

The Oklahoma Reader

Volume 51 Issue 1, Winter 2015
ISSN 0030-1833s

Sierra Leone Northern Polytechnic March 2014.

Jeanie Cozens, William Edwards, and faculty from Northern Polytechnic along some of the administrators from Catholic Relief Services who is the prime contractor on the Food for Education grant.



The Oklahoma Reader

Volume 51 No 1 Winter 2015

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Volume 51 No 1 Winter 2015

The journal of the Oklahoma Reading Association, an affiliate of the International Reading Association

The Oklahoma Reading Association (an affiliate of the International Reading Association) publishes *The Oklahoma Reader* two times a year. Members of the Oklahoma Reading Association will receive *The Oklahoma Reader* as a part of their membership. *The Oklahoma Reader* is available to libraries and schools on the Oklahoma Reading Association website at <http://www.oklahomareadingassociation.org/>.

The Oklahoma Reader is published for members of the Oklahoma Reading Association and all others concerned with reading. Because *The Oklahoma Reader* serves as an open forum, its contents do not necessarily reflect or imply endorsement of the ORA, its officers, or its members.

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The Oklahoma Reader invites teachers, graduate students, college and university instructors, and other reading professionals to submit original articles related to all areas of reading and literacy education. *The Oklahoma Reader* has a large readership of classroom teachers and teacher educators. The editorial board encourages articles about classroom practice and current issues related to literacy education. *The Oklahoma Reader* also publishes research syntheses and reviews, original research, and reviews of professional materials related to literacy.

Specific instructions for authors are described on page 26.



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(www.reading.org)

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Letter from the Editor

Where has the winter gone? Change in the weather is only one of many changes Oklahoma teachers of reading are experiencing this year. New leadership in the Oklahoma State Department of Education promises increased involvement of teachers and the respect of those who dedicate their lives to educating children in our beloved state. Dr. Joy Hoffmeister has reached out to many literacy teachers and asked input for pedagogy, assessment, and other aspects involved with reading. New standards apparently are on the way. No matter what standards are presented, Oklahoma teachers will ensure all students become lifelong readers and writers. Changes in assessment are prevalent. Not having the 'field test' for the fifth-grade writing test this year was such a blessing for children in Oklahoma. Amidst all of these changes, one constant remains – Oklahoma has the most wonderful teachers in the nation!

As spring approaches, reading teachers usually reflect on what has been done and remains yet to do before the close of school. Oklahoma teachers are masters of supporting a love of reading and writing. This winter issue of *The Oklahoma Reader* addresses the complexity of teaching reading in a variety of ways. As you read this issue, I hope you find many ideas to try!

As always, I am encouraging everyone to share the activities you are using in your classrooms that are working with your learners. I'm always happy to hear from our readers and to read your articles and teacher tips. Happy Spring!!

Dr. Stephan E. Sargent





This is a Socratic Circle discussion. The participant is passing out a new story to read.

Partnerships in Literacy: Literacy Workshop Experience in Sierra Leone

By

William L. Edwards & Jeanie Cozens

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Abstract: *Two faculty employed in a southwest Missouri university facilitated workshops with college instructors at a government polytechnic teaching college in central Sierra Leone. The training was done under the auspices of the International Reading Association. Two workshops lasting four days each were conducted in May 2013 and March 2014. A total of 61 instructors from the college were trained in basic reading instruction and assessment for beginning readers as well as comprehension and vocabulary for older students currently attending classes at the college. The mean (average) participant pre-test score for the Workshop II constructed response was 5.35 out of 15.00 (36%). (The average participant post-test score for the constructed response was 9.5 out of 15.00 (63%). Performance indicators were met as all of the 61 participants in the two workshops were able to describe at least one new teaching technique learned in the training. Project partners include the USDA Food for Education, Catholic Relief Services and the International Reading Association.*

About Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is approximately the size of South Carolina. The country encompasses 70,000 square kilometers of rainforests, mountains, grasslands, beaches, marshes, swamps, and rivers. Sierra Leone is positioned on the southwest corner of West Africa (CIA, 2014). Bordered by Guinea to the north and northwest and by Liberia to the east and southeast, Sierra Leone has had a long history of friendly relations with both neighbors. Sierra Leone was originally settled by the Portuguese and later

colonized by the British. In 1462, the Portuguese explorer, Pedro da Cintra, named the mountains towering over coastal Sierra Leone, the *Serra Lyoa* or Lion Mountains. The British maintained a commercial trading presence in Sierra Leone for over a century before the country became a British colony in 1800. It remained under British protection until its independence in 1958.

In their recent history Sierra Leone became embroiled in a lengthy civil war in 1992. Despite the end of their ten-year civil war in 2001, Sierra Leone is still recovering economically and socially. Progress has been slow, but progress is evident. Substantial donations in resources and expertise from many nations have helped Sierra Leone once again work toward taking its place as a stable and productive nation.



This group of instructors is planning the output for a collaborative learning structure. They will take what they've discussed and write it on a poster paper and share with the class.

Introduction

The workshops for lecturers from Northern Polytechnic College located in Makeni, Sierra Leone took place over the period of May 17 - 20, 2013 and March 18 - 21, 2014. The overall objective of the workshops was to provide support to lecturers who train beginning teachers in the area of reading instruction. The number of participants trained in the two workshops equaled 61. Thirty-one instructors were trained during the May 2013 workshop and 30 instructors were trained during the March 2014 workshop.

The workshops were funded through a \$15 million dollar grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Dole-McGovern Food for Education* Program. The primary grant recipient for the Food for Education grant was Catholic Relief Services (CRS). The Catholic Relief Services are the official overseas relief and development agency of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. CRS has had a continual presence in Sierra Leone since 1963. Through Catholic Relief Services, the

International Reading Association was invited to provide technical expertise to the literacy component of the grant.

Two presenters with expertise and experience in the area of reading instruction planned and facilitated the workshop. The presenters have combined university teaching experience of over 20 years and combined K-12 classroom and reading specialist experience of approximately 39 years. Both facilitators hold earned doctorates and tenured faculty standing at their university.

Workshop Format

The participants were divided into two smaller groups in order to provide a better instructional experience where participation would be maximized. The first presenter focused on the primary workshop deliverables of teaching reading to young people and how to assess student performance. To accomplish this objective, the major components of reading instruction consisting of *phonemic awareness*, *phonics*, *vocabulary*, *fluency*, and *comprehension* (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) were addressed. The second presenter focused on working with struggling readers and provided the workshop participants with instruction in word sorting activities to assist with phonics and vocabulary instruction. Higher order and critical thinking skills were presented through a Socratic Circle format (Stumpf, 1999). This provided opportunities to teach close reading skills to aid comprehension. Different strategies were used to involve participants in teaching vocabulary and comprehension through the use of Socratic Circles. After two days, the groups alternated presenters.

The workshop began on the first day as a whole group activity. Workshop participants were welcomed by both the Northern Polytechnic administrator and the Catholic Relief Services staff. The CRS/IRA expectations for the workshop were explained to the participants as well as the rationale as to why the topics for instruction were selected.

Participant Assessment

After formalities, a pretest was administered using a constructed response (short essay) that asked each participant to identify ways that each of the five reading components (vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, phonics, and phoneme awareness) were being taught in their teacher training classes. Upon completion of the pretest, the participants were divided into two working groups until the final day. On the final day,

participants were again asked to complete the constructed responses in the five instructional areas and to provide specifics as to how they would teach in those areas of literacy instruction (Learning Point Associates, 2005).



The participants are working on a collaborative poster project with Dr. Cozens' group.

Workshop Activities

During the workshop each component of reading was addressed separately. Participants were provided a theoretical basis, definitions, strategies, and activities for instruction. Suggested assessments were also provided.

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness was defined as the basic understanding that speech is composed of a series of individual sounds and that it is the ability to segment, blend, and manipulate sounds (University of Oregon: Center on Teaching and Learning, 2012). Strategies presented included identifying sounds within the words (beginning, middle, end), categorizing sounds in words, substituting sounds in words, blending sounds to form words and segmenting sounds in words. Activities included games such as "snap and clap" rhymes, "rhyming word sit down", songs and poems (Patti's Electronic Classroom, n.d.; Raffi, 1996).

An assessment to determine phonemic awareness was taught to all workshop participants. This consisted of the teacher sitting next to or behind the child being assessed and asking them to identify if words were identical or different. For example, participants would practice reading sets of words such as *pin* and *pen* and asked their seat partner if they could detect a difference in the words. Participants were shown how correct and incorrect responses could be recorded to determine the young child's understanding of this critical beginning reading skill.

We observed that participants were not familiar with the concept of phonemic awareness. At the end of the two workshops, a substantial number of

participants still identified this early reading concept as part of symbol recognition rather than sound distinction of various phonemes in a word.

Teaching and assessing subtle differences in sound patterns seemed unfamiliar to many of the participants. How well these early reading skills can be transferred by the workshop participants to their students still needs to be observed.

Phonics

This component of reading was identified to the workshop participants as the graphic representation of the sounds of language. Phonics was identified as the relationship between phonemes and graphemes. Basic phonics generalizations were presented to each group as well as activities for practice such as creating class charts, creating a book of words representing a phonics concept and locating words exemplifying phonics patterns (Blevins, W., 1996; KIZCLUB, 2013).



