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Self-evaluation of a whole-language classroom

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Self-evaluation of a whole-language classroom

Abstract

Over the last two decades significant new information concerning the acquisition of functional literacy has been generated through theoretical and applied research. Traditional notions of literacy as the application by an individual of a set of independent skills to read or write have undergone a tremendous transformation (Langer, 1987). After taking into consideration new and important insights from recent research in the field of literacy, Wells (1990) defines literacy as the "disposition to engage appropriately with texts of different types in order to empower actions, feelings and thinking in the context of purposeful social activity" (p. 14).

SELF-EVALUATION OF A WHOLE-LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

A Graduate Project

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Recent Trends in Literacy Research

Over the last two decades significant new information concerning the acquisition of functional literacy has been generated through theoretical and applied research. Traditional notions of literacy as the application by an individual of a set of independent skills to read or write have undergone a tremendous transformation (Langer, 1987). After taking into consideration new and important insights from recent research in the field of literacy, Wells (1990) defines literacy as the "disposition to engage appropriately with texts of different types in order to empower actions, feelings and thinking in the context of purposeful social activity" (p. 14).

The motivation for this research is the concern that unless persons are literate they are unable to successfully contribute to the affairs of the workplace and to those of the wider society. For full participation in a literate society individuals need to develop reading strategies for constructing and critically evaluating their own interpretations of texts. They also need to develop writing strategies to develop and clarify their understanding of the topics about which they write.

Unless they develop these strategies they remain dependent on others to do their thinking for them (Wells, 1990).

Recent research has transformed the understanding of how literacy is acquired. One major concept that has emerged from naturalistic studies of oral language development emphasizes both the active and constructive nature of the child's intellectual development and its social basis (Hall, 1987). According to this view, there is no sequence of skills in language development (Goodman, 1986a); rather, language abilities are learned simultaneously in the context of authentic speech and literacy events. Children learn more effectively through jointly participating in meaningful reading and writing events in talk about the text with a more competent member of the culture (Wells, 1990).

The implication for achieving the goal of literacy for all students in our society, whatever their cultural or socioeconomic background, is the creation of classroom communities of literate thinkers (Smith, 1988; Knapp & Shields, 1989; Wells, 1990). In such classrooms, students collaborate with each other in activities that involve the use of a variety of texts. The social nature of literacy is emphasized. Students engage in talk about the text. Through participating in these often spontaneous talks, the teacher at times models and explains how to engage

with texts in ways appropriate to the purpose at hand (Wells, 1990).

In the United States basal readers dominate reading instruction (Goodman, 1986a). The philosophy of basal reading instruction is not consistent with recent research on functional literacy development (Goodman, 1986a). Basal reader approaches often define reading as a mastery of arbitrary skill sequences as measured by performance on multiple-choice tests. Such an approach leads learners to put undue emphasis on isolated aspects of language, and not enough on making sense of real, comprehensible stories. It isolates reading from its use and from language processes, and minimizes time spent on reading while monopolizing school time for skills exercises. Often the use of real children's literature is altered by rewriting it or using excerpts instead of whole texts. Often the basal reader becomes the entire reading curriculum. The high cost of basals does not leave funds for school and classroom libraries and other more authentic reading materials (Goodman, 1986a).

Basal reader approaches do not create classroom communities of literate thinkers. A growing number of educators are responding to this challenge by implementing an alternative instructional approach based on a whole-language philosophy (Goodman, Goodman, & Hood, 1989; Altweger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987). The whole-language movement is an attempt by informed

teachers to use new knowledge about functional literacy development and learning to build better, more effective, and more satisfying experiences for their students and themselves. Whole language is a philosophical stance that involves language instruction across the curriculum, being guided by teacher observation of students engaged in meaningful language use. Oral and written language development is integrated with conceptual learning. In such a program, language learning depends on an integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Whole language uses a wide range of authentic, natural, and functional material to build literacy. The learner uses language for a variety of purposes and audiences, encounters complete pieces of texts, produces meaningful types of communication, and learns in a supportive environment that encourages risk taking and independence. Methods and materials that fragment language, ignore its context, or value form over meaning are contrary to the whole-language philosophy (Goodman, 1986a).

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to assess the instructional procedure within a specific classroom to determine which aspects are in accordance with whole-language philosophy and what changes can be made to make it a more effective whole-language classroom. To accomplish this purpose, three criteria will be used for assessment: (a) the principles of whole-language philosophy, (b)

the natural language learning conditions, and (c) the key elements of a reading/writing process program as described in the following chapters. Second, a detailed description of the schedule and instructional activities of the classroom to be assessed will be included. Third, recommendations will be offered in order to make this specific classroom a more effective whole-language classroom.

A Final Note

Each individual educator needs the autonomy to make professional decisions for his or her own classroom. Theory and research form the knowledge base, which provides teachers with a framework to use as a guide in observing, interpreting, and assessing children. As Angela Jaggard (1985) stated:

In education we often mistakenly assume that good teaching is a matter of knowing the research and putting theory into practice. But for research and theory to be meaningful, teachers must be able to relate the findings and ideas to their own models of language and to what they know about their students' language and ways of learning. (p. 4)

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Literature on reading instruction indicates that literature-based, whole-language approaches are successful in building literacy with all types of students and particularly with disabled and uninterested readers (Tunnel & Jacobs, 1989). A number of controlled studies have directly compared literature-based reading with basal learning instruction while others have simply looked at growth within whole-language classrooms employing literature-based reading programs (Tunnel & Jacobs, 1989).

Can Reading Be Taught Successfully Without the Basal?

