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MISSION STATEMENT

Thinking Classroom serves as an international forum of exchange among teachers, teacher educators, and others interested in promoting democratic teaching practices. The publication encourages professional development, research, and reflection. *Thinking Classroom* features articles that foster learner-centered teaching strategies including critical and creative thinking, active and cooperative learning, and problem solving. The journal also publishes articles about the institutional structures that support these practices.

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THINKING Classroom

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Letter from the Editor

Application, the ability to use what we have learned, is arguably the most important aspect of the ability to think critically. In evaluating our own critical thinking ability, and that of our students, we might begin by assessing the skill with which we examine our own conundrums or issues. Are we able effectively to gather evidence and discuss alternatives in a reasoned fashion? How well do we analyze recurring themes or incidents that continue to gnaw at our consciousness?

For us, the editors, two such gnawing concerns are globalization and its handmaiden, technology.

We at *TC/P* know that our *raison d'être*—sharing and discussing international educational practices—is closely related to the success of globalization. Our work on this journal is totally dependent on technology. Articles are submitted and reviewed online, the editorial team communicates daily via e-mail, and parties interested in our content are able to meet face-to-face by flying halfway across the world to conferences or meetings. Our work is made possible by our ability to shrink time and distance.

But in embracing global values and technologies we also suffer losses. For instance, linguists tell us that about half of the 6,800 different languages in the world today will die out in the next

hundred years. Due to political, social, and economic pressures, many people seek to develop proficiency in the languages that have greatest utility, often at the expense of the language of their own national or cultural group. Surely communication between and among groups is improved through such a process—we are able to speak to one another, read each other's journals, watch each other's movies and TV programs—but what have we lost in the process? Can everything we wish to say be translated? Or when translated, do our words carry the same connotations? The questions continue: Does it make sense to teach literature in translation? How should it be done?

Such queries and concerns are especially poignant to the editors of *TC/P*. They also spill over into what are generally thought of as political or social questions. In a recent issue of *The Reading Teacher* (vol. 57, no. 7), Yang Hu, a U.S. education professor, recounts her observations and impressions of China, the place where she grew up and was educated, as she looks at her former school system with new eyes. Her assertion, that one must “appreciate the interface between literacy instruction and cultural tradition” leaves us thinking about how the economy and politics of a nation are expressed through the education system. In a rapidly changing society such

as our own, the past, present, and future seem to collide within the walls of the schoolhouse. What the teachers of today learned as children may prove to be dysfunctional in tomorrow's economy. Keeping that fact in mind, how do we help students make sense of the present—that space between what their grandparents knew to be true and what many experts believe citizens will need to know in order to function effectively in a globalized world? From a curricular perspective, what is it important to teach, in terms of both process and content?

We talk in *TC/P* about democratic values, but what, in fact, are those values? Too often democracy, at least in schools, is portrayed as majority rule. But real democracy must wrestle with more difficult and subtle issues, issues that are played out in classrooms for even young children. How, for instance, can we teach students to appreciate and protect minority rights. How can we engender in students a sense of responsibility toward both the local and global communities in which they live? How do we teach them—and model for them—the importance of protecting people's right to privacy and, at the same time, create a safe environment in the school? How do we as teachers encourage risk taking, when at the same time we must realistically assess the genuine risks around us?

Letter from the Editor

What makes *TC/P* a unique journal is not its practical advice or its interest in applied research, although we and our readers value both of those attributes. What, in fact, distinguishes this journal is its concern with, and dedication to, the ways in which critical thinking and global understanding overlap, intersect, and sometimes collide. It is through the willingness of our readers and authors to think critically about their local worlds that we finally come to grips with the promises and challenges of the globalized world. We invite you to share your ideas on these subjects and consider such questions as you read this issue.

Wendy Saul

Wendy Saul



Photo: PhotoDisc, Inc.

Dear Editors,

I have always been convinced that the most important point in the work of every teacher is teaching pupils to think. Without this point teaching is hardly worth doing.

I am happy that there is such a journal as *Thinking Classroom*. It is like a new window on the world for me. Having read it through in one sitting, and re-read some of its features several times, I have surely enriched my mind with new ideas worth putting into practice.

Most of all I have become interested in getting pupils to think in their learning, and in helping them with their thinking process. And the feature “Developing Thinking Skills with Peers, Parents, and Volunteers” [K. Topping, *Thinking Classroom*, 4(4), 27–37] is the piece that intrigued me most. Why? Because it offered ideas that are to a certain extent new in my country. There are also so many wonderful tips for teachers! I am sure they will enrich my teaching, so my pupils will enjoy my classes more, and will be

thinking more and more. It is really a vital task facing every teacher to contribute to his/her country by educating the greatest possible number of thinking people.

That’s why I am so grateful for your journal for fostering thinking. As for me, I will try to contribute to the journal by submitting my own ideas to *Thinking Classroom* in the future.

Yours sincerely,
Viktor Kovba, teacher,
Netishyn High School, Ukraine

Look Who's Talking



THE QUESTION:

How do you promote active citizenship among your students?

Gabriela Mitkova

Regional Inspectorate of Education
Silistra, Bulgaria



The best way to promote active citizenship on the part of the students is project-based learning, which can be focused on many differ-

ent types of activities—school newspapers, leadership training, various types of clubs (Euro-clubs, drug-prevention clubs, debate clubs etc.), and ecological or human rights campaigns. Other possible projects include studying local social problems, investigating the history of the local community through an oral history project, or organizing various events and competitions. Within the framework of a particular project, students are empowered to act, and are required to use their knowledge in a concrete way, thus raising their awareness of the social implications of their decisions and their impact on other individuals and the community.

Tatiana Dusheina

English teacher, School #11
Vyborg, Russia

It's a well-known fact that it is mostly people of the older generation who vote in Russia. We realize that it's very important for young people to take an active role in

political life. One of the aims of our school is to help students understand that much of what happens in the country depends on them, that they can influence both the current form and the future directions of our society, that it's their duty as citizens to vote.

At the school level, our students are taught to make decisions through elections to the School Parliament. The School Parliament



is an organ of student self-government consisting of several commissions, which are responsible for different spheres of school life.

The Chair of the Parliament is elected directly by secret vote. The election campaign takes place in spring. High school classes nominate candidates. Information about the candidates and their platforms is displayed in the school foyer. All the candidates participate in debates.

Students come to the election center with their passports [domestic ID cards], receive a ballot, and cast their votes. An election committee supervises the election process and announces the results.

It's a great event for the whole school. The students are all excited and everyone takes an interest in the outcome. Certainly this promotes active citizenship among our students!

Laima Toliusiene

History and Civic Education Teacher
Silute Gymnasium No. 1, Lithuania



Our social sciences curriculum includes history, political science, and civic education. As a teacher of these sub-

jects, I use different engagement strategies and methods, both in my classes and in extracurricular activities. For example, with older students we read, analyze, and reflect on our national Constitution (of the Republic of Lithuania), and other official documents as well. Our students take part in various national and international projects that promote active citizenship. We live in a small town in the west of Lithuania, so we all know each other and can easily come together when necessary. For example, before the Day of All Saints, we work together as a community to maintain the town cemeteries. Students can also participate in summer archaeology camps, which give them the opportunity to explore their native land, communicate with local people, and gain a better understanding what it means to be citizen of your country.

Look Who's Talking



Marvin W. Berkowitz

Professor, University of Missouri-St. Louis
St. Louis, Missouri, USA



All social systems, and especially democracies, ultimately depend on the character of their members; i.e., their citizens.

The architects of U.S. democracy explicitly recognized that the success of their radical experiment depended on the character of its citizens. It is surprising how often proponents of civic or democratic education fail to focus on educational processes that promote the development of student character. In the U.S., we constantly lament the fact that the majority of our voting-age citizens, and especially the youngest ones, abstain from the most basic act of the democratic process—voting. I think the reason is at least partly obvious. We raise our youth in relatively authoritarian, hierarchical families and then send them to authoritarian, hierarchical schools, where they are disempowered and learn that their voices simply do not matter in any substantive way. Then we ask them to be contributing members of an egalitarian democratic process, but they have no experience doing so. We may have taught them at great length about democracy, about government, about civic duty and the responsibilities of citizenship. But learning about such things has little impact on one's inclination actually to participate in them. Students need to experience contributing to an open democratic

process. Families need to authentically empower children's voices and respect their perspectives. Schools need to genuinely value students' minds and choices, and actually implement structures that reflect these priorities. Community organizations need to listen to youth and encourage their participation in leadership, decision making, problem solving, and planning. Most important, students need to experience relationships with benevolent adults who truly respect their autonomy, their rights, and their contribution to the collective discourse. Then and only then will children develop pro-social, responsible, respectful character, which is the most basic building block of citizenship.

Paata Chorgolashvili

Counselor, Experimental School #2
Tbilisi, Georgia



Civil society is an open social system, separate from the government, that aims to prepare its citizens for active participation in social and political life. The role of the school in this system is to equip students with the requisite knowledge and skills, and to help them become independent and responsible individuals capable of making reasonable decisions.

In our school we encourage problem-solving activities, and teach our students to take responsibility for their decisions, through both classroom instruction and extracurricular activities. Develop-

ing problem-solving skills in the classroom is a step-by-step process. The first step is a clear statement of the essence of the problem. The next step is to collect information: The children either play the role of reporters and conduct interviews, or they research other sources to find the data they need. Then they assemble and analyze the information, paying particular attention to factors that might either help or hinder progress toward a solution. This is a creative process—based on the information they have gathered, and considering the relevant contextual factors, the students themselves devise a strategy for resolving the problem.

Problem solving is usually conducted in teams, with each member assigned a particular role. Working together on concrete tasks, however simple, develops children's confidence in their own ability to solve problems, confidence that will serve them in good stead when they face more complicated tasks in the future.

These are difficult times for our society, and our young people must be prepared to assume responsibility for its future.

A question for the next issue:

When my class is working in groups, sometimes it is hard for me to keep them focused on the assignment. What can be done to make group work more efficient and effective?

Readers are invited to respond to this question by October 1, 2004. The editors will select items for printing. Please e-mail your answers, and suggestions for future questions, to bmichaels@reading.org

Literacy Strategies for Unlocking Meaning in Content Area Texts:

Using Student Voices to Inform Professional Development

Literacy Learning in Primary and Intermediate Schools

Reading instruction in New Zealand primary schools (ages 5–11) and intermediate schools (ages 11–13) is undertaken by generalist teachers, working from a curriculum aimed to ensure that students in their early years learn and use strategies to decode text in order to read for meaning and enjoyment (Ministry of Education, 1994). The contexts for instruction, and the texts used, often give priority to the students' command of narrative rather than nonfiction texts (Biddulph & Biddulph, 1999). According to the Education Review Office (1997), as students proceed through years 7 and 8 (the two years preceding entry to secondary school) their instructional programs often focus on the consolidation of previous learning and emphasize reading for enjoyment. In such cases, students do not receive instruction to promote independence in integrating reading processes or to enhance their control over a wide range of strategies for reading the unfamiliar nonfiction texts they will face at secondary school.

The National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP), an assessment undertaken by the Educational Assessment Research Unit in New Zealand, provides data relating to students' literacy achievement in year 8. In 2000 it was found that a high percentage of students (97%) could accurately extract information from short nonfiction texts on familiar topics with strong visual supports. By contrast, only 57% managed a similar task with a more complex text, fewer visuals, and the need for inferring (Flockton & Crooks, 2000).

Similarly, in the 1997 NEMP assessment of information skills, many students were successful when locating a single piece of information clearly matched to the question, but success rates diminished when students needed to select from multiple items of information. From the assessments that investigated students' ability to ask appropriate study questions, it was ascertained that when the topic was directly related to them, around 75% were successful. This number was reduced when the task became more abstract and involved finding information about the work and lives of other people (fewer than 66% of students responded correctly) (Crooks & Flockton, 1997).

Literacy Learning in Secondary Schools

Once students enter the secondary-school system and work with content area teachers, their reading and writing instruction is limited to classes dedicated to the study of literary English and any other languages chosen for study. However, this instruction centers on the elements of literary form rather than analysis or strategies for making meaning. Furthermore, in other curriculum areas, students are faced with literacy tasks and texts that are subject specific, and—as they progress through their schooling—increasingly complex in content, structure, and vocabulary (Unsworth, 2001).

Recently, in association with curriculum and assessment changes in New Zealand, there has been an increased interest in the improvement of secondary-school literacy teaching practices

(Ministry of Education, 1992, 1994, 1997). Arguably, this interest has been fueled by the results of the Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) assessment, conducted with 15-year-old students in Organisation for Economic and Commercial Development (OECD) countries (May, 2001). Although New Zealand had the highest proportion of students in the top performing group (20%), the spread of student achievement was the widest across the OECD. In this assessment, many students experienced difficulty in determining the usefulness of extracts of text; and in locating, sequencing, and combining embedded information in unfamiliar texts. Many also had difficulty explaining information contained in text features, identifying main ideas, making comparisons, dealing with ambiguities, evaluating text, and making high-level inferences.

Student Voices: Conceptualizing Strategies as Local and Global

Two years ago, we were invited into a girls' secondary school to provide a professional development program in literacy for content area teachers. These teachers recognized that many of their students demonstrated adequate subject knowledge but were challenged in their ability to interact with text as readers and writers. The goal of our program was to assist teachers in identifying the literacy strategies students need in order to work independently with unfamiliar texts, and to develop teaching approaches that could be smoothly integrated into their content teaching. While our work was informed by the research findings above, we believed that, to be effective, it also needed to be supplemented by student perspectives. For this reason, we conducted interviews with 21 students selected by the teachers to represent a cross-section of age levels, perceived literacy and content area abilities, skills, and interests. We have since extended this research, interviewing additional cohorts of students from other schools. We spoke to them about their view of themselves as readers and writers, their attitude toward reading and how much they read outside school (Brozo, 2000), the strategies they used to access meaning in unfamiliar text (Nicholson, 1984), how they attacked

unfamiliar words in text (Ruddell, 1994), and the strategies and understandings they brought to their literacy tasks as text users (Luke & Freebody, 1997). Our analysis of the interview transcripts was informed by the NEMP and PISA findings, along with other literature and policy relevant to secondary literacy (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Dymock, 1995; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Ministry of Education, 1994; Readance, Moore, & Rickelman, 2000; Stewart-Dore, 1996; Tovari, 2000; Tunmer, 1999).