These faculty members from Northern Polytechnic are answering some information questions on a literacy assignment given by Dr. Cozens.

Participants were also introduced to spelling assessments that will aid in spelling, vocabulary, and word study (Pearson Publishing, 2013). Participants were divided into groups of two and three and asked to sort by specific patterns (Bear, et. al., 2008). The presenter checked several times to see how they were progressing. At the end of the word sorting activity, follow-up activities were introduced to the participants in order to enhance and reinforce the initial pattern sorting. We observed that the workshop participants appeared to be comfortable with phonics instruction. How well the new phonics strategies learned in the workshops will be transferred by the workshop participants to their students, still needs to be observed.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary was a focus of both presenters. A discussion of vocabulary and reading achievement was used to emphasize the importance of

vocabulary development. The concept of the three tiers of words (Beck, McKeon, & Kucan, 2002) was presented as well as identifying the levels of word knowledge. Word learning strategies such as rereading the sentence, graphic organizers, using context clues, and examining word parts (e.g., root words and affixes, and using a dictionary) were introduced and demonstrated by the instructor and practiced by the participants (Rasinski, T., 2008).

Activities to strengthen vocabulary development included word posters, word maps, word sorts, and word chains (Beck, I., McKeon, M., & Kucan, L., 2002; ReadingQuest, 2012). Participants created word maps and posters related to instruction (AdLit.org., 2013; McGuire, M., 2010). Word Walls were introduced as another way to build vocabulary. Assessment of vocabulary included rubrics for students and teachers to use to assess word knowledge. Socratic Circles were used to read stories and find multiple meanings of words such as "right" as in "it landed right in the middle", "What gives you the right?", "The ball landed right in the middle of...", "I think you may be right", etc. (Fry, E., 1998; Sprod, T., 2012).

Fluency

Fluency is defined as the ability to read and write effortlessly with the focus on meaning and not decoding. The three components of fluency were introduced: automaticity, speed, prosody. Multiple activities were presented to develop fluency that included Readers Theater (Shepard, A., 2002), timed readings, and repeated readings. Assessment guidelines were provided with rubrics for fluency. Participants practiced fluency checks with seat partners and checked for accuracy and rate. Participants were shown to encourage their students to self-assess their reading fluency through graphing results over a period of time. Participants were also shown how to help their students set goals to improve their fluency.

Comprehension

Comprehension was defined as the process of constructing meaning, which is the goal of reading. Presenters provided information on reading comprehension skills and strategies (DeVries, B.A., 2011). Comprehension skills included *cause and effect*, *compare and contrast*, *main idea*, and *details*. Comprehension strategies emphasized *word questioning*, *noting details*, *making connections*, *monitoring* and *visualizing* (Adler, C., 2004). Activities such as the use of *Beginning/Middle/End* charts were used as well as

the activity "*Somebody Wanted But... So...*" (Macon, Bewell and Vogt, 1991) were introduced as ways to teach these strategies. Participants were introduced to literature circles as a comprehension vehicle for their students (Literature Circle Notes, n.d.). Retelling assessments were introduced to assess comprehension as well as the use of story maps. Close reading was introduced through the use of Socratic Circles where participants were asked to use information from the text in order to develop critical thinking skills (Buckley J., 2011).

Workshop Closure

During the last hour of the workshops, participants were asked to gather for a closure activity. An inflatable question cube was tossed to the participants. The question cube had open-ended statements taped on each side. Participants read and responded to one statement before tossing the ball to another participant. Included were statements such as "One question I still have is..." or "Something new that I learned was..."

At the end of the closure activity participants completed a post-test. Once post-tests were completed, the participants from the first workshop (May, 2013) and participants from the second workshop (March, 2014) were awarded certificates of completion. The Teacher Education Dean from the college provided certificates to each participant. Photographs were also taken of each participant holding their certificates.

Assessment Results

Under the *Agreement Between The Government of the United States of America and Catholic Relief Services – United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* (OGSM: FFE-636-2012/042-00) the performance indicators for *Increased Capacity of Government Institutions* required reporting of the percent of teacher training college staff who are able to describe a threshold number of new teaching techniques. The *Food for Education* performance indicator was met as all of the 61 participants in the two workshops were able to describe at least one new teaching technique learned in the training.

Constructed Response Design

The constructed responses (written, short essay) pre/post required participants to write briefly on how they teach (or think they should teach) *vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, phonics, and phonemic awareness* in the classroom. Participants

were scored on a 0 to 3 scale for each question. No evidence of any instructional methodology (e.g., unrelated answer, left blank, etc.) resulted in a score of 0. A number of students simply defined the skill but did not write any instructional strategy. Those responses were also scored as 0. If there was evidence of any instructional methodology however marginal, a score of 1 was assigned. A specific strategy that involved an instructional practice was scored as a 2. A well-detailed response identifying some level of student outcomes and responsibilities warranted a score of 3. Given that there were five areas of instruction with a range of 0 - 3 for each of the five sections, the maximum score for the entire pretest was 15.

Pre/Post Results of Workshop I - May 2013

The mean (average) participant pre-test score for the Workshop I constructed response was 6.33 out of 15.00 (42.2%). The mean participant post-test score for the Workshop I constructed response was 9.40 out of 15.00 (62.7%).

Pre/Post Results of Workshop II - March 2014

The mean (average) participant pre-test score for the Workshop II constructed response was 5.35 out of 15.00 (36%). (The average participant post-test score for the constructed response was 9.5 out of 15.00 (63%).

*A number of participants elected to do more than one activity resulting in a total of 48 activities for the 30 participants in Workshop II.

Combined Pre/Post Results for Workshops I and II

The mean (average) participant pre-test score for the combined workshop constructed response was 11.68 out of 30 (38.9%). The mean participant post-test score for the combined workshop constructed response was 18.90 out of 30 (63.0%).

Discussion

Overview: Overall, the workshops went well. The second workshop was far more organized and a number of organizational problems were overcome during the first workshop and were non-existent in the second workshop. Catholic Relief Services staff and the leadership at Northern Polytechnic College were invaluable in assisting us with transportation, tape, markers, water, and any necessary materials and requests.

The majority of the participants were very good about their training commitment. For the second workshop, a number of the previous issues were

resolved through physical space progress by the College. New buildings were constructed during the interim that relieved the critical space problem. We scheduled the next workshop during the weekdays so as not to impact the free time of the participants. This resolved the attendance and outside noise problems encountered during the first workshop.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Follow-up observations and mentoring should be done over the course of the next grant period. Participants who have completed workshops I and II and future workshop participants should be provided regular one-on-one mentoring and feedback on their implementation of instructional methods used in the workshops.

Recommendation #2: Given the 3% pass rate on the national examination in 2010 following a full 12 years of formal schooling (Kuyvenhoven, 2012), the workshops need to be expanded to include instructional methods to teach Science and Mathematics. Reading and comprehension in these content areas need to be provided to Northern Polytechnic College faculty so they can be introduced to their current and future college students.

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"Just a Thought"

Vickie Caudle, Graduate Assistant to
Dr. Stephan E. Sargent, Northeastern State University,
Broken Arrow, Oklahoma

On the basics.

Recently I was engaged in conversation with a woman who works in a store I frequent about the prevalence of technologies and how adept even young children are at using them. Though we agreed upon the possibilities for these children, we were simultaneously concerned. My friend had had the recent experience of tutoring a grandchild who was having difficulties in school in a particular subject. When she assigned the child to read a certain chapter in his textbook so they could have a discussion of it, he failed to do so. She was

frustrated and dismayed, but saw the problem and worked to resolve it successfully with the child.

The difficulty we saw was that many times computer or *online* applications are much like watching television or a movie to a child and tends to make those activities seem *unreal* to some, for so much of what they view is “make-believe” or fantasy.

Though we can certainly use technologies to benefit children in learning, we must not forget the *nature* of a child and the need to build on the basics.



Technology Integration: What's Your Next Step?

by Amy Hutchison
Iowa State University

Technology integration continues to be an important educational topic. This importance is evidenced by the inclusion of digital technology in the Common Core State Standards, the continuing research on achievement gaps that exist for online reading ability based on income inequality (Leu, Forzani, Rhoads, Maykel, Kennedy, & Timbrell, 2014), the way that digital technology is increasingly a part of the way that children learn to read and write, and the way that digital technology is part of the literacy practices the children see modeled in their homes (Beschoner & Hutchison, 2013). The integration of digital technology is especially relevant and important for literacy instruction because literacy teachers are responsible for teaching the dominant modes and genres for reading and writing, which now includes reading and writing in digital environments (Hutchison & Reinking, 2011). Yet, integrating digital technology into literacy instruction continues to be difficult for many teachers due to a variety of constraints such as lack of understanding about how to teach both traditional and digital literacy skills (Hutchison & Reinking, 2010).

Numerous models have been developed to describe the ways that technology should be used in the classroom. A popular model for considering types of technology integration is the Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition (SAMR) model (Puentedura, 2006). This model advocates using technology in a way that moves along a continuum that begins with simply substituting technology for an existing classroom practice, but at the highest level, involves using technology to redefine instruction by creating new tasks that would not be possible without technology. Based on this model, it is a desirable goal for teachers to integrate technology at the redefinition level. However, there is evidence that this is not how technology is being integrated into literacy instruction (Hutchison & Reinking, 2011).

