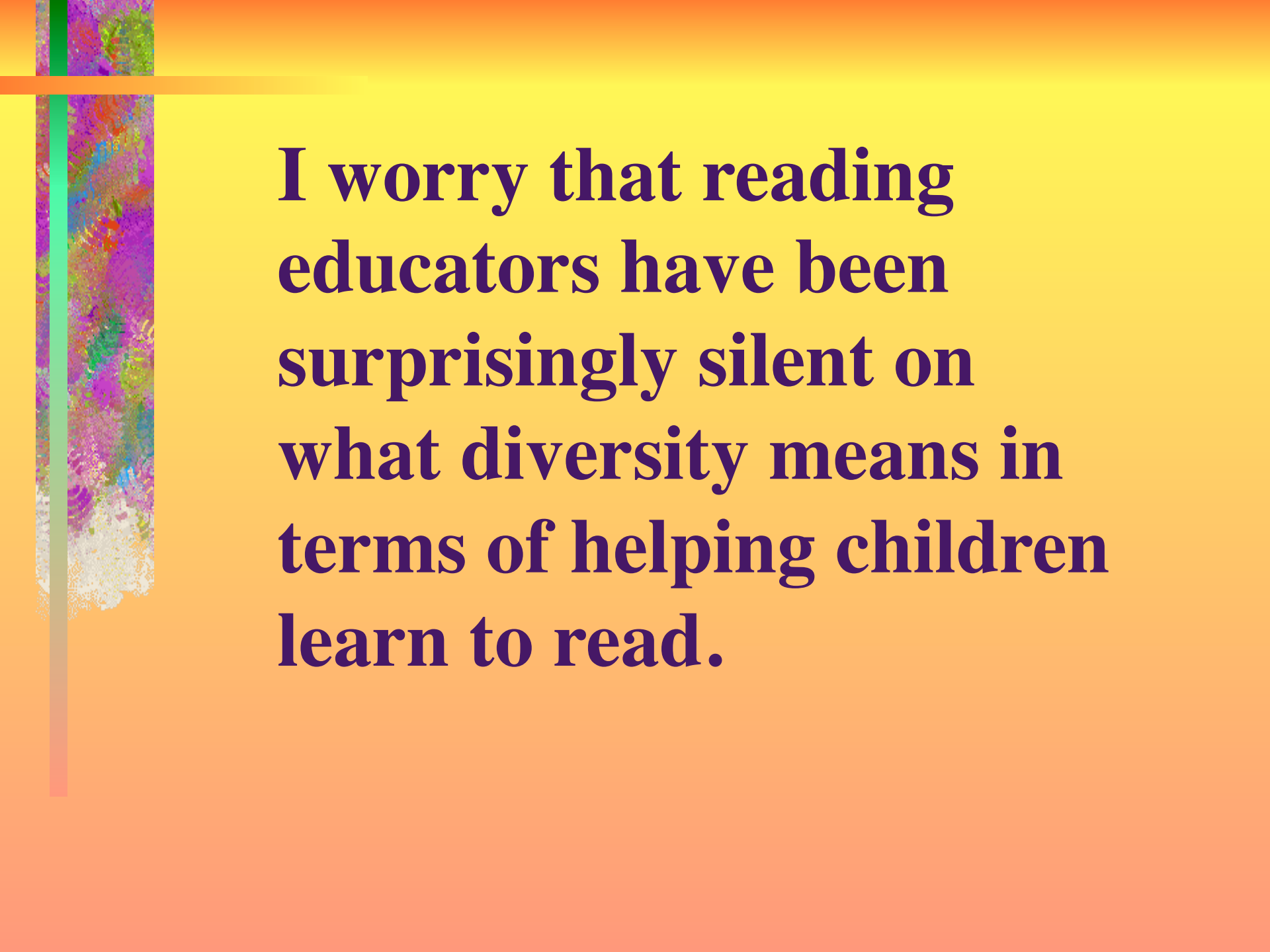





Reading Lessons from Martin: A Case Study of One African American Student

Catherine Compton-Lilly

University of Wisconsin Madison



I worry that reading educators have been surprisingly silent on what diversity means in terms of helping children learn to read.



Over half the students
in our nation's schools
are children of color.

Yet, we have been silent
on what this might
mean.




**I sometimes hear statements
from teachers such as:**

**“I don’t see my students as
black, white, or brown. They
are all children who need my
help.”**




Colorblindness

Feagin calls the “colorblindness” a “sincere fiction” because Whites truly believe that their views are consistent with ideals of fairness and equity.




“Sincere fictions are on some level quite insincere, operating as a cover for unacknowledged racism and as a self-deceptive screen to protect a status quo from which Whites as a group benefit.” (Bell, 2002, p. 4)



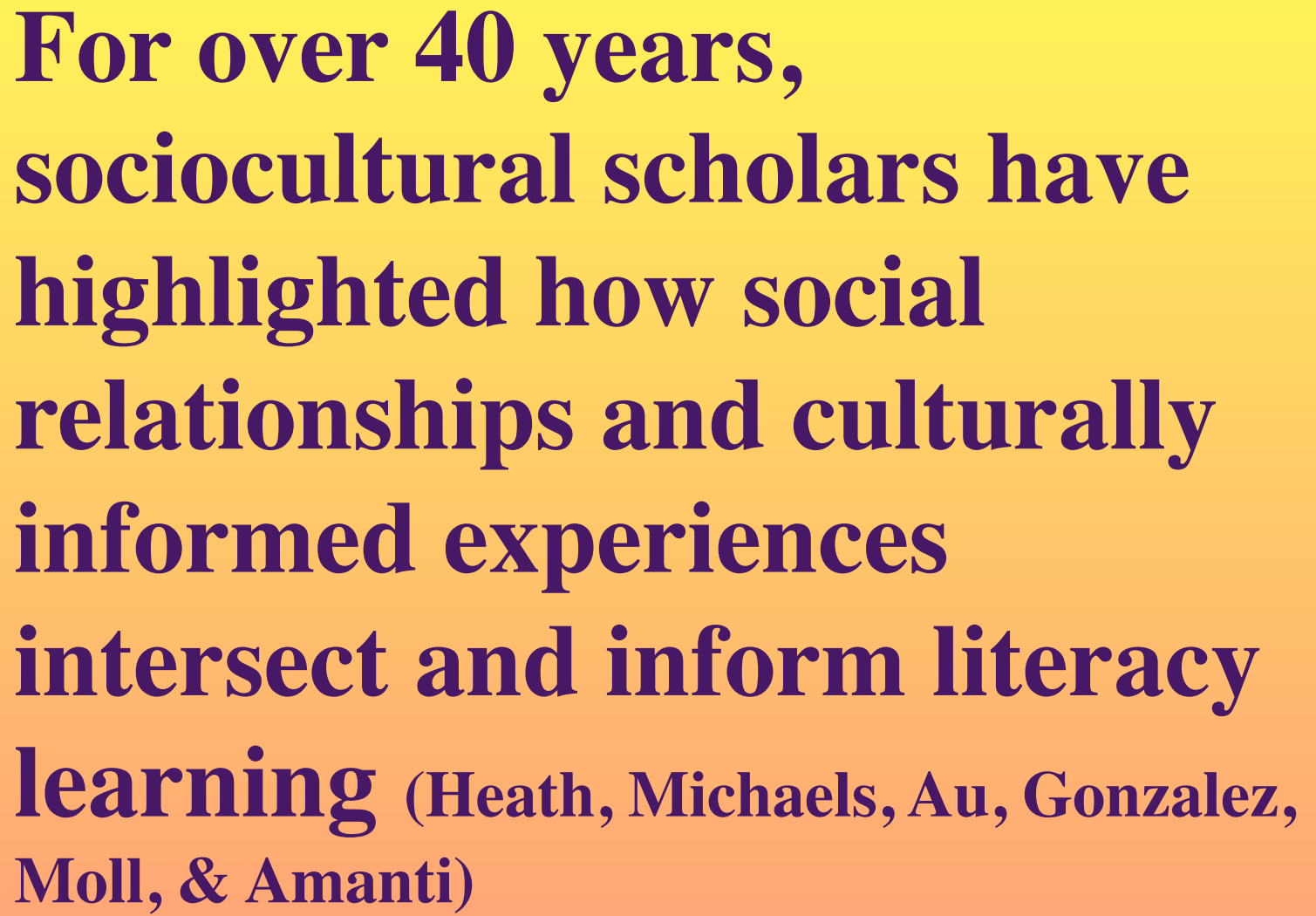
Many teachers erroneously believe that if they recognize the race of their students or discuss issues of ethnicity, they might be labeled as insensitive, or worse, racists.

However, when teachers ignore their students' ethnic identities and unique cultural beliefs, perceptions, values, and worldviews, they fail as culturally responsive pedagogists.



Color-blind teachers
claim that they treat all
students “the same”
which usually means
that all students are
treated as if they are, or
should be both White
and middle-class.”


(Irvine, 2003, xvii)



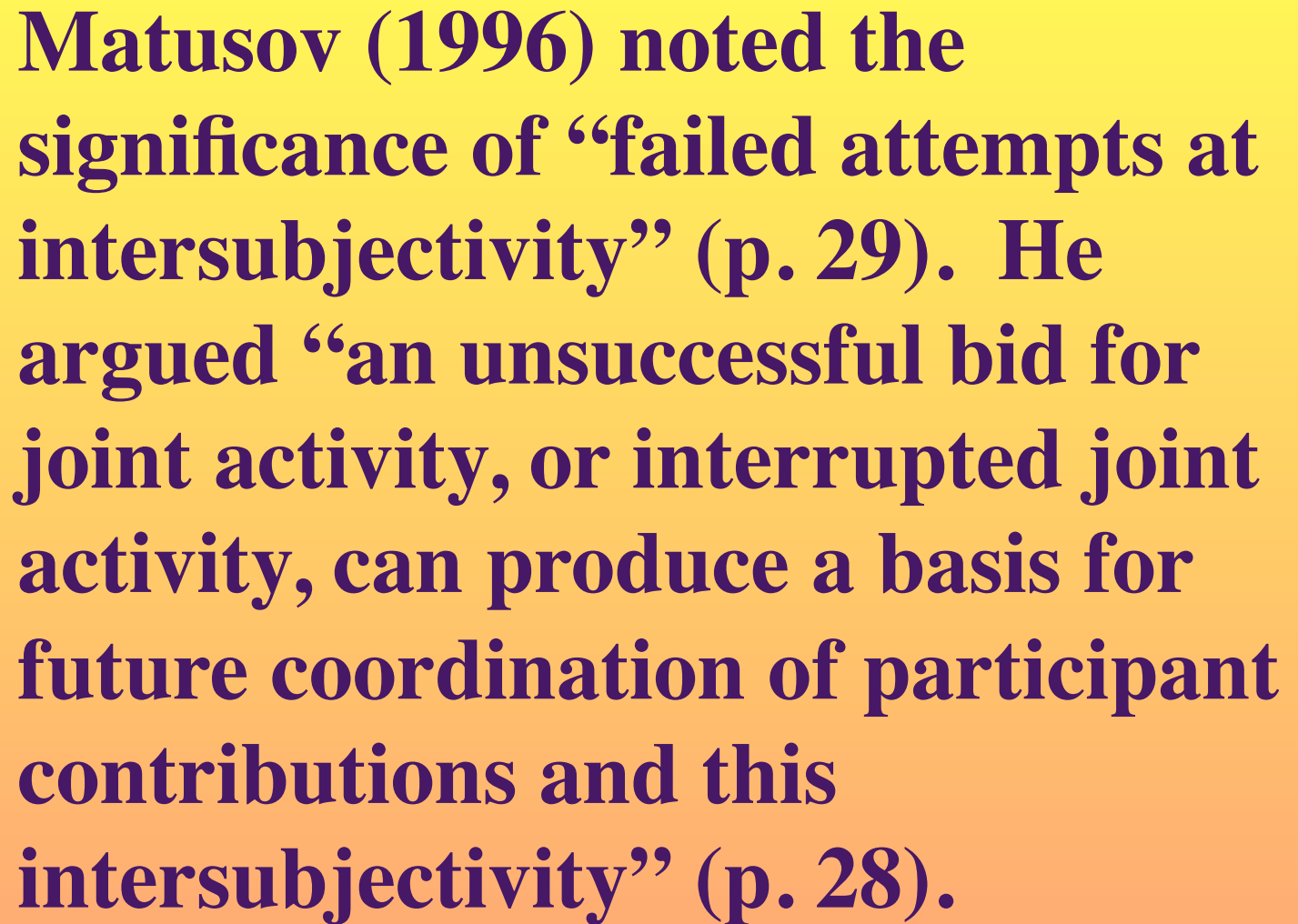
**For over 40 years,
sociocultural scholars have
highlighted how social
relationships and culturally
informed experiences
intersect and inform literacy
learning (Heath, Michaels, Au, Gonzalez,
Moll, & Amanti)**



INTERSUBJECTIVITY



Brunner (1997) referred to intersubjectivity as the ways we “manage to know each other’s minds, know them well enough to aid each other in constructing our worlds through negotiation, instruction, enculturation, and so on” (p. 67).



Matusov (1996) noted the significance of “failed attempts at intersubjectivity” (p. 29). He argued “an unsuccessful bid for joint activity, or interrupted joint activity, can produce a basis for future coordination of participant contributions and this intersubjectivity” (p. 28).




Reading Recovery is a short-term intervention for first-grade students.


Children meet individually with a specially trained teacher for 30 minutes each day for a maximum of 20 weeks.

The goal is for children to develop effective reading and writing strategies that enable them to be successful in regular classroom programs.

