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JOURNALS

Ray Chartrand

My name is Ray Chartrand. I am a teaching assistant at H. C. Avery School and an education student at the University of Manitoba. As an education student in the Weekend College Program at the University of Manitoba, I have been assigned to write reflective journals throughout many of my courses.

These reflective journals have been an eye-opener for me. They have resulted in my learning, reflecting, reviewing and challenging my actions, ideas and beliefs. I have learned much about education and myself by taking the time to think and write. This experience has made me a better teaching assistant, student and person. I am able to reflect on my experiences, ideas and beliefs. Through these reflections, I can learn, rejoice, vent or change my actions, ideas or beliefs to aid my students. The writing of journals provides an opportunity to grow as an educator. These journals have provided me with the opportunity to develop and strengthen my educational philosophy. My hope is to continue thinking and writing in the future, so that I can help my students and myself.

Here are a few examples of my writings. I would like to thank Mrs. Thompson at H. C. Avery School for the opportunity to share my experience with you and I welcome the opportunity to help.

Quiet Learning

Last year, I worked with a grade seven male in a Life Skills class. This student has minor learning disabilities and that is why he was in this Life Skills class. The goal of the class was to develop social skills within a small group setting (5 students).

The Life Skills class met once a cycle. We would do a cooking activity, such as baking cookies or making macaroni and cheese. Our small group would share the responsibility of the different tasks to complete the cooking assignment. These five students had to learn to communicate and cooperate with each other to be successful. Also, they had to work with adults who were not familiar to them.

I was not familiar with this student. This student was not someone with whom I had worked. I would meet him for the first time in January when our Life Skills classes began and would continue with him until the end of June. Harry (not his real name) was very quiet and shy. During our classes, he would always keep his head down and not say much to me or to anyone else. I would often try to engage Harry in conversation but I was not successful.

Overall, I was extremely pleased with our Life Skills class. The children had much opportunity to develop social skills. They learned how to work together to complete their assignments. During this time they followed instructions of the instructors. Most importantly, they talked and laughed about the things they were experiencing within this educational setting.

On the other hand, I was not sure what kind of learning Harry had experienced. He did not address me by name and often would ignore me outside the building. From this standpoint, I felt that we had not gained or experienced much within our Life Skills class.

To my surprise, during this new school year, Harry has smiled at me and called my by name. Our conversation is at the stage where we only say hello, but I am amazed at this situation. I have learned that certain students learn at different stages and rates. Even when I assume that no learning may be taking place, learning is occurring. This learning occurs at a level that I do not fully understand yet, but I hope that I will learn more about how this takes place.

Secondly, on the theme of communication, when I attempted to engage Harry in conversation, I was pleasant, calm, and thoughtful. I never pressured Harry to respond. At every situation, I would smile and ask him questions that I would ask any other student. I am glad that I handled myself this way because this may have given Harry the confidence and courage to speak to me, then, or at a later time. If I had ignored him, he may not have spoken to me this year. Harry spoke to me on his own terms and I am grateful to him.

Why?

In my university class the other day, we were discussing the "Manitoba School Question". This made me think of questions that I would like to ask someone and answers I would like to have.

Why is it that certain students get funding and others do not? In my experience, I have seen students who could use the assistance of a para-professional to aid them with their education. Yet, these students do not get the extra attention because they are not handicapped enough or they are not violent. I have thought that many of these students could achieve more with more funding. The answer to this question does not seem fair.

Why do all schools seem alike? An educator like Howard Gardner states that we have multiple intelligences. Children learn at different rates and levels. Children learn in many different ways. Yet, all our schools seem to be the same. This idea of teaching students in all the same way is "for the birds".

Why are we having standards tests? Is the answer to this question as stupid as I think it is? Children from the city will experience different things than children from rural areas. These different experiences allow children to learn different things. Also, I believe that we value different ideas and experiences. A child from a reserve in Manitoba may speak Cree, and English may be his second language. Therefore, he will not place a greater value on speaking English than Cree, making for an unfair situation for standards testing situations. In my personal past, while a Grade 8 student, I had a teacher who taught poetry through music. This created a love of English for me, which may not have occurred if he had stayed within the exact parameters of the curriculum. There are many other reasons that support the abolition of standards tests. On the other hand, proponents of standards tests will have many reasons for their decisions. Once and for all, I wish an answer could be reached which would be in the best interest of all children.

Why are there not more opportunities for professional development? In these days of cutbacks, it seems more and more difficult to improve oneself if funding and resources are withdrawn.

Why are there "politics" in education? The goal of education is to do what is best for children. Governments make decisions, which seem good for them, but are not in the best interest of children.

I find it interesting that there are elite opportunities for gifted children in sports, music, dance, etc., but within the schools, the enrichment programs are being cut because of budget cuts. Parents wish to produce the next Wayne Gretzky, but there is not as much interest in producing the next Louis Pasteur. Isn't there something wrong with this vision?

What is the role of the teacher? I have seen today where the role of the teacher has greatly expanded. The classroom teacher, all at the same time, must be teacher, nurse, parent, counsellor, mind reader, as well as various other roles. These expanding roles and duties make it more difficult and challenging to satisfy the needs of the students. It would be much easier if our sole responsibility was to teach. In the future, teachers must dialogue and work with students, teachers, administrators, school boards, government, parents, community and business to define the role of teacher so that the children can best be served.

These are some of the ideas and questions that I want to explore and study. Some cannot be answered easily but I will be able to answer parts of these questions myself. These discoveries will allow me to be a better teacher and challenge the teaching profession.

Finally, I will develop a philosophy because of these questions, which will allow me to best serve the students in my care. One day when I meet my God, I will get the answers to these difficult questions. Will I find out why little "Johnny" was not able to learn today?

Group Project

I felt that this was an excellent project. I learned things about the process of working with a team; I learned about my subject matter and I learned about myself.

I enjoyed working as a member of a team. The idea of a teacher being an island within another group of islands is passé. To teach successfully, the teacher of today should work as a team member. This type of teamwork leads to greater creativity. Teamwork lessens the load of preparation. Teamwork allows for support.

During our project, division of the work among us made it easier. We each were able to do a little bit. Everyone in the group brought artifacts and items to aid in our project; the abundance of these helped us be creative. Because there were four individuals bringing ideas to the table, our creativity was increased by a factor of four. An idea was presented and modified, making it more creative than the original thought. There is an extra bonus for working in the group. With the help of peers, you can use your strengths to help the group. With your weaknesses, the others in the group can support and help you. For example: it was obvious that some of us really enjoyed public speaking and others did not. Working in a group allowed those with strength in this area to be very creative, and those who viewed this as a weakness to receive the support they needed.

Group support was very evident to me. When my mother-in-law suffered a stroke, the team supported me emotionally and physically. I could count on them. When I was away, they were prepared to carry this project through without my help. Emotionally, I was given comfort by their kind words of support. This type of support will be needed at sometime by everyone. At our school, we have had children who were abused and others who have passed away during the past year. Peer support in these difficult times is important.

