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RETHINKING LITERACY INSTRUCTION

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SEAN RUDAY, EDITOR
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Table of Contents

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

SEAN RUDAY, *JLI* FOUNDER AND EDITOR
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My favorite quotation from *Game of Thrones* is Tyrion Lannister's explanation that "a mind needs books like a sword needs a whetstone if it is to keep its edge." This statement about the impact of literacy on one's ability to succeed reflects the mission of the *Journal of Literacy Innovation*: here at *JLI,* we advocate for the importance of effective literacy instruction and the ability of reading and writing to impact the quality of one's life. I'm thrilled to say that the articles featured in this issue provide insights into meaningful literacy practices that can enhance students' thinking abilities and potential to succeed. Each manuscript in this issue of *JLI* describes innovative and useful instructional ideas that merge theory and practice. I am thrilled to share these thoughtful and practical works with you and hope you find them as informative as I do.

The first article in this issue, "Building and Connecting Literacy in a Theatre Classroom" by Cynthia Dawn Martelli and Johanna Ryan, describes a middle school theatre teacher's experiences as she worked to "build and form connections between theatrical tools and literacy tools" in her students. The authors of this piece discuss research, classroom activities, and instructional recommendations for developing the students' literacy skills and strategies needed for them to perform successfully in a theatre class. An excerpt from the piece captures the transformative experiences students had as a result of them learning these strategies: "Because of our emphasis on reading comprehension, my students formed authentic connections between their acting roles and the written piece. Instead of just stating lines of dialogue, my kids were now *becoming* their characters."

The second article you'll encounter, April Brannon's "Wild Writing: Reading and Writing the Natural World," makes a compelling and thoughtful case for the inclusion of environmental education in the English classroom. In this piece, Brannon "uses the term wild writing to include poems and essays that address the natural world and describes how to include both in the classroom." The article draws on research, mentor texts, and the author's own classroom practices to explain how incorporating the natural world can enhance English instruction, the natural word, and students' lives. Brannon synthesizes these ideas with an insightful statement that speaks to the interconnectedness of this approach: "While English curricular demands and mandates are often onerous, wild writing provides students the opportunity to not only to read the land, but also to read their lives."

Next, you'll come to the excellent "Lessons in Letters: A Case Study of Individualized Reading Instruction" by Lisa Crayton. This piece addresses the important question of what happens to students "who fall through the cracks, never learning to read in the elementary school?" Crayton's "case study examines the literacy experience of one such student: James, a 17-year-old, African-American non-reader labeled learning disabled and emotionally disturbed." This piece describes James' impressive development as a reader and the instructional implications of

James' experience, concluding with insightful instructional recommendations that can enhance literacy instruction in a variety of contexts. As Crayton explains, "When teachers and students work as partners, and students create their own knowledge by pursuing their interests in meaningful ways, successful literacy experiences can evolve naturally."

This issue concludes with "Talk to Learn: Rethinking Rehearsal in the Speaking Process" by Sheryl Lain. In this thought-provoking article, Lain "shares a variety of techniques to help kids use the speaking process to rehearse for oral performances including readers theater, choral reading, literature interpretation, and oration." Drawing comparisons to the writing process, Lain makes a compelling case for the importance of classroom activities that help students develop their speaking abilities. This article discusses a number of classroom-ready activities that teachers of a variety of grade levels can integrate into their instruction to help students become confident speakers who are ready to use their verbal skills in authentic situations. Lain summarizes her argument perfectly: "Just as students need to revise and edit their writing for the real purpose of sharing with readers, so students need to rehearse for the purpose of performing."

I am proud to share these insightful and innovative pieces. I hope you will consider adding your voice to this conversation by submitting your work for consideration for publication in a future issue of the *Journal of Literacy Innovation.* For more information on the journal, please visit www.journalofliteracyinnovation.weebly.com.

See you in April 2018 for *JLI*'s next issue!

Sean

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BUILDING AND CONNECTING LITERACY IN A THEATRE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

The world of theatre encompasses so many different elements including acting, building, improvising, and moving. However, one of the most important elements is the reading and analyzing of scripts and other literature. After entering my theatre classroom for the first time, I soon realized that my students needed more than content-driven knowledge to flourish in my performative arts class. My students needed literacy tools to understand and grow their theatrical knowledge. This paper is a record of my journey to implement these literacy tools into my classroom. I found that after incorporating reading strategies into my theatre lessons, my students gained deeper understanding and confidence in their work as young actors.

Building and Connecting Literacy in a Theatre Classroom

When I started planning for my first teaching job as a middle school theatre instructor, my immediate "go to" was a curriculum of theatre basics: warm up stretches, improvisation, stage layouts, costume, makeup, etc. About three weeks into the semester, after getting to know my students and building peer relations, I realized that my original curriculum needed to encompass much more than basic drama concepts.

This realization came after introducing an exercise I thought to be fairly simple. I created four different scripts; each script was meant for two people and contained simple, vague dialogue so that my students could create their own character based on the lines given. Below is an excerpt from one of my scripts:

A: Hi

B: Hi

A: How are you?

B: Fine

A: Really?

B: Yes

A: Yes?

B: Yes!

My thought with this first critical thinking exercise was that if I made the dialogue simple, it would allow my students the freedom to create unique, interesting characters. However, I soon found that my "simple" character exercise was not so simple to my middle school kids. Students in every class stated, "I don't get it, how do we make a character from this?" and "These lines don't make sense". My kids were having a difficult time inferring meaning as well as utilizing context clues to guide them.

I soon realized that I had made a mistake. I *assumed* my students had the literacy tools to navigate theatrical concepts, such as character development, and then pushed them into unknown territory. The truth is that the performative arts are much more than simply reading a script and acting it out. I agree with James Thomas's (2005) idea that stage dialogue, though very similar to its literary cousin, is a concentrated and powerful form of verbal expression. Thomas (2005) states, "Speech is more condensed on stage and each word carries far more dramatic impact than in most other literature" (p. xxxii). To truly understand and appreciate a play means analyzing its contents, breaking parts down into chunks, and finally, creating a synthesis of that representation of ideas. To meet my students' needs, what I needed to do was build and form connections between theatrical tools and literacy tools.

The Research

Research in the field of literacy and the arts is limited, especially regarding the utilization of literacy strategies *in* a performing arts classroom (Barton, 2013; Frambaugh-Kritzer, Buelow, & Steele, 2015). This may be due to the fact that literacy strategies are often used as a means to increase test scores and are, therefore, grounded in data driven subject areas like English Language Arts. In addition, many subject area teachers avoid teaching literacy strategies in their classroom for several reasons. The primary responsibility of middle and high school teachers has always focused on teaching the content, with little emphasis on literacy practices that are crucial to comprehending that content (Goldman, 2012). Subject teachers may also believe that it is not their responsibility to teach reading and writing strategies, nor have they been trained in the reading process (Hurst & Pearman, 2013). For whatever reason, this lack of literacy in content area classrooms negatively impacts students' subject area knowledge, as well as their reading skills.

Twenty-first century literacy requires children to be able to apply reading and interpretation skills differently depending on the subject matter (Goldman, 2012). Students need to be able to read and comprehend informational text in a science class and then analyze and interpret a fictional novel in an English Language Arts class. In the realm of arts education, there is an understanding that students need to read and write about art from a critical perspective, but also take this new information and apply it to creating *new* art work (Barton, 2013). If students are to

become successful in their fields, they need to become synthesizers. In other words, they need to become *makers*.

In addition to creating new work, arts education requires a *communication* of student ideas through writing, oral exchange, and performance. For example, students may demonstrate their knowledge of a scene by sharing with a peer, writing about their reactions, or creating a skit. These activities foster higher-order thinking and active participation which benefits students in many other subject areas. One study showed that sixth grade students who participated in a theatre-infused language arts curriculum did better on their state assessment exams than the non-treatment groups. Interesting to note is that these same students improved in both their language arts scores *and* math scores (Inoa, Weltsek, and Tabone, 2014).