(Clay, 2005a, 2005b)



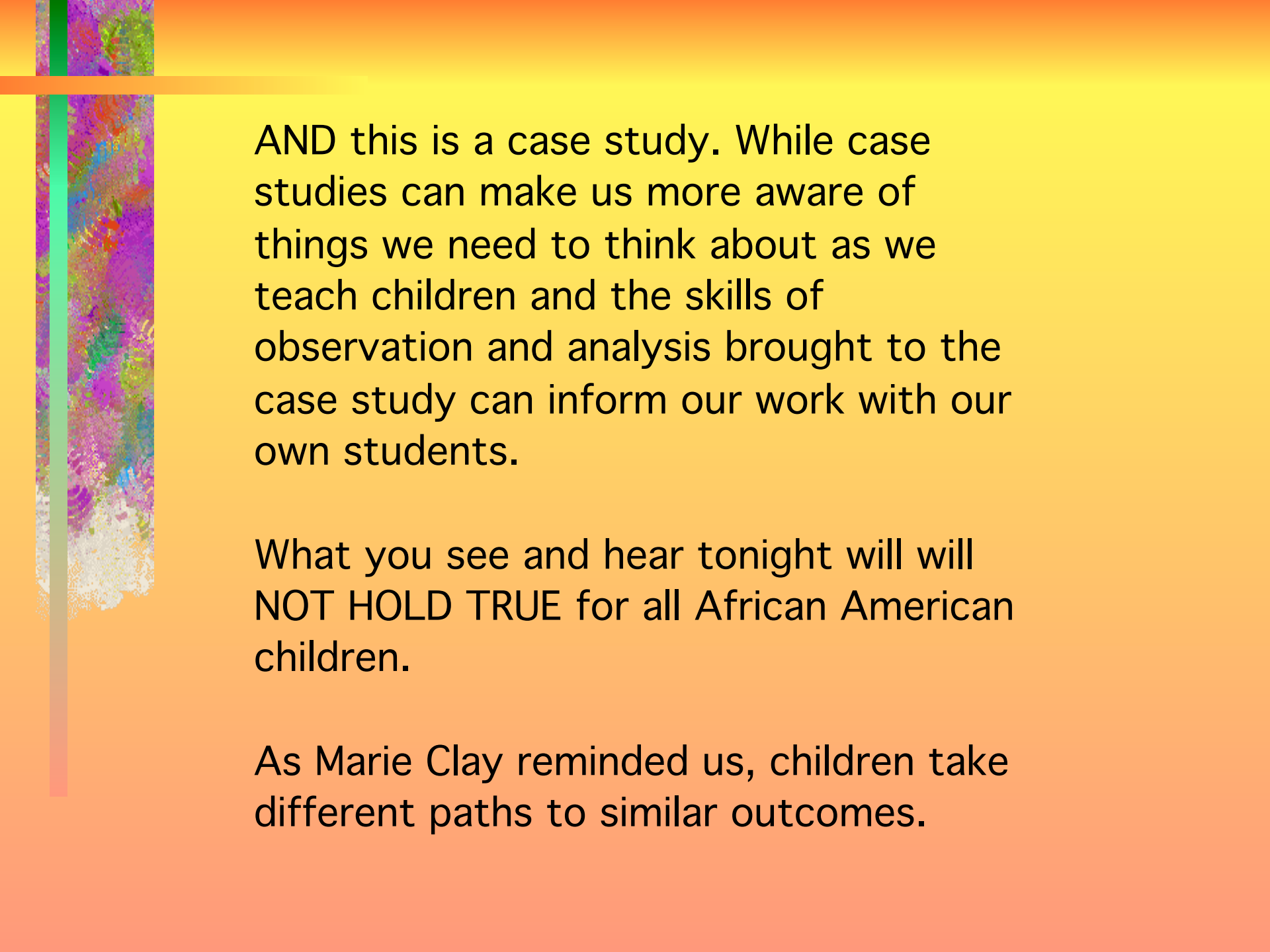
Martin's case was one of four case studies that I completed over a school year with African American Reading Recovery students.



Martin is African American, but he is also much, much more.

Martin is a first grade student, a former foster child, a child living with a single mother, a recipient of free school lunches, a fan of cartoons and video games, and a friendly student with many friends.


However, being African American has real historical and continuing effects on the lives of people.




AND this is a case study. While case studies can make us more aware of things we need to think about as we teach children and the skills of observation and analysis brought to the case study can inform our work with our own students.

What you see and hear tonight will will NOT HOLD TRUE for all African American children.

As Marie Clay reminded us, children take different paths to similar outcomes.



Martin was chosen for this research project because he is African American. In the city where this research is being conducted, African American students do not fare as well as European American students with reading and these statistics have been consistent across time.



It is my hope that this case study helps us to attend to our own teaching in new ways and helps us to identify and address times when we are “out-of-synch” with our students.

It is not about identifying a set of descriptions or characteristics for particular groups of children. It is about getting beyond assumptions and beliefs and watching children closely to become sensitive to what they can teach us.

The Project

This is the first of four case studies that I will complete over the next year. The case studies include:

Weekly observations of Reading Recovery Lessons (beginning at least two weeks after roaming is completed)

Audiotape and observational notes

Classroom observations every two weeks
Observational notes

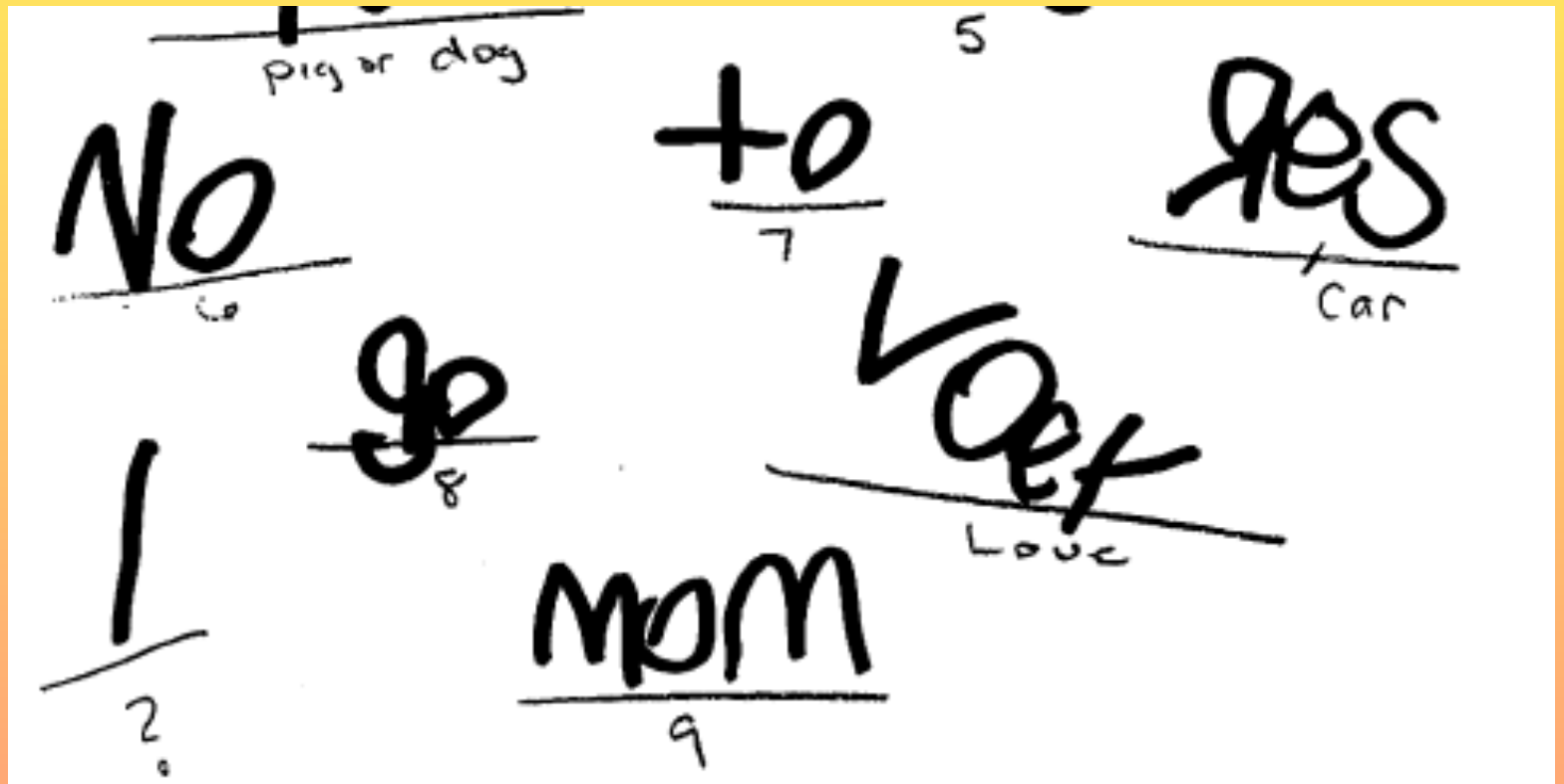
Pre- and Post interview with parents

Classroom teacher interview

Reading Recovery teacher interview

	Score	Comments
Letter ID	46	Unknown Letter: Q Confusions: T/J, E/N, N/E, i/j, i/l(sc), p/q, b/d, k/x(sc), y/v
CAP	16	No 1 to 1, knows letters/words and first/last; located your/was "Was starts with an "y", right?, attempted to turn the pages in the book
Word List	1	Read "like" for "and", "the", "little" and "like"
Writing Vocabulary	9	Wrote: sister's name, cat, The, go, i, name, No, to, MoM Attempted: giog/dog or pig; voey/love, Res/car
HRSW	17	I vo/have o/a N/big Gog/dog ar/at hi/home to Da/day I m/am go/going to k/take HIK/him to ooDK/school
Text Reading	2 93% nil	Read <i>A Snack for Gilbert</i> after it was read to him. Read "bananas/a banana".

Writing Vocabulary



I
I

have
have

a
a

big
big

dog
dog

at
at

home
home

to

I
I

today
today

am
am

going
going

to

to
to

to
to

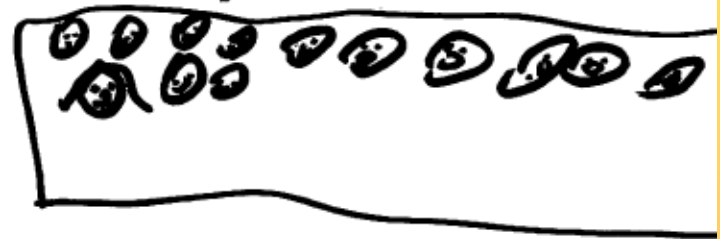
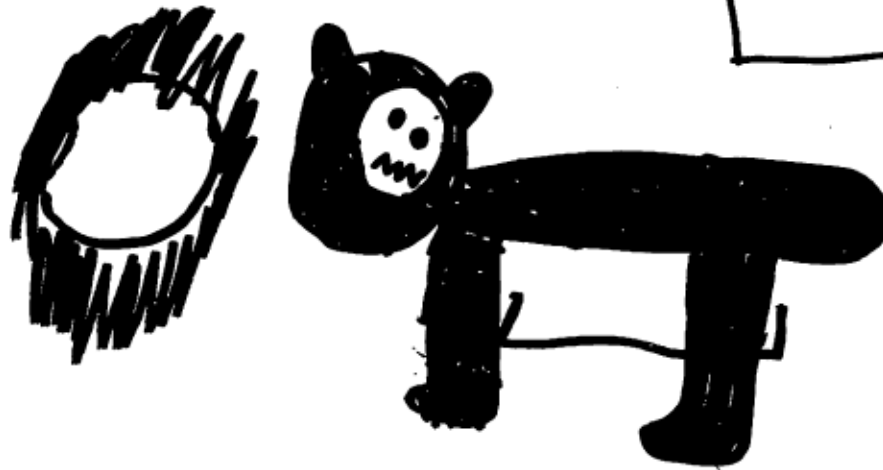
Instructional Text

93%

Page	Title	E	SC	Information used	
				E MSV	SC MSV
	A snack for Gilbert ^{2/28}	②	⑥		
2	✓✓✓✓				
4	✓✓✓✓✓				
6	✓✓✓✓✓				
8	✓✓✓ $\frac{-}{a}$ bananas banana	2		MSV	
10	✓✓✓✓				
12	✓✓✓✓✓				

Martin's Scaffolded Writing

The Tiger jumped in
hula hoops.



The tiger jumped in
hula hoops .




Introducing Ms. Paten

Ms. Paten was among the most successful Reading Recovery teachers in her school district. Her success rate with Reading Recovery students far exceeded the national average.



Teacher Strengths

Endless Patience and Praise



Martin is writing the “fly” part of “firefly.
It’s been a long journey to get this far with
the sentence.

Ms. Paten: /f-l-i/

Martin: /f-l/

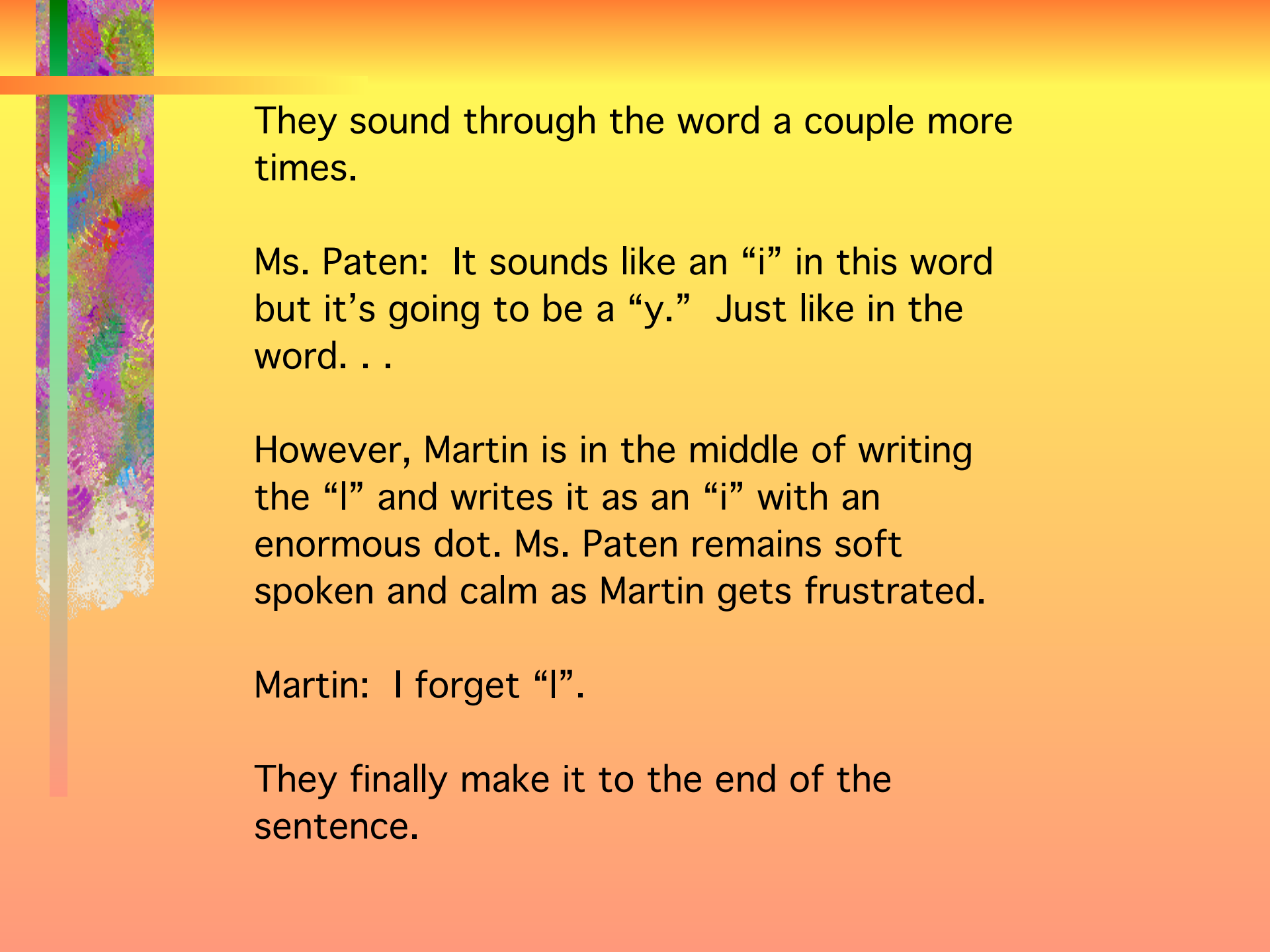
Ms. Paten: /f-l-i/ You put a. . .