I learned a little more about parents and communication – especially that there are many ways to communicate with them. I must be diligent and prepared to communicate with them. Because communication is very important, I must use a variety of tools to reach parents and students. The key is clarity of message, patience, consistency, and positiveness. The message should be clearly understood by both parties. Patience is required to send a message and to wait for the idea to be processed. There will be times when the idea is not accepted and once again, patience will be needed. The message or passing of ideas needs to be done in a consistent manner. It is important to communicate in a positive way; positive communication leads to growth in understanding. Messages given in a positive way are received and accepted more readily, even if the idea or message is difficult to accept.

I believe that I learned more about myself in this project. I learned that I can work within a team concept. I have ideas that help the team. I do not have to compromise my ideas or beliefs. Finally, I learned that I can teach. As members of the group, we effectively communicated our ideas. I felt very confident about speaking to the group. I believe that learning and teaching occurred. I am closer to achieving my dream because I am willing to learn. I believe, therefore, my ability to teach will continue to grow and develop.

REFLECTIONS ON GARY FENSTERMACHER'S VIEW OF SEVEN OAKS EDUCATORS

Ruth Shrofel

Gary wrote:

The staff I have encountered at Seven Oaks are open, gracious, supportive and committed, superb combination of attributes. In Seven Oaks one sees colleagues wanting to make better schools for a better world. There is a moral sensitivity here, a view of what education can be when pursued with all the energy and hope that can be mustered on its behalf. Again, it is rare to encounter such high levels of enthusiasm and commitment dispersed so widely throughout the division.

**Seven Oaks People - open supportive, committed?
Are we? To whom? For what? What does it look like, sound like, and feel like?**

I've chosen the following definitions from the Canadian Oxford Dictionary as the definitions I believe Gary meant when he wrote this letter to us.

Open (of a person) frank and communicative. (of a mind) accessible to new ideas, unprejudiced or undecided.

Supportive to be actively interested in, occupy a position by the side of (a person) in order to give assistance or encouragement, assist by one's presence or attendance;

Committed having a strong dedication to a cause or a belief

Gracious kindly, courteous

It is very interesting to look at the many further definitions and once again become aware of perspective and the social construction of our reality.

Support reinforced with elastic fibers in order to support the muscles and veins in the leg

Open not constipated

Today I believe we are here to get behind these terms and see what they mean to us and how applicable (or non-applicable) they are in our daily practice. Are these attributes evidence of company manners or do we operate in such a way in our daily practice as to be worthy of this high praise?

Ideally, I feel Seven Oaks is truly about people. The people around whom we centre our care and concern are the children, our students. I find I must watch the use of the word children, because I often deal with eighteen-year-old students and their perception of themselves is not one of being children.

I recently dealt with an issue involving some students and some particularly childish behavior (in their terms: just goofing around! In my terms: theft!) When one of those involved and I came to that point in our discussion when all that need be said had been, (or at least no more would be heard), and we both felt the issue was over, restitution had been established. I put out my hand to seal our discussion and ended the meeting. The student, rather self consciously, shook my hand. I said, "The next time I shake your hand will be when you, in cap and gown, cross the stage and I congratulate you as I hand you your diploma." I saw the hesitation and then almost glassy-eyed stare that came to his face, followed by a genuine smile. What a simple gesture I thought and realized that handshake had accomplished many things:

- it brought our discipline issue to an end
- it also symbolized an acceptance, almost an expectation, of this student's maturity
- it helped him visualize a positive future, a realization of his goal
- it was a sharing of my confidence in the student.

To me this situation illustrated how simple it is to be open, supportive, committed and gracious, and yet how difficult. What it takes is the sharing of oneself – the reaching out. While I know that a hug can do wonders for my own children, at school that connection is not the most appropriate. What a difference a handshake can make.

Are we willing to reach out? Are we willing to let others reach in? I think about Gary's terms and I sum them up as relationships and connections. Of all the attributes in Gary's description, I think I struggled most with the concept of openness. I believe that openness goes beyond a personal quality. It is a relationship one has with others.

When I tried to relate this to daily practice, I kept returning to a school team which deals with "students at-risk". I wrote that and then realized that each one of us is "at-risk". The group I am referring to, for the most part, are students with severe attendance behavioural issues – students who are not functioning with any success amid the general population. We have formed a support committee, consisting of three members, to work with these students. Along with supporting parents and students, we most certainly act as support for one another. Coming from three perspectives means that no one must make decisions in isolation. We try to define openness in our work together as the act of speaking openly and honestly about the important issues facing our students and their families. But (and here I feel is the essence of my definition of openness) we draw from each other the support to face the continual struggle of challenging our own thinking.

I have come to the understanding that openness is much more than expressing one's opinion, more than allowing everyone a say. I believe that we short-change ourselves when, even though everyone feels he/she has a right to air his/her views, no one really listens and reflects. This is substituting talking "at" for genuine communication and dialogue. Nothing undermines openness more than certainty. When we feel as if we have the answer all motivation to question our thinking disappears. We often have a pre-meeting to discuss the student we will be "interviewing", or as we often say, who will be interviewing us. At times, we do approach the meeting with some strategies and possible outcomes, but we find by working together as closely as we have that we never hesitate to say "you know I'd like to rethink this", or "I thought that my answer would be ... but I've heard things today that have made me stop and think." We offer support to each other, to the students, to the parents, to other staff members, and to the division. Sometimes things do not work out for the students, even though we have attempted to put in as many supports as possible. We then do not simply let the student vanish. Instead, we once again call on student and parent to meet for an "out-take" meeting at which we, once again, offer support to the family in dealing with a student who will not attend our school. We have been very frank with parents in indicating that we refuse to mirror the negatives in the students life. We look for ways to support parents

in their parenting role, offering CGC intervention (often previously refused, but now worth a second look) or connections to agencies or services that might be useful, e.g. the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, family therapy. We may be involved in connecting the student with a volunteer placement or assisting with the creation of a resume for employment. We also try to support the parent by connecting him or her with parents of other students in the class.

