

# Literacy



## FOR ALL

# Wisconsin State Reading Association

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### PRESIDENT (2015-2016)

Sue Boquist  
N113W16241 Sylvan Cir Unit 116  
Germantown, WI 53022-6035

### PRESIDENT-ELECT (2016-2017)

Barb Novak

### 1<sup>st</sup> VICE PRESIDENT (2017-2018)

Gale Gerharz  
885 Heritage Trail  
Oshkosh, WI 54904-8009

### 2<sup>nd</sup> VICE PRESIDENT (2018-2019)

Deborah Cromer  
424 22nd Street North  
La Crosse, WI 54601

### 3<sup>rd</sup> VICE PRESIDENT (2019-2020)

Cindy Cate  
N8754 Lutz Rd  
Iola, WI 54945

### PAST PRESIDENT

Kathy Galvin  
134 S. Wind Trail  
Horicon, WI 53032

### PUBLIC RELATIONS LIAISON

Winnie Huebsch  
2905 E. Locust Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53211-3415

### TREASURER

Sandy Benton  
N1301 Cty. M  
Hortonville, WI 54944

### ILA STATE COORDINATOR

Norm Andrews  
6964 N. Lincolnshire Circle  
Milwaukee, WI 53223-6341

### COMMITTEE COORDINATOR

Debra Zarling  
2716 Shady Lane  
Neenah, WI 54956

### ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Joyce Uglow  
909 Rock Ridge Rd  
Burlington, WI 53105

### ZONE COORDINATORS

Jan Kienbaum  
40 S. Second St  
Barron, WI 54812-1407

Barbara Townsend  
1309 Robincrest Ln  
Elkhorn, WI 53121-9483

Diane Jenquin  
1119 Carney Blvd  
Marinette, WI 54143-2511

Judy Ellickson  
1813 Sunrise Court  
Stoughton, WI 53589

Colleen Konicek  
11484 Cagle Rd  
Arbor Vitae, WI 54568-9233

## Editor



**Jacqueline Witter-Easley, EdD**  
Associate Professor, Carthage College  
Education Department  
jeasley@carthage.edu

## Editorial Review Board

Elizabeth Alderton, UW-Oshkosh  
Jeannette Armstrong, Viterbo University  
Sandy Brehl, Consultant  
Melissa Bruce, UW-Eau Claire  
Jamie Erickson, Lakeland Union High School  
Lynda Fernholz, Viterbo University  
Amy Frederick, UW-River Falls  
Paula Houdek, Phillips School District  
Laura Johnsrud, Door County School District  
Judy Lambert, UW-Oshkosh  
Susan Landt, St. Norbert College  
Peggy Marciniak, UW-Platteville  
Kim Martinez, UW-Stout  
Deb Modschiedler, Marinette School District  
Colleen Pennell, Marian University  
Matthew Renwick, Wisconsin Rapids School District  
Patricia Rieman, Carthage College  
Karen Rigoni, UW-Milwaukee  
Caitlin Rosemeyer, Platteville School District  
Nancy L. Stevens, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater  
Brad Stibbe, Waukesha School District  
Deby Tomic, Concordia University  
Lois Zamzow, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh  
Debra Zarling, Oshkosh Area Schools

## Wisconsin State Reading Association Publications

Design/Layout: ColorWorks Design, Madison, WI  
WSRA Journal, Jacqueline-Witter Easley, Editor  
WSRA Update, Judy Hartl, Editor  
Website: [www.wsra.org](http://www.wsra.org), Joyce Uglow, Editor

Copyright, 2008, Wisconsin State Reading Association, 909 Rock Ridge Rd., Burlington, WI 53105. The *Wisconsin State Reading Association Journal* is published 3 times a year, as copy permits, and is the official publication of the Wisconsin State Reading Association. Subscriptions are included with the \$37.00 membership fee.

Back copies may be obtained for \$7.50 each postpaid. Requests for these may be sent to the WSRA Administrative Assistant. Correspondence on editorial matters may be sent to the *Journal* Editor. Refer to the call for manuscripts page for information regarding manuscripts.

*WSRA Update* is the official quarterly newsletter of the Wisconsin State Reading Association published six times a year. For information contact the editor.

The WSRA website, located at [www.wsra.org](http://www.wsra.org), includes current information about the state of reading in Wisconsin, WSRA's position statements and other information of interest to literacy professionals.

---

## FROM THE EDITOR

---

- Welcome Readers .....1  
Jacqueline Witter-Easley

---

## ARTICLES

- A Family Case Study: How Money Might Matter for Academic Learning ..... 3  
Catherine Compton-Lilly
- Using Storybooks to Enhance Literacy Development in Early Emergent Readers:  
A Closer Look at the Use of Dialogic Reading ..... 16  
Sarah E. Peterson
- Ten Powerful Strategies to Practice Academic Language ..... 29  
Amy Frederick, Donald Bear, Karen Carpenter, Lori Helman, Sarah Negrete
- Problem Solving Circles: Linking Literacy into Mathematics ..... 39  
Samantha Goodger, Nicole Hawkins
- From Chemistry to Advanced Spanish: 21st Century Word Wall Success ..... 53  
Peg Grafwallner, Abby Felton, Jamie Kramer

---

## CLASSROOM CONSIDERATIONS

- Everyday Diversity: What's in Your Classroom? ..... 63  
Megan Schliesman, Merri Lindgren
- Gloom, Despair, and Strawberry PopTarts™: Failure Stories and Their Effect  
on Agency During the Bad Days in the Reading Intervention Classroom ..... 67  
Mary Beth Nicklaus

---

## WONDERFUL WISCONSIN CHILDREN'S AUTHORS

---

- An Interview with Jane Kelley ..... 73  
Sandra Nichols

---

## BOOK REVIEW

- Differentiated Literacy Strategies for English Language Learners Grades 7 – 12  
by Gayle H. Gregory & Amy Burkman. .... 79  
Lara Christoun

# The Wisconsin State Reading Association Presents

How Students Learn: Understanding the Complexities of Teaching and Learning Series

## The Power of Students and Teachers Thinking Together



Co-sponsored by WSRA and CESA 9

**July 27, 2016**

CESA 9 Office • 304 Kaphaem Road • Tomahawk, WI 54487



Credit will be offered by Carthage Contact Sharon Tilton at stilton44@yahoo.com

Institute check-in begins at 8:30 AM • Institute time: 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM

What happens when teachers relentlessly pursue the most powerful practices that result in significant academic gains for all and, in addition, have an extraordinary impact on children's social and emotional growth? What does it take to set a learning trajectory for each student that results in competence, a sense of belonging, meaningfulness, and autonomy for learning? Can we really have it all?

This institute will unpack the theories, research, and practices that result in the kind of learning we might not think is possible. Have a look inside classrooms where children and teachers think together to accomplish these goals and experience their journeys. Videotapes will be shared.

### Participants will:

- Learn practices to encourage academic and social-emotional growth
- Understand how to use formative practices to develop learning trajectories for individual students
- Develop strategies for building a classroom community of readers and writers
- Experience each presenter's classroom through videotapes
- Collaborate with other educators

While these educators are teachers in K-3 settings, the principles of what they do, cut across grade levels.

---

## Registration

Co-sponsored by  
WSRA and CESA 9



**July 27, 2016**

CESA 9 Office • 304 Kaphaem Road • Tomahawk, WI 54487

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership # \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

Register Online at:

<https://goo.gl/zzQEDk>

or Mail to:

WSRA  
909 Rock Ridge Road  
Burlington, WI 53105  
(262) 514-1450

Member..... \$40

Nonmember..... \$75

WSRA membership fee.... \$37

# Wisconsin State Reading Association Presents

## The Power of Students and Teachers Thinking Together



Co-sponsored by WSRA and CESA 9

**July 27, 2016**

CESA 9 Office • 304 Kaphaem Road • Tomahawk, WI 54487



### Institute Speakers



**Peter Johnston, Keynote Speaker**

Author, Professor Emeritus, University State at Albany, State University of New York. The relationship between research and practice is complicated and proponents on each side of any educational argument (appropriate strategies for instruction, intervention, assessment, etc.), claim that research is on their side. This session introduces educators to some ways to think critically and sensibly about evidence when trying to improve teaching and learning.



**Kathy Champeau**

Reading Specialist, Consultant, Adjunct instructor at UW-Milwaukee, & WSRA Past President

**Laurie McCarthy**  
Multi-age  
First/Second  
Grade Teacher,  
Muskego-Norway



**Merry Komar**  
Multi-age Second/Third  
Grade Teacher, Waukesha



**Sarah Helmer**  
Kindergarten Teacher,  
Muskego-Norway

After visiting these teachers' classrooms, Peter Johnston, author of *Choice Words* and *Opening Minds*, said this about Sarah Helmer, "She has an uncommonly strong understanding of children's collective and individual literacy development and how to teach effectively."

Johnston told Merry Komar "I can't image a better learning community. I could have stayed all day." When visiting Laurie McCarthy's classroom, Johnston recognized, "She carefully chooses the books she uses for reading with the children in order to help them address issues they are dealing with and to build a productive learning community."

A graphic showing a stack of papers or documents, with the words "Call for" written in a large, bold, white font over the top paper.

# Call for

# Manuscripts

## Call for Manuscripts and Submission/Review Process

The *WSRA Journal* (ISSN 0160-9270) is published three times a year and addresses literacy research, current literacy topics and presents educational strategies for classroom literacy instruction. There are themed issues as well as open issues. Each issue includes a Call for Manuscripts. WSRA members are encouraged to submit ideas on any topic. The general themes listed in the Call for Manuscripts are only suggested guides. The *WSRA Journal* is available to all WSRA members. Acceptance rate is 70%.

**Call for Manuscripts:** *WSRA Journal* welcomes well-written, original descriptions of research-based instruction that improves literacy learning. Manuscripts must provide an appropriate blend of practical classroom application and solid theoretical framework. High-quality articles, essays, and reports of different types on reading and literacy education are considered for inclusion in the *Journal*. Have you engaged in classroom research? Have you tried a new strategy with your class that has had good results? Do you have successful ways of connecting home-school-community? Have you read a new professional book or a great children's or YA book? Share the news! Separate features, such as non-peer-reviewed essays and poetry, are welcomed, as are papers that give us a glimpse of education in Wisconsin's history; all of these are printed as space allows. Literature reviews without actual application to classroom instruction will generally be rejected. Digital photographs of students and/or teachers engaged in literacy activities are welcomed, as are examples of student work. All photos and student work examples require proof of permission, including parent permission when applicable, for inclusion in the *Journal*.

**Open Issue:** We are currently seeking manuscript submissions that focus on a variety of topics and research projects across all grade levels.

**Submission/Review Process:** All *Journal* manuscripts will be blind peer-reviewed by a minimum of two reviewers. Authors will typically receive notice of manuscript status within one month of submission. At this point, reviewer comments, suggestions, and questions will be anonymously shared with authors. If the reviewers suggest the authors revise and resubmit, the authors will be given one month to make the revisions and then resubmit. The editor of the *Journal* will send the revised manuscripts back to the original reviewers for further review. Reviewers are asked to complete the second reviews within two weeks. Depending on the reviewer comments, the manuscript

could be sent back to the authors for final revision or accepted for publication.

***WSRA Journal* is divided into different sections:**

- **Articles:** Research-based, blind, peer-reviewed on literacy-related topics
- **Departments:** Teaching Tips/Classroom Considerations, Creative Corner, Children's/Young Adult Book Reviews, Reviews of Professional Books, and Literacy and Technology

## Editorial Guidelines and Process

Submit your manuscript to Jacqueline Witter-Easley, *Journal* Editor at: [jeasley@carthage.edu](mailto:jeasley@carthage.edu)

All submissions for peer review should conform to the style outlined in the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Authors of accepted manuscripts must also provide written permission releases for use of material from another source (including student's writing samples, text or figures excerpted from another published work, etc.). Releases must also be provided for use of any person's words or likeness.

All manuscripts must be submitted electronically. Text should be presented double-spaced in 12-point font, preferably in Microsoft Word; images should be submitted in tif or jpg format. Prepare the following files for uploading.

- Cover letter, including your name and affiliation (as you would have them published) and your mailing and e-mail addresses. Any coauthors should be listed in preferred order, with name, affiliation, and contact information.
- Abstract of 150 words, written in the third person and without citations.
- One standard copy of the manuscript
- One blinded copy of the manuscript. To prepare this version, remove author names and affiliations from bylines, replace references to your own and to coauthors' published work simply with "Author (year)" in text and in reference list (that is, delete publication titles), and mask any city, state, institutional affiliation, or links to personal websites. Note that all in-text citations and corresponding references must be in standard APA format. Footnotes and appendixes should not appear. Instead, incorporate such material into the article text.
- Tables and figures in separate file(s).



# Welcome to Our Themed Issue: Literacy For All

Jacqueline Witter-Easley  
WSRA Journal Editor

What does literacy mean to you? I have posed this question to my undergraduate students in my Reading and Language Arts Methods course each semester. And, each semester, their lists of ideas consist of the following: entertainment, knowledge, escape from reality, etc. I follow up this question with a short text about the plight of slaves who wanted to learn to read and write. The article explains that laws were created to outlaw the teaching of literacy skills to slaves. Many states did not allow slaves to attend public schools. Those who secretly learned how to read and write were putting their lives, and their teachers' lives, at risk. Why would slave owners deny literacy to their slaves?

After reading this essay, I again ask my students to make a list of what literacy means to them. Their revised lists contain ideas such as: empowerment, freedom, access to knowledge, communication, advocacy, etc. What happened here? How did their mindsets evolve over the course of a single class session? I believe their lists changed because they began to understand literacy from a new perspective: those whose access had been denied. Literacy hasn't always been for all.

Now that we're in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we might ask ourselves why this statement is still necessary. After all, everyone now has access to public education and, therefore, to literacy. Right? Let's think about this. What does it mean to have access?

Public schools are funded through property tax. This funding structure creates limited access just by its nature: the wealthy live in large homes near

other large homes and their property taxes generate larger revenue for their local schools. Low-income families live in homes and apartment buildings that generally do not provide equal revenue. So, the teachers in public schools within the same state do not have access to equal funds for literacy programs and materials for all of their students. Catherine Compton-Lilly explores this issue in her article, *A Family Case Study: How Money Might Matter for Academic Learning*.

Additionally, students from low-income neighborhoods enter school without the same access to early childhood educational programs that their peers from higher-income neighborhoods may have had. Sarah E. Peterson describes an effective program for enhancing the literacy experiences of all pre-school students in her article, *Using Storybooks to Enhance Literacy Development in Early Emergent Readers: A Closer Look at the Use of Dialogic Reading*. As students progress into elementary school, they continue to need support to increase their literacy skills. Public schools must be inclusive to all students. This means that teachers face the challenge of providing an effective, culturally responsive learning environment for all members of their classrooms. How can teachers make this a reality for students whose native language is not English, for example? In this issue, teachers will find effective strategies to increase their English Language Learners' access to academic language in the article titled, *Ten Powerful Strategies to Practice Academic Language*. Lara Christoun's

book review guides readers through the pages of a teacher resource book designed to enhance literacy instruction for English Language Learners in middle and secondary classrooms. How can teachers create culturally responsive learning environments beyond their lesson plans? Megan Schliesmann and Merri Lindgren, librarians at the Cooperative Children's Book Center, encourage teachers to think from a culturally responsive perspective about the books contained in classroom libraries in their article, *Everyday Diversity: What's in Your Classroom?* Furthermore, Sandra Nichols' interview with Wisconsin author Jane Kelley provides insights into this author's books about middle school students from a variety of perspectives.

Inclusive classrooms are those in which the learning environment embraces all. All cultures, all languages, all ability levels. How can teachers fully include all learners in all content areas at all age levels? Two articles provide informative methods

for enhancing literacy development across content areas and ability levels: *Problem Solving Circles: Linking Literacy into Mathematics*, and *From Chemistry to Advanced Spanish: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Word Wall Success*. And, for those difficult days when students lack the motivation and self-confidence to participate in their own literacy development, Mary Beth Nicklaus shares her personal journey with her students in her article, *Gloom, Despair, and Strawberry PopTarts™: Failure Stories and Their Effect on Agency During the Bad Days in the Reading Intervention Classroom*.

Yes, literacy is for all. As teachers, we know this is true, and we understand the power of literacy for our students. We are dedicated to providing access to literacy and inclusive learning environments. I believe that these articles will serve to enhance our efforts and increase our own access to research-based literacy practices.

## IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

### WSRA CONVENTIONS

2017 Convention . . . . . February 9–11, 2017 . . . . . Wisconsin Center, Milwaukee  
 2018 Convention . . . . . February 8–10, 2018 . . . . . Wisconsin Center, Milwaukee

### INTERNATIONAL LITERACY ASSOCIATION (ILA) CONVENTIONS

ILA's 61st annual convention will be in Boston, MA on July 8–11, 2016

**Watch the WSRA website for details: [www.wsra.org](http://www.wsra.org)**



---

# A Family Case Study: How Money Might Matter for Academic Learning

Catherine Compton-Lilly

Reprinted with permission from "A family case study: How money might matter for academic learning" by Catherine Compton-Lilly, 2014. *Global Education Review*, Volume 1 (2), 26–40. 2014 by *Global Education Review*, a publication of The School of Education at Mercy College, New York.

## Abstract

---

*Many children living in low-income communities do not face struggles in school. Many learn quickly and easily. But for some students, living in high-poverty communities and attending under-funded schools has consequences that can make learning difficult. In this article, the author draws on the words of a parent living in a low-income community to explore how economic and social challenges affected the schooling of her daughter over a ten-year period. As the following accounts reveal, Ms. Rodriguez, an African American, low-income parent, was committed to her daughter's learning and school progress and brought a thoughtful and informed critique to her children's school experience that reveals the multiple ways that money affects academic learning.*

## A Family Case Study: How Money Might Matter for Academic Learning

When Alicia was in my first-grade class, her mother, Ms. Rodriguez, maintained that being poor did not affect Alicia's academic and literacy learning. She referenced the experiences of Alicia's four older brothers who did well in school saying "I been poorer than poor. Okay? If that's the case, my kids should be the dumbest little ones on earth." Ms. Rodriguez argued that you can always make time to read, "like you can read at night, or like we used to do—[when] we lived in the city we'd read in the train on the bus, so you can, you can always make time." However, over the course of a ten-year longitudinal study, Ms. Rodriguez identified a range of challenges related to financial hardships that affected literacy learning and school success.

Alicia was not a struggling reader. When she was in my first-grade class, she was among the best readers in the class. Every morning, Alicia and her friends would gather in the book corner of the classroom and choose books that they would take back to their seats and read chorally. A few years before Alicia was in my class, I had taught her older brother, Tyreek. Like his sister, Tyreek was bright and inquisitive. He was interested in everything school offered. Tyreek particularly loved books, science, and computers. While over a ten-year period Alicia became less enamored of reading school texts, she remained an avid reader at home and wrote poetry.

Despite her lack of interest in school-assigned texts, Alicia continued to demonstrate her abilities with reading as she moved through school. In eighth grade, her mother reported that she could "read her little tail off" and that the school had assessed

---

her at the “tenth grade level.” However, it was also in middle school when Alicia’s grades began to drop. For the first time, Alicia was getting “D’s” in social studies, English, and gym. Despite her literacy achievements, Alicia described her teachers as uncaring and complained about boring assigned texts.

Alicia’s story is not a story of not learning as much of a story of not finding the support that she needed to maintain success in school despite obvious talents, a supportive family, and an interest in reading. The challenges Alicia faced were exacerbated by negative assumptions that are often made about children and families of color from poor communities. As will be illustrated below, Ms. Rodriguez challenged these assumptions. She was a low-income parent who was very concerned about her children’s literacy and school progress. She cared deeply about her children and consistently supported them at school. In addition, she brought a thoughtful and informed critique to her children’s school experiences.

This paper is about one family and how the economic challenges they faced intersect with academic and literacy learning. In short, I argue that poverty matters and I draw on the voices of family members to identify how and when being poor affects schooling. This analysis reveals larger societal inequities that affect families (e.g., financial challenges, the assumptions made about students and their families, inequitable school resources, dangerous neighborhoods and schools, limited access to students’ dreams). Specifically, I draw on Bourdieu’s (1986) description of economic capital to explore and explain economic capital for one family. While the names of people and places reported in this paper are pseudonyms, their words and experiences are real.

## **Poverty, Assumptions and School Achievement**

The relationship between poverty and school learning has been controversial. In 1946, Robinson, drawing on research available at the time, argued that there was a lack of “objective evidence” (p. 95) regarding the relationship between socioeconomic status and reading progress. Consternation over

the relationship between poverty and academic achievement has led to accounts that blame children’s families for the challenges children face with learning at school. Fueled by popular media depictions including the 1965 Moynihan Report (originally titled the “The Negro Family: The Case For National Action”), the assumed pathology of poor African American families continues to infiltrate American thought and extend into discussions about achievement in schools. These assumptions were challenged by Auerbach (1989) who critiqued family literacy programs that were designed to remediate the parenting practices of low-income parents. She worried that family literacy was being reduced to “performing school-like literacy activities within the family setting” (p. 166) and that these attempts to reform families did not attend to the rich literacy practices that occur in low-income households.

In 1988, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines challenged correlations between poverty, reading achievement, and parenting by highlighting the cases of four children from a high-poverty urban community who were “perceived by their parents to be successfully learning to read and write” (p. xvii). While Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines highlighted the success of these children and the agential capacity of families to support their children with academics, they also stated that “the difficulties that confound their lives are shaped into personal configurations of poverty” including “inadequate housing, the lack of essential resources, poor schools, limited access to higher education and restricted job opportunities” (p. 195). Despite these challenges, their work revealed how some low-income inner city families were able to use literacy for a wide variety of purposes. They described family members who demonstrated high degrees of personal literacy but were either not successful in school or did not receive formal education. In short, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines and others (e.g., Cushman, 1998) highlighted the high degree of intelligence, creativity, and resilience that family members displayed in supporting their children with literacy learning.

Similarly, Snow and her colleagues (1991) focused on low-income successful literacy learners. The initial study focused on 31 children in grades 2, 4, and 6 and revealed “quite bright prospects” for the

---

children based on their reading progress in elementary school. However, data collected four years later was less promising: “Few of the students in the study had continued to make gains in literacy consonant with their abilities. Only a small minority were taking courses that would qualify them for entry to college. Several were high school dropouts, and very few planned to go on to training of any sort after high school” (p. 213). Snow and her colleagues ultimately argued that American society must make choices that ensure that students’, parents’ and teachers’ goals can be fulfilled.

The case studies conducted by Robinson (1946), Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), and Snow and her colleagues (1991) all highlight the potential of children from low-income families to thrive as learners. However, general patterns continue to indicate that school success, and accompanying literacy learning are inequitably challenging for children from low-income families and communities (Berliner & Biddle, 1996; Ravitch, 2013; Rist, 1978). In 1996, Berliner and Biddle recognized that nutritional needs, health care, the lack of safe neighborhoods, income misdistribution, and the lack of resources for purchasing books and other materials to support literacy and school learning created academic difficulties for poor families.

The challenges faced by students and families in Alicia’s school are not unique to the city where I taught. As others (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991, 2012) have described, poor inner city schools across America lack instructional supplies, books, and equipment including technology. Instruction in these schools often involves cognitively low-level rote learning with little connection to students’ lives outside of school (Kozol, 2012; Rist, 1978). Shannon (1998) argued that poverty and schooling were intricately intertwined as evidenced by historical policies and practices related to IQ testing, the content of textbooks, standardized tests, teacher and school expectations, the materials available to students, and the recent implementation of national standards. Shannon deconstructed official representations of poverty to focus on the historic and current political and economic interests operating behind ideological arguments. He connected the lack of economic resources in some communities to an

accompanying lack of rich literate experiences, opportunities, and goals. Shannon argued for a re-reading of poverty that included equitable school funding, respect for students and their communities, and the provision of powerful opportunities for students to read and write their worlds. As he maintained, “reading cannot make us rich, it cannot guarantee power, but it can help us to struggle for justice, equality, and freedom” (p. 17).

Taylor (1996) uncovered toxic alliances between low socioeconomic status and minimal literacy learning. She argued that analyzing the relationships between literacy and poverty could provide a tool to challenge representations of the poor and to envision possibilities for alternative educational practices. Taylor (1996) specifically documented cases in which texts were used to position people as drug pushers, drunks, welfare frauds, and deficit parents. Her descriptions invite readers to see what it’s like to be poor. As Shannon (1998) wrote, reading poverty becomes “a way of being with the poor and understanding their lives” as well as a means of understanding why institutions, laws and social practices operate as they do and why these practices and policies seem natural or expected in American society.

In their exploration of economic and public policies, Danzinger and Danzinger (2008) argue for a small set of changes that would significantly benefit women, like Ms. Rodriguez, who wanted to make the transition from welfare to work. They argue for increasing the minimum wage, subsidizing health-care, reforming the unemployment insurance program, and providing transitional jobs that would be available to all who wanted to work.

In this discussion of poverty, it is essential to recognize the significant relationship between race and social class in America. As evidenced below, Ms. Rodriguez is clearly aware of this connection. While not the focus of the current article, race matters. In the words of Corcoran (2008), “even when African American children are raised in similar economic conditions as white children, they are less likely to be upwardly mobile and more likely to be downwardly mobile” (p. 48). Upward mobility is much more common for white people living in poverty

---

than for African American people. Having myself grown up at the poverty line and knowing that my white skin has afforded me opportunities and benefits, I recognize that this is not the case for many of my former students.

In 2004, this author drew on data from her initial round of research with Ms. Rodriguez and other families to directly challenge the myths that portrayed poor urban families as generally unconcerned about school and literacy learning. In the current analysis, I draw on the construct of economic capital and the words of Ms. Rodriguez and her children to explore intersections between poverty and learning.

## **An Introduction to Economic Literacy Capital**

Sociologists and educators (Bourdieu, 1986; Luke & Carrington, 1997) have used the construct of capital to reveal and examine the ways groups of people and individuals are favored within particular social and economic contexts. While early interpretations of Bourdieu described his work as reproduction theory in which disenfranchised populations tended to pass their social and economic status onto their children, later readings have presented Bourdieu as highlighting nuances of economic, social, and cultural capital that contribute in complex and interactive ways to future success which is always contingent on the field in which people act and interact (Bourdieu, 1990). As Bourdieu (1986) explained, the construct of capital makes it “possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes” (p. 243). Bourdieu identifies factors (e.g., ways of talking, acting, interacting; available social networks; access to resources) that extend beyond personal failure or inferiority as the reasons for success or failure within educational, social, and economic fields. In prior work (Compton-Lilly, 2007), I have applied an analysis of various forms of capital to reading to explore the literacy learning of kindergarten students in a high-poverty community. I drew on Bourdieu’s (1986) description of forms of capital—economic, social, and cultural—to explore how children and their families were positioned relative to school success.

Although I agree that the acquisition of any form of capital will serve people assuming that the field in which they operate recognizes and values that capital, in this article, I focus specifically on economic capital and the role it plays on the academic learning in one family. I rely on the voices of Ms. Rodriguez and her children whose words I have collected over a ten-year period. This article is not intended to be the ultimate account of how poverty affects learning. Rather, it presents the voices of members in one family and in particular the words of Ms. Rodriguez who struggled to do what she believed was best for her children to ensure that they learned to read and graduated from high school despite challenges related to community and school resources.

I define economic academic capital as possessions and experiences that require economic investment and are convertible to academic success. In some cases, accessing these resources is contingent on being able to afford housing in economically healthy neighborhoods and thus attending well-funded schools. Examples of economic academic capital include computers, electronic educational toys, significant numbers of quality books, and private tutoring.

## **A Longitudinal Family Case Study**

According to Saldaña (2003), longitudinal research enables educators to view the breadth and depth of people’s life experiences and to document change. The case study presented in this article followed Alicia and her family (pseudonyms are used for all people and places) over a ten-year period. The family participated in the study when Alicia was 6, 10, 13, and 17 years old. Initially, I was interested in the concepts about reading held by Alicia and her family. While literacy remained the focus of the research, over time, the scope of the research broadened in response to students’ and parents’ comments about school, teachers, and their goals for the future.

Alicia’s full case included interviews, classroom observations, field notes, reading assessments, state test scores, and writing samples. In this paper, because I focus on the accounts of family members related to economic challenges, I draw specifically on interview data. All interviews with Alicia and her family were conducted in the Rodriguez’s living

---

room and were audiotaped and transcribed; field notes were typed following the interviews. I used data analysis programs to sort segments of interviews and field note data into code sets based on patterns suggested by multiple readings of the transcripts during each phase of the project (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once interviews were coded, I revised, condensed, and combined the codes into categories. I combined code sets that were similar and re-sorted data from particularly large code sets to identify sub-themes. Codes related to “challenges,” “resources,” “resilience,” “community, and “suburban schools” were among the code sets that contributed significantly to the analysis presented in this article.

In addition to the themes identified through the coding of data from each phase of the project, I triangulated the data across research phases and across time by identifying recurring themes, stories, and even language. For example, stories of sharing books recurred during all four phases of the project. Likewise, describing teachers as not caring about students and teaching only for their “paychecks” also recurred. This longitudinal analysis allowed me to consider not only accounts offered at particular points in time, but also repeated accounts that recurred across time. Challenging the assumptions often made about children from poor African American families, this account highlights economic challenges alongside Ms. Rodriguez’s commitment to her children’s education.