Martin: “L”

Ms. Paten: You push [the chips].

Martin: “F.” I just keep on hearing [the
letters] right away.

Ms. Paten: You do. You are such a good
hearer.




They sound through the word a couple more times.

Ms. Paten: It sounds like an “i” in this word but it’s going to be a “y.” Just like in the word. . .

However, Martin is in the middle of writing the “l” and writes it as an “i” with an enormous dot. Ms. Paten remains soft spoken and calm as Martin gets frustrated.


Martin: I forget “l”.

They finally make it to the end of the sentence.



A few minutes later, Martin has constructed his cut-up sentence. He has put the word firefly together incorrectly. It says “fly.fire” Ms. Paten asks him to reread the sentence and he self corrects. The teacher asks him how he knew to switch the order and he said he used the period after “fly” to fix it.

Ms. Paten accidentally jumbles the sentence with his new book which she is taking out for the next portion of the lesson.




By now Martin is pretty frustrated. He yells at the teacher:

Martin: Hey little girl, little girl, because of you I messed up.

Ms Paten is patient as Martin reconstructs the sentence. While he is working she reminds him to check his work.

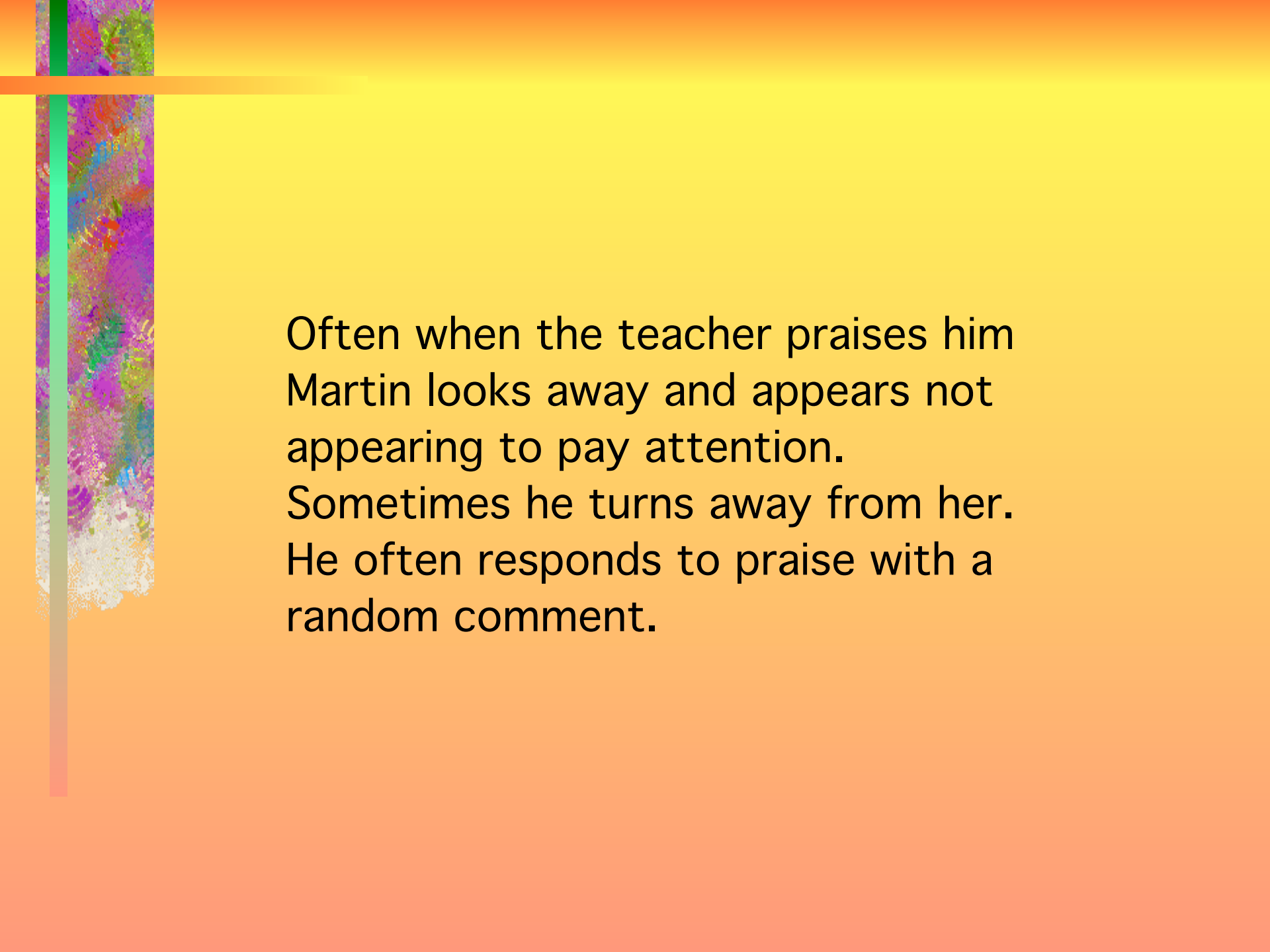
Martin: (In a frustrated voice) I can't. I'm still working on the sentence.



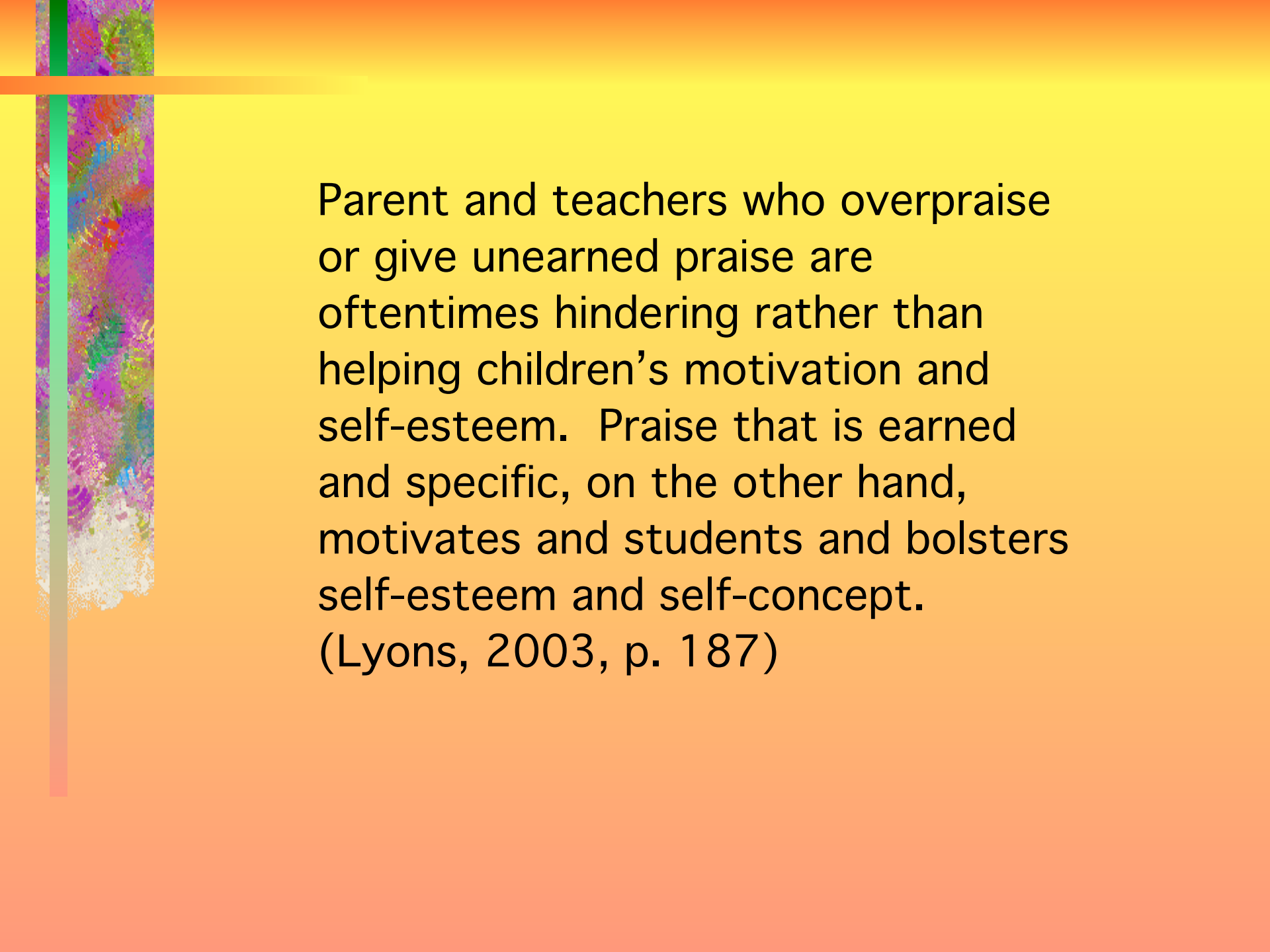
Ms. Paten's patience is endless. She tends to answer all his questions.

Martin: After this can we read this backwards?

Ms. Paten patiently explains that if you read it backwards it does not make sense.



Often when the teacher praises him
Martin looks away and appears not
appearing to pay attention.
Sometimes he turns away from her.
He often responds to praise with a
random comment.




Parent and teachers who overpraise or give unearned praise are oftentimes hindering rather than helping children's motivation and self-esteem. Praise that is earned and specific, on the other hand, motivates students and bolsters self-esteem and self-concept. (Lyons, 2003, p. 187)



Teacher Strengths

Resisting Assumptions




On the way down the hall, Martin tells us that last night he read his book to his dad because his mom was “knocked out”.

Ms. Paten: Well, mom must be tired from working.

Martin: No, my mom doesn't work.

Ms. Paten: Well, she must do your laundry.

Martin: I do my own.




Ms. Paten is challenging statements that she could easily construe as evidence of poor parenting. While we do not know how she ultimately internalized or made sense of these statements, we do see her challenging his story and defending his mother. Might it be too extreme to suggest that Martin is testing the teacher to see how she responds to his negative talk about his mother?



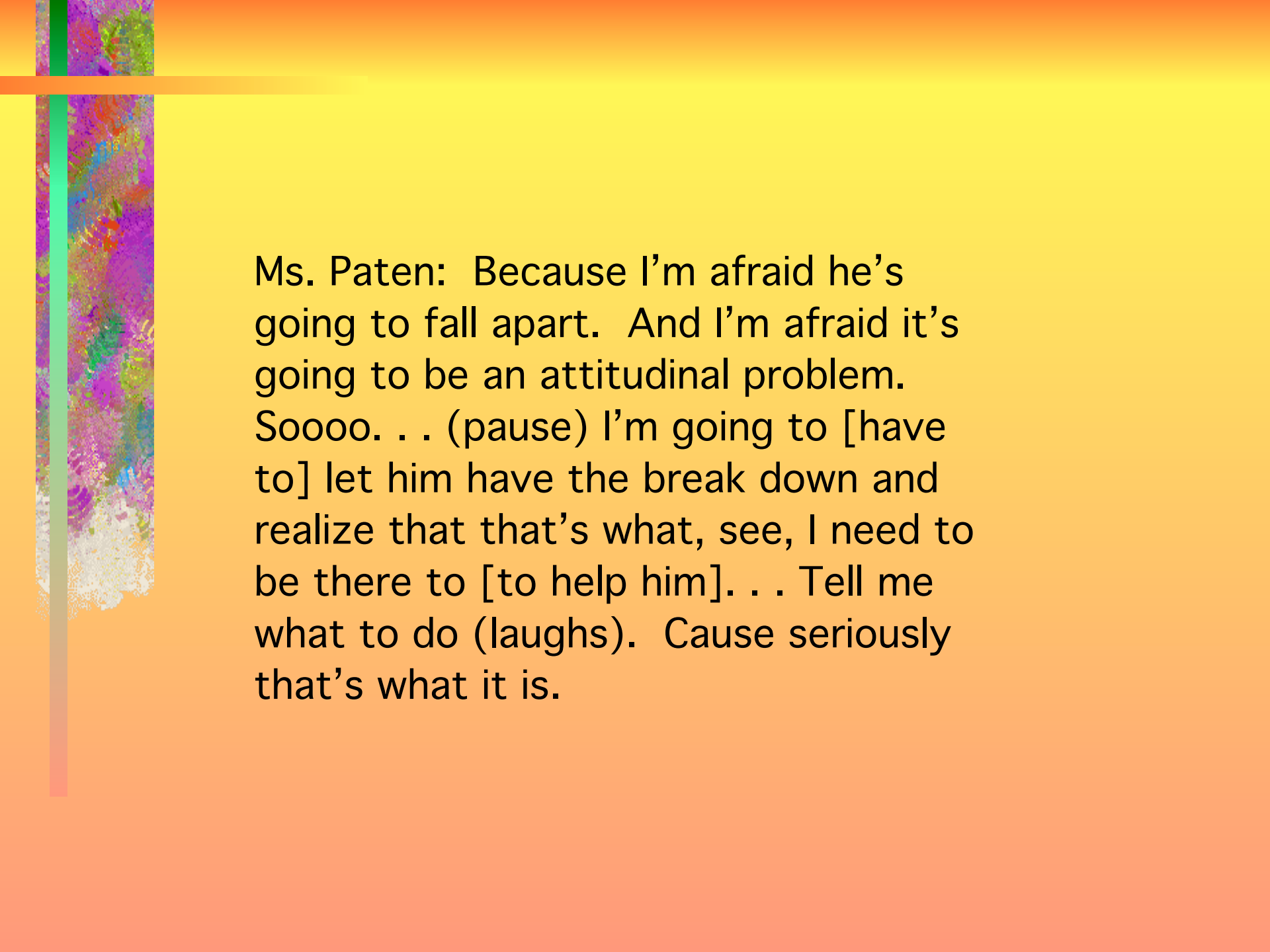
Teacher Strengths

Ms. Paten Knows What She
Needs to Do




Ms. Paten: But I know I'm supporting
him too much and I know it (laughs)
I know.