I see this as a microcosm of what Seven Oaks is all about. There is need for connections, for leadership, for sharing and supporting the leadership role. In this type of open and supportive environment, we tend not to see the "authority" (be that the administrator, teacher, social worker, parent or student) as having all the answers. I believe an authoritarian mentality weakens the individual, allowing him/her to absolve himself/herself of responsibility. It also sets one up for cynicism when an event arises which reveals the people "at the top" do not have all the answers. An open and supportive community would acknowledge that any answer is at best an approximation, always subject to improvement, and, therefore, never final. What does an open discussion look like? I believe that to carry on a frank and communicative discussion, we need to avoid the use of the words "many of us feel", or "most teachers feel" or "the community in general" etc., if "the many" or "the most" cannot be named. I've dealt with situations involving staff, students and parents in which the use of these words was intended to add weight to the statement, but in fact, has led to more misunderstanding and hard feelings. To be open means that one can openly voice an opinion and expect to be heard on the strength of his /her own beliefs. When each statement is prefaced by the use of a collective, it implies that the individual does not feel worthy on his/her own to be heard. Perhaps this is indicative of the fact that not everyone agrees that we are indeed a supportive, open community. How do we show that each individual can be heard in a respectful manner? I believe that we must take the time to sit down face-to-face and discuss our perceptions. Physicist, David Bohm's concept of dialogue can be compared to openness which emerges when two or more individuals become willing to suspend their certainty in the other's presence. They become willing to share their thinking and susceptible to having their thinking influenced by one another. When we stop and question who the "everyone" or "most " actually are, we face the situation with those who want to be named. Having said this, there is a definite place for "We" language. A supportive community involves a "We" mentality as opposed to an "Us/Them" way of constructing the world. Difficulties are not mine or theirs or yours to address but, rather, "ours". "Support", using the definition I choose to follow implies that we "occupy a position beside a person in order to give assistance or encouragement, assist by one's presence or attendance." When I think of the team approach, I see the supportive aspect in action. Support does not mean assuming all responsibility but, rather, extending the hand, acknowledging the individual and being there. I see support as being part of a team that trusts one another, complements each other's strengths, compensates for each other's limitations and sets goals that are larger than individual ones. This I see as the strength and purpose, which motivate Seven Oaks people.

To quote Peter Senge in his book The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of a Learning Organization [openness is]

"a commitment to serve one another, and a willingness to be vulnerable in the context of that service. The best definition of the love that underlies openness is the full and unconditional commitment to another's "completion". To another being all that she or he can and wants to be.... This is a tough notion (sometimes characterized by the phrase ruthless compassion) which brooks no compromise in both the sharing of one's feelings and views and being open to having those views change."

THE DO-NOTHING VICE-PRINCIPAL

Mark Miles

I was asked to write a paper based on comments I made at the Administrator's Retreat last February, where I talked about being "a do-nothing Vice-Principal". I agreed to do it, forgetting that I had made very few notes – it's easy for me to ramble on when I have a microphone and a captive audience. I have found it difficult to ramble on when it comes to putting pen to paper!

During a conversation with a colleague at a Friday evening social function last Christmas, we somehow got talking about perceptions people had of the administrative team named to the "new" West Kildonan Collegiate. As I remember it, the response went something like this:

*"We've heard lots of great things about Betty".
"Ron sure knows the high school system".
"And Miles – well, he'll be the do-nothing Vice-Principal".*

I have to admit I hadn't spent much time thinking about how people viewed me as a Vice-Principal and, as a result, didn't have much of a reply (even if I had thought about it, I don't think I'd have had a reply!) I also have to admit that I didn't spend much time thinking about the comment for the rest of the weekend. However, when I returned to school on Monday morning I began to think about what it meant to be a "do-nothing Vice-Principal" – because it certainly didn't seem as if I'd been doing nothing for the past two years.

I began by thinking about the way I viewed the Vice-Principals during my school days. (I got to know some of them pretty well!) From Grades seven to twelve, the vice-principal's I had were the disciplinarians, the ones who took care of the troublemakers. The job of the vice-principal, it seemed, was to yell at, give a detention to or suspend a student from school. If that was the role I was expected to play, then I admit I was a "do-nothing Vice-Principal".

I then thought of a piece of advice that Dave Coulter passed on to me before he left for U.B.C. The advice was "not to allow teachers to give their 'power' to you". In this context "power" was understood to mean the relationship between teachers and their students. I came to understand that I couldn't simply take students who were causing trouble and yell at them, give them a detention, or suspend them. Rather, it meant that I had to begin a series of conversations with the student, with the teacher and, most importantly, it meant I had to initiate or mediate a conversation between the teacher and the student. What surprised me after these conversations began was the amount of care and compassion that the teachers showed. The conversations weren't about detentions and suspensions, but rather about creating the best possible learning environment for the student in trouble. Time and time again, I marveled at teachers who would go the fourth, fifth and sixth mile in order to keep "at-risk" students in their classrooms.

This doesn't mean that suspensions weren't used. It did mean that a conversation or a series of conversations took place prior to a student being suspended. Exceptions were made, of course, for fighting, drug/alcohol use, etc. Conversations with these students began when they returned to school. Actually what became difficult in dealing with "at-risk" students was learning to distinguish between caring for a child and enabling a child. To care for the child meant to create a safe environment where the child could continue his/her education. This is obviously what we wanted to do. To enable meant to leave the student in an environment where her/she could continue "at-risk" behaviours without any changes occurring. I believe the most difficult decision we have to make is the one to "let go" and find alternatives for a child outside of our school.

I concluded my rambling by sharing a newsletter that my nephew Thomas brought home. To understand it fully you need to know that his mother Jennifer and I graduated together from the Faculty of Education

and for the past seventeen years have had a continuous dialogue about education. The conversation was enriched five years ago when my niece Jane began Grade one in a multi-age classroom taught by Lisa Siemens at Riverview School. This newsletter, I believe, is a small but powerful example of the way Lisa approaches education.

Hi Mark,

This is actually not a bad way to start your school day – with a little inspirational poetry. This came home from Lisa (now Thomas's teacher) on the 1st day of school. I thought you might like it.

SHOULDERS

Naomi Shihab Nye

**A man crosses the street in rain,
stepping gently, looking two times north and south,
because his son is asleep on his shoulder.
No car must splash him.
No car drive too near to his shadow.
This man carries the world's most sensitive cargo
But he's not marked.
Nowhere does his jacket say FRAGILE,
HANDLE WITH CARE.
His ear fills up with breathing.
He hears the hum of a boy's dream
deep inside him.
We're not going to be able
to live in this world
if we're not willing to do what he's doing
with one another.
The road will only be wide.
The rain will never stop falling.**

Lisa continued with,

"When my nephew was born, I gave my brother a copy of this poem, thinking it was mostly about what it means to be a parent. Today, I am sending it to you thinking that it is about more than that – it is about living in a world where we need to be reminded how important it is to care for each other. As we in Room 209 set out to live and learn together in the coming year, it seems a perfectly fitting metaphor. Sometimes I think we should all be walking around with signs saying FRAGILE HANDLE WITH CARE. One of my main hopes for this year is that Room 209 becomes a place where people step gently, hear the hum of other's dreams, and realize that we are all, each of us, "the world's most sensitive cargo."

Up until I read this poem, I had been quite unemotional about Thomas going into Grade 1. This stopped me in my tracks. I wasn't half-way through reading it before I started misting over. I know part of it was that Thomas does need special care in that room in order to be allergy-safe. But it got to me on other levels, too. It's a good reminder about what's important in life.

As I write this, I think about some of the kids that you work with and wonder whether they even know that they have dreams deep inside them somewhere. Keep on looking past the surface they give you. "The rain will never stop falling."

My, my, how philosophical! Must be late at night. Take care of yourself, too.

Love, Jen

I believe deeply that the conversations we have allow us to move past the surface that many of our students display for us. Working together, the conversations allow us to survive "the rain" and most importantly to "hear the hum of a dream" within all the students in our care. If that is perceived as doing nothing, then I'm grateful for all the teachers who continue to "do nothing" with me.