### **Ms. Rodriguez and her Children**

I met Ms. Rodriguez and her children three years before Alicia was in my first-grade class when her older brother, Tyreek, was in my first-grade class. Alicia and her family lived a few blocks from school, and I would often chat with Ms. Rodriguez and older sons when they walked Tyreek to school each day. Three years later, Alicia was randomly selected from my current class of first-grade students to participate in my doctoral research study.

At the time that the study began, Rosa Parks School housed over 1,200 students, and the vast majority were African American and Puerto Rican children. Ninety-seven percent of the children, including Alicia, qualified for free/reduced lunch. Alicia had

four older brothers and a younger sister. The older brothers had attended elementary school in New York City prior to moving to a smaller city. Over the course of the interview, Ms. Rodriguez consistently expressed high expectations for her children. She believed that her actions had long-term effects on her children. Alicia’s brothers did well in school through the final phase of the study.

Ms. Rodriguez is not a professional educator. In fact, people who do not know her might classify her as the quintessential welfare mom. She is a single mother of six children residing in a low-income community. In the past, she has received welfare and has consistently struggled to provide her family with basic amenities including shelter and food. However, Ms. Rodriguez is much more than a welfare mom. As the accounts presented below attest, she is a savvy thinker and an insightful critic of the ways she has been positioned and treated by schools and in the larger community.

Challenging the assumption of low-income parents as described above, Ms. Rodriguez created a rich literate environment for her children. On my first visit to Alicia’s home, her mother showed me a large box of books that she had collected as Alicia’s four older brothers progressed through elementary school. The cardboard box, which was large enough to have held a washing machine, was filled with a vast selection of books including discarded library books, old textbooks, Dr. Seuss books, and paperback trade books. Alicia, her younger sister, and her older brothers gathered around the box flipping through books and revisiting their favorites. One of Alicia’s older brothers brought a pile of books out from his bedroom and exchanged them for books from the box. Collecting and valuing books was clearly a shared literacy practice.

Alicia’s family was also involved in multiple networks of book circulation. As Ms. Rodriguez explained, “Everybody that I know loves to read.” She described exchanging books with her friends and how that practice was taken-up by her children. When Alicia was in fifth grade, her mother described reading the book *Mama* (McMillan, 1987) that she had gotten from a friend. At a later interview she informed me that one of Alicia’s older brothers had

---

read the book. “Leon snatched my book cause after I read it, he snatched it [and] tells me, I want to read it.” In eighth grade, Alicia described reading *Mama* as well as other books that she acquired from her mother, “Yeah, my mom gets books and I always have books around.” Ms. Rodriguez spoke about a book, *Rockin Robin* (Johnson, 2005) that had recently circulated through the neighborhood. When Ms. Rodriguez was reading this book, she mentioned to Alicia that the protagonist was a bit “crazy.” Alicia then picked up the book and started reading it. Ms. Rodriguez described Alicia’s response, “She’s like ‘Mom! This lady is...’ I was like, wait ‘til you get to the other part.” Books routinely circulated through networks of friends and neighbors and were often read not only by Ms. Rodriguez but also by her sons and daughters. In eleventh grade, Alicia described getting books from her mother, taking them to school, and of her friends reading them. In return, some of Alicia’s friends brought her books that she read and passed on.

Books were part of the social fabric of the family. Challenging discourses about the lack of books in poor urban families, Ms. Rodriguez demonstrated a commitment to literacy learning. Her acts of agency are significant as I turn to the challenges Ms. Rodriguez faced in supporting her children with literacy learning and schooling in her inner city community. In short, this is not a story of a low-income parent who does not care. In contrast, it is a remarkable tale of resilience and resourcefulness.

### **Economic Challenges that Affect Academic Learning**

In these times of school budget austerity and discourses advocating for the privatization of services that have been traditionally funded through the public sector, conversations about school funding have been stymied, and critiques of schooling have focused on teacher quality and accountability rather than on shared societal obligations to children. In this article, I strive to deflect our attention away from stereotypes of ineffective parenting and place our focus on larger social issues. To do this, I draw on the words and experiences of Ms. Rodriguez. While popular discourses encourage the poor to lift themselves up, get a job, and alleviate their

economic woes, the words of Ms. Rodriguez present a more complicated analysis revealing the intersections between community resources, the lack of viable employment, underfunded schools, and race.

Throughout the study, Ms. Rodriguez worked low-wage jobs. During the early years, Ms. Rodriguez completed her child-care certificate and worked as a childcare provider at a local daycare. For a short period of time, Ms. Rodriguez managed to open her own daycare center, however, challenges with parents and liabilities related to operating the center resulted in Ms. Rodriguez leaving childcare and taking a position as a certified nursing assistant and working in home health care settings.

### **Finances**

Over the course of the ten-year project, Ms. Rodriguez rented two apartments; both were within a one-mile radius of Rosa Parks School where Alicia attended first grade. Both apartments had three bedrooms and were located on the first floor of older homes that had been subdivided into rental units. The furnishings were sparse – a sofa, a small television, bare floors, and little decoration. I was often there during the dinner hour and the children were often in and out of the kitchen preparing simple meals of pasta, rice, or peanut butter sandwiches.

During the duration of the ten-year study, the Rodriguez family never depended solely on welfare. However, Ms. Rodriguez reported that they had in the past. She described their situation when Alicia was in first grade.

I’m like on CAP... it’s like assistance but it’s not um, like welfare. It’s better than welfare though because you can work and they help you still... they help me pay the rent. The food and everything else I pay. But I still get my benefit card [health insurance] which is my main reason.

Ms. Rodriguez was relieved to no longer have to rely on welfare. As she explained,

It’s like that your life is an open book. Cause they ask you questions that you wouldn’t believe.... One question was when was the last time you had sex? Yep, and if you answer yes it’s like who with and I’m like why do you all need to know that? It’s none of your business really.



---

She believed that receiving welfare had a negative affect on people, saying it makes you “want to lie” and “feel degraded.” While she believed that “a lot of people, they sit back and they sit on welfare and just keep collecting their checks,” she adamantly distinguished herself from these sorts of people, “I wanted to get off with every inch of my body. I cannot, I hated depending on those people for anything.”

When Alicia was in first grade, Ms. Rodriguez identified money as the greatest obstacle to her children attending college. Three years later, Alicia’s brother who was in high school was concerned about not being able to afford college. He explained, “If I don’t get no scholarship, I don’t know what I’m going to do after that.” James’ older brother P.T. had received a scholarship and attended the local community college. Three years after that, Tyreek was hoping to attend a private school in New York City where his father lived to study electronics and sound mixing. Unfortunately, the school was expensive and despite the commitment and efforts of both his parents, Tyreek was not able to attend; Tyreek eventually got into trouble in the neighborhood and was incarcerated.

By the end of the project, three of Alicia’s older brothers had graduated from high school and two had taken courses at the local community college. One brother was a manager at McDonalds®. A second was doing maintenance work for apartment buildings. The third was living in another state and employed as a bartender; he had landed a couple small acting jobs. All three faced ongoing financial challenges.

### **Assumptions about Students and their Families**

As described above, assumptions are often made about children from poor families (Auerbach, 1989; Author, 2003). Low wages, receiving benefits, and living in a high-poverty community affected the ways teachers and other professionals viewed families. Ms. Rodriguez clearly recognized the assumptions people made about her:

A lot of teachers in a lot of schools they figure you live in a low [income community], and they say this is the ghetto right?... they assume everybody is on welfare. And they’ll say when your mother get

her check tell her to buy you so and so. And that’s embarrassing for the kid.

In response to this situation in which a teacher implied that Ms. Rodriguez should use her welfare check to purchase gloves for her daughter, Ms. Rodriguez confronted the teacher and explained the situation that involved Ms. Rodriguez sharing her own gloves with her daughter.

An additional set of assumptions revealed Ms. Rodriguez’s awareness of assumptions related to race. When I asked Ms. Rodriguez whether being African American affected her children’s school experiences, she turned to her son, who was in high school and sitting nearby. He immediately responded, “YES.”

P.T.: You talking about school and race right?

Oh yes, it affects a whole lot in my school.

Ms. Rodriguez: Yeah, because his school’s mostly white anyway.

P.T.: Yes, it is and not to mention there is a lot of prejudice and I’ve seen all kinds of stuff with that principal.

Ms. Rodriguez: Oooh, yeah, your principal is like a real trip. In his school, his principal is...

P.T.: ... a racist

Ms. Rodriguez describes visiting her son’s school and encountering the school principal admonishing P.T. and his friend:

I’ve walked in the school and he was [saying] “All you ones act...” He was yelling at Jim [P.T.’s friend]... Then he went from Jim to say something about him (points to P.T.) and I stood behind him [P.T.] and I looked at him I said “What about P.T.?” He was like, “Oh nothing, I’m just.” I was like “No, what about P.T.? You was about to say something about my child. What about him?”

Both P.T. and his mother believed that the white students at his school were treated better.

Years later when Alicia was in eleventh grade, her mother worried that being black affected the ways Alicia’s teachers treated her, “Most teachers in her school, they just, like [they assume] her parents don’t work. They stay at home, collecting welfare,

---

doing nothing with their life, but sitting there.” She adamantly explained that this was not the case for her family,

I’m not one of those parents that sit at home. Don’t act like I don’t care about my kids. And that’s when they was like, ‘Uh, well, we is just asking’ [Ms. Rodriguez recreates her role in the conversation] ‘No. You got a problem with my daughter you need to call me. You don’t approach her. You don’t put your hand in her face, and you don’t, no. But you tell me. I’ll handle it.’

Displays of racial prejudice were not limited to school personnel. Ms. Rodriguez reported that she feared the “police more than anything.” The police had recently stopped two of her sons because they had “looked suspicious with a book bag” walking down the street at night near her apartment. As she explained, “I think being young and black and they figured most young black people are either out there selling drugs or doing drugs and they think because you live in the ghetto, they figure you got to act like the ghetto. But that’s not true.” She reported that there have been similar incidents over the years with her teenage sons; thus, she worried about her children’s safety both in school and on the streets.

### **Teachers Don’t Care**

Ms. Rodriguez and her children reported that too many teachers in the city schools did not care about their students. Leon, who was in high school at the time, reported “Teachers don’t care. I know the teachers at [Johnson High School] don’t.” Ms. Rodriguez expressed similar concerns, “The teachers is like, they’re not like when I was coming up. Teachers seem when I was coming up that they care. Now they seem like they just there for a paycheck.” She worried that the teachers did not respect their students:

They want the respect from the kids but they don’t want to give that respect. So they want to talk to you any kind of way and then expect you all to sit back and say okay and then you got to be, kids that are practically grown that is looking at you like my mamma don’t talk to me like that.

In grade eight, Alicia’s words reflected her mother’s concerns. She reported that her school was “not

really” a good place to learn “cause the teachers act like they don’t like the kids or they scared of them.” Alicia explained “when the kids fight in class, they don’t try to break them up. They don’t. They think that the kids will try to hurt them or something.” Alicia believed that schools should “change the way the teachers act” saying that teachers should “help the kids more and to do their job.” Like her mother, Alicia highlighted the importance of respect, “They should be respectful if they want the kids to be respectful to them. And they should let the kids be who they are instead of trying to change them.”

### **Inequitable School Resources**

Across the longitudinal project, several parents, including Ms. Rodriguez, repeatedly spoke about the differences between suburban and urban schools. Ms. Rodriguez explicitly named race as being related to these differences:

I think school, it mostly leans over to the white people’s side because if you go out in the suburbs and you go to school, [if] you are [walking] across the street to the school, there’s a bus that picks you up and takes you across the street and you can walk right across the street to go to school. I know I have been out there and I watched it. I am like my daughter have to walk a [long city] block. Yeah, I think it is very bias. If you have more money, the more education you have [and] the better your education is.

When I asked her if she had ever considered sending her children to suburban schools, she said she had, “but it is just I can’t afford it.” Three years later, Ms. Rodriguez worried that many kids in the city schools were not reading as well as their peers in the suburbs. She argued that the kids in the suburbs “have better teachers, better books, better surroundings.”

In grade 11, Ms. Rodriguez felt that the education Alicia got “could have been better.” She explained, “There’s so many kids in the class so, everyday they come home they’s like, ‘there was a fight today. And this one said this.’ You know it’s more social than ‘sit down’ and ‘do your work’ and ‘we’re not having this.’” She thought that a suburban school might have been better:

---

I think she'd be more focused on school than anything. It would be more important going to school to learn not going to school for social [things]...

In those [suburban] schools they go "Work, work.

I don't care what went on in your neighborhood."

For most of the ten-year project, I continued to teach in the same school district that Alicia attended. Illustrating the types of economic challenges school districts faced, during my final years in that district, I was allocated fifty dollars to purchase classroom supplies for the entire school year; this allocation was intended to cover copy paper and all other supplies. Needless to say, my colleagues and I spent a good portion of our salaries on classroom materials.

### **Dangerous Neighborhoods and Schools**

Throughout the ten-year study, Ms. Rodriguez worried about her children's safety. As she reported, "My biggest fear is somebody actually killing one of them." She explained, "Nowadays you have gangsters [who might say] 'You looked at me wrong' or 'You done stepped on my shoes'... they do[those things or] mistaking you for somebody else or you are with the wrong person."

These concerns about safety became significant in middle school, when Alicia spoke regularly about fighting at school while assuring me that she was safe because she had "a lot of friends." By the beginning of eleventh grade, Alicia's mother was increasingly concerned. Ms. Rodriguez thought that a lot of the fighting was caused by jealousy. "One think this one got more than the other one or this one is talking about what this one is doing and something like that. Or they talking about this one looks [at], likes her old boyfriend and all that crap. Jealousy. Jealousy, envy, or what somebody else got. I think it's stupid." She reported that she was thinking about having Alicia change schools. Alicia herself remained unshaken, "I'm safe. I can take care of myself. I know how to fight." Later when her mother was not present, Alicia spoke more about her friends:

I [am] in a club, you know, because I had to help my goons out. You know goons [are the] people that you fight with [alongside]. And friends, I fight with [alongside] my friends... We got colors. Our color is green.

When asked directly, Alicia denied that she was involved with a gang, although she later acknowledged that it was a "gang" but continued to maintain that the kids had been "friends since nursery school." While Ms. Rodriguez was notably concerned about the situation, she also acknowledged that the group had been friends for years, saying to me "You know most of the kids because they went to Rosa Parks Elementary School."

However, as the school year progressed, the fighting became worse, and Alicia and her friends were labeled by teachers and administrators as "gang members." A teacher at the school had seen Alicia and her friends' names listed on MySpace® and reported this "gang affiliation" to the school administrator. Shortly after that Alicia was jumped in a school stairwell and a fight ensued. Alicia was suspended and placed in an in-school suspension program for the remainder of the school year – from December until June.

Alicia's mother was angry and felt that the school officials had made their decision without consulting her. She recreated her conversation with the school officials:

'You didn't really want to see [Alicia]. You didn't want to talk to her... But you're sitting up here telling her what she's gonna do and what she ain't gonna do and what you're not going to tolerate and I'm telling you that what makes you think that she's going to tolerate it?' And I'm like 'She's never been suspended, she always got good grades, and then you gonna talk about that if she was 17 at this time you would kick her out of school?'... And I'm looking at him like 'How you gonna say that, and she never been in trouble. She got good grades.' But he didn't care.

As Ms. Rodriguez reported, this fight was an isolated incident—"She never been in no fight. She has got her grades up, she started getting A's and B's." Being placed in in-school suspension for the remainder of the school year affected not only Alicia's sense of self as a student, but it also prevented Alicia from graduating with her class as she could not take all the classes she needed for graduation.

---

### Limited Access to Dreams

Despite the challenges Alicia faced in school, she had a clear dream for her future. Starting in eighth grade, Alicia was enthusiastic about becoming a photographer. Her uncle worked at a local factory that made and processed the film from disposable cameras. He would bring her disposable cameras and develop her pictures at work. Her family agreed that Alicia took good pictures. In eighth grade, Ms. Rodriguez was trying to get Alicia a camera. She made arrangements to buy a used camera from a friend, but when that strategy fell through she assured Alicia that she would find another way to buy her one. As Alicia reported, “I know my mom would get it... Cause she already told me she’s gonna give me like one of them photography cameras.”

In fall of eleventh grade, Alicia was finally able to take a photography class. Her mother reported that she loved the class. Alicia and her classmates made their own cameras and learned to develop film. “[We’d] get to go in the darkroom and all that. It’s just so much fun. And he used to give us cameras just to go around the school taking pictures of like patterns and stuff. And we developed them ourselves.” In Alicia’s high school, this photography class was her only option. There was no photography club and Alicia could not afford community photography classes despite the city she lived in being an international center for photographic arts.

That year, her mother got her a camera for Christmas. However on the first day she had the camera, Alicia dropped it and it broke. In addition, when Alicia was placed in the in-school suspension program, she was no longer able to take her photography course. When I asked her what other career goals she might have besides photography, she reported having no other dreams.

Access to possibilities extended beyond Alicia and her dream of becoming a photographer. As Ms. Rodriguez reported, recently implemented testing policies made it difficult for many students to graduate from high school. “You got all these kids dropping out because it’s becoming too hard to get out.” She argued that the tests were making some kids “feel like they’s stupid and they’re not stupid.” Alicia and other kids attending underfunded schools in

poorly resourced communities need opportunities to grow, thrive, and dream; school should be a site of possibilities.

Living in a poor urban area, attending underfunded schools, and being African American are not separate issues. They are woven together in ways that make the effects of each of these dimensions invisible. Teachers and parents are blamed for the poor academic progress of children, obfuscating the real experiences of children and families living in poor communities. As Ms. Rodriguez’s words attest, poverty matters and takes many forms. Part of the invisibility of poverty lies in the accumulation of its multiple dimensions. Just living in a dangerous neighborhood, or having a low paying job, or attending an underfunded school alone could be compensated by a caring parent and a strong attitude. However, poverty has multiple effects that combine to work against even resilient and resourceful families like Alicia’s.

### Hope and Possibilities: Highlighting Cultural Embodied Capital

While dominant discourses tend to blame families and teachers for the literate challenges faced by children in low-income communities, the voices of Ms. Rodriguez and her children highlight disadvantages related to economic academic capital and suggest that responsibility extends beyond teachers and families. Larger social issues related to racism, employment, school resources, safe communities, and support for students’ dreams are clearly raised. While economic disparity raises significant obstacles, in this discussion section, I return to Bourdieu’s theories to situate this lack of economic capital within Bourdieu’s larger discussion of capital, which also describes the roles played by social and cultural capital. Social academic capital involves the networks that families can access and use to support their children academically. In Alicia’s family, social academic capital was limited and generally bounded by family and friends as illustrated by their book sharing networks. Social interactions with school personnel, including administrators and teachers, often led to problematic outcomes which could be attributed to assumptions made about families, frustrated

---

teachers, insufficient resources, and the lack of services.

However, cultural academic capital was a strength of this family. Cultural academic capital refers to dispositions and ways of being, acting, talking, and valuing that align with school success. Examples of cultural academic capital were evident in Ms. Rodriguez's belief and trust in both literacy learning and schooling. She spoke consistently about the importance of literacy and schooling, modeled the importance of schooling by completing her GED and obtaining both her child care and certified nursing assistant certifications, intervening with school officials when she felt that her children were not being well-served, and emphasizing the importance of getting a diploma.

Despite the challenges faced by Alicia and her siblings, Ms. Rodriguez consistently demonstrated a remarkable degree of cultural academic capital as she advocated for her children:

Ms. Rodriguez: I'm on them constantly. To do work. (grade 1)

Ms. Rodriguez: See, I come from New York. So, with us it's [you keep on them]. In New York a lot of times you slip through that system and you just skid. (grade 5)

Ms. Rodriguez: I am so happy that they know how to read cause I refuse to let them push them through school. (grade 8)

Ms. Rodriguez: I'm not one of those parents that sit at home. Don't act like I don't care about my kids. And that's when they was like, "Uh, well, we is just asking -" "No. You got a problem with my daughter you need to call me." (grade 11)

Her dedication to her children's academic pursuits included getting a high school diploma:

Oh, I stay on them and my son knows I don't care if he don't go to college that's one thing but he says he probably end up going to a trade school or something. I think that's fine. But one thing I've always told him. Regardless of what you do in life, you gonna have a diploma. I don't care what you do, you gonna bring home the diploma. And they all know that. And they all like you know ma

ain't going to let up until we get the diploma, so. Let's get it and get it over with.

Ms. Rodriguez described the various things she did to support the school success of her children; she would "write letters, show up at school meetings and talk to the teachers." As she explained, "You have to be that parent that actually cares and let them know that you care and let them know you're not going to, they're not going to push your child through school, just push them on through when they don't know anything." Alicia's three oldest brothers all graduated from high school. Tyreek was the first sibling not to graduate and his incarceration was a huge disappointment for Ms. Rodriguez.

Ms. Rodriguez's resilience was apparent again as she described her concerns for her children. She explained "My biggest fear is failure. Yeah, I don't like to fail." She continued "I don't like people to quit. I can't stand quitters and my biggest fear is that they are going to get up there and say 'I quit. I don't want to do it no more.' That's why I am always on [them] you see." Alicia's older brothers joined the conversation:

Ms. Rodriguez: I don't have a fear. I believe every last one of them are going to make something of themselves.

Leon: I know I am.

Tyreek: I'm going to be in charge of the country.

Ms. Rodriguez not only enacted agency of behalf of her children, but she also accessed cultural academic capital (e.g., advocating for literacy and schooling, completing various degrees and certifications, intervening with school officials, highlighting the importance of getting a diploma). While financial limits had real effects, Ms. Rodriguez was savvy and harnessed available resources.

## Conclusions and Implications

Over the ten years that I worked with Alicia and her family, her mother repeatedly identified fiscal challenges while demonstrating a high degree of cultural academic capital. Three significant conclusions can be drawn. First, Ms. Rodriguez aptly named and critiqued the economic challenges she faced in helping her children to be successful in school.

These challenges relate to both economic challenges within the family and challenges related to living in a high-poverty community. Second, Ms. Rodriguez provided a lived account of the experience of raising children in a high-poverty community. She identified challenges that are often invisible to outsiders, including teachers. Finally, her longitudinal account highlights the agency and resiliency that she brought to the challenges that she faced. She repeatedly demonstrated cultural academic capital through her commitment to schooling and literacy, high expectations for her children, and her continued faith in her children's abilities and potential.

The words of Ms. Rodriguez and her children invite us to look beyond parenting and teaching as the cause of disparities in academic achievement. As echoed in the writings of Kozol (2012), Neuman and Celano (2012), and Ravitch (2013), socioeconomic status and the economic health of communities matter. Anyon (1997) argued for an "all-out attack on poverty and racial isolation" writing that "until the economic and political systems in which the cities are enmeshed are themselves transformed so they may be more democratic and productive for urban residents, educational reformers have little chance of effecting long-lasting educational changes in city schools" (p. 13). Thus the words of Ms. Rodriguez alert us to essential issues beyond teacher competency and parental responsibility.

With these insights I offer two implications related to poverty and learning. I begin with a call to action that extends beyond teachers and schools. As a society we need to recognize that all children and families are entitled to jobs that pay a living wage, safe neighborhoods, well-resourced schools, and access to students' dreams. As educators, we must continually remind ourselves and others that poverty has real effects on people's lives. Change must include not only reforming schools, but also reforming neighborhoods and, ultimately, society. This is avowedly political—but essential—as we consider children's lives and futures.

A second set of implications is evident in the ways Ms. Rodriguez described teachers and schools. Foremost teachers must show students that they care. They need to listen to their students and be

respectful of students' families and situations. In particular, educators must constantly re-examine their own attitudes and assumptions. Learning about the challenges that families face is a first step that can lead to helping families to locate resources, address issues in their communities and schools, and have a more powerful voice in their children's futures.

## Note

1. This research was supported by the Spencer Foundation.

## References

- Author. (2004).
- Author. (2007).
- Anyon, J. (1997). *Ghetto schooling: A political economy of urban educational reform*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Auerbach, E.R. (1989). Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 59(2), pp. 165–181
- Berliner, D. & Biddle, B.J. (1996). *The manufactured crisis: Myths, fraud, and the attack on America's public schools*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). New York, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Translated by R. Nice. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Carrington, V., & Luke, A. (1997). Literacy and Bourdieu's sociological theory: A reframing. *Language and Education*, 11(2), 96–112.
- Cushman, E. (1998). *The struggle and the tools: Oral and literate strategies in an inner city community*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Danzinger, S.K. & Danzinger, S.H. (2008). *Childhood poverty in economic and public policy contexts*. In S.B. Neuman (Ed.) *Educating the Other America: Top experts tackle poverty, literacy, and achievement in our schools*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.
- Kozol, J. (2012). *Fire in the ashes: Twenty five years among the poorest children in America*. New York: Random House.
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- National Commission on Children. (1991). *Beyond rhetoric: A new American agenda for children and families*. Washington, DC.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Neuman, S. & Celano, D.C. (2012). *Giving our children a fighting chance*. New York: Teachers College Press.



- 
- Ravitch, D. (2013). *Reign of error: The hoax of the privatization movement and the danger to America's public schools*. New York: Knopf Publishing.
- Rist, R. (1978). *The invisible children: School integration in American society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Robinson, H.M. (1946). *Why pupils fail in reading*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Saldaña, J. (2003). *Longitudinal research: Analyzing change through time*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Shannon, P. (1998). *Reading poverty*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Snow, C.E., Barnes, W.S., Chandler, J., Goodman, I.F., & Hemphill, L. (1991). *Unfulfilled expectations: Home and school influences on literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, D. (1996). *Toxic literacies: Exposing the injustice of bureaucratic texts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Taylor, D. & Dorsey-Gaines, C. (1988). *Growing up literate: Learning from inner-city families*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

## Literature References

- Johnson, S. (2005) *Rockin Robin*. New York: Urban Books.
- McMillan, T. (1987). *Mama*. Boston: Pocket Books.

## About the Author:

*Catherine Compton-Lilly, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin Madison. Dr. Compton-Lilly teaches courses in literacy studies and works with professional development schools in Madison. She has a passion for helping teachers to support children in learning to read and write. Her interests include examining how time operates as a contextual factor in children's lives as they progress through school and construct their identities as students and readers. Dr. Compton-Lilly is the author/editor of several books and has published widely in educational journals.*

---

# Using Storybooks to Enhance Literacy Development in Early Emergent Readers:

## A Closer Look at the Use of Dialogic Reading

Sarah E. Peterson

### Abstract

---

*Kindergarten preparedness is commonly presumed to be an academic focus of preschool classrooms across the nation; however, an estimated one third of school-aged children entering kindergarten do not demonstrate skills commonly associated with adequate literacy development for this age group. There exists an increasing amount of research data to suggest that storybook read alouds, using specific guidelines or strategies including dialogic reading, can increase student comprehension, aid in story retell, and advance critical thinking. In this study, the number of session participants ranged from one-on-one to small groups of 3–4 children. Data was collected for each session using videotapes which were then analyzed for visual cues that indicated student engagement, picture citations in retellings and the number of words in a student response (directly related to the book). Data was also collected to determine how many questions the researcher was able to ask with reference to group size. Based on this research, students demonstrated an increased level of engagement, increasingly used pictures as clues during the retell process, and steadily increased the detailed length of responses as process repetition occurred.*

### Keywords:

*Dialogic reading, emergent readers, retell, questions, preschool, read aloud, vocabulary, visual cues*

### Introduction

Kindergarten preparedness is commonly presumed to be an “academic” focus of preschool classrooms across the nation. However a growing number of children, particularly those from low-income families, begin kindergarten far behind their middle/upper middle class peers when it comes to literacy development (Whitehurst, 2014). These literacy developmental traits include: language development, vocabulary acquisition, and critical thinking, among others. In an effort to combat these achievement gaps, both the federal and 40 state governments, as well as the District of Columbia, currently allocate

money for children from low Social Economic Status (SES) backgrounds who qualify to attend preschool for free through two programs: Head Start (federally funded), “which targets children from families with incomes less than 130 percent of the federal poverty level; and state-funded programs which, may also assist middle-class children” (Cascio & Schanzenbach, 2014, p. 1).

A recent data collection reported approximately 28 percent of 4-year-olds and four percent of 3-year-olds in the United States are served in state-funded preschools according to “The State of Preschool Yearbook 2013” and, nationwide, Head Start

---

provides services to nearly 1.1 million additional preschool-aged children (Samuels, 2014). Head Start and other federally funded preschool programs with targeted enrollment share an important goal: "...offset the myriad developmental risks associated with disability and poverty by improving children's readiness for schooling and, by extension, their short- and long-term academic success" (Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010, p. 504). Consequently, as enrollment in free pre-K programs increases the early childhood/pre-K classrooms are seeing an increased number of students identified with developmental risks such as language impairments, and these language impairments place these pre-K students at a greater risk of developing reading disorders. Therefore, more focus and attention is being directed to the quality and amount of time allocated to providing children with the best instructional practices associated with early literacy and language development. Within these pre-K classroom settings the goal then must be to implement and explicitly teach research-based practices and programs that have positive developmental impacts on both normally-developing and language-impaired preschool-aged children (Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta, 2008; Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009; Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010), and the key to promoting reading development is through prevention.