One reason that teachers may not frequently integrate digital technology into literacy instruction, or integrate technology in a way that moves beyond the substitution level, is that they simply are unsure how to start. Alternately, teachers may attempt to integrate technology, but face barriers along the way that they are not able to overcome or that cause them to abandon their goal. These potential barriers are why Hutchison and Woodward created the Technology Integration Planning Cycle (2014). The cycle is presented in Figure 1. The purpose of the Technology Integration Planning Cycle is to guide teachers in planning instruction by first considering their instructional goal rather than starting with the technology application they will use and then trying to make the instructional content fit with the technology. The cycle further guides teachers in considering how the use of technology contributes to the instruction, the possible constraints they may face when integrating the technology, and the ways that they may need to reconsider aspects of the classroom routine when technology is integrated.

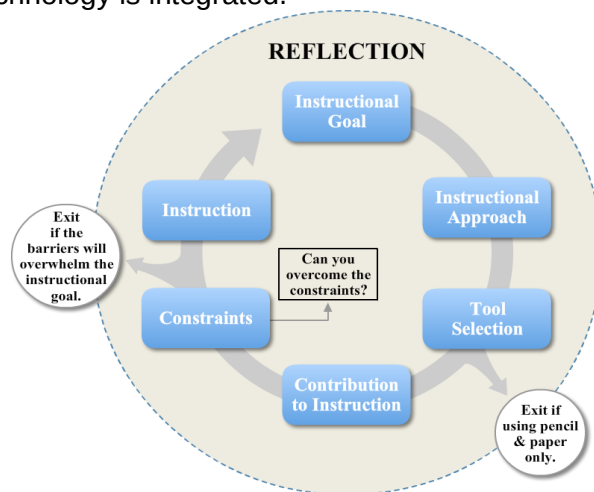


Figure 1. Technology Integration Planning Cycle (Hutchison & Woodward, 2014)

However, even when using a planning model such as the Technology Integration Planning Cycle, teachers may still have difficulty with a particular aspect of the planning process or the classroom implementation. Additionally, teachers vary in their knowledge of the content they teach, in their knowledge of the best approaches for teaching the content, and in their knowledge of digital tools that can support their teaching of the content. Thus, even with a clear vision of how technology should be integrated, and a planning model to plan instruction involving digital technology, it can be difficult to move beyond barriers to integrate technology. Therefore, I propose a process that asks teachers to consider the next step that they need to take to advance in their integration of technology, regardless of where they are in that process. This approach is described in the section that follows.

What is your next step?

Perhaps you are a teacher that integrates technology daily in a variety of ways and you are ready to try new apps and websites that will advance your students' opportunities to learn with technology even further. Perhaps you are a teacher who occasionally integrates technology, but you would like to integrate digital tools on a more regular basis so that your students can steadily build their digital skills in order to complete more complex tasks. Perhaps you are a teacher who rarely or never integrates technology into instruction and you want to start integrating for the first time. Wherever you are on this continuum, one of the best ways to move forward is to consider your next step. You can determine the best next step for you by asking questions presented in Figure 2. There are limitless ways that these questions could be answered, but some possible scenarios and considerations are considered subsequently.

- Q1: How am I doing in regards to integrating digital technology?
- Q2: What, if anything, is stopping me from moving

forward?

- Q3: How can I use the resources available to me?
- Q4: What is the next step I need to take to integrate digital technology into my instruction?
- Q5: How can I get what I need to take the next step?

Figure 2. Determining your next step for technology integration.

Question 1: How am I doing in regards to integrating technology?

Some possible responses to this question might be:

- A. Really great! Things are going so well that I want to integrate technology even more.
- B. Just okay. I need to learn more about how to use the iPads that are sitting in my classroom
- C. Not well. I don't really like technology and am frustrated that I have to teach with it.
- D. Things aren't going at all because I have no technology available to me in my classroom.

Regardless of which of these responses most closely resembles your response, there are steps that can be taken to continue improving your integration of technology.

Question 2: What, if anything, is stopping me from moving forward?

Some possible responses to this question might be:

- A. Though things are great, I don't know any other ways to use technology beyond what I am already doing.
- B. Although I learned about some interesting ways to use technology in my recent professional development workshop, I haven't taken the time to further explore how I can integrate them into my instruction.
- C. I'm not sure how to start.

- D. I don't have technology available to me.
How can I integrate it?

Although each of these possible responses represent challenges that teachers commonly face when it comes to integration, they can all often be overcome by accessing resources that are available through a variety of sources.

Question 3: How can I use the resources available to me?

Some possible responses to this question might be:

- A. I can develop a professional learning network through Twitter to learn about ways that other teachers are integrating technology into their instruction. This will likely give me the ideas that I need to try something new.
- B. I have no idea how to use Twitter, but I do have a wonderful instructional coach who will likely be able to help me if I just ask.
- C. There are professional development opportunities on this topic available through my school district. I can finally get around to signing up for one of those workshops!
- D. I don't have technology to use in my classroom, but I certainly would use it if I did. I can ask my instructional coach or principal to help me brainstorm about ways to find funding to get technology for my classroom.

After considering the resources that are available to you, you are likely ready to determine the next step that you can take to improve your integration of technology into the classroom.

Question 4: What is the next step I need to take to better integrate digital technology into my instruction?

Each teacher's next step will be different, but, based on the possible responses presented for the previous three questions, this section provides some possible next steps.

If your situation most closely resembles Answer A from the first three questions:

A great next step for you may be to develop a professional learning network by following professionals with similar interests on Twitter, by connecting with other teachers in your district who are interested in integration, or by utilizing resources providing by professional organizations

such as the International Society for Technology in Education (www.iste.org) or the International Reading Association (www.readwritethink.org). If you choose to use Twitter to develop your network, it is important to know whom to follow. Some relevant people or groups to follow are listed below:

- @TIPcycle
- @IRAToday
- @Edudemic
- @Edutopia
- @Isteconnects

If your situation most closely resembles Answer B from the first three questions:

A possible next step for you may be to plan a time when you will consider how you can better integrate technology and generate a list of questions or ideas that you have. After you have determined what you need help with, schedule a meeting with your instructional coach, another colleague, or someone else who can help you with integration to ask questions and brainstorm ideas for your classroom. After taking these initial steps, you may be ready to use the Technology Integration Planning Cycle (Hutchison & Woodward, 2014) to begin planning to integrate technology into your instruction.

If your situation most closely resembles Answer C from the first three questions:

It's time to sign up for a professional development workshop! Even if nothing is available through your school or district, there are many ways to learn more through online webinars, massively open online courses (MOOCs), professional conferences, and online courses. After you familiarize yourself with a few tools, you may be ready to use the Technology Integration Planning Cycle (Hutchison & Woodward, 2014) to begin planning to integrate technology into your instruction.

If your situation most closely resembles Answer D from the first three questions:

It's time to start searching for ways to acquire technology resources for your classroom. One approach to getting tools for your classroom is to search for grant funding through a site such as www.getedfunding.com.

Conclusion

Wherever you are in regards to your integration, there are always steps you can take to continue to improve the quality of your integration. By asking and answering the questions presented in this

article, you can determine how to continue developing your technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge to better support your students' learning through technology integration. In conclusion, I challenge you to answer this question: What is your next step?

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Technology

Column Editor

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Fun and Engaging Literacy Websites for Today's Classrooms Megan Moreland

The enormity of the world wide web can be overwhelming for teachers in today's classroom. Too many options create challenges for teachers when deciding which literacy websites best engage learners and motivate them to read. I interviewed several classroom teachers and asked them to recommend their most favorite digital classroom resources. The following is a list of websites that I compiled based on their recommendations.

Bookflix

<http://auth.grolier.com/login/bookflix/login.php>

Bookflix, a website sponsored by Scholastic, contains a plethora of fiction/non-fiction book pairings. While this website does require a subscription, the diversity of the resources proves a wonderful classroom resource that support student reading. This website offers many popular titles of beloved children's books presented in an engaging digital format. Some of the highlights include: a) many of the books have both Spanish and English versions; b) the books could be read aloud or silently with captions at the bottom of the screen for ease of reading; and c) additional resources such as author information, fun learning activities related to each book, and links for further research are provided. Furthermore, the books can be connected to a Smartboard, and the pages can be easily manipulated on the Smartboard to keep students captivated.

Kahoot

<https://getkahoot.com/>

Kahoot is a game based interactive classroom tool that can be used with computers or smartphones. Creating a free username and password is very easy and takes less than thirty seconds. Teachers can create quizzes with a colorful backdrop of their choice. These quizzes include pictures or teacher created questions. Students then compete with one another in the

form of a game to answer the questions. The questions support classroom content and serve as an assessment in a vivid and engaging format.

Eduplace

<http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/>

While Eduplace contains many wonderful resources, the graphic organizer link is particularly useful. It contains several engaging graphic organizers. They are available in both Spanish and English. Some examples include an ice cream cone organizer suitable for developing a story topic with supporting details, an observation chart for science inquires, and a persuasion map to support persuasive writing. The graphic organizers are free, and no login is required to use these resources.