From this material we identified strategies that the students employed, or could employ, in literacy tasks. We then developed a *strategy taxonomy* (Appendix 1) and differentiated the strategies as being either *local* or *global*. Strategies used for code breaking (as in words and text structure), or for the direct interpretation of content from single sources, we deem to be local strategies, following Smith's description of strategies he labeled *focal* strategies (Smith, 1994). Strategies necessary for making inferences, evaluating, and synthesizing information in extended text we refer to as global, similar to Berghoff, Harste, and Leland (1997) and Fitzgerald (1999). Local-level strategies enable readers to unlock the meaning of text at a literal level and to make inferences from single unambiguous sources. Working at this level allows students to gather information from text and to extend their knowledge base around a familiar topic. However, local strategies alone preclude the ability to summarize, prioritize, and manipulate multiple items of complex or contradictory information; and they fail to provide the skills needed for a diverse range of written assignments or assessments.

Global strategies allow readers to infer meaning from multiple clues in nonliteral texts; to locate, gather, analyze, and evaluate information from disparate sources; to interrogate authorial intent; and to use text for a variety of purposes. In this way, readers combine curriculum content and reading strategies to develop new understandings of their world and of themselves as readers and writers. Successfully meeting the literacy demands of the New Zealand secondary-school curriculum requires that students acquire both local- and global-level strategies. Specifically, they

need to be able to build meaning through the effective interpretation of a wide range of texts, to apply information to new situations, and to monitor and cross-check their own reading behavior and success (Ministry of Education, 1992, 1994, 1997).

Using the strategy taxonomy, we determined that the literacy practices of the students with whom we spoke fell broadly into three groups. While we do not pretend to be definitive in our analysis, we identified 10 students as reading predominantly at the local level, four as reading predominantly at the global level, and seven whom we would describe as *transitional*. Transitional students were those who saw reading as more than an information-retrieval exercise, but who were hampered by a lack of strategies to handle the complexity of the process efficiently. One such reader knew that “flow” was essential to successful reading; however, she thought she had to memorize “the heaps of information” received daily, and she saw content acquisition as the focus of learning.

Another student at the transitional level worked at trying to make sense of unknown individual words from their context and sought the main ideas and key information by considering “what really points out to me.” We believe that although she operated at the word level, she understood meaning to be more than just the comprehension of words. Like many of her schoolmates, she had no articulated strategy for managing the assigned reading in her various courses. We noted that the transitional students regularly read outside of class, going beyond their assigned texts, but that they frequently felt frustrated and overwhelmed by the challenges they faced in reading about unfamiliar topics. For this reason, these students did not expect to be able to learn new material from their independent reading.

The readers we identified as operating at a local level generally disliked reading, and, beyond browsing “stuff about actors and stuff” in magazines, seldom read outside of school. Some reported that they often started books but rarely finished them. In most cases these students perceived that successful reading, either for pleasure or for school assignments, was pretty much beyond their

reach. In discussing their first impressions of any unfamiliar text, students using local-level strategies did not refer to text features—diagrams, text boxes, maps, or headings—that would assist them in previewing the content. Although one history student mentioned that information presented on timelines could be easily read, and another student said that she used diagrams, neither identified the relationship of this material to the running text, or realized how text features could deepen their understanding of what they read. When asked if there was anything in a preview of the text that could assist their reading, one said, “just the pictures and stuff, arrows and stuff.” Other students’ comments referred to the amount of writing and the font size, for instance:

It looks a whole lot better when it’s a page of big letters than when it’s a page of tiny little letters together and I think, “That’s too much I don’t want to read it.”

When the text became challenging so that the meaning “broke down,” the only strategy that students identified as available to them was re-reading. Likewise students’ strategies for accessing the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary words were negligible, “like I don’t know a word so I read the sentence about seven times.” Some students relied on dictionaries and glossaries or asked others. Some students even suggested that the unknown words could simply be ignored, as they may not contribute substantially to the meaning, or they may become clearer later in the text, “...just blank the word out and keep going.” None of the local-level readers created a mental picture of the content or saw themselves as engaged in a process of cross-checking, eliminating, experimenting, and self-correcting. One student provided this explanation:

Reading is like, um, I’d say spelling, spelling words and understanding quite a few words, like you’ve got to understand quite a few words. Like when you read something, you’ve got to understand what it means. Get it in the right order sort of thing.

Some of these students expressed a preference for material that posed few challenges in content, vocabulary, and structure, finding comfort with texts that used “words I use every day” and to be

about “things that can come true.” Others who used local strategies preferred nonfiction for similar reasons: “They’re not a story.” Students using local-level strategies implied that they needed a good deal of support. They appreciated being read to:

I liked it better because it was easier to understand...[when I read on my own]...it was like, I got to the end of the page and I couldn’t remember anything.

They also like to have material organized for them:

It’s good when teachers put things in order. If it’s not in order it gets confusing. I like to remember and learn the main things and then remember that it belongs to each other.

When writing assignments, students commonly used a process of locating and “re-presenting” information, interacting minimally with the content that they had encountered through analysis, interpretation, or synthesis. Rather, it involved

pick[ing] out all the stuff that I need to answer my assignment and then I just put it into my own words, just transfer it into my own words.

Some students said that they did this by “trying to find something that looks similar, to answer the question,” or “I just write the information out the same as the book.” Another said that “you have to get the right information down, but not the same you know, like put it into your own words”; and yet another: “you just like look up information and so it’s sort of like, you’re not really reading it.” These students were not aware of strategies to use in determining main or important ideas, although they could categorize information that they understood under sub-topics. We determined that the use of local-level strategies limited the extent to which students could interact with texts or use them flexibly for the variety of curricular and literacy purposes.

Not surprisingly, some of these readers also had difficulty in making links between readings on current and previous topics.

I find I like getting the work over and done with instead of it being dragged out all over again. I sort of tend to forget it, I don’t really forget it but I’d have to have it revised again so that I would remember how to do it.

By contrast, the few readers we described as working at the global level talked about reading as a process of integrating the information from a range of text features, of the need to re-read, to interpret, and to confirm their understandings on a regular basis. One student spoke about her reading of a math text:

I read the graphs first, and then look at the thing and then go back to the graphs, look at it, think about what’s going on here, and then read what it’s about and then go back to “suss” out whatever questions.

These students acknowledged the challenges they encountered in dealing with new and unfamiliar texts:

...and it takes some, you know, energy to, mental energy to try to comprehend what they’re trying to say. I try to take the perspective of the characters, some of the time I’m actually being with the characters and after a while you’re like, oh God, I don’t understand this.

This reader also said that she didn’t like to dwell on words only, “I just, I get annoyed, I get impatient.” She said that reading was the process of

tapping into language skills or memory you know, skills, trying to comprehend what the book’s putting across. I try to create a picture in my head. It’s unique to me, I mean no one else is in my head and they can’t perceive the same picture as I do if they read the same story, different experiences in life, different ideas of how my emotions can deal with it.

When undertaking content area literacy tasks, global readers use information from various sources flexibly. As one student explained,

I read the information first and write down what I think it means; I would note down the points and then read all the related information and note down the points and then reorganize.

Students able to use global strategies also knew that texts aren’t infallible and spoke about writers missing steps, writing confusing questions, or not knowing how to “put across what they mean.” Interestingly, many of these students worked at the *craft* of their own writing. One student said that the formal structure of her writing needed work. To this end, she had borrowed written assignments done by

one of her friends so that she could look at how her friend had approached the task. Students who employed global strategies believed that they had some control over the processes of reading and writing, and that these processes were integral aspects of their learning and life—beliefs that reinforce the sharp contrast between these students and those operating at the local strategy level. We were struck by one student's description of reading as

something that taps into your deep emotions...something different, and, like, coming to school every day, reading whatever we read in class, it's a change you know. It takes us into a different world and I think I enjoy that. Reading as well, it brings more insight into my life. I think books help me; I'm a very in-depth reader.

These readers made conscious strategic decisions about how to attack texts. They proceeded flexibly and confidently, moving between local and global strategies in accordance with their estimations of the demands of the literacy task, simultaneously monitoring and cross-checking their strategy implementation. It is these behaviors that we believe teaching must foster for students who have access to only local-level strategies.

Professional Development

The professional development program that we planned and implemented on the basis of the research literature and our findings has now been extended to include additional schools. Teachers are introduced to the findings from our interviews, other research, possible approaches to instruction, and the strategy taxonomy (Figure 1). Our program must acknowledge the diversity of the content areas while supporting teachers to modify their practice in individual and self-sustaining ways. For this reason, it is founded upon broad instructional principles:

- Literacy teaching opportunities are authentic and context based,
- Students work from a common text, as in shared reading (Holdaway, 1980),
- Strategy teaching points, identified prior to and during the teaching session, are dependent on student needs and on the challenges presented by a particular text,

- Instruction must provide opportunities for supported practice and application (Morris & Stewart-Dore, 1984) aimed at developing independence,
- Self-questioning (Harp, 1999) and self-monitoring practices are modeled in context (Tunmer, 1999),
- Instruction demonstrates the purpose and usefulness of strategies for meaning making (Meyer, 1984), and
- Teaching is consistent throughout the school to foster generalization across the curriculum (Tierney & Pearson, 1994).

We have used the strategy taxonomy as the basis of possible teaching points for any content area. It is predicated on the belief that readers make meaning by integrating information from the text structure, content, and vocabulary of any text. While teaching may focus on just one of these three dimensions, it is essential that students understand how that strategy contributes to their overall process of meaning making. For this reason the strategies from each dimension must be presented in relationship to one another and to any problem-solving component of the literacy task.

From the outset, we recommend that teachers attempt to increase student awareness of text structure, demonstrating how this might help them preview unfamiliar content. From our teaching to date, we note that when we direct students' attention to the various text features and their purpose (see Box 1),

Box 1 Introducing text feature strategies

When you read this new text it is important to consider three things as part of your preview:

- What do you already know or think you know about the topic?
- What text features has the author used, and for what purpose? (headings and subheadings can be the first place for the reader to gather preliminary information; tables and text boxes will provide essential supplementary information)
- What information about the topic can you gather from the visuals, the headings, and the sub-headings?

Thinking about these questions will assist you to prepare for the detailed reading so that you may gather and organize information, evaluate content, and learn from the text.

Strategies for Literacy Independence Across the Curriculum

	Structure Level	Content Level	Word Level
L O C A L L E V E L	(How is the text organized?)	(What makes sense?)	(What is the word?)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use prior knowledge of text conventions to predict content specific structure Understand text conventions, paragraph and sentence structure Identify and interpret text features, for example, headings, subheadings, fonts, bolds, diagrams, labels, tables, graphs Identify language features of imagery, e.g., metaphor, simile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use prior knowledge of reading strategies and content to predict and connect with ideas in text Integrate known content, vocabulary, and structural information to make predictions about text, and visualize content From a single source: Locate main points. Categorize information under own headings. Summarize information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use prior knowledge of syntax and content familiarity to predict specialist content vocabulary Use prior knowledge of process vocabulary to interpret instructions, e.g. list, analyze, explain Use semantic cues to decode Use graphophonic cues to decode Use syntactic cues to decode Integrate cue processes to select and cross-check
	Language feature/text convention awareness	Semantic Awareness	Graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic awareness
	Structure Level	Content Level	Word Level
G L O B A L L E V E L	(Why has the author structured the text in this way?)	(How can I use this text in real, complex, and critical ways?)	(How can I use my knowledge of syntax, semantics, and morphology to build meaning?)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze author's reason for content organisation Analyze how conventions, features, and genre suit topic Predict and infer the purpose of the material, its relative importance from structure Integrate above to critically analyze authorial intent in relation to text usage, purpose, and audience Identify structural ambiguities and contradictions Use knowledge, text structure, and conventions to predict and build meaning in known and unknown texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze why the author has selected this content Consider content ambiguities and contradictions from within the text and with prior knowledge Critically analyze the authorial intention for usage of this content and the implications for readers Demonstrate ability to gain information in multiple ways and from multiple sources: Locate main points. Categorize information under own headings. Summarize information. Interpret, infer, analyze, and evaluate information. Identify synergies and variances Develop understandings of the meaning making process to solve new reading problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and use morphemic knowledge of root words, prefixes, suffixes, compound words, etc. Use context to decode and gain meaning Integrate morphemic and contextual cues to cross-check and confirm Integrate cues to build meaning of unknown vocabulary Develop understandings of the way words work to solve new problems Recognize how and why authors select vocabulary to convey specific messages or meanings
	Genre and intent awareness	Applicability awareness	Morphemic awareness

the students are able to gain preliminary information that assists their in-depth reading. For example, when they know that headings indicate broad concepts, bullet points list related items, text boxes provide examples, tables and graphs display comparative data, and diagrams give visual explanations or descriptions, many students begin their information gathering with increased success and confidence.

Box 2 Introducing content strategies, main idea

Authors usually provide details or examples to support the main idea. Sometimes if you find the details particularly interesting you may miss the main idea that the author is conveying. Remember to consider all of the information provided.

- Main ideas of a written text are often restated through written examples or visual examples (e.g., text boxes, diagrams).
- Paragraphs usually contain a main idea (sometimes two) and supporting information.
- Supporting information is often indicated by the words “for example,” “in addition,” “as well as.”
- Quotations sometimes support the main point.
- Terms such as “next,” “later,” and “then” are often used to organize main and supporting ideas.

We have observed that some of the students who have less success in locating main ideas simply look for the most interesting or exciting information, often overlooking the demands of the task or the author’s message and purpose. We have found that referring students to an initial overview of information contained in the visual text features provides them with a more complete picture of the content, and a more comprehensive base from which to determine main ideas, using the markers below.

In vocabulary work, we encourage teachers to reduce their focus on word lists and glossaries and instead to use the unfamiliar vocabulary in a text to model problem-solving strategies from the taxonomy. One teacher remarked that her students now make suggestions as to the possible meaning of an unknown word, rather than asking for its definition.

Box 3 Introducing vocabulary strategies

When you are reading this text it is likely that you will meet unfamiliar words. Remember the strategies that you have available:

- Context strategy. Read three or four surrounding sentences and think about their meaning and the overall topic of your reading. What might the word mean? Does it look like a word that you have heard spoken?
- Morphemic strategy. Consider any parts of the word that you have seen elsewhere. For example, *antioxidant*: what does *anti* mean? What other word does *oxide* look like? What might the *-ant* on the end of the word do to it?
- Grammar strategy. Think what part of speech this word needs to be in order to make sense.
- Refer to any diagrams, illustrations, or labels that give you more information about the word.
- Reconsider all of the information. What is the word (or what might it be) and what does it mean?