In order to meet the needs of both normally developing and language impaired children, reading experts [including Speech and Language Pathologists (SLPs) and interventionists] are calling on a balanced literacy approach to reading instruction; one which includes dialogic reading and print awareness in the emergent (pre-K through elementary) years, as well as engaging children with meaningful literature and focusing on providing them with many opportunities to develop their oral language skills (Gillon, 2000; Justice & Ezell, 2002; Gillon, 2005; Rvachew, 2007; Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta, 2008; Paul & Norbury, 2012; Carson, Gillon, & Boustead, 2013; Whitehurst 1992; Whitehurst, 2014). Incorporating a balanced literacy approach into early childhood settings helps pre-K students and children gain meaning from the text, make connections to their own lives through

discussion, further develop their understandings of the functions of print, and overall enhance their literacy development.

## **Importance of Supporting Literacy Development**

Literacy development is a complex process that begins long before a child enters kindergarten, and understanding this developmental process—so as to incorporate developmentally-appropriate literacy skills into the everyday routine—is critical for educators/care givers/parents alike. The complex development of literacy relies on many skills and is highly influenced by different factors (Skebo et al., 2013). Long before they are actually able to decode print, children develop ideas about written language—how it works and what it's used for—during the emergent literacy phase of development. Emergent literacy skills develop largely in part due to "social interactions," most often through parent-child storybook read-alouds. It is during these interactions that children are able to listen and learn a lot about the different aspects and functions of these books (Paul & Norbury, 2012). For example, children learn which way to hold a book correctly; they begin to realize the black squiggles on a page represent meaning and that those markings tell the reader what to say on each page, every time; and most importantly, these social interactions expose children to different genres or styles of literacy language, different from their usual spoken language and oral conversation.

Today it is no secret that being read to, beginning in the earliest stages of life and through the preschool years, has been shown to enhance both literacy and language development throughout a child's elementary years and beyond (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Chomsky, 1972; Elley, 1989; Roth, Speece, & Cooper, 2002; Snow, 1983; Whitehurst et al., 1988). Research suggests that children who are read to frequently as preschoolers are more likely to become better readers in the later school years than their peers from non-reading families (Crain-Thoreson, Dale, 1992; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010; Paul, & Norbury, 2012; Snow, 1983; Whitehurst et al., 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1999). Additionally, children

---

benefit substantially more through engaging discussion about the story, as well as through explicit conversations drawing attention to print awareness (Justice & Ezell, 2001; Justice & Ezell, 2002; Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009; Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010; Paul & Norbury, 2012). Consequently, time spent reading to children in these early years has been proven to positively relate to linguistic development (Chomsky, 1972), and children who read (or listen to) rich and complex materials benefit from what Chomsky refers to as “a range of linguistic inputs,” which are unavailable to the non-literary child (p. 23) and children’s books can provide a wealth of information to young readers and serve as excellent tools from which children gain knowledge.

In the publication *Literacy and Language: Relationships during the Preschool Years*, Snow (1983) cites studies which have shown that there are preschool-aged children from low-income families with, “considerable access to and experience with books,” (p. 185) who have been socialized for school by their mothers in explicit and direct ways, proving that access to literacy materials alone is simply not enough to explain the reading achievement gap between working and middle-class children. In reality, more recent correlational studies have shown evidence which supports a relationship between a child’s preschool narrative skills and later academic achievement which suggests fostering personal narratives in the preschool years influences oral language skills and development (Zevenbergen, Whitehurst, & Zevenbergen, 2003). Therefore, regardless of the SES background of the child, it is because these and other language differences exist that an inexpensive and effective best practice is needed to close the language gap.

At a time in education when the term ‘best practice’ is used frequently to describe the practices and techniques that should be implemented in the classroom to both help level the playing field for disadvantaged students and encourage all students to achieve their personal best, careful consideration must be given to the evidence that demonstrates whether or not the effectiveness of the activities and/or strategies we use with our students exists, as

supported by objective and comprehensive research and evaluation. Based on evaluative research, the What Works Clearinghouse (2007) has deemed that dialogic reading, one particular shared book reading technique, when used with preschool-aged children, is an effective tool in increasing language and literacy development. The advantage to this technique is its ability to be implemented both within the home and in one-on-one or small-group school settings.

## **Supporting the Emergent Reader Using Dialogic Reading**

Dialogic reading, an intervention program developed by Whitehurst et al. (1988), is designed to, “accelerate young children’s language development [and] based on the assumption that practice, feedback, and appropriately scaffolded interactions facilitate language development” (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst & Epstein, 1994, p. 236). During dialogic reading the child is encouraged to increasingly ‘take on the role of the storyteller,’ while the adult uses prompts, response expansions, and positive reinforcement to scaffold learning and role-reversal (LaCour, McDonald, Tissington, & Thomason, 2013).

The concept behind dialogic reading is far from new, however. Even before Whitehurst and his colleagues coined this term, many educational researchers were recognizing that semantic contingency in adult speech was a major “facilitator” in language acquisition (Snow, 1983). Adult utterances that continue the topics introduced by the child’s utterances (previously made statements) are considered semantically contingent. The word semantic quite literally means the meaning of a word, phrase, sentence, or text; while contingency means what follows in the future. Therefore, semantic contingency means continuing the topic started by the child. Snow’s research identified ways in which adult utterances can continue the topics introduced by the child. Such utterances made by the adult to aid the child in language acquisition can include: (1) expansions, which are limited to the content of the previous child utterance; (2) semantic extensions, which add new information to the topic; (3) clarifying questions, which demand clarification of the child utterance; and (4) answers to child questions. It is important to note that because the earliest stages of language

---

acquisition are dependent on the social nature of the reading process, recognizing the adult-child interactions—or social nature—of the reading process is crucial. These early stages of language development are best supported by particular characteristics of social interaction that include: semantic contingency, scaffolding, accountability procedures, and the use of routines (1983). The key idea behind this adult-child interaction is that it promotes language acquisition within the child.

Dialogic reading is very much a social interaction between the adult and child. Though it is sometimes referred to as shared reading, dialogic reading really is different in the fact that unlike shared reading in which the teacher/adult reads to an entire class, with dialogic reading the adult works one-on-one or with small groups of children (no more than 5, fewer is better), and is therefore able to give direct response and feedback to the child in a more intimate setting (Brooke & Bramwell, 2006; Flynn, 2011). Dialogic reading is a specific type of social interaction; an event which involves sharing the storybook reading itself between the parent and the child, making the child a participant in the reading of the story (Whitehurst, 1992).

### Dialogic Reading Principles

Dialogic reading consists of seven essential principles that help distinguish the process itself from shared reading. The effectiveness of these principles has been researched and evaluated, with a widely accepted conclusion that supports dialogic reading practices in both school and home settings. In 1994, *Accelerating Language Development Through Picture Book Reading: Replication and Extension to a Videotape Training Format* was published as a follow-up to another influential study, *Accelerating Language Development Through Picture Book Reading* (Whitehurst et al., 1988) in which the effectiveness of one-on-one picture book reading between a mother and a child using dialogic reading techniques was evaluated. In both studies the mother's efforts, following a set of specific interactive techniques, "produced substantial effects on preschool children's language development" (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994, p. 238). In this 1994, and the previous 1988, study the

adult participants in the experimental group were to follow guidelines, or principles, meant to navigate them through the dialogic reading process. The seven guiding principles were then divided into two assignments that were meant to scaffold instruction. The seven principles of dialogic reading are (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994, p. 238):

1. *Ask "what" questions.* When children practice language they develop their language skills, and when parents ask "what" questions they evoke speech from the child. Such questions more effectively elicit language than does either pointing or asking "yes/no" questions.
2. *Follow answers with questions.* Once the child knows the name of a pictured object, parents should ask a further question about the object. Examples include attribute questions, which require the child to describe aspects of the object such as its shape, its color, or its parts, and action questions, require the child to describe what the object is used for or who is using it.
3. *Repeat what the child says.* Parents should repeat the child's correct responses to provide encouragement and to indicate when the child is correct.
4. *Help the child as needed.* Parents should provide models of a good answer and have the child imitate the models.
5. *Praise and encourage.* Parents should provide feedback and praise when the child says something about the book, for example, "good talking," "That's right," or "nice job."
6. *Shadow the child's interests.* It is important for parents to talk about the things that the child wants to talk about. When the child points at a picture or begins to talk about part of a page, parents should use this interest as a chance to encourage the child to talk.
7. *Have fun.* Parents can make reading fun by using a game-like, turn-taking approach. Parents should keep the procedures in proportion by simply reading to the child part of the time (p. 238).

---

Since its inception, dialogic reading has been studied, researched, and implemented in classrooms, homes, and university laboratories alike (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Brooke & Bramwell, 2006; Flynn, 2011; LaCour, McDonald, Tissington, & Thomason, 2013; Whitehurst et al., 1988; Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith & Fischel, 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1999). The findings of these studies, and perhaps countless others, both strongly suggest and demonstrate the effectiveness of dialogic reading when used as an intervention strategy aimed at increasing language development among emergent readers. In fact the findings in Elley's (1989) research concluded that through activities such as listening to entertaining stories read aloud, children both learned and retained more information. In their 2013 study, LaCour, McDonald, Tissington, and Thomason found that through dialogic storybook reading the child was able to enjoy books, thus developing an attitude which led to further interest in reading and literacy. Furthermore, their study also echoed previous studies (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith & Fischel, 1994; Brooke & Bramwell, 2006; Flynn, 2011) that found that dialogic reading encourages literacy development through the social interaction between adult and child. Based on such research, the evidence strongly suggests implementing dialogic reading in the shared reading experience between an adult and a preschool-aged child.

## Implementing Dialogic Reading

The principles of dialogic reading remain the same whether implemented in the home or school setting. Regardless of the setting in which dialogic reading takes place, the important aspect to remember is how parents/adults talk to their children/students makes a difference.

Because the goal of dialogic reading is to enhance language development, successful implementation is crucial. Such implementation depends on a solid understanding of both the fundamental reading technique, also known as PEER, and what Whitehurst (1992) refers to as the five prompts used in dialogic reading, or CROWD. Whitehurst

developed the following two acronyms to help guide the teacher/parent in the dialogic reading process:

### PEER technique

PEER is the fundamental reading technique used in dialogic reading (LaCour, McDonald, Tissington, & Thomason, 2013, p. 2). It is a short interaction between the child and the adult in which the adult:

- P**rompts the child to say something related to the book,
- E**valuates the child's response, related to the book,
- E**xpands the child's response by rephrasing and adding additional information to it, and
- R**epeats the prompt (making sure the child has learned from the expansion).

### CROWD questions

CROWD questions are used at the prompting stage of the PEER sequence (Whitehurst, 1992) and are designed to assist the child in further development of emergent literacy skills (LaCour, McDonald, Tissington, & Thomason, 2013). There are five types of prompts used in dialogic reading (Whitehurst, 1992):

*Completion* prompts—usually used with rhyming books or books with repetitive phrases, reader leaves a blank at the end of the sentence for the child to fill in. *Aim:* provides child with information about the structure of language that is critical to later reading.

*Recall* prompts—questions about what happened (to be used after a child has read the story).

Recall prompts can work with nearly every book, with the exception of alphabet books. *Aim:* helps child understand story plots as well as describing sequences of events.

*Open-ended* prompts—these questions work best with books that have detailed illustrations as the prompts focus on the pictures themselves. *Aim:* assisting the child in increasing expressive fluency and attention to detail.

*Wh- prompts*—focus on the what, where, when, why, and how questions. *Aim:* using the pictures in the book to teach new vocabulary.



---

*Distancing* prompts—help form a bridge between books and the real world by asking the child to relate their own experiences to a picture or words in the book. Aim: to form a bridge between the books and the real world, as well as increasing verbal fluency, conversational abilities, and narrative skills.

## Repeated Readings

Research has shown that as children listen to stories being read, much language is learned incidentally (Snow, 1983; Whitehurst et al., 1988; Elley, 1989; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Roth, Speece, & Cooper, 2002). Therefore, through repeated readings of texts, children gain a deeper understanding of words and their meanings. Brief discussion throughout the reading experience further aids in comprehension and development. The importance of repeated readings was reported in Elley's (1989) study: "Given three readings of the story over a week, without any explanation of the target words, the first class showed a mean gain of 19 percent in their understanding of words; given one reading, with brief explanation of target words as they were read, the second class produced a mean gain of 20 percent; and given three readings, as well as brief explanations, the third class achieved a mean gain of 33 percent" (p. 177).

Through repeated readings and opportunities to discuss the text, dialogic reading helps to strengthen oral narration abilities. The findings of Roth, Speece, & Cooper (2002) concluded the converse effect in which, "deficits in oral narration may have a substantial impact on children's reading achievement when narrative structure has not been sufficiently developed or cannot be effectively accessed" (p.262). Currently in Wisconsin, Common Core State Standard>>English Language Arts-Reading:Literature>>Kindergarten>>2 exists to promote kindergarten students' abilities to, "retell familiar stories, including key details," (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/K/#CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.2>) with prompting and support (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2014). Based on this research we can conclude that the repeated reading aspect of dialogic reading is vital to its success among children. Therefore, I set out to

determine whether dialogic reading, with repeated readings of stories, has a positive effect on the literacy development of preschool children.

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants in this study were four preschool-aged children (each four years of age), two females and two males, randomly selected from a larger class of 14 students in a suburban preschool located in the Midwest. The participants were solicited from the Monday and Wednesday a.m. class at the preschool through announced solicitations and sign-up sheets. Participants' parents received consent forms and were asked to sign on their child's behalf granting permission to participate in the study. For the purposes of gender equality and neutrality, I divided the consent forms into two groups: males and females, and from these groups two names were selected. The selected students were identified by their classroom teachers as typically developing children of this age group and without physical and/or cognitive limitations. It is worth noting that none of the children within the larger group had any known physical and/or cognitive limitations, nor were such limitations prohibited within this research prior to the start of the study.

This study was conducted over a seven-week period and took place in both the primary preschool classroom, for the whole-group instruction and assessment, and in a quiet "nook" located outside the primary classroom, where small-group as well as individual instruction and assessments took place. Materials used for this study included pre-selected children's books (see Appendix A) and an iPhone™ which served as a recording device (used for audio recording). All data was collected during face-to-face interactions between the researcher and the participating children.

### Procedures

The seven-week study consisted of bi-weekly class sessions, Monday and Wednesday mornings, for approximately 20 minutes each. In addition to the regularly-scheduled thematically-based stories the classroom teachers read on a daily basis, participants in the research sessions were read to twice

---

weekly—on Monday and Wednesday mornings—while the large group was read to only an additional time during the school week (Monday mornings only). Ultimately, this meant more reading instruction for all of the children and specifically for the participants of this study during the time period in which the study took place. The large-group Monday sessions lasted approximately 10–15 minutes each in length and the objective was aimed at introducing the story to the children via picture walks and prediction-making. Wednesday morning sessions were conducted in small-group then individual, one-on-one sessions lasting approximately 15–20 minutes with a specific focus on dialogic reading techniques and concept of print prompting.

Throughout each of the sessions within this study, participants were encouraged to actively listen to and enjoy the storybooks in both the whole-group and small-group settings, during which time the children were asked to be carefully looking at and examining the pictures within these stories as I read. Following the readings, students were invited, voluntarily, to talk about the stories, emphasizing the importance of using the pictures to guide their thoughts and trigger their memories. The purpose of talking about what had just been read to them was to help develop oral language skills as well as aid in overall comprehension.

As a part of the dialogic reading process the story was read twice, sometimes three times. Twice was the most common frequency the participants heard the story read to them, which included both the large group as well as the small group (and one-on-one) settings. Large group sessions consisted of reading the story only once. The rationale behind the multiple readings was to aid in the students' understanding of the story itself, while further developing their oral language abilities through the retelling.

The first session of each week, which occurred on Mondays, was designed to engage the participants in the story and to familiarize them with key aspects (main idea, specific word, repeated phrase, etc.) important to the story itself [i.e.: repetition in Rosen's (1989) *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, and the word "share" in Dewdney's (2012) *Llama*

*Llama Time to Share*]. During the Monday sessions, a whole-group "picture walk" took place. Picture walks allowed for brief discussions as students within the large-group setting worked together to: highlight various print concepts, gather clues from the images, as well as make predictions related to the story prior to reading. This part of the process I referred to as the "Activating Engagement Stage," or AES. It was during the AES that the story was originally introduced to the students within this study (within the larger group setting).

On Wednesdays study participants were seen in their small-group (2–3 students) setting and listened a second time to the same story they had heard during the AES on Monday. In the Wednesday sessions the participants were prompted to discuss the story using pictures and personal connections. They were then asked to recall anything new/different they hadn't noticed in the previous readings. The children were encouraged to share these differences and once again, retell in their own words, the events of the story and/or any personal connections they may have with characters or events. It is very important to note here that when implementing dialogic reading either into a small-group, classroom setting, or one-on-one within a home or school setting, the manner in which we speak to the child(ren)—and not at—is critical. At no point were their retellings posed as "tests" to "check" what the children did/did not remember. The retellings were meant to be structured as a dialog between adult and student.

Based on the dialogs between the researcher and the students, the participants' responses were then evaluated four separate times in order to collect data for the Visual Indication of Engagement, Using Pictures as Clues, and Quality of Oral Retelling measures. This data collection occurred in the Wednesday sessions of weeks one, three, five, and seven.

The data accumulated within this study was collected through a combination of on-sight observational note-taking and audio/video recordings consisting of participants' oral and behavioral responses during the Wednesday small group sessions. The objective of the data collection was to determine to what degree, if any, the dialogic

reading process positively effected individual students' reading development. Three measures—Visual Indication of Engagement, Using Pictures as Clues, and Quality of Oral Retelling—were observed to evaluate the participants' progress. As the title suggests, the Visual Indication of Engagement portion of the assessment examined to what degree the child was actively engaged within the session as evidenced by his/her visual cues. Indicators suggesting the student was engaged during the sessions included: focusing on the pages/pictures in the book as it was being read as well as looking at or making eye contact with the reader throughout the session. Students were evaluated on the basis of "visual participation." Because the sessions were video recorded, the percentage of time, in minutes, could be assessed to determine if the child's visual participation was "consistently observed" (meaning >75% of the time), "not consistently observed (74%>), or "not observed."

Children in the study were also observed to determine if they went back and used the pictures within the story to aid in their retellings. The child's actions were recorded as "consistently observed" if he/she went through the book—from the beginning—citing multiple events from within the story. If the child randomly opened the book and/or did not use the pictures in a sequential order, hence was unable to recall multiple events from within the story, the observation was marked as "not consistently observed." If the child did not attempt to the use the book/any of the pictures to aid in the story recall the child's actions were then marked "not observed."

The third measure observed within this study examined the quality of the retell. This was by far the most subjective portion of the data collection process, however because the data was recorded—and thus could consequently be listened to more thoroughly and multiple times—one could argue this made the evaluation process itself more accurate due to the listener's ability to carefully reexamine the child's responses. Responses were evaluated based upon: the number of words (related directly to the retell of the story itself) within a response, the detail (main ideas: most, some, or none) of the

response, and whether or not the child(ren) added personal connections to the retell. For example, a personal connection might sound something like, "I went to the beach once too, like [character's name]. It was sunny that day, just like in [name of story] and I had fun too." As the data suggests, this was an advanced level of response that the preschool aged children within this study were not able to demonstrate within the relatively short length of time of the study. There were, however, many notable and positive gains.

## Results

At the end of the seven-week period, each of the four children in the study showed noticeable improvement in the area of using pictures as aids in their story retellings (see TABLE 2.1). Additionally, all participants showed gradual, yet steady, improvement in the quality of their story retellings (TABLE 3.1).

However, given the fact that the participants were only three weeks into the school year, they were not yet fully adjusted to the new routine of school itself and therefore, as the Visual Indication of Engagement data (TABLE 1.1) seems to suggest—particularly in the case of both Matthew and Thomas who took slightly longer to demonstrate engagement via eye contact—the unfamiliar routine of participating in small reading groups coupled with a relatively new school routine could be one of the reasons behind the subtle delay in demonstrating full engagement within the initial sessions.

**TABLE 1.1**  
Visual indication of engagement

	1	2	3	4
Matthew	–	o	+	+
Amy	+	+	+	+
Erin	+	+	+	+
Thomas	o	+	+	+

– Not observed   o Not consistently observed   + Consistently observed

Using Pictures as Clues (TABLE 2.1) proved to be challenging for the children. Quite often, they looked upwards or off to the side as if trying to

remember what had happened in the story, or of a memory they were thinking of. As a guide, students were reminded to, “use the pictures [from the book] in front of you.” Based on the observations, the act of looking, and perhaps retelling in general, was certainly new the children. While more time would be needed to help them become more familiar as well as comfortable with the process, the data does show they were gradually moving towards the habit of looking back at the pictures to use as a reference and aid in the retelling of the story.

**TABLE 2.1**  
Using pictures as clues

	1	2	3	4
Matthew	–	–	o	+
Amy	–	o	o	+
Erin	–	–	o	o
Thomas	–	–	–	o

– Not observed   o Not consistently observed   + Consistently observed

Increasing student vocabulary was an additional benefit resulting from the strategy Using Pictures as Clues in conjunction with the use of the PEER technique. Selecting children’s books with rich language also supports vocabulary growth. Using the PEER technique allowed for a deeper discussion of words, especially those unfamiliar to the pre-school-aged children. But while increasing vocabulary may be enticing right out of the gate, it is not advised to do so on the first reading. Only when going back a second or even third time, can the reader afford to slow down and really “dissect” the text. This is important to keep in mind when reading to early/emergent readers in the pre-K programs and classrooms.

Another key element to vocabulary acquisition (which is important to overall comprehension and retelling abilities) is making mindful selections when it comes to choosing books for preschool-aged children. Within this study, two books in particular were selected based on the rich vocabulary within their texts: *Bear Snores On* by Karma Wilson (2002), and *The Little House* by Virginia Lee Burton (1988).

Of all of the literacy skills assessed within this study, the oral retellings were the most challenging for the children. The data collected revealed this to be a skill they were least familiar with as evidenced by participants’ responses, which were very limited. Given these very limited responses the oral retelling, as part of the dialogic reading process, was slow to develop in each of the children (see TABLE 3.1) and required explicit instruction which included direct modeling.

**TABLE 3.1**  
Using pictures as clues

	1	2	3	4
Matthew	–	–	o	o
Amy	–	o	o	o
Erin	–	–	o	o
Thomas	–	–	–	o

– Limited   o Adequate   + Thorough   ++ Personal Connection

For example, to aid the participants’ recollection of what was just read to them I would model by first demonstrating the retell process myself and use statements I had prepared such as, “I’m going to look back in this book and carefully look at the pictures in this story and I’ll use the pictures as clues to help me remember what I just heard.” [turn to the beginning of the book] “Let’s see. What happened first? Oh, yes. First...” I would model this after each book and then give the child his/her turn.

During the retell process, the CROWD prompts were necessary in guiding them in their thought process. As the data shows, however, it was a gradual process and one in which none of the children had demonstrated a thorough ability by the end of the seven week period.

## Discussion

Given the relatively short length of the study itself and other factors that may have inhibited the children (their age, the newness of a new school year, familiarizing themselves with me, etc.), the results are especially noticeable when we consider that the findings do support the research in favor of implementing both dialogic reading techniques

---

and explicitly teaching print concepts to preschool aged children. When examining the results of implementing the dialogic reading techniques, the greatest gains made by the preschool-aged participants of the study were found in the area of Using Pictures as a Guide.

Though the quality of each of the participants' responses during the oral retellings did improve in both length and content over the seven-week period, they varied in degree and I was still needing to use multiple prompts to both lengthen the response and enhance detail. This is an important facet to dialogic reading; a process that requires both time and practice. And while the children were showing marked improvement in their retelling abilities, the direct instruction time over the seven week period was not long enough to transform their retelling abilities consistently. However, based on the data, reason would suggest that if continued consistently, the children would continue to make further gains in this area.

Despite this small sampling of students and the relatively short length of the study, the data shows a strong correlation between explicitly implementing dialogic reading techniques when reading to smaller groups of children as well as in one-on-one settings. Furthermore, the data collected on the participants' responses to the explicit concepts of print instruction indicated significant gains made by each of the children which, is very exciting and promising information.

## Conclusions and Clinical Implications

Reading aloud to children using storybooks as a context for explicitly-taught intervention strategies can increase student comprehension, aid in story retell, and advance critical thinking. Educational researchers have identified a key correlation between the time, and quality of time, spent reading to pre-kindergarten aged children and the effects it has on the children's literacy growth (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1994; Brooke & Bramwell, 2006; U.S Department of Education, 2007; Flynn, 2011; LaCour, McDonald, Tislington, & Thomason, 2013). It is important to note here, however, explicit and systematic literacy instruction in whole-group,

drill-and-practice style is not appropriate for young children, but rather: instruction that embeds explicit instruction into meaningful, "naturalistic" learning activities using a variety of instructional approaches is best for pre-K learners (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009). Shared book reading, thus, can serve as a means for embedding intentional and systematic literacy and language instruction in the early years of reading development.

The demand for research-based, effective instructional strategies and interventions to be implemented in our nation's preschools and elementary schools is growing. Preventative measures, such as an increase in dialogic reading practices in the emergent literacy development years, are a must. Therefore the collaboration between classroom teachers, parents, reading specialists, SLPs, and interventionists alike is necessary to increase the practice of effective intervention throughout our schools and, ultimately, to achieve the goal of implementing effective preventative measures and interventions in order to reduce the number of elementary-aged children, particularly the nation's most underserved, who are unable to demonstrate high skill performance in the area of literacy and reading development. Therefore, because early literacy and language intervention is critical, not only aiding in reading development for typically developing children (both from middle and low-SES backgrounds) but for language impaired children as well, the early implementation of literacy-promoting techniques such as dialogic reading during the preschool years is critical. The responsibility falls on each of us in the field of education to focus our attention on prevention and in so doing continue to incorporate best practices within our classrooms and beyond to give our students the greatest advantage in education possible.

## Children's Books Cited

- Bang, M. (1999). *When Sophie gets angry—really, really, angry*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Burton, V. L. (1988). *The little house*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.

- Cooney, B. (1982). *Miss Rumphius*. New York, NY: Viking Penguin.
- Dewdney, A. (2012). *Llama time to share*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Downey, R. (2001). *Love is a family*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Freeman, D. (1972). *A pocket for Corduroy*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Hoberman, M. A. (1997). *The seven silly eaters*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt.
- Joose, B. M. (1996). *I love you the purplest*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Keats, E. J. (1962). *The snowy day*. New York, NY: Viking Penguin.
- Mantle, B. (2009). *Five little pumpkins*. Wilton, CT: HarperCollins.
- McCloud, C. & Butzke, C. (2013). *Bucket filling from A to Z*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Meiners, C. (2013). *Feel confident*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, Inc.
- Numeroff, L. J. (1985). *If you give a mouse a cookie*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Rosen, M. (1989). *We're going on a bear hunt*. New York, NY: Aladdin.
- Sendak, M. (1991). *Chicken soup with rice*. New York, NY: Harper Trophy.
- Simon, N. (1999). *All kinds of children*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Co.
- Slobodkina, E. (1987). *Caps for sale*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Wilson, K. (2002). *Bear snores on*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Wimmer, M. (1999). *Summertime*. New York, NY: Aladdin.
- Wood, A. (1984). *The napping house*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (1991). *Ready to learn: A mandate for the nation*. New York: Author.
- Chall, J.S. (1983). *Stages of reading development*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Chomsky, C. (1972). *Stages in language development and reading exposure*. Harvard Educational Review, 42 (1), 1–33.
- Clay, M. (1995). *Reading recovery: A guidebook for teachers in training*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Crain-Thoreson, C., Dale, P. (1992). Do early talkers become early readers? Linguistic precocity, preschool language, and emergent literacy. *Developmental Psychology*, 28(3), 421–429.
- Elley, W. (1989). Vocabulary acquisition from listening to stories. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 24(2), 175–187.
- Flynn, K. (2011). Developing children's oral language skills through dialogic reading: guidelines for implementation. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 44(2), 8–16.
- Gillon, G. T. (2000). The efficacy of phonological awareness intervention for children with spoken language impairment. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 31, 126–141.
- Gillon, G. T. (2005). Facilitating phoneme awareness development in 3- and 4-year-old children with speech impairment. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 36, 308–324.
- Hogan, T. P., Catts, H. W., & Little, T. D. (2005). The relationship between phonological awareness and reading: Implications for the assessment of phonological awareness. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 36, 285–293.
- Justice, L. M. & Ezell, H. K. (2001). Word and print awareness in 4-year-old children. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 17(3), 207–225.
- Justice, L. M. & Ezell, H. K. (2002). Use of storybook reading to increase print awareness in at-risk children. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 11, 17–29.
- Justice, L. M., Pullen, P. C., & Pence, K. (2008). Influence of verbal and nonverbal references to print on preschoolers' visual attention to print during storybook reading. *Developmental Psychology*, 44(3), 855–866.
- Justice, L. M., Mashburn, S. J., Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2008). Quality of language and literacy instruction in preschool classrooms serving at-risk pupils. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23, 51–68.
- Justice, L. M., Kaderavek, J. N., Fan, X., Sofka, A., & Hunt, A. (2009). Accelerating preschoolers' early literacy development through classroom-based teacher-child storybook reading and explicit print referencing. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 40, 67–85.
- Justice, L. M., McGinty, A. S., Piasta, S. B., Kaderavek, J. N., & Fan, X. (2010). Print-focused read-alouds in preschool classrooms: Intervention effectiveness and moderators of child outcomes. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 41, 504–520.