CCL: But why are you doing that?



Ms. Paten: Because I'm afraid he's going to fall apart. And I'm afraid it's going to be an attitudinal problem. Soooo. . . (pause) I'm going to [have to] let him have the break down and realize that that's what, see, I need to be there to [to help him]. . . Tell me what to do (laughs). Cause seriously that's what it is.



Ms. Paten: Because, do I know he's capable of it? Yes, I think that he could come up with ideas [when he gets stuck on a word]. I think he could do all that. But he, he has just such a short fuse and he gets so frustrated that he doesn't want to do that. But how am I going to get it so that he will want to do that? (long pause) It is, it's, it's, that's what screws me up there.



Ms. Paten: I'm noticing errors for him. It's like [he's saying] "I don't know when there's something right. You tell me." You know that's what I'm sure he's saying. Oh, God!

CCL: You've got this scenario in your head of what's going to happen.

Ms. Paten: I do.

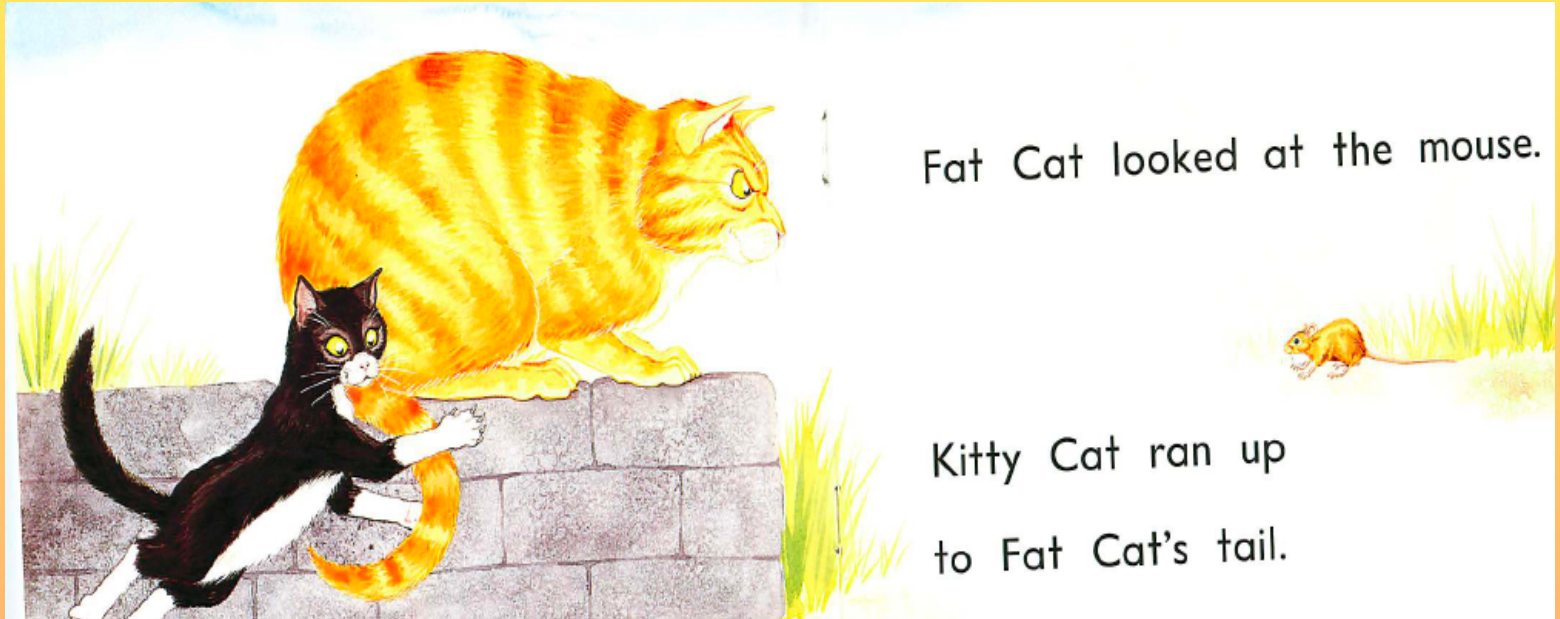
CCL And it doesn't look pretty.

Ms. Paten: Well, I mean you have that preconceived scenario about him. Is that a piece. Should I just have. . . I don't know.



Out-of-Synch Teaching

Lots of Teacher Talk



Fat Cat looked at the mouse.

Kitty Cat ran up
to Fat Cat's tail.



It is familiar reading. Martin is reading his first book.

Ms. Paten: Kitty Cat and Fat Cat. (In an engaging voice) You remember, Kitty Cat always gets fat cat into trouble.

M: Cat [sc] Kitty Cat and Fat Cat

Ms. Paten: Kitty Cat and Fat Cat

Martin: Kitty cat, kitty cat. . .

Ms. Paten: Did he jump?

Martin: No. Went?



Ms. Paten: /r/-

Ms. Paten and Martin: Ran


Ms. Paten: Did he ran?

Martin: No.

Ms. Paten: He did he. . .

Ms. Paten and Martin: . . .ran

Martin: I don't know that word, /on/-
/t/



Ms. Paten: He ran, Kitty Cat ran,
hmmm.

Martin: To?

Ms. Paten: Let's see, /tooooo/.

Martin: No.

Ms. Paten: He ran. . . could it be into?

Martin: Yeah.




Ms. Paten: Let me see you do a check.

Martin: In, into.


Ms. Paten: Ahhh, Kitty Cat ran into. . .

Martin: . . .the red leaves.

The story continues for several more pages in the same fashion.

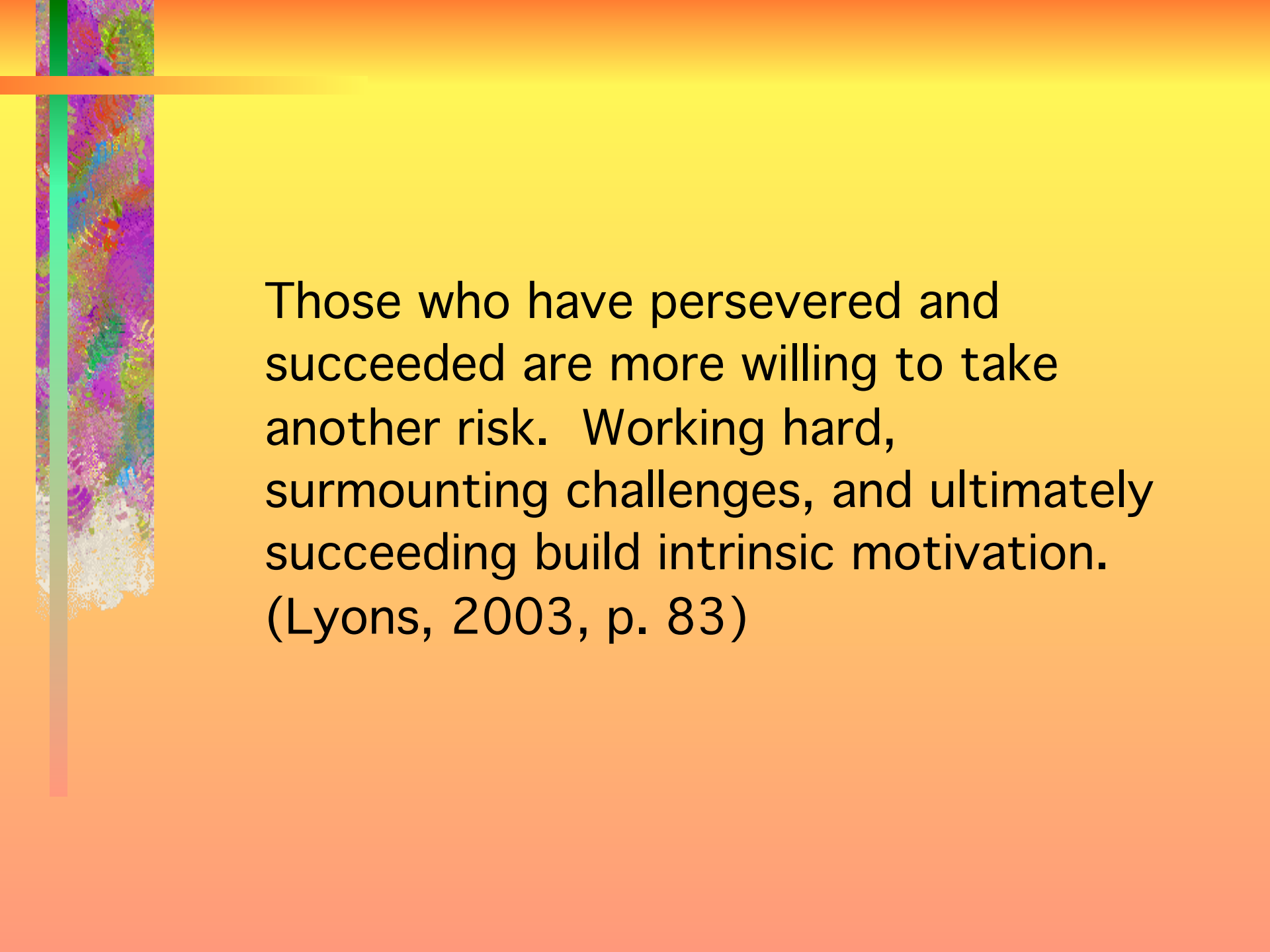


On the first page of the
book, Ms. Paten
intervened nine times.



Too much prompting interferes with the development of independent solving. (Clay, LL1, p. 39)

You do not need to talk about the demonstration; just do it. .
. (Clay, LL2, p. 7)

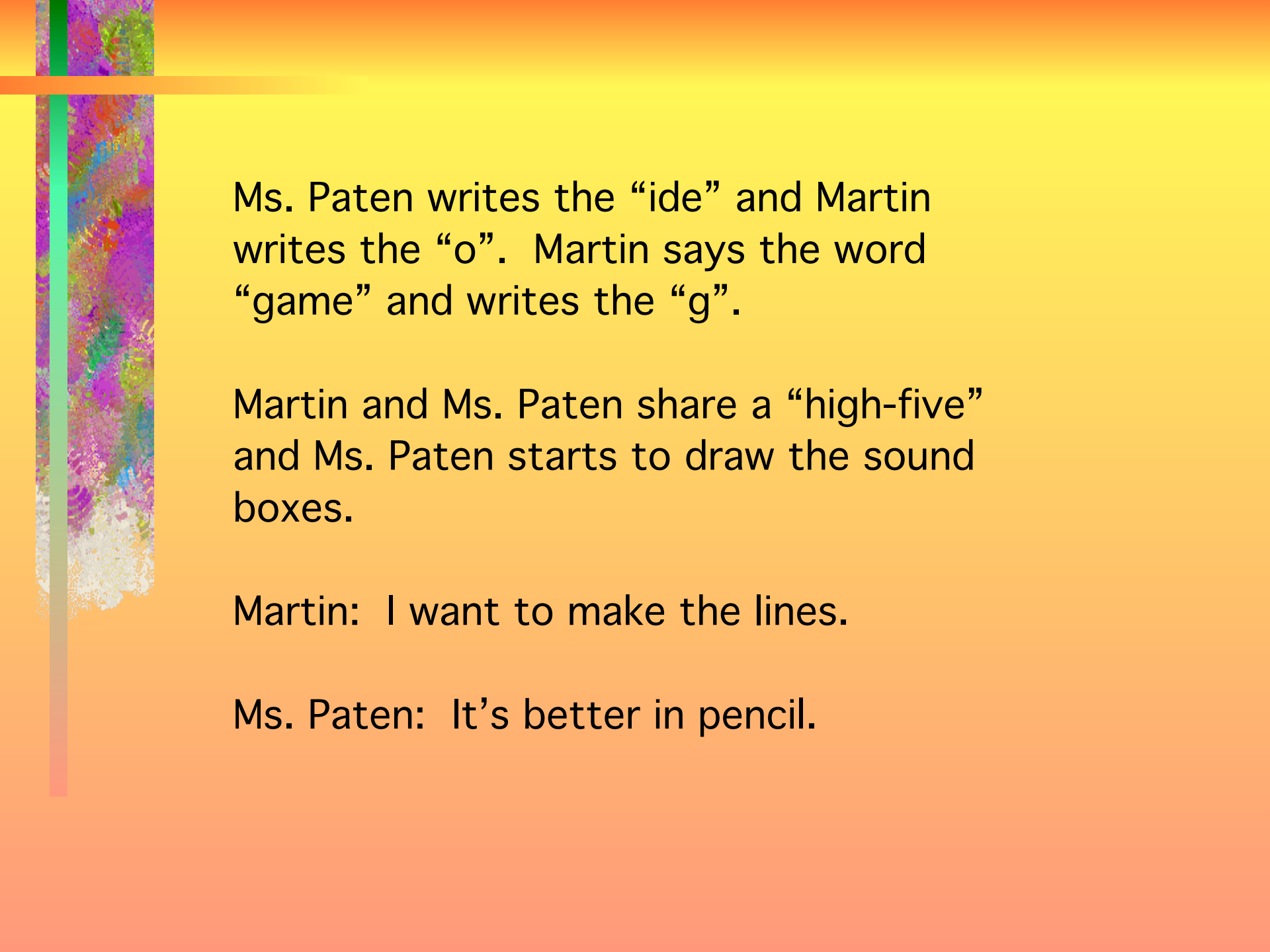


Those who have persevered and succeeded are more willing to take another risk. Working hard, surmounting challenges, and ultimately succeeding build intrinsic motivation. (Lyons, 2003, p. 83)