Wonderopolis

<http://wonderopolis.org/>

Wonderopolis, a free website which does not require a login, is both motivating and informative. It is appropriate for use as part of a research station during the literacy block. A wonder-of-the-day is prominently displayed on the home page of the website. Currently, the wonder pertains to how candy bars are created. The website includes a teacher “sandbox” which allows easy navigation to find wonders based on grade level and literacy standards. This website also includes engaging videos to support the various topics coupled with a focus on creating wonders by teachers to stimulate curiosity in our young learners.

Newsela

www.newsela.com

Newsela contains current articles written for students in second through twelfth grade. It is a free website but does require users to sign up for a username and password. The website promotes high interest topics available at five different reading levels. This allows for all students to partake in the same assignment yet differentiating the readings to suit their instructional levels. Many high interest articles are available to promote the reading of non-fiction texts.

This list represents a sprinkling of the many engaging digital resources available for today's teachers. Using motivating and engaging digital

resources helps to capture the attention of our students. Finding quality digital resources may be challenging but the outcome of incorporating such motivating websites in our literacy teaching certainly has a reward as students interact with them and grow as readers.

Using iPads to Teach Writing

Marcy Zipke, PhD

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Are you interested in incorporating iPads into your classroom more often, but are not sure where to start? Think about using them to teach writing. Why use iPads to teach writing? For one reason, Sullivan (2013, 1) posits that students will write more when using a “gadget.” And, since it is frequent, sustained writing that leads to gains in the *quality* of students' writing, anything we can do to increase their motivation to write is positive.

That said, as much as I love technology and am a fan of the purposeful use of tech tools in the classroom, when it comes to writing, I am a bit of a traditionalist. Modern students still need to know how to organize, draft, edit, and publish (okay... “share”). But new technologies, like mobile computers and the Internet offer much more exciting and collaborative ways of writing. In elementary school, I learned that organizing meant writing an outline—and every outline *must* have at least two arguments for each major point. I was supposed to then take that outline and turn it into a draft, use the feedback from the teacher, and write a final draft. The teacher then marked it up again in red pen and I “published” by handing it off to Mom (or, worse, throwing it away without another glance). Hurray for the writing process.

Today, students can still learn to organize, draft, revise, edit, and share, but in more authentic ways. Perhaps more important than increasing motivation to write, iPads can serve as tools that allow students to more easily monitor their own writing, explore content, and collaborate with others (Sullivan, 2013). There are many interesting apps out there to help your students to better organize their thoughts, support their drafting, collaborate as they revise and edit, and have fun with publishing. The writing process can be more authentic and students can communicate quickly with one another and with the outside world. Holland (2014) even argues that when we teach writing with iPads, the goal should be to redefine what is possible.

One example of this redefinition is the second graders described by Wideen (2014) who learned

the power of persuasive writing through social media. Because she wanted to make writing a persuasive letter as authentic as possible for her second graders, Mrs. Wideen brainstormed with her students a list of things they could persuade their principal to buy for them or let them do. The students agreed that what they really wanted was a bird feeder to put outside the classroom window. They then learned about persuasive writing and drafted their letters as in any classroom. But they published their letters by posting them to their personal blogs and then tweeting the links to their principal. This got them the desired result, in that the letters were seen not only by the principal, but by the Director of Education as well, and the students got the bird feeder they had been advocating for in their letters. Wideen writes on her blog (the link to which is in the references) about the fact that her students see both the iPad and social media primarily as teaching tools.

Many of the tools you need to begin incorporating iPads into writing lessons are already built-in. For example, the camera and the notepad may be all that are needed to encourage a young scientist to explore the natural world and take notes in an authentic fashion. Those notes can later be turned into a more formal write-up. For those with Internet access who wish to use social media, iPads put the Web right at your fingertips. And there are no shortage of apps for blogging: I use the free app (and host) Blogger (Google, Inc., Free) for my personal blog; Mrs. Wideen's class, in the example above, used KidBlog (Kiddblog, Free), which also comes with a free app.

In addition to the built-in apps, there are many excellent apps available in the app store for the iPad to help your students better organize, draft, revise/edit, and share their writing. The very best of them encourage creativity, collaboration, and/or communication.

For adults and older students, it is possible to turn the iPad into a mini laptop by downloading a word processing app like Google Docs (Google, Inc, Free) or Pages (Apple, \$9.99). Linking an inexpensive Bluetooth keyboard (I use Logitech's \$69 model) adds comfort and speed to the typing experience—although some teachers report that trying to link more than one Bluetooth keyboard to multiple iPads is inconvenient, and that children adapt much more easily than adults to typing on a touchpad. At any rate, for early elementary students who are not quite ready to brainstorm on a blank screen just yet, described below are some

innovative apps that provide varying levels of teaching and support.

Organizing

For pre-writing, writers of all ages might benefit from the use of a brainstorming tool, like Popplet or SimpleMind. Both of these apps allow the writer to mind map with elegant and colorful flow charts.

Popplet, by Notion (\$4.99), is a visual mind-mapping platform for making idea webs. The writer chooses a topic for the center of the web and then can add ideas ("popples") and sort—by physically moving, changing the color of the popples, and/or drawing lines between popples—to create the relationship between thoughts. In addition to writing, it is easy to draw or add photos to the popples. You could also use the popples to map relationships such as cause/effect or compare/contrast. Download Popplet Lite to try out the app for free, but the lite version limits you to one popplet. The five-dollar full version allows for an unlimited number of popplets to be stored on your iPad. For a further subscription fee, you can also collaborate and edit on the Web.

SimpleMind (xpt Software & Consulting B.V., Free) is similar to Popplet, in that the writer creates mind maps around a key idea or ideas. But SimpleMind does not support all of the features that Popplet does; students cannot draw or drop photos into the map, nor can they change the color of individual cells. While those features may not be deal-breakers, the most frustrating aspect to SimpleMind may be the trashcan icon at the top that empties the map with one click. Students could find their work erased with an accidental click. In addition, know that while the app is free, the price may be deceptive. The free version allows the writer to save locally, but the "Save to Desktop" button only works with a subscription that begins at \$23.99.

Drafting

Once your students are ready to move on from pre-writing to drafting, you still must determine how much support the iPad will provide, versus how much teaching you will provide. The apps that follow are organized from those that prompt word-by-word at the sentence level to those that teach every element of a story's structure to a word processor for kids.

SentenceBuilder for iPad and StoryBuilder for iPad (Mobile Education Store LLC, \$5.99) are not the most exciting apps, but they provide the most language support of any of the apps listed below.

SentenceBuilder was once strongly recommended to me by a model teacher of English Language

Learners. The app opens to a settings page, where Level 1, 2, or 3 is chosen. In every level a picture is supplied and the student is prompted to build an appropriate sentence from choices on a wheel describing the picture. In Level 1 the subject and adjective are fixed, in Level 2 the student chooses all the words, but with limited options, and Level 3 adds more choices on each wheel. Although the app is primarily focused on grammar, one of the nice things about this app is that students must also use their comprehension skills in order to make inferences about what is happening in the pictures before creating their sentences. I do wish there was a Level 4, however, that was more open-ended and allowed students to create their own sentences, instead of merely choosing from the picker wheels.

StoryBuilder for iPad (Mobile Education Store LLC, \$5.99), uses the same layout and basic format as Sentence Builder. This time though, the student orally records a whole story in response to the prompts. The student is provided both with a picture and is prompted to tell a story about it. In Level 1, the student is provided with a series of four questions to answer, such as “What is the woman doing?” and a sentence starter for answering the question. In Level 2, the questions require the student to make inferences, so one of the questions I got was, “Where did the boy find the frog?” Level 3 has no questions or sentence starters, just the instructions to make up a story about the picture and to be sure to use complete sentences. In this way, students are practicing the sentence building skills they learned from the previous app, and adding in sequencing skills. If a student is not happy with a recording, it can be re-recorded, or if a student does not like the picture it can be skipped. Once all of the questions are answered, the “Play Story” button stitches all of the answers together into a narrative. The stories can then be saved in an archive on the iPad.

On a somewhat more fun note, there is You’re the Storyteller: The Surprise (Hamaguchi Apps for Speech, Language & Auditory Development, \$5.99 home edition with one profile, or \$9.99 pro edition, which allows up to 30 profiles to be saved). This app presents the student with a split screen: a short cartoon on the left, and a blank writing area on the right. Narrator’s tools appear below, which include a button for challenge words, a microphone for recording/playing back the story, and questions in case the student needs prompts. The idea is for the

student to watch the (wordless) video, then to make an oral recording of the story, using the prompts and/or challenge words as desired. When ready, the student can play back the audio he/she has just created and work on writing the story in words. This becomes Chapter 1, and the student can then move on to the next connected video segment. When finished, the student can print the finished written story, or email the written or narrated story. There are eight segments in all, which can be played as one continuous 2 minute movie. Best of all, the animated short is one that everyone can relate to—it is a coherent narrative told through sound effects and body language about a boy who brings home a puppy and tries, in vain, to hide it from his mother.