Unfortunately, getting students to reach this upper level of Bloom's Taxonomy is a difficult task. Many children read below grade level because reading instruction typically stops at sixth grade (Hurst & Pearman, 2013). As a result, students who could not read adequately in the lower grades, struggle more as they move into upper, content-specific areas (Goldman, 2012). When middle and high school instructors take the time and effort to incorporate literacy in their classrooms, children make positive gains in reading as well as content area knowledge.

My Beginning Process

Fortunately, at the time of my new teaching experience, I was also a graduate student taking a course in literacy strategies for struggling readers. We used Kylene Beers' (2003) text, *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do,* to guide us through our literacy assignments. I found that Beers' mini lessons and strategies, intended for use in an English Language Arts classroom, could easily be transferred to my classroom to introduce plays, summarize information, and help with cognition.

In addition to the reading, our class also participated in workshop-style lessons that *showed* us how to incorporate these strategies in our classroom. Our professor often used sticky notes and large poster board to get us up off our chairs and walking around the room, a challenging task for teachers who have been on their feet all day. Her enthusiasm and unique approaches to teaching prediction, inferencing, and summarization gave me several ideas for my own classroom and how I could get my kids to *care* about analyzing plays.

Implementation of Strategies

During my teaching semester, I implemented seven unique strategies into my theatre lessons to help my kids with reading comprehension. These strategies helped with inferencing, predicting, identifying main ideas, and summarizing. I then revised and recycled these seven strategies to fit specific lessons or limited time periods. There were two strategies in particular that I found the most rewarding, both for me and my students.

My first strategy, called Tea Party, comes from Beers (2003) and allows students the opportunity to examine parts of a text *before* they actually read it. It allows students to predict what they think will happen, utilize background knowledge, and make inferences (Beers, 2003).

In my class, I used Tea Party to spark interest and help my students analyze our new play: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (2004). I chose 18 catchy lines from the play, typed them out, and cut them out into strips. Some of these phrases included "Tom, that's a real dead body!" and "That place is haunted!" The day of the lesson, as I introduced the idea of reader's theatre, my students picked random slips out of a cup. Without giving away too much information, I asked them to stand up and walk around the room. They each needed to find a partner, say their phrase aloud, and move on to another partner. I did notice some usual eye rolls and long sighs, but after walking around and observing, I noticed many giggling at their partners phrase or getting excited when two partners had the same phrase. After about five minutes, I asked them to take their seats and explained that the phrases they were reading came from our new play. I created a word web on the board and asked them to make predictions about the new play. At this point, my kids got excited and started calling out words like "witches", "pirates", and "a dead cat". I even got a response from Kevin, a sixth grader who very much wanted gym instead of theatre. Kevin sat in the back and rarely participated but that day he was the first to raise his hand and tell me "Somebody's gonna be dead," which was actually a correct prediction. After hearing many ideas, and some elaborated stories, I finally told them the name of the play. As I began to pass out the scripts, my students became instantly engaged; they started selecting character parts, asked questions about the story, and shared their own experiences with Mark Twain.

My second successful strategy, which helps students *after* they have read a play, is called Somebody Wanted But So (SWBS). SWBS is an excellent literacy strategy that helps students both summarize and analyze key elements from a text including main characters, plot, conflict, and resolution (Beers, 2003). I originally did not think too much about this strategy until my students bombed their *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* assessment and needed another week of review. The assessment required my students to write the key plot points, explain the antagonist and protagonist, and discuss the theme of the story. Knowing that reviews can be tedious, I wanted to give this activity a try.

I started the activity by creating the SWBS table on the board which separated the words Somebody (character), Wanted (objective), But (conflict), and So (resolution). After explaining each element to the class, I modeled how to fill in the table with the character of Tom Sawyer using a think-aloud technique. We discussed why Tom is an important character, what he wanted most in the story, what elements got in the way, and what happened in the end. With a little direction, my students were able to fill in the table with a variety of characters from the play. It was an exciting moment when I was able to take a green marker and circle answers in the table that were also answers to our assessment. I explained to my students that they came up with the right answers all on their own, just in a different way, and their reactions were priceless. I saw several light bulbs turn on during that lesson.

In addition to reading comprehension, the SWBS strategy also struck a debate in one of my classes. After filling in the table for several characters, Nick, one of my eighth graders, stated "The pirate scene doesn't really matter to the story so it shouldn't be in the table". I asked him why he thought that, and after explaining his reasoning, several hands shot up to debate his idea. The enthusiasm was so great, I decided to divide the class and let them justify their sides using

textual evidence. Everyone was so engaged that we forgot the time, and when the bell rang, I still had students debating their views. This spontaneous debate became my favorite teaching moment that year.

Student Response

After implementing both of these strategies, I had my students give their feedback through exit slips. With the Tea Party strategy, I utilized a rating scale (1-5) asking students a) if the strategy helped them predict the play b) if the strategy got them excited about the play and c) if they would like me to use this strategy again. I also included a section to explain their reasoning. With a total of 130 students, 58% of my students believed the strategy helped them make predictions about the play (giving high ratings of 4 and 5). On average, 88% of my students wanted to do the strategy again. In the explanation section, Kevin wrote: "I would like you to do it again because it was fun." Other student comments included:

"It got my attention and the activity was fun."

"Yes, I feel that this activity was way more fun than you just telling us the play."

"It makes me wonder why the phrase was said. So it makes me a little interested."

For the SWBS strategy, I asked my students to do a quick write, answering the question "Did SWBS help you review the play (*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*) and why?" Out of 131 students, 96% said the strategy did help them review the play. Many students wrote that the strategy made the plot clear, helped organize the information, and helped them remember details. One of my favorite reactions came from one of my low-achievers, Tim, who asked, "Can we do another example? I'm actually really learning today!" Although this was not the most positive statement for a teacher to hear, it was an honest success for this student and so it made me smile. In fact, many of my struggling students and English Language Learners (ELLs) believed this strategy positively influenced them. Some of their responses included:

"It helped me a lot, it made everything organized."

"S.W. B. S. helped me by telling me how to put it in order and what really happens."

"Yes, and it help me to understand better and get more facts."

"Yes it really did help me. It was fun and I was learning at the same time."

I also found that the majority of my students improved on their *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* post-assessment, many by a whole letter grade.

Recommendations

Based on the research and my own teaching experience, I would highly recommend integrating literacy techniques into other subject-area classrooms. Many teachers may find that students who struggle in content areas such as science, social studies, or health have problems due to *literacy*, not the subject material. Fortunately, literacy strategies are flexible. They can be utilized before,

during and after reading, depending on the strategy. In addition, literacy strategies can be implemented into any lesson plan; they can be used as a warm-up, direct lesson, or final review.

In order to successfully utilize literacy strategies in the classroom, they first need to be taught in an *explicit* and *direct* way (Beers, 2003). During my lessons, I found that my students were more likely to be receptive to the strategy when I was open and honest about what we were doing and *why* we were doing it. For example, during my SWBS strategy, I explained to my students that we needed to review *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* using a new method because the majority needed extra help understanding the elements of the story. After I explained the reasoning, I modeled the strategy, incorporating a think-aloud technique so that my students *heard* how I came to my conclusions. Following this, I put my students into groups and observed as they practiced the strategy. Finally, we filled in the SWBS chart as a whole-group, and I reviewed key character concepts, making direct connections to what was on their previous assessment. Every step of the literacy implementation was direct and clear. This way, when I incorporate the strategy in the future, my students will already be familiar with the procedure and its purpose.

In addition, I would recommend collecting student feedback regarding each literacy strategy. Engaging strategies are more likely to cognitively stick with the students and help them summarize, predict, or infer meaning from future text. If the strategy was not well explained or implemented, student feedback will support this data and then changes can be made. Student data can be collected in the form of exit slips, open discussions, or journal entries. I found exit slips to be the most helpful because I was able to view feedback that day and keep the data for later use. In addition, exit slips can come in many formats such as questionnaires, surveys, or simple free-writes to suit the lesson and time frame. Collecting feedback from several different strategies ultimately creates a toolbox of literacy techniques that work for each unique group of students.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of my first semester, I felt very proud of the progress my students had made. Their literacy skills improved greatly as we delved into several works and theatrical materials. They learned how to compare and contrast characters, use context clues to predict outcomes, and even tackle difficult language with an adapted version of Moliere's *Tartuffe*. For their final project, my students spent almost two months working on a production of *All's Faire* (2004). Using our literacy strategies, we read, analyzed, and explored the historical background of this medieval play. Because of our emphasis on reading comprehension, my students formed authentic connections between their acting roles and the written piece. Instead of just stating lines of dialogue, my kids were now *becoming* their characters.