Wanting Control

They have decided on a story for his journal. Martin reaches for the pen saying “I want to write it.” He writes:

I Like my V

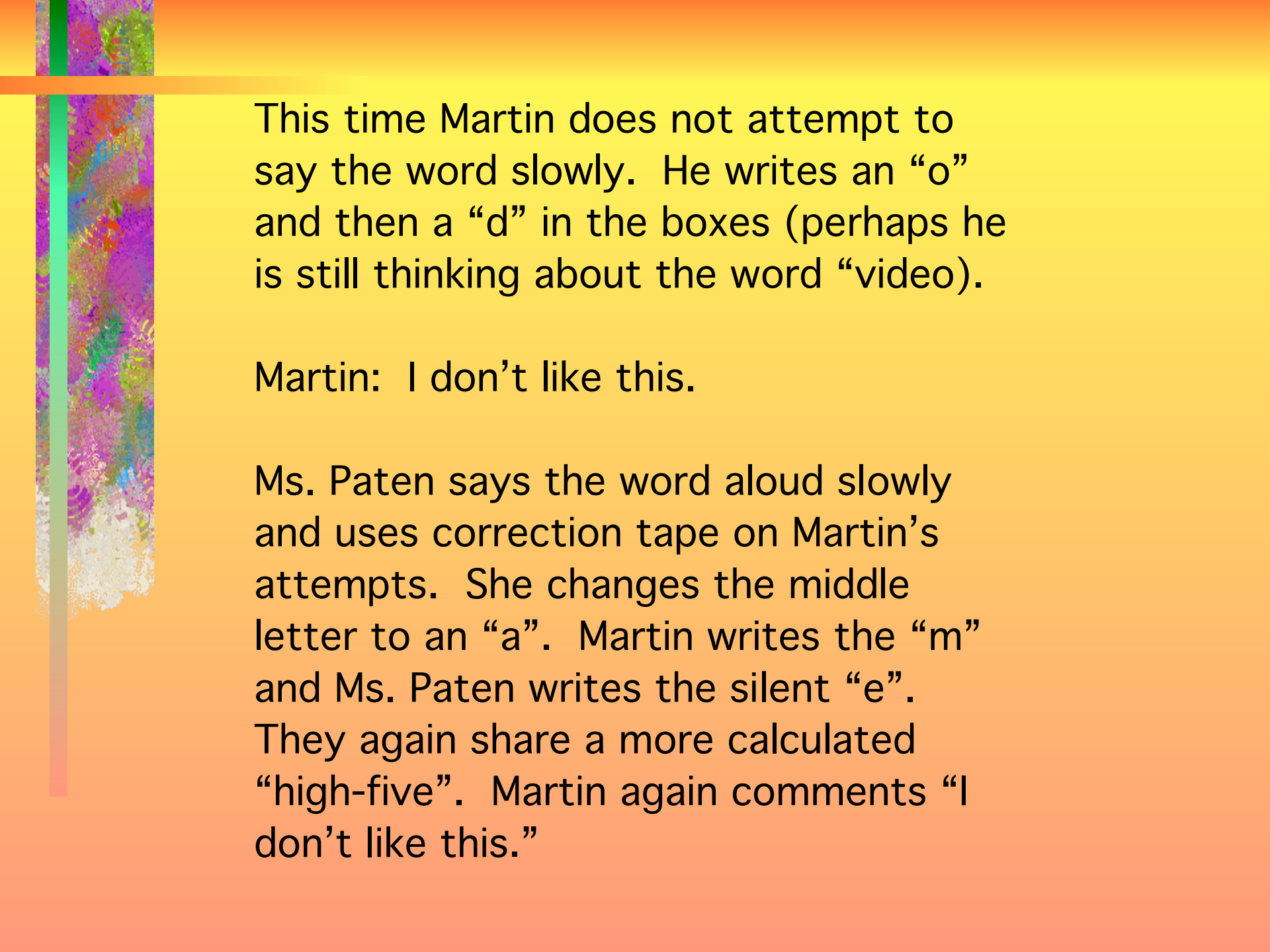


Ms. Paten writes the “ide” and Martin writes the “o”. Martin says the word “game” and writes the “g”.

Martin and Ms. Paten share a “high-five” and Ms. Paten starts to draw the sound boxes.

Martin: I want to make the lines.

Ms. Paten: It’s better in pencil.



This time Martin does not attempt to say the word slowly. He writes an “o” and then a “d” in the boxes (perhaps he is still thinking about the word “video”).

Martin: I don’t like this.

Ms. Paten says the word aloud slowly and uses correction tape on Martin’s attempts. She changes the middle letter to an “a”. Martin writes the “m” and Ms. Paten writes the silent “e”. They again share a more calculated “high-five”. Martin again comments “I don’t like this.”

I Like my Video
games 🍷



Martin has been given a choice between two titles for his new book.


Ms. Paten tells him about each book.

He listens and then makes a choice.

Martin: I want this [a story about a girl learning to ride bike]. How many pages is it?

Ms. Paten: 16

Martin: Ahhhhh, 16 pages? Hecky no, hecky no, hecky no, (laughs) hecky no, hecky no, hecky YES!



A couple minutes later Martin tells us about his experiences with learning to ride a bike.

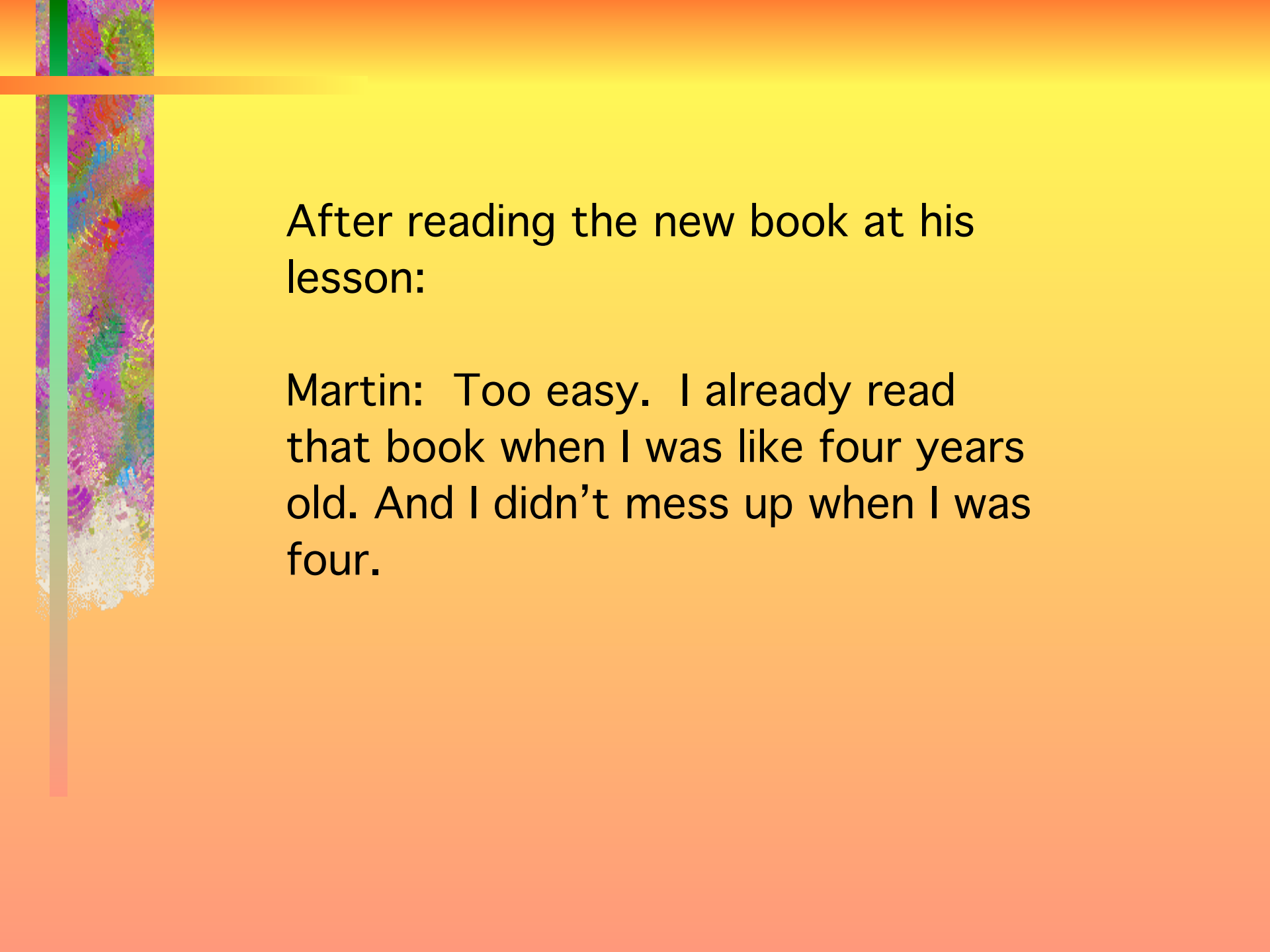
Martin: I was riding a bike when I was a baby

Ms. Paten: Did you have somebody hold the bike?

Martin: Hecky no.


Ms. Paten: Hecky no?

Martin: I ain't no baby. I wasn't scared at all.



After reading the new book at his lesson:

Martin: Too easy. I already read that book when I was like four years old. And I didn't mess up when I was four.



Martin has just finished reading a difficult running record.

Ms. Paten: Remember, when you get frustrated, I will help you.

Martin: I wasn't frustrated. I was faking.


Avoidance of Challenging Tasks

Ms. Paten takes a few minutes before the lesson to practice words.

Martin: I can go to the office today?

Ms. Paten: Well after you're done here.

The teacher is making words on the board with magnetic letters before the lesson. She is having him check a word to see if he is reading them correctly.



Ms. Paten: Close your eyes. Open.
Does it says Dad.

Martin checks it and is correct.

Martin: I want read a hundred books.

Ms. Paten makes another word and has
him check. He is correct.

Martin: How come you didn't pick Cal
first?

Ms. Paten: Close your eyes. Close your
eyes. Close your eyes. Does it say
"look?




Martin: No. Can I tell you something?

Ms. Paten: What?

Martin: How come you didn't pick up Cal first.

The episode continues with the teacher doing words and Martin fussing.

Martin: But my stomach hurts. How many times do I have to do these?



Martin: I don't want to do these for a lot.

Ms. Paten says Martin can go to the bathroom.

Martin: Can I go get a drink?

He comes back immediately; does not use the bathroom.

Martin sits down and says hello into my microphone.

And this is all before the first book. . .



During the first familiar read, Martin made these comments:

I want to read this book.

I know that word.

But I don't need any help.

How many books do I got to read now?

After this book how many, then?

I don't want to come [to Reading Recovery]

Can you just leave me alone for a few minutes. (Martin crosses his arms and turns away. He sits quietly for about a minute.

Can you pick up James first?

Do I have to come tomorrow?



“This is getting boring already.”

Martin crosses his arms across chest and does not say anything.

He says “No” when asked to read.


Martin tells the teacher, “My dad he makes paper and he makes books, and he made this book but he made me send it to school.”

Martin talks about having a stuffy nose and fever and taking medicine.

Martin takes the hand cleaner and smells it.

He tells the teacher, “Your watch is upside down.”

He asks the teacher, “Can I tell you something. . .?”



Diversion means, “let me get out of this situation” and denotes little will to try. If the teacher assists the child in developing various strategic ways to problem-solve she will acquire many different ways to attempt to resolve conflict. (Lyons, 2003, p. 71)



Movement and Song

Ms. Paten offers dancing, music, or cupcakes as topics for writing. Martin rejects them all.

Martin: I like a cat.”

Ms. Paten: What do you like about cats?

Martin: I said cats, that’s why. I just like cats.

Ms. Paten: Do you like to hold them?
Play with them?

Martin: I like to play with cats.



The Magic of Movement

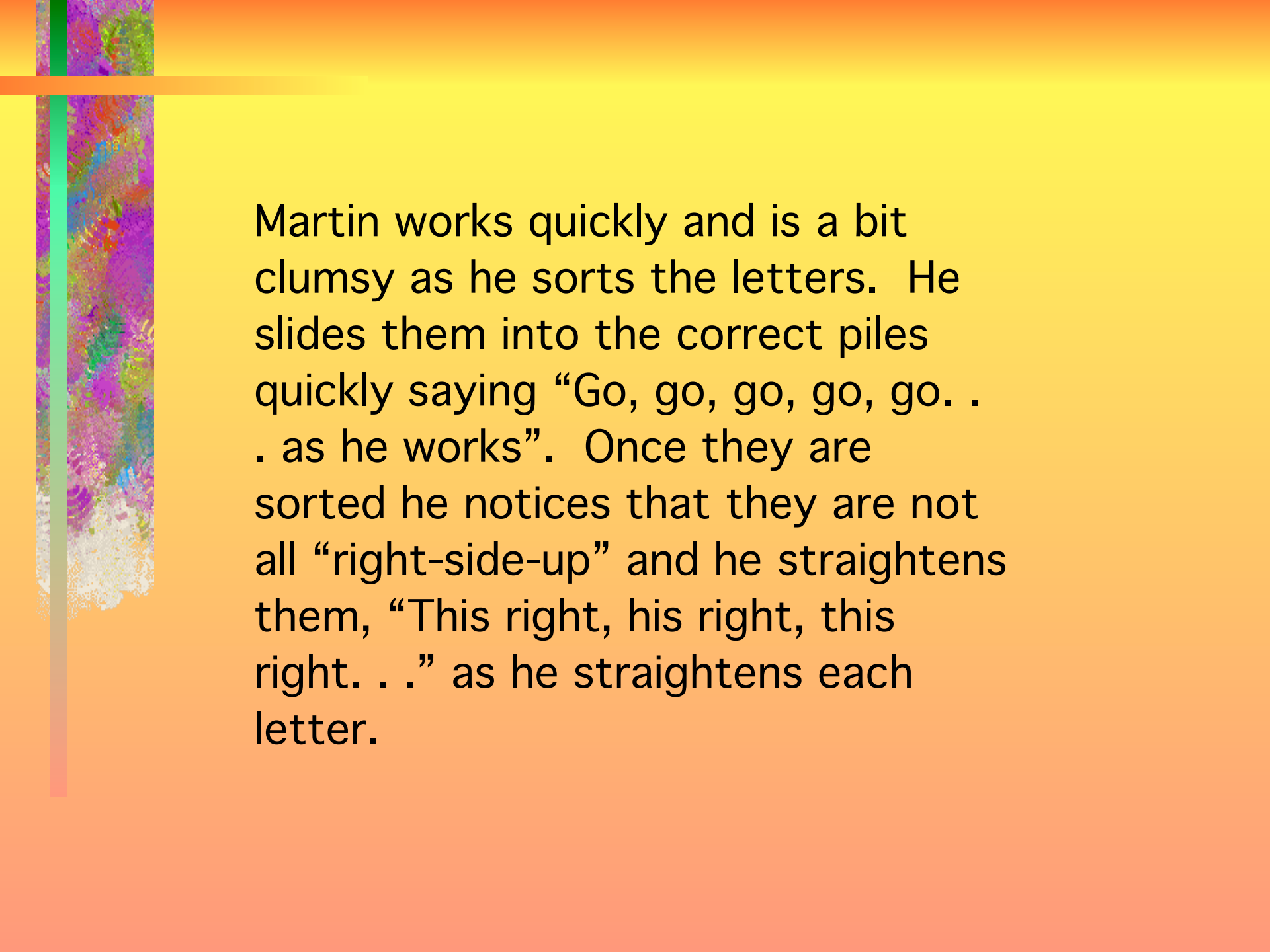
Martin: “This is my favorite.”