PROACTIVE PLANNING AND EDUCATIONAL CHANGE **One School's Path to the Future**

Clarence Fisher

The need for educational change has been passionately debated in the media and coffee shops for the past several years. As the pressure grows, individual schools and districts need to form "change plans" to be effective in future years. This is not "new" or shocking to anyone remotely involved with the system. The question then becomes, so what are we going to do? There are many choices and possibilities and all of the pundits have their own prescription for the future. Cultural literacy, multiple intelligences, brain-based learning, and differentiated instruction are only a few examples of current educational movements. I want to discuss the proactive plans that one small school is making and pursuing in order to see themselves safely into the information age.

The School District of Snow Lake is the smallest in the province of Manitoba. The district itself consists of a single kindergarten to senior four school. The student population in past years has been as high as 500, but with mines closing in the area, it currently hovers around 300. The school is located in the town of Snow Lake, approximately 600 kms. north of Winnipeg. The facts of geography and economics have driven us to re-examine our role, and to form a vision for our future.

We have had success in previous years with a traditionally organized system. Our children have strong basic skills and are graduating and continuing on to post-secondary education at a rate higher than the national average. Lately though, we have been questioning the effectiveness and the role of the school system as a whole. We are concerned about issues of technological literacy and the "new basics" that children will require to be productive members of society. We have been reflecting on our reasons for initiating and continuing certain classroom practices and characteristics of school organization. This has included small issues such as "why do the students put their shoes there after recess?" "Why do they line up? Wouldn't it be faster if they just came in?" and also much larger issues such as "Why are we relying on internal testing for student assessment to such a great extent?" "Could our curriculum be organized differently or more effectively?"

This reflection on school performance in the past, and "visioning" for the future is based upon ongoing internal dialogues concerning the skills, abilities, and school practices we feel will be of most benefit to the children in our system. We have an internal professional development group that meets to discuss recent books and articles that we see as being beneficial. As well, it is the responsibility of our Curriculum Coordinator to promote discussion around issues which will improve the quality of education at our school. A recent example of this is the internal publication and conversation surrounding an eight point "Statement of Beliefs" regarding the role of evaluation and assessment in our school. These dialogues occur not only internally among staff, but also involve administration, the school board, and parents. Regular communication at school board meetings regarding these discussions, and ongoing school board and parental representation at committee meetings allow all stakeholders to have an impartial view of proceedings and input into changes being considered.

These discussions and questions have led us to the point of action. This academic year we have initiated a project called Challenge 2000. It involves restructuring our curriculum, reorganizing our reporting procedures, and working with teachers on world class grade level standards and classroom practices.

The project has begun this year with the designing and implementation of an integrated curriculum. These locally developed documents have clear grade level standards and technological skills incorporated into units that require children to demonstrate their understanding of content through real world projects. From kindergarten to grade eight, each classroom will investigate six integrated units that comprise approximately eighty percent of their school year. The units are designed under three general headings: Human Relationships, Science/Technology, and Global Awareness. These organizers allow a new focus for mandated curriculum content to emerge and also allow teachers to work with their children and course content in inventive ways. Teachers plan and structure classroom activities with the concepts of Numeracy, Literacy, Life Skills, The Arts, and Creative Applications in mind. These organizers ensure that mandated content is taught, yet allow the teachers a level of comfort and a planning tool when working with integrated topics in their classrooms.

We have placed a firm focus in the units on information accessing, processing, and communicating skills. Information is growing at an incredible exponential rate, and students must have the skills to manage this volume and convert it into useable formats to meet their needs. The traditional school setting in which teachers control the flow of information is not a reality. By giving children access to technology and information, their classroom becomes the world.

Reorganizing our curriculum has led us to the challenge of time. Forty, sixty, or eighty minute working blocks do not address reality at all. The learning curve required to access information and to format it into multimedia presentations, spreadsheets, etc. requires large time allotments. For this reason, these units are designed to be taught in integrated half days. Because we are a K-12 school, we have primary and elementary teachers who have the expertise to mentor middle school teachers who may not have as much experience working with their students in this way. These extended time blocks have children more engaged with information and compels them to investigate issues more deeply than otherwise possible. These changes are meant to make the learning situations in our school more authentic, and to increase the possibilities that children will take part in activities that are realistic to the "outside world." We want our classrooms to be places that engage children with real world problems and issues. By having teachers implement units that immerse students in authentic issues and require them to work with the technology that brings these issues "to life," we believe students will become much more cognizant, competent, and confident of the knowledge, skills, and abilities they require. These immersion units give classroom communities the time they require, not only to become involved in passive, impressionistic acts of learning, but also with constructive, expressive, and reflective models. This balanced instructional design will allow our children to become learners who are reflective of their own skills and abilities and constantly conscious of ways to improve.

When implementing a new curriculum, the issue of program and student evaluation arises. We have listened to our teachers and community members who are asking for a more detailed reporting format. Our present report cards do not address many of the issues tackled in the new units. New report cards that emphasize skill lists and skill demonstrations over test scores will be the next challenge. We are currently discussing other system-wide assessment choices, such as portfolios, student checklists, and student self-assessments to supplement our report cards. These techniques encourage the children to become more reflective and critical of their own products and the processes they engage in to complete their work. We believe our integrated program will see our children gaining more skills at higher levels of competencies, and these successes need to be fully communicated to staff members, parents, and the children themselves.

Any change required in a school must address the context of the school if we want it to be successful. For this project, we have been sure to involve all levels of stakeholders in our discussions. From informal parent meetings at the classroom level, to the provincial Department of Education, all must be informed and kept up-to-date on our progress. This has required a great amount of time writing newspaper articles, doing interviews, and being open to telephone calls to address the concerns of the community. One major characteristic of this project is that we are not trying to "sell" it to our community. We have introduced this project as, in our view, to be one possible route for the future of the school. This openness to dialogue has allowed the initial concept to be reformed and modified many times to address community concerns

and ideals. The basic starting point of Challenge 2000 is still strong, but through authentic dialogue at every level, we have made many refinements.

As this project is being implemented over the next several years, the issues that we face are still large and varied. Differences of opinion over assessment techniques and formats loom large, as our students are required to write standards tests mandated by the provincial government. We also still encounter a critical public perception of "school." Issues are being resolved through dialogue, and we cannot back away from the table. Ongoing committee and public meetings, and informal discussions will help our reform project grow stronger. If we would like the public and the community as a whole to support our work, we must learn to function with these groups in new ways – just as we must learn to do so with our students.

Appendix One

Joseph H. Kerr
Statement of Beliefs:
Evaluation and Assessment

1. Assessment should be ongoing and continuous.
2. Assessment methods should be varied (six or seven methods).
3. All forms of assessment are equally important and valid.
4. Students at the K-8 level should have no more than one test per week.
5. No one subject area should be tested more than once per month.
6. Evaluations should call for higher level thinking, problem-solving, and demonstrating skills in authentic situations.
7. When possible, students should be allowed to choose the format, which will demonstrate their skills and knowledge best.
8. A main goal of assessment is to encourage children to become reflective thinkers about their academic progress and to help them set goals for continuing improvement.