A landmark study by Cohen (1968) supports the success of the literature-based approach to literacy with students with low socioeconomic backgrounds. Cohen used a control group of 130 students in second grade who were taught with basal readers and compared them to 155 children in an experimental group using a literature-based approach. The experimental treatment consisted mainly of reading aloud to children from 50 carefully selected children's trade picture books--books without fixed vocabulary or sentence length--and then following up with meaning-related activities. The children were encouraged to read the books anytime. The experimental group showed significant increases over

the control group (on the Metropolitan Achievement Tests and A Free Association Vocabulary Test administered in October and June) in word knowledge ($p < .005$), reading comprehension ($p < .01$), vocabulary ($p < .05$). When the six lowest classes were compared, the experimental group showed an even more significant increase over the control group (Cohen, 1968). Cohen's study was replicated a few years later by Cullinan, Jaggar, and Strickland (1974), yielding basically the same results.

A study conducted by Eldredge and Butterfield (1986) involved 1,149 children in second grade in 50 Utah classrooms. They compared a traditional basal approach to five other experimental methods, including two which used variations of a literature-based program. Employing a variety of evaluative techniques (an instrument for evaluating phonics skills developed and validated by Eldredge, the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, and a Pictorial Self-Concept Scale) the researchers discovered that 14 of 20 significant differences among the instructional methods favored the literature approach teamed with a series of special decoding lessons (also developed by Eldredge) taking no more than 15 minutes daily. The other literature-based group also placed highly. Eldredge and Butterfield (1986) were able to conclude that "the use of children's literature to teach children to read had a positive effect upon students' achievement and attitudes

toward reading--much greater than the traditional methods" (p. 35).

One of the most recent experiments dealing with literature-based reading and children at high risk of failure was conducted at a school on New York City's west side (Larrick, 1987). Of these children, 92% came from non-English speaking homes, 96% lived below the poverty level, and 80% spoke no English when entering school. The Open Sesame Program was initiated with 225 kindergarten students, providing them an opportunity to read in an unpressured, pleasurable way--using neither basals nor workbooks. Immersion in children's literature and language-experience approaches to reading and writing were the major instructional procedures, and skills were taught primarily in meaningful context as children asked for help in reading. At the end of the year, all 225 students could read their dictated stories and many of the picture books shown in class. Some were even reading on a second-grade level. School officials were so impressed that they made a commitment to extend the program gradually through sixth grade.

The results of these studies offer support to teachers who want to use children's literature to teach children to read. Immersing children in the natural language of books seems to give children reason to read, teaching them not only how to read, but to want to read.

A Language-Centered View of Curriculum

Instruction based on a whole-language philosophy draws on scientific theories based on research from linguistics, language development, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and education (Goodman, 1986a). It has a language-centered view of curriculum based on conditions fostering natural language acquisition. As described by Dorothy Watson (1980) in Three Language Arts Curriculum Models, a publication of NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English), this view of curriculum calls for:

teachers who invite students to explore and expand their own private and public linguistic powers in an atmosphere that is natural and filling; the students in this setting come to think of themselves as joyful receivers and producers of stories, plays, songs, poems--all forms of worthy and useful language. Both learners and teacher pay respect to the ideas and language of each other; they never cease asking questions of each other, and in a cooperative environment, they use language and experience to generate new questions, new ideas, new experiences, and new ways of expression--to achieve personal growth. (p. 96)

Butler and Turbill (1987), Goodman (1986b), and Newman (1985) describe similar curriculum viewpoints of a whole-language program. Integration of curriculum is a key principle for language development and learning through language. Content and

language development become a dual curriculum. The teachers maximize opportunities for students to engage in authentic speech and literacy events and evaluate both linguistic and cognitive development. Language processes are integrated. The content curriculum draws on the interests and experiences of the children. The curriculum is child-centered. The teacher starts where the child is in language and knowledge and expands upon it. The teacher accepts pupil differences. Individual growth is the goal.

Whole-language teachers organize the whole or a large part of the curriculum around topics or themes such as science, social studies, or literature units. A unit provides a focal point for inquiry, for use of language, and for cognitive development. It involves students in planning, directing, and evaluating activities, and gives them choices of authentic, relevant activities within productive studies.

In a whole-language classroom a literate environment is created. There are books, magazines, newspapers, directories, signs, labels, posters, and every other kind of appropriate print all around. Primary classrooms have mail boxes, writing centers, library corners, and newsstands. All students participate in the creation of a literate environment by bringing in all kinds of written language materials appropriate to their interests and the curriculum.

Materials should be plentiful and accessible. It is very important to have a wide range of books and other materials within immediate reach. A variety of recreational books are needed--fiction and non-fiction, with a wide range of difficulty and interest. Every classroom at every level needs a classroom library. Inappropriate materials include basal readers that fragment language and ignore its context (Butler & Turbill, 1987; Goodman, 1986b; Newman, 1985).

Principles of Whole-Language Philosophy

Goodman (1986b) explained five key principles of a whole-language philosophy. The first principle recognizes the importance of prior knowledge. Using their prior knowledge and experiences, readers construct meaning by interacting with the texts. Supporting this principle Pearson (1985) stated that comprehension is now viewed as an active-constructive model. Johnston's (1984) research also supports this principle. He found a reader's knowledge about a topic was a better predictor of comprehension of a text than is any measure of reading ability or achievement.

The second principle is that comprehension is always the goal of the readers. Cohen (1968) showed that children who were exposed to whole-language reading activities such as being read to, being involved in stories and poems, and being provided books to explore independently comprehend better than children in the

control group not given those opportunities. The findings of Cullinan, Jaggar, and Strickland (1974) also support this principle.

The third principle is that expression of meaning is always what writers are trying to achieve. This is supported by the findings of Marie Clay (1975). She noted that when children create their first scribbles, they expect them to carry meaning.