Martin talks as he moves the letters.

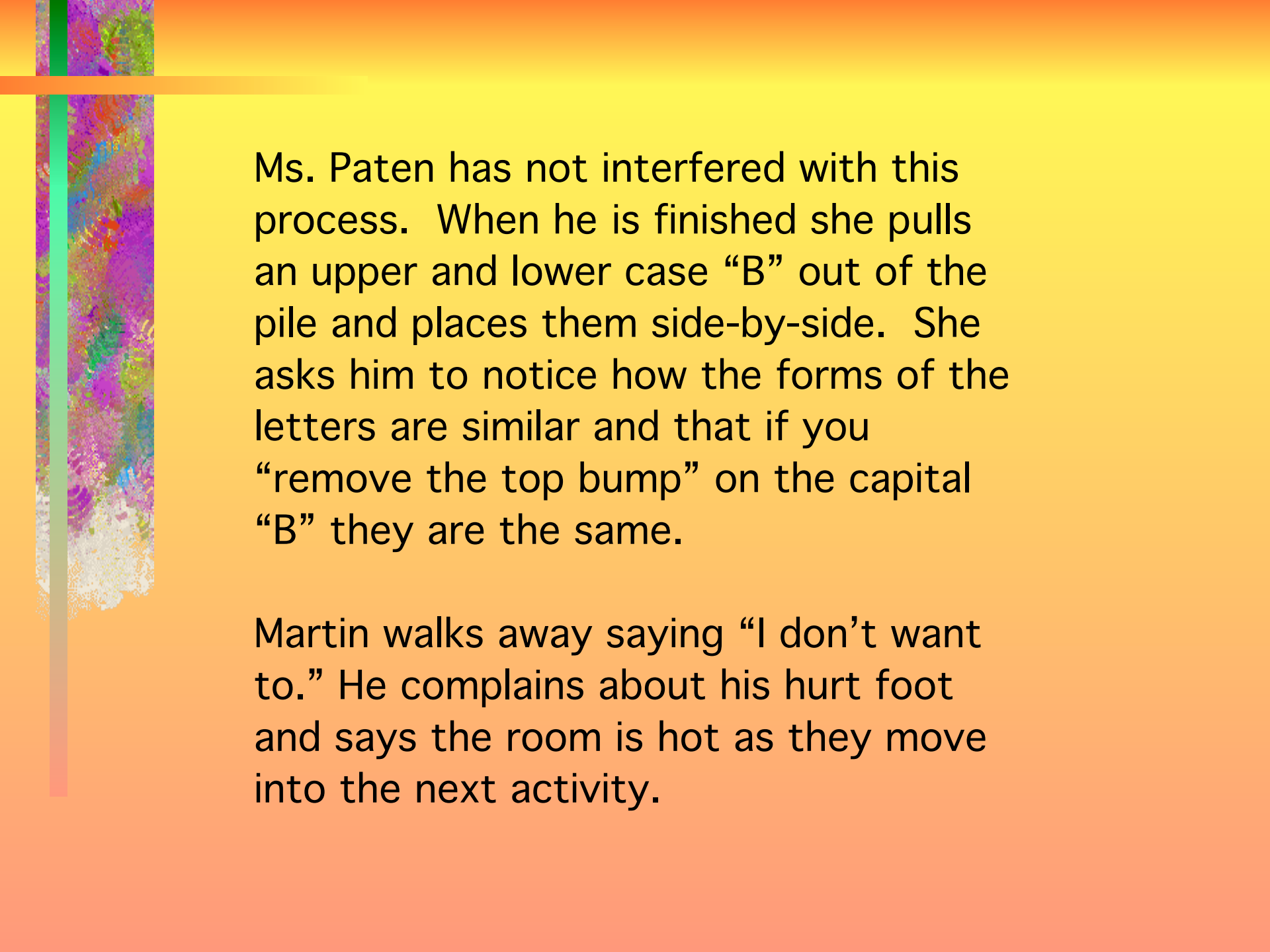
Another day. . .

The teacher puts a variety of magnetic letters up on the board in an array.

Martin: I love this game.




Martin works quickly and is a bit clumsy as he sorts the letters. He slides them into the correct piles quickly saying “Go, go, go, go, go. . . as he works”. Once they are sorted he notices that they are not all “right-side-up” and he straightens them, “This right, his right, this right. . .” as he straightens each letter.



Ms. Paten has not interfered with this process. When he is finished she pulls an upper and lower case “B” out of the pile and places them side-by-side. She asks him to notice how the forms of the letters are similar and that if you “remove the top bump” on the capital “B” they are the same.

Martin walks away saying “I don’t want to.” He complains about his hurt foot and says the room is hot as they move into the next activity.

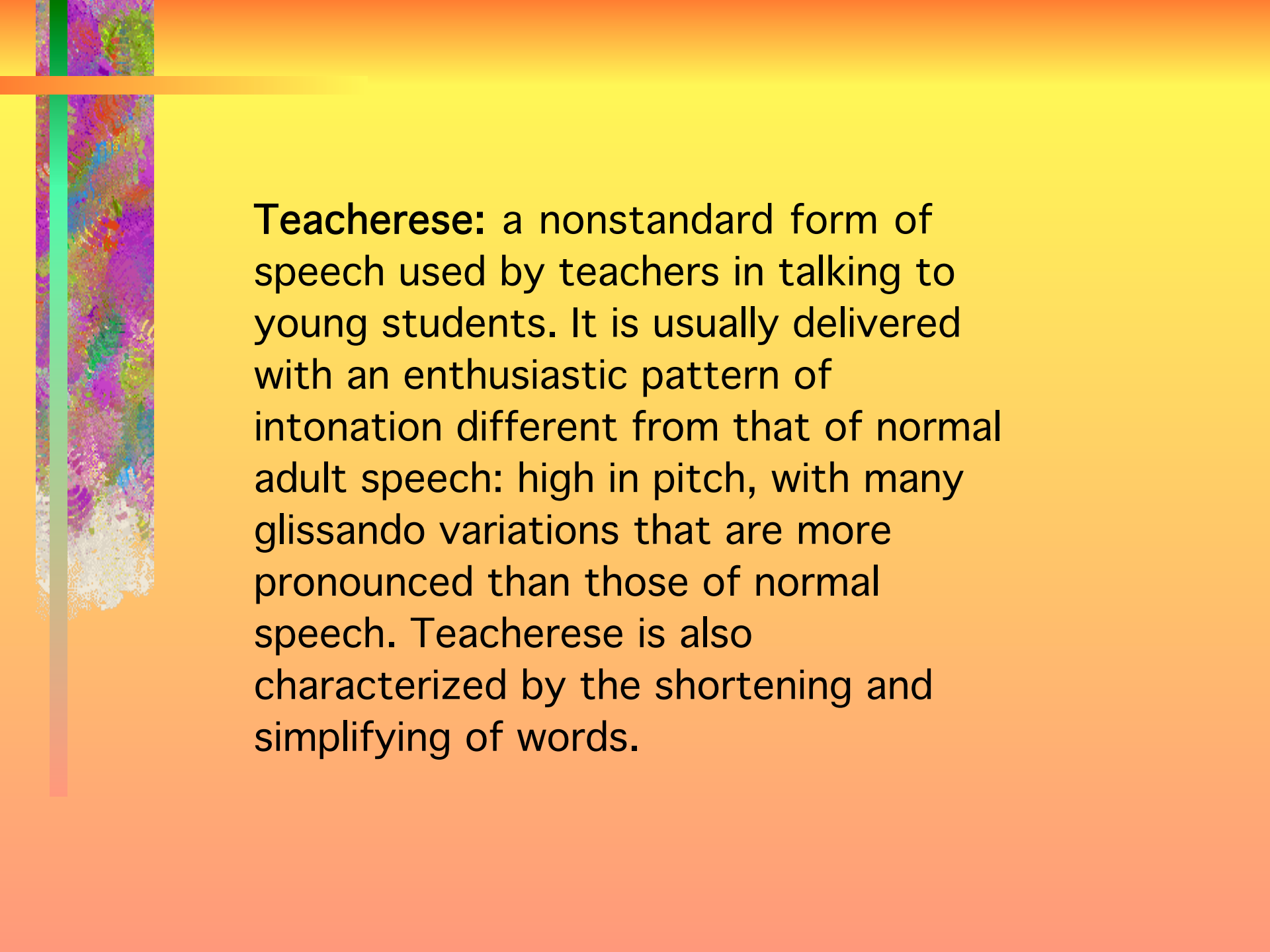


In order to become self-directed and independent learners, children must attend and be actively engaged in a task. Movement is an indispensable part of focusing attention while an individual is interacting with her environment. (Lyons, 2003, p. 40)




The Ways People Talk and Read

Motherese, parentese, baby talk, or child-directed speech (CDS) is a nonstandard form of speech used by adults in talking to toddlers and infants. It is usually delivered with a "cooing" pattern of intonation different from that of normal adult speech: high in pitch, with many glissando variations that are more pronounced than those of normal speech. Baby talk is also characterized by the shortening and simplifying of words and used by people when talking to their pets.



Teacherese: a nonstandard form of speech used by teachers in talking to young students. It is usually delivered with an enthusiastic pattern of intonation different from that of normal adult speech: high in pitch, with many glissando variations that are more pronounced than those of normal speech. Teacherese is also characterized by the shortening and simplifying of words.



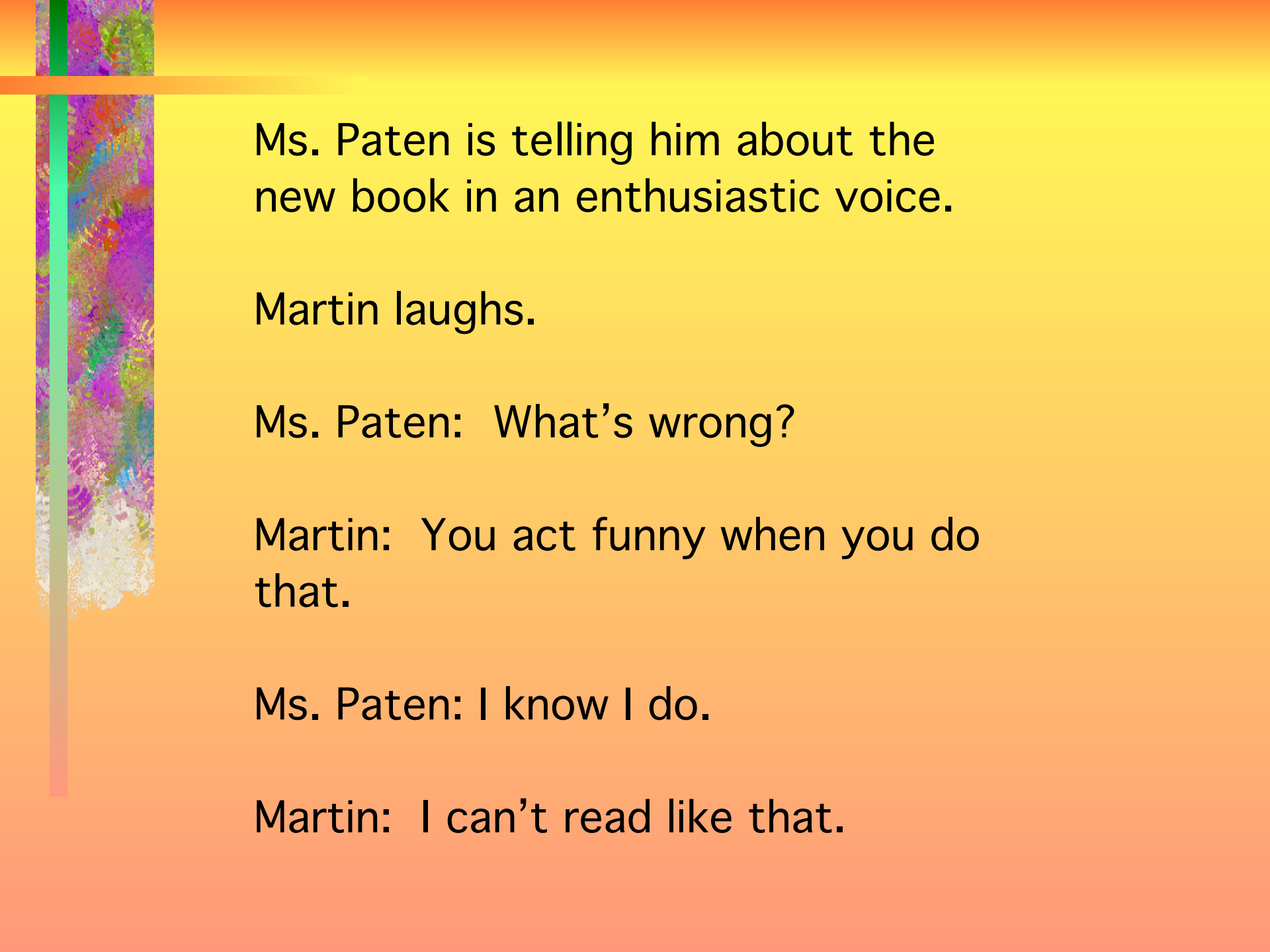
Ms. Paten: Ohhhh! So what does the big cat do? Let's find out!!!