Starting this next year, my goal is to continue this progress, giving students the literary tools they need to fully appreciate the world of theatre. Literacy and performative arts are not separate entities but intertwining fields. By modeling and practicing literacy strategies in my classroom, students gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for stage dialogue and the stories they tell.

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WILD WRITING:
READING AND WRITING THE NATURAL WORLD

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Abstract

The author argues that environmental education should be included in the English classroom. She uses the term wild writing to include poems and essays that address the natural world and describes how to include both in the classroom. She also advocates for students to use their observations and to conduct their own research on natural phenomena in order to promote what E.O. Wilson calls biophilia, or an affinity for the natural world.

Wild Writing: Reading and Writing the Natural World

Years ago, a student in my sophomore English class brought me an amaryllis bulb for Christmas. While it sat on top of my desk, it drew numerous comments from students about its odd shape and dirty surface. When I finally potted it, within a month it grew to a stalk over three feet tall with four red blooms on top. Students were fascinated by the rapid growth of this plant and would make casual observations before class. I was surprised by their enthusiasm--I hadn't expected them even to notice the plant—and wondered if they had ever had the satisfaction of planting something and watching it grow.

In his book, *The Immortal Wilderness*, John Hay (1989) writes, "There are occasions when you can hear the mysterious language of the Earth, in water, or coming through the trees, emanating from the mosses, seeping through the undercurrents of the soil, but you have to be willing to wait and receive" (p. 157). I see the classroom as a place to develop a form of literacy that goes beyond reading and writing; it is a place to foster critical consciousness, to promote a knowledge of the landscape, and to form an "ethic of care" about the environment. This effort to develop a relationship with the Earth may seem to be an artificial addition to the English classroom, but I believe an ecological awareness is essential to all education. Elaine Riley Taylor (2002) argues, "Education should address a wide range of human potentials, fostering within children an awareness of their own human capacities for wisdom, imagination, appreciation, and indeed, their own responsibility within something which is larger than themselves: the family, the community, the ecological world" (p. 16). David Orr (1992) makes a similar claim when he states, "All education is environmental education" (p. 90). Drawing from notions of the hidden curriculum, Orr's point is that by relegating environmental issues to a unit in science class and never discussing them anywhere else in the curriculum, educators communicate that the environment is a tangential concern of little weight in the context of the curriculum and,

therefore, of the world. If we, as teachers, really want students to develop ecological consciousness, we have to integrate the environment into classes across the curriculum.

What follows is a description of the ways I use writing that addresses the natural world in the English classroom.

Wild Writing

One way to promote ecological consciousness in the English classroom is through the use of nature or place-based essays or poems, what I call wild writing. Poet Gary Snyder notes that the term *wild,* when defined from a human standpoint, is usually defined by *what is not*, as in *not* tame, *not* cultivated or *not* restrained. He has re-visioned the term *wild* to provide its definition in terms of what is. His newly made definition includes terms such as resisting oppression, expressive, self-propagating, and independent (p. 8). This definition is, in short, what nature writing often does.

Snyder's distinction is important because wild writing addresses the earth, plants, and animals--the very things that surround us in our everyday lives--and I want students to recognize that finding the wild is not something that requires an L.L. Bean catalog or an REI compass. To achieve a relationship with the wild, they do not have to go on a twenty-mile backpacking trip or even leave their own front yard. The natural world surrounds them and with it comes a multitude of organisms and life forms, all of which are opportunities for developing a relationship with the planet.

As English teachers, we are accustomed to providing students with a means to develop a meta-awareness of their own reading and writing processes. We show them how to read novels, newspapers, advertisements, and editorials for a wide variety of reasons and by using a wide variety of strategies. But we do not commonly show them how to read, or, perhaps more accurately, to notice their surroundings, In *The Hour of the Land*, nature writer and poet, Terry Tempest Williams (2016) states:

> The nature of our national parks [or the natural world] is bound to the nature of our own humility, our capacity to stay open and curious in a world that beckons closure through fear. For me, humility begins as a deep recognition of all I do not know. This understanding does not stop me, it inspires me to ask more questions, to look more closely, feel more fully the character of the place where I am. (p.14-15).

It is here, in the questioning and willingness to wonder, where wild writings, both reading them and creating them, are useful.

The practice of reading wild writings can be used as training that prepares students to “read" the landscape for themselves. This type of writing can be read as the written record and reflection of a writer’s own process of reading the physical world—in short, wild writing is didactic by its

very nature. Moreover, wild writing is a means to ecological consciousness because such readings potentially tap into E.O Wilson's (1998) notion of biophilia, or "the affinity for the living world" (p. 86). Wilson argues that all humans have an innate sense of wonder and affinity for the beauty and aesthetics of the wild. He believes that that affinity forms the cornerstone of an ethic of care about the environment. Wild writing, by its very nature, creates an aesthetic response and captures some of the wonder Wilson describes.

One way to include wild writings in the classroom regularly is through the inclusion of wild poetry. By adding a short discussion about one or two wild poems in the classroom each week, students are privy to a poet's observations and insights of the natural world. Consider, for example, these two stanzas from Mary Oliver's "The Swan":

> Across the wide waters
> something comes
> floating—a slim
> and delicate
>
> ship, filled
> with white flowers—
> and it moves
> on its miraculous muscles (p. 78)

The imagery in these stanzas is striking. And yet, to simply revel in the beauty of the lines is not enough to help students tap into their own sense of biophilia. Allowing wild poems to "just sit" with students runs the danger of reducing them to the equivalent of vacation photographs or something akin to a verbal wall calendar—worth gawking at or even admiring, but easily forgettable when out of sight. Similarly, while wild writing helps sharpen our focus of the natural world, reducing the writing (or the world) to something that can be checked for accuracy by questioning whether the metaphorical language measures up to actual species or place is counter-productive.

When reading "The Swan," students consider how Oliver knew the information necessary to write it. Most students are puzzled by the simplicity of this question and common responses are "She might have looked up a picture of a swan on the Internet," or "She probably just knows what a swan looks like." While both responses are reasonable, what I want students to realize is that Oliver may very well have carefully *looked* at a *real* swan in its *real* habitat and articulated her reading of the swan into a poem. I ask students to consider that wild writing can and often does *come from* and is *part of* someone's experience, and that they have this same opportunity for *close looking* every time they step out the door. Mary Oliver's work is particularly useful for this type of discussion because she has many poems that include sharp observation, and her book of collected work, *New and Selected Poems*, is a useful compendium of wild poems that are classroom friendly.

Reading the World through Journaling

Reading wild writing often elicits an aesthetic response, but it is important to get students to develop the practice of "reading the world" on their own and to articulate that reading. To do so, I have students choose a wild element such as a blade of grass, a cactus from the front yard, or an ant colony--and "read" it. This reading is an active, involved process, an interaction between the person and a text—in this case the text is an element—which might involve using multiple senses in order to make meaning. Furthermore, simply seeing an object is not reading it, just as merely glancing at words on a page is not reading them. Students have to spend time considering the object; that is, they must have the transactional experience of Louise Rosenblatt's reader response theory. To do so, they consider what they know, observe, and what to know about the element, and they write their observations and questions down, along with personal reflections and poetic descriptions for later reflection.

In my classes, students have chosen such things as the sunset, the Grand Canyon, and bougainvillea bushes in their front yards. Sometimes, as a group, we all read the same thing. For example, once we all read the moon for a month. However, whatever we choose to "read," we share our interpretations and talk about how we came to our reading.