The fourth principle is that readers predict, select, confirm, and self-correct as they seek to make sense of print. Clay (1982) and Holdaway (1979) pointed out that children who are just learning to read show signs of this type of comprehension monitoring when they make spontaneous corrections of words read incorrectly.

The fifth principle is that all of the linguistic cue systems interact in written language: the graphophonic (sound and letter patterns), the syntactic (sentence patterns), and the semantic (meanings). They can't be isolated for instruction without creating non-language abstractions. Theorists such as Smith (1978) and Goodman (1986b) support this principle.

Natural Language Learning Conditions

Cambourne's (1988) comparative research about learning to talk and learning to read indicates certain conditions operate together to create a climate that greatly aids in all language learning. Cambourne (1988) described seven conditions for

natural language learning: immersion, demonstration, expectation, responsibility, approximation, employment, and feedback.

The first condition is immersion. From birth most children are immersed in language demonstrated by proficient users. It is encountered in the context of meaningful and purposeful use. In a whole-language classroom children would be immersed in books and book experiences (Cambourne, 1988).

Cambourne's (1988) next condition is demonstration. Young children are exposed to oral language "demonstrations" used in functional ways. Language is modeled by skillful users. The technique of expert demonstration can be provided in the classroom through teacher modeling of reading and writing. In a whole-language classroom, teachers model strategies that focus on the cognitive processes of reading (Paris, Lipson, & Wilson, 1983).

Expectation, another condition of natural language learning, is important. Parents expect their offspring to learn to talk. Expectations are subtle forms of communication that have strong influence on the learner. In a whole-language classroom the teacher expects and believes that all children will learn to read and write. Expectations are closely related to building high self-esteem in learners and developing a trusting relationship with them (Cambourne, 1988).

Responsibility is another condition. It is the child's ownership of learning. Children learn language without any formal instruction. They learn it naturally. By responding to modeling, beginning and developing readers can assume some of the responsibility for the books and writing topics they choose to explore. It means being given practice in making decisions that are appropriate with the learner's knowledge and skill (Cambourne, 1988).

Adults expect approximation from young talkers. This is another condition that fosters natural language learning. Beginning talkers receive positive feedback for coming close when trying to communicate orally. Beginning readers and writers will thrive upon similar reinforcement of approximate use of language. Learning is viewed as a form of hypothesis testing. The learner hypothesizes and confirms. If the hypothesis is not correct, it becomes necessary for him to reengage in the learning experience. This learning cycle is repeated, ensuring progress or refinement (Cambourne, 1988).

Employment describes the condition in which beginning talkers get plenty of opportunity to use language. They practice for long, extended periods of time. Also, their engagement is not piecemeal, but rather they practice the whole act each time. In a whole-language classroom, extended time for practice sessions with the "whole" acts of reading and writing are

necessary for fluent development. Teachers need to create settings in which learners experience an urgent need to read and write in order to achieve ends other than learning about reading and writing (Cambourne, 1988).

The last condition is feedback. Young talkers receive constant positive feedback from their expert parents, despite the quality of their approximation. In a whole-language classroom, the learner would be given positive reinforcement of approximate use of language. These conditions foster literacy acquisition (Cambourne, 1988).

Chapter 3

Implications for Instruction

Key Elements of a Writing/Reading Program

Hansen (1987) describes five key elements of a writing/reading program. They are time, choice, response, structure, and community. In this type of natural literacy acquisition program, teaching is based on responses from the students.

In a whole-language classroom, children spend most of their time reading books and writing. Students share their books daily. They recognize that just as various classmates respond differently to the texts they create when they write that those classmates will also respond differently to the books they read. They spend their time in comprehension discussions, contrasting and comparing their varied insights into what they read and write. They come together to learn from each other as well as from the teacher and author. Time to read and write daily is important.

Choice is another important element of a reading/writing program. Readers are allowed choices about their reading materials. Writers are allowed choices over their topics. In order for children to be able to make appropriate choices, they may need to be taught how to choose topics and books. Choice

need not eliminate sessions in which readers compare insights on something they've all read. When a few children find a story they all like, they can meet to share it in a small group.

The essence of the difference between basal reading instruction and reading instruction based on a whole-language philosophy is response. In a program based on a whole-language philosophy there is no preconceived script for teacher and student. Students are responsible for composing a personally meaningful message to share with their peers in order to receive response from them. During writing workshop, the writers learn to respond to and assess their own work, as well as that of their peers. They also learn to approach the writing of professionals the same way they approach their own writing. Self-direction is an important goal. They can meet for their discussion with or without the teacher, learning to value each other's knowledge and their own. Independence is taught in both writing and reading (Hansen, 1987).

In order for the teacher and students to focus on content, there must be a highly organized structure. In a response-based philosophy classroom the teacher not only sets up the routine, she teaches the children to use it. This new notion of structure is based on the concept of self-discipline. Hansen (1987) stated the following:

The test of a well-structured classroom is whether the children can read books, get help from others, and share books in small and large groups with and without the teacher. They benefit from her support, but she has taught them to learn from each other. (p. 126)

In reading/writing classrooms a sense of community is built. Teachers do not divide their students into ability groups because grouping splits the community. The teacher teaches the children to support each other. They share their reading and writing and learn from each other.

These five elements allow the author an opportunity to speak in a "strong voice" and allow the students' "voices" to be heard during reading.

How Teachers Interpret Literature-Based Reading

In Henke's (1986) description of West Des Moines' implementation of their literature-based reading program, the first item addressed was the role of the basal in the new program. In order to allow teachers freedom to make professional decisions for their classrooms, those teachers who were most comfortable with basal reading could continue to use it up to fifty percent of the allocated reading time. The remainder of the block was to involve reading experiences drawn from the West Des Moines trade book program. Those who chose not to use the

basal at all were free to do so, but they were to consult the basal skills taxonomy as they designed their lessons.