Martin: What?

Ms. Paten: Teacher repeats

Martin: You're going to make me laugh.

Martin starts talking in a funny way, imitating the teacher.



Ms. Paten is telling him about the new book in an enthusiastic voice.

Martin laughs.

Ms. Paten: What's wrong?

Martin: You act funny when you do that.

Ms. Paten: I know I do.

Martin: I can't read like that.



A few pages later. . .


Ms. Paten: (Talking about the book) Uh-oh!!! What just happened here?

Martin: You making me laugh.

Ms. Paten: Better that than crying.


The image features a vertical strip on the left side containing a microscopic view of tissue, likely stained with hematoxylin and eosin (H&E). The tissue shows various cellular structures and colors, including purple, green, and white. To the right of this strip is a large, solid area with a vertical color gradient from yellow at the top to orange at the bottom. The word "MICROAGGRESSIONS" is printed in bold black capital letters across the lower portion of the orange area.

MICROAGGRESSIONS




Microaggressions are “subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns” (Pierce (1969, p. 660) that African American, Latina/o, and other students from diverse backgrounds encounter regularly in instructional and social spaces (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solózano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solózano, 2009).

These interactions can be subtle, automatic, verbal or nonverbal. Microaggressions include the stress that students experience from trying to make sense of experiences that produce feelings of confusion, inferiority, and degradation (Yosso, et al., 2009).



Microaggressions are routinely experienced by diverse students and cumulate over time. While a single microaggressive experience might have little or no affect on a child, repeated microaggressions over time affect students' identities and their sense of academic efficacy.

In short, microaggressions can be pervasive revealing the inherent inadequacy of colorblind perspectives by revealing how racism can take unconscious and unrecognized forms.



While term “microaggression” might seem harsh, I consciously use the term noting that its harshness is justified based on the effects - intended or unintended - that microaggressions have on children.



Microaggressions

THREE EXAMPLES

Example 1

Martin is writing his sentence in his journal and spontaneously says “Tasha was my cousin, she died.”

Ms. Paten: I’m sorry.

Martin: What for? (Meaning what was she sorry for?)

Ms. Paten looks a bit confused but does not respond.

Example 2

Martin is stuck on a word and Ms. Paten is posing contemplatively with her head to one side.

Martin: Why you do that?

Ms. Paten: I'm trying to think of a word. I'm trying to think of a word that it could be. "Am", could it be "am"?

Martin: Yeah, you like [this] (Martin cocks his head to one side and imitates Ms. Paten).

Ms. Paten: Isn't that what you do when you think?

Martin: No.

Example 3

Martin is writing the word “with.” Ms. Paten writes it on a small piece of paper and tells him it’s a pocket word. She tells him that way if he needs to write “with” he can just take it out of his pocket.

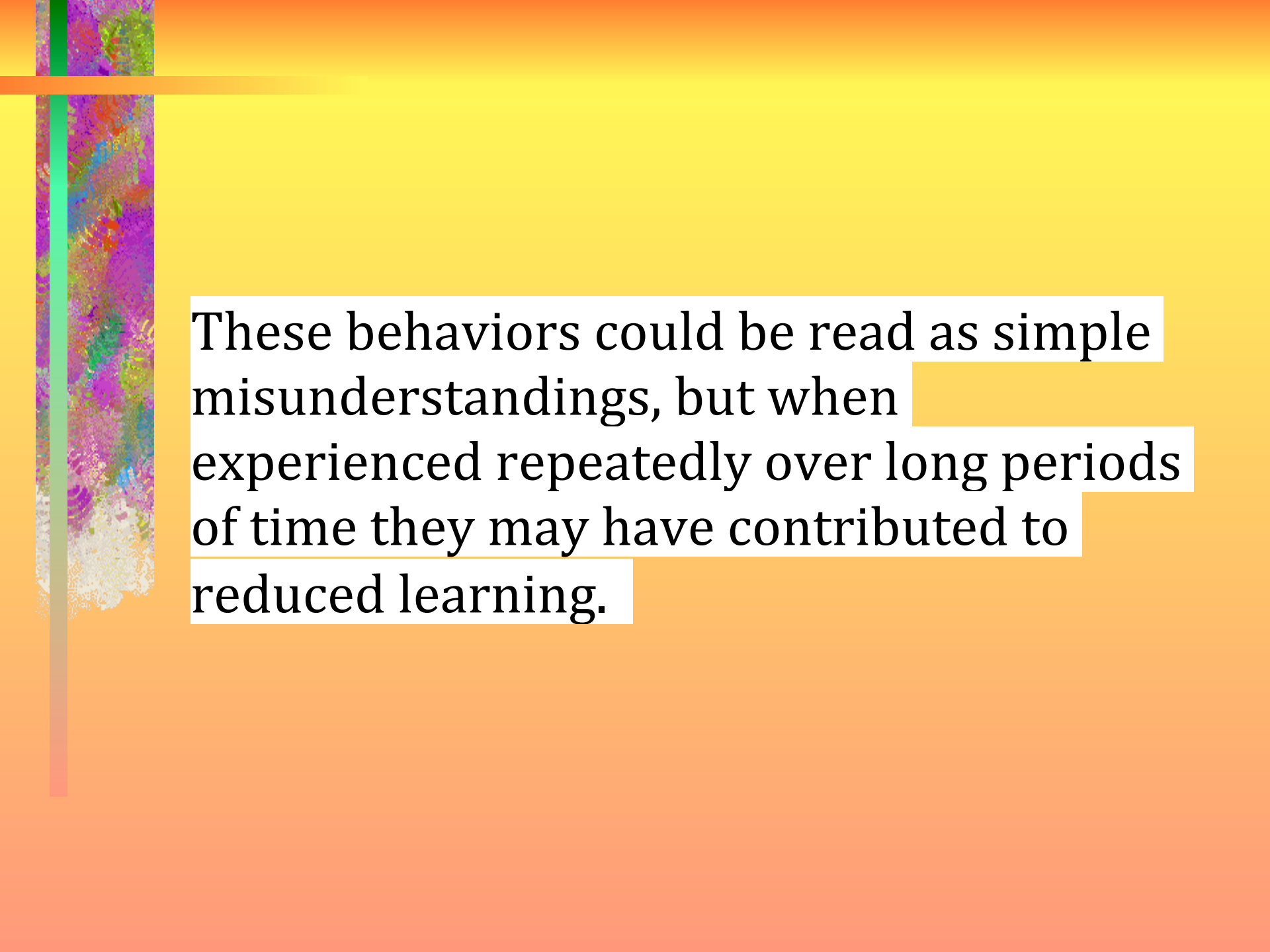
Martin: But that’s called cheating.

Ms. Paten: No it’s not. It’s called learning.

Martin: No, it’s called cheating. That’s what my mom says.

Ms. Paten: No, it’s not. . . .

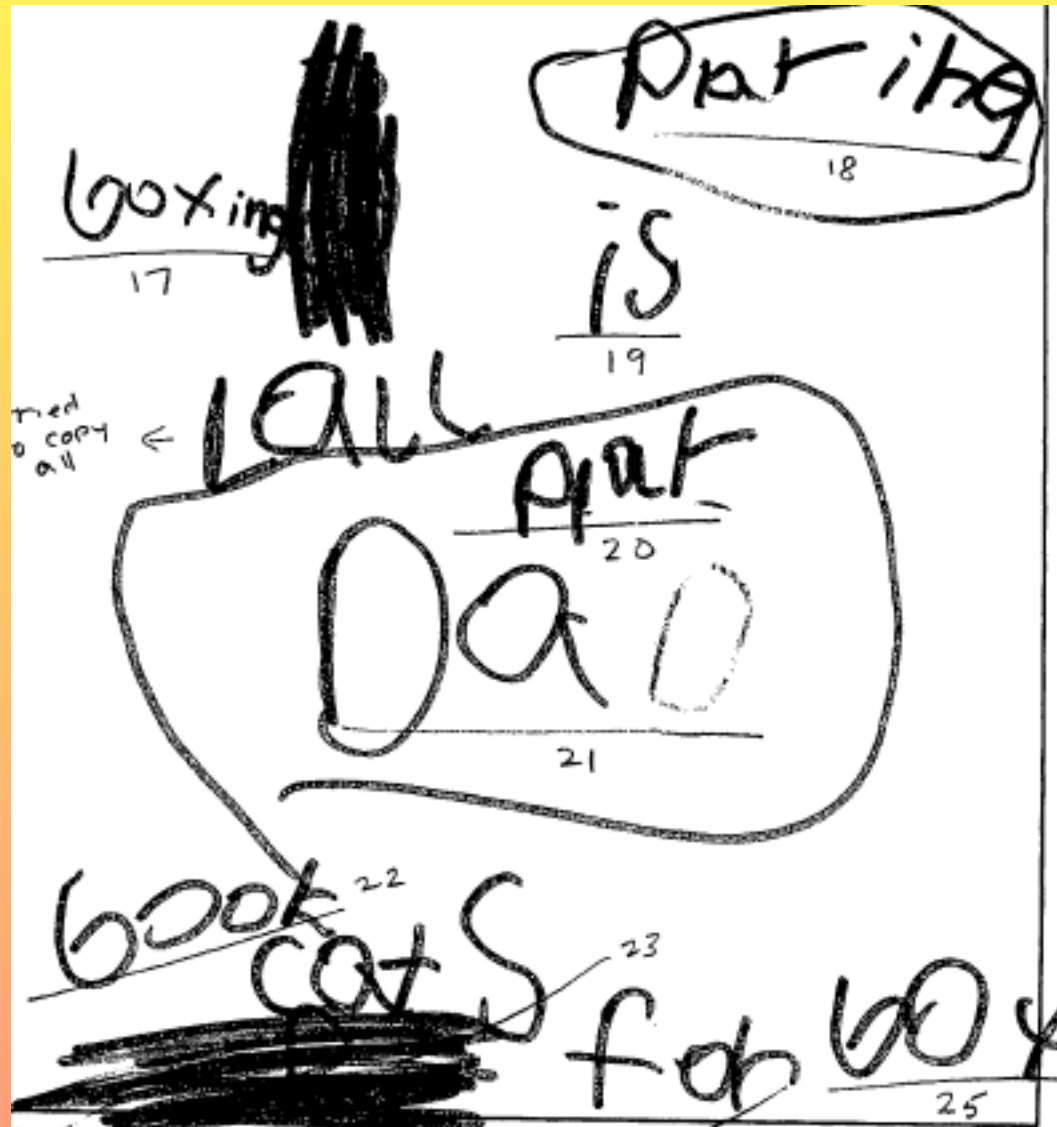
Martin: But I gonna be changing different clothes everyday. (Pause) Ok, but it’s cheating, for real.

The image features a decorative vertical bar on the left side, composed of a green-to-red gradient and a colorful abstract pattern. The background is a gradient from yellow at the top to orange at the bottom. The text is presented in a white, serif font, arranged in a staggered, block-like format.

These behaviors could be read as simple misunderstandings, but when experienced repeatedly over long periods of time they may have contributed to reduced learning.


	Entry	Exit	Comments
Letter ID	46	51	Unknown Letter: D Confusions: b/d, p/q
CAP	16	18	Did not demonstrate one-to-one, ran finger under; line order; change in word or letter order; meaning of quotation
Word List	1	7	Read: "big," "to," "for," "you," "in," "at," "eat" Attempted: run/red, with/now, fo/from, here/have
Writing Vocabulary	9	25	Wrote: Name, brother's name, go, look, mom, I, No, Me, LoVe, cat, to, Like, The, My, Little, boxing, playing, is, play, DaD, book, cats, for, box Attempted: goine/going,
HRSW	17	17	The -/boy i2/is rhging/riding -/his idk/bike HaKe/he Ke/can go e/very -/fast inekP/on The/it.
Text Reading	2 93% nil	3 95% 1:3	looked/looks girl - Told boy - Told A/The sc See/looks sc