I love how there are so many varying levels of support presented through this app. For example, the student can choose to narrate first, or jump right into writing. The student who gets stuck in creating his/her narration can click on the Questions button for prompts like, “Why did he hide the dog?” or “Why did the boy look panicked when he hears a knock on the door?” (Unfortunately though, these prompts are not presented orally—the student has to read well enough to use them as scaffolds.) And the student who needs a challenge can choose to incorporate the Challenge Words—like “peeked,” “suspicious,” and “scowled.” The major drawback to this app, however, is that there is only one story to view and write. Once the student has completed the app, it is done. Hopefully future updates will include additional chapters.

Toontastic (Launchpad Toys, \$9.99) is one of my all-time favorite apps. The Toontastic creators describe their app as digital storytelling meets puppet theater. The app opens to a screen that explicitly teaches story arc: set-up, conflict, challenge, climax, and resolution—all concisely described. The student taps on each one to create a separate scene. For example, the set-up button signals the setting. The student selects a background and some characters, then presses record and the app records the student’s voice and the characters’ movements as the student creates a story. When the scene is finished, the student can add music for dramatic effect. When all five scenes are done, the app stitches them together to create a seamless cartoon that can be saved to the camera roll or uploaded to ToonTube. This past summer, the creators of Toontastic launched a companion website called #LaunchpadEDU that contains lesson plans and ideas for using Toontastic in the classroom.

There are four Toontastic Jr. apps which are currently still free, while Toontastic is selling for \$9.99. Depending on how many iPads you are buying for, the full edition may be worth the splurge. The junior editions are commercial off-shoots (Shrek characters in one, for example) that are fun for home use, but not ideal for the classroom. The school edition has many more characters than the junior editions and they are useful for teaching: historical figures (e.g., Susan B. Anthony) mix with pirates and sharks. There are also prototypes of characters so that students can easily design their own. Another drawback to Toontastic Jr. is that it does not support uploading/exporting. Download Toontastic to use the proprietary ToonTube to share students' creations with family and friends around the world.

It was a toss-up whether iDiary (Tipitap, \$1.99) belonged in the drafting or publishing category. iDiary is a journaling tool. The app opens to a lined screen with a time stamp and options to write, draw, add stickers or photos, and then share via email, print, or the photo gallery. Students can scroll forward or back through the months, and add a contact book with friends' names, phone numbers, and email addresses. The idea is that students learn storytelling skills as they reflect on their day or other activities. The app promises writing prompts through an inspiration icon that is supposed to appear if you hesitate for a few seconds while typing, but no matter what I did, I was never able to summon it. Basically, this is a very cute and inexpensive word processing app. iDiary supports multiple password-protected users.

Revising/Editing

The revolution that iPads can bring to the editing process is to make collaboration seamless and transparent. As Holland (2014) put it, "Imagine a scenario where students receive not only an annotated version of their draft, but also a video of either their teacher or peer reading it." This is possible through the use of file sharing services like Dropbox (Dropbox, Free) or Google Drive (Google, Inc, Free) that operate both through the Web and as apps on the iPad. Write something on one iPad and open it on another. Or write something on a laptop and open it on your iPad. It used to be that you needed a floppy disk or a flash drive to move files around, but with these file sharing services, everything is in the cloud.

I tried out a number of screencasting apps to try to do as Holland describes—to import a document and mark it up, while recording myself explaining

what I am doing and why. Some that were recommended to me were ScreenChomp (TechSmith Corporation, Free), Educreations (Educreations, Inc., Free), Docreri (SP Controls, Inc, Free), and Explain Everything (MorrisCooke, \$2.99). The only one that did everything, exactly as I wanted it to, was Explain Everything. With Explain Everything, the student can easily open a document directly from the cloud (I used Dropbox), hit record, and begin editing while thinking aloud. The app records all annotations and narrations and saves them as a video. It is simple to then export that video back to another user through the file sharing service again, or through email. The other screencasting apps mentioned above all had their strengths and weaknesses (and it was nice that they were free!), but none of them supported documents without an additional fee. They are powerful teaching tools for explaining a concept from scratch as if using a whiteboard, and then posting to a blog (say, for example, for a student who was absent that day), but for editing a piece of writing, Explain Everything is the best app.

Publishing

For elementary students who want to create something that looks like a book on the iPad, complete with hand-drawn pictures, photographs, borders, page numbers, and moveable text in different fonts of all different sizes, etc. choose a desktop publishing app, rather than a word processor. Or, better yet, draft in a word processor or voice recorder, and then finish off the piece in one of these book publishing apps. The two best apps that I have used for publishing are Storybook Maker (Merge Mobile, \$2.99) and My Story – Book Maker (HiDef Web Solutions, \$3.99).

Both of these apps are tools that prompt the student, step-by-step, in how to create a book. The student begins with a cover page and adds a title to the book. As the student adds pages, he/she can add as much or as little text as necessary, and drag it to the precise location on the page. If the student prefers not to type, both apps also have a microphone that can be used to tell the story instead. Click to insert pictures, whether they are photographs from the camera roll, or stickers (both have extensive collections and neither offers in-app purchases), or draw with a finger and the paint brush tools. Save as a pdf, email the finished version, or publish to the Web.

Storybook Maker has a couple of extras—background audio like applause or fireworks sounds that can be added to any page, and some

of the stickers move (a bouncing ball)--but the app is sometimes buggy, and crashes more often than My Story – Book Maker. Moreover, My Story – Book Maker has been designed for classroom use. Teachers can add multiple authors and sync across multiple iPads, plus publish finished stories to iBooks or share to various places on the Web.

I have successfully used these apps with children as young as four in one-on-one settings and with third graders in whole-class lessons. Students are enthusiastic about writing in this format; they love the bells and whistles and seeing their words come to life in book form. These apps are a fun way to polish off a finished story.

In sum, iPads can be a powerful tool for teaching all facets of the writing process. There are apps that can help with organization during pre-writing; help teach language skills during drafting; aid in collaboration while revising and editing; and encourage creativity in publishing.

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Apps

Blogger

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/blogger/id459407288?mt=8>

Doceri

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/doceri-interactive-whiteboard/id412443803?mt=8>

Dropbox

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/dropbox/id327630330?mt=8>

Educreations

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/educreations-interactive-whiteboard/id478617061?mt=8>

ExplainEverything

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/explain-everything/id431493086?mt=8>

Google Docs

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/google-docs/id842842640?mt=8>

Google Drive

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/google-drive-free-online-storage/id507874739?mt=8>

iDiary

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/idiary-diary-calendar-encryption/id289672626?mt=8>

KidBlog

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/kidblog/id565951433?mt=8>

My Story – Book Maker

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/my-story-book-maker-for-kids/id449232368?mt=8>

Pages

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/pages/id361309726?mt=8>

Popplet

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/popplet/id374151636?mt=8>

ScreenChomp

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/screenchomp/id442415881?mt=8>

SentenceBuilder for iPad

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/sentencebuilder-for-ipad/id364197515?mt=8>

SimpleMind

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/simplemind+-mind-mapping/id305727658?mt=8>

Storybook Maker

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/storybook-maker/id593996170?mt=8>

StoryBuilder for iPad

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/storybuilder-for-ipad/id377631532?mt=8>

Toontastic

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/toontastic-school-edition/id563403725?mt=8>

You're the Storyteller: The Surprise

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/youre-storyteller-surprise/id527223436?mt=8>

Research Summary

Column Editor

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“Courageous Reading Instruction” and “Experts Teaching”

Editor's Note: This column discusses the role of motivational instructional practices, implemented in classrooms in addition to standards-based curriculum expectations. The featured research is from:

Courageous Reading Instruction: The Effects of an Elementary Motivation Intervention, by Barbara A. Marinak in The Journal of Educational Research 106: pp. 39-48, 2013.

The author of the reviewed article opens with the assertion that “motivation plays a central role in literacy development.” That idea is not new and is certainly not surprising. More than thirty-five years ago, Richard Allington asked an important related question when he titled an article in the *Journal of Reading*: If they don't read much, how they ever gonna get good? (Allington, 1977). Turner and Paris (1995) found that the most motivational practices were “open tasks,” in which students had some control. They summarized the influence of open tasks with six Cs: choice, challenge, control, collaboration, constructive comprehension, and consequences. Guthrie (2010) described classroom contexts needed to promote engaged reading, which he described as a “merger of motivation and thoughtfulness”.

Educators today continue to search for effective ways to support students in becoming “good readers”. These educators are sometimes frustrated and concerned that rigid, uniform expectations about instruction in today's classrooms may be ignoring research-based evidence about the importance of motivational factors. The participants in this study implemented a school-year long intervention to encourage their students to read independently, read widely, engage in discussions about text, and collaborate about books.