The program aimed for several essential commonalties in the classrooms in order for the district to move toward a whole-language orientation. All teachers were to schedule 30 minutes daily for independent reading and 45 minutes for writing workshop. The remaining hour and 30 minutes of the reading/writing block could be used according to the individual teacher's discretion (Henke, 1986).

At each grade level, sets of children's books were organized into thematic webs and whole-class readings. Each grade level had five whole-class readings and five thematic webs with corresponding teaching outlines (Henke, 1986).

Many of the books selected for whole-class reading corresponded with topics in science and social studies. The students were not required to be able to decode every word in the whole-class book reading. The belief was that all students can learn from listening and participating in discussions and other related activities (Henke, 1986).

Guides (Henke, 1986) were developed by the teachers for the whole-class books. The guides included:

1. Pre-reading activities in which children explore one or more of the issues addressed in the book by relating personal experiences and offering opinions.

2. Check points which provide students time to pause and reflect on what they've read.

3. Follow-up activities which frequently required the student to return to the book to locate information which would clarify, substantiate, or expand their thinking. Follow-up activities included questions, writing, drama, and occasional mini-lessons which focus on a particular reading skill readily developed in the text of the story. The teachers were encouraged to choose activities selectively and insure every reading program contained an extended period of time devoted exclusively to reading.

Thematic webs consisted of at least four different titles exploring a central theme. Each teacher gave a book talk about each of the titles to encourage the children to read the books. The books were displayed in the classroom for browsing. Then, the children indicated their first and second choices. The groups were then formed based on this information. During web work, children read, discussed the books in their small groups, and participated in large group activities exploring the theme. Mini-lessons drawn from objectives in the basal taxonomy and readily developed in the text of the story were taught. Students met in small groups for discussion, most often without the teacher. The teacher established predictable rules and routines, defined the roles of discussion leaders, recorders, and

participants, and outlined clearly for the group their tasks and time limits (Henke, 1986).

High priority was also given to independent reading. The teachers structured the minimum of a half hour to include time for children to read the books they selected, to confer with the teacher about their reading selections, and to participate in whole-class book talk (Henke, 1986).

Daily writing workshops based on the work by Graves (1983) and Calkins (1986) were implemented. Each teacher was encouraged to implement 45 minutes of writing workshop. The children learned to confer with each other, to revise and edit, and to respond to other writers appropriately.

Zarrillo (1989) conducted a study to explore the various interpretations teachers have of literature-based reading. Three interpretations were generated by observing elementary classrooms in southern California.

Qualitative data was gathered through the use of ethnographic techniques, such as interviewing administrators, teachers, and students. Classroom observations and samples of student writing and drawing were further data sources. Data analysis involved the search for patterns occurring across classrooms (Zarrillo, 1989).

Through his observations, Zarrillo (1989) identified three interpretations of literature-based reading: (a) the core book,

(b) literature units, and (c) self-selection and self-pacing. Core books were identified as those selections that are to be taught in the classroom, are given close reading and intensive consideration, and are likely to be an important stimulus for writing and discussion. He found effective teachers used the core books as spring boards for independent reading and writing and gave children choices of activities. Writing in response to core books included free response in journals, letters to characters, poetry, advertisements, newspaper articles, and answers to interpretative questions. Effective teachers avoided turning novels into textbooks. Finally, effective teachers placed core books in perspective as part of a broader literature-based program. Core books were followed by literature units, and there was time each day for independent reading and writing.

A literature unit has a unifying element such as a genre, an author, or a theme from social studies or science. The teacher read aloud books that were good examples of the unifying element. The teacher encouraged children to form groups to read these books. In classrooms where literature units worked well, there was flexibility in the process of forming groups. Successful implementation of a literature unit involved the teacher finding a balance of common activities and student-selected options. All students shared some experiences, such as read alouds, response activities to the read alouds, and lessons relating to the

unifying element. Zarrillo's (1989) observations revealed that when units were based on genres of literature, authors, social studies content, and topics for science, children were exposed to a wide variety of good literature, were provided many opportunities for meaningful reading and writing, and were introduced to important concepts from the content areas.

In self-selection and self-pacing programs, children chose their reading materials, read at their own pace, and conferenced periodically with the teacher. In Zarrillo's (1989) study, in all but one instance self-selection was a supplement to a core book or a literature unit.

Zarrillo (1989) listed five categories of activities that were shared by the 15 teachers who were successfully teaching with children's books. They were:

1. The presentation of literature. This included the teacher reading aloud or use of dramatic forms such as films, filmstrips, and student plays.

2. Children's response to literature. There were five categories of response to literature activities upon which successful teachers relied:

- a. Children predicted what would happen next.
- b. Children evaluated character's actions.
- c. Children changed perspective, responded from the point of view of a character.

- d. Children shared personal experiences that related to occurrences in a book.
- e. Children shared open-ended responses such as interests, questions, and interpretations after experiencing a book.

3. Individualized time. During this time students read self-selected books and completed response activities or journals to books they read independently.

4. Teacher-directed lessons. These lessons varied according to the three interpretations: (a) the core book, (b) the literature unit, and (c) self-selection. Core-book teachers tended to work with the entire group, teachers of literature units preferred small groups, and the self-selection teachers conferenced with individuals.

5. Projects. Successful teachers considered these projects to be ancillary and did not allow projects to take time away from reading literature.