Additionally, we look at nature writing by studying essays from *The Best American Science and Nature Writing Series*, and we notice what kinds of observations authors make and what types of research and information they include. We always talk about craft and notice how the essays are put together. For an excellent discussion on how to read a wild essay in this way, Katherine Bomer (2016), in her book, *The Journey is Everything,* includes a detailed explanation of her reading of Brian Doyle's "Joyas Valadoras," an essay about a hummingbird that uses scientific information to launch a philosophic inquiry.

The Role of Research in Wild Writing

After noticing that nature writing is often not simply observation and often includes factual information, we turn to research. Snyder (1990) advocates for the inclusion of scientific and factual knowledge in developing an ecological consciousness, noting, "It is not enough just to 'love nature.' As humans, our relation to the natural world takes place in a *place* and must be grounded in information and experience" (p. 39). He adds that these types of knowledge, while not essential for survival in urban environments, make a person "feel more at home" (p. 38).

Beyond creating the sense of familiarity and belongingness, scientific knowledge promotes biophilia because it can literally infuse wonder into life. Each plant, animal, and rock has unique properties, and science can help students see that. While I am not advocating for students to memorize multi-syllabic Latin names of plants or to develop an in-depth understanding of the chemical processes of photosynthesis in their English classes, a rudimentary scientific knowledge can help students read the land with a more sophisticated and awe-struck eye. For example, one of my students chose to read a creosote bush. Early on, she talked about the way

the creosote smells after rain and how the branches curved into the sky. She also noticed that no other types of plants grew around the creosote bush and chose to do some science-based research in order to find out why. She discovered that the creosote plant sends poison from its roots into the ground so that other plants will not be able to grow too close and rob it of ground water. When telling the class about her scientific research, it was clear that such research deepened her reading of and appreciation for the plant.

To integrate scientific knowledge successfully and appropriately in the English classroom, an inquiry-based approach rooted in students' initial landscape readings—their primary source information—is appropriate. Students notice a peculiar feature of a plant or animal and look for scientific explanations in order to inform their initial reading in a new way. The criteria for this research is that what they learn should influence their reading of the land, not simply provide academic knowledge. Furthermore, this research need not be overly technical. Students should simply discover something unique and personally interesting about whatever it is they are researching.

When searching for scientific knowledge, students often find mythic, medicinal, and historical information about whatever it is that they are researching. If students are drawn to these types of knowledge, it is useful for them to continue their investigation in these ways as well.

Tying It All Together

While English curricular demands and mandates are often onerous, wild writing provides students the opportunity to not only to read the land, but also to read their lives. By teaching students to be aware of their surroundings--and by surroundings I really mean the world that surrounds them--we are teaching them to really see what's in front of them and to recognize that they are embedded in and part of that world. This recognition is an essential step in moving students toward environmental activism and a better future for our planet, all while developing reading and writing skills.

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LESSONS IN LETTERS: A CASE STUDY OF INDIVIDUALIZED READING INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

Reading instruction in the secondary school has generally been viewed as too little, too late. Students with reading difficulties are targeted in the elementary school where much time and resources are spent making sure children learn how to read. But what about those students who fall through the cracks, never learning to read in the elementary school? This case study examines the literacy experience of one such student: James, a 17-year-old, African-American non-reader labeled learning disabled and emotionally disturbed. Working on an individualized reading program suited to his needs and experiences, James was able to make significant gains in reading attitude, perception, motivation, and interest. He began to view himself as a reader. As his story unfolds, literacy educators can gain insights into what struggling readers really need in order to succeed.

Lessons in Letters: A Case Study of Individualized Reading Instruction

"Reading words, and writing them, must come from the dynamic movement of reading the world. The question is how to create a fluid continuity between, on the one hand, reading the world, of speaking about experience, of talking freely with spontaneity and, on the other hand, the moment of writing and then learning how to read." (Freire, 1985, p.18)

Introduction

Reading instruction in the secondary school has generally been viewed as too little, too late. Students with reading difficulties are targeted in the elementary school where much time and resources are spent making sure children learn how to read. But what about those students who fall through the cracks, never learning to read in the elementary school? Secondary school teachers rarely have the opportunity to work for extended periods of time exclusively with one student or have the freedom to diverge from traditional secondary reading practices where textbooks predominate, teachers emphasize factual information, and teachers govern students' encounters with print (Warner & Lovell, 2014). This case study examines what happens when a teacher devotes time and resources to one student in the secondary school, for one semester. The student, James, a 17-year-old, African- American, non-reader was labelled "learning disabled" and "emotionally disturbed." What transpired was an account with three critical outcomes: 1) the student took control of his learning and curriculum; 2) the teacher revised the learning context

based on the needs, capacities, interests, and experiences of the student; and 3) a successful literacy experience unfolded, culminating in the student's jubilant outburst "I can read!"

Theoretical Perspective

Reading instruction in the secondary school has characteristically been viewed as too little, too late because: 1) it is assumed that students with reading difficulties have engaged in remedial instruction in the elementary school that enabled them to reach a reading level necessary to enter high school; and 2) secondary teachers are trained as content area, subject-matter specialists, not equipped to teach basic reading skills (Brozo & Simpson, 2007). Teaching children to read is the emphasis in the child-centered environment and self-contained structure of elementary schools so that once students enter high school, they are prepared for the lecture-oriented, teacher-directed instruction and textbook assignments in content areas that they will encounter. How to catch up secondary students, then, who still cannot read? Along with this inability are a host of negative attitudes about reading and writing. With the luxury of working individually with one struggling high school reader, I chose to adopt classic educational philosophies from Dewey, Vygotsky, and Freire in order to optimize the individualized nature of our instructional paradigm.

Ideally, education should be based on the actual life experiences of the individual learner who is given the freedom to establish the purposes of learning and who actively participates in the development of the curriculum based on personal needs, capacities, interests, and experiences (Dewey, 1938). Teachers are mediators who create the environment where facilitation of students' transactions with the world are conducted in a safe, supportive fashion (Vygotsky, 1978). Freire (1985) proposes that it is important that the words which become the starting point for learning to read and write come from the student's ideas, not from the teacher's reading book: "We should respect the expectations that students have and the knowledge students have. Our tendency as teachers is to start from the point at which we are and not from the point at which the students are" (p.15) With these theories driving my instructional decision-making process, I decided that the most appropriate methods and procedures for designing the curriculum for James would be self-selection of books and the Language Experience Approach.

Using literature and stories that students choose for themselves as the basis for reading instruction is beneficial because it gives the students motivation to read what interests them and it is a powerful predictor of reading success (Allington, 2001). Self-selection of books enables students to take ownership of their instructional context. Integrating self-selection of books with the Language Experience Approach, another instructional technique based on student input, creates a learning environment where the student is actively choosing and creating the reading texts: "In a typical Language Experience Activity, the student talks while the teacher takes dictation. Once the message has been written down, the student should be able to read back the message. The written text becomes the instructional material the teacher can use because the student is familiar with both the content and context of the message" (Fisher et. al., 2007). In this

instructional context, James was given the freedom to choose the books we read together and the freedom to dictate the words which became the cornerstone of our reading curriculum.

Methods and Procedures

James informed me during an interest inventory interview that he enjoyed reading scary stories. I took advantage of this knowledge and proceeded to check out a stack of short stories from the library—Edgar Allen Poe's classic tales, Deary's *True Ghost Stories* and Irving's *The Headless Horseman* became the texts that centered our curriculum. I would read aloud to James as he would listen to the stories. Afterwards, we would engage in comprehension strategy activities such as retellings, story maps, reciprocal questioning, text impressions, and summaries. As I slowly earned his trust by allowing him to shape and focus our curriculum with books that interested him, James began to open up to me. Once he realized that our time together was time for him to tell me what he wanted to learn about reading and writing, not time for me to tell him what I think he should know, he began to share personal aspects of his life, namely, his epistolary relationship with a girl. He would come to class with letters from her, letters that he could not read. This dilemma was weighing on him, but he timidly asked if I would read the letters to him. Jumping on this opportunity to infuse authentic literacy experiences into our curriculum, these letters became the focus of our instruction.