Appendix Two

A sample grade four integrated unit under the heading of Global Awareness

CANADA'S LINKS TO THE WORLD

Grade Four

Overview

This unit is mainly based out of the current social studies curriculum guides. It emphasizes the fact that Canada is only one country in the world and that interdependence in the world is a reality today. With the linking of financial markets, trade, the ease of world travel, and goods and services available to us worldwide in the blink of an eye, an understanding of the world as linked is vital.

This study should focus on links to the world made through trade, family descent, travel, products available, and interest. The manner in which interdependence effects their lives personally should be a strong focus.

Knowledge

- Locate specific regions, countries, and bodies of water on a world map.
- Describe some of the important physical and/or cultural aspects of selected regions or countries.
- Describe how physical environments and location effect communities and their ability to produce certain types of goods and services.
- Give examples of similarities and differences between communities, and the goods and services available and produced.
- Describe how specific regions or countries and Canada are linked and interdependent.
- Provide examples and be able to use as labels SOME of these terms: continent, island, peninsula, plain, valley, hill, mountain, oasis, stream, river, lake, sea, ocean, coast, bay, strait, hemisphere, poles, country, province, state, territory, region, capital, city, village, urban, rural, reservoir, canal.
- Gain an understanding of the concept of time zones and the differences in the differing value of world currencies.
- Have an understanding of the concept of immigration and how the patterns of immigration have changed over time.

SKILLS

Math

- Can count money and make change up to \$50.00.
- Read and write time using a.m. and p.m., reads an analog clock to the nearest minute.
- Can calculate the time in different time zones worldwide and the simple monetary values.
- Communicate and apply directions on a grid using North, South, East, West and place objects in a specific place on a grid.
- Illustrate and use decimal points to the hundredths (money).
- Use multiplication and a calculator to make monetary conversions.

Language

- Identify similarities and differences between personal experiences and the experiences of people from various cultures portrayed in oral, literary, and media texts.
- Answer inquiry or research questions using a variety of information sources.

Personal Skills

- Assess the usefulness of information for inquiry or research needs using a set of pre-established criteria.

- Think through problem situations and anticipate occurrences.
- Accept cultural and community differences.

Interpersonal Skills

- Prepare and share information on a topic using print and non-print aids to inform a familiar audience.
- Work in a group and help peers reach group goals.
- Use appropriate voice, gesture, and body language to peers and adults and "read" the voice, gesture, and body language of others.

Accessing Information

- Use the Internet to gain information about a specific place or region.
- Use Boolean search schemes to narrow searches.
- Use e-mail to communicate with people in diverse world locations.
- Use the cardinal and intermediate directions to describe the placement of countries and/or regions on a world map.
- Use effective library skills to identify all possible sources of information (books, newspapers, magazines, etc.).
- Use a multimedia encyclopedia to locate appropriate information.
- Use an atlas.
- Use coordinates on a grid system to locate a place on a map.
- Use a map legend and common symbols to gain information from a map.

Managing Information

- Organize information and ideas in logical sequences using a variety of strategies (note-taking, clustering, webbing, etc.)
- Make notes of keywords, phrases, and images.
- Cite authors and titles of sources alphabetically.

Communicating Information

- Use an age-appropriate multimedia program to produce a presentation containing information about a good or service available in Canada from a different part of the world.
- Create original texts (murals, scripts, short plays, descriptive stories, etc.) to demonstrate an understanding of how Canada is linked to the world.

- Create a model or web to show different types of links they have or Canada has with the world.

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LESSONS FROM READING RECOVERY

Orysia Hull

Intent of Reading Recovery

During the 1998-99 school year, I had an unusual and interesting opportunity to observe students and teachers working together in the Reading Recovery Program within our division. It was my job to work with the classroom teachers whose students were participating in the program. From our readings of research into Reading Recovery, we knew that transfer of knowledge to the classroom situation did not occur easily. Therefore, students needed to see themselves as readers, not only in the resource room, but also in the classroom. In order to assist with this process, I observed students in both settings on numerous occasions. My point of view about Reading Recovery is based on these observations and my knowledge of how young children learn to read and write.

I am not surprised to see that all of our Reading Recovery students made gains in their reading and writing. After all, the program is based on sound reading theory and professional practice. Ken Goodman (at Wayne State in Detroit) published "Reading is Only a Psycholinguistic Guessing Game" in 1965. This article was the result of his study of what it is that all readers do when they are reading. He came to the conclusion that readers use at least three cueing systems – semantics, syntax and grapho-phonemics. Fluent readers use these systems well and seem to know intuitively how to do so. Poor readers use these same systems, but much more inefficiently. Thus semantics, syntax or grapho-phonemic cues cause these readers to create miscues, while proficient readers use these systems to comprehend the text. At around the same time in New Zealand, Marie Clay realized that a significantly large percentage of students referred to the psychologist also exhibited difficulty reading. She observed five and six-year-old children as they were reading to see if she could ascertain what distinguished proficient readers from non-proficient ones. She concluded that proficient readers use all cueing systems simultaneously. In the late 1970's, after a variety of techniques were tested, she developed Reading Recovery as a way of showing weak readers what strong readers do, with the inherent assumption that this would help the weak readers.

It is important to note that in New Zealand children spend a full day in kindergarten, in classrooms that have a strong focus on literacy. Reading and writing are daily tasks for all kindergarten children. This is often referred to as the "first wave" of teaching in which the classroom teacher is the promoter and facilitator of literacy learning. A vast majority of students make significant gains in their control over literacy processes in the classroom setting. Some require additional support. These students are then referred to Reading Recovery. The premise is that they have experienced a first year of quality teaching. In addition, these students must be six years of age. It is believed that a certain level of developmental maturity is required to complete the Reading Recovery program successfully. Participation in the program constitutes the "second wave" of teaching. Again, the vast majority of the students involved in Reading Recovery do very well.

Those who do not are then referred to the "third wave" of teaching, which is special education. These numbers are very small. They truly represent those who need the intervention of specialists.

Reading Recovery Lessons

The format of a Reading Recovery lesson is basically the same in all locations, regardless of country or continent. The duration of the lesson is thirty minutes - a very pressured and intensive half-hour, both for the teacher and the student. Specially written little books are used. The text is very controlled and, at the earliest levels, sounds like "*primerese*". Whether or not it is true or accurate, the assumption here is that students need limited text to gain control slowly over the reading process. Picture clues, controlled vocabulary, repeated words, familiar language patterns and concepts (to New Zealanders, not necessarily Canadians) are typical of the books at the beginning of the series.

A typical Reading Recovery lesson includes:

- reading of a familiar book,
- reading of a new book which was briefly introduced (a "walk through") the previous day, while the teacher completes a running record,
- identifying letters and examining orthographic patterns (very briefly),
- writing a sentence or story and then re-arranging a cut-up version of it,
- viewing a new book.