Conclusion

It is clear to us that a central tenet of literacy instruction in New Zealand secondary schools must be to develop all students as effective readers and writers—across the curriculum and throughout all of their years of schooling. It is our contention that students who have not already acquired from their early literacy training the strategies they need to read across the content area benefit from explicit in-context strategy teaching as described above. We have noted from our opportunities modeling this teaching that many students, including those for whom reading is often a challenge, respond positively, apply the strategies readily, and exhibit increased control and understanding of the texts they encounter. As one such student explained,

If there is a diagram...it might have something written underneath it and you think, “And why have they put this near this? Or why have they put this diagram in?” And you get the whole picture...if the diagram didn’t (contribute) you’d think there was something else they were trying to point out to you.

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Teachers' Understandings of Critical Literacy:

An Exploratory International Study

The genesis of the research project

This article grew from a conversation among the three authors, who were brought together through work in Central Asia with the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project. We were discussing difficulties experienced by our teacher workshop participants in Kazakhstan as they practiced classroom strategies to encourage critical thinking. Sapargul (from Kazakhstan) raised a gentle challenge to Sara (Sally, from the United States) and Angela (from Canada) as North American teacher educators: "How do North American teachers understand and practice critical literacy?" As leaders in a project that advocates democratizing classrooms through critical literacy, all three of us took this question seriously and talked earnestly about how we might best explore teachers' understandings of critical literacy in each of our countries. In keeping with the participatory principles of our inservice project, we chose a qualitative methodology through which teachers' voices and experiences could be recognized.

The three authors gathered data through semistructured, conversational interviews conducted with teachers in our home countries of Kazakhstan, Canada, and the United States. A total of 18 teachers (six from each country) from elementary schools, high schools, universities, and professional development institutes were asked about their training and background in teaching critical thinking and critical literacy. Most of the

interview questions focused on current classroom practices in critical pedagogy, providing the opportunity for teachers to share concrete examples of their successes and struggles.

Our own understandings of critical thinking and critical literacy

In the context of this research, critical literacy is broadly defined as the thinking processes involved when texts are approached with critical analysis of their content, structure, function, and purpose (Green, 2001). According to McCaffery (2000), texts and discourses represent the perspectives of those groups who have the power to determine who has access to the publication process.

To achieve critical literacy, metacognitive and metalinguistic processes must be made explicit (McLaughlin & Vogt, 2001). Through metacognitive processes students become aware of the strategies that they use to make sense of written text and discussions. Students who are accustomed to reading with metacognitive awareness are more likely to connect text with their previous knowledge, and to generate questions which deepen understanding. For both teachers and students, metacognitive development ideally takes place within a community of practice, where the process of learning is emphasized as strongly as the product (Vygotsky, 1978). These concepts of critical thinking and critical literacy are the underpinnings of the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project in which all three authors have been engaged. This project has been informed by definitions of critical thinking that

Teacher interview questions on critical literacy and critical thinking

- Please tell me about your experience as a teacher
- Training
- Levels at which you have taught, subject area disciplines
- Amount of experience, types of schools
- Geographical location
- How did you come to teach at your current school/university?
- What do you understand by “critical approaches to literacy”?
- Please try to describe a student who is a critical thinker.
- Let’s imagine that you want to teach this piece of text/writing to your students. Talk through the activities you would do based on the text.
- Tell me why you would choose to do the activities this way.
- What would be your goals for teaching the text?
- Why would you choose this text?
- What do you expect students to be able to do when you teach for critical thinking?
- Is it easy or difficult for you to teach in a way that encourages your students to be critical thinkers?
- What characterizes a teacher who is practicing critical thinking methods?
- How did you learn to become a teacher of critical thinking/literacy?
- What help do you need to support you in becoming a better teacher of critical literacy?

focus on its participatory and metacognitive nature. For example, Klooster (2001) describes critical thinking as independent thinking that uses information as the starting point. It may begin with questions, build on reasoned arguments (claim, reasons, evidence), and involve social thinking. Other writers take the view that critical literacy must move beyond individual response and personal discovery to interrogate the curriculum and the everyday world (Cardiero-Kaplan, 2002). The work of Lewison, Seely Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) describes the role of critical literacy as disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice. This theme also underpins the work of critical pedagogues in Australia (for example, Morgan, 1997), who deal explicitly with matters of class, gender, and ethnicity. In the classroom, this approach to critical literacy might involve challenging stereotypes in a given text, or identifying missing perspectives (often those of minority peoples). In approaching critical literacy from a social justice viewpoint, students learn to identify and address issues of power and privilege.

Given the histories of many of the post-Soviet countries in which it is operating, the RWCT project has tended to focus on opening up participation and respectful dialogue within classrooms. This is in accord with the views of The New London Group (1996), who note, “We cannot remake the world through schooling, but we can instantiate a vision through pedagogy that creates in microcosm a transformed set of relationships and possibilities for social futures, a vision that is lived in schools” (p. 72). In North America there have been “waves” of understanding of critical thinking, beginning in the 1970s with an emphasis on the theory of logic and techniques of argument, and becoming more diffuse in the 1980s (Unrau, 1997). Current approaches combine close scrutiny of thought and text with broad inclusiveness. This range of critical perspectives means that our understanding of critical literacy is provisional and incomplete (Morgan, 1997).

We used core questions in interviewing teachers in each country (see sidebar), but of course the geographical and educational contexts vary. As interviewers, we tried to be responsive to our teacher participants, so we engaged them in conversations tempered by our own knowledge of their educational and cultural backgrounds. In the following sections, the interview findings from each country are introduced by a brief discussion of their contexts.

Kazakhstan: Sapargul Mirseitova

Kazakhstan is a large country, with a rich and diverse landscape. It can take three days to travel across the country by train, from mountain settings through orchards, desert, steppe, birch forests, and oil fields. Like Canada and the United States, Kazakhstan is a multicultural country, but it has the recent additional challenge of negotiating its place in a rapidly changing world. While in the curricula of Western countries critical thinking is a key element, in Kazakhstan we have just begun to argue that critical thinking should be an explicit part of our curriculum. In Soviet culture we were accustomed to reading the text without taking into account the social and cultural contexts in which the texts were constructed (McCaffery, 2000). For example, for their exams my students at the University could retell word for word what was given in the book. But when I asked, "What do you think about it?" there was surprise in their eyes. They were likely to say, "Why should I think? The information is given in the book!" Similarly, at first the participants in the RWCT project were very quick to develop literal questions, but they were less comfortable with building their own knowledge from workshop experiences. The participants assumed that workshop leaders had important information, which could be directly passed on to them.

Traditional Kazakh culture emphasizes the authority of elders and teachers. Historically, this attitude has meant that students were not supposed to express their own opinions in front of older people, teachers, and professors, or even to share original ideas about books written by respected authors. There are many positives in such an attitude—for instance, a deep respect for elders, who have lived longer and gained wisdom, is in stark contrast to North American youth-oriented culture. However, it makes it difficult for teachers from Kazakh-speaking schools to accept that their students might have opinions that contradict their own.

In the early stages of the RWCT project, participating teachers struggled with different notions of *critical*, interpreting the word in the context of their prior experiences of being criticized by

administrators, rather than seeing it as a form of reflective practice. Now, five years after the RWCT project began, their understandings have changed, and teachers have become more reflective. At first they found that working together in seminars and visiting each others' classrooms was a challenge; it took several years before teachers were able to listen to varying points of view without searching for the "correct" one. Similarly, at first teachers in Kazakhstan wanted to be told exactly what was wrong or right with their implementation of particular teaching strategies. However, through ongoing professional networks, many teachers in Kazakhstan have learned to take responsibility for their own learning and to share their ideas with each other, and have thus become more comfortable with ambiguity.

Backgrounds of the Kazakhstani teachers in the study

The six teachers in the study come from a range of backgrounds: Two teachers with Russian backgrounds and two with Kazakh backgrounds were educated totally in Russian schools. The other two Kazakh teachers received entirely Kazakh educations. They come from different regions of the country. All the teachers had backgrounds in pedagogy, and one university teacher has a doctorate. They have between 16 and 45 years of teaching experience, all are currently teaching in urban environments (although four have previously had experiences in rural schools).

One of the things that unites them is that they have all been associated with Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking from its inception in Kazakhstan. All have been recognized by their peers at National Reading Conferences in Kazakhstan as outstanding among the 50 other RWCT trainers. They have all have chosen this profession because they have been "teaching" since childhood; and they all like teaching, schools, and children.

How the Kazakhstani teachers understood "critical approaches to literacy"

The teachers interviewed for this study understood critical approaches to literacy differently according to their teaching

levels. Elementary teachers focused on affective aspects of the classroom environment. They recognized critical thinking through students' social interactions with each other and their teachers.

Elementary teachers believed that students should feel that they are important and should be confident in expressing their own thoughts. Their goals were to have students understand content, be able to compare previous and new knowledge, and to recognize literary and moral elements in what they read. Elementary teachers saw their role as preparing their students for life in the community. "Critical thinking should become their habit in everyday life," as one teacher said.

Secondary teachers wanted their students to express opinions and facilitated this by motivating their students to read texts more deeply, question their reading, and engage in discussions with each other. Active learning and response to text were seen as especially important. Secondary teachers expected that their students would become thoughtful readers, be able to evaluate information, and be courageous in expressing their own thoughts.

Study participants teaching at pedagogical institutes focused on self-evaluation and self-direction from the inservice teachers they taught, and they looked for them to accept a range of possibilities: "They should not see it as only white and black." Teachers at the inservice level were particularly concerned with building on their students' previous experiences and knowledge. They wanted the teachers with whom they work to change their attitudes toward the process of learning, and to transform the relationship between teacher and student. They also hoped that the teachers would gain skills of self-observation and not consider themselves as the only source of information.

Reflections on the Kazakhstani interviews

When the teachers we interviewed were invited to take RWCT courses five years ago, as the first generation in Kazakhstan, they were all ready for change. Alexandra, who has 45 years of teaching experience behind her, noted, "What we had before RWCT did not satisfy me, it was formulaic. Elementary

teachers took a positive view toward the process of changing their teaching role, because the young children they taught were enthusiastic about more active learning methods." One of the elementary teachers remarked, "It is exciting to watch them be flexible in their learning." Secondary teachers saw the change as involving more work for them, especially in planning: "It is creative work, it can't be easy." Inservice teachers also recognized the amount of work involved but saw it becoming easier as participants grasped active teaching principles.

The six project teachers' personal theories about education are based mostly on the philosophy of the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project, emphasizing active learning and critical engagement with text. Each teacher's understanding of the notion of critical thinking was not by the book—it was a personal approach based on classroom practices and his or her own experience of implementing the RWCT philosophy and strategies. Though at the beginning I was really concerned that they might not define critical literacy as it is described in the research literature, by the end of the study I came to realize that the teachers I interviewed have begun to construct their own understandings of critical literacy in the context of Kazakhstan.

Canada: Angela Ward

Canada is a federation of regions, and on the national scale it is a multicultural country. There are significant geographical and demographic contrasts between regions. The Canadian province where this study took place has a sparsely distributed population of one million people. The small towns where the interviews were conducted are in transition from farming communities to more urban environments.

In Canadian school curricula, critical thinking is, theoretically at least, woven as a strand into all subject areas, but in reality it is considered marginal by many teachers and rarely planned for or evaluated. The most specific references to critical thinking and critical literacy in curricula are found in objectives for the elementary and secondary humanities areas.



Backgrounds of Canadian teachers in the study

The six teachers who participated are all from English-speaking backgrounds and have taught mostly in western Canada. The university teachers were the most experienced, with 30-year teaching careers, while the elementary and secondary teachers had from five to 20 years of experience. For the two elementary teachers in the study, teaching was their first “professional” career. Interestingly, four of the six participants came from families in which one or both of the parents were teachers. Several credited their own family backgrounds with encouraging their growth as critical thinkers, citing such family activities as discussions about the newspaper, or listening to a grandfather’s sermons in church. In general, the Canadian teachers did not feel that their own schooling had prepared them to be critical thinkers, although several mentioned individual teachers (usually at the secondary or university level) who had inspired them. Several teachers noted that there had been far too much memorization required of them in their university classes. Many of the Canadians interviewed viewed their own university education and teacher-training classes as a disappointment, so they did not see their postsecondary education as helpful in their development into thoughtful teachers. Critical and creative teachers existed but seemed to be idiosyncratic occurrences. Betty recalled a drama teacher who encouraged students to

rewrite plays from the perspective of minor characters; Ruth, now a university teacher, spent a year teaching overseas as a high school teacher before becoming officially “qualified,” and came to believe that “you learn to teach by teaching.” (We have used pseudonyms for all teachers’ names.)

How the Canadian teachers understood “critical approaches to literacy”

There was a strong sense among these teachers that teaching for critical thinking involved more than strategies and techniques. As Luke noted,

“Technique is much lower than it’s cracked up to be. Without technique, of course, no one gets anywhere, but the rest of it is transformative. You can educate people to be teachers, and it seems that a person can become a satisfactory teacher and learn techniques, read books, and practice the appropriate practices. And I think that’s really important.... But you walk down the hall of any school and there will be, in any group of 25, maybe five with that transformative quality.”

Ruth saw herself as helping her university students understand social inequities: “I think that what you do when you come to an understanding of the injustice of the unequal power relations in the world permeates your whole life.”

None of the teachers interviewed could readily name particular teaching strategies and methodologies. However, all of the teachers engaged their students in active learning, often favoring a specific approach. One elementary teacher had

become expert at using literature circles. Betty, a secondary teacher, preferred to use drama and writing activities that required students to take on different perspectives. University teachers placed great value on working with text in their English classes. Both school teachers and university professors involved in the study used various forms of student discussion (e.g., cooperative learning, “think/pair/share”), and described student engagement as a major goal.

Reflections on the Canadian teacher interviews

For the Canadian teachers in the study, being a critically literate teacher was more complex than merely learning teaching techniques and strategies. Building community and responsiveness was at the heart of these teachers’ experiences. Their responses showed an emphasis on personality and disposition, and on informal educational experiences rather than on specific techniques. Their own upbringing played a powerful role in teachers’ views of themselves as critical pedagogues. They described reading extensively as children and young adults, as well as having reflective conversations with family and peers. As a professor of education, I was intrigued by the passion for teaching demonstrated by liberal arts university professors in the study. In general, participants in the Canadian group are still “writing the word rather than the world,” i.e., engaging their students in active learning and reading beyond assigned texts to challenge assumptions, but not obviously setting out to transform the world beyond the classroom.