James would come to class with letters from his female friend and I would read them aloud to him. He would then dictate a response, which I wrote down and he subsequently copied in his handwriting in order to give them to her. One day as we were composing a letter together, he asked "Do you know where I could get some poetry to put in these letters?" I enthusiastically found poetry books for James from different genres. I exposed him to Shakespearian Sonnets, the Romantic poets such as Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, and Keats, lyricism, and modern poetry in hopes that these classic authors and styles would inspire him in his poetic musings and enlighten him towards a deeper understanding of the power of language as a means of reflecting emotion and feeling. But he didn't just copy the poems of famous authors. He said that his girlfriend liked the poems he composed himself and this motivated him to work conscientiously and thoughtfully on creating poetry. He told me that he considers poetry to be his favorite type of reading material.

Results and Discussion

James came to our meetings ready to write several pages of original text in letter form. He informed me that his girlfriend wanted at least a two-page letter every other day. It got to the point where he didn't want to listen to any more stories or engage in any other activities except write letters and compose poetry. He seemed to be gaining confidence in his ability as a writer because he had a supportive and enthusiastic audience. Most significantly, he was making the transition to reading the letters independently once they were written. One way I supported this transition was to repeat his sentences aloud as I was writing them down. James would ask "What have I got now?" and "Start from the beginning." I ended up reading these letters at least four or

five times in the course of their composition because James liked to hear the whole text and make continuous additions and revisions. These repeated readings helped James hear how his letters flowed and this made it easier for him to read the text back to me. When he would read a sentence or two aloud, I asked him to read them back again so he could hear his voice reading fluently.

One day during our final weeks together, James dictated a two-page letter that I wrote down for him. As I was writing it down, I asked him, "James, when you're copying these letters do you know the words you are writing? Can you read what you are copying?" He answered, "Yes, except for a few hard words that I just copy." This conversation seemed to trigger his thinking about his ability to read independently the words he was copying. He took the letter and began reading it softly to himself. He read about half way down the page and was so happy and proud of himself that he shouted "I can read! I can read! Give me a book! Give me a book! I need to practice on a book! I'm going to go home tonight and read a book! Let me read something to you! Give me something to read!" This outburst was particularly "un-James like." He was usually distant and reserved with a cool attitude of indifference. Not anymore. He then said, "I don't get it. We haven't been working on words and you haven't been making me read from books but how come all of a sudden I can read this?" I explained to him that the letters we were writing were in his own words, on a subject he cares about, and that's why he could read them better than anything anyone else has written. After this conversation, James was in such a great mood. He opened up and told me about his family and his plans for vacation. He really seemed to appreciate me instead of being defensive, hostile, and on-guard. I knew that this session with James was a real turning point for him as a reader. I realized that all the reading and writing we engaged in had paid off in his understanding of what reading is and in his view of himself as a person who can and does read. His confidence soared and he began to view himself as a reader and writer.

Conclusion and Implications

Making reading and writing relevant to the real-life experiences in the lives of students and giving students the freedom to establish their own literacy purposes and activities are two ways teachers can empower and motivate students towards successful and rewarding literacy experiences. Secondary school reading teachers should keep in mind that their students are individuals with unique interests, abilities, needs, and experiences who need opportunities to express themselves through reading and writing of self-selected topics. Secondary students with reading difficulties do not all learn the same way and should not be expected to read the same books, practice the same skills, and write about the same topics. James had a successful experience as a reader only when he took control of our activities and told me what he wanted to learn. I needed to trust that if I gave up my control of our curriculum, James would be given the freedom to discover himself as a reader and writer. He subsequently created a reason to want to learn how to read, that is, to read his own letters. What he was learning had personal meaning to him and was directly relevant to his life.

Secondary school teachers may feel pressure to rely on traditional teacher-directed instruction based on textbooks and literal recall of facts. They may let the textbook dictate what goes on in their classrooms. While this may save time and make it easier to assess what students know and don't know, other valuable and authentic learning experiences may be lost in the process. In content areas such as science and social studies, students should be encouraged and allowed to read biographies, historical fiction, and non-fiction, informational text related to specific topics instead of relying solely on textbook descriptions. This way, content area teachers can help improve reading ability in conjunction with teaching specific subjects. In English and reading classes, students should engage in some form of individualized reading and writing during which time they choose their own materials and topics, proceed at their own pace, dialogue with peers about their texts, and share in their own unique fashion.

Now that James has experienced success at reading and writing and he knows how good it makes him feel about himself, he will be motivated to continue reading and writing in the future. When teachers and students work as partners, and students create their own knowledge by pursuing their interests in meaningful ways, successful literacy experiences can evolve naturally. By giving up the impulse to control and direct student encounters with print and text, teachers can actually empower their students with the gift of freedom to be independent learners, in control of their own lives as readers.

Recommendations

Besides the many lessons taught in the context of teaching literacy through letter writing, many other lessons were learned from an educator viewpoint on how to best teach struggling readers. Explicit suggestions for literacy educators on specific pedagogical tactics they can use in order to achieve similar results with their students always begin with the students themselves. Who are they as readers and writers? What are their interests, experiences, and life stories that can be explored by personalizing the literacy curriculum through reading and writing experiences? Utilizing interest inventories, questionnaires, and informal conversations at the start of the school year can shed light on the likes and dislikes of each student. Then, specific reading materials and writing projects can be incorporated into the curriculum at relevant points in the school year. Specifically, the Reading and Writing Workshop model (Tompkins, 2014) can be a starting point where students self-select their reading materials and create their own writing response activities while the teacher meets individually with each student to provide support and feedback in conferences. The individualized nature of this framework allows students to connect reading and writing to their real-world experiences so they see the possibilities of reading and writing for genuine communicative purposes.

Literacy educators can also take risks by trying new innovative ways to incorporate reading and writing into the curriculum for struggling readers. With the plethora of new technologies emerging at record speed, literacy educators can modernize the curriculum to meet the unique challenges of reaching tech-savvy students in their social media worlds. While it can be tempting to adopt the new technologies in an attempt to reach struggling readers, it is also valuable to teach the types of reading and writing that have been around since ancient times. James thrived

when he was exposed to old fashioned letter writing. He blossomed when he wrote poetry and letters in his own handwriting. The laborious process of creating letters fascinated him as he painstakingly composed drafts and added personal touches to his letters. He saw the real communicative purposes for reading and writing in an authentic context. This intrinsic motivation compelled him to want to read and write, activities he had never connected with before. What is old becomes new again—the saying goes—and for James, he embraced the time-honored tradition of writing letters as his bridge to becoming a successful reader and writer.

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TALK TO LEARN:
RETHINKING REHEARSAL IN THE SPEAKING PROCESS

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Abstract

Oral work improves reading and writing, and I want my language arts students to go public, performing with skill and confidence. This article shares a variety of techniques to help kids use the speaking process to rehearse for oral performances including readers theater, choral reading, literature interpretation, and oration. Rehearsing formally using scripts and a rubric and informally in quick classroom activities reduces students' stress when they have to perform before an audience. What Donald Graves says about writing is true for speaking, too. Students should write, redraft, and finally go public with their writing. Likewise, students should speak, rehearse and finally go public with their speaking. When oral activities become a regular part of our literacy program, all students can be more successful at speaking as well as reading and writing.

Talk to Learn: Rethinking Rehearsal in the Speaking Process

Bobby Bippit bought a bat! The class is noisy as the ninth graders chant this line, lips and tongues enunciating. My friend Kay, drama coach extraordinaire, admonishes the kids to move their mouths and speak distinctly: “B’s and t’s! B’s and t’s!" she calls out. "Get those tongues moving!”

My advice to language arts teachers is to seek out a drama coach like Kay and use a variety of oral activities all year long so students are more comfortable when they stand in front of an audience and speak. I believe that oral work improves reading and writing, as well as speaking, and I want my language arts students to go public, performing with skill and confidence. This article shares a variety of techniques to help kids use the speaking process to rehearse for readers theater, choral reading, literature interpretation, and oration. Quick classroom activities reduce students' stress when they have to speak before an audience.