Implications for Teachers

So what is it about this format and these activities that encourage students to become better readers? What implications do these have for classrooms?

The first is consistency. Reading Recovery students receive daily, half-hour, one-to-one instruction. How many of us as classroom teachers have wished that we had an opportunity to work with our weak readers for an uninterrupted time everyday? We know that daily practice is important, and that for some students, school is the only place to practise reading. Learning to read and write is no different than learning to ride a bike or play the piano. We learn by doing. The more we do the task, the better we are able to perform it. The more we perform it well, the more confident we become and the more willing we are to take on other tasks. As we contemplate our classroom practices, we need to consider the consistency we provide to those who need it most.

The second is the framework and structure of developmental learning theory, which is embedded in all the tasks. Learning proceeds from the gross to the fine. Students begin with familiar topics and language. They start with the context or meaning, using their background of experience and what they know about the way language works, and move eventually to the print. Thus, they begin with the panoramic view and slowly move to a narrower range and finally to a zoom focus on detail, going from the big picture to the little one, from the gross to the fine.

There is also consistency between the learning theory and the reading theory inherent in this approach. In psycholinguistic reading theory, learning proceeds from the gross to the fine. Semantics and syntax are the bigger pictures or blue prints that guide readers as they construct meaning and grapho-phonemics are the finishing details that complete the construction. Students who struggle with reading usually struggle with semantics and syntax, or the meaning of text. If they also struggle with grapho-phonemics, it is because the sounds and symbols do not trigger meaning for them.

In Reading Recovery lessons, the print used for the study of sound-symbol relationships is taken from the text just read and from familiar vocabulary, which is the third reason students experience success. They use the pragmatics of language – their knowledge of the topic or the context in which it occurs. Because they "walked through the text" previously and then read it aloud to the teacher, they know the context. They have narrowed the possibilities of what the words might be. They are using the appropriate schema or schemata to make sense of the words.

In using their background knowledge, moving from the gross to the fine, and calling up the required schemata, they are working from the familiar and treading into the unfamiliar. Their developing knowledge

of the written form is supported by their knowledge about the topic and about the way oral language works. This is an example of using Vygotsky's theory of proximal development as the teacher assists the child in "stretching" his or her knowledge base, moving slightly beyond what the child is able to do on his or her own.

Instruction is specific to the literacy needs of the child, based on observations, interactions, conversations, running records, written responses and what the teacher knows about the child as a person. Running record is Marie Clay's more "teacher-friendly" version of Goodman's miscue analysis. The other tools are in keeping with the notion of "kid-watching". These activities and procedures help us to understand the child's intent and the child's thinking about literacy processes. They are "windows into the child's mind" (Goodman). When we look through a window, we only see part of a room and what is happening in it. The same is true for the tools we use to help us see what the child is attempting to do. At the same time, though, these tools give us some direction about the next step in learning/teaching and they give us clues about the most appropriate way of expanding literacy knowledge within the child's view of the world. Interaction during reading or writing conferences is based on a specific need identified through these observations.

Furthermore, teacher feedback is immediate, verifying the child's attempts to make sense of the print. This prevents getting lost in a sea of print and floundering for long periods of time, as we sometimes see in large classrooms in which reading and writing conferences are not a regular part of instruction. I did not observe the learned helplessness that may develop when students see the resource teacher over an extended period of time. Positive feedback is plentiful; students believe they will learn. Therefore, they do learn. Only one issue for growth or improvement is raised each day so that the child is not overwhelmed by what needs to be remembered. The focus is more heavily weighted toward looking at what the child can do, instead of what the child cannot do. Also, whenever possible, strategies discussed in Reading Recovery are applied by the classroom teacher in order to assist with transfer of knowledge to other appropriate situations.

Because Reading Recovery students write every day immediately after reading, they begin to see the connections between reading and writing and to oral language. Some of this is interactive writing in which the teacher takes on a very small part of the writing task in order to get past a major obstacle for the student. The pen is quickly returned to the student so that he or she maintains responsibility for and control over the writing task. In this way, the child learns that he or she can write. How many of us, in our concern for those who do not or choose not to write, have taken the task over for them? From the first day of school, children need to write by themselves so that they view themselves as writers. When someone else does the writing, the only lesson the child learns is "I can't do it". In Reading Recovery lessons, the teacher takes over the task only for a moment and then encourages the student to write the remainder of the intended text on his or her own.

While the student continues to write, the teacher quickly prints the sentence or story on a strip of paper and cuts the strip into individual words. This is the smallest unit of language used. Words allow us to draw upon our meanings for them, whereas letters need to be enmeshed in a word to determine context, meaning and pronunciation. The student verifies his or her understanding of the print by arranging the words in a meaningful order (usually the same as the original).

Letters are discussed when students need support with sounds and corresponding symbols within words. Sound boxes are created by the teacher and filled in by the student. Words are not separated into their letter sounds.



Instead, the word is said as one complete unit, perhaps a little more slowly than the normal speaking rate. The student is asked to listen for the sounds he or she hears and to write them in the position in which they are heard. Usually beginning and end are the first to be noted by the student. Sometimes teacher prompting is required for the middle. The word is repeated again. If the student is unable to

discern the middle sounds (and therefore, corresponding letters), the teacher writes them in for the student, but the student is then expected to write the word in his or her piece. Students are referred to other places in their books or journals when they have difficulty remembering words they have examined before. They begin to learn very quickly which sources they may use when they are uncertain.

Expectations are high regarding the conventions of print. Students are encouraged and expected to use appropriate punctuation, grammar, lower and upper case print, as well as standard spelling after an attempt has been made with approximated spelling. This sometimes differs from the expectations in the classroom. Those in which daily discussions occurred about the methods that authors use to help us comprehend print were the ones that appeared to be most successful in fostering consistent use of these elements. In these classes, teachers used numerous examples from children's literature to demonstrate techniques (standard forms) that authors employ to help us comprehend their text. For example, students who leave no spaces between words, or who experiment with non-standard methods of indicating words (periods, hyphens or slashes between words, circles or rectangles around the word, etc.) soon learn that authors always leave a space between the end of one word and the beginning of another. This is a courtesy that writers show their readers.

Punctuation works on the same principle. " 'Tom', said Dad" differs in meaning from "Tom said, 'Dad.'" The placement of the quotation marks and the commas is essential to our understanding of the sentence. The words are exactly the same, but the punctuation cues us to know which one is the speaker and which one is the listener, as well as the inflection required to allow a reader to convey this to an audience. In classrooms in which teachers constantly refer their students to published texts to see what authors do, students develop a fairly sophisticated knowledge of punctuation and its uses. In one of my observations, grade one students enthusiastically informed their library technician, as she was reading a story to them and said "dot, dot, dot" (...), "That's an ellipsis!" They repeated the word and then spelled it for her so that there could be no doubt about its pronunciation.

For Reading Recovery students, there is an opportunity to get up and move about the room. Their sitting time is no longer than fifteen minutes. Fidgety students don't fidget so much when they know they will have a legitimate reason to move around the room.