## References

- Arnold, D. H., Lonigan, C. J., Whitehurst, G. J., & Epstein, J. N. (1994). Accelerating language development through picture-book reading: Replication and extension to a videotape training format. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 86(2), 235–243.
- Brooke, G. D., Bramwell, W. (2006). Promoting emergent literacy and social-emotional learning through dialogic reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(6), 554–564.
- Cascio, E. U., Schanzenbach, D. W. (2014, June 19). Expanding preschool access for disadvantaged children. Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2014/06/19-expanding-preschool-access-disadvantaged-children-cascio-schanzenbach>



- LaCour, M. M., McDonald, C., Tisington, L. D., & Thomason, G. (2013). Improving pre-kindergarten children's attitude and interest in reading through a parent workshop on the use of dialogic reading techniques. *Reading Improvement, 50*(1), 1–11.
- Lonigan, C. L., & Whitehurst, G. J., (1998). Relative efficacy of parent and teacher involvement in a shared-reading intervention for preschool children from low-income backgrounds. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 13*(2), 263–290.
- Owens, R. E. (2012). *Language development: An introduction*. Boston: Pearson.
- Paul, R., & Norbury, C. F. (2012). Language, reading, and learning in school. In *Language disorders from infancy through adolescence: Listening, speaking, reading, writing, and communicating* (pp. 409–415). St. Louis, MO: Mosby.
- Roth, F., Speece, D., & Cooper, D. (2002). A longitudinal analysis of the connection between oral language and early reading. *The Journal of Educational Research, 95*(5), 259–272.
- Rvachew, S. (2007). Phonological processing and reading in children with speech sound disorders. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 16*, 260–270.
- Samuels, C. A. (2014, May 13). Pre-k enrollment dipped, funding rose in 2012-13, report says. *Education Week*. Retrieved from [http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/05/13/32\\_preschool\\_h33.html?tkn=PZRFvdU30BkYgWunt%2FuiXXSzFQCCbDcte1Hx&print=1](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/05/13/32_preschool_h33.html?tkn=PZRFvdU30BkYgWunt%2FuiXXSzFQCCbDcte1Hx&print=1)
- Skebo, C. M., Lewis, B. A., Freebairn, L. A., Tag, J., Ciesla, A. A., & Stein, C. M. (2013). Reading skills of students with speech sound disorders at three stages of literacy development. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 44*, 360–373.
- Snow, C. (1983). *Literacy and language: Relationships during the preschool years*. Harvard Educational Review, 53(2), 165–189.
- Soifer, L. H. (2005). Development of oral language and its relationship to literacy. In J. R. Birsh (Eds.), *Multisensory teaching of basic language skills* (43–79). Baltimore: Brookes.
- U.S Department of Education (2007). What Works Clearinghouse: Dialogic reading. Retrieved from: [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/intervention\\_reports/WWC\\_Dialogic\\_Reading\\_020807.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/intervention_reports/WWC_Dialogic_Reading_020807.pdf)
- Whitehurst, G. J., Falco, F. L., Lonigan, C. J., Fischel, J. E., DeBaryshe, B. D., Valdez-Menchaca, M.C., & Caulfield, M. (1988). Accelerating Language Development Through Picture Book Reading. *Developmental Psychology, 24*(4), 552–559.
- Whitehurst, G. J. (1992). Dialogic reading: An effective way to read to preschoolers. Retrieved from: <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/400>
- Whitehurst, G. J., Arnold, D. S., Epstein, J. N., Angell, A. L., Smith, M., & Fischel, J. E. (1994). A picture book reading intervention in daycare and home for children from low-income families. *Developmental Psychology, 30*(5), 679–689.
- Whitehurst, G. J., Epstein, J. N., Angell, A. L., Payne, A. C., Crone, D. A., & Fischel, J. E. (1994). Outcomes of an emergent literacy intervention in Head Start. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 86*(4), 542–555.
- Whitehurst, G. J., Zevenbergen, A. A., Crone, D. A., Schultz, M. D., Velting, O. N., & Fischel, J.E. (1999). Outcomes of an emergent literacy intervention from Head Start through second grade. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 91*, 261–272.
- Whitehurst, G. J. (2013). New evidence raises doubts on Obama's preschool for all. Retrieved from: <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/brown-center-chalkboard/posts/2013/11/20-evidence-raises-doubts-about-obamas-preschool-for-all-whitehurst>
- Whitehurst, G. J. (2014). Whitehurst testimony on early childhood education to the Committee on Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from: <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/brown-center-chalkboard/posts/2014/02/05-congressional-testimony-preschool-whitehurst>
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2014). My Wisconsin standard—Week of December 8, 2014. Retrieved from <http://dpi.wi.gov/my-wi-standards/ela/12-9-14>
- Zevenbergen, A. A., Whitehurst, G. J., & Zevenbergen, J.A. (2003). Effects of a shared-reading intervention on the inclusion of evaluative devices in narratives of children from low-income families. *Applied Development Psychology, 24*, 1–15.
- Zucker, T. A., Justice, L. M., & Piasta, S. B. (2009). Prekindergarten teachers' verbal references to print during classroom-based, large group shared reading. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 40*, 376–392.

*Sarah Peterson, M.S.Ed., is an experienced educator who currently lives and works in the Twin Cities area as a consultant working with teachers, students, and their families in pre-k classroom and early-childhood settings who specializes in school-readiness skills; primarily developing pre-reading skills in early emergent readers. The author can be contacted at sarah@earlyliteracyproject.org*

**Key vocabulary words selected from texts:**  
***Bear Snores On*, by Karma Wilson (2002)**  
**and *The Little House*, by Virginia Lee Burton**  
**(1988) used within this study:**

from <i>Bear Snores On</i> , by Karma Wilson	from <i>The Little House</i> , by Virginia Lee Burton
Lair	Country
Dank	Buds
Wee	Brook
Hare	Blossom
Scuttles	Harvest
Divvy	Ripen
Wren	Coasting
Raven	Horseless carriage
Slumbering	Surveyor / surveyed
Stokes	Steam shovel
Blubbers	Steam Roller
Fret	Automobile
Blustery	Tenement House
Spins / tall tales	Trolley Cars
	Cellars
	Stories
	Shabby
	Jack up
	Foundation

## CROWD

Examples of prompting questions:

### Completion prompts:

*"It's thick to beat and quick to bake – It's fine to eat and fun to \_\_\_\_."* The word is *make*.

[Hoberman, M. A. (1997). *The seven silly eaters*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt.]

### Recall prompts:

*Can you tell me what happened to the little house in this story?"*

[Burton, V. L. (1988). *The little house*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.]

### Open-ended prompts:

*"Tell me what's happening in this picture."* (Open-ended prompts work with a child who is familiar with the story.

[Rosen, M. (1989). *We're going on a bear hunt*. New York, NY: Aladdin.]

### Wh – prompts:

*"What's the name of this?" while pointing to an apple-peeler, for example.*

[Wimmer, M. (1999). *Summertime*. New York, NY: Aladdin.]

### Distancing prompts:

*"Do you remember the time you went fishing? What things did you take with you on the boat?"*

[Joosse, B. M. (1996). *I love you the*

## PEER

Example of a parent/teacher-child interaction using PEER:

**TEACHER:** "What is this?"

(prompt – *pointing to a picture of a steam shovel*)

**CHILD:** "A digger."

**TEACHER:** "That's right; (evaluation) It's a steam shovel (expansion). Can you say *steam shovel*?" (repetition)

**CHILD:** "Steam shovel."

**TEACHER:** "Yes! Very good; a steam shovel!"

*Adapted from, Dialogic Reading: An Effective Way to Read to Preschoolers (Whitehurst, 1992).*

---

# Ten Powerful Strategies to Practice Academic Language

Amy Frederick, Donald Bear, Karen Carpenter, Lori Helman, and Sarah Negrete

## Abstract

---

*Specific instructional strategies for developing and practicing academic language benefit both English learners and native English speakers in linguistically diverse classrooms. In this article the authors present ten content-based strategies to engage learners from varied backgrounds in activities that emphasize oral language development and peer support. Strategies incorporate techniques such as structured games, writing activities, finding cross-language connections, and storytelling. The authors present each instructional activity in the context of a classroom setting and include clear step-by-step guidelines for easy application.*

Schools in the United States are becoming more and more diverse. Most elementary schools have English language learners at all grade levels, and students from non-English speaking backgrounds compose the fastest growing sub-set of the K–12 student population (Ryan, 2013). It is not uncommon to find numerous languages represented within a given school, as well as students from a variety of cultural groups, socio-economic levels, and background experiences relevant to academic learning. Teachers and educational leaders are eager to find strategies that help them transform their teaching practices to better serve all students in their schools from a range of cultural or economic backgrounds.

For the large majority of students learning English, the primary context of instruction is in a general education monolingual English-speaking classroom. Therefore, teachers in these classrooms must gain proficiency at serving the needs of all students in their classrooms, including students who speak languages other than English and who come from backgrounds very different from their own. However, most elementary teachers do not feel prepared to

accomplish this goal. Largely, elementary teachers report feeling under-prepared in working with students from linguistically-diverse backgrounds (De Jong & Harper, 2005), receive little coursework or guidance to understand the knowledge and experiences of learners from their students (Samson & Collins, 2012), and believe they don't adequately understand the cultural resources that their diverse students bring to the classroom (Futrell, Gomez & Bedden, 2003; Nieto, 2002).

## Understanding Academic Language

Simply defined, *academic language* is the listening, speaking, reading, and writing that students need to use for their schoolwork. Academic vocabulary words are part of academic language, but not enough. Academic language also involves the syntax and discourse patterns of "school language," including the ways students and teachers use spoken English in a variety of school settings. In fact, many native English speakers also benefit from attention to academic language due to its distinction from the everyday language they use and hear regularly outside of school.

---

Academic language is becoming a frequently used term in school in part because of key shifts in the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The standards emphasize: 1) regular practice with complex texts and their academic language, 2) reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from texts, and 3) building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction (see <http://www.corestandards.org/other-resources/key-shifts-in-english-language-arts/>). Each of these shifts requires significant demands on students' language and literacy abilities. Of the 32 English language arts standards in the CCSS, four of them overtly emphasize vocabulary, while many other standards in the areas of Listening and Speaking and Foundational Skills indirectly require substantial practice with academic language (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

The language of school differs from everyday language in its vocabulary, structures, and the dense concepts it conveys. Academic language is particularly complex for students who are learning a language and learning *from* a language simultaneously. Linguistically diverse students face the challenging task of acquiring everyday and academic language while also learning content, such as reading strategies or genre characteristics, in an unfamiliar language. There is a growing body of scholarship documenting the importance of developing academic English proficiency so that students from all varieties of academic preparedness and linguistic background can access the content of academic texts and academic talk (Bailey, 2007; Crosson & Lesaux, 2008; Scarcella, 2003; Schleppegrell, 2004). August and Shanahan (2006) reported that, "Specifically, English vocabulary knowledge, listening comprehension, syntactic skills, and the ability to handle metalinguistic aspects of language, such as providing definitions of words, are linked to English reading and writing proficiency" (p. 4).

### **Developing Language in the Elementary Classroom**

The development of academic language benefits both English learners (ELs) and native English

speakers. In planning instruction, teachers need to keep these three general principles in mind: 1) effective instructional practices benefit all learners, 2) EL students, and some native speakers, will likely need extra instructional support, and 3) using a child's home language—even if other than English—is beneficial for their conceptual development (Goldenberg, 2008).

In general, best practices that have been shown to be effective in the classroom should be used with English learners (Goldenberg, 2008). For example, classrooms that name clear objectives for learning and have recognized classroom routines are beneficial for English learners and monolingual English speakers alike. However, students learning English as a new language require added support to be successful in the classroom. This includes, for example, visual supports and the use of materials that connect to their background experiences. Instructional supports might also include translations or a specific preview of content before a lesson conducted only in English (Goldenberg, 2008). Still, providing instructional support should not be confused with creating or preparing separate, often less rigorous, lessons. Instead, these supports need to be embedded across the curriculum in ways that scaffold students' understandings of complex concepts (Carrier, 2005). Finally, though it has been a controversial issue for many years, recent research has shown that incorporating students' home language supports their efforts to learn a new language (August & Shanahan, 2006). The transfer from one language to another, however, is not automatic. Teachers need to be explicit about connecting the two languages and encourage the use of primary languages to access and connect to the English.

### **Ten Powerful Classroom Strategies for Practicing Academic Language**

Next, we share ten research-based approaches to incorporating language development into the regular curriculum. As teacher educators and professional developers ourselves, we have used or observed these engaging and effective strategies in elementary and middle school classrooms across the United States. We have chosen these strategies to demonstrate the incorporation of language

development in a range of activities, content areas, and grade levels. The strategies highlight four key ideas important to language development: 1) teaching academic language explicitly, 2) encouraging verbal interaction, 3) making connections between students' home language and English, and 4) scaffolding literacy learning. Each instructional strategy is situated within a figurative classroom context and an optimal grade range (primary, intermediate, middle).

## Strategies that Teach Academic Language Explicitly

### 1. Concept Sorts (primary, intermediate, middle)

Mr. Gromak used concept sorts as an inquiry-based approach to teaching geometrical figures. Instead of a traditional lecture approach, he had his students work collaboratively in small groups as they categorized triangles in terms of their shared properties, features, and attributes. His fourth-grade students busily engaged in grouping objects and explaining their thinking. Mr. Gromak added new academic terminology to the students' descriptions as they discussed the concepts in depth.

Using academic language in mathematical discourse to discuss ideas and discoveries is critical for English learners' success in mathematics (National Governors Association for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Through sorting, students reach their own understandings of the concept(s), develop critical insights, and learn to express their discoveries using mathematical vocabulary.

Concept sorts can be used across content areas and throughout the curriculum (Gillet & Kita, 1979; Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2015). Students can classify landforms and bodies of waters in geography; states of matter in science; or collect and sort examples of figurative language, in English. Students can sort objects, images, or word cards. (See [http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/concept\\_sort](http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/concept_sort) for more ideas about concept sorting and watch a video of this strategy being used in an elementary classroom).

## Take Action!

1. Group students in pairs or groups of 4.
2. Pass out sets of 9–15 isosceles, equilateral, and scalene triangles (all different sizes and colors).
3. Instruct students to sort the triangles anyway they choose and to have an explanation for their sort.
4. Have students share sorts and explanations.
5. Pass out rulers to each pair or group.
6. Instruct students to measure the sides of each triangle and record measurements for each of the sides. (You may want the triangles labeled so students can record the length of each side on a recording sheet.)
7. Have students sort triangles by their measurements. Have students share sorts and explanations.
8. At least one group/pair will have sorted the triangles as triangles with all equal sides (equilateral), triangles with two equal sides (isosceles), and triangles with no equal sides (scalene).
9. Discuss this discovery and introduce the vocabulary equilateral, isosceles, and scalene.
10. Have groups/pairs make and record predictions about the measurements of the angles based on the measurements of the sides.
11. Have groups/pairs measure and record the size of each angle.
12. Discuss predictions, results, and insights about the relationship between the measurement of the sides and the angles to the type of triangle.

### 2. Teaching Academic Language with Movement (primary, intermediate)






It's time for Writers Workshop in her fifth-grade classroom and Ms. Vue is mid-way through her unit on opinion writing. Using the Common Core State Standards to guide her lesson planning, Ms. Vue presented a whole class mini-lesson on how to use a variety of linking words, phrases, and clauses to connect reasons to claims. However, she has noticed that many of her students are still not using the desired language in their writing. It seems as if they need more experience with how academic vocabulary is used in a variety of texts in order to gain a deeper understanding of how to incorporate such language into their own writing.

## Take Action!

1. Create a chart with three columns: connecting text, action, and a drawing or photo to illustrate. You and your students will fill in the interactive chart as you collect more text devices throughout the year.
2. Tell students that connecting text includes words or phrases that are used to help readers follow along easily and tie the ideas together (eg. "however," "of course," or "in addition").
3. Display a text that uses some of these phrases. The text could be from a picture book, magazine article, or procedural writing. As you read together, emphasize text devices. Then ask students to identify and circle them.
4. Talk about the meanings of the circled words. Together, create a motion that helps them remember the meaning. Add the word or phrase to the chart along with the action.
5. Go back and do a shared reading of the text with the motions added in. This may take some practice!
6. Continue to add new devices to the chart as students notice them throughout the year. Help them understand that some have similar meanings and can use the same action.

Elementary classrooms provide countless opportunities to focus on language. Adding movement to written or spoken text is an example of one engaging way to focus on how words are used in context. By adding gestures or actions to words or phrases, students pay close attention to how language is used. In turn, kinesthetic movements may help students remember meanings of difficult words or concepts by creating a visual link to the written form. In this activity (Zwiers, 2007), students learn basic academic language that is important to understanding how to navigate texts—"mortar" words. Academic language can be thought of as both "brick" and "mortar" words (Dutro & Moran, 2003). "Brick" words are those that are specific to the content being taught and range from basic to highly specialized vocabulary, like *government*, *giraffe*, or *metaphor*. "Mortar" words and phrases, on the other hand, are the parts of the sentence that arrange the bricks to express an intended meaning. These important pieces of language are often overlooked

Figure 1: Sample Academic Language Chart

Connecting Text	Action	What it looks like
however but yet	Right hand then left hand	
and furthermore moreover in addition	Make a plus sign with fingers	
therefore for this reason, thus	Put hands together and circle	
granted of course	Both hands palms up	
first to begin with on top of that then finally	Count on fingers	

instructionally, but students need to have a clear understanding of what these devices mean and how to use them. For example, if students understand that the phrase *to begin with* is likely to be followed by a series of points, they will comprehend the text better. And the more experience they have with these phrases in their reading and spoken language, the more they will show up in their writing.

## Strategies that Encourage Verbal Interaction

### 3. Tell a Story to Get a Story (primary)

"Tell a story to get a story" is an activity to encourage verbal interaction through sharing personal narratives. This can be a whole class activity or an individual activity as informal as sharing stories while waiting in line for lunch. Personal narratives can show teachers something about students'



## Take Action!

1. Explain that you are going to tell a story about something that happened to you and then maybe students would tell a story after you.
2. Tell a two-sentence story about a not-too-serious accident that happened to you. Two-sentence story models include an insect sting, a broken arm, a cooking accident. (You may come in with a Band-Aid on a finger and say, "I was cutting some carrots to make some soup last night and I cut my finger. I put my finger under the water to help stop the bleeding, and then I put a Band-Aid on my finger. And that's why I am wearing a Band-Aid today.")
3. Ask the student to tell you a story about something that happened to them.
4. Nod, say "what else?", or repeat their last sentences to encourage students to say more.

cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as their language development (McCabe, 1996; McCabe & Bliss, 2003). Speech and EL teachers also use "tell a story" to assess students' narrative development.

Model the activity for the children with a personal narrative following the directions in the Take Action box. The name of this activity captures the essence of this activity: If we want students to tell us a story, tell them a story first. After teacher modeling, students tell a personal story about something that happened to them, real or even sometimes imagined.

Ms. Randall used this process in first grade to understand her children's language development and to collect materials for a class book on teeth that included students' pictures and one-sentence stories based on a story. Ms. Randall provided a coherent and substantial one sentence narrative that was later typed and included in a personal collection of familiar reading materials, their Personal Readers: *My tooth came out because I played tug of war with a blanket and the tooth fairy came to pick it up.* Collecting and analyzing students' stories is a good way to learn about their language capabilities. For example, Ms. Randall gained insight into one child's English proficiency when she observed her say, "I let my tooth out."

Because the topic of the retelling is so familiar, and because students have probably told their stories several times previously, the verbal planning

demands for reciting them are low. Therefore, the "tell a story" routine is a fine way to assess students' oral language production in the areas of fluency and vocabulary. Compare the fluency of this activity with the demands of story retelling in which students recall, plan, and organize a summary of a new narrative, a much more verbally taxing task. The "tell a story" personal narratives give a sense of children's language use at its best.

## 4. Incorporating Partner Talk into Reading Lessons (primary, intermediate)

A whole-class reading lesson usually follows a by-now-familiar format – it connects to what students know, teaches and models a concept, skill, or strategy, and then gives students a chance to practice. However, because of the short time frame (usually 15-20 minutes) reading lessons often lack the opportunity for students to interact verbally with the teacher or other students. Ms. Romero knows that except for the few who raise their hands to answer her questions, students spend most of their time listening rather than speaking. Yet, because tremendous amounts of learning occur as students construct their own knowledge through rich discussions (Cole, 2003; Nichols, 2006), she chose to add a partner talk protocol as one way to provide more chances for students to talk during reading lessons.

## Take Action!

1. Teach and practice routines that will make partner talk go smoothly. Some things to think about: eye contact, how to sit, what to do when your partner is absent, how to come back to the whole group, etc.
2. Choose something meaty to talk about and put a sticky note in the text to mark where you will ask students to turn and talk.
3. Model the language students will need to use with their partner. Provide sentence frames (e.g. "I wonder why\_\_\_\_\_") to scaffold for English learners.
4. Allow students a short time to talk with their partner. Listen in on a few pairs as they share so that you can use their examples when you bring students back together.
5. Efficiently gather students back together. Either share what you heard from the groups or ask a few students to share their thinking, but don't get carried away and allow the sharing to take too much time from the lesson or get off focus.

### Some online video resources for using partner talk:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VCtE8N44nA&feature=related>

Read aloud with turn and talk to practice predictions

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0aF02dl800&feature=related>

A first grade teacher introduces her students to partner talk activities and teaches them how to interact with their peers

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlxbqNrlBUo>

Interactive modeling of how to talk with a partner from Responsive Classroom lesson or get off focus.

English learners particularly stand to benefit from partner talk. It gives them a chance to listen to peer-produced spoken language as well as time for them to get their ideas together and practice their response in a safe, one-on-one setting before speaking in front of a whole class. It also may allow them to process complex ideas in their first language with a peer before translating their message to English.

#### 5. Who's Telling the Truth? (intermediate, middle)

Ms. Kathis prepared lessons for her students as she reflected on their need for structured oral language opportunities. To integrate subjects and maximize her instructional time, she decided to play *Who's Telling the Truth?* which provides peer support and encourages both speaking and listening skills.

Because *Who's Telling the Truth?* requires several retellings of a narrative story, the opportunity for students to hear many models of language boosts their confidence when it is their turn to speak. In addition, students get to practice their narrative and refine it in a small group before sharing it with the larger classroom audience. The opportunities are rich for improving language skills in an enjoyable and safe setting. While primarily a speaking and listening activity, it also provides a common anchor activity to refer to during Writers Workshop—focusing on how organization, details, and language use impact the reader.

### Take Action!

1. Group students into triads. Provide a couple minutes for students to think about a short experience each wishes to share.
2. Provide each person with two minutes to share his/her story with the other group members. The time limit keeps the short stories from becoming memoirs. After each group has heard its members' stories, the group selects only one story to share with the class. Each member of the triad will tell the SAME story to the class.
3. After the story's selection, give students time to practice and ask the story's owner for any details. Ask the first triad to stand at the front of the classroom. Each member of the group will tell the same story as if it happened to him/her. Each student will surely embellish or change some details of the story—sometimes on purpose; sometimes on accident (increasing the fun). Upon conclusion, the class decides: Who is Telling the Truth? After the votes are in, ask the owners to step forward.
4. While students practice their speaking and listening skills during the activity, after the activity is your chance to ask student to consider the reasons why the students think one is telling the truth over the others. Is it the use of juicy details or their overuse? Was it facial expression or body language? Was it ease of presentation? You can also evaluate the strategies used by second language learners. That is, how do second language learners enhance their English with their knowledge of their native language?

### Strategies that Make Connections Between Students' Home Languages and English

#### 6. Quiz/Quiz/Trade (primary)

After introducing and examining long vowel patterns through word sorts and other word study activities, Ms. Matthews noticed her English learners continued to struggle with spelling long vowels. Realizing students' understanding and working knowledge of the English writing system is a significant factor in their literacy development, she decided on an approach that helped students reinforce their understandings.

Mastery of the vowel patterns that represent long vowels in English are challenging for all students and even more of a challenge to English learners



## Take Action!

1. Provide each student with a card. On the front of the card will be a picture of the spelling word. On the back of the card will be these instructions: A) Name the picture; B) Name the vowel sound; C) Spell the vowel sound; and D) Spell the word.
2. Use the verbal cues "stand-up" and "hand-up" to have students begin walking around the room.
3. Use the verbal cue "pair-up" to have students find a partner.
4. Partner A will show Partner B the picture card and read the instructions on the back. If at any time a partner struggles or does not know the correct response, the other partner will provide the correct response(s).
5. Partner B will show Partner A the picture card and read the instructions on the back.
6. Partners A and B will shake hands, thank each other, and switch cards.

(Author, 2012). First, vowels represent more than one sound, and sounds are spelled in a variety of ways. Second, many of the vowel sounds found in English are not found in other languages (Helman, 2004). Quiz/Quiz/Trade is an activity based on cooperative learning structures (Kagan, 1994) and is effective for reviewing long vowel sounds and spelling patterns. In this activity, students develop their spelling knowledge as they work with various partners. The partner's role is seen as a peer-tutor: providing support, guidance, and recognition.

This activity can be adapted to reinforce important skills and content across the curriculum and requires students to use academic language as they engage in conversation to construct a response.

### 7. Looking for Cognates in Texts: Start with What They've Got (intermediate, middle)

In Ms. Sullivan's classroom many students speak Spanish with their families at home. Although her students have not been formally instructed in Spanish, they know many words that have similar spellings and meanings across the two languages, or cognates. Nevertheless, students are not connecting their background knowledge to written words they are learning in English.

## Take Action!

1. Find 3-4 short pieces of text at your students' reading level in a language that shares cognates with English. Informational text is more likely to have technical words that are frequently cognates. Make enough copies of the texts so that every 2 students can share a copy.
2. Explain what a cognate is, and show students several examples (see Figure 2).
3. Have students form partnerships and review the text to find words they think are cognates. Encourage discussion and questioning as they search. Potential cognates should be written on a sheet of paper to share with others.
4. Share out potential cognates in a teacher-facilitated whole group discussion, or in small groups.
5. Keep a list of cognates in different languages. Encourage students to add to the list as they read texts in English and find words that seem familiar to words they know in their home languages.

Figure 2: Simple Cognates Across Languages

English word	Example cognates
baby	bebé (Spanish, Portuguese) bébé (French), Baby (German, Catalán, Swedish)
dinosaur	dinosaurio (Spanish), dinosauro (Italian), dinossauro (Portuguese), Dinosaurier (German)
flower	flor (Spanish, Portuguese, Catalán), fleur (French), Floare (Romanian)
hospital	hospital (Spanish, Portuguese, Catalán), hôpital (French), ospedale (Italian),

Students learn best when instruction builds on what they already know (McNamara & Kintsch, 1996). Because English learners bring multilingual resources to the classroom, their background knowledge can enhance their understanding of English words (Dressler, Carlo, Snow, August, & White, 2011). In this activity, students are given a piece of text to read and search for cognates.

Languages that are derived from Latin share a great number of cognates, but because of increased globalization many non-Latinate languages also share some cognates with English. Use your multilingual students as an ongoing resource for making cross-language connections.

## Strategies that Scaffold Literacy Learning

### 8. Re-reading for Fluency: Poetry Party (primary, intermediate)

As Mr. Sanchez planned for a balanced literacy environment for his students, he realized they needed practice re-reading material to increase their fluency (Samuels, 1997). He also realized that it was important for students to *want* to read the material more than once. With this in mind, he decided to hold a weekly Poetry Party, centering on the principles of performance reading, similar to those in Martinez, Roser, and Strecker's (1998) readers' theatre instructional plan and others' use of poetry in similar ways (Bear, Helman, Templeton, Invernizzi, & Johnston, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Rasinski, Padak, Linek, & Sturtevant, 1994).

Students who need added support, such as English learners, benefit from rereading because they are given time to practice the same material multiple times and, with a teacher's keen assistance, cement

their developing vocabulary. Diverse classrooms provide the setting for all levels of students to be grouped in twos or threes to provide proper peer support. Initially Mr. Sanchez established the routine by using the same poem; thereafter, he tailored the reading to individual strengths, differentiating the poems each week. Of course, the students should have some choice in their poem, as well. The beauty of Poetry Party is that the procedures become routine, but the content of the readings change, keeping engagement high.