In summary, Zarrillo (1989) recommended that teachers consider programs that involve all three interpretations through the use of (a) the core book, (b) literature units, and (c) self-selection and self-pacing. Colt and Hiebert (1989) also describe similar interpretations of literature-based reading, and they also recommend that a total reading program should contain all

three interpretations so that children develop into thoughtful, proficient readers.

Evaluation

Goodman (1989) explains five important characteristics of evaluation in a whole-language classroom. One, whole-language evaluation is continuous, ongoing, and cumulative. Whenever teachers observe children engaged in authentic literacy events, they evaluate what the observations show about students' growth.

Whole-language evaluation is interpretive. These interpretations are based on the teacher's knowledge about learning, teaching, and curriculum. The teachers' evaluations are discussed with their students in order to gain the students' perspectives into their learning. Based on these discussions, teachers and students plan for experiences that expand on their previous learning.

Whole-language evaluation involves self-evaluation for both the teachers and the learners. The teachers evaluate their own teaching and needs for professional growth. Goodman (1989) states the following:

This continuous self-evaluation shows the integral nature of evaluation and the development of the curriculum. As teachers reflect on concerns for time in the curriculum, on the kinds of response students give in different settings, on the relation between assignments and students' responses, and on the degree

to which students take initiative in their own learning, the impact on curriculum development is obvious. (p. 8)

Whole-language evaluation takes many forms. Whole-language evaluation will be different from one setting to the next. Teachers keep anecdotal records of the interaction between their students. Reading and writing conferences provide opportunities for students to share their self-reflection on their learning process with the teacher. Writing portfolios provide valuable information on students' growth. Miscue analyses give important information about students predominant oral reading strategies. Teachers choose to evaluate different features at different times based on what is important for a particular student at a particular point in time (Goodman, 1989).

Whole-language evaluation informs curriculum and at the same time is informed by curriculum. Evaluation is an integral part of the curriculum. Evaluation drives the curriculum; curriculum drives the evaluation. Evaluation is a very important component of a natural language acquisition program (Goodman, 1989).

Chapter 4

Putting Theory Into Practice

One Day of Whole-Language Instruction in a Second Grade Classroom

In 1986 after several years of teaching second grade, I began questioning instruction centered around language arts and basal reader materials that fragmented language and left little time for connected reading and writing. I also was especially concerned about programs that relegated at-risk students to the lowest track that often impaired their attitudes and self-concepts and left them as far behind as when they started.

Instead, I envisioned a classroom where children spent the bulk of the reading period reading and engaging in related activities. I pictured children's literature as the vehicle for promoting language and thinking skills. It seemed logical to me to integrate reading and writing across the curriculum. At this same time I became aware of the whole-language movement and learned that my emerging beliefs about language and language acquisition were congruent with those presented by whole-language advocates. Therefore, I implemented a whole-language program as an alternative to my traditional literacy program.

Whole language views reading, writing, listening, and speaking as interrelated and mutually supportive components of a language acquisition program. Students use language functionally

and purposefully in meaningful situations. A rich variety of entire texts are used. Whole-language teachers view learners as social, and collaboration with peers is encouraged (Goodman, 1986b).

When teachers begin to base instruction on whole-language theory, they frequently look for specifics about classroom organization, activities, and materials. Therefore, the intent of this chapter is to show one implementation of instruction based on whole language in a second grade classroom. This account shows how I integrated reading, writing, listening, and speaking across the content areas during one specific day in my second-grade classroom of 27 multicultural students with varying degrees of academic ability.

Setting

On this day as you walk into our classroom, you will notice that almost every inch of the classroom walls is covered with writing, and there are many interest centers. The students' semantic webs of information about the Plains and Pueblo Indians are displayed along with a map showing the location of the different major tribes in the United States. Around the map are posted students' stories using picture writing similar to those of Native Americans. In the reading center their retelling of Where the Buffalo Begin (Baker, 1981) is available for students to reread. Student-selected vocabulary from the story is

displayed on buffalo-shaped cards. Next to this center is a Native American exhibit created by the students. Student-created murals of Plains and Pueblo Indian village life also are exhibited. Lists of vocabulary words students have selected from their literature books are on the wall. On the message board are students' notes about Indian in the Cupboard (Banks, 1980). Books perched on the classroom ledges surround the students. In brief, my classroom is print-rich, thematically organized, and student-centered.

Our class day is divided into periods wherein related yet different activities occur. The daily schedule includes major time blocks devoted to literature study, writing workshop, independent reading, activity-based science, social studies, and math problem-solving activities.

Greetings and Opening Exercises (8:45 - 9:00)

The class day begins at 8:45 a.m., and within minutes the students are involved in reading or writing. Activities may include silent reading, writing in their journals, or listening to the teacher read aloud a story. Opening exercises, such as announcements, also occur at this time.

Spelling and Phonics in Context (9:00 - 9:30)

The children have a weekly dictation period that provides continuous reinforcement and review of previously and recently acquired writing and spelling skills (Schofer, 1977). I use the

dictated sentences from Basic Goals in Spelling (Kottmeyer & Claus, 1984). There are six to eight sentences in each of the 36 units.

Each unit emphasizes a spelling pattern. Students use some of the words from the dictated sentences in word wall activities, word sorts, and word ladders (e.g., chew, new, blew). The children also use these words in choral or echo readings. Through these activities the children gain insight in and mastery over the skills of decoding, spelling, and standard English.

The children also make up and write their own sentences for these words. I have observed that regular work with sentence making develops the children's ability to recognize words, strengthens their sense of sentence concept, and encourages the habit of capitalizing and punctuating sentences in their written work.

Literature-Based Reading (9:00 - 10:30)

In the morning the children engage in literature-based activities with materials used either by the whole class or by small groups. A whole-class reading involves the children in reading and reacting to the content of a common text. Many of the books selected for whole-class readings correspond with topics in science and social studies. Or, small groups of students read and interact with different books based on a central theme that is being studied (Henke, 1986).

