechless and had eyes as big as the moon itself. My 6-year-old daughter, however, gave me her thoughts on the situation. "You see, Mom, the moon is really the sun at night, and the reason we can look at it so easily without hurting our eyes is that the stars take away the bright light and then it's sprinkled all over the night sky." "Wow, honey, that is some very creative thinking, let's write that one down!" The moon slipped into the ocean, we made French toast and then we wrote it in her journal.

Learning To Read the Heart: Nurturing Emotional Literacy

Connecting emotions and background experiences with text and integrating higher level comprehension skills into a reading curriculum may take practice and persistence on the part of teachers and students alike. Michele McDonald, a former fourth-grade teacher at a rural school in Pasco, Washington, describes a literacy activity that began with little student enthusiasm, but became a time of "reflection, sharing, and empathy":

> Last year in my fourth-grade class I was working hard to integrate higher-level thinking, connecting emotions and background experiences, and comprehension into my reading curriculum. I chose to use a book called *Maniac McGee* by Jerry Spinelli in a literature circle. I chose this book because of the content of the story. The story is about a boy who runs away from a very dysfunctional home. Throughout his adventures he encounters racial segregation in the town in which he lives, east vs. west (black vs. white). I introduced the book by describing the basic premise of the book. I began trying to elicit from the students any experiences they may have had with racism.
>
> The discussion was lagging until I started talking about a movie that the book reminded me of. I shared the story line from the movie *The Outsider* produced by Francis Ford Coppola from the book with the same title, written by S. E. Hinton. This happened to be one of my favorite movies as a child. I told the students about my running home from school as fast as I could to see the opening credits when it happened to be on HBO. They got a real kick out of hearing a personal story about their teacher. Once I described the story they began to come up with lots of examples. They shared about movies and stories they had seen or read, and about personal experiences. This really started the discussion off on the right foot.
>
> We began reading together. In the beginning chapter of the book the little boy finally snaps during a school program and starts screaming at the top of his lungs to his aunt and uncle (with whom he lives). He begins to run and run and never comes back. I stopped and began to talk to the students about how the little boy felt. I got the typical canned answers: bad, mad, sad, etc. I wanted more than that. I wanted the students to really think and connect with how he was feeling. I kept probing: "What do you mean by mad?" "Where in his body do you think he felt that emotion?" "Have you ever felt that way?" The students really started to connect with the feelings of the character. They even shared some personal experiences of times they felt overwhelmed with emotion and cried, yelled, etc.
>
> Throughout the story we would stop and have long conversation about how the characters were feeling, why they were acting the way they did. Students began to talk beautifully about the feelings illustrated in the book. It even began to spill into other areas of the day. The students became more eloquent about sharing their own feelings as well as predicting the feelings of their fellow students.
>
> Shortly after finishing the story of *Maniac McGee*, one of my students brought me the *Diary of Anne Frank* and asked if I would read it out loud to the class. She had been reading it during sustained silent reading (SSR) and thought it would be a good book for all the class to hear. So, knowing the story myself, I gave the students a mini-history lesson and tried to connect it to the story of *Maniac McGee* to provide the students a foundation from which to build. Once we got started, the students really were hooked; they wanted me to read and read and read and read. I would read, we would stop and discuss, I would read some more, and before I knew it an hour had passed like a minute. Our read-aloud book had become more than a transition between subjects or a relaxing listening time. It truly became a time of reflection, sharing, and empathy.

One very touching conversation we had dealt with crying. During this same time my fiancée's sister's house burnt down. She had two small children (one the same age as the students in my class). I shared this experience with the students, again to get them to connect with others emotionally. The students became very interested in the story and began to follow it in the newspaper. One day a student brought me a newspaper article about the family. I began to read it and tears started steaming down my cheeks. I was a little embarrassed, but I thought it was OK because it tied into connecting with people emotionally.

One of the students asked me, "Why are your eyes watering?" I told him, "because I am crying." He asked why. I told him when something touches your heart it is OK to cry. Well (this all ties together), when we were reading the story it came to a very touching part and a handful of the girls got teary. One of the boys said something like, "What are you crying for?" Another boy said, "Don't you remember what Miss McDonald said? She said when something touched your heart it is OK to cry."

As a result of our discussion and sharing I truly believe that students got a better understanding of the text and connected with it on many, many levels.

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Northwest Regional
Educational Laboratory

Creating Communities
of Learning
& Excellence

101 S.W. Main Place, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204

Telephone: (503) 275-9500
Fax: (503) 275-0458
E-mail: Info@nwrel.org
Web Site: www.nwrel.org

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Northwest Regional
Educational Laboratory

Creating Communities
of Learning
& Excellence

101 S.W. Main Street
Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204

Telephone: (503) 275-9500
Fax: (503) 275-0458
E-mail: info@nwrel.org
Web site: www.nwrel.org

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