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Chapter I teachers as reading facilitators through connecting the comprehension-composition processes

Abstract

Reading teachers in Chapter I school programs are currently following a job description based upon expectations of the past (Robinson & Pettit, 1978). Traditionally, the solution for schools' reading problems has been to employ specially trained teachers to work with students on a referral basis outside the classroom. An increased interest in reading and an abundance of government funding during the 1950s and 1960s served to reinforce this plan. The emphasis in these remedial programs was on correcting reading failure after it had happened rather than preventing it (Smith, 1962).

Chapter I Teachers as Reading
Facilitators Through Connecting
The Comprehension-Composition Processes

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Reading teachers in Chapter I school programs are currently following a job description based upon expectations of the past (Robinson & Pettit, 1978). Traditionally, the solution for schools' reading problems has been to employ specially trained teachers to work with students on a referral basis outside the classroom. An increased interest in reading and an abundance of government funding during the 1950's and 1960's served to reinforce this plan. The emphasis in these remedial programs was on correcting reading failure after it had happened rather than preventing it (Smith, 1962).

Difficulties were bound to arise when the special reading teacher was used in this limited fashion. Perhaps the most serious resulted from the shift of responsibility for instruction of less able readers from the classroom teacher to the reading teacher. As teachers became accustomed to sending children outside the class for individualized or small group work, problems in communication developed. Questions concerning selecting materials, grading, and assigning free reading reflected this division in teacher accountability. Instead of instruction based upon close cooperation between the classroom teacher and the reading teacher, the children with reading deficiencies had to contend with two separate programs.

Research evidence supports the importance of the classroom teacher in any successful reading program (Stauffer, 1967).

Robinson (1967), Robinson & Rauch (1965), and Mason & Palmatier (1973) have suggested that the Chapter I reading teacher's prime responsibility should be to assist the classroom program rather than to serve as a referral resource. Smith (1969) found a positive effect of the reading resource person's position if this person's efforts raised the school personnel's consciousness of reading: Colleagues discussed reading instruction more among themselves, were more interested in teaching methods, and were willing to try new materials in the classroom. Also, Bean (1985) found that a resource teacher working within a classroom setting with a teacher could contribute to teacher cooperation, individualized instruction, small class size, and increased interaction and cooperation in planning and teaching. The weaknesses were space problems and differences in teaching styles, scheduling, and inadequate joint planning times. Opponents of an expanded role for the reading teacher frequently noted that yet still broader responsibilities were beyond the purposes of the job.

Factors Affecting Chapter I Teachers' Role

Studies of Chapter I reading programs indicate that the role of Chapter I reading teachers has tended to be ambiguous and varies in different schools (Mangieri, 1980 and Smith, 1969). Robinson and Rauch (1965) indicated that a wide range of responsibilities expected of these teachers tends to limit their

effectiveness. They identified seven functions--a resource person, advisor, in-service leader, investigator, diagnostician, instructor, and evaluator. Archambault (1985) also concluded that the goals and job descriptions associated with the reading specialist position were not clear. Many reading teachers saw their role as one with responsibility without authority.

Mangieri (1980) found that reading teachers' understanding of their responsibilities differed from their administrator's view.

Another factor influencing Chapter I teachers is related to the role of the Chapter I resource teacher and the functions of the Chapter I program. Some classroom teachers have unrealistic expectations of the progress that is reasonable for children to make in a resource room and believe that a resource teacher has more free time and a less important role than the regular classroom teacher (Zehm, 1975).

A subtle yet significant influence on many reading teachers has been the regulations accompanying much of the state and federal money given to schools. Requirements for admission to a remedial reading program, class size, and teaching time are defined in these guidelines, shaping the daily activities of the reading teachers. The guidelines set forth by the Iowa Department of Education and the restrictions imposed by the limited time periods students are released from classroom activity for extra reading instruction limit the Chapter I teacher's program.

These restrictions lessen children's involvement in the learning process. Local interpretation can also contribute to restrictions placed on the reading teacher.

The challenge facing reading teachers is to define what their jobs should include and then to work to implement these activities within the limitations of their local situations (Robinson & Pettit, 1978).