The research study was conducted by a team of educators who realized that the curriculum was doing little to motivate their students. They sought out a university researcher for support in investigating their questions. They wondered if “standards-based instruction and motivating literacy practices were hopelessly at odds.” The research participants included two fifth-grade classroom teachers, two reading specialists, a learning support teacher, and a building principal, working with a university researcher. The control group included two fifth-grade classroom teachers in a control school, who implemented the expected literacy curriculum without the added motivational components. The schools were in two suburban school districts in a mid-Atlantic region. The districts were comparable in class sizes, percentage of economically disadvantaged students, number of minutes in the language arts block (120 minutes), use of the same basal series and supplemental materials, and lack of use any reading incentive programs. The teachers were similar in terms of experience (12 to 15 years of teaching) and education (all held certification and master's degrees). The treatment group included 32 fifth-grade students (15 boys and 17 girls), while the control group contained 44 students (28 boys and 16 girls). The Reading Survey portion of the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996) was used to measure the reading motivation of students in the treatment and control groups. Other data were gathered using Participatory Action Research (PAR, McIntyre, 2008) and included biweekly meetings (September to April), fidelity checks during weekly classroom visits (January to April), and ongoing e-mail communication between the university researcher and the fifth-grade team.

The participant teachers were committed to their professional responsibility to provide standards-based lessons that prepared their students for high-stakes assessments. Throughout the intervention study, they continued to implement the strict standards-aligned system of instruction without compromising the expectations or rigor. In addition, they implemented a bold program that the author described as “courageous reading instruction”. It was based on three curricular practices including (a) giving students choice in the teacher read-aloud, (b) utilizing jigsaw during informational text reading, and (c) providing book clubs in addition to self-selected silent reading.

These practices were adapted and expanded, based on teacher observations throughout the school year.

Teachers in the treatment group allowed their students to choose texts for teacher read-alouds, instead of the teacher selecting the books. Teachers gathered eight new books (4 fiction and four nonfiction), book-talked each book, and allowed the students to browse the books for three days before they would vote on their choice for the teacher to read aloud. During the three days, teachers observed the students and took field notes. Teachers reported that students listened attentively during the book talks, browsed the books frequently, and lobbied for book votes. In addition, teachers noted that the books not selected were consistently read by students during independent reading. Teachers also noted “spontaneous confidentiality discussions” as students realized the remaining books might later be used for other read-alouds, so they asked each other not to spoil the book by telling its contents.

Jigsaw groups (“experts teaching”) used three informational texts during reading instruction. The texts were chunked, and each group read and discussed a portion of the book, then presented the content to their peers. Teachers reported high levels of on-task behavior and engaged discussion. Students used a wide variety of presentation modes (plays, games, PowerPoints, posters) and frequently asked to work on their presentations during recess or after completing other reading workshop assignments. Students frequently discussed how to support group presentations (technology, photos, artifacts, videos). A student commented to a researcher that the process of Jigsaw (working in groups and teaching each other) was “experts teaching,” and student discussions indicated students taking ownership of their roles in the teaching process.

After observing the “experts teaching” process, teachers suspended traditional self-selected reading for the final nine weeks of the year and replaced it with book clubs. They offered five choices (three fiction titles, a nonfiction title, and a current events group that accessed news from the internet). The teachers provided a brief overview of the options, and each student selected a book club. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays during self-selected reading time, students read their books or current events. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the book clubs met to discuss their reading. Teachers reported they did not need to lead the discussions. Teachers described high

student engagement during self-selected reading time, respectful discussions, and few occurrences of students coming to book clubs unprepared for discussion.

The Reading Survey portion of the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) includes a Self-Concept as a Reader subscale, a Value of Reading subscale, and a total score. Students completed the MRP in October, and again at the end of the school year. Data were analyzed using analysis of variance to determine if statistical differences in reading motivation existed between students in the treatment and control groups. A one-way ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences on the total student scores and on the Value of Reading subscale. No significant differences were found for the Self-Concept as a Reader subscale. The article reports more detailed analysis of data for each item in the MRP, and data indicates that the practices described in the study resulted in students self-reporting higher reading motivation. The findings suggest that instructional practices utilizing choice, authenticity, challenge, and collaboration resulted in higher value of reading.

Data from the study suggest that teacher-developed instructional practices can indeed be implemented to nurture motivation without jeopardizing the fidelity of reading instruction. In addition to the ideas from this one research study, ideas from other research studies can support Oklahoma classroom teachers in “courageously” enhancing reading instruction in their own classrooms. The literature review for this article is extensive, and it provides many other practical ideas. The commitment of the teachers in this study was critical to the successful results. The author points out that reading motivation is best supported when teachers actively attend to their students, not when an intervention is imposed or adopted based on an external design. Even with the large body of motivational research to provide ideas, the most effective designs will come as teachers continue to question and collaborate, sharing ideas in the best sense of “experts teaching”, and modifying in response to the needs and reactions of individual students in every classroom.

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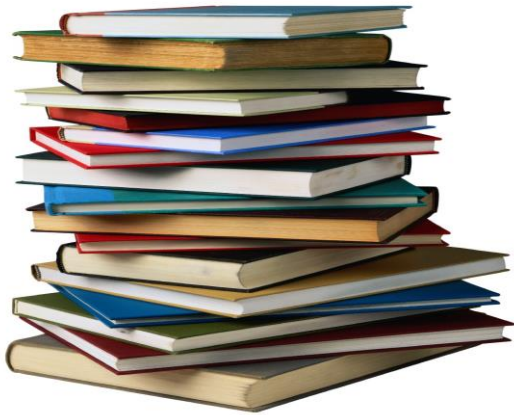
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Supporting Primary Students' Writing through Reading, Talk, and Literate Dramatic Play in Primary Classrooms

**by
Shelley Stagg Peterson**

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Stephen Leacock, a Canadian humourist, observed that "Writing is no trouble; you just jot down ideas as they occur to you. The jotting is simplicity itself—it is the occurring which is difficult" (1944, p. 14). Almost everyone I know, young and experienced writers alike, would nod in agreement with Stephen Leacock. Once the ideas "occur" to a writer, it is a pleasure having them spill onto the page or screen and then to share the writing with

others. As Leacock points out, however, generating content is a struggle for many writers, particularly young writers in primary classrooms. When writing about unfamiliar topics, young writers may be tapping into a shallow well of background knowledge and experiences. Supporting students' writing requires experiences that will help to build a rich reservoir of ideas, examples, and information.

In this paper, I argue that primary classroom writing classes should include ample time for students to read about the topics of their writing, and to engage in dramatic play in order to develop background knowledge and experience for their writing. I conclude with an argument for incorporating talk about the experiences in order to deepen students' understandings, and provide a range of perspectives and language that students might use to construct meaning from their experiences.

Building Background Knowledge through Reading

I believe that providing opportunities for students to gather information through reading is important to support all students as writers, but especially for those who struggle with writing. My research with award-winning authors and illustrators of fictional narrative or informational books for children and young adults (Peterson, 2014) reveals that authors devote hours, weeks, and sometimes years finding out more about the topics of their writing. Leda Schubert, for example, advises that young writers should: "Read, read, read. Read more. And then read more. Make the story part of every cell in your body. Go as deeply as you can into your work. . . . Do the work! . . . Don't be afraid to go deep" (p. 502). Like the authors in my study, students are likely to find that the topic becomes more and more interesting to them as they expand their knowledge about it—the more that students know, the more that they will want to know. Excitement for the topic leads to an eagerness to get started on a writing project and a commitment to seeing a writing project through to completion. Students' new understandings about their chosen topic help them to create written texts that say something substantive and meaningful to themselves and to a wider audience.

Literate Dramatic Play and Writing

Students' writing can also be enriched through opportunities to participate in dramatic play where they take up pretend roles (Smilansky, 1968). Dramatic play deepens students' personal reservoirs of background experience and

knowledge. Additionally, dramatic play provides authentic contexts for students to communicate with others and to express themselves through writing. When writing materials are available in dramatic play centers (e.g., kitchen, restaurant, post office, grocery store, veterinarian office centers), children can incorporate written texts into the imaginary context, just as they observe adults doing in parallel real-life settings. The underlying assumptions for bringing dramatic play into the writing curriculum are that (1) authentic writing fits readily into dramatic play; and (2) the writing that follows from the dramatic play will be richer because children have concrete experiences to draw from when they write.

My definition of dramatic play is not entirely true to the commonly-accepted view of play, which is seen as child-directed activity “in which the process of playing is more important than the end result” (Pellegrini & Van Ryzin, 2009, p. 70). In the kind of dramatic play I am advocating, children make many decisions about the how the dramatic play will be carried out, but teachers provide some input into the play, as well. They ensure that writing materials are among the materials available in the play settings, for example, and may teach a mini lesson on writing from time to time.

The kind of dramatic play I am proposing could be considered *literate dramatic play* because teachers encourage students’ creation of written texts to support and extend the play. Conversely, the writing that arises during and after the play could be considered as play-inspired writing. The during-play writing takes many practical forms, such as notes, signs, lists, because it is a communication tool that helps children to carry out their intentions within the play context. In this respect, the during-play writing helps children to see that writing performs numerous and varied functions in everyday life—an understanding that supports children’s overall literacy development (Clay, 1998). Children’s after-play writing is often inspired by the story lines, interactions and understandings that are constructed in the dramatic play. The literate dramatic play deepens children’s reservoirs of knowledge and experience so that they have a ready source of ideas for their writing.