### 9. Content Dictations to Access Complex Text (intermediate, middle)

In this activity, students in a small group dictate to the teacher a summary of a content text the teacher has just read to them. These content-based dictations help English learners to Access Complex Text (ACT) that is too difficult to read accurately and independently on their own. This activity helps students grow their vocabularies and is a way for them to hear and reread a summary of their content texts. This is an adaptation of the language experience approach and is a way for English learners to practice academic language patterns. Ms. Paige met with students and read them a section from their science texts. Students dictated a summary of what they heard

#### Take Action!

1. In preparation for the Poetry Party, the teacher reads a poem aloud, then chorally with the students. Introduce any vocabulary words on this first day, too.
2. On day two, students practice their poems, using expression, for five to ten minutes. Pairs or triads work well, with each student reading individually to the others. Repeat the second day's practice on days three and four or split the class into groups for a choral reading by stanza.
3. On the final day, provide a special performance place in the classroom for each student to read the poem (it is not memorized) to the class. The performance will repeat throughout the weeks, with different audiences providing additional motivation. For example, invite the principal one week, the parents the next. Don't forget to use other classrooms and staff as potential "new" audiences.

#### Take Action!

1. Gather two or three students for whom the text is at a frustration level. Explain to them that this activity is a way to study the text, and that you will read the text to them. They will dictate a brief summary one part at a time.
2. Read a short selection from the text. Often the text from one heading to another is too long. Ask the students to stop "when their brains are full" to dictate a brief summary of what they heard.
3. Type as they dictate and shape the language for accuracy and structure as long as students can read the text with these edits. Sometimes we go back to the text to see if the information is accurate.
4. Collect a dictation of several paragraphs over a few days.
5. Schedule a routine for the students to practice rereading the dictation over the coming 5-7 days, and continue to examine and use the vocabulary.

including this sentence about sand sharks: “Sand sharks’ teeth are made to hold, not to tear. They hold on with their teeth, and their teeth are not jagged. If their teeth were jagged, the prey could get away. The teeth are circular like pegs. This keeps the prey inside.”

Ms. Paige printed these summaries and posted them online in the science section of their class web page. The students in the group were instructed to reread their content dictations. After several rereadings, fluency improved, and the vocabulary was more familiar and easier to use (Helman, Bear, Templeton, Invernizzi, & Johnston, 2012).

### 10. Coach and Practice: Be a Personal Trainer to Your Students (primary, intermediate)

Ms. Garcia noted in her daily lessons that the majority of her students were not able to demonstrate a level of proficiency on the language arts standards. For example, in a recent lesson on descriptive language and dialogue, third grader Jessica began: I LIKE WHEN I WENT AROUND COMO TOWN BECAUSE IT LOOKED BIG AND FUN. While Ms. Garcia knew that there were plenty of teaching points that could be addressed based on this writing sample, she also knew that a good coach watches you perform, shows you what a new behavior looks like first, and then provides an opportunity to practice with feedback.

A coach helps novices to build stamina and extend their skills by taking on just the right amount of

challenge. In a similar manner, students become strong readers and writers by exercising their literacy muscles on projects that step-by-step call on greater performance skills. Studies on effective teaching practices show that coaching students as they engage with literacy tasks is a more powerful strategy than simply giving them an answer (Pressley, 2006; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003).

Figure 3 shows the writing frame that Ms. Garcia used to help Jessica fit her content into a basic grammatical structure that used the past tense and descriptive words. Jessica was able to bring her ideas into this new structure while at the same time practicing grade-level expectations in writing.

**Figure 3: Writing Frame**

On my trip to the (forest) I saw \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ . What I liked most was \_\_\_\_\_. It was so (dark) in the (forest) that my (Friend/family member) said, “ \_\_\_\_\_.” I said, “ \_\_\_\_\_.”

### Conclusion

It is incumbent upon educators to emphasize strategies in their classrooms that will engage all of their learners to increase academic language through wide reading and extensive opportunities for academic talk. Diverse classroom settings require it. Creating a learning environment that fosters children’s language growth means that teachers must draw on principles of literacy development, as well as the knowledge base of effective practices, and use this information to guide instruction. In this article, we provided ten strategies with a variety of access points for students to do just that. Teachers can masterfully craft lessons that scaffold the learning of their students by engaging them in a rich variety of materials, challenges, and activities that will effectively promote each child’s learning and development.

### Take Action!

1. Look for examples of the students’ practice, perhaps pieces of unedited writing, spelling inventories, or listening to them read a text.
2. Using your knowledge of grade-level expectations, select a next step for the student, keeping in mind that reading and writing muscles grow a little at a time and we can’t coach on everything at once.
3. Think of a way to demonstrate what you mean visually or in writing.
4. Provide opportunities for student practice.
5. Use positive feedback to reinforce students’ implementation of the new practice with phrases such as, “I see you using (the strategy or technique) here.”

## References

- August, D., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bailey, A. L. (Ed.). (2007). *The language demands of school: Putting academic English to the test*. Yale University Press.
- Bear, D. R., Helman, L., Templeton, S., Invernizzi, M., & Johnston, F. (2005). *Words their way with English learners*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Bear, D. R., Invernizzi, M., Templeton, S., & Johnston, F. (2015). *Words their way*. (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Carrier, K. A. (2005). Key issues for teaching English language learners in academic classrooms. *Middle School Journal*, 37, 4-9.
- Cole, A. (2003). Knee to Knee, Eye to Eye: Circling in on Comprehension. Heinemann.
- Crosson, A. C., Lesaux, N. K., & Martiniello, M. (2008). Factors that influence comprehension of connectives among language minority children from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 29(04), 603-625.
- De Jong, E. J., & Harper, C. A. (2005). Preparing mainstream teachers for English-language learners: Is being a good teacher good enough? *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 101-124.
- Dressler, C., Carlo, M., Snow, C., August, D., & White, C. (2011). Spanish-speaking students' use of cognate knowledge to infer the meaning of English words. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 14, 243-255.
- Dutro, S., & Moran, C. (2003). Rethinking English language instruction: An architectural approach. In G.G. García (Ed.), *English learners: Reaching the highest level of English literacy* (pp. 227-258). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2014). Content area vocabulary learning. *The Reading Teacher*, 67, 594-599.
- Futrell, M. H., Gomez, J., & Bedden, D. (2003). Teaching the children of a new America: The challenge of diversity. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 84(5), 381-85.
- Gillet, J. W., & Kita, M. J. (1979). Words, kids and categories. *The Reading Teacher*, 32(5), 538-542.
- Goldenberg, C. (2008). Teaching English language learners: What the research does—and does not—say. *American Educator*, 32, 8-23.
- Griffith, L. W., & Rasinski, T. V. (2004). A focus on fluency: How one teacher incorporated fluency with her reading curriculum. *The Reading Teacher*, 58, 126-137.
- Helman, L. (2004). Building on the sound system of Spanish. *The Reading Teacher*, 57, 452-460.
- Helman, L. A., Bear, D. R., Templeton, S., Invernizzi, M. A., & Johnston, F. (2012). *Words their way with English learners: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Kagan, S. (1994). *Cooperative learning*. San Clemente, CA: Resources for Teachers, Inc.
- McCabe, A. (1996). *Chameleon Readers: All kinds of good stories*. New York, NY: Webster-McGraw-Hill.
- McCabe, A. & Bliss, L.S. (2003) (Eds.). *Patterns of narrative discourse: A multicultural, life span*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- McNamara, D. & Kintsch, W. (1996). Learning from texts: Effects of prior knowledge and text coherence. *Discourse Processes*, 22, 247-288.
- Martinez, M., Roser, N.L., & Strecker, S. (1998-1999, December-January). "I never thought I could be a star." A readers' theatre ticket to fluency. *The Reading Teacher*, 52, 326-334.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Washington, DC: Authors.
- Nichols, M. (2006). Comprehension through conversation: The power of purposeful talk in the reading workshop. Heinemann.
- Nieto, S. (2002). *Language, culture, and teaching*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Pressley, M. (2006). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Guilford Press.
- Rasinski, T. V., Padak, N. D., Linek, W. L., & Sturtevant, E. (1994). Effects of fluency development on urban second grade readers. *Journal of Educational Research*, 87, 158-165.
- Ryan, C. (2013, August). *Language use in the United States: 2011, American community survey reports*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce/U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved from <http://census.gov>.
- Samson, J. F., & Collins, B. A. (2012). Preparing All Teachers to Meet the Needs of English Language Learners: Applying Research to Policy and Practice for Teacher Effectiveness. *Center for American Progress*.
- Samuels, S. J. (1997). The method of repeated readings. *The Reading Teacher*, 32, 403-408. (Original work published 1979).
- Scarcella, R. (2003). Academic English: A Conceptual Framework. UC Berkeley: University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute. Retrieved from: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6pd082d4>
- Schleppegrell, M. (2004). The language of schooling. *A Functional Linguistics Perspective*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Taylor, B. M., Pearson, P. D., Peterson, D. S., & Rodriguez, M. C. (2003). Reading growth in high-poverty classrooms: The influence of teacher practices that encourage cognitive engagement in literacy learning. *Elementary School Journal*, 104, 3-28.
- Zwiers, (2007). *Building Academic Language: Essential Practices for Content Classrooms, Grades 5-12*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

---

## About the Authors

*Amy Frederick was an ELL teacher and literacy coach in St. Paul, MN and is now Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin River Falls in the Teacher Education Department.*

*Donald Bear was a classroom teacher and is professor emeritus from Iowa State University and University of Nevada, Reno. He is co-author of articles, chapters, and books, including Words Their Way, 6th and 15 other Words Their Way books, and he is a board member of the International Literacy Association.*

*Karen Carpenter taught for 27 years in a public school setting and is now an Associate Professor of Education at Coker College.*

*Lori Helman is Associate Professor at the University of Minnesota in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction and Director of the Minnesota Center for Reading Research.*

*Sarah Negrete taught for eleven years in public schools, was a professor in the Teacher Education Program at Great Basin College for ten years, and is currently the Director of Professional Development for the Northeastern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program.*

# WSRA COMMITTEES

WSRA's goals are accomplished through the work of statewide committees. WSRA members are encouraged to serve on one of the committees listed below. If you are interested in nominating yourself for a position on one of these committees, please fill out our Self Nomination Form at [www.wsra.org](http://www.wsra.org). If you have questions about self-nomination, contact the WSRA Committee Coordinator.

## **Advocacy/PI34**

Collects, prepares, and disseminates information to support members as they advocate for the best practices in reading; seeks to become familiar with PI34, to actively influence state policy and to address the importance of PI34 for WSRA and its members.

## **Authors Festival**

Dedicated to being a liaison to local Reading Councils in organizing Authors Festivals to promote reading and writing enrichment opportunities for Wisconsin students and build partnerships with local Reading Councils.

## **Awards & Honors**

Oversees the process of granting awards and honors for exemplary service to reading education.

## **Children's Literature**

Works to promote the daily use of high quality literature and writing with all students.

## **Convention Planning**

Plans the annual convention.

## **Early Childhood Literacy**

Provides support and information to teachers of preschools, day care centers, kindergartens, and first grades for developing emergent reading and writing programs.

## **Early Intervention**

Provides support and information for developing early intervention programs.

## **Elementary Reading**

Explores the needs of elementary level teachers of reading, examines research relative to these programs, and prepares information for dissemination.

## **Families & Literacy**

Develops and carries out plans which convey to parents the value of involvement in reading activities with children.

## **High School Literacy**

Explores the needs of high school teachers of reading, examines research relative to these programs, and prepares information for dissemination.

## **Intellectual Freedom**

Informs, advises, and supports members regarding matters of intellectual and academic freedom.

## **International Partnership**

Seeks to develop and strengthen partnerships with educational institutes and/or individuals in foreign countries in an effort to expand access to literacy for all.

## **Legislative**

Studies state and national legislation, disseminates information about legislation which is current, pending or needs development, and interacts with education committees.

## **Membership**

Promotes membership in International Reading Association, WSRA, and local councils.

## **Middle Level Literacy**

Explores the needs of middle level teachers of reading, examines research relative to those programs, and prepares information for dissemination.

## **Nominations**

Seeks candidates for elected positions in WSRA.

## **Preservice Teachers**

Encourages the next generation of teachers to become members of WSRA, its local councils, and IRA; supports the professional development of preservice teachers in regard to literacy and literacy instruction.

## **Publications**

Sets and monitors policies and procedures needed for Association publications.

## **Reading & Technology**

Researches and makes recommendations concerning the latest in educational technology.

## **Reading Specialists**

Provides leadership and opportunities for the professional growth of reading specialists.

## **Research**

Seeks to determine problems which merit intensive study, stimulates research activities and disseminates research findings.

## **Title I**

Ascertains and serves the needs of Title I teachers.

---

# Problem Solving Circles: Linking Literacy into Mathematics

Samantha Goodger

School District of Greenfield (Greenfield, WI)

Nicole Hawkins

Greendale School District (Greendale, WI)

---

## Abstract

*Common Core English/Language Arts College and Career Readiness Anchor standards, as well as the Math Practice standards, require that students apply writing, speaking, and listening strategies and skills in math; therefore, it is imperative that teachers find ways to infuse literacy into the teaching and learning that happens in their classrooms. Problem Solving Circles (PSCs) is one method by which math teachers can utilize literacy skills within their discipline. This process is a blend of best practices in reading instruction, effective methods for encouraging productive discourse in the classroom, and best practices in mathematics instruction. In this article, readers will learn about Problem Solving Circles, a process through which teachers can guide their students to help them effectively make sense of word problems, discuss their thinking with others, and prove their answers and methods.*

## Background and Rationale for Problem Solving Circles

Problem Solving Circles (PSCs) came out of our desire to figure out what really works to help students develop the ability to independently solve word problems in mathematics. We realized that even students who could do the mathematics behind the problem were simply stumped when it came to tackling a word problem. Often, they would give up after reading the problem, resigned to the fact that it was too difficult for them to attempt. Equally disconcerting was how much we, as teachers, guided them through the problems when the student would ask a question or claim to be stuck. Neither one of these practices allowed students to persevere through attempting a solution to word problems.

Additionally, we observed that in many classroom settings, students do not get the opportunity to discuss and compare their thinking with one another, especially in a content-heavy course like

mathematics. However, it is imperative that students are provided with frequent opportunities for purposeful discussions to help synthesize information rather than passively receiving information from the teacher. This needs to be done frequently if we want students to engage in and take ownership of their learning (Daniels & Steineke, 2014).

What we came up with to address both of these concerns was a process that promotes independent thinking, careful analysis of word problems, mathematical discourse, and purposeful questioning of the reasoning of oneself and others. The use of this process, which we came to call Problem Solving Circles (PSCs), changed the struggling learners in our Tier 2 math classes from showing apathy and helplessness towards word problems to embracing the challenge of independently tackling word problems and carefully analyzing the solutions and mathematical reasoning of themselves and others.

---

## Standards

At the core of PSCs are the standards to which teachers of mathematics adhere. While the tasks themselves are aligned to appropriate content standards at each grade, the processes and procedures in PSCs align to the Standards for Mathematical Practice (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010b) and Common Core State Standards English/Language Arts College and Career Readiness Anchor (CCSS ELA-Literacy CCRA) Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010a). These math practice and literacy-related standards serve as guidelines for the habits and practices that should be present in all math classes.

PSCs clearly address many of the Standards for Mathematical Practice. One example is CCSS.Math.Practice.MP1: Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010b). Students need to slow down and read problems multiple times with a specific purpose each time. The thinking prompts in PSCs help students make observations, determine the known, unknown and confusing, connect to previous learning, and map out a solution pathway. The discourse sprinkled throughout PSCs gives students feedback from their peers, encourages them to keep thinking and rethinking and helps highlight previously unnoticed information.

CCSS.Math.Practice.MP3, construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others, is closely related (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010b). In PSCs, students write. They must explain their thinking clearly in writing and in their discussions with their peers. Students are also required to respond to each other and response prompts are provided. Because the teacher takes a facilitator role, students focus on evidence, use mathematical language and have respectful disagreements in an attempt to understand each other's thinking and strategies and find a solution to the task.

In addition to math content and practice standards, teachers of mathematics must also utilize literacy instructional practices to immerse their students in mathematical literacy. CCSS ELA-Literacy CCRA Standards exist to ensure that teachers understand the literacy skills that will help prepare students for college and the work force. These ELA-Literacy CCRA Standards should be applied in all content areas, including mathematics, because these literacy skills are applicable in a variety of professions. Students who participate in PSCs work towards proficiency in the reading, language, writing, and speaking/listening anchor standards.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1, one of the reading anchor standards, states that students need to read a text closely to comprehend and make inferences from it, as well as cite textual evidence from the text to support conclusions from the text (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010a). When discussing the tasks used in PSCs, students must understand the task, draw inferences and conclusions from the task, and explain their thinking through use of specific evidence from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.6, one of the language anchor standards, requires students to use domain-specific vocabulary in reading and writing (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010a). In order to participate effectively in PSCs, students have to use mathematic-specific vocabulary when describing their thinking about the problem, explaining their reasoning to peers, and writing out an explanation for how they solved the problem. Additionally, they have to recognize and interpret the meaning of the words in the task in a mathematical context, rather than a literary context.

Although students do not write extended pieces as part of PSCs, they are still required to communicate in ways that help them to develop their writing abilities. Two of the writing anchor standards, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 and CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9, require students to communicate their thinking clearly through their writing in a format that uses textual evidence and is appropriate for their task and audience (National Governors



---

Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010a). Students have to write sentences to describe their mathematical thinking about the problem prior to discussion and solution, but they also have to write mathematically while solving in order to communicate their solutions clearly to their peers.

PSCs allow for students to work towards attainment of several of the anchor standards for speaking and listening, including CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 (participate in a variety of conversations with different peers), CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3 (evaluate a speaker's point of view and reasoning), and CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4 (present information in a logical manner) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010a). This occurs in the discussion portions of PSCs, while students share and evaluate their thinking on the problem and the solutions.

## Problem Solving Circles

PSCs are about so much more than just the task chosen or even the discussions that ensue from it. The classroom environment, teacher preparation and anticipation of misconceptions, and the teacher's ability to build the mindset of independent learning within a collaborative setting are crucial to the success of this process. Time spent creating curiosity or teaching students appropriate ways to respond to each other is an investment in the creation of mathematical thinkers and learners.

## Preparation

For students to engage effectively in PSCs, they need to feel safe to share ideas and make mistakes in front of their teacher and peers. One method we have used is Classroom Circles (Clifford, 2013). Students get the opportunity to speak and listen to one another on a daily basis about topics that are of interest to them. Additionally, we used several of the lessons in the book *Teaching the Social Skills of Academic Interaction* (Daniels & Steineke, 2014) to guide our students through the guidelines of effective partner and group work. Both of these tools helped to develop a sense of belonging and acceptance in the classroom, as well as fostering an

attitude that "everyone works with everyone" in the classroom (Daniels & Steineke, 2014, p. 40).

It is valuable for the teacher and students to co-create a set of classroom norms to guide behavior during PSCs. Jim Knight (2013) states that "norms are the invisible forces that shape behavior within a culture" and recommends that teachers co-construct norms with their students in order to "shape a learner-friendly culture" (p. 251). Appendix A shows one example of norms that we co-created with our students for PSCs.

Determining and shaping students' mindsets on their mathematical abilities is also a vital component in preparing students to participate in PSCs. Students tend to believe that they are either "good" or "bad" at math; upper elementary and secondary students who are in tier 2 and 3 interventions are particularly prone to having a fixed mindset about their math ability. However, teaching these students about how their brains work and the importance of having a growth mindset has a direct influence on their effort and grades in school (Dweck, 2010, p. 26). We reinforce the concept and importance of having a growth mindset with our students who participate in PSCs because this helps students to be open to the need to persevere through tough math concepts and problems.

The task chosen for a PSC is extremely important. This task needs to be a low-floor, high-ceiling task. Rich task "features include the following: the extent to which the task lends itself to multiple solution strategies, the extent to which the task encourages multiple representations, and the extent to which the task demands explanations from the students" (Stein & Lane, 1996, p. 57). Students will be rereading the problem multiple times and manipulating information from it for an extended period of time. If there is no room for experimentation in math or the task is not engaging enough to sustain multiple readings and discussions, students will lose interest and the opportunity to build that deep understanding will be squandered.

To make PSCs more successful, begin with something that will pique a student's curiosity. Perhaps a picture can illustrate the problem or a short video that provides some background knowledge on the

---

topic of the task can be used to kick off the task. Matthias Gruber, neuroscience researcher at the University of California, Davis, states, “Curiosity ... may put the brain in a state that is more likely to retain new information, even if that information is not what got you curious in the first place” (as cited in Barclay, 2014, para. 7). Engaging students in a task-related discussion about a visual or other common experience prepares their minds to think critically about the task.

### **Process and Procedure**

The primary goal of PSCs is to help students develop the problem solving and critical thinking skills necessary to solve complex problems. However, an equally worthy goal is to help students develop their ability to effectively engage in mathematical discourse with their peers. Even though a significant portion of the process involves discussion about reasoning and the problem, the word problem is ultimately solved by each student independently; problems are not solved collaboratively, even though the discussions prior to and after solutions may alter (and hopefully improve) the reasoning of the student and lead him/her in the right direction with the problem.

Appendices B and C are the two sides of the bookmark we give students to guide them through the PSC process. This bookmark explains the process for the PSCs, provides students with thinking prompts to use as they analyze and hypothesize about the problem, and lists some question stems to lead students through their discussions on their thinking and solutions. Each step is carefully modeled and guided at first so that, eventually, the process can be completed independently. Below are the steps and the reasoning behind each step.

#### ***Step 1: Read the problem.***

Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey (2014) recommend that, when implementing a close reading of a text, the initial reading should help students determine the literal meaning of a text through annotation of important words and phrases (p. 47). In PSCs, we want students to get a general overview of what the problem says and identify any words or phrases that might cause difficulties for them.

#### ***Step 2: Read the problem again.***

When close reading a text, the second reading should be an analysis of the internal workings of the text: how it is structured, what other problems it might be like, and an analysis of words or phrases specifically chosen in the problem (Fisher and Frey, 2014, p. 47). With this second reading, we want students to really break apart the problem to determine what question is being asked and gather specific information from the problem, including important numbers, phrases, and units of measurement. With some problems, we encouraged students to rephrase the question into an answer statement where they would later fill-in-the-blank with the answer to the problem.

#### ***Step 3: Record thinking based on question and specific information.***

Students have a difficult time understanding how and why to write in math class. During PSCs, we forced students to slow down and record their thinking about the problem before ever attempting to solve it. Goudvis and Harvey (2000) explain that “it is nearly impossible to make reading concrete,” which is why teachers use think-alouds to demonstrate comprehension strategies for their students (p. 32). We altered this common reading instruction practice into a written format that allows students to show their thinking to each other and to their teachers. To help students record their thinking, we adapted common think-aloud prompts used in reading comprehension instruction to sentence starters that promote critical thinking about the problem’s meaning. The prompts we provide students to encourage their thinking about the problems are listed on the bookmark (Appendix B), and the prompts are:

- I notice...
- One pattern I see is...
- I need to draw...
- I already knew...
- This reminds me of...
- I am confused by...
- A strategy I might use is...

- \_\_\_\_\_ in math means...
- My first step is...
- What I need to know is...
- It is important to remember...
- A question I have is...

#### ***Step 4: Share thinking.***

After thinking and writing about the problem individually, but not yet solving the problem, students get the opportunity to share their thinking about the problem with a group of two to three peers. Daniels and Steineke (2014) state, “Students should only be working in groups if it will enhance the task and the learning” (p. 25), so the purpose of the discussion is to clarify the thinking of individual students while developing critical thinking skills through analysis of peers’ thinking. Students take turns sharing their thinking, comparing others’ thinking to their own, and questioning others’ reasoning in a respectful, constructive manner. To guide these discussions, we provide students with questioning prompts on their bookmarks (Appendix C). These prompts include:

- Why did you think that was important?
- How will you use that strategy?
- I saw something similar...

We also provide students with some initial structures to guide the format of discussions in order to scaffold students into having organic dialogues about their mathematical thinking. For instance, we may initially require students on either side of the sharer to ask a question about the thinking. These discussions allow for students to clarify their own thinking and engage in discourse involving mathematical concepts and terminology.

#### ***Step 5: Reread the problem. Choose a strategy for solving.***

Students combine their knowledge from their peer discussion and existing understanding of the problem when reading the problem for a third time. During this reread, students refocus their thinking about the problem and assign meaning to numbers and the problem as a whole. Essentially, they are drawing inferences and creating an understanding

of the problem, which is an essential step in a close reading of any text (Fisher and Frey, 2014, p.54-55). Additionally, this reading helps students to come to a conclusion about what strategy or strategies they should try to solve the problem.

#### ***Step 6. Solve the problem and record process.***

Once students have closely read the problem several times, completed some in-depth thinking about the problem, and critiqued their and their peers’ thinking, they can engage in solving the problem. Students need to be reminded to carefully record their solution process in a transparent, logical way in order to share with peers. Solving of the problem must be done independently of peers and the teacher in order for students to actively and productively engage in discussions about the solution.

#### ***Step 7: Share strategy and solution.***

The final formal step of the PSC process is to provide students with the opportunity to share the strategies and solutions that resulted from their thinking, reading, and discussions about the problem. Students follow a similar format to the discussions about the thinking prompts; they need to share their own work, answer questions about their thinking, and analyze the reasoning of others. Additional prompts on the student bookmark (Appendix C) help to guide their discussions. These prompts include:

- I agree/disagree with \_\_\_\_\_’s thinking because...
- What makes you think that?
- How do you know that?
- How did you figure that out?
- Can you explain that in another way?
- How does your visual support your thinking?
- \_\_\_\_\_ (this part) really helped me understand your thinking.
- What if \_\_\_\_\_?
- Is that what the problem was actually asking?
- However, it says in the problem \_\_\_\_\_.

---

The purposes of the discussion are to clarify understanding of each student's strategy and solution and to determine if the solution and strategies used all make mathematical sense. If necessary, students can be given the opportunity to revise their solutions. However, this opportunity should be given prior to the teacher sharing any information about appropriate solutions or answers to the problem; any revisions to strategies or solutions should be done by students based on the critiques and analysis of the solutions by their peers.

### Teacher Role

PSCs require students to use a variety of skills and practices, from analytical thinking to disciplinary writing to active discussion techniques. Obviously, most students will be unequipped to fully participate in PSCs without explicit instruction in content, discussion strategies, and writing. Teachers play a vital role in scaffolding students to complete the complex tasks and initially challenging procedures of PSCs.

One of the primary goals of any teacher is to help students develop an in-depth understanding of the content which they teach. Math teachers must use quality instructional techniques to guide students to an in-depth understanding of mathematical concepts and strategies. Some of these include, but are not limited to: identifying similarities and differences, use of nonlinguistic representations, summarizing learning, and effective questioning techniques (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

Principles to Actions (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), 2014) details eight high-leverage teaching practices to implement in the classroom. Two of these practices relate heavily to the work done in PSCs. The first practice is "Implement Tasks that Promote Reasoning and Problem Solving" (NCTM, 2014). Many features of a quality task have already been addressed, but Principles to Actions makes it clear that the mathematics learned differs greatly based on the task chosen. "Over time, the cumulative effect of the use of mathematics tasks is students' implicit development of ideas about the nature of mathematics—about whether mathematics is something that they personally can make sense of and how long and how

hard they should have to work to solve any mathematical task" (NCTM, 2014, p. 20). The other high leverage teaching practice that is deeply embedded in PSCs is "Facilitate Meaningful Mathematical Discourse" (NCTM, 2014). Principles to Actions (2014) defines it as "the purposeful exchange of ideas through classroom discussion, as well as through other forms of verbal, visual and written communications" (p. 29). All of these practices are implemented through PSCs; as teachers learn their role in creating this type of environment, students begin to take ownership of their mathematical learning and understanding.

Teachers also need to provide students with continuous feedback on their implementation of the Math Practice Standards as observed during the PSC process. One of the ways we developed to assess the students' abilities to engage in mathematical discourse is an observation rubric (Appendix D) used at the beginning, middle, and end of PSC implementation. Use of a rubric like this allows students to see progress in attainment of Math Practice Standards, which are not always easily assessed. Additionally, this provides teachers with formative and summative assessment data that allows them to reflect on their practices and provide instruction to help students attain the Math Practice Standards.

### Impact of PSCs

Currently, PSCs are used in Tier 2 math interventions at the elementary and middle school levels. Students in these interventions demonstrated a need to develop skills in perseverance while working on mathematical tasks, analysis of texts involving mathematics, and communication of mathematical thinking in written and oral formats. We have observed success in reaching these goals through the use of PSCs. Students engaged in high-level discussions about the mathematical tasks they were presented. Additionally, the students who engaged in PSCs in their math interventions transferred the skills and strategies into their math classrooms, participating more actively in problem solving situations that required them to explain their thinking.

Most importantly, the attitudes of the students who participated in PSCs changed. With a framework they could use to approach word problems, the

---

students were more likely to persevere in solving complex mathematical tasks than previously observed. Jill, one of the teachers with whom we worked, stated in an interview after PSC implementation that she had observed several students change their mathematical mindsets after engaging in PSCs. For example, one student who participated in a Tier 2 intervention during 6<sup>th</sup> grade frequently said, “I don’t get it” when facing word problems; he had both a fixed mindset of failure and a weak process for approaching word problems. After engaging in PSCs as a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student, she rarely heard this from him because he had developed a framework for thinking that helped him overcome his fixed mindset and work through challenging tasks (personal communication, November 13, 2015).