On this specific day, the literature unit is "Native American Folktales." The unit includes The Legend of the Bluebonnet (De Paola, 1983), Iktomi and the Boulder (Goble, 1988), and Fire Bringer (Hodges, 1972). Before the students read these Native American folktales, I activated their prior knowledge and developed their understanding of the characteristics of folktales. Because these stories are Pueblo and Plains Native American folktales, I read factual books to the students to broaden their knowledge about these groups. This information about folktales and Pueblo and Plains Native Americans was displayed in semantic webs.

My students meet in small cooperative groups without me. They learn to respond to each other without my presence and learn to value each other's knowledge and their own. This teaches them independence and gives them ownership over their reading. In order to have meaningful small-group work, predictable rules and routines were established earlier in the year. Also, tasks were clearly defined, and time allotments were followed. Appropriate behaviors were modeled and taught.

The grouping in my classroom is heterogeneous and is based on the books the children choose to read. This form of grouping breaks down defensive barriers that interfere with learning. I have seen less able readers' confidence and self-esteem grow when they realize their contributions are valued by others in their

learning community. They become more motivated and less anxious. They come to see reading as a purposeful and pleasurable experience rather than a competition.

On this morning my students broke into small groups to identify character traits, feelings, and motives of the main character in their book. I overheard the following statements while my students were meeting:

"I think Iktomi was clever because he tricked the bats into freeing him from the boulder." (Brad)

"I think Iktomi was frightened because the boulder fell on top of him." (Megan)

"I think he was a good problem solver. He thought of reasonable strategies to escape the boulder." (Lonnie)

On several previous occasions, I had modeled the procedure of identifying a character trait and stating an example from the story to support it. Earlier in the folktales unit, I had modeled this procedure using Where the Buffalo Begin (Baker, 1981).

For vocabulary development the students and I earlier had compiled an expansive list of character traits. This list was displayed on the blackboard throughout the folktales unit. My whole-class strategic lessons help ensure success during independent small-group discussions (Goodman, 1986b). Often, these strategic lessons are drawn from objectives in the basal

reader skill taxonomy. During the three-week folktale study students will also examine cause and effect, story telling, and illustrator's style in their own trade books.

After the students were finished with their small-group task, they met as a large group to compile their information. Using a data chart (McKenzie, 1979) to organize their information, the students and I listed the characters, characteristics, and supporting actions in order to compare them. In order to synthesize the information further, the students wrote in their journals two ways the characters were alike. In the future in order to further sharpen their comprehension, small groups of students will retell their story to other classes using shadow figures on the overhead projector.

Recess (10:30 - 10:45)

Independent Reading (10:45 - 11:10)

During independent reading time a wide variety of activities occur. Excited, chattering students pour into the classroom from morning recess at this time. They take off their coats, grab their snack breaks, and settle down comfortably with a favorite book. The following paragraphs describe activities that occurred during independent reading.

On this specific day Megan is one of the first to begin to read. She is eager to read more about James' dilemma. She is on her second chapter of James and the Giant Peach (Dahl, 1961). on

the previous day, she had shared the descriptive and rhyming verses James' aunts had used to describe themselves. The rich language she shared made vivid pictures in the children's minds, and they laughed.

Jean is rereading Now One Foot, Now the Other (De Paola, 1981). She has enjoyed this book so much that she has signed up to read it to the class. Jean knows Tomie De Paolo is one of the class's favorite authors because of his unique illustrations and because of the special messages he relates to his readers.

Lisa's face lights up with excitement. "Mrs. Guenther," she whispers, "I found the word nuisance in my book." A few days before we had discussed the word "nuisance" when I was reading The Enormous Egg (Butterworth, 1956) to the class. We were both proud of her awareness of the new word.

Brandon is in the hall reading his book to Lonnie. Earlier in the week Lonnie had read the book to the class. They are enjoying their favorite book together. Nicole has donned earphones and is reading along with her story on tape. During this time students also record the books they have read.

Independent reading is a priority in my classroom, and a key to its success is providing a consistent time for the children to read. The children need to know they can rely on this time each day. I schedule 20 minutes daily for independent reading. These long blocks of uninterrupted time provide opportunities to

appreciate, reflect, and explore connections with books. Additionally, this extended time allows reading conferences and shared reading to occur.

Reading Conferences. On this same day Tyler is eager to share the latest book he has read. "Mrs. Guenther, could I read Arrow to the Sun (McDermott, 1974) to you? It is a Caldecott winner." By now most of the students have settled down to read and to enjoy their snack. Tyler and I sit down to enjoy his book. "I like this page with the bright purples and dark black pictures best," Tyler stated appreciatively. Earlier in the week Tyler had read the book to himself. I knew this was a favorite of his because he had written about it earlier in his reading journal.

I conference with each child twice a month. It is an opportunity for them to share their personal response to their book with me and to read their favorite passage aloud (Hansen, 1987).

Partner Reading. During this same time, Jerry, a fourth grader, stands at the door searching for his younger reading partner. Ben, Jerry's second grade reading partner, sees him and walks eagerly toward him. Out in the hallway Jerry reads Morris Goes to School (Wiseman, 1970) to Ben. They sit close together discussing and enjoying the humorous parts. For ten special

minutes they are partners in learning. When the partner reading session ends, they both return to their classrooms.

Later, Ben enjoyed this book so much he asked to take it home. At home he read it to his younger brother. After several readings with different audiences, he felt confident enough to read it to his classmates. His expressive reading made it an enjoyable experience for his peers.

The cross-grade arrangement with a group of older students that we call partner reading is a powerful activity. The purpose is to help both participants read more fluently and to enjoy books. It is an activity that has been very successful.