Here is an example illustrating what I mean by literate dramatic play. Four kindergarten children have created a fishing boat out of a box that once housed a new television. They use objects from the classroom to enrich their play (e.g., rulers as fishing poles and blocks as fish). The teacher’s input involves a mini-lesson on the use of signs to direct

people to do certain things. She talks about seeing a sign that there are worms for sale, and a sign about getting a fishing license at the local pier. The teacher and children talk about what happens at the pier and the information that might be written on signs that they would see at the pier (e.g., signs for selling fish, list of things to put in the boat, list of things to do and not to do in a boat). By talking about the functions of signs in real-life contexts, such as fishing at the pier, the teacher is showing one of the ways in which writing is part of everyday life. She is also providing input to enrich students’ knowledge about fishing; input that the children can use to take their dramatic play in new directions. The teacher shows students how they might write signs at the dramatic play center (e.g., she demonstrates how children can stretch out the sounds in words to help them create their signs and explains that students can add pictures to their signs). The teacher then leaves sign templates and pencils/markers at the dramatic play center for students to use when they see a need for signs in their dramatic play.

The kindergarten children take up their teacher’s suggestions, as one boy uses the writing materials to create a sign: “B W S H” (Buy Worms Here). The children enact a scene where they are not successful at catching fish and decide that worms are needed. One child points to the sign and another child announces that she is selling worms. The children disembark from their boat and buy some worms so they will have better luck catching fish. Not only has the sign become part of the play, it has moved the play in new directions. These new directions have enriched students’ background knowledge about what might happen when they go fishing, providing a wealth of ideas and experiences to draw from in writing that they might do at the writing center.

Talk Enriches Understandings from the Experiences

Up to this point in my argument for incorporating time to read and engage in literate dramatic play into writing instruction, I have neglected talk, something that is critical to support children’s learning and writing. Resnick and Snow (2009) explain that “talk is the main way children get to know the world, understand complex events, and encounter different perspectives” (p. 3). Together with the talk that occurs in the dramatic play interactions, there should be opportunities for students to talk with peers and with their teacher about their experiences and the understandings

generated through reading and engaging in the dramatic play. Talk supports students' learning and literacy in multiple ways, including: (1) making sense of what has taken place in the literate dramatic play; (2) gaining new perspectives on the experience; (3) making connections between the experiences and what they and others know about the topics/themes of the literate dramatic play; and (4) experimenting with language that might be used to write about the experiences, information and ideas.

Teachers should encourage and support the questions, exclamations, assertions, and other types of talk that accompanies children's reading of books, magazines, websites and other texts about topics of interest. They should also create space for the talk that is a natural part of dramatic play. Children's negotiation and establishment of roles and relationships between characters in the imaginary play setting, and their explanations of what objects in the play represent within the imagined play context, are among the many kinds of talk that help students to create meaning of their literate dramatic play and build background knowledge. Teachers' questions, their sharing of stories and anecdotes, and their sincere interest in what students are doing in their literate dramatic play and in their reading further extend children's knowledge and experiences for their writing.

In summary, the "occurring of ideas" difficulties that primary student writers sometimes face can be overcome or at least mitigated when primary school students have opportunities to build on their background knowledge experiences through reading texts on topics of interest and through engaging in literate dramatic play. Talk, with peers, the teacher and other adults in the classroom, is essential to support students' meaning-making of their reading and play experiences. Although play and talk have long been recognized as fundamental to young children's language and literacy development (Smith, 2009), writing has not generally been considered a natural play activity. I argue that teachers' introduction of writing materials and modeling of authentic purposes for creating written texts that extend dramatic play have great potential to enrich the literacy possibilities of play. In turn, teachers can make the most of children's literate dramatic play experiences by encouraging students to draw on the play-generated background knowledge in their writing.

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Updates Related to Reading Policy

Policy Column

Julie Collins, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Reading Education, Chair, Council on Teacher Education Curriculum Committee, University of Central Oklahoma, College of Education and Professional Studies

Continuing the Education Policy Discussions in Oklahoma

At this time of year we are given the opportunity to follow possible revisions to Oklahoma education policy through legislative proposals. This column will update you on proposed legislation and the work of the Standard Setting Steering Committee.

Developing Oklahoma Academic Standards

As required by House Bill 3399 passed during last year's legislative session and signed into law in June, 2014, by Governor Mary Fallin, work is currently under way to develop new academic standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. A Standards Setting Steering Committee has been created which includes two teachers (a math specialist and a reading specialist), a district superintendent, and representatives of the Oklahoma State Board of Education, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, and the Department of

Commerce and Tourism. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Joy Hofmeister is on the steering committee, which is chaired by Oklahoma State Board of Education Member Anne Ford. Executive Director Dr. William Radke is overseeing the work of the steering committee.

The standards developed through this process are promoted as being developed “By Oklahomans, for Oklahomans,” and seek to involve Oklahoma citizens in the process. While the newly developed standards are intended to be college, career and citizen ready, preparing Oklahoma students for college curriculum and/or the workforce, the standards are also expected to reflect Oklahoma values and principles. A timetable has been laid out to develop the standards, have the standards reviewed by national experts and state higher education faculty, and have the standards ready to present to the Oklahoma State Board of Education in the fall of 2015. The new standards are to be ready for 2016-2017 school year.

Information about the work of the committee is available on the Oklahoma State Department of Education website at <http://ok.gov/sde/newstandards>. On this site you will find information about the process, meeting agendas and summaries, presentations made to the committee, as well as audio and video links for the meetings. You can also stream the meetings live if you are interested in following the process.

Proposed Legislation

The 2015 Legislative Session is underway, and it promises to be busy one regarding education policy in Oklahoma. Each legislative session provides us with the opportunity to consider new policy recommendations. This section will provide an overview of some of the bills that have been submitted. I encourage you to check out the full text of these bills and follow the progress of any that affect your areas of interest at <http://www.oklegislature.gov/>. You can read the bills in their entirety and track the progress of each bill using links under the “LEGISLATION” tab at the top of the page.

Dyslexia

Identifying students with dyslexia and providing appropriate instruction and intervention for them continues to be a focus of lawmakers. House Bill 1542, authored by Representative Shelton, proposes revisions to the Reading Sufficiency Act by including screening for dyslexia for all students identified as having difficulty in reading

(kindergarten) or not to be reading at grade level. Any students found to be dyslexic will be provided instruction through multisensory phonics. This bill was heard and sent to the Common Education Committee, but has not yet been heard in committee.

Assessment

House Bill 1065, authored by Representative Nollan, revises the assessment requirements of the Reading Sufficiency Act in regard to the retention of third grade students. This revision would require the Oklahoma State Department of Education to “administer a valid and reliable criterion-referenced test that measures only reading proficiency and not proficiency in the language arts.” There is an estimate that development of this test would cost \$2.5 million, and an additional \$1 million to facilitate the test annually. This bill has been read, referred to the Common Education Committee, and passed from the Common Education Committee. Representative Kern has signed on as a co-author, and Senator Stanislawski has become the principal Senate author.

House Bill 1272, authored by Representative Casey and co-authored by Senator Ford, is also aimed at revising the high school assessment system. This bill would remove the references to criterion-referenced tests and replace that language with state-mandated assessments. This would remove the existing End-of-Instruction assessments and replace them with assessments currently used for admissions and placement by institutions within the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education. The State Board of Education would be required to develop rules for this process by July 1, 2015. These rules would include the fact that the assessments cannot be aligned with the Common Core State Standards and shall measure the level of mastery of state subject matter standards. This bill has been read, and referred to and passed from the Common Education Committee.

Senate Bill 707, proposed by primary author Senator Ford, builds on last year’s legislation requiring academic standards to be written and controlled by Oklahoma and not influenced or controlled by federal policy. This bill would require that End-of-Instruction student assessments in high school related to those standards be approved solely by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. In addition the bill adds language stating that students will be given additional opportunities to meet the requirement set. This bill has been

referred to, and passed through, the Education Committee and the Appropriations Committee. The title and emergency clauses have been stricken.

Senate Bill 784, authored by Senator Jolley and Representative Denney, also proposes revisions to the state assessment system. This bill proposes that before the 2017-2018 school year, the Oklahoma State Board of Education "shall consider and review a standards-based system of assessment that monitors progress toward college and career readiness for grades three through ten." If at least an eighty percent alignment is found between the newly developed academic standards and the system of assessment, the new system would be used in place of the current assessment system. This proposal would also require that freshman in the 2017-2018 school year would be required to demonstrate mastery of state academic content standards in order to graduate from a public high school with a standard diploma. Mastery would be defined as obtaining a score on a common assessment set by the Commission for Educational Quality and Accountability, in collaboration with the State Department of Education and the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. The mastery level would be required to be "no less than the level required for entry into a community college with minimal remediation." Additionally, students who do not meet these requirements may qualify for graduation with a standard diploma by "achieving a score on the ACT Workkeys job skills assessment that is equal to or above the minimum score set by the Commission for Educational Quality and Accountability, in collaboration with the State Department of Career and Technology Education and the Oklahoma Department of Commerce." This bill has been referred to and passed from both the Education Committee and the Appropriations Committee. The fiscal analysis shows no fiscal impact for this bill. The title and the emergency clause have been stricken.