United States: Sara Ann Beach

The United States is a diverse federation of states, and although English is the primary language, immigrants have brought a myriad of other languages to the country and its school systems. The U.S. teachers interviewed all taught in a state located in the center of the country. This state was originally set aside for the specific use of Native American tribes, but was opened to white settlers in the late 19th century. The state has two large metropolitan areas, but the bulk of the population lives in medium-sized towns

or rural communities. Education policies here are “populist,” with a large number of public universities to enable as many students as possible to go to a university near their home. The curriculum for the schools is built around so-called Priority Academic Skills, a list of curriculum standards in all disciplines. Critical literacy is specifically listed in the literacy standards but is addressed only briefly. The literacy standards form the basis for standardized high-stakes testing at several grade levels, which provides a measure of school effectiveness (as required by federal law) and also determines high school graduation.

Backgrounds of U.S. teachers in the study

The U.S. teachers all taught either in a rural community in the central part of the state or in a large university nearby. They had a wide range of teaching experience, ranging from three to 29 years. Both of the elementary teachers taught all subject areas, while the secondary and university teachers taught either literacy or social studies (history, government, economics).

How U.S. teachers understood “critical approaches to literacy”

While their personal definitions were different, all the teachers viewed critical literacy as a way of thinking that goes beyond the literal and helps students make life decisions. Both the elementary and secondary teachers emphasized the importance of making connections, including connections from the text to the real world, and connections from text to text and situation to situation. Elizabeth, for example, described critical literacy as knowing how to learn; and John stated, “It’s helping them transfer knowledge from one situation to another, looking beyond the simplistic to understand why.” The university professors, however, went beyond the idea of making connections to include the notions of questioning, wondering, and analyzing. All the teachers viewed their role as one that supported thinking, decision making, and making connections, and they stressed the importance of helping students apply ideas to new situations. Holly, a grade 3 teacher, talked about helping children know

“how events, decisions, and other people’s lives have brought us to where we are...to insist that a child be responsible for their own choices and know there is a consequence for those choices...every time you make a child responsible for what they choose, they’re having to think critically about that choice.”

John, a grade 8 teacher, went further, emphasizing that it is important for a teacher to help students learn how to use what they know to become involved in the life of the community. Neil, a university professor, summed up his view in his statement:

“There’s a sort of dimension of keeping it up and passing it on...keeping it up is how do you continue to be a critical person in a society that doesn’t necessarily support critical thinking...and then passing it on is the idea that...what we need to do is...try to promote or support the development of a critical orientation in our children.”

The strategies the teachers used to accomplish these goals for their students included the use of writing, group discussion, and art or drama. They all maintained the importance of using multiple texts and making explicit connections to their students’ lives.

Reflections on the U.S. teacher interviews

In contrast to the Canadian teachers interviewed, these U.S. teachers did not describe family environment as crucial to their development as critical thinkers. Instead, most identified a professor from their own college careers who had questioned, challenged, and pushed them to think beyond the literal. They all felt that immersion in that academic context, a context that demanded they be thoughtful and critical, had been key to their own belief in the importance of critical literacy. Unfortunately, none of them associated such contexts with their regular schooling or their teacher education courses. While each teacher could talk about critical thinking, several had difficulty defining critical literacy, and none of their descriptions matched those found in the literature. In spite of not being able to name what they were doing, they could describe key components of a classroom environment necessary to develop critical literacy. These components included providing students with choice; creating opportunities for

students to make connections between texts, situations, and ideas; stressing the importance of listening to the perspectives of others; and ensuring that students take ownership of ideas. While all the teachers’ descriptions of their own lessons and classrooms had aspects of each component, those with more experience in teaching were better able to discuss the reasons why they did what they did and its relationship to life outside of the classroom.

Summary of the data: Themes across all teacher interviews

Teachers’ experiences of critical thinking and literacy appeared to be heavily context dependent. In North America, the teachers with whom we spoke believed they became critical thinkers through family experiences and the inspiration of individual role models, rather than through formal preservice and inservice training. Betty said,

There are many teachers who have influenced me immensely, and there are many teachers who have brought me to these wonderful ideas, given me places to jump from. I think that, for the most part in my career, I’ve been the learner from these people. It’s just recently that I’ve started to give back.

Given the strong emphasis on individual learning and responsibility in both the United States and Canada, it is not surprising that teachers from these countries attributed their ability to take critical stances to their own predispositions and their family experiences. In Kazakhstan, where critical thinking was not previously encouraged by the state or the educational system, teachers saw their development as teachers of critical literacy to be more closely connected to recent, shared professional experiences. Teachers there were likely to attribute their understanding of critical pedagogy to involvement in the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project. Kazakhstani teachers also described their classroom practices in terms of strategies and techniques learned through their association with RWCT. However, from previous informal conversations with Kazakhstani teachers and frequent observations in their classrooms, it is clear that many teachers attracted to the

RWCT project were already teaching in a more critical way than their colleagues.

North American teachers had incorporated critical literacy teaching strategies from varied sources and did not use a common vocabulary in describing classroom practice. Indeed, their professional experiences seemed somewhat unplanned and haphazard. Teachers in Canada and the United States used drama, debates, and a wide variety of strategies based on literature to enhance active learning and critical thinking. It seems likely that teachers who have participated in the RWCT project in Eastern Europe and Central Asia will adapt and invent their own critical literacy strategies as they become more comfortable with their guiding principles. In reflecting on support for their practice as teachers of critical literacy, some study participants commented that it was easier to win over administrators than their own teaching colleagues, who were often threatened by new ideas. The constraints of time and curriculum demands also made it a challenge for all participants to implement creative ideas in their classrooms.

Conclusion

All teachers in the study engaged in practices congruent with critical literacy as described in the educational literature. Metacognitive strategies were widely used to engage students in active learning. Teachers reported implementing small-group discussions, think/pair/share, writing across the curriculum, and writers' and readers' workshops. A few teachers, mainly North Americans, used critical literacy in a social justice framework, encouraging students to challenge their worlds as well as written ideas.

Teachers in all three countries clearly expressed shared dreams for their students. All teachers with whom we spoke want students in their classrooms to become engaged, active learners who question as they read. While their understandings of critical literacy do not necessarily reflect the terminology found in the research literature, teachers in our study from Kazakhstan, Canada, and the United States all demonstrated a passionate desire to support their students' development as thoughtful readers and independent thinkers.

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Strengthening Literate Identities Through Retrospective Miscue Analysis: The Process of Revaluing Readers and Reading

Literate identities are the perceptions that learners have of reading, writing, and themselves in relation to literacy. Learners construct their literate identities through their experiences reading and writing for a variety of purposes in a variety of social and cultural contexts. An interview with nine-year-old Christy (Note: all names used are pseudonyms) demonstrates how her previous literacy experiences influence her current literate identity, which is revealed in her perceptions of reading and herself as a reader.

Christy was a student in a large urban school district in the midwestern United States that had a policy of not promoting students to the fourth grade unless they attained certain grade-level scores in both reading and math on a commercial standardized test. Because her scores missed the mark, Christy was repeating third grade in a classroom with other students who were also repeating for the second or third time. When Prisca (the author) met her, Christy gave the following responses to questions in the Reading Interview (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987):

PRISCA (P): When you are reading and come to something you don't know, what do you do?

CHRISTY (C): Try sounding it out or tell somebody "What does this word say?"...[or] I skip it.

P: Who is a good reader you know?

C: A teacher.... They practice a lot.

P: Do you think a teacher ever comes to something she doesn't know?

C: Yes.... They try sounding it out or tell another teacher.

P: If you knew someone was having trouble reading, how would you help that person?

C: ...by sounding [the word] out to them....

P: What do you do well as a reader?

C: I can practice it and I could read a little bit.

P: What would you like to do better?

C: Know the words.

P: Do you think you are a good reader right now?

C: No.

P: Why not?

C: Because I'm still in third grade and I don't know that much words.

Christy's responses reveal her perception of reading in English as a word-oriented process: Readers "sound it out" when they experience difficulty; and she needs to "know the words [better]" to improve as a reader. Her responses also reveal a weak image of herself as a reader. While she acknowledges that she does do some things well (practices and can read "a little bit"), she does not believe she is a good reader "because I'm still in third grade and I don't know that much words."

Christy expresses a weak literate identity even though she names the same strategies (sound out, ask someone, and practice) for herself and for good readers, and even identifies an additional strategy, "skip it," for herself. Research reveals that when readers, such as Christy, are more concerned about *words* than they are about *meaning* and don't have positive literate identities, they read less proficiently (Goodman & Marek, 1996).

In this article we examine why literate identities matter and how they relate to literacy learning in relation to reading, and we suggest one experience—retrospective miscue analysis (RMA)—that strengthens literate identities and also empowers both students and teachers. To ground this discussion, we begin by exploring the reading process as informed by research in miscue analysis before turning to literate identities and RMA.

The Reading Process as Informed by Miscue Analysis

Miscues are unexpected responses (commonly known as *mistakes* or *errors*) that readers make when reading. Ken Goodman (1973) coined the term when he discovered that these unexpected responses are based on inferences and predictions using the same language cues and reading strategies that readers use to make expected (or *correct*) responses. Through the windows into the reading process that miscues open, Goodman learned that readers orchestrate cues from two bodies of knowledge as they transact with texts in their sociocultural context (Goodman, 1973). One of these bodies is the set of language cueing systems: the *graphophonic system*—the relationship between oral and written language; the *syntactic system*—linguistic and structural relationships (grammar); and the *semantic/pragmatic system*—personal and social meanings of language in a cultural context. The other body of knowledge is a set of cognitive strategies: readers *initiate*, making the decision to read; *sample*, selecting the most useful cues; *infer*, guessing needed information; *predict*, anticipating coming information; *confirm* or *disconfirm*, self-monitoring their reading for meaning; *correct*, reconstructing the text if necessary to recover meaning; and, *terminate*, deciding to stop reading.

Miscues are never random, nor are they evidence of carelessness; they are cued by readers' knowledge and concepts of language and the world, and they demonstrate that readers are thinking and trying to make sense of texts (Goodman, 2003). By analyzing a reader's miscues and retelling, research-

ers discover patterns in the miscues across the text and patterns in the reader's focus on constructing meaning. These patterns indicate how efficiently and effectively the reader is integrating the language cueing systems and reading strategies (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987). Since Goodman pioneered miscue analysis in the 1960s, hundreds of miscue studies (see Brown, Goodman, & Marek, 1996) on readers from a broad range of cultures, ages, and abilities have supported the findings of his research. These studies include readers of Thai (Chattiwat, 1990), Arabic (Al-Fahid, 2000), Chinese (Xu, 1998), French (Dank & McEachern, 1979), Yiddish (Hodes, 1981), and Spanish (Arellano-Osuna, 1988). Findings from these and other studies consistently reveal that while each language is unique in its syntax, orthography, etc., the underlying reading process in all cases is one of constructing meaning; and all readers, regardless of proficiency, make miscues (Goodman, 2003).

Literate Identities and Literacy Learning

While their literacy resources and the ways families interact with literacy may vary, all children, including those in ethnic- and language-minority homes, are immersed from birth in a constant stream of rich and diverse literacy events, seamlessly woven into various cultural and social contexts (Barratt-Pugh, 2000; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). As children engage in these literacy events, they become socialized to literacy and develop a sense of who they are in their culture, in their family, and as literate beings (Barratt-Pugh, 2000). They invent personal literate identities (Bloome & Dail, 1997; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Martens, Flurkey, Meyer, & Udell, 1999) that reflect the influence of their particular cultural (Gee, 1990) and social practices (Luke & Freebody, 1997; Taylor, 1998). By the time they enter formal schooling, students have personal beliefs about reading and writing and about themselves as literate beings (Heath, 1983). As they participate in classroom literacy events, these literate identities are validated or challenged (Jenkins, 1994; Schooley, 1994).



Literate identities are never simple or fixed; they are complex and dynamic, reflecting the intersection of a variety of factors (McCarthy, 2002; Young & Beach, 1997). To each new literacy context, learners bring connections to previous literacy events. Their literate identities, then, are interwoven tapestries of threads connected to previous meanings and experiences with other oral and written texts (Bloome & Dail, 1997; Martens et al., 1999).

Christy, for example, drew on previous literacy experiences when she stated that she wasn't a good reader "because I'm still in third grade and I don't know that much words." Countless threads from those previous experiences connected to particular oral and written texts (in reading groups, testing situations, interactions with her teacher and peers, etc.) that positioned her and her literate identity in the interview cited earlier. We have worked with numerous readers like Christy who have similar perceptions of reading and weak literate identities (Arya, 1996, 1999; Martens, 1998; Martens & Adamson, 2001; Martens et al., 1999).

Literate identities are key in students' literacy learning. When students do not see literacy as purposeful and meaningful, and do not identify themselves as readers and writers, they frequently find ways—and create excuses—to avoid having to read and write. RMA is a strategy that empowers readers to revalue reading and themselves as readers, and thus to read more proficiently and willingly.

Retrospective Miscue Analysis

In RMA readers reflect on the reading process by analyzing and evaluating their oral reading miscues in collaboration with the teacher-researcher. The first step in the standard RMA process is a miscue session, in which a teacher-researcher meets one-on-one with a student and has the student read and retell a text (for more information on procedures, see Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987). Then, in the subsequent RMA session, the learner is invited to participate in analyzing particular miscues as the teacher-researcher points out the effective and efficient strategies these miscues reveal (for more information on procedures, see Goodman & Marek, 1996). Through RMA, students change their negative perceptions of reading and their weak literate identities; and they learn to appreciate their strengths, revalue themselves as competent capable readers, revalue reading as a meaningful constructive process, and, as a result, improve their proficiency in reading (Flurkey & Goodman, 2000; Goodman & Marek, 1996; Martens, 1998).

An example of the power of RMA in this standard setting is the story of Michael, a U.S. third grader with a learning disability (Martens, 1998). When Michael read, he frequently continued reading when his substitutions didn't make sense. He did not see himself as a good reader, stating, "[I'm] not that good. I have to sound out a lot." Through RMA sessions over several months he listened to an audiotope of

himself reading and examined selected high-quality miscues he had made (miscues that are acceptable and that do not interfere with the reader's construction of meaning), and discussed the strategies and strengths these miscues revealed about him. Gradually, Michael began to see himself as a capable reader who used strategies flexibly with a focus on constructing meaning. His miscue analysis scores improved, and in one of the final sessions he admitted that he was a "good reader."