Additionally, helping students engage in PSCs has helped us and the other teachers with whom we work to improve our instructional practices and come to a true understanding of how students process word problems. One teacher with whom we worked, Jill, stated in a post-lesson reflection that she came to a better understanding of the importance for students to label numbers in the problems: “I discovered that when reading a task, my students saw naked numbers and didn’t attach any meaning to the quantity... but following the PSC process forced us to bring meaning to each quantity, which then helped us find reasonable solutions.” This teacher also explained that she never realized how often she told her students what to do to get the answer to the word problems. She explained that she has now learned to ask specific questions to promote thinking about the problem and encourage students to justify their reasoning behind how they solved the problem (personal communication, November 13, 2015).

Anecdotally, we have also seen improvements in students’ transfer of literacy skills between disciplines. Students who started the interventions by saying that they did not see the need to read or write in math class show a distinct mind shift by the end of the intervention as they begin to realize the benefits of being able to write and read well in all of their subjects, including math. While we reviewed the PSC procedure as a class prior to engaging in a new task, one student (anonymous) even recognized

the purpose of a reading specialist working in a math intervention with a math teacher when she stated, “[As math and reading teachers], you’re working together to expand reading and math into both classes” (personal communication, October 15, 2014). Students who see purpose and value in utilizing literacy skills across disciplines are more likely to engage and see benefit in disciplinary literacy activities and practices.

Because of the positive impact of PSCs for students in Tier 2 interventions, we believe that this process could be used in mainstream math classes to help all students develop their ability to engage in mathematical discourse and persevere in solving word problems. The PSC process could also be modified for use in a variety of subject areas. The thinking and discussion prompts may change, but the process of individual reflection, group discussion, and individual synthesis of information would remain the same. For instance, a science teacher may have students research and analyze a problem, discuss with their groups, perform an experiment or investigation, and then discuss the results with their peers prior to writing a lab conclusion.

The process of engaging in Problem Solving Circles has had a dramatic impact on students’ abilities to engage in mathematical discourse, explain their reasoning and thinking through use of mathematical terminology, and persevere through challenging and authentic tasks. We hope that continued work on refining the process and expanding it to other classes will benefit students at all levels and abilities.

## References

- Barclay, R. (2014). *Curiosity changes the brain to boost learning and memory*. Retrieved from Heathline News: <http://www.healthline.com/health-news/curiosity-boosts-learning-and-memory-100214#1>
- Clifford, A. (2013). *Teaching restorative practices with classroom circles*. Retrieved from Center for Restorative Process: [www.centerforrestorativeprocess.com](http://www.centerforrestorativeprocess.com)
- Daniels, H., & Steineke, N. (2014). *Teaching the social skills of academic interaction*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Dweck, C. S. (2015). Mind-sets and equitable education. *Principal Leadership*, 26–29.

- 
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2014). *Close reading and writing from sources*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Knight, J. (2013). *High-impact instruction: A framework for great teaching*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. (2014). *Principles to actions: Ensuring mathematical success for all*. Reston, VA: Author.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards for English language arts: College and career readiness anchor standards*. Washington DC: Authors.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards for Mathematics*. Washington, D.C.
- Stein, M., & Lane, S. (1996). Instructional tasks and the development of student capacity to think and reason: An analysis of the relationship between teaching and learning in a reform mathematics project. *Educational Research and Evaluation: An International Journal on Theory and Practice*, 50–80.

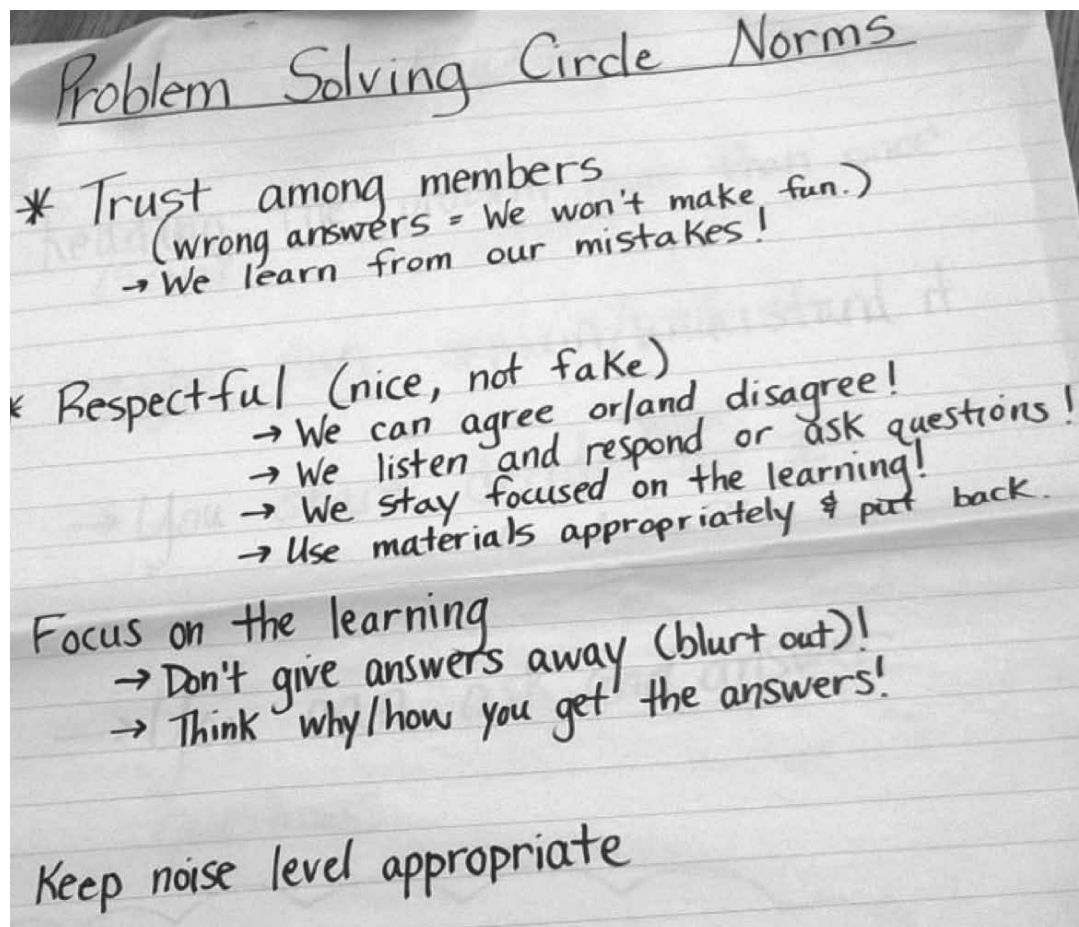
## About the Authors:

*Nicole Hawkins currently serves as a Math Specialist in the Greendale School District and is finishing her masters in Leadership in Math Education at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. She can be reached at hawkins\_nicole@outlook.com.*

*Samantha Goodger is a Reading Specialist and Instructional Coach at Greenfield Middle School. Her work with teachers focuses primarily on disciplinary literacy and instructional practices that promote student engagement. She can be reached at sgoodger@greenfield.k12.wi.us.*

## Appendix A. Problem Solving Circle Group Norms

Teachers and students co-create norms to reference and guide their interactions with one another while engaging in PSCs. This is one example created by a group of fifth grade students who engaged in PSCs.



## Appendix B. Problem Solving Circle Bookmark, Side 1

This portion of the student bookmark is provided to students to help guide their thinking as they read a word problem initially. Also, the process is detailed to remind students of the process for PSCs.

# Problem-Solving Circles

## Thinking Prompts

I notice...

One pattern I see is...

I need to draw...

I already knew...

This reminds me of...

I am confused by...

A strategy I might use is...

\_\_\_\_\_ in math means...

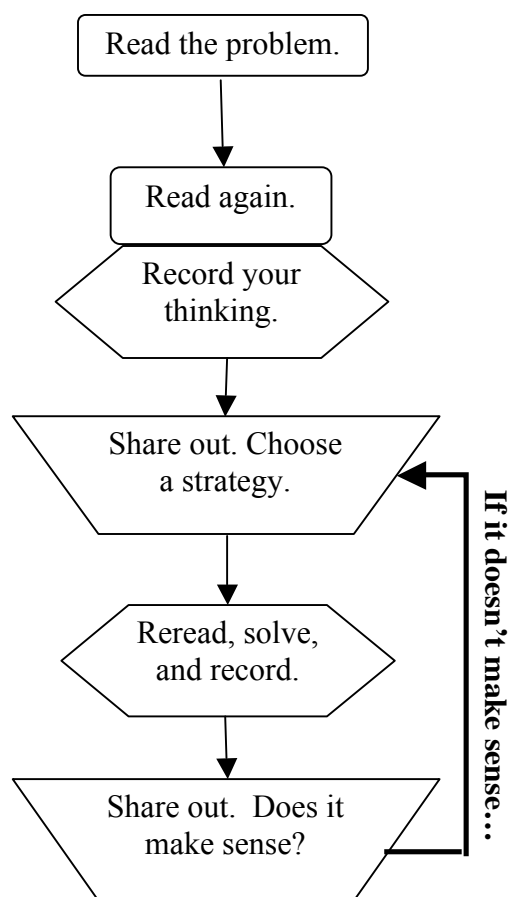
My first step is...

What I need to know is...

It is important to remember...

A question I have is...

## Process



*Created by Nicole Hawkins, Jill Leffler, and Samantha Goodger (2015).*

*Reproduction permissible for school use.*



---

## Appendix C. Problem Solving Circle Bookmark, Side 2

This portion of the student bookmark is provided to guide students in their discussions about their thinking and solutions. Students use these discussion stems in a structured, teacher-guided way at first, but they develop independence and engage in mathematical discourse more naturally and without the use of the prompts as they continue to practice having these type of academic discussions.

### Problem-Solving Circle Questions

#### Discussions on Thinking Prompts

Why did you think that was important?

How will you use that strategy?

I saw something similar...

#### To the answer and explanation:

I agree/disagree with \_\_\_\_\_'s thinking because...

What makes you think that?

How do you know that?

How did you figure that out?

Can you explain that in another way?

How does your visual support your thinking?

\_\_\_\_\_ (this part) really helped me understand your thinking.

What if \_\_\_\_\_?

Is that what the problem was actually asking?

However, it says in the problem \_\_\_\_\_.

*Created by Nicole Hawkins, Jill Leffler, and Samantha Goodger (2015).*

*Reproduction permissible for school use.*

## Appendix D. Rubric to Assess Math Practice Standards

This rubric was developed to use in conjunction with PSCs in order to assess students' abilities to engage in mathematical discourse and attain the Math Practice Standards. The rubric can be used for formative or summative assessment.

### Rubric for Assessing Student Growth - Problem Solving Circles

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Practice Standard	Emerging	Supported	Evidence	Independent
<i>Math Practice Standard #1</i> ← Written Work on Reasoning →				
Make sense of problems		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writes thinking using at least one prompt</li> <li>Writing on thinking prompts shows an understanding of the problem</li> </ul>		
Persevere in solving problems		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to solve the problem with minimal assistance</li> <li>Reads problem multiple times;</li> </ul>		
<i>Math Practice Standard #2</i> ← Written Work Toward Solution →				
Reason abstractly and quantitatively		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses at least one solution strategy</li> <li>Uses at least one form of representation</li> <li>Shows some understanding of the symbolic representation of the problem</li> </ul>		
<i>Math Practice Standard #3</i> ← Discourse →				
Construct viable arguments		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to explain reasoning</li> <li>Able to justify solution or reasonability of answer</li> </ul>		
Critique the reasoning of others		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asks at least one question that pushes the thinking of self and peers</li> </ul>		

Additional Comments:

---

# From Chemistry to Advanced Spanish: 21st Century Word Wall Success

**Peg Grafwallner**

M.Ed. (School Support Teacher/Reading Specialist), Ronald Reagan IB High School, Milwaukee Public Schools

**Abby Felten**

Chemistry Teacher, Ronald Reagan IB High School, Milwaukee Public Schools

**Jamie Kramer**

Spanish Teacher, Ronald Reagan IB High School, Milwaukee Public Schools

**T**he iconic Word Wall. It's been around since the dawn of civilization. Early renderings have been found in the caves of Lascaux, France depicting prehistoric symbols presumably drawn by our ancestors highlighting the beginnings of language, dialogue and conversation (Curtis, 2007. p. 50).

From those early prehistoric vocabulary immersions to today's classrooms, one can assume that the word wall has gone through many transformations. It has typically been thought of as a vocabulary tool utilized in the elementary classroom, but to limit its use to only the primary grades is a great disservice to our middle and secondary students. According to Cronsberry (2004), "The use of a word wall in a classroom can be a highly effective teaching strategy to improve ... key vocabulary, whether it be learning to explain a word, to compare it to other key concepts, or to spell it" (p. 3). What could a word wall look like in today's high school classrooms where students can demonstrate and apply 21<sup>st</sup>-century skill building? As the School Support Teacher/Reading Specialist at a large urban high school, I've recommended the use of a word wall in many content areas as a way to engage students in a visual interpretation of new vocabulary. To be successful, "students must be surrounded by words and motivated to learn them. A word-rich classroom includes frequent use of words that have been taught

and interesting words students have encountered in their reading" ("A Research Based Guide to Word Walls in the Secondary Classroom," n.d., p. 2). From Chemistry to Advanced Spanish, students have benefited from the support created by using word walls.

## Word Walls in Chemistry Class

Last fall, Abby, our Chemistry teacher, and I created a lesson introducing Greek prefixes to her sophomore students. Abby explained that before students could really move forward in their understanding of Chemistry or the implementation of a Chemistry lab, they needed a common vocabulary. We chose to focus only on the Greek prefixes associated with numerals one through ten. Instead of flashcards or the Frayer Model (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2013, p. 71), which are both excellent vocabulary strategies as well, I suggested implementing the word wall strategy. Abby had heard of it, but as a high school Science teacher, she didn't actually realize how it might benefit her students.

Based on the work of Robert Marzano, I suggested students work in groups to kinesthetically create a visual representation of the numeral. Marzano (2009) states that "having students represent their understanding of a new term by drawing a picture, pictograph, or symbolic representation" (p. 83) is a key step to the success of vocabulary recall. He

goes on to say, “When students do this step well, achievement soars” (Marzano, 2009, p. 84). As a result of this possibility, Abby suggested ways in which the numeral prefix could be applied to the Chemistry content through the use of bonding and nomenclature. Once established, it could be revisited throughout the school year.

The focus of the lesson was introduced to the students:

**Lesson Title:** Defining and Applying Chemistry Numeral Prefixes

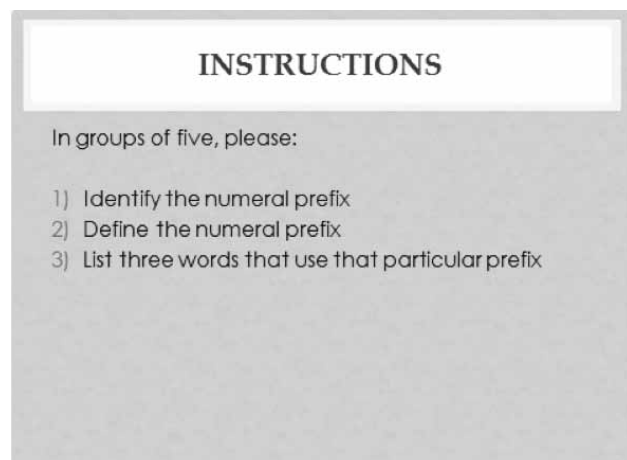
**Learning Intention:** I can effectively pronounce, define and apply Chemistry numeral prefixes when reading something that is unfamiliar; in this class and in my other classes.

**Success Criteria:** I know I am successful when I can pronounce, define and apply numeral prefixes when reading something that is unfamiliar; in this class and in my other classes.

**ACT College and Career Readiness Standards: Word Meanings and Word Choice: 23-27:** Interpret most words and phrases as they are used in somewhat challenging passages, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings

The instructions indicated that students would create a picture of their numeral prefix and use words that applied to their particular prefix. We were hoping to tap into student connections and prior knowledge. Abby’s PowerPoint™ presentation began with these instructions:

**Figure 1**



I observed Abby as she presented the lesson to her students. I wanted to see her students’ initial reactions because I wondered if they would think it too elementary to create a word wall. I wanted to observe their engagement in the lesson to see if they would stay on task and motivated throughout the lesson. I also wanted to see if they could apply the word wall’s information to their homework and summative assessments. I wondered: if they achieved success on an assessment, would they connect their achievement to the word wall?

As we all know, even the best lesson can fall flat if the delivery is not engaging, exciting and engrossing. As she introduced the lesson, the class began muttering their approval. The idea of creating a picture using markers and colored paper appealed to them, while the opportunity to brainstorm various prefixes using the dictionary app on their phone enticed the typical teenager in all of them!

Students began grabbing markers and colored paper. Abby walked around with a basket containing the prefixes on individual slips of paper. Each group chose one slip of paper. As groups began working, it was rewarding to hear their questions, directions and comments:

*“What should we draw?”*

*“Wait, let’s map it out on lined paper first. Use a pencil!”*

*“This paper is too dark. No one will be able to see what we write.”*

*“Octo, octo, octo. This is a hard one. Wait, there’s Octagon. But then what?”*

Clearly, my concern about the lesson being pedestrian or dull was quickly put to rest. Students were engaged and their ideas were creative and colorful. As students worked, Abby and I circulated throughout the room. Student drawings showed a tricycle, a stop sign, and many other familiar objects. It was evident that prior knowledge was being used to build connections—especially with mathematical symbols. Some students were brainstorming prefixes, while others were using their smartphones and tablets for more ideas. The room was abuzz with learning and laughter.

**Figure 2**

In this close-up, you can see the thoughtful consideration students gave this project. Students applied their background knowledge to show their understanding of numerology and applied that understanding to Chemistry.



**Figure 3**

Take a close look at the Octagon: using a simple picture of a "Stop" sign, these students highlighted their understanding of Octagon making meaning with Octopus, Octuplet and Octet!



The finished products were displayed in a prominent place in the classroom where all students could see their work. Upon reflection, Abby said, "This lesson kept students engaged and curious. They were eager to see what their classmates had created and without even realizing it, they built another layer of collaboration" (personal communication, November 21, 2014). We had given students a strategy that they could "use to learn and remember the many technical terms, key concepts, and academic vocabulary that they encounter in the study of various disciplines" (Irvin, Meltzer and Dukes, 2007, p. 34). This

**Figure 4**

Please note the imagination of the application: Students identified the numeral prefix, defined the prefix, listed three words that used that particular prefix and drew a picture of the prefix.



strategy and their use of teamwork were each an observable success.

## Word Walls in Advanced Spanish Class

Using this idea proved beneficial late last summer when Jamie, our Advanced Spanish teacher, was looking for some vocabulary ideas for the start of the school year. I sent Jamie the instructions and pictures of Abby's word wall. Jamie was excited to see how this might look in Advanced Spanish.

She met with me and we brainstormed some ideas. She explained that as students learn more tenses in a World Language, it becomes harder for them to remember when to use each one and how to use it correctly. She said, "I wanted to create a way for students to visually see the different tenses with concrete examples. Now, when I talk about a specific tense in class I can refer to the "Conjuguemos" Wall so students can see what I'm talking about" (personal communication, September 26, 2015).

Jamie introduced her lesson to her students:

**Lesson Title:** Reviewing Commonly Used Verb Tenses.

**Learning Intention:** I can effectively use a variety of verb tenses.

**Success Criteria:** I know I am successful when I can use various verb tenses in my writing and identify different tenses in an authentic text.

**ACT College and Career Readiness Standards: Word Meanings and Word Choice: 23-27:** Interpret most words and phrases as they are used in somewhat challenging passages, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings

Jamie's PowerPoint™ instructions explained the task ahead:

**Figure 5**

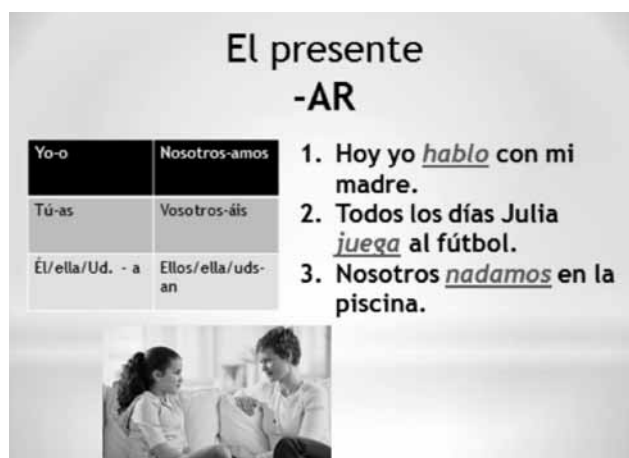


Directions in English:

1. Identify the type of verb (ar, er, ir)
2. Write the endings in a chart
3. Write 3 complete sentences with different subjects. (Don't use irregulars)
4. Create a drawing that relates to one of the sentences.

This slide modeled the activity:

**Figure 6**



After she gave the directions in Spanish, students formed their groups of three. She circulated among the groups and assigned them each a verb (ar, er, or ir). She asked some groups to work with irregular verbs such as stem changers or verbs that change in the 'yo' form.

To verify instructions, students began to ask important questions:

*"How many pictures do we need?"*

*"Do we need the table in the final copy?"*

*"Can you give us an ER and IR verb that is not irregular?"*

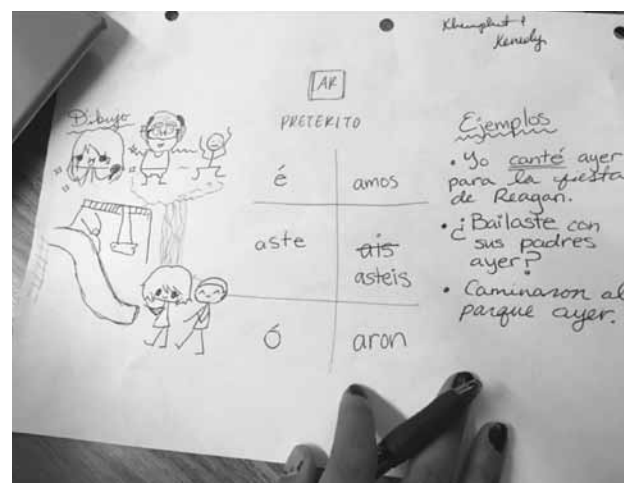
As I walked around the classroom, I asked one group about their particular example. They explained: *"Our example was 'Spending Money.' We had to draw a picture in the past. So I drew my bank account yesterday showing that I had money and then I drew a picture of how I spent my money."*

Another group commented: *"We had a dilemma. Our picture is a camp on the beach. We were supposed to use an AR verb, but we used an IR verb, so we had to reconstruct the sentence, but we kept the main idea. We had to rewrite it."*

The similarities between the Advanced Spanish students and the Chemistry students' reactions were profound. Like Abby's students, Jamie's students

**Figure 7**

In these examples, students map out their group's thoughts before committing to final versions!



were taking the activity seriously and were supporting each other on each idea and each drawing. It was interesting to note how “duties” had been divided up: the student voted with the “best” handwriting became the scribe, while the student with the “best” drawing skills became the group artist. In addition, the sense of community and mutual respect was palpable as students laughed and collaborated in an atmosphere of learning.

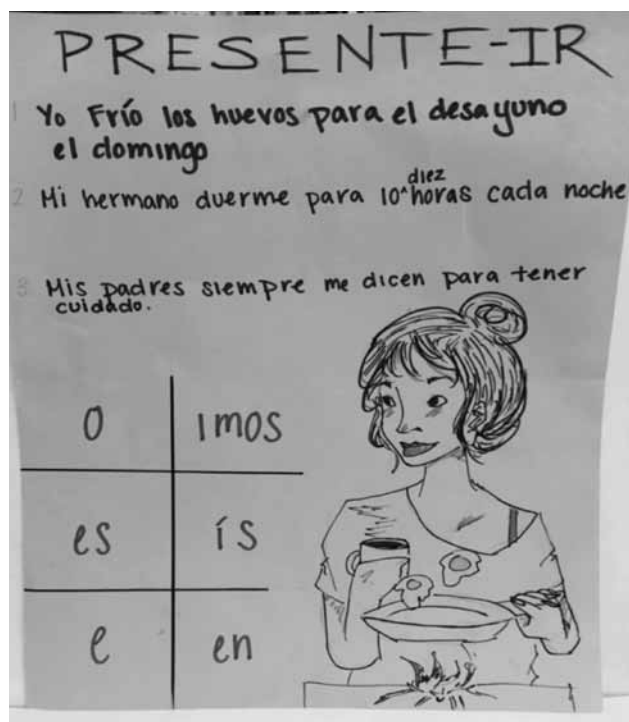
**Figure 8**

Translation:

I fry the eggs for breakfast on Sunday.

My brother sleeps for 10 hours every night.

My parents always tell me to be careful.



The success of this lesson highlights the creativity of the students, the authentic learning being generated and the role of teacher as facilitator. The Success Criteria was met as students did indeed, use various verb tenses in their writing and were able to identify different tenses in student-generated text. In addition, the same type of collaboration found in Abby's class was demonstrated once again as Spanish students worked together to create opportunities to show their background knowledge and prior connections.

## Conclusion

The success of the word wall in Chemistry was demonstrated when students were able to successfully match and define the Greek prefixes with numerals. Abby continually referred back to the Chemistry Word Wall as did her students, thereby showing the connections between the prefixes and the terms. Similarly, Jamie constantly denoted the word wall in Advanced Spanish; thereby, giving her students the immersion of a second language and not just an occasional interval. Also, the common use of the ACT standard illustrated the value of word meanings in all disciplines, refraining from vocabulary as just something “done” in English or the Humanities. When the time came to take a vocabulary test, Abby and Jamie took down the word walls. However, students from both classes commented later that they could “close their eyes and see the wall,” therefore, making the test-taking process less anxious and helping them to feel confident about their knowledge of the terms. Abby and Jamie were delighted that their students had embraced the lessons in such a meaningful way and both educators felt confident that the vocabulary would remain with their

**Figure 9**

Students collaborate to create their visual representation of vocabulary!



students.

In closing, it is apparent that the creativity inspired by the use of word walls is limitless for teachers and students. These lessons show how a skill can be transferred to any discipline and in all content

---

areas. All teachers of all grade levels can apply this concept to any subject. All students, regardless of ability level, would have the opportunity to build connections among disciplines, highlight prior knowledge, and become a collaborative team. These are the core elements of 21<sup>st</sup>-century readiness.

## References

- Allen, J. (1999). *Words, words, words: Teaching vocabulary in grades 4-12*. New York, NY: Stenhouse.
- Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2013). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Broward County School Board. *A research based guide to word walls in the secondary classroom*. Retrieved from <http://www.fulton-ind.k12.ky.us/userfiles/56/Classes/4649/Secondary%20Word%20Walls.pdf>
- Cronsberry, J. (2004). "Word walls: A support for literacy in secondary school classrooms." Retrieved from [http://www.readingrockets.org/content/pdfs/World\\_Walls\\_-\\_A\\_Support\\_for\\_Literacy\\_in\\_Secondary\\_School\\_Classrooms.pdf](http://www.readingrockets.org/content/pdfs/World_Walls_-_A_Support_for_Literacy_in_Secondary_School_Classrooms.pdf).
- Curtis, G. (2007). *The cave painters: Probing the mysteries of the world's first artists*. New York, NY: Anchor.
- Dean, C.B., Hubbell, E.R., Pitler, H., & Stone, B.J. (2013). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. New York, NY: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Freeman, Y. S., & Freeman, D. E. (2006). *Teaching reading and writing in Spanish and English*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Irvin, J., Meltzer, D. & Dukes, M. (2007). *Taking action on adolescent literacy: An implementation guide for school leaders*. New York, NY: Association for Supervision of Curriculum and Development.
- Marzano, R.J. (2009). The art and science of teaching/Six steps to better vocabulary instruction. *Educational Leadership: Teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 67 (1), 83-84.

## About the Authors:

*Peg Grafwallner is the School Support Teacher and Reading Specialist at Ronald Reagan IB High School in Milwaukee Public Schools. Peg coaches teachers in literacy best practices focusing on connecting IB, Common Core and ACT standards. She has given local, regional and national presentations on the topics of literacy, motivation, and engagement. If you would like more information about this article, please contact Peg at [grafwapj@milwaukee.k12.wi.us](mailto:grafwapj@milwaukee.k12.wi.us).*

*Abby Felten is a MYP Chemistry teacher at Ronald Reagan IB High School. She graduated from Marquette University in spring of 2014 with a bachelor's of science in Secondary Education and Broadfield Science with a minor in Chemistry and an emphasis in Biology. This is her second year teaching MYP Chemistry at Reagan IB High School. She also is the Personal Project coordinator. If you would like more information about this article, please contact Abby at [croftal@milwaukee.k12.wi.us](mailto:croftal@milwaukee.k12.wi.us).*

*Jamie Kramer is a Spanish teacher at Ronald Reagan IB High School in Milwaukee Public Schools. Jamie teaches IB Spanish 1 and 2. She began teaching high school Spanish 9 years ago. Jamie is also certified to teach English Language Learners. If you would like more information about this article, please contact Jamie at [kramerrj1@milwaukee.k12.wi.us](mailto:kramerrj1@milwaukee.k12.wi.us).*



# WSRA MISSION STATEMENT

The Wisconsin State Reading Association provides leadership, advocacy, and professional learning for the implementation of effective literacy practices, recognizing the complex nature of literacy and engaging students to apply their literacies in meaningful ways in a changing world.