International LITERACY Association

Finally, our parent organization is undergoing a transition from our history as the International Reading Association to the International Literacy Association. The name change recognizes that while reading is an important part of educators' instructional focus, education includes all aspects of literacy to prepare today's students for the world. The focus is on the transformative power of literacy. The website remains www.reading.org. Visiting this site will provide you with an overview of the

renewed vision and the changes taking place, as well as information on the upcoming annual conference which will be held in July, 2015, in St. Louis, rather than in the traditional spring window.



You've Got Mail: Billie Letts RIP

By Molly Griffis

My dear friend Billie Letts "...reached out and touched the face of God" on August 2, 2014, and I lost one of my favorite "witnesses" as novelist John Updike called friends such as she. In *Rabbit Is Rich*, Updike said, "What you lose as you age are witnesses. Those who watched you from early on and cared."

Billie "watched" me from early on. And she cared. Our friendship began one happy spring day when she dropped into my little little Levite of Apache bookstore some fifteen years ago to ask me to help her promote her newly issued first novel, *Where the Heart Is*. This was B.O. as we later termed it...Before Oprah. Because I was known for unorthodox books signings like having a live buffalo at my shop or selling books out of the trunk of my car, I had more than my share of authors coming to me for marketing tips, and I love nothing better than handing out advice!

We talked...and bonded...and began a friendship that was aided by an exchange of letter that lasted for many years. "You write great letters! The problem is that the people who receive them can never throw them away. Not ever!" Billie penned me back in 1995, so from time to time, just for the fun of it, I carbon copied my edition at Eakin Press in Austin, Texas. To make a long story longer...which I always do...when Oprah *anointed* Billie with the oil of Oprah's Book Club, Virginia Messer, my Eakin editor suggested I get Billie's permission to reprint her letters to me and mine to her so we could issue a collection entitled *You've Got Mail, Billie Letts*. Billie graciously agreed and, to my amazement, the book has stayed in print for almost twenty years and is now available in e-book from Amazon!

In her *Daily Oklahoman* review, Ann DeFrangé said, "I have actually met both of these women and can verify that they are real. Nobody could create

Molly and Billie except Molly and Billie and readers and postmen are glad they did. *You've Got Mail*, *Billie Letts* harkens back to a simpler time when the real thing--*snail mail* delivered by a genuine U.S. Snailman--brightened lives and cheered hearts."

Billie was an activist before being an activist became popular. She was passionate about her Democratic party and that red head of hers served her well. She was the most generous soul I ever met and always ready to help the down-and-out of the world. Her pride in her son's accomplishments eased the pain and suffering brought on by her declining health, but her sudden death was a shock to us all.

My dearest of witnesses is not around to watch and cheer me anymore, and her passing left a tear in my heart that can't be mended.

Rest in peace, Billie dear, and know that you are missed.

Oklahoma Reading Association Membership Form

ORA DUES: \$20 Local Council name or # _____
(Enter "At Large" if you do not belong to a local council)

Local dues \$ _____ Check _____ Cash _____

College Student Dues: \$5 _____ Name of Higher Ed. Institution _____

Contact Information – Please PRINT legibly

Date _____ mm/dd/yy
Name (Last, First) _____ MI _____
E-mail _____ (email is important for membership renewal dates)
Mailing Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone Number _____ Please enter the number that is best to reach you.

ORA Membership: New _____ Renewal _____

IRA Membership: Yes _____ No _____

If yes, IRA # _____ Expires _____

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All areas are required to check membership status on-line, especially middle initial.

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Mailing Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone Number _____ Please enter the number that is best to reach you.

ORA Membership: New _____ Renewal _____

IRA Membership: Yes _____ No _____

If yes, IRA # _____ Expires _____

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Editorial Review Board Application

Name _____ School _____

Current Job. _____ E-mail _____

Have you ever reviewed articles for a journal or newsletter? Yes No

If so, which journal(s) or newsletter(s)?

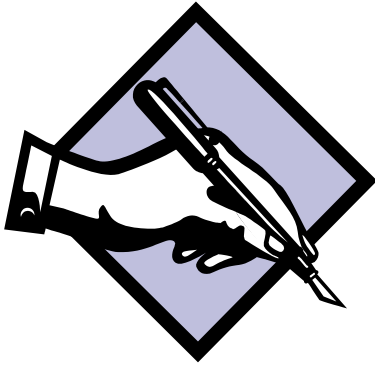
Educational background: Please list your degrees:

List all teaching certifications that you hold.

Circle the areas that you could review articles about. These areas should be ones on which you have expertise or special interest.

Fluency	Adolescent	Critical Literacy	Comprehension
Adult	Spelling	Early childhood	Vocabulary
Comprehension strategies	Phonics/word work	Phonological awareness	
Literature	Assessment	Reading Policy	Struggling readers
Writing	Professional development	Language skills	
Content area reading	Research skills	Reading research	

List any publications you have or presentations that you have made.



Doing something in your classroom that really helps kids learn literacy skills?

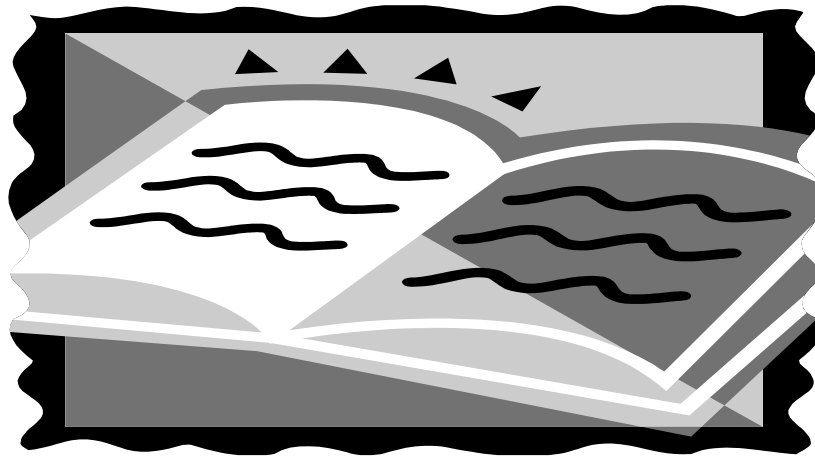
Researched an issue or problem in your classroom?

Read a great professional book?

Learned something new about Research-based best practices?

Write about it for ***The Oklahoma Reader***.

Share what you know and do with others by submitting an article, an activity description, a research summary, a review of a professional resource, or a summary of your own action research.



The Oklahoma Reader

Guidelines for Authors

Authors are requested to submit only unpublished articles not under review by any other publication. A manuscript (1500-3500 words) should be typed, double spaced, not right justified, not hyphenated, and should follow APA, 6th Edition guidelines (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association). Tables and graphs should be used only when absolutely necessary. Include a cover page giving the article title, professional affiliation, complete address, e-mail, and phone number of the author(s). Special sections have specific requirements that are described below. The editors reserve the right to edit all copy.

Submit the manuscript electronically as either a Word or rich text file attached to an e-mail message. The e-mail message should include information about which section the manuscript is being submitted for (articles, Teacher to Teacher, Teacher Research, Research Summary, and Professional Resources), the title of the manuscript, and a brief description of the topic. All correspondence regarding the manuscript will be electronic. Send manuscripts to **Vickie Caudle, Editorial Assistant, at caudlev@nsuok.edu**.

Teacher to Teacher: Submit descriptions of teaching activities that have helped students learn an essential literacy skill, concept, strategy, or attitude. Submissions should be no longer than 1500 words, typed and double-spaced, and follow the following format:

-  Title (if adapting from another source, cite reference and provide a bibliography).
-  Purpose of activity, including the literacy skill, concept, strategy, or attitude the students will learn.
-  Description of activity with examples, questions, responses. Please provide enough detail so someone else can implement the activity.
-  How activity was evaluated to know if purpose was achieved.

Teacher Research: Submit manuscripts that describe research or inquiry conducted in classrooms. Submissions should be 1000-2000 words, typed and double-spaced following guidelines of the APA, 6th Edition, and follow this format:

-  Description of the question or issue guiding the research/inquiry, including a short review of pertinent literature
-  Description of who participated in the study, what the sources of data were, how the data were gathered and examined.
-  Description of the findings and conclusions from the research/inquiry.

Research Summary: Submit manuscripts that summarize either one current published piece of research or two to three related studies. Submissions should be 1000-1500 words, typed and double-spaced following guidelines of the APA, 6th Edition, and following this format:

-  Introduce and describe the study or studies, including purpose, information about who participated and in the study, how and what type of data was gathered, and the findings or conclusions.
-  Discuss the implications of the study or studies for classroom teachers. The implications could include a discussion of what the study told us about literacy learners and literacy learning and/or what the study implies teachers should do to support learning.

Professional Resources: Submit reviews of professional resources of interest to teachers or reading specialists. Resources reviewed could include books for teachers, books for children, curriculum packages, computer programs or other technology, or games for children. Reviews of technology will be forwarded to Dr. Jiening Ruan, editor of the Technology and Literacy column for her review. Submissions should be 500-1000 words, typed and double-spaced following guidelines of the APA, 6th Edition, and following this format:

-  Title, author, publisher of the resource.
-  Short description of the resource.
-  Critical review of the resource, including strengths and weaknesses.
-  Short discussion of how the resource might be useful to a teacher.