Writing Vocabulary

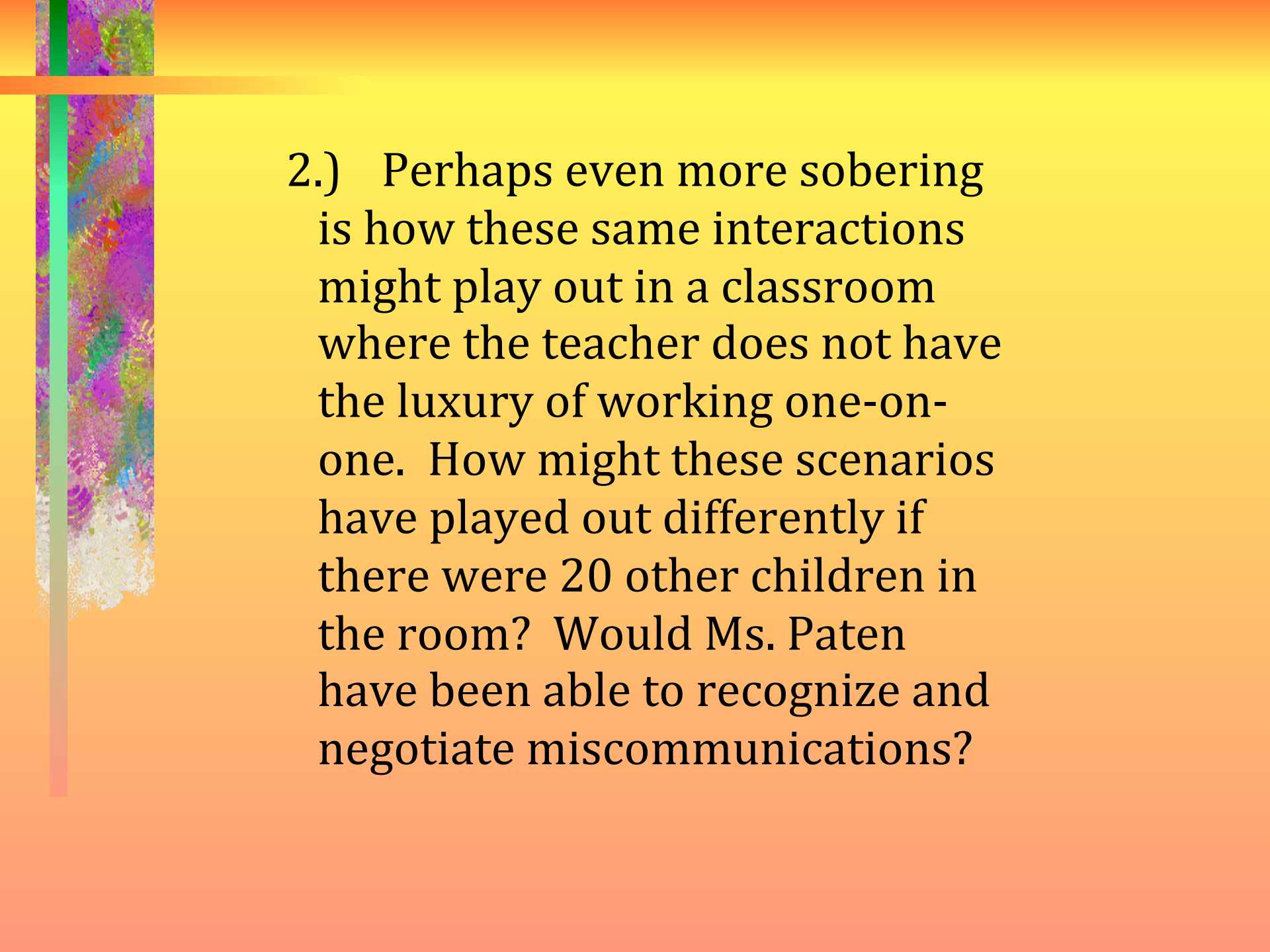




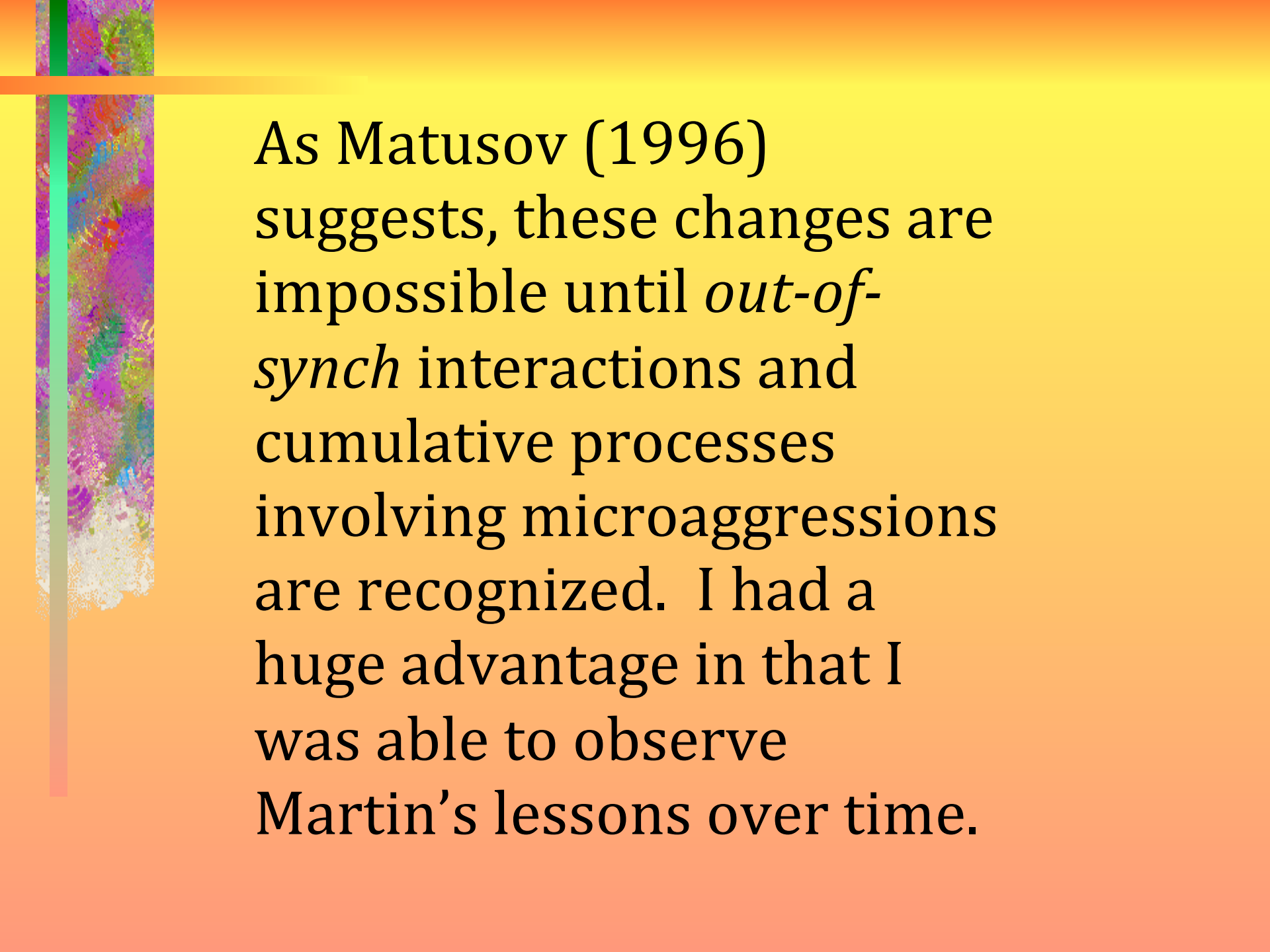
Two caveats. . .



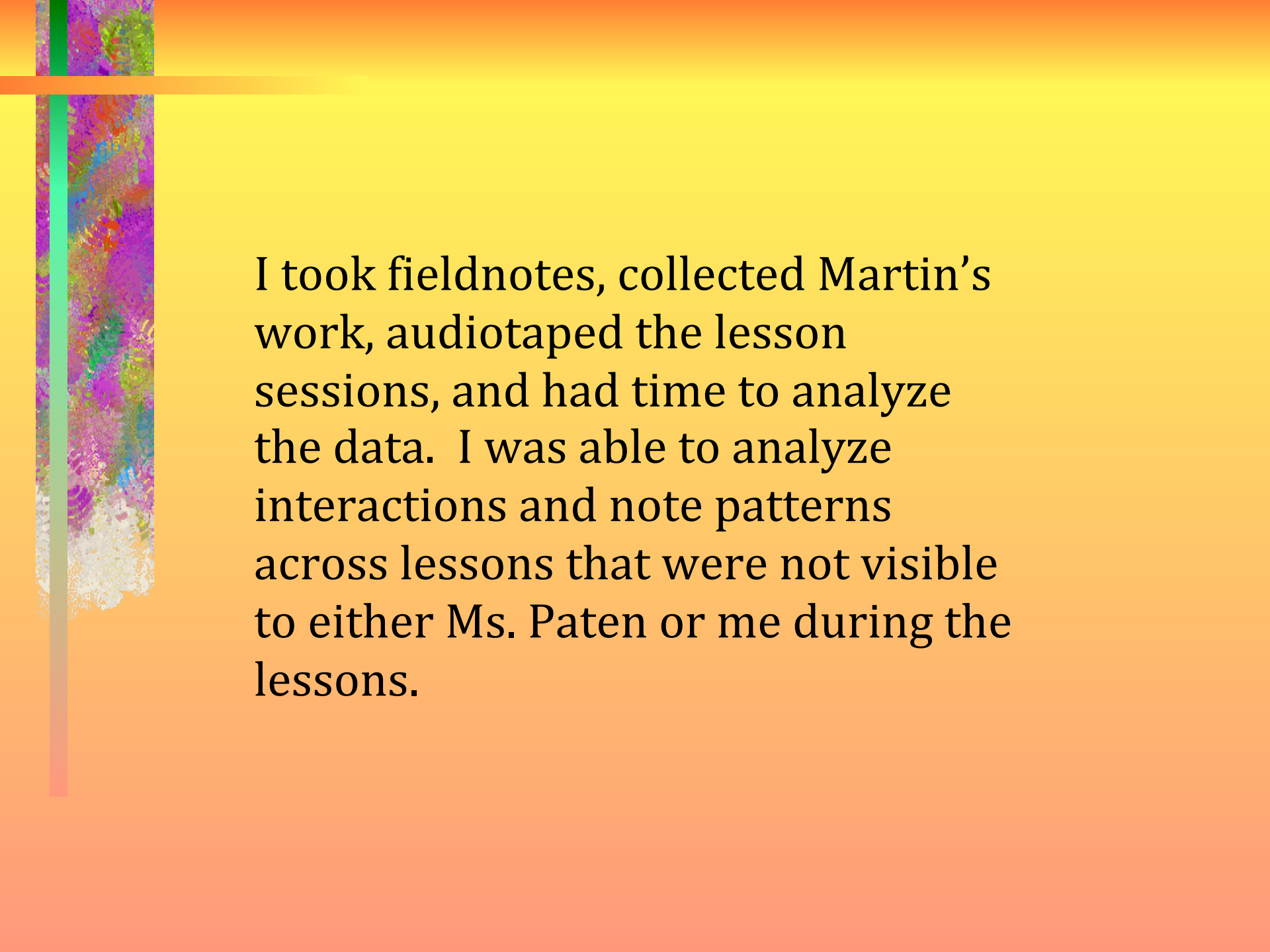
1.) We must ask, what do miscommunications like these mean within instructional relationships over a long period of time. When do out-of-synch interactions become microaggressions that affect students' identities and their sense of literate efficacy?




2.) Perhaps even more sobering is how these same interactions might play out in a classroom where the teacher does not have the luxury of working one-on-one. How might these scenarios have played out differently if there were 20 other children in the room? Would Ms. Paten have been able to recognize and negotiate miscommunications?



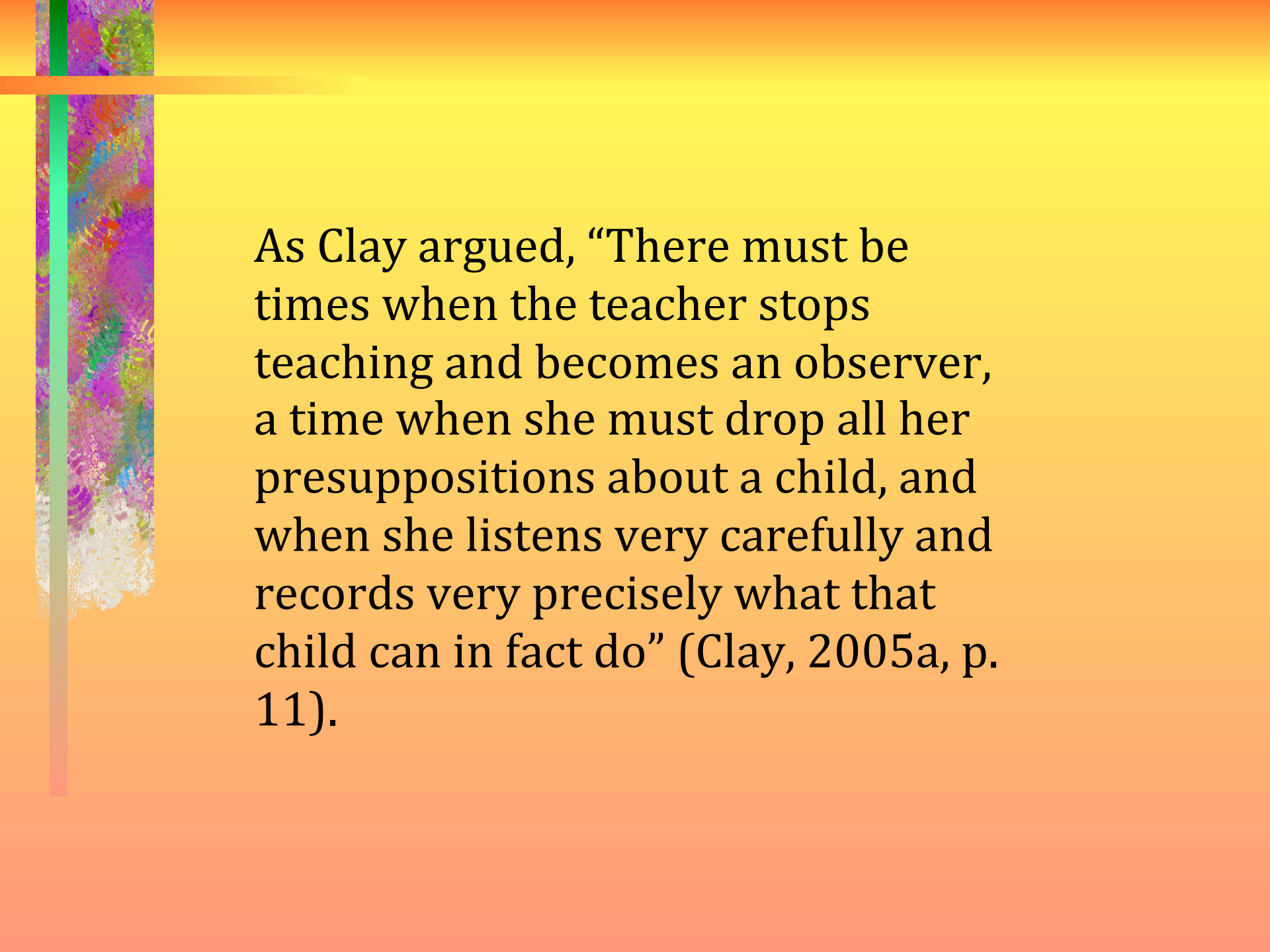
As Matusov (1996) suggests, these changes are impossible until *out-of-synch* interactions and cumulative processes involving microaggressions are recognized. I had a huge advantage in that I was able to observe Martin's lessons over time.



I took fieldnotes, collected Martin's work, audiotaped the lesson sessions, and had time to analyze the data. I was able to analyze interactions and note patterns across lessons that were not visible to either Ms. Paten or me during the lessons.



While most teachers may not be able to collect data to this extent, they can videotape their interactions with challenging students, talk with students about what makes them uncomfortable, analyze student work, and invite students to write about their most or least favorite reading and writing activities. Teachers can pay particular attention to times when students withdraw, engage in avoidance behaviors, and make comments that provide clues as to how they are experiencing instruction.



As Clay argued, “There must be times when the teacher stops teaching and becomes an observer, a time when she must drop all her presuppositions about a child, and when she listens very carefully and records very precisely what that child can in fact do” (Clay, 2005a, p. 11).



Thank you for Listening!!!!

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