Writing Workshop (11:10 - 11:40)

I provide 40 minutes daily for writing workshops based on descriptions by Calkins (1986) and Hansen (1987). During this time students choose their own topics. Some of this workshop time is also used for researching content-area reports. The children learn to confer with each other, to revise and edit, and to respond to other writers in a constructive, positive manner.

On this day at 11:10 I meet with the students in order to read several poems relating to Native Americans. As a group we discussed poets' styles. It is important to provide a clear, consistent workshop structure for the students in order to help them gain control over their own writing process. I find it helpful to begin the workshop gathered together at the front of

the room for a mini-lesson. A mini-lesson is usually about five minutes. The mini-lessons early in the year focus on routine procedures for the writing workshop. Other mini-lessons might focus on topic choice, peer conferences, qualities of good writing, and styles of writing.

At 11:15 the students are provided a block of uninterrupted time to write. The students know their options and the limits of decision making. They know it is their responsibility to write during this time. Therefore, my second graders often work on more than one idea at a time. My second graders frequently begin new work as well as continue with a piece of writing from previous days.

Children have folders in which to store their dated drafts and completed work. The students' completed works are displayed on the walls and in the classroom library. There is also a word wall which gives spelling assistance. On it, small cards show often-requested words, taped in alphabetical order. Words are frequently added to this display.

Toward the end of each writing workshop period, the students are able to initiate peer conferences or continue working on their piece of writing. The time typically ends with a sharing session during which the entire class gathers together to respond to one or two students' drafts. The author sits in a special chair, the author's chair (Hansen, 1987), and the class gathers

around the author. Authors tell their listeners why they are sharing. Then the author reads and asks for questions and responses.

During writing workshop on this specific day, Ben had asked to share his writing with the class. During writing time he had been completely involved with his writing, and proud of his writing, he was eager to hear what parts his classmates liked. I overheard the following responses:

"I liked that the characters in the story were students in our class," stated Lonnie.

"I liked the ending. It surprised me. I didn't think your team would win because of the events in the beginning," Jean added.

My students are eager to write and share their writings. They have come to know that they are a part of a community that supports them and is eager to celebrate their writing accomplishments.

Lunch (11:40 - 12:20)

Sustained Silent Reading, Sharing, and Sustained Writing (12:30 - 1:00)

When the children return from lunch, they immediately go to their desks to begin reading. The students read fiction and non-fiction books on a variety of subjects at different reading levels. Books written and made by the children are available for

the children to read. During the sustained silent reading period the only sound allowed is that of turning pages. I also read silently with my students.

After 15 minutes the children turn to their peers for the familiar sharing time. Pairs or small groups share their books with each other, some reading aloud and some talking about their books.

Following sharing time, the students pull out their reading journals for sustained writing. Now is the time they may write a personal response to a story, illustrate an event or character from their book, or copy a favorite passage.

Math (1:00 - 1:45)

On this specific day in math, the children are engaged in productive oral communication and extended writing. For several days they have been using Multi Links (Educational Teaching Aids) in small groups. Each member of the group demonstrates and explains the process of addition with renaming using Multi Links. As a group they solve a set of problems and record their answers.

Afterwards my students chose one addition problem with renaming and wrote a story to illustrate it. The children wrote their stories in their math journals. Time was also allotted for the students to share their problems with the class. Later, I will collect and compile the problems into a booklet for the class library.

Gym (1:50 - 2:15)

Recess (2:15 - 2:30)

Literature Time (2:30 - 2:45)

Students may sign up to read a book to the class. This activity provides an authentic purpose for the student to fluently read a story. When ready, each child signs up to read a book to the class. At this time Olivia had signed up to read The Friendly Wolf (Goble, 1974). The students often select books to read to the class that relate to the theme the class is studying. Afterwards, Olivia ended with the familiar procedure of calling on different students and answering their questions about her book: "Have you read other books by this same author?" "Did the ending surprise you?" and "Who was your favorite character and why?" These questions serve as an informal reading conference. Early in the year the students and I compiled a list of questions that would be appropriate to ask the reader at this time. These questions are displayed in the room. For each story read fluently, the students receive a special award certificate. The children are encouraged to read to their families and share their certificates.

Social Studies (2:45 - 3:15)

At this time, the class continued to work on the thematic unit focusing on the Pueblo and Plains Native Americans. The week before, the students had read and discussed the various

aspects of their village life. Information about their clothing, shelter, tools, weapons, crafts, ceremonies, and mode of transportation had been gathered using films, tradebooks, and artifacts. The students had made murals to depict their village life. This activity integrated all the information the students gathered, and it made this new knowledge more vivid. On this specific day, the children were compiling a list of appropriate questions to ask Oliviah and her mother. Oliviah is a Mesquakie Indian, and her mother will be sharing information about the tribe. Parents and community resource people are frequent presenters in my classroom.

Ending Activities (3:15 - 3:30)

After the children tidy up the room, I end the day by reading to my students. I believe that by reading good literature aloud and engaging children in a variety of responses I will improve their comprehension and vocabulary (Cohen, 1968). On this specific day I am reading a chapter from Indian in the Cupboard (Banks, 1980).

A Final Word

This is my third year of implementing whole language in my classroom. My students are enthusiastic about reading and writing. The parent's comments have been extremely positive and supportive.

It has been exciting, as well as challenging, for me to implement whole language in my classroom. I am aware there are many whole-language variations, and I continue to revise and re-evaluate. I have become committed to this exhilarating and professionally empowering whole-language approach.