Effectiveness of Chapter I Reading Programs

Doubts about the effectiveness of the remedial reading program in schools stem from research conclusions indicating that students in a remedial reading program appear to remain poor readers and to continue to be referred for remedial reading as long as they were in school. Milligan (1986) found several instructional procedures hindering effectiveness of the remedial reading program: Children are not spending enough time involved in the reading process, the focus of diagnosis is on phonetic skills, and the instructional emphasis is on sounding out unfamiliar words and on accurate oral reading.

From this information, a Chapter I reading teacher's effectiveness would be enhanced by more clearly defining responsibilities as well as changing the nature of the role. These changes would include more time for collaboration with classroom teachers to develop programs for children within the classroom rather than attempting to remediate in a separate instructional setting.

The remainder of this paper will discuss the role of a Chapter I reading teacher as a reading facilitator rather than a skills teacher, in that way supporting the instructional program of the classroom which presents whole units of language through quality literature and related expressive activity. This whole language concept which is to be integrated into the classroom will be modeled by the Chapter I reading teacher in her program, discussed with individual teachers, and presented to the elementary school staff as part of the inservice.

Whole Language and the Chapter I Program

The greatest potential for improving children's performance and attitudes in reading is recognizing the way in which children learn to read naturally through involvement in thinking-language processes. Escaping the confines of basal reader instruction and establishing a quality literature base can be one of the means in the instructional development process that fosters learning through "whole language." This concept is based on the premise that language is learned from whole to part. Parts, or skills, cannot be learned outside of the whole experience. The personal power to create language is shaped by the social need to understand others and to be understood by them; therefore, the individual's language soon falls within the norms of the language of the community (Goodman, 1986).

As natural learners, children develop thinking-language abilities as they interact through oral language with their environment. Also they become aware of written language as they develop intellectually and have experiences with print in their environment. Written language is approached as naturally and easily as oral language. Children learn to read by engaging in the process of reading.

Literature-Based Reading Instruction

Many children begin school having had few experiences with stories and with adults who read. In response to this neglect of literacy in the home, schools need to be centers of rich literature and expressive experiences. Dorothy Cohen's study (1968) suggests that if children have not been exposed to stories at home, it is not too late to provide children with these opportunities at school. Chapter I reading teachers can offer home reading experiences to parents so they become involved in their children's language growth.

A literature-based curriculum is supported by quality literature from the different genres and provides opportunities for children to engage in the various modes of expressive activity. A quality work is one which naturally offers invitations to readers to return for more consideration. Literature experiences and related expressive activities can mobilize imaginations to create meanings, resolve conflict, and

serve as a basis for interaction (Harms, 1986). Literature experiences humanize children and offer models of language (Huck, et al., 1987).

In many schools, the instruction in reading is presented chiefly through a basal reading series. In fact, the gap between the knowledge of emerging literacy and the programs offered in basal readers today is widening. Theory based on research conclusions is moving in one direction and basals in another. The current basals require more time for reading instruction and less time for students' actual reading time. Children's emerging language abilities are assessed by performance on multiple-choice tests. Basal readers misrepresent the reading process by defining it as a mastery of arbitrary skill sequences (Goodman, 1986).

Chapter I Reading Teachers as Reading Facilitators

Chapter I teachers as reading facilitators can encourage the development of dynamic learning environments rich in literature experiences that are meaningful to children. Within this type of an environment, teachers can serve as models of reading and writing and can facilitate students' realization that their responses are important and worthy of sharing through a number of ways with others. Children can witness their peers and teachers as a community of readers, excited about books, reading, and writing (Helper, 1982).

Chapter I teachers can promote children responding to the ideas gained in reading experiences through different types of expressive activity. Many of the same thinking tasks are involved in the comprehension and composition processes. When these processes are connected, learning is extended. Reading experiences can generate children's ideas and offer models of language for writing experiences. Writing experiences can serve as reading experiences as children read their own compositions for enjoyment and for redrafting and editing to clarify their ideas.

According to Graves (1983), providing literature experiences allows children to develop their concept of authorship. Reading quality literature helps set the climate for writing. He believes children will want to write when they have established a sense of story and have heard the rich voices in quality literature. According to Murray (1985), every writer is a reader. When a student writes, he/she has to read what has been written then reads ahead to what they have not quite yet written.