WSRA...providing leadership, advocacy, and expertise

## WSRA Goals

### Professional Development

Promote professional growth opportunities for educators, administrators, families, and community members.

### Communication

Provide leadership in addressing issues and trends in reading and communication arts to inform educators, administrators, families, and community members.

### Partnership

Create partnerships that foster literacy in the home, school, community, and workplace.

### Membership

Develop and strengthen an active and diverse membership.

### Advocacy

Develop tools, strategies and interest to motivate WSRA members to engage in advocacy efforts to improve research, policy and practices for literacy programs that best serve students, families and educators.

### Research

Promote and disseminate research findings that will strengthen and support the best practices for instruction and assessment in reading and the communication arts.



WISCONSIN STATE READING ASSOCIATION  
PRESENTS

# Having Hard Conversations

JENNIFER ABRAMS

Thursday, July 21, 2016

8:30 AM - 3:30 PM

(Registration begins at 8:00 AM)

Radisson Hotel | 200 2nd Street South | La Crosse, WI

As teacher leaders, coaches, or administrators, we often come up against situations where difficult topics must be addressed. What do we know about the best strategies for those moments? What questions should we be asking ourselves before we speak up and what words shall we use so the conversation can be as humane and growth producing as possible?

Having Hard Conversations is an interactive workshop and personal approach to mastering the art of challenging conversations. The strategies in the workshop address a wide range of situations, including communications with peers, administrators, and/or supervisees. The workshop helps literacy leaders at all levels speak with clarity and courage to directly address difficult situations within their schools.

"Hard conversations are about being true to oneself, doing what is right for students, and shaping an environment that supports learning. We need to learn to do them well."

Jennifer Abrams, *Having Hard Conversations*, p. 3

Participants will learn how to:

- ▶ Identify why they hesitate to have hard conversations
- ▶ Design questions to ask themselves before they choose to speak up
- ▶ Articulate in professional language the challenges they are facing
- ▶ Determine the goals of the conversation and write an action plan of support
- ▶ Script the conversation avoiding trigger words that put others on the defensive
- ▶ Choose the best "wheres" and "whens" for a productive discussion



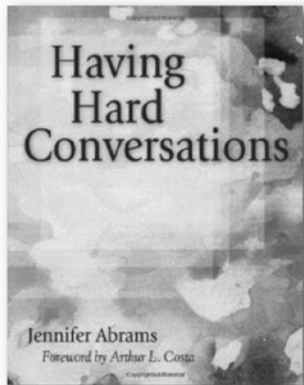
Jennifer Abrams

Jennifer Abrams is an international educational and communications consultant for public and independent schools, hospitals, universities, and non-profits. Jennifer trains and coaches teachers, administrators, nurses, hospital personnel, and others on new employee support, supervision, being generationally savvy, having hard conversations, and effective collaboration skills.

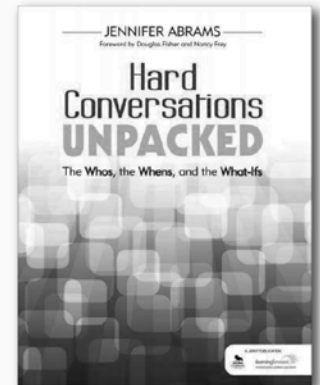
Jennifer considers herself a "Voice Coach," helping others learn how to best use their voices - be it collaborating on a team, presenting in front of an audience, coaching a colleague, and/or supervising an employee. Jennifer holds a Master's Degree in Education from Stanford University and a Bachelor's Degree in English from Tufts University. She lives in Palo Alto, California. Jennifer can be reached at [jennifer@jenniferabrams.com](mailto:jennifer@jenniferabrams.com), [www.jenniferabrams.com](http://www.jenniferabrams.com), and on Twitter @jenniferabrams.

"It is not easy to speak up, find our voice, or tell our truths. Yet by doing so, we say yes to something bigger - what is best for schools, students, and ourselves. If we come from a sincere place, and we believe in the capacity of our colleague to hear us and for us to professionally discuss the issue, we are starting from the right spot."

Jennifer Abrams, *Having Hard Conversations*, p. 63



Registration fees for this event include a copy of either  
***Having Hard Conversations*** or  
***Hard Conversations Unpacked***.



To register online and for information about graduate credit, go to [www.wsra.org](http://www.wsra.org) > Webinars and Institutes > July 21 Having Hard Conversations.

All attendees must register online by July 15 and payment is due by July 20, 2016.

WSRA accepts echecks as well as Visa, Mastercard, and Discover credit cards.

Attendees' book choice will be picked up on Thursday, July 21 at the institute check-in.

#### Cost to Attend

\$50 for Local Reading Council Officer

\$50 for WSRA Committee member

\$50 for Full-time Undergraduate student

\$165 for current WSRA member

\$205 for Nonmember

Free for:

- WSRA Past Presidents
- WSRA Committee Chair and one guest
- Local Reading Council President and one guest
- Members of the WSRA Board of Directors



# CLASSROOM CONSIDERATIONS



---

# Everyday Diversity: What's in Your Classroom?

Megan Schliesman and Merri Lindgren

Cooperative Children's Book Center

School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

*Take a look at the books around your classroom.*

*What do they say to your students about themselves, and about the world in which they live?*

*Do they help make all of the children feel visible, validated, welcome? Do they reflect diversity in many forms? Or do they assume that White is the norm? That everything else is token, or an exception?*

*Do they perpetuate stereotypes?*

Books being taught today and even being published today, still skew dramatically toward the assumption of *Whiteness*—White students, White teachers. Additionally, books with stereotypical depictions of other cultures and races can still be found on classroom and library shelves and in the curriculum.

Many teachers have worked to challenge this assumption of *Whiteness* and the presence of stereotypical material in the curriculum. But incorporating materials that reflect diversity and offer authentic, accurate portrayals of people of color and First/Native Nations individuals must go beyond a matter of choice or personal commitment. No child or teen should feel invisible or invalidated in the classroom; all educators must do the work of overturning that “assumption of *Whiteness*”. And doing so will benefit all students.

## How does such work begin?

*Look around again. Ask yourself what you are teaching and why. Ask yourself what you aren't teaching, and why not.*

The Cooperative Children's Book Center of the School of Education at the University of

Wisconsin-Madison documents the number of books we receive annually by and about American Indians and people of color. Year after year we ask the same kinds of questions: Why are there so few books by and about Latinos? Where are the books about American Indians? Where are the picture books about contemporary African American children? In a library where we see over 3,000 new books a year for children and teens, titles like these are too few and far between. (The CCBC statistics are available online at <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp>).

At the same time, there are books already in print that can help move every classroom and library beyond stereotypes, beyond tokenism and into meaningful engagement with literature that collectively reflects aspects of individual, cultural and national identity that are critical to the lives of all children and teens today.

In the fall 2015, textbook publisher McGraw-Hill was taken to task for a passage in a Texas world geography book referencing the slave trade. The passage read: “The Atlantic Slave Trade between the 1500s and 1800s brought millions of workers from Africa to the southern United States to work on agricultural plantations.” A fifteen-year-old African American student sent a photo of the text to his mother, who posted it on Facebook®, and the resulting outcry led McGraw-Hill to apologize and change the language of the passage that rendered the horrors of slavery invisible (Feldman, 2015).

Nothing excuses the McGraw-Hill passage, but the truth is that even when textbooks are accurate, they too often fail to tell much of the story while

---

negating opportunities for connection and engagement among many readers. So even when textbooks are required, trade books have an important place in the curriculum. For example, works such as *Day of Tears* (Lester, 2005), or *Breaking Ground, Breaking Silence: The Story of New York's African Burial Ground* (Hansen, 1998) are among those that can be used to offer a fuller (and therefore more painful and honest) depiction of slavery in America.

That's not to say books for children and teens always get it right. Throughout the fall of 2015, there was much online discussion and debate surrounding the depiction of slavery in the picture book *A Fine Dessert* (Jenkins, 2015). The discussion heated up even more after author Emily Jenkins apologized for the book being "racially insensitive," despite the care she thought she'd taken (Barack, 2015). Discussion of the depiction of enslavement in books for younger children was the focus of heated exchanges again earlier this year when Scholastic issued and then withdrew the picture book *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* (Ganeshram, 2016).

These were difficult, sometimes painful conversations, about a difficult, painful topic. Much like the McGraw-Hill textbook concern, the criticism of both books has much to do with negating that pain, rendering it invisible, resulting in a potentially skewed understanding of slavery for young readers. But finding picture books that counter such depictions is possible, whether it's a spare offering like *Underground* (Evans, 2011) or a longer offering, such as *The Amazing Age of John Roy Lynch* (Barton, 2015).

Last year also saw publication of *Go Set a Watchman* (Lee, 2015), the sequel to *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), a frequently taught book in ninth grade across the United States. *Go Set a Watchman* disillusioned many readers with its depiction of Atticus Finch as a racist. But there are people of color, African Americans in particular, who have been saying for years that *To Kill a Mockingbird* itself offers a problematic depiction of race in America with its doomed Black man and his white would-be savior. *Racism in Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird"* (Mancini, 2008) offers a range

of perspectives on the topic. Whether or not an educator personally agrees with the criticism, awareness, and the willingness to ask hard questions in classroom discussions about the book's depiction of race, is one way to make sure all students, regardless of their backgrounds, have the opportunity to feel validated and heard, and to consider critical questions that are relevant to their everyday lives in a country where we continue to struggle with the lasting impact of attitudes and injustices that go all the way back to slavery.

It doesn't take more than a glance at the latest headlines, or a look around almost any community, to see evidence of that lasting impact in myriad ways. One highly visible example over the past two years has been police violence against African Americans and other people of color. Stories in the news are more prevalent—although no more tragic—than ever before. Educators interested in connecting their literature classrooms to the headlines will revel in *All American Boys* (Reynolds and Kiely, 2015), which examines the harsh realities and emotional complexities of race in America through the perspectives of two teenagers. African American Rashad is beaten by a White police officer and struggles with pain and fear in the aftermath. White Quinn witnesses the beating and struggles with pressure to side with the officer.

There are many reasons students and teachers alike must think critically about race and racism. The issue of Indian mascots in Wisconsin schools remains charged, for example, with some districts moving toward meaningful change while others continue to perpetuate painful objectification and stereotypes. Students who can explore Wisconsin history through an outstanding novel like *The Birchbark House* (Erdrich, 1999) may also be in classrooms where *The Indian in the Cupboard* (Banks, 1985) or *The Sign of the Beaver* (Speare, 1983), with their stereotypes and misrepresentation of Native cultures, are also among their reading choices. All of this makes the need for authentic books about Native children and Native cultures critical. Books such as *The Birchbark House* and *How I Became a Ghost* (Tingle, 2013), as well as *Indian Shoes* (Smith, 2002), *Jingle Dancer* (Smith,



2000), *The Good Luck Cat* (Harjo, 2000) and *Wild Berries* (Flett, 2013) are examples of marvelous titles that merit inclusion in classrooms for many reasons, not the least of which is the important visibility and authenticity they offer regarding the lives of Native peoples, including contemporary Native children.

There was a time not long ago when the norm was to teach the concept of colorblindness. In recent years, it's become clear that doing so is not only counterintuitive for children and teens, but also potentially damaging (Scruggs, 2009). It's not seeing difference that's the problem; it's children learning to think negatively about differences they see. More and more educators understand the importance of talking about race and racism, but they often struggle with how to have those conversations. Picture books like *skin again* (hooks, 2004), *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001) and *Shades of Black* (Pinkney, 2000), or novels like *Project Mulberry* (Park, 2005), *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie, 2007), *All American Boys* (Reynolds and Kiely, 2015), or *X: A Novel* (Shabazz and Magoon, 2015), among others, can invite conversations about race and racism.

Also important are books like *The Year of the Dog* (Lin, 2006), *Unusual Chickens for the Exceptional Poultry Farmer* (Jones, 2015), or *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* (Medina, 2013), in which race and cultural identity are integral to characters' identity without necessarily being a point of the story, just as they are integral in the lives of children of color and First/Native Nations children. The truth is this: racial and cultural identity should be and are a source of pride, but to be a child or teen of color or a First/Native Nations child or teen is also to live in a world that doesn't let you forget you aren't white.

At the same time, race impacts the way *all* children experience the world. And *all* children need to become aware of race and its impact on people's lives in order to have those difficult, transformative conversations and opportunities for reflection that can help them understand their own place in the world, and their own potential to help change it.

None of this is necessarily easy. But all of it is nurtured by classroom environments that normalize

diversity through the books available to children and teens, rather than treating it as something extra or exceptional. Children and teens are living in a world full of both uncertainty and promise. We need to offer books and mediated experiences that can help all of them navigate that uncertainty, and see themselves as deserving of the promise. Yes, choices must be made thoughtfully, following school and district policies and procedures. But regardless of the demographics of an individual school, inclusion is essential to meeting the needs of the curriculum when it comes to preparing students to engage with the wider world.

## Reference List

- Alexie, S. (2007). *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Banks, L. R. (1980). *The Indian in the Cupboard*. New York: Doubleday.
- Barack, L. (2015). "Emily Jenkins Apologizes for 'A Fine Dessert.'" *School Library Journal*, November 3, 2015. <http://www.slj.com/2015/11/industry-news/emily-jenkins-apologizes-for-a-fine-dessert/>
- Barton, C. (2015). *The amazing age of John Roy Lynch*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers.
- Erdrich, L. (1999). *The birchbark house*. New York: Hyperion.
- Evans, S. W. (2001). *Underground*. New York: Roaring Brook Press.
- Feldman, J. (2015). "McGraw-Hill Apologizes for TX Textbook Referring to Slaves as 'Workers.'" *Mediaite*, October 7, 2015. <http://www.mediaite.com/online/mcgraw-hill-apologizes-for-tx-textbook-referring-to-slaves-as-workers/>
- Flett, J. (2013). *Wild berries*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: Simply Read Books.
- Ganeshram, R. (2016). *A birthday cake for George Washington*. New York: Scholastic.
- Hansen, J. and G. McGowan. (1998). *Breaking ground, breaking silence: The story of New York's African burial ground*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Harjo, J. (2000). *The good luck cat*. New York: Harcourt.
- hooks, b. (2004). *skin again*. New York: Hyperion.
- Jenkins, E. (2015). *A Fine Dessert: Four centuries, four families, one delicious treat*. New York: Schwartz & Wade.
- Jones, K. (2015). *Unusual chickens for the exceptional poultry farmer*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Lee, H. (2015). *Go Set a Watchman*. New York: Harper.

- 
- Lee, H. (1960). *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Warner.
- Lester, J. (2005). *Day of Tears: A novel in dialogue*. New York: Jump at the Sun / Hyperion.
- Lin, G. (2006). *The Year of the Dog*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Mancini, C. (ed.) (2008). *Racism in Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird"*. Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press.
- Medina, M. (2013). *Yaqui Delgado wants to kick your ass*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Park, L. S. L.(2005). *Project Mulberry*. New York: Clarion.
- Pinkney, S. L. (2000). *Shades of Black: A celebration of our children*. New York: Scholastic.
- Reynolds, J. and B. Kiely. (2015). *All American boys*. New York: Atheneum.
- Scruggs, A. E. (2009). "Colorblindness: The New Racism?" *Teaching Tolerance* n. 36. <http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-36-fall-2009/feature/colorblindness-new-racism>
- Shabazz, I. and K. Magoon (2015). *X: A Novel*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Smith, C. L. (2002). *Indian Shoes*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Smith, C. L. (2000). *Jingle Dancer*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Speare, E. G. (1983). *The Sign of the Beaver*. New York: Houghton.
- Tingle, T. (2013). *How I became a ghost: A Choctaw Trail of Tears story*. Oklahoma City, OK: Roadrunner Press.
- Woodson, J. (2001). *The other side*. New York: Putnam.

## About the Authors:

*Megan Schliesman and Merri Lindgren are librarians at the Cooperative Children's Book Center of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Both are coauthors with their CCBC colleagues of the annual CCBC Choices publication highlighting outstanding books of the year. They can be reached at [schliesman@education.wisc.edu](mailto:schliesman@education.wisc.edu) and [mlindgren@education.wisc.edu](mailto:mlindgren@education.wisc.edu)*



---

# Gloom, Despair, and Strawberry Pop Tarts™:

## Failure stories and their effect on agency during the bad days in the reading intervention classroom

Mary Beth Nicklaus

*It's fine to celebrate success, but it's more important to heed the lessons of failure.*

— attributed to Bill Gates

**O**n the coldest wind chill week of the year so far, we have been suffering from “First Period Icy Cold Depression.” This has been bad news for my action research on increasing growth mindset in the reading intervention classroom. From what I have been witnessing of my class and myself since Monday of this week, the old Hee Haw lament replays itself through my head:

“Gloom, despair, and agony on me,

Deep, dark depression, excessive misery...”  
(Brillstein, Peppiatt & Aylesworth, 1969).

It's so palpable; I'm tempted to twang this song to my class. They all gaze up at me, bleary-eyed, sorrowful bloodhounds.

When I think about how I've been waking up this week, wishing for a wind chill day so I don't have to haul my lazy posterior out of bed so early, I understand my students' feelings. A few students have even gotten whiny/nasty to me, saying they don't want to work, this is boring, why do we have to...????? Let's all just sleep instead! A teacher's first instinct during a first period icy cold depression may be to get crabby or nasty back, muscle them into respect for the class, engage them in a “how-dare-you-defile-this-sacred-learning-zone” tirade.

Today, I am just like, “I know, right?” I proceed to tell them that this weather makes us all want to

hibernate. I let them in on the fact that yesterday after school, I craved carbs and sugar on my “21 day fix” so much so that I stopped by the snack cart and purchased four strawberry Pop Tarts™, (over 800 calories and almost 100% of my allocation of calories for the day) and proceeded to eat them. Then I went home and fell asleep for an hour instead of sweating through my exercise program. One of my crabbiest students poked her head out from under her arm and out of the gray hood over her face, and proudly announced that she actually witnessed me purchasing the four Pop Tarts™ at the snack cart yesterday.

I feel the sputtering tractor that is my first period Reading Essentials class, lurch into drive, and we stumble more smoothly through the rest of the period. So what has just happened that makes this struggling first period class just a little more palatable for all of us?

### **Reinforcement of Growth Mindset... the hard way.**

East Junior High is an 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> grade school in the Wisconsin Rapids School District. For the past 20 years, I have worked as a reading specialist/interventionist at the junior high level. Over the years, East Junior High has seen an increase in the number of students living in poverty, where 40% are currently eligible for free or reduced lunch. Three

---

reading intervention classes at East Junior High strive to meet the Response to Intervention (RTI) goal of keeping students in their regular classrooms for reading instruction. We base our criteria for admittance to reading intervention classes on two requirements: Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) results, which measures reading level in Lexile points, and a grade of C- or lower in English class. We use Scholastic's Read 180® (R180) program which includes the computer component Mindplay Virtual Reading Coach® (MVRC), and a Varied Intervention Program (VIP) class. Along with the technological components of the classes, students also have independent reading time for the books they enjoy.

All three classes have been effective, according to SRI scores used for progress monitoring. Along with the increases in reading level, we want to see skills transfer to the English/Language Arts classes. Initially students' grades may increase to a "C" or better, but it doesn't always stick. In a class of six eighth-grade students serviced last year, one student who graduated from the program had progressed from the "F" she had upon entering the Reading Essentials class, to holding steady at a B- in her 9<sup>th</sup>-grade English class. By October, the other students' 8<sup>th</sup>-grade intervention successes were not reflected in their English/Language Arts grades. I realized that I needed to help the students build a mental attitude of confidence to continue their reading growth in their core area classes, too.

I learned that just because the scores are there, doesn't guarantee that the mindset to utilize that growth also present. A "fixed mindset" is characterized by the belief that one is born with a set amount of intelligence which neither increases nor decreases. "Growth mindset" focuses on learning and effort, rather than being labeled "smart." Students with a growth mindset demonstrate joy in learning growth and look at failure as an opportunity to learn (Dweck, 2015). My responsibility towards these students needed to be more than just increasing their Lexile number, then happily waving them off into the wild blue yonder at the end of the year.

At this writing, I work with 27 reading intervention eighth and ninth graders in five intervention classes. Seven have a primary learning disability,

two are Hispanic, two are African American, and two are Asian English Language Learners. During the fall semester of 2015 I administered the PERTS Mindset Assessment®. The PERTS is a free mindset assessment available online through Stanford University. The results last fall showed that a significant number of my students were in a fixed mindset as opposed to a growth mindset. Many of my students felt that they were internally and academically defective, and that's why they had landed in my class. They seemed to feel that success was not an option, and to try to work towards success was often a waste of their time. (This attitude is epitomized through my conversation with Thomas located later in this article.)

It would be dishonest for a reading professional to simply rest on her laurels because of high scores if there were proof that the real deal of increased reading level was not always carrying over in students' academic reading. There was proof that my students generally didn't feel good about their own capabilities to learn and I needed to study ways to fix this. I needed to send them off with more than a larger Lexile number under their belt.

My research question became: In what ways can I work to increase more than just reading scores? How can I increase growth mindset in my students' attitudes towards their own power in their learning and skill building in the area of reading? Quite simply, in what ways can I plant the seeds to perpetuate the expectation that with hard work, it is possible to experience growth in what they are working towards, and it's something we can celebrate right now?

When I embarked on increasing growth mindset into my classes this fall, my imagined picture of the research and performance were more sophisticated. I imagined most of the work coming from graphs and charts, and teaching students how to look at and consider these graphs and charts, and the same time having them write to prompts where they would consider how they are approaching mindset in their everyday scholastic endeavors. Yes, there is a certain amount of that. To some, it makes a difference. We work that computer. We read that book. We discuss our thoughts. We analyze that text. We write in that journal. We study and discuss our growth.

---

To a number of intervention students however, the numbers, lines and grades do not mean a great deal to them. There are few, if any, stars on *their* charts. By January, my growth mindset project is getting downright messy.

The first semester entailed navigating through all the reports, the graphs, the scores, the grades... ever on the lookout for that glowing horizon of triumph. (What that triumph would like like early on, I am not quite sure.) I looked for higher scores. I looked for happier, more positive student attitudes. We have taken the Mindset Meter® ...we had the conversation about the importance of having a “growth mindset” as opposed to a “fixed mindset.” I conferred weekly with my students. We can all continue growing! There is always some growth to be done. Rah Rah! Some students fly with it! Yes! However, some don’t and this nags at me.

Many of these students come from a place of poverty. For many at-risk students who spend their lives downshifting for survival in the outside world and home life, the growth statistics may just not compute right away nor have a place in difficult living conditions. They have physical and mental survival to think about. Listening to stories of people experiencing success may not positively impact them. Constant success stories may just convince these students that these are the elite worlds beyond their navigation. Sometimes, it’s just easier to sink into journeys of anger. Humans need to be in a place where they can relate. It’s just more comfortable that way. We do have something to impart to these students, however. We can teach them that a seemingly, static, negative world can be affected by their actions. We can teach them that most times, success is born of failure, and everyone experiences failure at one time or another. We can dispel the myth among these students that some people are born to success, and that it may not be their own birthright. Peter Johnston (2004) refers to having the power to create and affect our own story as a sense of “agency.” I’m finding a correlation exists between some students’ lack of success and their self-perception of their own inability to succeed in reading comprehension and vocabulary skills. This became evident through my conversation with Thomas.

### **Script of an early conference with my student, Thomas (pseudonym):**

Mrs. N: “Here, can you try to grow by increasing this score, maybe by 10 points in three months? You can do it, I know you can!”

Thomas: “No, I can’t do it. I keep telling you I’m a retard. Why else would I be in this class?”

Mrs. N: “Okay, first of all we don’t say “retard” in here.”

Thomas: “Okay, STUPID, then!”

Mrs. N: “Not true. Now, is there any evidence of your potential answer in the passage?”

Thomas: “I don’t know.”

Mrs. N: “You aren’t looking. Are there any keywords in the paragraph that show evidence of happiness?”

Thomas: “I **am** looking, and I **don’t** know!”

Mrs. N: “What if you **did** know?” (This is supposed to work for elementary school students)

Thomas: “Well, I don’t know, so obviously... I DON’T KNOW!!!” (Okay, doesn’t work for junior high. Note to self.)

I stop the conversation. We are spinning our wheels. Teacher/Researcher is hitting frustration mode. Thomas’ body language shows he is downright miserable. He slumps in his chair. He reads with his forehead slumped into his hand to the point that I wonder if he even has his eyes open.

Like Thomas, there are students who come to the table, hood over their face, head buried under their armpit, hidden earplugs channeling Wiz Khalifa to drown out the world and the annoying teacher voice in this annoying intervention with a subject I-hate- worse- than- anything- in- the- whole -world- and-makes-me-feel-stupid- but- am- forced- to -work-at- 47 -minutes -every- day-in-front-of-people. These are the ones to whom I told my account of yesterday’s diet/clean eating program failure. I reach out and tap them on the shoulder, coax them out of their sad-eyed morning hermit crab shell of perceived failure. For students who are unfamiliar with agency in their own lives, a teacher can model it for them by sharing her own accounts of failure, and her

---

own resiliency in the face of it. I think to myself, *Ahhhhhhh, Grasshopper, for every sunrise on the horizon, there needs first to occur a sunset.*

A week later, by accident, I get my sunrise. After the Pop Tart™ incident I'm noticing the need to incorporate **different** stories into the mix in my teacher talk with students. Stories that focus on humbling me. Anecdotes that don't show me, the teacher, in the best light. Those are the kinds that grab students who so far seem just out of reach. Another conversation with Thomas takes place in front of the class this time. We are embarking on the Jack London (Scholastic, 2006) classic short story, "To Build a Fire." This story, in true London fashion, shows a man succumbing to the 75-degree-below-zero weather because of his lack of humility and willingness to learn from an old-timer's advice and adjust his actions accordingly.

Mrs. N: "We are going to be reading *To Build a Fire*. Look at the picture. Let's read the information on Jack London together."

Mrs. N and class read together.

Mrs. N: "So, we know that Jack London spent a lot of time, where?" (Everyone says, "Yukon.") "Good. Many of Jack London's stories take place in the Yukon. The Yukon is in Alaska. I think."

Thomas: "Ummm, Mrs. Nicklaus? The Yukon is in Canada."

The first paragraph of the story proves Thomas correct. I pause in our reading and announce that sometimes I learn more from my students than I did in teacher school. Thomas looks down at his book and says nothing. But I can see a glow in his eyes.

Thomas is proven correct again a week later in another teacher error. We are speaking about substantial libraries, and I tell the students that I remember walking up the steps to the New York Public Library. I excitedly reveal it to be the same place where the "Rocky running up the steps" scene was filmed! Ahh, no. Thomas corrects me yet again. The scene was filmed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He knows because he is originally from there. Students agree with him, vigorously nodding heads. I research it in front of them on the Smartboard™, and pull up information. Sure enough! One of Philly's

claims to fame is that it is the place where the famous Rocky scene was filmed. Thomas is correct about that, also. Twice in a period of 2 weeks, Thomas is proven smarter than the teacher in geography.

I notice Thomas standing (and sitting) a little bit straighter after that. A week later, he draws my attention to a weekly quiz he passed for the first time in his English class. Earlier he had chalked the vocabulary quizzes up to an assignment he would just never pass. These are the students who teach me that I sometimes need to share experiences in and out of school with navigating the struggles of everyday life because, "Hmmm, if she can do it..." Sharing my own successes and growth motivates some students. Sharing my failures, however, such as my lack of geographical knowledge, or my Strawberry Pop Tart™ binging, diet/exercise failure caught in the act by one of my own intervention students, reaches additional students, like Thomas. Teachers need to share moments of weakness and show students that even teachers can learn from their students. Sometimes the sage on the stage can fail just like everyone else. This is powerful for our students because they see that my failure does not make me helpless. Quite the opposite: my failure empowers me to become stronger.

This is where agency comes in: I am modeling that I can go to work to learn new information. I will look to others to help me. I will not give up *forever* during moments of weakness. I will start over again the next day. I will use what I learn from failure to create strategies for success. I will not let the 75-degree-below-zero weather in the Yukon (in Canada) find me unprepared. I will write my own story. I will keep plodding along, albeit slowly at times. I will share that the most fun about failure is the adrenaline rush of learning something new, or the excitement of finally doing something that I thought I never could. **We** will keep plodding through the icy cold, gloomy terrain, sliding down the hill, landing knee deep in the icy spring, afterwards building the fire together to get our frozen blood going, and to bring ourselves to life again, together. The warming sun comes out eventually and the traction created will help us regain our footing on our trek for the few points of that success we hunger for in our growth mindset. Sometimes it's a little at a time, sometimes it's a lot at a time.