A balanced literacy framework offers rich opportunities to learn through talk. (An example of a balanced literacy framework is depicted in Table One in the Appendix.) Informal talk happens in literature circles as students hold book discussions (Daniels & Zemelman, 2007), in guided reading as they explain what they know and how they know it (Fountas & Pinnell, 2000), in writing workshop as they share their own pieces aloud (Graves, 2003), and in speaking/listening activities. All of these structures incorporate talk.

A balanced literacy approach encourages informal, unrehearsed talk; but it also allows for formal, polished oral performance. What Donald Graves says about writing is true for speaking, too. Students should write, redraft, and finally go public with their writing. Likewise, students should speak, rehearse and go public with their speaking.

The beauty of oral work is that speaking enhances reading (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). Indeed, reading, writing, speaking, and listening are not stand-alone standards but are interwoven so that each standard supports the teaching and learning of the others. Students whose reading fluency lacks flow are often the same kids who don't comprehend well, thus, needing speaking opportunities that enhance both reading fluency and writing voice.

Oral performance can be highly stressful for kids unless they have ample time and opportunity to rehearse. Before we take a look at a variety of rehearsal ideas, here are some formal speaking activities for language arts class, activities that incorporate the speaking process—practicing, polishing, and performing.

Classroom Speaking Activities

Readers Theater

Students of all ages perform readers theater. I saw a first grade class perform for parents using *Click, Clack, Moo, Cows that Type* by Doreen Cronin (2000) and *My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Seuss (1996). The children depicted the cavorting characters while strong first grade readers were narrators of the text. These same books work well with students up the grades as well.

Teachers adapt a text into a script and perform it. Often the characters sit on stools in a semicircle in front of the audience and read the text aloud. They may wear a few costume pieces and hold a simple prop to indicate characterization, but rather than memorize all the lines and move around on a stage, student speakers sit and use their scripts for support. Many texts lend themselves to readers theater, including picture books and dialogue-rich excerpts from novels or short stories. Later in this article, I will offer some picture book lessons to use for readers theater.

Poetry Interpretation

To perform poetry, students from third grade up select two or three poems and write an introduction, a closing and transitions that weave the poems together. A student might find poems from a single poet or she might select two or three poems by different authors with a common theme. Students perform their own poetry, too. My friend has her sixth graders perform their poems for parents before school. She calls this parent function Poetry and Pastries. She brings donuts, juice, and coffee, and parents drop by before they go to work to hear their kids perform. To prepare for poetry interpretation, students need time to rehearse at school incorporating peer feedback. See the rehearsal rubric depicted in Table Two in the Appendix.

Dramatic or Humorous Interpretation

Secondary students select a prose text from literature, including novels, short stories or plays. The text for dramatic interpretation is serious, tragic, or emotional, while the text for humorous interpretation is funny.

Interpreted Oratory

An oration is a persuasive essay morphed into a solo speech delivered by grade three through high school; students speak with voice and expressiveness using facial expression, hand gestures, and some purposeful movement. A student usually writes her oration, commits it to memory, practices it, and then performs it.

Choral Reading

This activity is when a whole class or a group of any age read aloud in unison. It helps build students' fluency, self-confidence, and motivation. Because students read aloud together, those who may feel self-conscious or nervous have built-in support from the others (Rosenblatt,1978). Many texts lend themselves to choral reading. For example, the book *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* by Paul Fleischman (1988) is already written for two voices—one side of the room speaking the role of the worker bee and the other depicting the queen.

A variation on choral reading is dividing the group in half and performing two poems such as *I Am a Rock* by Simon and Garfunkel and John Donne's *No Man Is an Island*, weaving the two poems together. *I Am a Rock* is used in its entirety and lines from *No Man Is an Island* add counterpoint. The poems' ideas play against each other. While Simon and Garfunkel reject humanity, Donne insists on human interdependence. A student narrator opens, offering the names of the poems, the authors, and a short line about the themes. The age group performing this particular pair of poem is high school, but students of all ages can use the idea if the texts are age-appropriate.

Warm-up Rehearsal Ideas

Most students, and adults, for that matter, are not comfortable speaking before an audience. Speakers of all ages need plenty of low-stress rehearsal. The following is a list of ideas that get students up and speaking.

Snowball

On a slip of paper, each student writes one thing she'll remember from a unit or a classroom activity. The kids crunch their notes into a ball and throw them into a basket in the middle of the circle. Everyone draws a paper snowball from the basket and, standing in a circle, reads the memory aloud to one another.

Circle of Voices

This activity by Katie Wood Ray (1998) is a low-stress way for students to ease into longer poetry interpretations. The teacher finds a poetry or prose text with strong voice such as Rylant's picture book entitled *When the Relatives Came* (1993). The teacher makes a copy of

the text for each student. Then students highlight their favorite part, selecting about fifteen continuous words. After students mark their favorite line(s), they practice reading them individually or in pairs in their best read-aloud voices. It doesn't matter if some students choose the same lines. A narrator reads the title and the author, and then the students begin to read around the circle. It is amazing how well these thrown-together lines mold into something cohesive and lovely. I like to collect the lines and form a group poem out of the snippets.

Booster Reading

"Hop on with me as I read," is what a teacher or partner says to a kid whose reading motor is slowly petering out. The teacher jumps in, joining the student's voice, reading a tiny click ahead, pulling the student along. Remember the adage, the one who does the work does the learning? Since the student is doing as much work as the teacher during booster reading, the student is learning to read with more fluency and expression. The teacher goes silent when the student's energy is restored and the reading pace flows again.

Vocal Tune-Up

Kids can sing any number of ditties together to warm up their voices and reduce their embarrassment when they speak alone. Go online and look for campfire songs to chant or sing together. The one below (www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgzU2MYgDok) has plenty of enunciation work:

Kumala Kumala Kumala Vista
(Repeat)
No, no, no, la vista
Eenie, meenie, dessimeenie
Ooh wahla wahla meenie
X-ameenie, sala-meenie
ooh wahla wahla meenie
Ohhh, e billy oh bo oh bo buh dit tin dot.

Punctuation Promotes Comprehension

The teacher makes punctuation slips: one for each student. On each slip, she writes one of the following punctuation marks: ellipsis, question mark, period, exclamation point. The students draw a punctuation slip and, working in pairs, repeat a sentence using the expression indicated by the punctuation mark. Some sample sentences are: *You are so right. What an awesome ___ (car, curveball, etc.). What a great friend. Oh, really. I look just perfect. I had a great time.*

Shakespearean Insults

Form two lines of students facing each other. Each student selects three words, one from each column below. The first two columns are adjectives and the last is a noun. The first student says: "Thou artless, base-court apple-john." Remind students to insult with expression but not to

take the insults literally. If you have a class that has not bonded, this might not be the exercise for you (www.nosweatshakespeare.com/resources/shakespeare-insults).

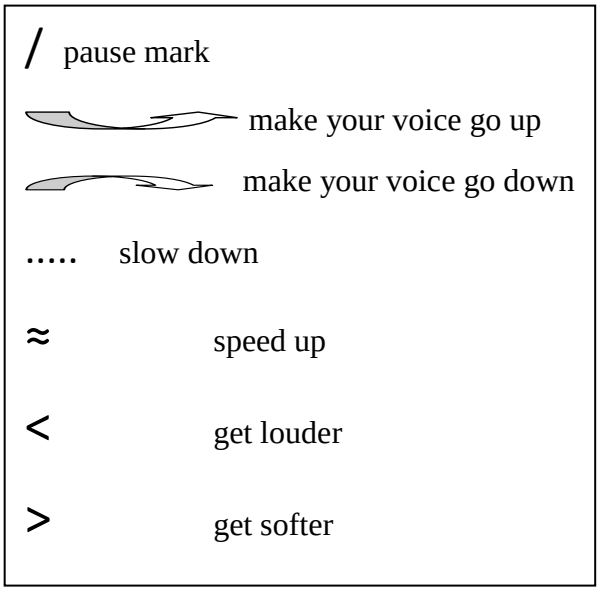
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
artless	base-court	apple-john
bawdy	bat-fowling	baggage
beslubbering	beef-witted	barnacle
bootless	beetle-headed	bladder
churlish	boil-brained	boar-pig

Fluency Marks

Give each student a page or two of a novel or a short story, any text that has emotional impact. I often use the last four or five paragraphs at the end of the text we just finished such as this excerpt from *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr (p. 63).