Adaptations of RMA

While teachers see the power of RMA, they sometimes feel constrained and overwhelmed by the standard procedure, which requires two one-on-one sessions with a student. However, with an understanding of the basic concept of reevaluating, RMA can be adapted and used successfully in other settings (see examples in Goodman & Marek, 1996). Prisca, for example, adapted the procedures for use in the classroom with Christy and her classmates. When listening to a student read, Prisca audiotaped the student and also made note of high-quality miscues that revealed the student's strengths. Before the student returned to his or her seat, Prisca would conduct a brief RMA session, pointing out some of the brilliant strategies she had heard the reader using, helping the reader understand that all good readers use these types of strategies, and explaining that the reader needed to use them more often. The following is an example of a discussion with Christy after she read the Frog and Toad story "Ice Cream" (Lobel, 1976).

PRISCA (P): You made some incredible miscues! Miscues are what I call the things that you say that aren't exactly like what is in the text. And, miscues are not things that are bad because they show that you are thinking. Like here [pointing to the sentence in the book] ...You said, "I just was" and then you went back and corrected it to "I just saw." Why do you think you went back and corrected that?

CHRISTY (C): Because it didn't make sense.

P: That's right. You were thinking. That's what good readers do. All good readers think about what they're reading and

correct their miscues when their reading isn't making sense. What else?... [looking at notes and the text] Here...you knew you did this. You weren't sure about this [pointing to the word *covered* the first time it appeared in the text] so you skipped it and kept going. And guess what happened when you got on the next page? What'd you do?

C: I put the word in.

P: And what word is it?

C: *Covered*.

P: *Covered*. So you weren't sure here and you did what good readers do. If you're not sure of something you can keep going, because if it is something that is really important it will come up again. And guess what? It came up again, and guess what happened that time? You figured it out. Just like good readers do. And who told you to do that?

C: My brain.

P: Your brain—because your brain knows all those kinds of good strategies.

Standard RMA sessions are typically more involved than this discussion and go into extensive depth in discussing the reader's miscues and the cues she used. Our adapted sessions were usually brief but meaningful discussions, as in this example, highlighting the reader's strengths and making her aware of the strategies she is using.

Prisca also used RMA in a group setting with Christy and her classmates. After reading individually with a student and discussing some of her high-quality miscues (as in the discussion with Christy above), Prisca got the student's permission to play a portion of the audiotape for the rest of the class so they could hear what brilliant strategies the student used (teachers could also work from notes). For the RMA session, Prisca wrote the text sentence onto the chalkboard, then played the audiotape for the class and facilitated a discussion of the miscues the students heard. As the students caught on they became insightful about the reading process and miscues, as illustrated by these excerpts from their discussion of miscues made by another of their classmates, Carol.

PRISCA: Carol did something no one else has done yet. This was the sentence. Let's read it.

ALL READING TOGETHER: "Turn us back into students," *Todd demanded. Mrs. Gorf had no choice.*

PRISCA: Now listen to what Carol read.

CAROL (on the audiotape): "Turn us back into students," *Ted said. Miss Gorf had to...had no choice.*

[Carol substituted, without correcting, *Ted, said,* and *Miss Gorf.* She also read *had to* for *had no*, but corrected that miscue.]

EVELYN: She said *Ted* and...*said*....

[Prisca writes the miscues on the chalkboard above the text words.]

SHARON: And she said "to"....

LEIGH: You can change the name....

PRISCA: Yes...So Carol read, "Turn us back into students," *Ted ...*

STUDENTS: ...*said*.

EVELYN: And it makes sense...like I did.

VIVIAN: And like I did when I read today too....

PRISCA: ...What was the brilliant thing she did?

DANIEL: She went back.

CAROL: That I correct myself. Up there [referring to the substitutions of *Ted* and *said*] I didn't have to go back and correct it, but down there [referring to *had to*] I had to.

PRISCA: Right. She knew that here [*had to*] she had to correct and here [*Ted* and *said*] she didn't. So, Carol, how did you know to say *said* there?

CAROL: Because I didn't know the word, and you said that we could put other words in to make sense.... I knew it was a name so I said *said*.

PRISCA: You knew somebody was...

CAROL: ...talking.

PRISCA: Talking. Any time you're reading and you see that somebody is talking you can always put in *said* or *asked*.... Carol paused just for a second and thought, "I don't know what that is but I know somebody is talking. I'm going to say *said*." And she kept going.

MARK: Something like I did....

PRISCA: And just like she [Carol] said, here [*had to*] she had to go back and correct it and here [*Ted* and *said*] she didn't. That's what good readers do. They know when they have to go back and correct and when they don't have to go back and correct.

While these sessions were brief, they highlighted for all the students the strategies readers use to construct meaning. Collaborating to analyze their classmates' miscues helped the students understand the nature of miscues and revalue reading as a process of constructing meaning, not just "knowing the words." The students also revalued themselves as capable, competent readers. Comments similar to "I did that, too!" were common in every discussion. As one reader's brilliance in using particular strategies was discussed, the reader's classmates basked in that brilliance, too. Multiple literate identities were built up simultaneously, and the children gradually began reading more proficiently.

Christy, for example, was present for the above RMA discussion of Carol's miscues, though she didn't speak. Through her experiences in these collaborative RMA sessions as well as personal sessions with Prisca, however, she began correcting miscues that didn't make sense and integrating various cues in the text to make high-quality substitutions that retained the meaning of the text. Her improved miscue analysis scores also documented this change.

The power of RMA lies in discussions about the reading process that focus readers on their own strengths and their concern with constructing meaning. These discussions provide a forum for learners to "define themselves as readers: literate human beings capable of learning what they want to learn" (Goodman & Marek, 1996, p. 203). RMA has been conducted with a range of readers, including learning disabled (Martens, 1998), at risk (Germain, 1998), adults (Marek, 1987), children (Martens & Adamson, 2001), and students in classroom settings (Goodman, 1996). Researchers have started using RMA with ESL students (Lee, 2000; Wurr, Theurer, & Kim, 2000) and with readers of various languages. Gennaoui (2000) and Chaleff and Ritter (2001) have successfully used RMA with deaf students. Though more research is needed, the power of RMA is evident in helping readers see reading as a process of constructing meaning and themselves as competent, capable readers.

Conclusion

Given the important relationship between students' literate identities and their literacy learning, it is critical to understand and appreciate the nature of literate identities. The development of positive literate identities is a complex process in which teachers play a vital role. Whether in an individual conference with a student or in a group setting, RMA discussions in any language empower both teachers and students as they collaborate to understand the strengths revealed by readers' miscues. By working together and generating knowledge about reading and readers, students revalue not only themselves, but also each other, as competent, capable learners, thus building and strengthening their literate identities.

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IDEC Leadership Workshop

“Promote literacy, ignorance is devastating!” This was the key message that Anne-Sophie Selin, member of the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association, addressed to the participants at the IDEC Leadership Workshop held in Rethymnon, the isle of Crete, 8–10 January 2004. The forum brought together 45 representatives of national reading associations from 21 European countries. Strategic planning discussions focused on several major challenges, including intercultural education, new definitions of mother tongue/native language, interactive teaching methods, and reluctant readers. Future cooperation within the international network will have four major goals: cooperation and exchange of information, professional training and development, establishing and attracting new national associations, and increasing internationalization of the movement for reading and literacy.

Fantasy and Social Realism: The Perfect Paradox. Or Not?

In my hometown they say that it is a very bad thing to wake a child abruptly. It should be done slowly and very gently. Because in his dreams a child travels to a faraway country and he must return slowly and gently. Otherwise, his soul won't fit in his body for the rest of that day.

I grew up on a farm in the district of Babanango, a small hamlet in the rural area of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. It is an isolated region of our country, where the villages have names such as Mtunzini, KwaDlangezwa, Nhlazatshi, Ixopo, and Nqutu. It is a region where the *inhleka-bafazis* sing in the trees, where the rivers have sweet water—*Amanzimtoti*—and where the artless, bare-breasted young women go about their daily activities, unaware of the artificial constraints of the morality of the Western world.

It is a region in which I grew up and became aware of the power of stories. Despite the abject poverty of these people, and although the social problems caused by destitution, over-population, and AIDS are felt more acutely here than in any other part of South Africa's wide and sad land, it is a region that has been abundantly blessed with a storehouse of tales, myths, and legends. It is also the country, and its people, that shaped me as a writer.

As a child, I had the unequalled privilege of sitting in the Ugogo's (the grandmother's) hut, huddled up against the Zulu children of our farming community, filled with anticipation, fervidly waiting for the enchanted hour: story time! Together with the black children I got to know and respect the age-old ritual of storytelling.

"Kwesukasukela," Ugogo said, when she was ready. The beginning had begun.

"Cosu, cosu," we replied, we are ready, we are listening.

We knew that the Thing that gives you horns if you listen to stories during the day had now gone, that the time was right and that the night was a safe haven for us.

"Indaba," the Ugogo said, and told us what the night's story would be about. (Today the word *Indaba* is used as a political term, meaning "meeting" or "brainstorming.")

"Soyipheka ngogozwana," we would say. Directly translated, it means: "We cook your words; we eat them."

And then, open-mouthed, we would listen to the tales about the Impundulu, the Inyati and the Indlovu, and—on a special evening—to the antics of that terrible, but terribly charming, rascal called Hlankanyana. My Ugogo's performances were magnificent one-woman shows: She could sing, chant, dance, impersonate five or six different characters in rapid succession—and all of it with only two or three teeth in her mouth.

My Ugogo's name was Juba, which means *dove*. But she was not only a dove, she was a lioness, she was a tigress, she was Scheherazade; she was wonderful and I adored her. From a tender age I learned that, in stories, everything is possible. That, at three months, Hlankanyana is able to get out of his mother's belly and that he can immediately slaughter three cows and devour them on the spot. We knew of the existence of cannibals with their terrible appetites; of monsters with only one leg and one eye. We knew of cruelty and villainy, of treachery and violence. We also knew of friendship and love and sacrifice.

We also knew that the spirits of stories would disappear into the fire if the Ugogo were to decide that she was tired and wanted to lie down on her *icansi* (sleeping mat) for the night.

“Coyi, cosu cosu! Iyaphela,” she would say, spitting into the fire. It was a horrific—and wonderful—sight, the glob of spit that went sizzling into the fire, but this was the magical incantation, the great reassurance: Tonight neither spirit nor ghost would climb into the children’s heads and give them nightmares. The fire had breamed it all—at least until tomorrow night.

Although I am white, I grew up with an African approach to literature, and only when I had completed my master’s degree and Ph.D. in literature study did I realize how fundamentally it differs from the Western approach. For the average white child there was neither the magic of the smoky fire nor the shelter of a clearly demarcated narrative domain. For the white child the nightmare of reality could continue endlessly; the monsters and the cannibals could become part of their ordinary daytime lives.

It may sound as if I suffer from an unrealistic longing for an idyllic, Arcadian existence where the oral narrative tradition is the only form of entertainment, and television and computers are nothing but figments of the imagination. And it is true—I am old enough to become melancholic about a lost heritage and to plead that the rich oral tradition of the art of storytelling, and the tales that have been told, must never be lost. I have promised myself that, when I am a grandmother, I shall wear purple and see to it that my grandchildren listen to stories.

And yet, I am old and cynical enough to know that the art of oral storytelling is very, very rapidly being usurped by the rapping and raging of television programs and the action-packed virtual reality of computer games. This is, after all, the 21st century, even in Africa.

But in this article, my focus is elsewhere. For a number of decades much attention has been given by publishers and educators to juvenile literature that addresses the contemporary social problems in South Africa; the so-called “problem fiction” as I would like to call it. It seems to be very chic to be sick. The Afrikaans market for juvenile fiction has been inundated by books in which every conceivable social and political problem is mooted. Mom is an alcoholic; Dad is a wife-basher or a sexual pervert or he has been wrongfully laid off from work. Junior

is either confused about his sexual identity or he has a drug problem; otherwise he’s a Satanist or he is obsessed with masturbating. If his sister doesn’t become pregnant at 14, she’s either bulimic or anorexic.

Don’t misunderstand me: These books *do* have their own niche, and this kind of writing undoubtedly has some form of therapeutic value for young, tormented souls, especially if it has literary merit and is written with integrity. After all, it is an undisputed fact that all good literature is engendered by tension.

My problem is that this is practically the only kind of book available to our young adult readers, both male and female. My problem is that our children grow up with the idea that normality does not exist; that the world is a place where monsters and perverts are the norm.

My personal experience as reader, writer, and, above all, teacher (of youngsters in grades 8–12 [ages 14–18]), points to the fact that young readers are fed up with being confronted not only by social realism, but also by “politically correct” books. For example, at the school where I teach—a leading, prominent, and racially well-represented school—*every single* prescribed novel, from grade 8 to grade 12, deals with some kind of racial matter. Every year my learners ask me glumly: Do we have to read all about white–black conflict *again*?

Although it is undoubtedly essential that our young people should be sensitive to racial matters, it is a fact that in the year 2004 they have very little first-hand knowledge of the evils of racism—and they are simply sick and tired of it. They *don’t* want to read about how a 15-year-old white boy fell in love with a beautiful colored girl and had to renounce her. They also balk at being forced to read about perfect affirmative action characters where the lead roles are contextualized in the perfect harmony of three black youths, two colored girls, and one white boy. Both black and white learners are rebelling against this kind of situation. Problem fiction has the “feel” of school, the aura of a moral lesson. The result: Our young readers read no more than what they are forced to read at school.

Franz Kafka once wrote in a letter to his friend Oskar Pollak (Jan. 27, 1904):

“I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us. We need the books that affect us like a disaster,

that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us.” (Kafka, 1904/1977)

I doubt that the wonderfully talented but melancholic Kafka was quite correct in this viewpoint. But I must admit that it truly reflects the state of contemporary Afrikaans juvenile literature. For English speakers there is at least a world literature to rely on, but the Afrikaans world—like that of other minority languages—is indeed very small.

It makes me wonder: Are we taking our social responsibility so seriously that we are denying our children the joy of fantasy? And now I am not referring to “fantasy” as in airy-fairy stuff and fables, but the fantasy of a richly imaginative story-world where everything, but everything, is possible.