---

Within a month, Thomas brings his “F” to a D-. He scores an “A” on another literature test in his language arts class. He tells me he is studying for the first time. I also begin a “bell ringer” journal activity, in which I begin class with a prompt like, “What is something you are proud of this week?,” for students to write about at the beginning of class, and underneath, I automatically include my own response to the writing. If students tell me they have nothing to write, I invite them to copy my own response into their journals. Boys right away learn that they don’t want to copy my writing about about things such as how they are “proud of finishing the crocheting of a bunny rabbit for my daughter,” so the excuses quickly disappear. After a month and a half, students begin actually asking to share their writings. Prompts are no longer met with silence and a “let’s get this over with” attitude. Conversation begins to flow from that also. This practice carries over into my conferences with students. .

By the end of January, five students are dismissed from the program because of passing English/ Language Arts grades, and grade level Lexile scores. This larger number is unexpected. Usually, one or two students may be dismissed before the end of the year, but five is not the norm. Although no longer in the class, three out of the five students continue to come in and put stars on their charts to signify A’s and B’s on vocabulary tests. I encourage this so I can keep track of their progress. In February, I start a parent blog with information on reading and study strategies, along with celebrations of student achievement. This is a big step in my own learning and study of strategies to get parents involved in our conversation on growth. In March, Thomas brings his Lexile score past a 100-point increase. He is so proud, he asks me to make two copies of his growth report so he can give one to his mother, and one to his Language Arts teacher.

At this writing, I have two months left of the school year and the action research. What have I taken away from this so far?

There is great power in our sharing our stories of growth. As an aside, my athletic students have added a great deal to our stories with accounts of their own growth in their respective sports. Just a week ago,

some of our quieter boys came out of their shells and impressed us with their knowledge of automotive vocabulary, and their work at home in the automotive world. I continue to look for opportunities to bring these hidden gems of our students to the forefront, as well as for practice to keep our conversations on growth and learning how to grow. Our mixtures of conversations and reading skills practice behave like lava in a lava lamp; they meld together, into new shapes and products and gifts to our learning. I, as teacher, began keeping a journal of the learning, and later I incorporate the products into new lessons.

And we continue to grow towards the warmth and sun.

This is how it will be for us, because we will keep each other honest, humble, and work at learning to grow, together. We will continue to work at growing our own stories and they will be good ones.

## References

- Brillstein, B., Peppiatt, F., and Aylesworth, J. (1969). Gloom, Despair and Agony on Me. [Recorded by Roy Clark and Buck Owens]. On *Hee-Haw* [Television Show]. Nashville, TN: CBS Television Network.
- Dweck, C. (2015). The secret to raising smart kids. *Scientific American Mind*, 36–43.
- Johnston, P. H. (2004). *Choice words: How our language affects children’s learning*. Portland, Me.: Stenhouse.
- Scholastic. (2006) Retelling of “To Build a Fire,” by Jack London. *Read 180 Next Generation rBook Flex I*, 154–163

## About the Author

*Mary Beth Nicklaus began her career in the early 1990s working as a High School English teacher in Wisconsin, and a reading enrichment teacher on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Her writings about her reservation teaching experience have been included in such publications as Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English Journal, Scholastic Instructor Magazine, and the teaching methods textbook, Teaching English in Middle and Secondary Schools, For the past 20 years she has worked as a reading specialist and interventionist at East Junior High in Wisconsin Rapids. She can be reached at marybeth.nicklaus@wrps.net*

# WONDERFUL WISCONSIN CHILDREN'S AUTHORS





# Sandra Nichols Invites us to Meet Jane Kelley, Wisconsin Author of Middle School Fiction and Nonfiction



Not everyone grows up wanting to be a writer. Jane Kelley didn't. But she did grow up loving books, and this love of books and stories led her down a life path and into the world of writing. Jane started to take her writing seriously after she

and her nine-year-old daughter began sharing their writing with each other. Jane's first book, *Nature Girl* (2010), the story of a young girl who heads out on her own along the Appalachian Trail, came from this nurturing relationship. Jane was born

in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where she spent many happy hours enjoying the woodland next to her home, yet most of Jane's adult years were spent in Brooklyn, New York. Here is where she wrote her next three books *The Girl Behind the Glass* (2011); *The Desperate Adventures of Zeno and Alya* (2013),



which was a Publisher Weekly recommended book; and *The Book of Dares for Lost Friends* (2015), which earned a Kirkus starred review. Jane was chosen as the 2013 Thurber House Children's Writer in Residence and has become one of four authors (who write under the collective pseudonym, E. F. Abbott) for the new BASED ON A TRUE STORY series. It is funny how life always draws us back to what we love. She has recently moved back to Wisconsin and lives in Mequon where once again, she is spending many happy hours in the woodland near home.

**Sandra:** Hi Jane, I want to first thank you for sharing your time, experiences, and insights with Wisconsin State Reading Association members.

Your first book, *Nature Girl*, was published in 2010, yet I know you began the book several years earlier. What inspired you to write this



---

story of a young somewhat self-centered girl named Megan who sets off alone on the Appalachian Trail?

**Jane:** I spent my childhood in Mequon, Wisconsin, where I enjoyed the freedom to roam through the woods behind my house. My daughter was growing up in Brooklyn, New York. I wanted her to have the same experiences that I did, so one summer we rented a house in Vermont. I quickly discovered placing a city girl in the country had lots of comic potential. I should clarify that my daughter was not miserable like Megan. In fact, Megan is more like me when I was a child. I often felt grumpy and misunderstood, and overwhelmed by feelings I couldn't control—until I found comfort in the woods. And so, in my novel, my character Megan learned self-reliance and a real appreciation for nature. She found herself by getting lost in the woods.

**Sandra:** What do you want the reader to take away from Megan's story?

**Jane:** I want readers to be inspired by Megan's improbable journey. She starts out as someone burdened by her "yucky" inner voice, which reminds her that she can't do anything. But she learns, as my character Trail Blaze Betty says, that the only way to fail is to quit. I also want readers to share my appreciation for nature. Its beauty is soothing and inspirational. Being in nature also provides a healthy perspective. We are not alone in the world—we are connected to other living things.

**Sandra:** You mention in an interview with Darlene Beck-Jacobson (Beck-Jacobson, July 31, 2015) that you took your daughter's advice for *Nature Girl* which led you to rewrite the story. Can you elaborate a bit on what your daughter advised you and what you ended up doing in the rewrite for *Nature Girl*?

**Jane:** My daughter was nine at the time—the perfect age to read a middle-grade novel! That summer, we were both writing in our notebooks. At the end of each session, she would eagerly grab my notebook to read what I had written that morning. I was thrilled by her enthusiastic response. Then one day, she wasn't interested. I panicked. I asked her what happened. She told me that I had run out of story. She was absolutely right. Megan couldn't just wander around lost in the woods—she needed

to have a goal. I decided that she should hike part of the Appalachian Trail to meet her friend Lucy. My daughter also told me how to fix the ending. In early versions, after the friends were reunited, I had Megan, who was now mature and selfless, accept that she couldn't be with Lucy. My daughter said that after the reader had suffered with Megan on the trail, I had to let the friends be together for more than five minutes. Of course she was right. And so I learned that one of the great pleasures of writing fiction is that I can provide happy endings.

**Sandra:** You obviously value your daughter's opinion. In fact, it seems as though she is the reader you write for. In his book, *On Writing: The Memoir of a Craft*, Stephen King (2000) stated that all writers should write for an imaginary or real reader. When you wrote *Nature Girl*, your daughter was nine years old. Now that she is older and away at college, how has this changed your writer/reader relationship and your approach to story or character development?

**Jane:** My daughter is still one of my early readers—when she isn't studying for finals or working on her BA thesis. She is a superb analyst and a talented writer herself. Her critical advice remains valuable, even though her personal problems are more adult. (Although she tells me that college kids can still act like middle-schoolers.)

I haven't wanted to write for teenagers. Middle-grade readers are at such an important time of transition. They retain some innocence as they begin to grapple with complex issues. With middle-grade novels, I can keep elements of fantasy in my realistic stories.

Stephen King is right, however. Writers should write for a particular reader. As a beginning writer, I was too focused on showing what I could do instead of sharing a story with someone else. It was extremely helpful to have a young reader in the house. Now that my daughter is older, I've been lucky to get to know other young readers—some of whom are boys. I keep them in my pocket as my touchstones. I constantly ask myself, what would Eliza think? Would Owen be interested in this? Books need readers. I don't consider my books to be finished until someone has responded to them.



**Sandra:** Your second book, *The Girl Behind the Glass* (2011), is a fascinating story of love and family that involves a ghost and a mystery. I can't help but wonder if you were interested in the supernatural when you were younger. Tell us what inspired this storyline and the ghost character, Ruth?

**Jane:** I never had any experiences with actual ghosts, but as a child I was very aware that objects were haunted by their former owners. An inscription in an old book, a burn mark on a bed frame, a broken doll—all conjured up stories.

My initial idea for *The Girl Behind the Glass* was to have twins invent a ghost to play a trick on their older sister. The twist was that the ghost would be real. As I thought more about the ghost, the character and the story deepened. What had happened to Ruth? Why was she stuck in the house? Who had she been when she was alive? What would happen to anyone left alone for years with just bats and spiders for companions? After several drafts, I hit upon the idea of telling the story from the point of view of the ghost. The character of Ruth really came alive for me when I decided that she would love books. Her favorite would be *The Bastable Children* by E Nesbit (1929), my mother's favorite book when she was a girl. In fact, I have her well-loved copy. Haunted, in this case, in a very good way, because underneath my mother's name and address is another name ... "Ruth."

**Sandra:** Each of your first four books features animals in one role or another. In *Nature Girl*, Megan travels with her little dog, Arp. In *Girl Behind the Glass*, the ghost Ruth protects the bats in the attic of her family's home.

But the animals in your third and fourth books take on a different role. They are characters within the story offering a different point of view. I love the parrot, Zeno, with all his self-centeredness in *The Desperate Adventures of Zeno and Alya* (2013). In the opening chapter, Zeno does not understand that his owner, Dr. Agard, has just died and is indignant towards Agard's assistant.

"Get that bird out of here," the assistant shouted.

*That bird?* The assistant should have learned Zeno's name by now. Dr. Agard had told the assistant often enough.

"Zeno," Zeno squawked. "Booful, briyant Zeno" (7).

Mau, the feral cat in *The Book of Dares for Lost Friends* (2015) weaves the characters of the book together as subtly as a cat weaves in and out of a room of visitors. Throughout the book, Mau sees what others are unable to.

But the other girl, the one called Lanora, was different. Mau spent a lot of time secretly observing her. Lanora wasn't a cat. She had no tail under her brightly colored skirt. And yet there was something about Lanora that Mau found to be familiar. Perhaps it was the intensity with which Lanora did absolutely nothing (3-4).

Both Zeno and Mau are fully developed personalities, centrally placed within the story. What led to this shift from minor object to supporting character for the animals in your stories?



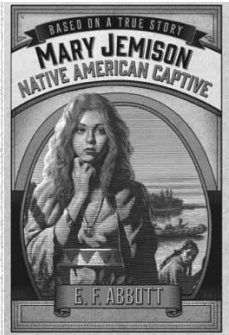
**Jane:** A young reader once asked why I always had animals in my stories. I like to include them because they can help connect us to nature, which is a theme I like to explore.

In my recent books, animals have become more important because of Zeno. I wrote *The Desperate Adventures of Zeno and Alya* because of my obsession with African gray parrots. I had read about the research Dr. Pepperberg is doing on their cognitive abilities. Her book *Alex and Me* contains so much insight into the minds of the birds. I was fascinated by how smart they were and their distinct personalities. Alex the parrot liked to be the smartest one in the room. Dr. Pepperberg made use of his emotions to teach him. I took a few creative liberties with my own parrot, Zeno. But I did my best to be true to what an intelligent parrot might actually think—and feel.

After writing about birds, I had to write about a cat. We live with a cat named Blackberry. Like many cat lovers, I have spent hours wondering what Blackberry is thinking. She acts as if she is a direct descendant to the Egyptian gods. She wouldn't have been satisfied with being a pet. And so I gave the cat

Mau a more important part to play. She embodies the mystery and the magic that the story needed. And since she has no owner, she can connect the different strands of the story. From a purely technical point of view, I needed

Mau to describe the Tasman scenes because if I got inside his head, I would have had to reveal his painful secret.



**Sandra:** Your latest book, *Mary Kemison: Native American Captive* (2016), is your first non-fiction book. I

enjoyed reading this book, partly because I was a history teacher for many years, but mainly because you skillfully bring to life Mary Kemison, her emotional and physical struggles as a captive, while at the same time creating empathy for the Seneca people who adopted her. How did you get involved with this book project? And, can you describe what it was like working on non-fiction as opposed to fiction? What challenges did you face writing non-fiction and how did you overcome them?

**Jane:** This book is part of the new series **BASED ON A TRUE STORY**. Four authors were given the challenge of writing a story about a real person. I was assigned Mary Kemison. She lived during the French and Indian war, when there was so much violence and fear. After Mary was kidnapped, the Seneca tribe chose not to seek revenge upon Mary, but to adopt her. I can't imagine living with one's enemy. And yet, I did have to imagine it to write about it.

The greatest challenge I faced was how to bring the complexities of Mary and the Seneca to life. I was acutely aware of my limitations, as a person of a different time and heritage. I strive to be respectful of all my characters, whether they are ghosts, parrots, or pesky little brothers. In this book, it was even more important to tell the story fairly. I couldn't ignore the violence of the time. All I could do was try to put that violence in a context. And hope that my efforts to describe the life of the Seneca would be able to communicate the riches of their culture.

This to me is one of the best parts about being a writer—and a reader. Books are one of the best

ways to increase our understanding of all people and situations.

I had always been a little shy about tackling historical fiction. But in reality, I do a lot of research for all the books I write. I love learning new things. And I know that many young readers do too. It's so gratifying when a nugget of information enhances the emotions of the story. For example, the Seneca planted corn, beans, and squash together to help them grow. They referred to them as the three sisters, which turned out to be a lovely image for Mary and her Seneca sisters.

**Sandra:** I can't wait to read what you're working on next. Can you give us a little description of it? (Consider this a 'teaser'.)

**Jane:** I'm working on two books that will both be published in May of 2017. They are about a boy who has too much imagination. He calls himself Clint McCool, even though his real name is Walter. His brain flashes get him in and then out of trouble. In one book, he tries to be in a monster movie being filmed on his street. In the other, his plans to be a super hero are ruined when the water main breaks. In both, he learns the valuable lesson that inspiration isn't enough—he needs some self-control to really save the day.

**Sandra:** Thanks, again, for spending some time with us. But, before you go, could you share some writing advice for all the middle school and high school writers out there?

**Jane:** Thank you for giving me the chance to share more about what I do. Your questions were so thoughtful and well researched.

I'm so grateful that I have the opportunity to use my imagination and my curiosity to discover more about our wonderful world. My advice to writers is:

- Be patient. It's okay if it takes you a long time to get it right.
- Be persistent. As Trail Blaze Betty says, the only way to fail is to quit.
- Be passionate. Your readers will love what you love.
- And READ!

---

Jane Kelly enjoys doing school visits and interacting with her young readers. She can be reached at her Web site “Jane Kelley” at <http://www.janekelley-books.com/Welcome.html>.

### **Jane Kelley’s Books:**

(2010). *Nature Girl*. New York: Random House.

(2011). *The Girl Behind the Glass*. New York: Random House.

(2013). *The Desperate Adventures of Zeno and Alya*. New York: Feiwel & Friends.

(2015). *The Book of Dares for Lost Friends*. New York: Feiwel & Friends.

E. F. Abbott (pseudonym). (2016). *Mary Jemison: Native American Captive: Based on a True Story*. New York: Feiwel & Friends.

### **About the Interviewer:**

*Sandra Nichols has taught writing at Mid-State Technical College for the past 10 years. She is an active member of Wisconsin State Reading Association’s Children’s Literature Committee and the Society of Children’s Book Writers International (SCBWI). Ms. Nichols can be reached at [sandra.nichols@mstc.edu](mailto:sandra.nichols@mstc.edu)*

# BOOK REVIEW



---

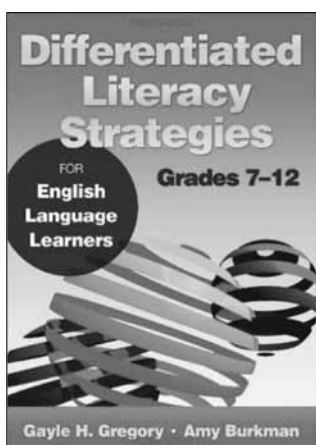
# Differentiated Literacy Strategies for English Language Learners Grades 7–12

Gayle H. Gregory & Amy Burkman

(2012). California: Corwin.

Reviewed by Lara M. Christoun, EdD

Assistant Professor of Education, Carthage College



Authors Gayle Gregory and Amy Burkman collectively offer an invaluable array of expertise ranging from K-12 instruction and administration, university instruction, curriculum consultant experience, instructional leadership, brain-compatible

learning, and how to effectively use data to differentiate instructional and assessment strategies. Gayle Gregory and Amy Burkman also co-authored *Differentiated Literacy Strategies for English Language Learners, Grades K–6* (2011). In addition, Gayle Gregory is the author of multiple educational resources some of which include the following: *Data Driven Differentiation in the Standards-Based Classroom*, Second Edition (2014, with Lin Kuzmich), *Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All*, Third Edition (2013, with Carolyn Chapman), *Differentiated Instructional Strategies Professional Learning Guide: One Size Doesn't Fit All*, Third Edition (2013).

Gregory and Burkman's latest co-authored work is entitled *Differentiated Literacy Strategies for English Language Learners Grades 7–12* (2012). It provides a multitude of ways to practically engage

adolescent English Language Learners (ELLs) in all stages of literacy development. This adaptable resource is organized across eight literacy domains that holistically and practically describe how educators can support and engage adolescent ELLs that function at or behind academic grade level expectations. Several highlights of this work include: how to create a comfortable and appropriate climate best suited for accelerated literacy learning, how to get to know the literacy learner, technological and innovative literacy strategies, and how to manage instruction in the differentiated literacy classroom.

From the onset, Gregory and Burkman pragmatically provide teachers with appropriate, practical strategies to close the achievement gap. They understand that time, resources and support are in short supply and believe that the key to closing the gap involves the acquisition of skills and demonstrations of learning that clearly reflect a high degree of literacy (p.3). As such, they detail how and why academic learning involves a depth of thinking and expression of thought that is required for academic success but also survival in a fast-paced twenty-first century global economy.

The authors address and clearly explain the five levels of language proficiency by providing a detailed description of each proficiency level that includes what students are able to do in terms of their ability to listen, speak, read, and write. The descriptors are easy to read and should prove helpful for teachers who need a quick snapshot of what students can

---

produce with regard to each student's proficiency level across the four learning domains.

As I read through the eight frameworks addressed in this work, it is apparent that the four literacy competencies addressed by the authors are the keys to academic success. Their literacy strategies revolve around these competencies: functional, content-area, technological, and innovative. The book addresses a number of easy to use strategies and visual examples that address a multitude of student needs. Gregory and Burkman stress that learning strategies designed to increase student learning should be centered on student struggle and attributes. The authors also clearly detail how brain research is needed to better understand how students acquire literacy. For instance, the authors note that mastering oral language is essential in building formal literacy skills. They define and describe nine factors linked to how the brain learns. They also address the holistic needs of students by highlighting a "basic toolkit" for teachers that address ELL academic need and how teachers can support racial and cultural diversity in their classrooms.

This book's layout is very user-friendly and includes 100 ways to engage adolescent ELLs. As an example, there are numerous graphic organizers that are adaptable across disciplines and are appealing to

adolescent learners. Several themes or examples of these organizers include: building blocks of a story, delving into details, story analysis, problems and solutions, anticipation guides, and strategies to engage learners before, during and after reading. These templates are easily adaptable for all learners including the varying ELL proficiency levels.

As one who is supportive of ELL interests, I was glad to note that Gregory and Burkman stress the need to engage and support ELLs both academically and emotionally. They describe how emotions are critical to the learning process and include research detailing how emotions interfere with students' learning. In their words, "how a student feels about being at school will impact his or her success" (p. 41). A final "take-a-way" for this book review was summed up well by Gregory and Burkman. "Literacy is the gateway to eliminating prejudice and inviting invention and reinvention of our lives and our students' lives" (p. 208).

## References

- Gregory, G. H. & Burkman, A. (2012). *Differentiated literacy strategies for English Language Learners: Grades 7-12*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

# Become a Reading Professional: Join the Wisconsin State Reading Association!

The primary mission of the Wisconsin State Reading Association is to promote excellence in reading. WSRA's goals are:

- **Communication:** Provide leadership in addressing issues and trends in reading and language arts to inform educators, families and community.
- **Membership:** Develop and strengthen an active and diverse membership.
- **Partnership:** Create partnerships that foster literacy in the home, school, community and workplace.
- **Professional Growth:** Encourage professional growth opportunities for families, educators, administrators and community members.
- **Research:** Promote and disseminate research findings that will strengthen and support the best practices for instruction in the communication arts.

As a WSRA member...

- You will receive *WSRA Update*, WSRA's bimonthly report of upcoming events, special projects, Wired Wednesday webinars, and association, legislative, and DPI news.
- You will receive three *WSRA Journals*, themed issues which address current topics and present education strategies for classroom instruction in reading and language arts.
- You will receive notification of WSRA conventions and institutes which you may attend at reduced rates.
- You may join one of WSRA's committees through which our goals are accomplished.
- You will stay current with trends in the field, grow professionally, gain new insights into reading instruction, and meet new colleagues who share your interests and concerns.



**Go to [wsra.org](http://wsra.org)**

## WSRA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Today's Date _____		_____ Ashland Bayfield Counties 55045	
First Name _____	Initial _____	Last Name _____	_____ Central Wisconsin 55050
Address _____			_____ Door County 55075
City _____ State _____ Zip + 4 _____			_____ Eau Claire 55100
Place of Employment/School District _____			_____ Fox Valley 55125
Duties, Title & Level/Dept. _____			_____ Greater Bayland 55150
Home Phone (____) _____ Work Phone (____) _____			_____ Headwaters 55200
E-mail _____			_____ Hidden Valley 55210
Are you a member of International Reading Association? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			_____ Interlake 55250
Are you a member of a local reading council? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If yes, check name(s) →			_____ Lake Superior 55300
Send me information about: <input type="checkbox"/> WSRA Committees			_____ Madison Area 55350
Information about your local reading council can be found at <a href="http://wsra.org">wsra.org</a>			_____ Mid-East Area 55400
			_____ Midwest Wisconsin 55450
			_____ Milwaukee Area 55500
			_____ Muirland 55512
			_____ Northeast Wisconsin 55525
			_____ Northwest Wisconsin 55550
			_____ Racine-Kenosha 55750
			_____ Rock River 55825
			_____ St. Croix Valley 55800
			_____ South Kettle Moraine 55850
			_____ Southern Lakes 55860
			_____ Washington Ozaukee 55875
			_____ Waukesha County 55900
			_____ Wis. Professors of Reading 56703
			_____ Wolf River 55950



☐ Renewal ☐ New Your membership expiration date appears on your mailing label.

Membership is for one year from the date of joining • Dues may be tax deductible. Some of the information provided will be in the WSRA Membership Directory.

You may join or renew your membership via:

**MAIL:** WSRA MEMBERSHIP • 909 Rock Ridge Road • Burlington, WI 53105-7230  
Please make checks payable to WSRA for \$37.00

**ONLINE:** Visit [wsra.org](http://wsra.org) and use your credit card



## WISCONSIN STATE READING ASSOCIATION PRESENTS

# NORTHWOODS LEARNING RETREAT

Creating Passionate Learners

July 14-15, 2016

Featuring  
Kim Brown  
Marci Glaus  
Joyce Uglow  
Kathy Galvin

**Thursday Registration/Breakfast: 8:00 a.m. • Institute: 8:30 a.m. – 3:15 p.m.**  
**Friday Breakfast/Networking: 8:00 a.m. • Institute: 8:30 a.m. – 3:15 p.m.**  
**Tomahawk Elementary School, Tomahawk Wisconsin**

**T**he role of all classroom teachers is multifaceted. Regardless of the content or age group being taught, student engagement and motivation must be a priority. This institute will integrate the research behind the theories and give several practical strategies with research-based guidelines to follow. Learn how to enhance your teaching to become more effective.

#### **Become more knowledgeable about**

- Student engagement
- Techniques for teaching listening
- Effective writing instruction
- Accessing and comprehending complex texts

**Keynote Presentation:** *Creating Passionate Learners*, Kim Brown

**Session 1:** *The Next Steps in Creating Passionate Learners*, Kim Brown

**Session 2:** *Characteristics of Effective Writing Instruction*, Marci Glaus

**Session 3:** *Listen Up! Listen to Learn*, Joyce Uglow

**Session 4:** *Accessing and Comprehending Complex Texts*, Kathy Galvin

#### **Registration Information**

Registration is only available online. The registration deadline is July 5, 2016. You will also find the institute schedule, session descriptions, information on lodging, audience, Wisconsin Educator Standards, and the WSRA refund policy at this site. One credit is being offered through Carthage College. Contact Sharon Tilton at stilton44@yahoo.com for details.

Questions? Contact Joyce Uglow at 262-514-1450, wsra@wsra.org.

For more information on this institute or to register online, go to:

**wsra.org > Calendar > July 2016 > July 14 Northwoods Retreat ~ Creating Passionate Learners**

#### **Cost to Attend**

\$110 WSRA Member

\$150 Nonmember

\$40 Full-time Undergraduate Student

\$37 Membership Fee



# NORTHWOODS LEARNING RETREAT



Kim Brown, Ph.D.

## **Keynote Presentation:** *Creating Passionate Learners*, Kim Brown

Student engagement is a defining factor for student success. However, a lack of consensus on the definition of “engagement” makes this difficult. But it can be made easier with a common engagement literacy – a simple understanding of how to maximize engagement in any school. Come learn about the four beliefs that will lead to emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement.

Kim Brown is a PhD candidate at Cardinal Stritch University with her doctoral dissertation focused on student engagement and autonomy supportive classrooms. In the past 23 years, she has served as a classroom teacher, elementary principal, assistant director of special education, director of early learning, and currently serves as the director of learning and communication.

### **Session 1**

#### *The Next Steps in Creating Passionate Learners*

Kim Brown

Now that you know the beliefs in the Conceptual Framework of Creating Passionate Learners of growth mindset, internal dialogue, self determination, and culture, take a deeper dive into building student's engagement and the skills and dispositions students will utilize.

### **Session 2**

#### *Characteristics of Effective Writing Instruction*

Marci Glaus

Writing is a complex, recursive, and often messy process. The focus of this presentation is to explore what some of the research and theory says about characteristics of effective writing instruction and the writing process. Wisconsin writers from a variety of contexts are featured as they share their writing processes to help inform educators and students about writing as a process and how writing for authentic purposes and audiences, when possible, promotes stated goals related to college and career readiness, and so much more. Sharing our own writing processes or those of other Wisconsin writers creates space to think about where within a writing process we can explicitly teach strategies for writing based on task, purpose, audience, and student needs.

### **Session 3**

#### *Listen Up!: Listen to Learn*

Joyce Uglow

Expecting students to listen unfortunately does not guarantee that they will become good listeners and subsequently excellent communicators. It is known that of all of the communication skills that humans acquire, general listening comes first. Moreover, we know that 45% of our communication time is spent in listening activities in school and in the work place. However, purposeful, directed, and specific techniques for listening are rarely - if ever - taught. Let's engage in the instructional emphasis that will help us to rethink what we do, how we teach, and redefine our expectations for students. Let's listen up and give listening the attention that it deserves to facilitate listening to learn.

### **Session 4**

#### *Accessing and Comprehending Complex Texts*

Kathy Galvin

The Wisconsin Academic Standards make it explicitly clear our students are expected to engage regularly with complex texts. We all know that simply assigning difficult texts will not ensure that students learn at high levels. As classroom teachers, how do we provide students access to these complex texts? How do we build bridges between the reader and the text? Join Kathy Galvin as she coaches participants in intentionally designing and delivering scaffolded, guided instructional practices that are intentional and targeted at improving student learning.

**Audience:** Educators, Reading Specialists, Coaches, Administrators, Directors of Curriculum

**Standards:** T1, T3, T4, T7, A1, A2

**Registration Deadline:** July 5, 2016

Tomahawk Elementary School is located at 1048 E King Rd, Tomahawk, Wisconsin

## **Institute Schedule**

### **July 14, 2016**

Registration and Breakfast:

8:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m.

Keynote: 8:30 a.m. - 9:15 a.m.

Session 1: 9:15 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Lunch: 11:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Session 2: 12:15 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.

### **July 15, 2016**

Check-in and Breakfast:

8:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m.

Session 3: 8:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Lunch: 11:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Session 4: 12:15 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.

Wrap Up and Reflection

**Lodging:** Visit [WSRA.org](http://WSRA.org) for lodging information

**Credit:** One credit is being offered through Carthage College. Contact Sharon Tilton at [stilton44@yahoo.com](mailto:stilton44@yahoo.com) for details.

For information on the WSRA refund policy and to register online with a credit card, go to [wsra.org](http://wsra.org).

**Questions?** Contact Joyce Uglow at 262-514-1450, [wsra@wsra.org](mailto:wsra@wsra.org)

## NOTES

[illegible]



## **WSRA**

909 Rock Ridge Road  
Burlington, WI 53105