Home reading is easily packaged for practice in the evening. It consists of the book used for the "walk-through" and the words from the cut-up sentence. Parents are taught how to do the home reading with their child and to indicate they have heard their child read the text. The focus is on the child doing the reading, rather than the parent, although parents are encouraged to read literature to their children. Considering the many elements, activities and experiences that are in place within the Reading Recovery Program, it is not a surprise that most children become better readers.

Concerns

Given the number of positive aspects of Reading Recovery, why am I concerned about the trend in this direction? Why am I uneasy about some of the implications of the program?

In past years, the United Nations indicated that the country with the highest rate of literacy was New Zealand. Therefore, it seemed wise to use one of their successful approaches in our context. If the Reading Recovery Program worked for New Zealand, then it must work for us. This sort of thinking concerns me for several reasons.

The first is that credit for success is given to the program instead of the teachers who have extensive knowledge of literacy processes and know how to share this with their students. Reading Recovery is like other programs in that it depends on the teacher and the quality of teaching. Research has shown that the teacher is the one who makes the difference, not the program. Why, then, do we as a society continue to heap accolades on the program but not the teacher? Why do we as teachers continue to perpetuate this myth by crediting a program instead of the learning and hard work we have undertaken?

One implication of Reading Recovery is that it is "teacher-proof". If certain routines and practices are followed, most students who have experienced some difficulty in learning to read will become readers. Thus, it seems prudent to adopt the program for our Canadian context. The knowledge base of the teacher, however, is the critical element that supports literacy development – not any particular program. Would some of our classrooms look different if all teachers had extensive and intensive knowledge of literacy processes? I am inclined to think they would.

Furthermore, in an attempt to ensure that all reading recovery teachers share a common knowledge base and maintain the basic tenets, only those accredited by a Reading Recovery Institute are "allowed" to teach the program. A side effect of this exclusivity is a sense that the knowledge base is not available to all teachers. It certainly is available and has been used for years by teachers who have applied it with great success in their classrooms. Surely the knowledge of reading/writing theories and processes is the key factor. In attempting to control the knowledge base of teachers, Reading Recovery has become "franchised teaching", with little room for interpretation or exploration of the basic tenets. I see parallels between fast-food franchises and Reading Recovery. I know exactly what McDonald's has to offer - the same menu to everyone with very little change from day to day. I can make some limited choices from the menu and only very small changes to my selection (no cheese, extra pickle). How limited my diet would be if I had a daily dose of McDonald's! The purpose of developing a knowledge base about literacy within Reading Recovery needs to be the continuing exploration of the theories, tenets and processes inherent in the program and not the program itself. If I limit myself to delivering the program, then I am buying into the franchise.

The wholesale adoption of a program from one culture to the next creates variables that need to be considered – ones that may have a profound impact on the success of implementation. The fact that children in New Zealand begin school in the month of their fifth birthday has a tremendous impact on the nature of a class. They spend four to six weeks as part of an in-take class before placement in the most appropriate classroom can occur. Only a few new students enter a class at a time. This allows the teacher to know his or her students well; it also creates a setting in which more experienced students teach newcomers the routines and procedures that are part of their daily work. Students work cooperatively, using the knowledge of classmates and other resources as they construct meaning for print; teachers work as directors and facilitators of learning for the class and for individuals. The culture of the classroom fosters creative and critical thinking, along with increasing degrees of independence.

Another important variable is the fact that kindergarten classes in New Zealand operate for a full day, with the prime focus on literacy. Playing with language and all its functions is viewed as essential learning. Language is not limited to the oral realm. Children listen, speak, read and write every day. Toys, sand, water and crafts activities are used in a meaningful way as part of playing with language. New Zealanders have an intensive opportunity to extend their literacy knowledge within the first year of schooling. If we contrast this with the North American experience, it is obvious that children in New Zealand have enhanced opportunities for language learning.

Furthermore, implicit assumptions made by teachers in New Zealand are important features that need to be considered. Children are referred to the Reading Recovery Program only if they are six years old, with the understanding that they have been in school for a full year and that they have been part of the "first wave of good teaching". The first assumption is that students need to be six years old in order to be sufficiently developmentally mature for the requirements of Reading Recovery. Nonetheless, there is still a range of maturity, in addition to reading and writing knowledge, in this group. Selecting a particular age level does not seem to restrict the diversity of students experiencing reading difficulty. Perhaps, as stated by one of our teachers, you get what you get, and you have to take them from where they are and lead them on the path to where you'd like them to be.

The second assumption is that students have had a year of good teaching/learning experiences that encourage, support and entrench literacy development. An anthropologist viewing a kindergarten classroom might conclude that "tons" of good literature and children's constant use of it are considered the most important elements of learning to read and write. Teaching of skills occurs within this context. It is only after students have experienced this kind of intensive learning that they are referred to Reading

Recovery. Within the first and second wave of good teaching, most students learn to read and write. Only a small percentage of students are then perceived to require the "third wave of good teaching". In our schools, can we say with confidence that all our early years classes are comparable to those in New Zealand and that the first wave of teaching is in place? Are children constantly immersed in good literature for meaningful and authentic purposes? Is this the prime focus in our classrooms?

Reading Recovery is viewed as a small portion of a child's literacy experiences. In Jerry Harste's words, "Children don't learn to read for the love of 'phonicing'. They do it for the love of reading and the places in their minds that reading takes them." In the same way that we don't learn to read just by sounding out words, we don't develop a love for reading by working through a diet of Reading Recovery texts. Approximately, the first fifteen "levels" of Reading Recovery books consist of very controlled vocabulary and often very contrived text. The language of good literature appears after that. It is imperative, therefore, that daily literature experiences be part of a rich classroom life. Reading Recovery is not enough. Texts that engage a student are critical motivation for reading. When we contrast the language of a fairy tale, such as *The Three Little Pigs*, to that of *Time for Dinner* found in Reading Recovery, we can readily understand why the language of literature beckons to its readers and listeners.

"Little pig, little pig, let me come in!"

"Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin", said the pig.

"Well, then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll BLOW your house down!" replied

the big, bad wolf. So he huffed and he puffed and he BLEW the house down.

Meow, meow.

Here we come!

Oink, oink.

Here we come!

Moo, moo.

Here we come! Etc.

Not only is the first text easier to read with fluency and expression, but it is more interesting for teaching the elements of language and written text. As a classroom or resource teacher, I can find a multitude of ways of using *The Three Little Pigs* to help children joyfully learn various reading strategies, as well as common English words. My potential for doing so is much more limited with *Time for Dinner*.

Thirty years ago, the miscue analysis team of Goodman, Goodman, Burke and Watson illustrated very clearly that the best measure of student comprehension of text is to re-tell it. In Reading Recovery, re-telling was insufficiently utilized as a comprehension check. More frequently, teachers posed questions to elicit a response. As a listener, I am not assured that students always understood what they read. There were times when I wondered if the student was merely saying the words. I also wondered if the type of questions asked, using key words from the text, allowed the student to respond without understanding. Most students were able to match the key word used by the teacher with the text. By reading the sentence in which the word occurred, the student was able to answer the teacher's question. Did the child understand the text? I have my doubts and am still uneasy about students' comprehension of these controlled texts.