Are these the children who, as adults, will say some day:

I am hereby officially tendering my resignation as an adult. I want to return to a time when life was simple.

I want to think the world is fair, that everyone is honest and good.

I want to believe that anything is possible. I want to be oblivious to the complexities of life and be overly excited by the little things again.

I want to live simply again.

So...here are my checkbook and my car keys and my credit card bills. I am officially resigning from adulthood.

What do our youthful readers want? Sometimes I think they themselves do not know, but it can be anything, as long as it's not boring. What is boring? Anything that is overly familiar, trite. It is action they want. Old-fashioned fun and mischief, love, sex, adventure, and, above all, a true and honest story.

And this is exactly the point where my heart splits in two: On the one hand I would love to give my youthful reader the kind of books he/she likes; I would like the reading experience to remain pleasurable for the rest of his or her life. On the other hand, I want to educate my reader; I want him/her to become a sophisticated, mature reader who will not shy away from any book or any genre. But most important, *I want to retain them as readers.*

Will this happen if a young adult reads only what he *thinks* he will like? Should a child read only what he wants to? Do I want to keep a child in my class naïve by providing a world of adventure and fables so that he remains an infantile reader to the end of his days? Someone who regards comic books and magazines as “books” and buys himself a *Calvin and Hobbes* [comic by Bill Watterson, U.S.] or a *Madam & Eve* [comic by S. Francis, South Africa] and thinks that this is enough reading matter to last a lifetime? No, I want my reader to come to grips with the full spectrum of life, *especially* through literature.

In adult literature the world is very rarely depicted as an idyllic, harmonious place, and when it is, it is either sentimentally romantic, or it is tranquil, parochial realism (known in Afrikaans as the dreaded *rustige, lokale realisme*). I believe that the juvenile novel is also susceptible to this syndrome, and I want to avoid it at all costs. But at the same time I want my reader to retain a sense of wonderment. How?

I am *not* asking that social problems be solved within the context of a story where a few characters and quasi-psychologists are thrown together in a facile three-point plan. My plea is for truly excellent literature that can handle *everything*—every single horror of our time—but that still retains respect for the wonder world of fantasy. Wake him softly, gently, give him time to travel from the faraway land of his dreams.

My plea is for literature with integrity, not money-spinners for publishers and writers with the prescribed book market in mind. Never underestimate our young adult readers! They have amazing “crap detectors.”

My ideal juvenile reader is sensitive and intelligent, someone who never ceases to be gripped, transported, and touched by the reading experience—whether the book is dealing with a social issue or not. But is this possible when fantasy and social realism are seen as the perfect paradox?

I believe it is possible. And it is especially possible within the South African context, where every stone and tree, every river and mountain, every living person—and ghost—is a story.

In the past decade in South Africa, the young adult has found himself in an

ever-expanding world. The world has extended, not only *outward*, with the contact that has become possible with the outside world in post-apartheid South Africa, but especially *inward*, through the discovery of, and the contact with, the strangers in our own afflicted country: the “other” population groups.

In the 1980s, pop singer Paul Simon made a CD in Johannesburg with Ladysmith Black Mambazo, a group from my part of South Africa. It was called *Graceland* and it made the world sit up and take note. The white writers of this country began to examine their “black” past and to enunciate their intimate experiences with friend and foe, the heroes *and* the damned of their youth. The literary world at large sat up and took note. A new symbiosis came into being between Africa and the West, and mutations and miracles started to happen.

What are the most obvious features of a literature that originates in a space and an era characterized by the paradox of tension and miracle, political unrest, *and* the joy of human co-existence? The simple, obvious answer is magical realism, the adult version of fairy tales.

The South American writers (Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Louis Borges, and others) have distinguished themselves in the field of magical realism by taking this genre to splendid heights. We in South Africa, who are well acquainted with the toktokkie (a well-known and loved little beetle) *and* the tikoloshe (demon sprite), magic potions (paljas), and bone-throwing (dolos), certainly don’t have to copy them: We are capable of creating our own, unique literature. Through magical realism one can address the problems of our time and still retain the miracle; through magical realism the unique symbiosis of Africa and the West can become a reality.

In 2001 my first juvenile book, *Blinde sambok*, was published. It is a simple tale of a girl who grows up on a farm and discovers the world and life together with her best pal, Bhubesi, with whom she makes a blood pact. I wrote this story as a form of reaction: I refused to bear any social responsibility through attempting to educate or sensitize my readers in matters of sexism, racism, or paternalism. I refused to be politically correct.

I tell the story of two children who dig out scorpions because they want a pet;

who run away from the fierce Jersey bull just to see whether they *can* actually do it; and who lie down in the veldt, smeared with cow dung and pretend to be dead, to find out whether the vultures will peck out their eyes. This is a dangerous world, where the vulnerable fairy-tale princess (she who suffered so because of the tiny pea under her mattress) would have died a quick death. It is a simple story, because it is the story of my own life, and the things my black friend and I got up to.

The reaction to this book was astounding. Both children and adults, *especially* adults, read the book and reacted with excessive praise. I have no idea why, because it isn’t a book in which the history of South Africa is rewritten. And it isn’t a book with a magical-realistic element. I think the success of the book lies in the fact that I looked at the world of the child through politically uncontaminated eyes.

I am not asking writers to go back in time, or to be old-fashioned. I am asking them to go back to their roots and discover the future. Before long I am going to huddle beside Ugogo’s story-time fire again. I am going to delve into the world of fantasy that was opened for me by my Ugogo’s “Indaba.” I am going to surrender myself to the wonder-world of Hlankanyana and the Impundulu, the Inyati and the Indlovu.

And then I’ll tackle cold reality.

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Instructional Ingredients: Educational Chefs Share Tricks of the Trade

Every profession has some special tricks of the trade that separate ordinary fare from professional fare. For example, every restaurant owner (and processed food manufacturer) knows that almost any dish tastes better than homemade if you add a little bit—or a lot—of extra sugar and salt, and serve with a garnish of choice. The same holds true for instruction. Only here, the resulting fare not only looks and tastes better to our “customers,” but it is also better for them, and, ideally, will have them recommending it to others.

We will now suggest several *amplifying instructional ingredients* that we have collected during our own years of research and practical experience, which have largely been in the area of literacy, higher order thinking, and learning. The special advantage in presenting these as *ingredients*, rather than as full-scale instructional methodologies, can be explained—to stay with our chef metaphor—by a comparison with the popular *fusion cuisine*. Fusion, a global trend in restaurants, selectively combines ingredients from vastly different cultures and geographical regions into hybrid dishes that are intriguing as well as nutritionally balanced and satisfying, just as knowledge should be. We believe, in effect, that each of the instructional ingredients presented here, and the many more that can follow, can be applied to other disciplines, often across age/grade levels (from kindergarten through college), with a variety of learners (including gifted, remedial, and second-language

learners), and in a variety of situations (tutorial, small group, or whole class). The four examples presented offer progress in learning through progress in literacy.

1. Facilitative Pretending— Acting So Can Make it So

While children’s play has been a focus of study for generations, it has only recently come into consideration again as a means of promoting literacy and academic learning (Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2002). While play may appear to offer an inviting means of teaching without appearing to teach, it is not so easy to achieve in practice. It requires considerable thought and planning on the part of the teacher.

Facilitative Role Play (FRP), or more simply Facilitative Pretending, is based on a simple idea. The goal is to get students to act the part of competent, socially poised, expert readers, writers, and thinkers, because doing so requires them to carefully watch and think about what the “experts” do, and helps them better coach themselves. This heightened attentiveness coupled with motivated self-teaching seems to raise students’ levels of performance and learning almost immediately. Facilitative Pretending is the child of a rich parentage, including play therapy, as originally outlined by Virginia Axline in 1946, and psychodrama therapy, as discussed by J.L. Moreno in 1947. This technique survives today in modified form in several reading/language arts methods and practices.

These include

1. *Peer Teaching*, as when a fifth grader who is a relatively poor reader is asked to teach a kindergartner or first grader to read, and in the process considerably improves his own reading.
2. *Reciprocal Questioning (ReQuest)* (Manzo, 1969a, 1969b), where a student is urged to ask questions the way a teacher might, and does so with great alacrity, with the result that he pays closer attention to how teachers ask questions, and therefore to the material from which the questions are drawn.
3. *Radio Reading*, where children are asked to practice reading a section of text, with a partner and/or at home, until they feel comfortable enough to stand up in class and read it as if they were a radio announcer.
4. *InQuest* (Schmitt, 1988), where students play the role of reporters and must question their way to successful understanding of a story or nonfiction piece.
5. *Sociodramatic Play* (Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2002), where teachers or other adults step into the middle of child-created plays to direct attention to literacy artifacts.
6. *Invented Spellings and Pretend Reading*, two basic routines of Emergent Literacy that encourage self-teaching, the sine qua non of all instruction.

The essential power of such role-playing methods seems to be in converting what students do most naturally into enactment of more competent models, incorporating higher level skills than they feel themselves capable of outside of the dramatization. This process, it has been noted, seems to be instrumental in getting children to internalize the external coaching of teachers and models of more competent peers (Manzo, 1969b; Manzo & Manzo, 2002; Vygotsky 1978). In addition, Facilitative

Figure 1 ReQuest Procedure, in Brief

This procedure was designed to teach students how to set their own purpose for reading almost any selection through a self-directed inquiry, as opposed to the next best form of “frontloading,” whereby the teacher gives students a reason/purpose for which to read.

Steps in the ReQuest Procedure

- Step 1** Both teacher and students read only the title and first sentence of a selection and look at any pictures or graphics that are part of the introduction.
- Step 2** The teacher tells students to ask as many questions as they wish about the first sentence, the title, and/or pictures or graphics. The teacher turns his or her copy of the selection face down, but students may continue to look at their copies. Students are told that they should ask the kinds of questions that they think a teacher might ask. (This permits students to ask ego-protective questions since they need not reveal whether they know the answers to their own questions.)
- Step 3** When all student questions have been fully and politely answered, the teacher turns his or her book face up while students are instructed to turn theirs face down. The teacher then asks as many additional questions (about the title, first sentence, and illustrations) as seems appropriate to bring about a sense of focus and purpose for reading the selection. The last of these questions (and the last question in subsequent question sets) should simply be, “What do you suppose the remainder of this selection will be about?”
- Step 4** The next few sentences are handled in the same way, with the students again leading off the questioning, followed by teacher questioning, and concluding with, “What do you suppose the remainder of this selection will be about?” The number of sentences covered altogether should be based on the teacher’s judgment: the ReQuest activity should conclude as soon as a *plausible* purpose for reading has been evolved, but should not last more than about 10 minutes.
- Step 5** At the conclusion of the ReQuest activity, the students are encouraged to continue reading the selection silently, keeping in mind the purpose that has been developed.
- Step 6** Following silent reading, the teacher should first ask the evaluative question, “Did we focus on the right purpose?”

The reasons for asking this final question are worth noting: First, it helps to overcome what has been called “confirmation bias” (Garrison & Hoskisson, 1989), or the tendency to conclude only what has been predicted. Second, it helps to keep the focus of instruction on the development of effective strategies for independent reading and learning, more than on merely comprehending a given selection. Third, it further develops the important metacognitive habit of monitoring one’s own comprehension and strategies while reading (Manzo, Manzo, & Albee, 2004).

Pretending tends to add an element of practice to tasks that students otherwise try to do without rehearsal, hence adding the simple power of *practice effects*.

2. Multiple Perspective Writing

Consider the potential of combining the 400-year-old European tradition of requiring brief writing assignments with a broadly defined form of Facilitative Pretending that requires thinking from multiple perspectives. Brief writing following instruction has been known to take an instructional methodology of modest impact, such as K-W-L (Know, Want to know, Learned), and convert it into a robust method with the simple addition of some form of postreading processing, such as mapping or summary writing (Carr & Ogle, 1987). Accordingly, we have identified several forms of brief, annotative writing, which we present in the context of a strategy called REAP (Manzo, Manzo, & Albee, 2002). REAP is a simple form of teaching multiple means of responding to text, lecture, and media experiences. This multiple-perspective form of teaching and responding offers empirically supported potential for taking ordinary classroom writing to another level and implicitly teaches complex thinking, one of the primary objectives of a quality education.

REAP: Background and Backbone

REAP is primarily a cognitive enrichment approach that teaches students to think more precisely and deeply about what they read, by following the four-step strategy represented by its title:

- READ to get the writer's basic message
- ENCODE the message into your own words while reading
- ANNOTATE your analysis of the message by writing responses from several perspectives
- PONDER what you have read and written—first by reviewing it yourself, then by sharing and discussing it with others, and finally by reading the responses of others.

At the heart of the approach is a set of annotation types that range in roughly hierarchical order from a simple summary of the author's basic message to various perspectives for higher order critical and creative analysis. The first few REAP annotation types require *reconstructive* thinking—understanding and perceiving the essence of the author's meaning. The remaining types require *constructive* thinking—going beyond the author's intended meaning to form personal schema connections, applications, and variations that permit the learner to transfer information and ideas from one context to another. This hierarchy aids assessment and gives guidance to students in reaching up to higher levels, or down to more basic ones that may not yet have been mastered. Descriptions and examples of some of the basic annotation types are provided in Figure 2. Other types can be created and customized. For example, several teachers have had rewarding results using a *humorous* annotation (also in Figure 2).

3. Reciprocity (and Mental Modeling)

Reciprocity is an often overlooked cornerstone of effective cognitive modeling, or apprenticeship teaching. Generally, instructional reciprocity means providing opportunities for students to assertively, though nonaggressively, “poke back” and influence the direction of a lesson or dialogue, without causing the teacher to relinquish responsibility or control over lesson objectives (Manzo & Manzo, 1990a). Reciprocity is a seamless form of diagnostic teaching that permits teacher and student to home in on a “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978), or the region of greatest receptivity to instruction. Reciprocity also provides a subtle means for students to interject needed breaks, repetitions, and clarifications in instructional conversations. One of the side benefits is that teachers often learn nearly as much about teaching as students do about learning from each interaction.

“The Travelers and the Plane Tree”

Two Travelers were walking along a bare and dusty road in the heat of a midsummer’s day. Coming upon a large shade tree, they happily stopped to shelter themselves from the burning sun in the shade of its spreading branches. While they rested, looking up into the tree, one of them said to his companion, “What a useless tree this is! It makes no flowers and bears no fruit. Of what use is it to anyone?” The tree itself replied indignantly, “You ungrateful people! You take shelter under me from the scorching sun, and then, in the very act of enjoying the cool shade of my leaves, you abuse me and call me good for nothing!”