> Sadako smiled at them. She was part of that warm, loving circle where she would always be. Nothing could ever change that. Already lights were dancing behind her eyes.... Life was slipping away from her. She looked at her flock hanging from the ceiling. As she watched, a light autumn breeze made the birds rustle and sway. They seemed to be alive and flying out through the open window. How beautiful and free they were! Sadako sighed and closed her eyes. She never woke up.

The teacher then posts the following fluency marks, asking students to mark the text signaling when to speed up, slow down, increase volume, etc. The students read in pairs or in unison as a whole class, obeying the marked text. This promotes the idea that text can be manipulated with one's voice to become more expressive, hence, comprehensible.



Top the Line

Have students circle, pair up, and try to outdo each other reading the following sample sentences with extreme expressiveness: *Fun! Fun! I haven't had so much fun in twenty years!* or *It's none of my business, but did you know she stole her grandma's girdle?*

Eye to Eye

This exercise is one of many from a Ft. Collins, Colorado teacher (2001). To help students become comfortable with eye contact, circle the group and model, saying: *What I'm going to do is go around the circle, looking each person in the eye. Then I'm going to stop and focus on one person in particular. After focusing on one person, that person and I will change places. She'll move to where I'm standing, and I'll move to her place. Now she will repeat what I just did. Remember, everyone gets a turn.*

Vivid Verb

Write on the board the boring verb *came*. Send five kids out of the room with these instructions: *Draw an emotion from the envelope. Enter the room acting out this emotion. Exaggerate so the rest of the room can guess the verb you are portraying.* The class watches one student at a time enter the room, acting out an emotion. Kids are likely to call out emotions, which are nouns, rather than verbs. Bring them back with these examples: *She <u>dragged</u> into the room. She <u>skipped</u> into the room*. This activity helps student writing by demonstrating a variety of vivid verbs to replace boring ones.

Mirrors

Form a circle and partner students. Then each student touches her palms to her partner's palms. They pull their hands back so they don't touch, about two inches apart. They are mirrors of one

another. Each looks into the partner's eyes. The imitator begins moving, still focusing on the initiator's eyes, the follower follows the movement. There are two rules: Partners must be silent. They never touch.

Tableau

Divide the class into small groups. Explain that a tableau is a still picture formed with human bodies. Give each group a slip of paper with a tableau subject written on it. These topics might be a family fight, a game of soccer, a new kid on the playground. Give the students three or four minutes to prepare their tableau and then count down, *4, 3, 2, 1* and say, *Freeze*! The class studies the tableau and guesses the storyline. This works great as a review of a text such as *Romeo and Juliet.*

Emotion Orchestra

Assign one student to be conductor. Groups of students follow her direction, producing sounds associated with their agreed-upon emotion: joyful, grief-stricken, furious, frightened, etc. The teacher says: *Many emotions have sounds associated with them. Everyone in "joyful" group, think of a sound for your emotion (continue around the class having students think of sound to match their emotion.) Everybody ready? Okay, all together now—make your sound.* Call for silence. Then show kids conducting signals: Raise your arms for louder. Put palms down for quieter. Move arms rapidly for faster. Move hands apart in a s-t-r-e-t-c-h motion for slower. Hold hands up for halt. Conduct all groups simultaneously. Stop one group altogether. Have two groups speed up while two others slow down. Repeat the cacophony of sounds again, this time following the conductor.

Gibberish Argument

Read aloud "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll. Ask two volunteers to stage an argument, talking gibberish. *Mary, you will start the argument with angry gibberish. Ty, respond with gibberish, escalating the argument. Continue back and forth till the argument peaks. Then wind down and resolve your argument, all using gibberish sounds.* Other emotions can be used by groups.

Everybody Verb

Two people demonstrate to the class. The first person jumps rope. The second person asks, "What are you doing?" The first person answers with a totally unrelated activity like, "I'm painting a fence." The second person imitates painting a fence. The first asks, "What are you doing?" The second person responds with a totally unrelated action verb.

Taxi

Simulate a taxi by arranging two chairs in front of the class. One student is driver and one is passenger hailing the cab. The second hails the cab and takes on certain personality traits. The driver imitates the rider. If the rider is nervous, the driver is nervous, etc. Then another person

steps forward and calls “Taxi!” The current driver exits. The passenger scoots over and becomes the driver who matches the passenger's character trait.

Preparation and Practice

Using vocal warm-ups throughout the school year helps students become more comfortable when it is time to speak publicly. I still cringe when I remember a girl who burst out in tears in my ninth grade English class during her required speech. What a shame! She needed much more scaffolding than I'd provided. Furthermore, she might have felt more comfortable with a younger audience or a smaller audience.

Warm-ups such as those above are essential but they are not enough. Students need to rehearse their actual scripts, reading and rereading before showtime. Just as students need to have a real purpose for revising and editing their writing to prepare for publishing, students also need a performance to justify rehearsing. A performance offers students a real-world purpose to reread for fluency. They reread their scripts until they reach a level of accuracy and speed that makes the reading sound like talking. All of this practice is worth the trouble for kids who know that a performance looms in the future. As soon as all students are fluent, they begin guided practice, reading their part to their partners who listen and provide feedback using one of the rehearsal rubrics in Table Two of the Appendix. The rubric offers students a roadmap to guide their practice.

Finally, my job is to find an appropriate audience. For example, with readers theater I often find an audience of younger children in a nearby elementary school. My seventh graders are much less intimidated to perform in front of third graders.

Using Picture Books for Readers Theater

One example of a picture book that easily converts into a readers theater is *My Mama Says*… by Judith Viorst (1973). With my seventh, eighth, and ninth graders, I use discarded Halloween costumes depicting the monsters in the book. Two or three students act as narrators of the text, reading it while the ghost or vampire or zombie tiptoes back and forth behind them. The audience chimes in with the refrain, “But sometimes even mamas make mistakes.”

Another picture book is *Click, Clack, Moo, Cows That Type*. In this little comedy, the farmer can’t control his astute animals. This readers theater requires a farmer, a herd of cows and a gaggle of ducks. For cow costumes, kids use white t-shirts with construction paper black dots pinned helter-skelter on fronts and backs. For typewriters, kids round up a few computer keyboards.

Gerald McBoing Boing, by Dr. Seuss (2000), is a story in the form of a poem. Gerald is probably ADHD. He is wild and wacky. His dad is turned inside out with worry. Gerald can’t speak words. He makes sound effects, instead. Students perform parts of narrators, Gerald, father, teacher, doctor, and radio man.

Other Texts for Oral Performance

Any of Shel Silverstein's poems make good performance pieces. I especially like poems in his book *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1974). For instance, *I'm Being Eaten by a Boa Constrictor* requires two actors, one who reads and one who is the snake on the floor, garbed in a green blanket, pulling the narrator under the covers as the poem moves to its climax and the narrator is completely eaten. *Us* uses two readers and a large shirt. Both kids get inside the shirt and read/recite. Three students perform *Loser*. They each need a football helmet, shoulder pads and a jersey. The helmets sit atop their heads, so that when the helmets fall off, the audience pretends the narrators lost their heads. S*ick* can be performed by four or five girls. They wear pajamas and slippers and apply props to signify how hurt they are—crutches, canes, band aides, dishtowels to hold broken arms, and red lipstick or round sticky dots to create measles.

My Many Colored Days by Dr. Seuss (1996) lends itself to performance for a young audience. This book requires a narrator to read the book and several students dressed in the colors mentioned in the text, two or three for each color. Some youngsters in the audience can form a percussion band using home-made instruments such as pie tins, paper plates stapled together with beans inside, wind chimes, etc. They play jazz-style according to the emotion depicted in the text. The performers' costumes are color-coded. For example, to depict joy, the students might wear red hats or red scarves.