Chapter I reading teachers can assist their students in connecting the comprehension-composition processes represented in many quality works from the different genre. Along with many literature works, the environment can be stocked with a typewriter and/or word processor, many types of writing instruments (crayons, chalk, markers and pencils, paper for writing and drawing),

cassette tape recorders with blank tapes for dictating stories as well as for listening to peer-taped compositions, a feltboard and cut-out characters, pictures to stimulate storytelling among children, cookie sheets with magnetic letters, envelopes and stickers for sending letters, nontoxic and washable hand stamps and ink pads, and blank books.

Student activities can be offered through teacher presentations and learning centers.

Teacher Presentations

Several activities to foster the comprehension-composition connection can be initiated through teacher presentations.

Reading Aloud Experiences

Teachers reading aloud to children encompasses several values. Young children who have stories read to them learn more about language structures, accumulate more background information, and have an opportunity to develop an interest in learning to read. It is very important that children hear one another read as well as their teacher.

Guided by the teacher, children can share and discuss their reading and writing with each other. Through interaction with their peers and teachers, children can extend the meaning of their reading and writing experiences and can gain ideas for refining these experiences besides ideas for other language experiences. During these times, the teacher can model the

reader and the writer for their students as they share their literature and language experiences and as they interact with others concerning their experiences.

Writer's Workshop

To provide opportunities for children to engage in the writing process with the support of their peers, a writer's workshop, a small group of peers, can meet regularly to nurture the recursive process of writing (the writer moves back and forth among the aspects of the writing process--selecting a topic, drafting, redrafting, editing and publishing). Peers can assist in finding meaningful topics, in serving as an audience as drafts are read aloud, and in suggesting ways to redraft and to edit. The teacher needs to spend time with a peer group as it is initiated to model the process and the appropriate responses to others' ideas, so each child can realize ownership of his/her writing experience, thus achieving meaning.

Independent Learning Experiences

Centers in which children work independently as an individual or in small groups allow children to extend the ownership of the language experience. Children can select meaningful literature experiences and related expressive activities thus making connections with the comprehension-composition processes. These experiences can allow children to learn more about language. While children are working in

centers, the Chapter I teacher or the classroom teacher can give specific instruction to other students.

Experiences with picture books, folk stories, and poems offer small units for a literature base. In the short time frame available for instruction in a Chapter I program, children are able to experience whole units. To nurture a positive view of the opportunities in a Chapter I reading program, the teacher and the students can share their experiences with the classroom teachers and the students not in the program.

Two types of centers can be presented. One type is the sustaining center. Sustaining centers are maintained throughout the school year and assist in creating a safe, predictable learning environment. Another type is specific to the development of the comprehension-composition connection. Activity related to a specific literary element, genre, concept, theme, or unit of study in a curricular area can be presented through a center.

Sustaining Centers

A Listening/Reading Center can provide interesting listening/reading experiences. Children can gain ideas by listening even if they cannot read the text. Children can follow along in the text with the accompanying cassette tape therefore acquiring reading abilities. The works offered can be primarily for enjoyment or can extend a particular reading

ability or theme in the remediation program or the classroom. Pieces for a feltboard can accompany the listening/reading experience. Children can place the pieces representative of major story elements on a board as they listen or retell the story.

An Author/Illustrator Center can offer models of readers and writers. Short biographies accompanied by the works of the author/illustrator can portray to students how the reading and other life experiences of an author/illustrator influenced his/her story or poetry composition and how the author/illustrator engages in the expressive processes to create meaning. Examples of author/illustrators who have created quality works enjoyed by children are Marc Brown, Arnold Lobel, Leo Lionni, Don Freeman and William Steig.

Reference Centers maintained throughout the year can also facilitate the comprehension-composition connection. The step-by-step directions for bookmaking along with the materials needed can allow children the pleasure of sharing their stories with others thereby offering a composition-comprehension connection. Ways to share a story, to retell a story, or to write a poem can be developed into folders and booklets.

Centers Connecting the Language Processes

Centers offering literature experiences and related expressive activity of many forms can encourage children to

respond with their ideas and can offer examples of language structures in which to express ideas and feelings, thus creating a comprehension-composition connection. These examples (from Jeanne McLain Harms' Literature and Expressive Activity, unpublished) can assist in making a comprehension-composition connection.

Title: Choices and More Choices

A. Literature Experience

Read What Did You Leave Behind? by Alvin Tresselt.

Expressive Activity

Choose one of your interesting experiences to think about. What do you remember seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling?

Compose a story about your experience.

B. Literature Experience

Read John Burningham's Would You Rather . . .