Reconstructive Annotations

- **Summary** states the basic message in brief form.
Travelers take shelter from the sun under a large tree. They criticize the tree for not making flowers or fruit. The tree speaks, and tells them that they are ungrateful people for taking shelter under her leaves and then criticizing her.
- **Telegram** briefly states the author’s basic theme with all unnecessary words removed—a crisp, telegram-like message.
Travelers rest under big tree. Travelers say tree is useless. Tree tells them off.
- **Heuristic** restates an attention-getting portion of the selection that makes the reader want to respond.
In this story, a tree talks back to people. The tree says, “You ungrateful people! You come and take shelter under me...and then...abuse me and call me good for nothing!”
- **Question** turns the main point into an organization question that the selection answers.
What if the things we use could talk back?

Constructive Annotations

- **Personal view** answers the question “How do your views and feelings compare with what the author says?”
We use resources like coal without thinking. Then we criticize it for damaging our lungs and dirtying our air. I guess kids sometimes use their parents the way the travelers used the tree, and then criticize them without thinking about their feelings.

- **Humorous** can vary from bringing a slight smile (usually by flirting with a naughty suggestion) to using jest to bring enlightenment.
I can just see that poor tree thinking, “I hope they’re about to stop here to seek shelter and not relief.”
- **Critical** begins by stating the author’s main point, then states whether the reader agrees, disagrees, or agrees in part with the author, and then briefly explains why.
Not every word spoken in criticism is meant that way. The travelers were just grumpy from the trip. The tree is too sensitive.
- **Contrary** states a logical alternative position, even though it may not be the one the student supports.
The travelers could be right, a better tree could produce something and also give shade.
- **Intention** states and briefly explains what the reader thinks was the author’s intention, plan, and purpose for writing the selection.
The author wants us to be more sensitive to the people and things we depend on—especially those we see and use often.
- **Motivation** states what might have caused the author to write the selection—the author’s personal agenda.
It sounds like the author may have felt used after having a bad experience with friends or family.
- **Discovery** states one or more practical questions that need to be answered before the accuracy or worth of the selection can be judged.
I wonder how many of us know when we are being “users.” We could take an anonymous poll to see how many class members secretly feel that they have been used and how many see themselves as users.
- **Creative** suggests different and perhaps better solutions or views and/or connections and applications to prior learning and experiences.
*This fable made me think that teachers are sometimes used unfairly. They give us so much, and then we put them down if they make a little mistake. They’re only human.
We should put this fable on the bulletin board where it will remind us not to be ungrateful “users.”
[How would you re-title this fable if you were writing it?] I’d call it “Travelers in the Dark,” to show that we go through life without knowing how many small “gifts” come to us along our way.*



Photo: PhotoDisc, Inc.

Strategic Parroting Yields Manifest Curiosity

In a study of kindergartners' "manifest curiosity," or inquiry modes expressed in questioning behavior, we came across one student who seemed to be totally devoid of all curiosity (Manzo & Legenza, 1975). The child was very attractive and attentive, yet seemed to be intent on standing idly by in neutral. In desperation, Legenza, one of the investigators, said to the child, "Here is a question that you could ask. Repeat it after me.... Now ask me that question." Legenza then proceeded to

answer the question fully and thoughtfully, as if the child had thought of it herself. After just a few such parroted questions, the child began to initiate her own twists on the strategic questions Legenza had modeled and thereafter to ask many of her own. The child had been transformed, at least in this situation, from an inert learner to one engaged in what we have called *epistemological inquiry*, or expressive knowledge seeking.

Palincsar, Brown, and Martin (1987) report equally remarkable success in Reciprocal Teaching episodes. They could not seem to impart the idea of having a student lead a discussion until they had one student mimic the teacher's discussion-leading statements. Thereafter, the discussion began to flow rather naturally.

These reports also seem to lend further credibility to Facilitative Pretending. A larger strategy for promoting classroom participation in this same way is called *Note Cue* (Manzo & Manzo, 1990). In *Note Cue*, students are given cards that essentially tell them precisely what to ask, answer, and comment on in a discussion following reading. The *Note Cue* cards then are faded to prompts on what they might say, and finally eliminated entirely for increasing numbers of children, until students have essentially been tutored in the complex art of learning through discussion.

4. Translation Questions

A Translation Question typically requires that a student be able to re-represent something presented in one symbolic form in another, or alternate, form. Translation involves taking one's ideas, which themselves may be incomplete, and beginning the public process of converting them to a clear, communicable form. This might be a charge to restate in one's own words something another student has said, or a written text. It could be a charge to convert a picture into descriptive words, or the inverse. Translation of inchoate notions into apprehendable words is one of the most challenging aspects of effective writing. At a clinical level, a translation question is a form of *diagnostic teaching*

and *instructional conversation*—easier to grasp than to execute.

There are several studies that have incidentally provided some insight into the typical level of usage by teachers of translation questions. Guszak (1967) found teachers using them less than 9% of the time in a conventional classroom setting. Manzo (1969) found a dramatic difference in utilization in a remedial/clinical setting between those using the Directed Reading Activity (Betts, 1957) (about 1% translation questions), and those using the ReQuest Procedure (about 9% translation questions) (Manzo, 1969a). So, it seems that the teaching approach affects the inclination to utilize this question type. One of the goals of the suggestions below is to detail more and better ways to promote the fruitful use of translation questions, questions directed by teacher to student, student to teacher, and, ideally, student to student.

Adding the Translation Ingredient

There are any number of ways to foster translation questioning. For example, the tutor might say, “Can you tell me in your own words what this phrase, or these words, mean in this sentence: [pointing to the words, or reading aloud] ‘Ellen left one of her lives behind?’” Or, “What do you suppose that picture says/illustrates?” Or, if ReQuest is being conducted in a group situation, the classroom teacher might say, “Who can restate Trish’s remark about ‘leaving lives behind’ in another way?”

A second way to build translation questions into oral language interactions is to make a personal commitment to essentially repeat a previously stated question (say what someone else has said in other words) at least twice in every period of classroom discussion. This should have the effect of allowing for comfortable repetition of a key point or bit of information without taking on the character of drill, while also encouraging greater attention to the discussion. If students begin to anticipate that they might be asked to *translate*, they are more likely to shift into a more active and possibly interactive mode. Students tend, as do we all,

to function in a quasi-passive mode when listening, expecting the speaker to repeat, underscore, and even explicitly tell us when something is sufficiently important that we should write it down.

Establishing a leitmotif of translation questions as part of one’s repertoire also provides a rather seamless way to support students with limited language proficiency, or other language and/or attention deficit problems. Importantly, this same essential pattern of questioning can be conducted at a prereading stage with pictures. Children are asked simply to tell what they see—translate the picture into words—and, along the way, to retranslate what was said by a prior student, which encourages them to listen carefully and learn acceptable (peer) language and poise from one another.

Another natural way for a teacher to encourage engagement with translation questions is to analyze proverbs and idioms, which naturally tend to say one thing at a simple, literal level and another at a more abstract level (Manzo, 1981). Introducing a new proverb each week, on the board or on a class website—with almost no other attention to it until Friday—has proven to be remarkably effective in our classes in promoting experience-rich discussion and abstract verbal reasoning (Manzo & Manzo, 1987).

Asking translation questions has a clear and positive impact on relevance and attention during aural-oral exchanges in a classroom. It is difficult to imagine anything else that could be done, at any price, that could have as powerful an effect on day-to-day teaching and learning as increasing the proportion of translation questions.

Quest Forward

The *instructional ingredients* described above resemble the Universal Strategies in Content Area Reading that we first articulated some time ago, and have refined more recently (Manzo, 1985; Manzo, Manzo, & Thomas, in press). It was with these ingredients in mind that we developed the Informal Reading-Thinking Inventory (Manzo, Manzo, & McKenna, 1995). Built on a familiar frame, this Informal Reading Inventory

is designed to simultaneously assess reading of, between, and beyond the lines, as well as several other crucial aspects of cognitive development.

As we have gone about identifying the four Amplifying Instructional Ingredients described here, many more potential ingredients have occurred to us. It will be interesting to learn from our readers how they view and utilize those described, and others that might have occurred to them. You can join our open-architecture, e-collaborative (ad)venture at <http://LiteracyLeaders.com>, a free-access website that we maintain largely for fellow professional educators, but also for the general public.

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Strategic Moves



Developing Classroom Talk

Geoff Ward

In the introduction to the first Strategic Moves column, William Brozo wrote, “When teachers think and ‘move’ strategically they deliberately plan experiences for and interactions with students that encourage and support active learning” (2003). In the most recent column, he illustrated this idea with three ways to engage students in effective discussions (2004). The aim is not merely to get students talking, but to have them talking in ways that lead to better learning. In this column, I suggest some of the many strategies (e.g., Ward, 1994) that develop classroom talk into a more useful tool for learning by helping students to participate more actively.

As you develop your use of the strategies, reflect on these three issues:

- *Why do you want your students to talk as part of their learning?* If you do not have a real commitment to the idea that classroom talk facilitates learning, then you may worry about the amount of noise that occurs and about the style of interaction that is going on. A class that is actively involved in on-task discussion is rarely too noisy.
- *What is the talk for?* The great thing about effective classroom talk is that it is always doing at least two things at once. It is developing oral language skills (and thinking and interaction skills, too); and it is developing subject matter or content knowl-

edge, because the class always has to talk about something.

- *What factors might make your class, or some students in it, reluctant to talk?* Look at your own beliefs about talk, at the messages that you convey to your students, and at the amount of talking that you do that could have been part of their activity. When you identify aspects of your classroom that you can change, find ways to reduce the factors that inhibit effective talk.

Sometimes the preservice teachers with whom I work are told by their supervising teachers, “You can’t do group work with these students.” I argue that the more difficult it may seem to break a class up into smaller groups, the more important it is to teach them how to handle such class activities. Group work and classroom talk may both require specific teaching, preferably through building up small successes, rather than trying to start with a grand and complicated session.

Start Small and Focused

At least part of the answer to the problem is to get started well at the beginning of the year. My favorite way to do that is with a very simple strategy I call *Group Prediction*. While you are reading an interesting story to the class—and, of course, it is valuable to read aloud to children often—stop at a significant moment in the story and ask the class two questions: “What do you think is going to happen next?” and “How do you think the story will turn out in the end?” You may think

of other questions, but these work well. Before accepting any answers, ask the students to turn to the people next to them and discuss these two questions. It is easiest to do this when the students are sitting close to each other. Give them only a minute or so to talk. You will overhear some of the talk while you wait for them, and you might use that information to select someone to present his or her view to the class. Or you can ask for a couple of volunteers. The real issue is that the class has had a brief and focused group discussion. If the story is interesting they will be eager for you to carry on with it, and they will be tuned in to what does happen next. Stop and ask your questions again, if possible, later in the same story. “Now what do you think will happen next, and how will the story turn out in the end?” You should avoid putting emphasis on which predictions matched what actually happened. The value is in thinking about how authors make choices, not in *being right*.

This strategy, if your comments are well directed, is effective in getting students to base their expectations on actual information from the particular story and on their experience of how stories usually work. This is a valuable technique for improving reading and writing skills, and you also have something—a brief class interaction—to build upon for group discussion skills. Little organization is needed because the groups do not need a leader or an elaborate discussion plan. You have made it easier for your class to achieve success by keeping the

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plan simple. Congratulate the class on their good discussion skills, and next time you use this activity, you can preface it by commenting that you are impressed with how well they work in groups.

“How will we know when we have good discussion skills?”

This question works so well in classrooms that I use it to identify an instructional strategy. I started thinking about this strategy when I was a preservice teacher myself. My supervising teacher would manipulate his class into thinking that they were generating a list of “Rules for good discussions,” when they were really just reproducing the same list that already existed on a faded old chart of his. For example, if someone said, “Always put your hand up if you want to speak,” he reworded that to say, “Raise your hand and wait to be asked to speak,” because that was the wording on his chart. I vowed that I would never do that to a class of mine when I began teaching.

When I first asked my class this question, “How will we know when we have good discussion skills?” I did not realize how powerful my strategy would be. One advantage of this question is that it leads to positive wording. Students will suggest that in a good discussion everyone will get a chance to talk or will be interested in what others are saying. You do not have to gather all of the ideas in one session, and you do not have to make a wall chart to list the ideas. The secret of the strategy is that you and the class have

something to aim toward, something that not only provides for achievable outcomes but also can and will be refined as the skills develop. As students get better at discussion, they will also get better at recognizing what good discussion is.

The classic example of this strategy at work in my class came one day when we were discussing an issue and Robert said, “Can we go back to what Mary was saying, because I don’t think that we finished with that?” Immediately, Gary said, “You know when we were talking about how we would know when we had good discussion skills? Well, I think that what Robert just said was a good example of that.” I could not have agreed more!

An idea worth reflecting on is that the best instructional strategies are ways of working that your students ultimately can take over for themselves. If the only way you can get an activity to work is by doing all the work yourself, perhaps it is not an instructional strategy at all.

Use Focused Discussions

Students who are reluctant to participate in discussions often feel that they have nothing to say. Teachers do not always recognize that some of the common activities for talk, particularly “Show and Tell,” are actually very unsuitable for developing classroom talk. Almost every time I have observed such a session, I have seen students who are bored and uninterested even as the teacher strives to keep them paying attention.

Students do need to talk in classrooms. One way to allow for talk is through focused discussions. Sometimes these can be prepared in advance. One of the most amazing discussions that I have ever been involved in was when my own class of 10- and 11-year-old students was studying the Middle Ages. I told them that in one week’s time we would have a discussion on medieval punishments. By the time we got to the discussion, a number of them had done quite a lot of research in their own. One student had made a model of a ducking stool. Others had found or made pictures. We had a very lively discussion. Note that it was not a formal debate about an issue; it just explored a focused topic that caught the imagination of the class, and it was assisted by the fact that it related to the topic of our current study. It would not have worked as well if it had depended on my providing all of the information.