However, as much as I would like to see re-telling as a natural response to reading, I am inclined to believe that the nature of the text does not facilitate re-telling. There is not much to comprehend; the little there is relies heavily on the illustrations, which do not necessarily convey a story. Thus, the most effective strategy for assessing comprehension is overlooked and re-coding ("correct word calling"), as viewed within the running record, becomes the prime measure of comprehension. This makes it possible for a student to sound as if he or she knows what is happening, yet have no understanding of the key elements or sequence of the piece.

I also wonder about the impact of removing a child from the classroom for Reading Recovery time. My concern is not as much with the child as with the classroom teacher. In our schools we work hard to create a school-based team approach for all our students. Who actually has the responsibility for ensuring a Reading Recovery student learns to read? An inherent pitfall of a pull-out approach at the early level is

to assign responsibility (often implicitly) to the resource person working with the child. Unintentionally, this is a hidden factor that can undermine colleagues' goals of working collaboratively. How much more valuable it would be, in my opinion, to have the resource person working with the classroom teacher for extended periods of time in order to explore solid theories of reading or writing and corresponding strategies or practices that empower students! Two people working together tend to see different aspects of the same thing. Through their ensuing interaction, they expand their perceptions and their knowledge base.

The last, but not the least, of my concerns relates to the understanding Reading Recovery students have of the reading process. Manitoba Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Grade 4 English Language Arts "emphasizes that metacognition (self-awareness of one's own thinking and learning) enables learners to plan, monitor progress, and evaluate personal learning". Metacognition is viewed as a very important part of the curriculum. The thirteen students I interviewed seemed to have very little knowledge of the strategies they used when reading.

Supposedly, running record (and therefore, the teacher's feedback to the child), places equal or higher emphasis on meaning and language structure (semantics and syntax) in comparison to sounds and symbols. The premise is that all three cueing systems must operate simultaneously for proficient reading. Thus, if it doesn't make sense, other cues or strategies need to be used in order to create sense. Marie Clay's notion of teaching the strategies that proficient readers use to those who are struggling readers does not appear to change the students' perception of how reading works.

I had anticipated that all thirteen students would exhibit more balance in the strategies they used while reading. I was surprised to discover, in questioning students for the Burke Reading Interview, that eleven children said they sounded out the words they didn't know. Of the two who said they used another strategy, one claimed he just "says something". Further discussion lead me to believe he would try any word, even if it didn't make sense. When asked how he would help someone who was having difficulty reading, he said he would "sound it out." If the person still had difficulty, he would help by "telling them some words." Clearly, twelve of the thirteen students viewed "sounding out" as the most important strategy for reading. Only one student used a different strategy first. He would "go back" and re-read, perhaps picking up more information that would help him comprehend the word. When asked if he ever did anything else, he said he "read it over again. If I don't know what the word says, then I'll sound it out. Then I'll know".

Students talked about various strategies their classroom teachers used to help them learn words they didn't know, but they did not apply these on their own or when helping someone else. The first step in word discrimination for each of them was to sound out the word. If semantics and syntax are the core of comprehension, why are Reading Recovery "discontinuing students" relying on sounding out as their prime strategy? Are students sounding out because they know a lot about semantics and syntax from their early language experiences? Are they overly focused on sounding out because this is a cueing system they have not used before and, therefore, are practising it in the same way they practised speaking? Further exploration may help us understand the thinking processes that led these children to reach this conclusion.

Does Reading Recovery sufficiently demonstrate explicit use of cueing systems and necessary strategies, or are these implied in the text? Is the student expected to learn these intuitively? Why would he or she do so? A student who is eligible for Reading Recovery has previously demonstrated an inability to intuit the intricacies of reading. It seems to me that more emphasis needs to be placed on explicit teaching of strategies through guided reading. Students need to hear the teacher's "think-aloud" associated with a text. "I thought it might be..., because that would make sense in this story and it sounds like the way we put words together in English, but then I noticed ... and I changed my mind." We need to have these conversations with our students so they can understand the critical thinking we utilize for proficient reading. If we do not illustrate our thinking, we will continue to have students who view reading as a mysterious process, even though the list of words they know by sight might increase.

Conclusion

In our limited experience, all of our Reading Recovery students made significant gains in reading. They perceived themselves as readers and were perceived as readers by their classmates. They exhibited more confidence and more independence in classroom reading and writing tasks. Teachers had opportunities to observe their students working with the Reading Recovery teacher. While maintaining a literature-enhanced environment, they encouraged students to apply their newly acquired skills and strategies to classroom tasks, thus making it possible for students to transfer their knowledge to other reading situations. The classroom teachers were highly interested in and knowledgeable about literacy processes and were continuing to explore their need to know more. They viewed their involvement, and that of their students, in Reading Recovery as highly beneficial.

For one teacher who did not have an extensive background in early reading development, the training in Reading Recovery was very valuable. Both Reading Recovery teachers indicated that the training was very intensive and the workload was exhausting. In spite of this, they suggested that all teachers would learn from this excellent professional development experience.

Regardless of grade level, each teacher continues to encounter students with reading difficulties; sometimes, it seems the number of such students is increasing. Therefore, why limit the knowledge base of Reading Recovery to a select few? Every teacher needs to know a great deal about literacy processes.

Consistency of practices, high expectations for reading and writing, running record and guided reading are congruent with a literature-rich classroom. These can be implemented readily in the classroom and do not need to be exclusive to the Reading Recovery setting.

Reading Recovery practices, including running record, are adaptations of miscue analysis and psycholinguistic approaches to literacy learning. To me, one of the shortcomings for the trainees is that the study of and experience with miscue analysis is not a prerequisite to entry into Reading Recovery. Those who have this background readily understand the adaptations made by Marie Clay and others, while also knowing thoroughly the theories, tenets and premises behind the practices. In attempting to create an abbreviated version, some important elements are lost for those who do not have experience with the more complete form. A shortcut works only if you know exactly where you are going and what you have eliminated to get there. It makes perfect sense if you know the long route first. You then know the direction, the landscape markers, streets that lead into the main route, possible side trips you might be able to make, speed limits, controlled intersections and the time it takes to traverse the route. Once this information is known, you are able to judge its relevance, and therefore, make decisions about the appropriateness of the shortcut. Likewise comprehension of psycholinguistic processes allows the teacher to make an informed judgement about Reading Recovery. Are those who do not have this knowledge base fated to never see or understand some key markers to a child's development in reading? I believe there are no shortcuts to learning to read and assessing reading. Personal experience has taught me that there are no shortcuts to fitness. Consistent practice and building on previous experiences are necessary, even though the means by which we attempt to become fit may vary. This is also true of reading (or any task) and assessment.

Reading Recovery is only a thread in the literacy fabric. Many threads are required to weave the cloth.

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