Expressive Activity

1. Make up some "would you rather" choices to write to tell about.
2. You might want to make up some categories to put in the pocket for others to use in their composition.

C. Literature Experience

Look at Hoban's Over, Under and Through.

Expressive Activity

1. Find pictures of the prepositions. Make your own book or folder.

over under through
 on in
 around across between
 beside below
 against behind

2. Pantomime the prepositions.

D. Literature Experience

Study the book Look Again, by Tana Hoban.

Expressive Activity

Make some "look agains" or a book of them. Choose an important feature to use as the clue.

Title: One Idea Leads To Another

A. Read A Good Thing . . . A Bad Thing, by Karen Thomas.

Expressive Activity

Make up some "good thing - bad thing" ideas.

B. Literature Experience

Read Fortunately, by Remy Charlip.

Expressive Activity

Choose a plot and write a fortunately-unfortunately story.

C. Literature Experience

Read Steven Kroll's The Tyrannosaurus Game.

Expressive Activity

Begin your own "add-on" story. Start the story on a tape or on a piece of chart paper or wrapping paper. Ask your classmates to help develop the story.

D. Literature Experience

Read Bear Hunt, by Anthony Browne.

Expressive Activity

1. Choose from the packet of cards a problem situation to draw, and then draw your way out. (Pictures of problems and crises could be used.)
2. Make up other problems to put in the packet.

Centers Specific to an Area of Study

Language knowledge. Understandings of literary elements (e.g., characterization, plot organization, imagery, figurative language, and theme) and of the different genres can be developed through work with centers. An example from Harms' booklet is given below.

Title: Story Settings and Mapmaking

A. Literature Experience

Read I'll Draw a Meadow, by Bornstein.

Expressive Activity

Find a picture of a place and a time you would like to be in or draw such a setting.

Compose a story about it.

B. Literature Experience and Expressive Activity

Choose a folk tale and draw a map of the setting of its events.

C. Literature Experience

Read Abel's Island, by William Steig.

Expressive Activity

Draw a map of the island and place the events of the story on it.

Concepts, themes, and units. Centers focusing on concepts, themes, and units can provide comprehension-composition experiences. The activity in the sustaining centers can support the development of these centers by providing different types of related literature.

Examples of recurring concepts closely related to children's lives can be the focus of centers with literature experiences and expressive ideas. Examples are the concepts of weather, seasons, holidays, and growing up. A center related to the concept of hats can spark interest in characters and can lead to dramatizing and writing about different roles. The center can contain hats representative of different roles along with literature works.

Centers can offer in-depth experiences with themes that are presented in the basal reader series. Children can listen to/read works from different genres and then engage in different kinds of expressive activity. Example themes are wishes and memories.

Centers can provide opportunities to extend the study of the social studies and science units in the classroom. For example, a child, as Australia is being studied in the classroom, might listen to/read aborigine folk stories in the Chapter I area and retell one in the oral tradition of this group. In studying metric measure in science, the child might become involved with the notion of some things that cannot be measured or biggest is

not always best through listening/reading works on that theme and then respond with his/her own ideas.

Evaluation

The assessment of whole language experiences needs to be made in qualitative terms for quantitative measures tend to focus on the fragments of language. Through observations of children's responses in group discussion, peer interaction in the workshop, and center activity, children's language growth can be noted. A checklist of comprehension-composition tasks can assist in noting progress and need for instruction.

Individual teacher-student conferences can also glean information about emerging language abilities. A columned record sheet can provide for an easy access record of pupil response. The columns might be labeled (from left to right) "Date," "What Shared" (either comprehension or composition experience or both), "Why Shared," "How Related to Instructional Program," and "How Collaborated" (with teacher). These categories reflect a program that encourages children to own their language experiences by allowing them to decide the focus of the conference, that relates instruction to child responses, and that extends children's responses in needed language tasks. A checklist sheet of language tasks can also be used to record child responses during conferences.

Summary

Chapter I reading teachers as facilitators can focus on providing learning experiences within the Chapter I program and as a resource to classroom teachers that will nurture children's language growth by involving them in creating their own meaning rather than in compensating for their apparent inability to develop language tasks in accordance with exterior standards. Quality literature experiences both listening and reading with opportunities to respond through many forms of expressive activities allow children to have meaningful experiences, to encounter models of language, and to experience in-depth learning by connecting the comprehension-composition processes.

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