Another type of focused discussion requires less preparation. There are many topics that can provide a good focus. For example, you might say that the next day the class will be talking about leaves. Students are encouraged to bring in an interesting leaf, preferably one that is no longer attached to a living plant. In some geographic areas a great variety of leaves would be readily available outside the school. You can ask the students to describe their leaves, and then work with them to put together a list of possible attributes. After some talk about attributes and related terminology, a student may then be able



to say something like, “My leaf is large; fairly smooth on the top surface, but rougher on the bottom surface and serrated on the edges; variegated, though most of the color has faded; it has alternating veins; and it is starting to decay.” I find that the discussion flows best when there are built-in interactions during the session. For example, it is interesting to ask students to find a classmate whose leaf is most like their own. Interesting discussions can ensue when two students have paired up but a third tries to convince one of them that his leaves are a better match. Such activities also give you the chance to observe your less confident students, and to help them in negotiating their place. You might provide a movement opportunity by asking the students to form a line of biggest to smallest leaves. Many language skills develop from these discussions, including the realization that “large” is a relative term. Once when students had settled on what they considered to be a truly large leaf, I produced an enormous banana frond. You will find that your students develop their ability to observe more carefully as they participate in deciding issues like which leaves might have fallen off the plant earliest. One of the most important reasons why this type of activity works so well is that it involves changes in the kinds of conversation and attention that are required. At some stages, the discussion includes the whole class; at other times, pairs or threesomes might discuss amongst themselves.

Final Thoughts

If you employ focused discussions that give your students opportunities for active participation, you will not only find yourself observing, supporting, and facilitating, you will also find that you are fascinated by the talk and the ideas. You will become more adept at thinking up ways to make the talk more interesting, and you will be more alert to suggestions from the students. If students are really discussing, then it will always be interesting. Boring discussion is an oxymoron.

One final suggestion: The two Strategic Moves columns on developing talk in the classroom provide merely a taste of the wonderful array of possible strategies. You can learn to use them by reading what we have written here and trying the ideas for yourself. But if

you really want to develop your skills in this area, strive to become a better discussant yourself.

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German and Bulgarian groups launch partnership

IRA affiliates Deutsche Gesellschaft für Lesen und Schreiben (DGLS) and the Bulgarian Reading Association (BulRA) have launched a partnership, reports DGLS President Renate Valtin. This partnership emphasizes several specific activities:

- DGLS and BulRA exchange information on the development of their associations’ status and activities on a regular basis.
- The groups exchange publications (yearbooks, magazines, and journals) on a regular basis
- The groups plan to exchange presenters when organizing conferences and seminars
- The groups will place emphasis on promoting the European Exchange Programme
- DGLS is sponsoring IRA membership for two BulRA board members

[Source: *Reading Today*, 21(4)—Feb/March 2004]

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Critical Thoughts on Critical Thinking

Serghei Lisenco

In Moldova today more and more people are talking about critical thinking: politicians, sociologists, representatives of public-service institutions, and, of course, educators. It is considered good form to discuss “the development of critical thinking in a certain teacher’s classes” or “creating conditions for fostering critical thinking in our young people.” The term *critical thinking* appears more and more often in combination with concepts such as *democracy* or *modern society*. All this talk has stimulated teachers’ interest in professional development courses on critical thinking. As a result, teachers and school administrators are beginning to employ the strategies they learned in these courses, and many of them come back to the courses for a second and third time. All the participants have their personal motives, but I think each of them is fundamentally seeking to answer the same questions: “What exactly is *critical thinking*? What can it do for me personally?” They gradually form a concept of *critical thinking* during the course. As they teach they begin to fill in various details and nuances, but there remains something indefinable, like the outlines of a wooded shoreline on a foggy morning.

The idea for writing this article came to me rather unexpectedly. I was involved in teaching a series of workshops for teachers in Tiraspol designed primarily to develop the participants’ writing

and editing skills. After several sessions the participants had acquired some experience with methods and strategies for developing critical thinking. We then asked them to write an essay on *Why it is necessary to develop critical thinking in learners today*. This essay was to provide the raw materials for perfecting their writing and editing skills. As the instructor I set to work alongside them. Soon we had a first draft, and we began a discussion. In answering my colleagues’ questions I suddenly realized what was really bothering me. I wanted to speak about all the things you need to be prepared for if you set out to think critically within the present education System (with a capital S to emphasize its great strength and relative independence from its participants). I wanted to address not so much the joys (which are obvious and easily accepted, even welcomed), but rather the doubts and questions awaiting anyone who ventures to try new methods. Perhaps if I can analyze my own impressions it will help some of my colleagues to sort through their own feelings and understand what is going on in their classes, schools, and their own experiences.

The initial results from using the new student-centered approach are energizing. Children forget about laziness, teachers forget about weariness, everybody works hard, and communication is lively. I am assuming here that the students already have some experience of expressing their ideas, debating among themselves, and thinking independ-

ently. *And* I am assuming that the teacher–student relationship is based on mutual trust and respect, *and* that these students still consider school a significant part of their lives. If, on the other hand, none of this holds true—there has been no freedom of thought or speech, no relationship of trust, and the students see school as a place where they are obliged to serve time—then all those things that seemed so interesting and attractive during the training sessions turn out to be incomprehensible, useless, and laborious in classroom practice.

Let us assume that the new methods work well for you. You and your students are happy with the results. However, after some time Her Majesty the System starts arranging things to her own taste, causing widespread suffering. You begin to realize that the new methods do not allow you to communicate enough factual knowledge for your students to pass the examination. Until now you have always been so efficient about it—and now you find there is just not enough time! Pretty soon your “top” students—the ones with excellent memories who are used to getting high grades simply by reproducing the teacher’s words—also recognize this problem. And they ask you, “What good will all this discussion do us at exam time? Why waste time on assumptions and hypotheses, most of which turn out to be mere rubbish? Just tell us the right answer, so we can memorize it.”

You and your students also begin to notice gaps in their knowledge: Certain concepts, names,



events, etc., are missing. And the question is, *Who is to blame?* No doubt students in all parts of the world would say the same thing: *You never told us that!* True enough, you did not tell them, or dictate to them, or instruct them to write it down (as you used to). Is it your fault? What did you do wrong? Was it the critical thinking?

This situation illustrates the conflict between the desire to develop critical thinking and the existing System's demands for results. The important thing is not to decide who is to blame, but to decide whose side *you* are on: Will you stay with the System or go with the people who are working to change it?

Now, about your colleagues and administrators. At first everything usually seems fine. An atmosphere of freedom in the classroom, group work, lively discussions, new strategies—it's all just great. After all, it's the latest fashion. But you cannot wear your Sunday best every day! Sometimes the noise from your class leaks into the next room, and your colleague's surprised (or indignant) face appears in your doorway. Someone reminds you with a kind smile, *Business before pleasure!* Then comes the question (or accusation, if you are not so lucky), "Why aren't you following the curriculum?" You also hear pointed, more general remarks: "Our system of education has produced many world-famous scientists (and we are no fools ourselves)." "Games are all very nice, but learning is a serious business." "An organized system, however imperfect, is better

than random, isolated episodes, however brilliant."

There are additional burdens on you, as well. You have limited experience in planning new activities, and the available textbooks do not lend themselves to critical reflection. You begin to feel your hands are fuller than ever. Now you need to spend more time planning each lesson. Again you are forced to choose: Do you work within the familiar requirements of the System, or do you attempt to change your professional behavior at great expense to your time, your nerves, and your relationship with your colleagues?

The above-mentioned challenges are only the beginning. Having some flexibility, the System will permit you to solve some of these problems (especially since the solution depends largely on you, your energy, and your flexibility). Your students may support you. Even the administration may be sympathetic and accepting of your somewhat unpredictable teaching style. But don't be too optimistic. Still to come is a whole new level of "second-echelon" problems, which you will soon realize you cannot solve on your own.

You teach your students to reflect, you develop their intellectual skills, and you help them formulate a personal worldview. But the standardized test writers expect your students to demonstrate factual knowledge, first and foremost. How can you influence the examination policy? How can you face your students *after* the exam? After all, it was you who taught them to believe in themselves and

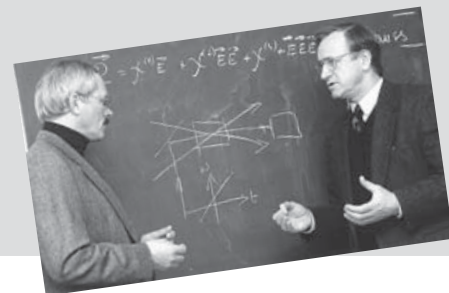
assured them of their right to make mistakes.

Your students will come to you with their disappointments. They will tell you that the freedom of thought you nurtured and encouraged has brought them trouble—that the real world plays by other rules and punishes anyone who tries to change these rules. They will expect an answer. What will you say?

You might even find yourself bored and dissatisfied if you ever attend a course, seminar, or teachers' meeting where participants are expected to sit respectfully and quietly instead of actively participating. You will think, *This must be how my students feel as they try to absorb the huge amounts of knowledge demanded by the System.* Think of your own experience at school—have you ever made use of most of the things you worked so hard to learn for your exams? This means that the amount of knowledge required by the System should be reduced considerably. No doubt this idea appeals to you with regard to content areas other than your own, and you feel competent to define the minimum requirements for the other subjects. But you would not be comfortable performing this task for your own beloved subject, be it history, literature, or geography. It would be so hard to decide what the students really need and what they can do without! So now you have a taste of how difficult it is to go against the System—the very system that molded you as a specialist in your field.

When you have coped with these problems, you still cannot relax, for there will be other chal-

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allenges to follow. What are they? I myself do not know. I am still fighting my “second echelon” problems. And I am sure that this level is not the last.

Now let us draw some conclusions.

What did the System demand from us before, and what does it still demand from us today? That we accept its rules and always behave in accordance with them. If we always conform to the System’s demands, then who is responsible for the success or failure of our efforts? The System is.

What does critical thinking demand from us? That we face the challenges involved in changing the System. Who will take responsibility for the decisions? No one but ourselves.

What are the System’s strengths? Its stability and predictability. But these are also its weaknesses.

Why do we find it so cheering to dispense with the current System? Because we feel free in thought and action. Why is it sometimes painful to follow the principles of critical thinking? Because we are forced to shoulder responsibility for so many things—for the changes we cause in society, our students, and ourselves.

“We are responsible for those who we have tamed,” wrote Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. In what way are we responsible for the people whom we have “tamed” into thinking critically? First, I think, we must never present ourselves to them as the experts. And we must not hide the fact that the world is not always ready for new ideas, and may even punish the innovators. We can only help them recognize this hard truth: Not only do they have freedom of

choice, but they also must take full responsibility for their choices.

What are our civic and personal responsibilities? We must always be searching, and always be prepared to change, if necessary, ourselves and our perceptions of the world. We must be able to admit our mistakes, but we must also be able to stand up for our beliefs. We must support our like-minded colleagues, but not hide behind their opinions. And we must never expect someone else—be it a government minister, a principal, or the author of a book—to solve our problems. It is up to us to create the necessary conditions for a solution, to seek out the people who can make the necessary decisions, and to suggest possible alternatives.

It can be scary to start something new. We do not know what lies ahead: What if we cannot rely on past experience to answer the questions that arise?

Think back on your own life. Weren’t there times when you had to begin everything anew, under difficult and unfamiliar conditions? And didn’t you feel pride and satisfaction when you managed to overcome those difficulties? I hope these recollections will give you confidence. With confidence and critical thinking, you *can* change the System.

Alumni, Professors, and Students of Central Asia Discuss New Educational Accreditation System

On 19 November, 46 alumni, professors, and students from 14 cities of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan participated in a virtual chat entitled “Academic Credits Technology: Problems and Solutions,” as one of many International Education Week events held at IATP [Internet Access and Training Program] access sites in Central Asia. The ministries of education in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are considering a move to an American-style, credit-hour-based university system. Changing Central Asian universities to an internationally recognized system of accreditation will make it possible for students to study abroad, change fields of study, and transfer credits. EdNet (USAID) has worked with the Ministries of Education in Central Asia and has been providing training and consultation to local university staff in Kazakhstan regarding accreditation technology. They used the regional chat platform to explain the advantages of the system and how to implement it at local universities. Professors learned how to grade and count credit hours, and students learned how a course transcript could be used. The log of the chat [in Russian] is available at <http://www.alumni.kz/?id=4&sendnews=1653&text=0>

[Source: IATP]

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Writing for Thinking Classroom

Thinking Classroom (also published in Russian as *Peremena*) serves as an international forum of exchange among teachers, teacher educators, and others interested in democratic teaching practices. It seeks to encourage professional development, research, and reflection. Authors are invited to submit articles that focus on active inquiry, student-centered learning, alternative assessment, and other aspects of educational change. Due to the international nature of the journal, articles should address issues that appeal to a wide audience, and terms or examples that are specific to a particular country or region should be explained in the text.

Thinking Classroom strives to maintain a balance of practical and theoretical information. The writing should take the form of a narrative, rather than a formal research report. Examples from classroom experience, quotations from colleagues or students, or examples of students' work can help communicate ideas to journal readers.

In addition to original submissions, *Thinking Classroom* will consider for publication articles that have appeared previously in national journals with limited circulation, to present these works to a wider international audience.

Format for Submissions

- Submissions are accepted in English or Russian.
- Articles should not exceed 4,000 words in length.
- Articles should be submitted electronically, preferably in .rtf format as an attachment to e-mail, to **bmichaels@reading.org**.
- The full name(s) of the author(s) should be included on a cover sheet, but this information should not appear in the body of the manuscript, as submissions are reviewed anonymously. The cover sheet should also include complete author contact information (**postal address and e-mail address**).
- References to articles or books cited must be complete. For journal articles include author, date of publication, title of article, title of journal, volume number, and page numbers (where article appeared). For books include author, year of publication, title, location and name of publisher. Additional details and examples can be found online at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_ap.html
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- The editors rely on a system of anonymous peer review to help them select articles for publication.

Letters to the Editor, **Reviews** of books or websites, and contributions to **Look Who's Talking** should also be sent to **bmichaels@reading.org**.

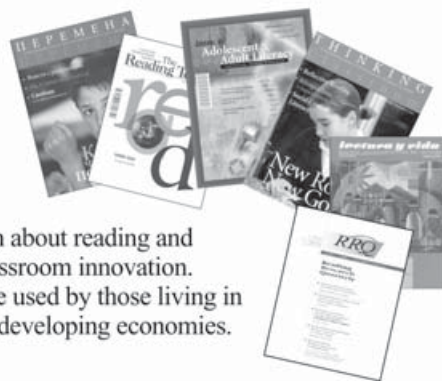
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