Chapter 5

Self-Reflection

Self-evaluation is a crucial component of becoming a whole-language teacher. As teachers reflect upon the ways in which they invite their students to learn, they are reflecting on their own teaching--self-evaluating--and informing their own teaching practices. Through self-evaluation, whole-language teachers revise and refine their teaching art. It may well be the most important tool of the teacher who aims at being a true professional (Goodman, Goodman & Hood, 1989).

In this chapter, through self-evaluation, I will assess the instructional procedures in my classroom to determine which aspects are in accordance with a whole-language philosophy. My criteria for the assessment are the principles of whole-language philosophy, the natural language learning conditions, and the key elements of a reading/writing process program as described above.

The principles of whole language as identified by Goodman (1986b) are reflected in the instructional procedures and activities in my classroom. I view reading as an active-constructive process. The importance of prior knowledge is recognized. For example, I used semantic webs to activate the students' prior knowledge of the characteristics of folk tales

and of the Pueblo and Plains Native Americans. I have observed in my classroom that my students learn new concepts related to a topic in relation to concepts they already possess about that same topic.

The students in my classroom are exposed to whole and natural reading activities such as being read to, being involved in discussions about stories, and being provided books to explore independently. These activities reflect the principle that comprehension of meaning is always the goal of the reader. The writing process utilized in my classroom reflects the principle that expression of meaning is always the goal of the writer. This is especially reflected in the revision process.

Instructional procedures in my classroom also reflect the fourth and fifth principles. Readers predict, select, confirm, and self-correct as they seek to make sense of print. All of the linguistic cue systems interact in written language. My students are taught to monitor their comprehension and to ask themselves while reading, "Does that make sense?" Risk-taking is encouraged. The students predict and guess as they try to make sense of print. They are taught to use all of the linguistic cue systems as they try to make sense of print. Self-correction is encouraged.

The conditions created in my classroom are conducive to natural language learning as described by Cambourne (191988).

These conditions are immersion, demonstration, expectations, responsibility, and employment. My students are immersed in a literate environment. Their writings and books surround them in the classroom. I model reading and writing by reading with my students during silent reading and by writing with them during writing workshop. My students are involved in authentic literacy events and they are in control of their use. There are extended periods of time for reading and writing. For example, I provide long blocks of uninterrupted time in order for students to read books they select, to confer with me about their selection, and to participate in book talks with their peers. These activities reflect the conditions of expectations, responsibility, and employment.

My reading/writing process program includes the five key elements of time, choice, response, structure, and community as described by Hansen (1987). It is similar to the literature-based interpretations described by both Henke (1986) and Zarrillo (1989). I will assess my program in relation to these two criteria.

My students are provided time to read and write daily. My schedule provides 30 minutes for silently reading and 45 minutes for writing workshop. My students spend time in comprehension discussions, contrasting and comparing their varied insights.

For example, they met in small groups to share their interpretation of the characters' traits in their books.

My students are allowed choices about their reading. They are allowed choices over book selections in thematic webs and during independent reading. During writing workshop they are allowed choices over their writing topics. I feel it is very important for children to have choices in order to develop ownership.

My teaching is based on my students' responses. This is reflected in the children's interpretive responses to literature. For example, my students evaluated the characters' actions in small heterogeneous groups or shared their interests, questions, and interpretations during their reading conference with me. During writing workshop my students sit in the author's chair to read to and to ask for responses from their audience. I feel response is a very valuable component. It teaches them independence and gives them ownership over their reading and writing.

There are no ability groups in my classroom in order to build a sense of community. The grouping in my classroom is heterogeneous based on books the children choose to read. I allow flexibility in the process of forming groups.

There are many aspects of my classroom that are in accordance with a whole-language philosophy. Most noticeable is

the absence of basal-reader instruction or workbooks that fragment language. A wide range of natural and functional material is used to develop literacy. My classroom is a supportive environment that encourages risk-taking and independence.

There is a definite organized structure underlying my instructional procedures and activities. It is based on the concept of self-discipline. A sense of trust is built between my students and me. This structure is built slowly and carefully. It requires extensive modeling for and practice with my students at the beginning of the year. It is important that this structure is adhered to throughout the year in order for my students and me to focus on content.

Recommendations

There are two areas I need to examine more closely in order to make my classroom a more effective whole-language classroom. They are (a) reading strategy instruction and (b) student evaluation. I will present recommendations for both areas.

My students have a strong sense of reading as a process of constructing meaning from print. I also frequently model strategies for my students. However, I need to ask myself if my students know when and why to use them. My students need to observe, understand, and practice these strategies. Team learning, partner reading, and semantic webbing are already

natural procedures in my classroom. I suggest I use more Think-Alouds (Moore, Moore, Cunningham & Cunningham, 1986) strategies and reciprocal teaching (Gillet & Temple, 1986) to make students better strategic readers.

My evaluation of my students takes many forms such as reading and writing conferences, audio tapes, running records, anecdotal records, writing folders, and learning logs. Through the self-evaluation process I have gained extensive knowledge of the reading and writing processes and of the process of literacy development. This is the knowledge base I need to help make my informal observations of my students more accurate and valid. My recommendation is to use this knowledge to recognize my students engaging in recognizable patterns in the development of the reading and writing processes and to know how to set a context so that certain behaviors are more likely to occur (Johnston, 1987).

Self-evaluation of my whole-language classroom lets me be in control of my own learning. My recommendation for myself is to emphasize the development of continual self-evaluation with my students so that they may be responsible for and direct their own learning. I suggest part of my students' evaluation involve putting together a portfolio of their work over a period of time (Valencia, 1990).

In summary, the conditions in my classroom are conducive to natural language learning, and my instructional procedures and

classroom activities are based on whole-language principles. In this strong whole-language context, I can now concentrate on improving my expertise at evaluating the process of literacy development.

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