Famous nursery rhymes such as *Little Miss Muffet*, fables like Three Billy Goats Gruff, for which you need a narrator, three billy goats and a troll, and early readers such as *Frog and Toad* (1972) work for readers theater. The text should have plenty of dialogue and a student narrator who ties the dialogue together. Eliminate the "he said" and "she said" attributions. Voila! A show is ready to go on. I use performers from upper grades through ninth grade and primary audiences for nursery rhymes, fables and some picture books.

Beyond Readers Theater

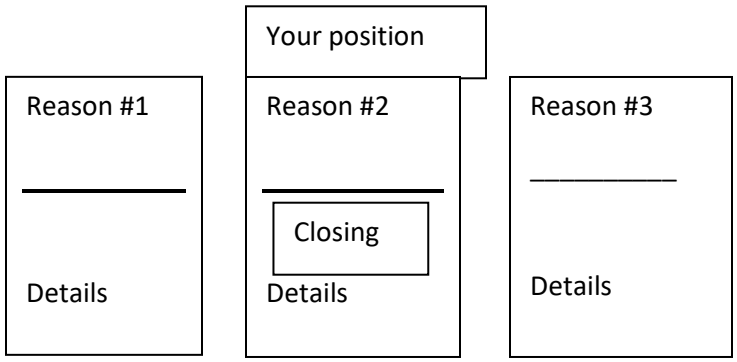
Picture books offer so many ways to incorporate speaking into the day. Readers theater is just one example. Another idea is to use picture books as writing prompts, with oral practice built in. have used this lesson with students of all ages, including adults in staff development trainings. For example, *Hey, Little Ant*, by Phillip Hoose (1998) encourages persuasive writing.

This book is a debate between an ant and a little boy. The boy ponders the question: shall I stomp you flat? The ant argues for his life. Two students are primed and ready to read the text to the class—one playing the part of the ant, the other the boy. The ant might wear a headband with orange pipe cleaner antennae. The boy dons a pair of oversized cardboard eyeglasses, reminiscent of the boy's in the book.

When the two finish reading, I ask the rest of the class to stand up and move to a space with a long imaginary line on the floor—a continuum. Those who would squash the ant go to one end of the line; those who wouldn't harm a fly go to the other end. All the students range themselves according to their stance on the subject along the continuum. Then we fold the line. I grasp the hand of the student on the end and pull him, and the whole line, with me. We fold the line in half so each student faces one other person. Then I tell the kids to give impromptu speeches to their partner, one person in favor of squashing the ant and one against. I tell them they need

three reasons to support their argument. "Get ready, get set, go." The room is abuzz with talk as they argue their positions with one another.

As soon as the noise dies down, we move back to our desks and I ask them to copy down in their journals a graphic organizer that mirrors what we just did in our impromptu speeches. Later, I will have students write a persuasive piece using this same structure: This piece can later be developed as an oration.



Another book that encourages talk is *Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown (1972). This is a simple book best used with primary students with an organizational structure that moves in circular fashion. The lesson uses assorted props representing action on the storyline. These props can be real objects or they can be pictures of objects: baby bunny, mommy bunny, fish, fisherman's line and hook, rock, walking stick, flower, spade, bird, tree, sailboat, wind, circus tent, trapeze, house, carrot. After reading aloud the book, discuss how the book is organized using a repeated pattern. Then, give each student a prop from the story. Reread the story, asking the student with the appropriate prop to place it down on the floor—in the order of the story line. When you have finished rereading, ask students to buddy up and retell the story to one another, using the props as prompts or memory helpers. An extension might be to use Props for Prompts with a social studies chapter or the steps in a science experiment. Props can be drawn, cut out of magazines, or shaped out of play dough.

Conclusion

Just as students need to revise and edit their writing for the real purpose of sharing with readers, so students need to rehearse for the purpose of performing. When performance becomes a regular part of our literacy program, all students can be more successful at speaking as well as reading and writing.

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Appendix: Tables One and Two

Table 1

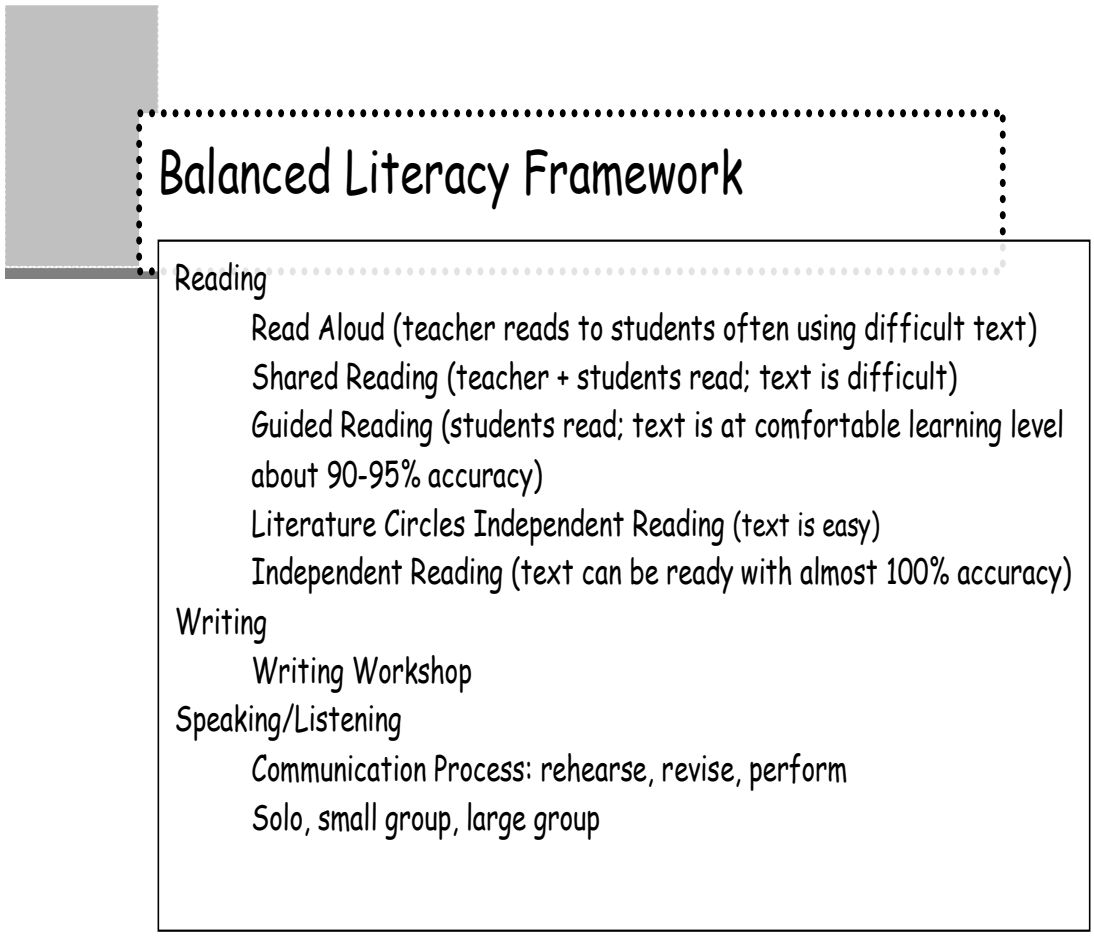

Table 2

Rehearsal Rubric with Teacher Explanation

Trait	1 (low)	2	3	4 (high)
Accuracy in decoding (saying the right word)				
Articulation (Also called Diction. This is clarity of words spoken w/ use of teeth, tongue, lips)				
Rate (speed—should have a variety)				
Pause (to build suspense, etc.)				
Volume (loud enough to be heard—a person can whisper and be heard with ample breath.)				
Pitch (highness/lowness of sound. Also called Vocal Variety or Intonation)				
Chunking (Also called Phrasing or Segmenting. Has to do with how a reader pauses/chunks apart a sentence so it is meaningful.				
Facial expressiveness (smile, frown)				

Rehearsal Rubric for Students

Trait	1	2	3	4
Fast and Slow (pacing)				
High and Low (pitch)				
Pausing				
Loud and Soft (volume)				
Clarity				

20-18 = 4
17-13 = 3
12-8 = 2
7-0 = 1

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